



PREPARING FOR IMPLEMENTATION

URBACT Implementation Networks

This Guidance has been designed as part of a series called 'Learning about Implementation' by the URBACT III Programme. It is relevant for all European cities implementing Integrated Strategies for Urban Development.

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1. Preparing for Implementation

1.1 Introduction

The URBACT Implementation Challenges were part of the core design of the Implementation Networks, providing six thematic areas to guide cities in exploring the difficulties commonly found during implementation of integrated action plans. The six Implementation challenges are:

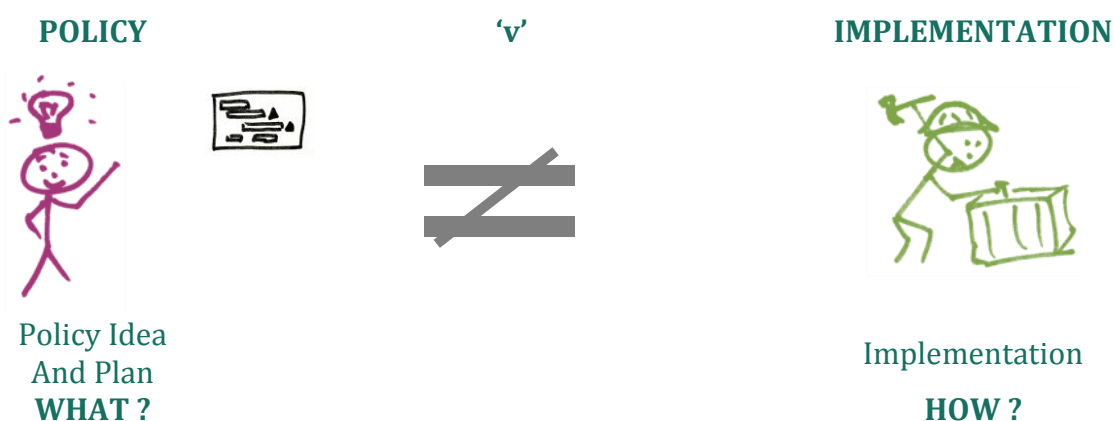
- > **Preparing for Implementation**
- > Ensuring the integrated approach in the delivery of the strategy & their related actions/projects
- > Maintaining involvement of local stakeholders and organising decision-making for delivery
- > Setting up efficient indicators & monitoring systems to measure performance
- > Designing smart public procurement frameworks
- > Enhancing funding of urban policies by exploring financial innovation

All the Implementation Challenges are interlinked to some degree. This guidance document is the first in the series and focuses on what cities need to do before they start implementing their strategies or plans. It explains what is meant by implementation as well as providing concrete tools to help cities plan and prepare for this important step.

1.2 What is Implementation?

Cities have strategies for everything; however they persistently struggle to transform these strategies into actions that can deliver results. This transformation is IMPLEMENTATION – the process of putting a decision or plan in to effect. When moving from a strategy towards implementation cities take a very important step from the theoretical towards reality. Without proper preparation and planning this can end badly. At best it simply means that nothing changes but at worst it can create negative results and reputational damage, making future implementation efforts even more difficult.

Diagram 1 – Differentiating the WHAT from the HOW.



By taking the time necessary to understand the difference between policy and implementation – the WHAT and the HOW – cities can start to think about how to deliver strategic objectives by designing actions that are achievable (see diagram 1). Cities can consider the links to other policy areas and the important role different stakeholders play in this delivery, they can anticipate problems and build in a solid evaluation process from the outset.

By understanding implementation as a discipline in its' own right cities will be better prepared for the inevitable challenges this brings but also for the change process it will launch.

2. The Nature of the Challenge

2.1 Implementation is a process of change

Implementation is the process of undertaking a series of actions to deliver the objectives and goals within a strategic plan. Implementation is about action and in order for the implementation to be achieved there is a need for the strategic goals and objectives to be realistic and achievable. The design of an implementation plan is a way of testing such things.

