UIA knowledge, the context.

Urban authorities are operating in a **totally new landscape**. The social, economic and environmental challenges are increasingly global and complex but the economic crisis has dramatically reduced mainstream financial resources and has thus greatly challenged urban authorities' capacity to respond to these complex challenges. In the meantime citizens are more informed and connected than ever, technology is revolutionizing the way they interact with the public sector while individuals and organisations are forming new kinds of partnerships to help solve the most pressing societal challenges. These are all factors that are pushing urban authorities to **radically change their way of working** and to look for **new and bold ideas**.

UIA's objective is to help urban authorities to navigate this new landscape and to experiment, at a real urban scale, **the most innovative and ground-breaking solutions** to fight against problems like urban poverty, unemployment, discrimination but also congestion, air pollution, waste, etc. It aims to do so by providing **financial resources** but also by creating the **right conditions** and **lowering the barriers** for urban authorities and local stakeholders to **co-design and jointly implement and evaluate** unproven solutions.

With around 80 to 100 projects being supported by the end of the Initiative, UIA represents a **unique observatory** of daring urban authorities and a wide spectrum of committed local stakeholders (e.g. research centres and NGOs but also private multinationals and start-ups) **implementing together bold and risky projects**.

During the implementation process, local partnerships will face **difficulties, barriers and challenges** linked to the experimental nature of the projects and approaches challenging existing practices and regulations but also to the specificities of the policy fields and the local context. Working together to overcome the challenges and trying hard to achieve the expected results will be an extraordinary learning experience for all the actors involved.

At UIA we are convinced that this wealth of knowledge on **how to effectively implement** innovative projects will be extremely valuable not only for the UIA beneficiaries but also for other cities and urban stakeholders in Europe and beyond.

In this perspective we have set up a **conceptual framework** and **mechanisms** to capture and share the knowledge on implementation that will be generated at project level.

The conceptual framework focuses on the implementation process (rather than on the policy design) and is built around **several challenges for implementation** that are identified as common by all projects, even though their meaning, intensity and potential impact will be different in each local context. These challenges for implementation are described later in this paper.

The main mechanism ensuring that the knowledge on how to overcome these challenges is captured and shared is the **UIA Expert**. Each project will be followed by a dedicated UIA Expert throughout its implementation. UIA Experts will be the projects' critical friends and will document their progress through the lens of the identified implementation challenges trying to isolate solutions and learning points for other urban stakeholders. They will capture and analyse this knowledge in the **Projects' Journals** that will be published on the project's webpage every six months.

The challenges for implementation

Building on the work carried out by URBACT with the Implementation Networks and on the interactive exchanges with urban authorities leading UIA projects approved in the framework of the first Call for Proposals, the following have been identified as the main cross-cutting operational challenges that UIA projects will face during their implementation phase.

- **Leadership**: Implementing and testing unproven solutions through a genuine participative approach implies a high degree of risk for urban authorities. But administrations in general and civil servants in particular operate in an environment where the level of risk aversion is traditionally high. A positive and committed leadership is therefore a key pre-requisite for municipal led innovation. Political and administrative (senior management) leadership can lower the aversion to risk by providing a strong vision and legitimisation but also by creating a professional environment where civil servants can be more inclined, motivated and rewarded to be innovative, to use their discretion, to work differently with local actors, etc. Positive leadership is also a guarantee for local stakeholders that by working with urban authorities on innovative projects, part of the risk is shared. How to secure this type of leadership? What are the characteristics of positive leadership for innovation? Is the top level political leadership (mayor) enough? Or should urban authorities look for a more "diffused" form of leadership? How to keep leaders enthusiastic about the project? How to manage changes in the political and senior management leadership over the implementation process?

- **Public procurement**[1]: Urban authorities are responsible for providing public services to ensure better quality of life for citizens. One way of doing this (and the most common one) is to tender out contracts to external service providers and/or purchase products through public procurement procedures. The total value of public procurement in the EU is estimated at €2 trillion per year – or about 19% of European GDP. The way in which this money is spent has clear implications for the economy, as well as for the organisations spending it and the citizens who ultimately benefit of their services. Public procurement procedures must comply with EU law which is transposed into national legislation by Member States. Public procurement is therefore perceived as an administrative procedure but also increasingly considered as a powerful leverage to promote innovation, achieve socio-economic and environmental policy objectives and address societal challenges. UIA projects will all tender contracts and procure services during the implementation phase. The type of services and products to be procured, the financial amounts mobilised, the nature and the competencies of service providers will be very different across projects. However overarching questions can be identified: How to effectively engage service providers in the definition of the best service/product (pre-procurement/pre-commercial procurement)? How to avoid hyper-specification of the services/products needed and focus on results to leave freedom and create the conditions for innovation in the mode of delivery (public procurement of innovation)? How to trigger other local benefits (social inclusion, employment and environment) through the procurement process? How to use data to show that procurement processes have contributed to deliver the expected results?

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[1] Public Procurement is one of the 12 topics of the Urban Agenda for the EU and a dedicated Partnership has been launched recently. Some of the points in this paragraph have been inspired by the Orientation Paper available here: https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/public-procurement

- **Organisational arrangements within the urban authority (cross-department working)**: UIA projects are complex because they test unproven solutions at a real urban scale but also because they try to do so by intervening on the different interconnected dimensions of the challenge(s) being addressed. Combining and coordinating different actions in the framework of an effective integrated approach, which looks at the interconnections between the social, economic and environmental dimensions, can be particularly difficult for urban authorities. The main difficulty is represented by the tension between the functional specialisation of departments and offices within municipalities versus the cross-department cooperation and coordination needed. Shaped by the traditional "silo" organisational culture, urban authorities are often ill equipped to fight against the modern complex challenges which extend beyond departments' boundaries and narrow competencies. UIA projects are all committed to testing new forms of management and coordination which involve all the relevant skills, experiences and competences within the municipality. The main questions here are: What are the most effective coordination mechanisms? How to make sure that these are accepted and understood by different levels of management? What is the role of senior management in creating and managing such "integrated task forces"? How can new technologies help this horizontal coordination and cooperation? How can risks and rewards be shared across departments involved?

- **Participative approach for co-implementation:** The participative approach – the development of strong partnerships between public bodies, the private sector and civil society (including citizens and inhabitants) - is widely recognised as a cornerstone of efficient urban development policies. Organisations as well as individuals and end-users external to the urban authorities are increasingly willing to contribute in finding and implementing new solutions to the most pressing societal challenges. NGOs and cooperatives are conceiving new ways of delivering welfare schemes for vulnerable groups while new technologies to reduce pollution or to improve mobility are being prototyped by research centres and private actors (multinationals as well as start-ups). Urban authorities need to tap into the collective intelligence of different stakeholders and benefit from the diffused knowledge and expertise to find new ways and approaches to develop efficient solutions to these societal challenges. UIA helps and encourages urban authorities to set up local partnerships that are rich, diverse and that involve "traditional stakeholders" as well as "unusual suspects". Delivery Partners have a key role in the project's co-implementation and they share with the urban authorities risks and responsibilities. Over the implementation process, UIA projects will generate valuable knowledge around questions such as: what are the most effective coordination mechanisms for co-implementation? How to maintain the motivation and commitment of all partners over the implementation phase? How to solve potential conflicts? What are the limits of sharing responsibilities?

- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Focusing on the actual changes achieved locally (i.e. the results) rather than on the delivered outputs and being able to monitor and evaluate to what extent projects are contributing to their achievement are essential aspects of sustainable urban development, and they are even more important for UIA projects. They are important because, first of all, UIA projects need clear parameters that will tell urban authorities and local partners whether or not the experimental solution tested was successful. They are also important because monitoring and evaluation tools can be designed as an ongoing process, generating a learning loop for all actors involved in order to adjust and improve the actions along the way. Last but not least they are important because only with evidence of the results urban authorities will be able to secure additional funds for upscaling the innovative solution tested. Given the innovative and experimental nature of UIA projects, they have been given the freedom to design and develop their own monitoring and evaluation framework. An initial observation of projects from the first two calls shows that this is a field where UIA projects are ready to experiment new approaches

(e.g. theory of change, Randomized Control Trials, etc.) and techniques (e.g. data mining, citizen evaluators, qualitative surveys, etc.). By working on these essential aspects, UIA projects are expected to provide examples and learning points on questions such as: How to co-design innovative projects starting from the expected results? What are the indicators that will best capture the achievement of results but also the added value of the innovative approach? To what extent can monitoring and evaluation frameworks generate the ongoing learning loop? What are the most effective approaches and techniques? How to isolate and discount achieved results from external factors?

- **Communication with target beneficiaries and users:** The final aim of any sustainable urban development project, and therefore of any UIA project, is to increase the quality of life of citizens. Beneficiaries, target groups, end users and more generally citizens are therefore key actors. Urban authorities have clear responsibilities and interest in involving them in the design and implementation process. Therefore, UIA projects need to establish a two-way inclusive and honest communication process that goes beyond the simple information about the project (the project's plaque and poster). They need to define a process able to engage target groups to increase the quality as well as the shared acceptance and ownership of the project by collecting and taking into consideration feedback, suggestions and proposals. The first UIA projects have all conceived their communication activities as an integral and important part of the implementation process and they demonstrate how it is possible to be innovative by testing new methods and techniques to outreach, engage and involve end users and beneficiaries. Last but not least a positive communication approach can also reinforce the message that the EU and its funds have a concrete impact on the ground on the quality of life of its citizens.

- **Upscaling:** UIA projects are conceived as experimental tests of innovative solutions never tested before in the EU at a real urban scale. As such they are limited in their scale (focusing on one specific neighbourhood or target group) and duration (3 years). The aim is to use this testing phase to verify how the innovative solution reacts to the complexity of real life and, if successful (according to the parameters defined in the monitoring and evaluation framework), the experimental stage should lead to an upscaling of the solutions. However planning the next stage is not something that urban authorities should start doing only at the end of the project. Already when designing their proposals, UIA projects were reflecting on questions such as: what should be the next step (a gradual or a generalised upscaling)? What types of conditions and resources are needed? What should be the role of the partners be in the upscaling process? What are the additional or new challenges of deploying the project at a larger scale?

Conclusions:

The UIA Initiative offers the possibility for urban authorities to test new and unproven ideas that are too risky and experimental to be supported by mainstream funding. It also needs to make sure that the lessons learned and the knowledge generated by these trials are captured and shared with other policy-makers and practitioners in Europe and beyond who, in turn, can use them to inform their own urban developments.

However, in order to systematically enable the transfer and adoption of UIA solutions in other urban authorities across Europe, a number of steps should be put in place[1]. The Journals produced by UIA

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[1] According to the three-pillar methodology defined by URBACT of understanding/adapting/re-using.

Experts are an extremely valuable tool for the start of this process ("the understanding"), to help capture and share the knowledge generated by UIA projects around key implementation-related challenges. This knowledge will be consolidated to extract wider and cross-cutting learning points for other urban authorities facing similar challenges and looking for inspiring solutions to be adapted to their specific context. UIA is seeking to work with key partners to transform this into practical knowledge by feeding in and contributing to capacity building and training activities for municipalities and urban stakeholders.