Successful implementation is linked to many factors and the planning should consider these from the outset. Implementation of integrated action plans requires systems in place to support the effective joint delivery of projects, involving all stakeholders and levels of governance, it also requires securing finance and advanced planning of procurement or innovative business models.

The use of the word implementation is widespread but it essentially refers to:

CHANGE

HOW cities can make changes through a series of actions. Implementation should lead to change for the better.

PROCESS

Considering implementation as a process for delivery and designing this process to meet the strategic objectives is crucial if integrated policies and action plans are to be implemented successfully.

CONTEXT

The context in which the actions are to be delivered is important. Local context at the time of implementation can influence the stakeholder involvement, the roles and responsibilities, the potential for joint delivery and the overall success of the implementation.

Change can refer to changing structures, procedures and regulations but it can also refer to changing culture, behaviour and mind-sets. In cities dealing with complex urban challenges, these softer elements are often needed first in order for the other more structural elements to be changed successfully.

Changing policy does NOT change reality

Only by Implementing policy can change reality - if it's done well.

2.2 Implementation as a Capability

One of the biggest challenges when speaking about implementation remains that cities generally do not recognise implementation as a discipline in its own right. Implementation is seen as something that exists as part of a process, however cities do not recognise this work as a set of skills that can be applied to different situations.

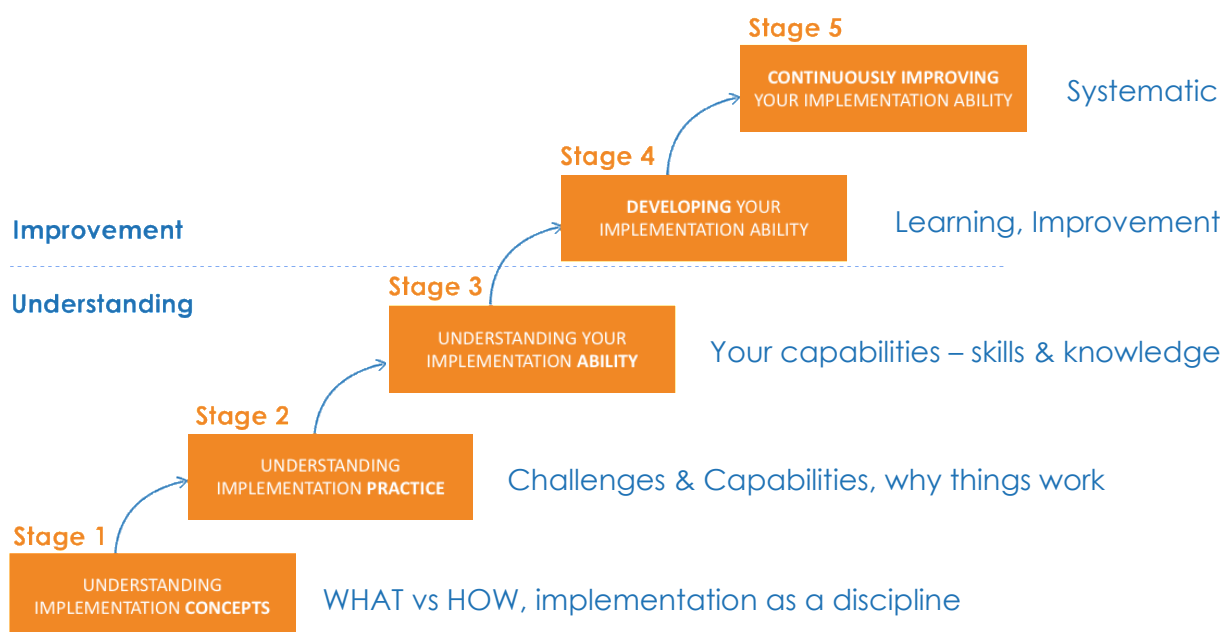
The Importance of a Learning Framework for Implementation

Looking at implementation as a discipline is a slightly abstract concept. Therefore, having a clear framework on which to learn makes it easier for cities to understand the process and principles. Such a framework helps to explain what is meant, to provide a common language and mechanisms by which to explore the concepts further.

URBACT Stay Tuned Network devised a simple 5 stage model to illustrate the thinking steps needed to move towards working on improving implementation skills and learning. The aim of the model was simply to reinforce the need for considering the different aspects of implementation practice - in terms of what that means to an individual, a team, a department, a ULG, as a municipality etc.



Ladder of Implementation Learning



The Five Stages of Implementation Learning

The following framework explains the difference in approaches and sets out the stages we need to go through to improve our implementation practice. It is designed to help individuals and cities understand their current position with regard to implementation and provide indications on which steps might be needed next.

There are five stages to the learning process, as we move through **understanding** of implementation into making **improvements** in the way in which we “do” implementation. These are described as follows:

Stage 1) UNDERSTANDING IMPLEMENTATION CONCEPTS

This stage helps cities to understand that thinking about implementation is essentially different to thinking about policy: about the difference between the WHAT and the HOW.

Stage 2) UNDERSTANDING IMPLEMENTATION PRACTICE

Stage 2 helps cities to breaking down the HOW into meaningful parts, to understand the challenges that are faced and the different aspects of HOW things are successfully implemented.

Stage 3) UNDERSTANDING YOUR IMPLEMENTATION ABILITY

Stage 3 helps cities to assess themselves in terms of the capacities needed for implementation (i.e. how we rate against the competencies, the skills, knowledge, methods, experience required.) Building a picture of the skills and abilities and the strengths and gaps will help to focus on areas where support may be needed.

Stage 4) DEVELOPING YOUR IMPLEMENTATION ABILITY

Stage 4 focuses on building on the implementation themes where capabilities are strong – securing and systematising the practice. As well as developing capabilities for weaker areas – acquiring and embedding new skills & methods.

Stage 5) CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVING YOUR IMPLEMENTATION ABILITY

Stage 5 helps cities to establish a systematic learning loop to constantly challenge current practice and improve the way in which projects are implemented on a local/city level. It will develop a deliberate and structured approach for cities to continuously learn and improve their practices.

It should be noted that there are various activities to help reach each stage but we have avoided calling the five parts of the ladder “steps” (as the ‘ladder’ metaphor perhaps demands) because in practice, they are not a set of sequential actions.

2.3 Understanding the Implementation Environment

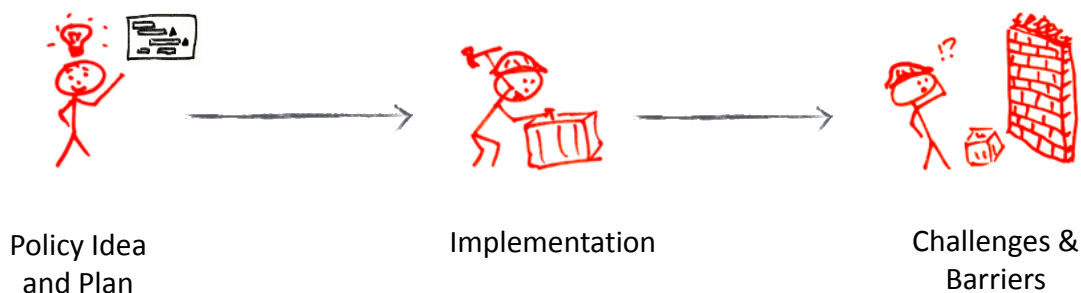
If cities can understand implementation as a discipline and identify their strengths and weaknesses in this process then they are ready to start to prepare in a more concrete way. Preparing for implementation is very much about context and will vary for all cities. This preparation, and the process of implementation, will both be dependent upon the local conditions within the city or area in question. These conditions refer

both to the social, economic and environmental context of the geographical or functional area but also to the culture and practices of the organisations involved in the implementation activities. This can include the municipality and any number of other local, regional and (even national) stakeholders.

There are, however, some general principles to follow which are relevant to all cities:

- Be aware of the **conditions** within your city and across your partner organisations and act accordingly (use the ladder of implementation learning);
- Recognise the **difference** between a strategy and a plan for implementing the strategy.
- Make sure you have a **robust plan** for your implementation with the **required resources** in place;
- Make sure the plan has detailed **actions** showing an **implementation journey**;
- Set up or adopt a **clear methodology** for delivery of your actions and make sure this is **resourced and managed** appropriately
- Know your **stakeholders**, be clear about **roles** and work with them in a clear and **open** way, thinking about how you **communicate** with them
- Be prepared to be as **flexible** with your plan and/or approach and **respond** to the situation on the ground
- Ensure you put the mechanisms in place for **monitoring** your implementation and that you do this *before* you start

Implementation is not easy! Step by step, challenges and barriers appear. Agile plans can respond to these barriers. Well prepared plans can foresee risk factors and prepare for how to deal with them.



The next chapter provides some concrete tools for cities to develop agile and robust implementation plans based on a solid understanding of the implementation capabilities of the city.

3. Tools to Prepare for Implementation

3.1 Assessing Implementation Capabilities

In the URBACT Stay Tuned network (ADD LINK) each partner started by assessing their own implementation capabilities using a standard set of themes. These themes, listed below, are generic to most action plans or strategies for sustainable urban development.

- Building Strong Action Plans
- Open Working & Stakeholder Involvement
- Conditions for Implementation
- Joint Delivery of Projects
- Project Monitoring, Evaluation & Decisions
- Quantifying & Communicating Progress
- Leadership of Change

Using these themes in a simple self-assessment sheet is a good way to consider local capabilities in a range of areas. This tool can help to identify the most important themes to focus on when delivering the strategy or action plan. The tool is designed to assess proficiency in a particular theme whilst taking into account the local practices and activities. Once completed the self-assessment sheet can guide a city to focus on areas which require particular attention. For more details on how to use this tool see the URBACT website.

Implementation Themes Self-Assessment Sheets Explained

Implementation Theme title and description

Implementation Theme: Building Strong Action Plans
Ensuring a high quality plan, to maximise chances of successful implementation

Capability	Level	Description	Local City Description (relating to ELET)
Building your plan and a clear results framework	None	This capability is not used or not present locally	
	Standard	Plans are focused purely on actions, not linked to resources or longer term results	
	Developed	Plans have a loose set of expected results described but there is no standard framework or process for defining these	
Ensuring your plan has a robust long-term theory of change	None	This capability is not used or not present locally	
	Standard	Plans are themes or actions only, with no single model / theory of change included – no clear rationale for what actions will lead to the expected results	
	Advanced	Plans have a general theory of change described, but not a clear thread through from all resources and to every result	
Analysing your plan and spotting the gaps / deficiencies	None	This capability is not used or not present locally	
	Standard	Comprehensive Logic Model used to check consequence of plan, using an iterative process to ensure actions will logically lead to the intended results	
	Developed	No process for reviewing plans and QA check. Some QA of plans happens but ad hoc	

Name of Capability specific skill, technique, method, knowledge etc.

Capability Levels proficiency in a Capability

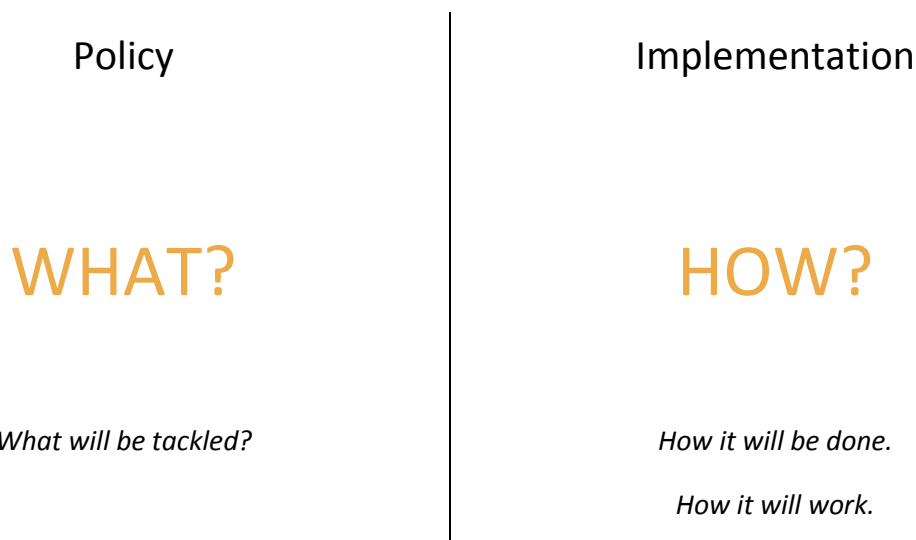
Description what each Capability Level means (in general terms)

Local City Description space to write an explanation of what the selected Capability Level looks like in practice (at local level)

3.2 Preparing an Implementation Plan

Section 1 of this guide set out the importance of planning for implementation. The preparation of an Implementation Plan allows cities to focus on key steps to move towards implementation. Most cities have a strategic document setting out objectives, goals and targets but most cities do not have an action plan to deliver or implement this strategy – the two documents are of a different nature.

Remember the WHAT and the HOW.



By investing time in the preparation of an implementation plan in collaboration with the relevant stakeholders, cities can anticipate and respond to the inevitable challenges ahead.

A well designed **Implementation Plan** should include:

1. Context of the plan
2. Specific Objectives of the plan – focus on the objectives which will be addressed through implementation perhaps not all the strategic objectives of the strategy
3. Links to other plans
4. Actions – a list of actions that the city will implement to achieve the objectives (see the next chapter for more detail on what is an action)
5. Result indicators and outputs
6. Result indicators and outputs
7. Risk Analysis – highlight the potential risks linked to each action and consider mitigating actions

More details can be found about this tool on the URBACT website.

3.3 Designing and Refining Actions

An essential part of any Implementation Plan is the section outlining the concrete actions to be delivered. Designing actions is not always easy. Cities often question what constitutes an action, what level of detail is required and how actions can be considered individually and as linked parts to an implementation plan.

Based on the intervention logic of the Implementation Plan an action roadmap should be designed for each specific objective. As example is shown below:

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE					
ACTION	Intended Result	Resources / Assets	Lead Agency	Key partners	Timescale

This short table can help cities to be focused in their actions and take into account only those actions that will really help to achieve the specific objective in question. It can help to provide a comprehensive overview of all the inter-related activities necessary to deliver the objectives. It is at this stage that some of the risks or challenges ahead will become apparent.

One tool to help cities work as part of a local stakeholder group to identify actions together taking into account the point of view of each stakeholder is the action plan card game. This is a simple game with a series of playing cards which ask probing questions to provoke discussion in small groups. An example can be found on the URBACT website.

Cities should, however, go a step further for each of the individual actions. Refining the different actions can be done using the action sheet developed by the URBACT programme. By analysing each action to consider which stakeholders need to be involved, what are the timescales for delivery, what outputs and indicators are concerned, how will the action be funded and what potential risks exist, cities can be more confident that the action can be successfully delivered. The action sheet below covers all of these aspects.

A more detailed explanation of this action sheet and how it can be used with some examples of completed sheets is available on the URBACT website.

ACTION Title		ACTION Owner		
Short Description	Stakeholders	Links to Strategy	Risks	
		Finance & Resources		
		ACTION Readiness		

ACTIVITIES				
ACTIVITY	Dates	OUTPUTS	Related ACTIVITIES	BLOCKERS / Concerns

3.4 What could possibly go wrong?

As part of the work with Implementation Networks, the URBACT programme used a game method as a creative tool to identify and evaluate potential risks to implementing the action plan. This game provided a number of pre-identified common risks linked to funding issues, public procurement challenges, losing key stakeholders, political changes and land or building problems. By providing such common risks to a city at the planning stage it can help with brainstorming the more specific barriers they could face for their actions and can help to start reflections about how to overcome these barriers.

An example of this game is available as part of the package of tools linked to this guide on the URBACT website.

3.5 Coherence Checking

The purpose of a coherence check is to verify that the implementation plan is coherent and robust. It challenges cities to question if the plan follows a logical line from the definition of the problem and its objectives and intended results through to the actions and outputs it plans to deliver (the ‘intervention logic’). The URBACT Implementation Networks used two tools to check the coherence of their implementation plans, the first was a peer to peer exercise using the 4Cs principle:

COHERENCE

Checking the plan stacks up
 Does it all seem plausible and realistic?
 Is it likely that completing all the actions will lead to the desired results?
 Does the budget and resource for each action seem appropriate?
 Are the actions linked to the overall strategy and the objectives?
 Is there a clear & logical path showing how each action contributes to a result?

COMPLETENESS

Checking that all the parts have been considered
 Are there one or more specific objectives clearly defined?
 Do the results all include suitable measures/metrics?
 Is the plan completed to a suitable level of detail?
 Is there detail attached to each action e.g. specific activities, timings, ownership etc.?

CONCERNS

Listing the things that still need some attention
 These include questions, doubts, or issues you need to focus on.

CONTINUATION

Finding ways to address the Concerns
 The next steps for the city. These can be in response to the Concerns, or in response to other things identified during the review process
 Activities identified here should have a timescale for completion and a responsible person allocated as a minimum.

This exercise was enhanced by self-assessment activity which was proposed to be undertaken as part of a meeting of the local stakeholder group. This coherence check was carried out using a checklist (see below). More detailed information on both these tools can be found on the URBACT website.

COHERENCE CHECKLIST						Score	Motivation, comments, remarks
	Not at all	Not really	Only partly	Mostly	Yes		
A. Intervention Logic of the Implementation Plan	1	2	3	4	5	from left	
1. Does the plan clearly and concretely define the problem / issue it addresses?							
2. Does the plan present specific objective(s) that clearly specify what changes the implementation plan seeks to achieve in the initial situation (the result)?							
3. Do all the proposed actions contribute to the specific objective and result that the implementation plan seeks to achieve?							
4. Do the result indicator(s) and their targets present relevant, realistic and measurable aspect(s) of the desired change in the original situation?							
5. Do the output indicator(s) and their targets capture relevant types of 'products' that the proposed actions can realistically deliver in contribution to the specific objective/result?							
6. Are arrangements in place to effectively monitor and review the progress of the implementation towards the targets for the result and output indicators?							
B. Robustness of implementation arrangements	1	2	3	4	5	from left	
1. Does the implementation plan present an integrated approach ensuring all relevant social, economic and environmental dimensions of the issue addressed are tackled by the proposed actions?							
2. Are all relevant local stakeholders identified and involved in the decision making and implementation of the proposed actions?							
3. Is the sequencing and timing of the actions in the implementation plan logical and realistic? (e.g. nursery staff recruited to start work when nursery building completed)							
4. Are the planned outputs of each action clearly defined and relevant in view of the intervention logic (specific objectives, result and output indicators)?							
5. Is an adequately detailed work plan included for each separate proposed action (concrete, complete and realistic)?							
6. Has an adequate budget been secured for the implementation of each proposed action?							
7. Have other necessary non-financial resources (staff, knowledge, land) been identified and secured for each action?							
8. Has the need for public procurement procedures been identified and included in work planning for all proposed actions?							
Coherence score							

3.6 Conclusion

This guidance document is the first in a series that focuses on implementation of sustainable urban development strategies in cities. Others in the series cover:

- Integrated Approach in Implementation
- Stakeholder Engagement in Implementation
- Measuring results in Implementation
- Public Procurement in Implementation

