Urban & Regional Stories

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Citizen Participation for Urban Regeneration

IURC CoP 6 · Deep Dive Exchange, Session 1

Four cities presented live urban regeneration projects and their participatory methods: a greening programme across Bologna's public spaces, an integrated resettlement/upgrading intervention in Salvador de Bahia, a former railway yard becoming a park in Buenos Aires, and a riverfront park in Concepción, Chile. Rome did not present but contributed to the workshop discussion. Rather than each city framing its own talk around a stated problem, most presentations described process and methodology directly; the challenges cities actually named were captured separately, on the session's Miro board.

1 Bologna: building trust through proximity agents

Bologna's greening strategy spans 12 pilot projects and runs on a 5-phase participatory cycle:

Information → Establish a dedicated visual identity and communication channels

Listening → Observe and analyse with local communities. Shared understanding

Co-design → Data analysis and solution co-design

Validation → Comparison and validation of final solution

Collaboration → Implementation of the solution

The dedicated role that carry these activities are the Proximity Agents. These are neither political nor purely technical actors; they function as a recognisable and transparent interface between institutions, intermediary organisations and residents. Grounded in long-term trust-building and active listening, they coordinate relationships across local communities and territorial stakeholders, design tailored engagement tools and languages, and foster neighbourhood-level networks that support inclusive urban transformation. As 'strategic designers' of local participatory processes, they connect broader urban strategies to everyday contexts by working through three iterative stages: Understand (preliminary analysis of the local area), Engage (design and implementation of community outreach), and Collaborate (facilitation of meetings, reporting back to communities, and follow-up on agreed actions).

Solution co-design during the TALEA (EUI IA) project
Picture provided by Bologna

2 Salvador de Bahia: Novo Mané Dendê

Novo Mané Dendê is an integrated urban regeneration programme across five neighbourhoods, covering about 34,000 inhabitants over 80 hectares and involving the resettlement of 1,700 families and the cleanup of a polluted watershed.

The participatory approach relies on social communication rooted in territorial identity: mobile social offices and commissions accompanying the works (CAL) maintain dialogue with residents throughout all construction phases, with specific activities for children and targeted campaigns for different groups. This continuous presence supports information, consultation and co-design around new housing, infrastructure and public facilities, and has contributed to outcomes such as residents naming new streets and increased use of cultural and sports amenities.

Key points in which the Novo Mané Dendê relies on. These factors prioritize the integration of solutions into the local culture. Picture provided by Salvador de Bahia Gvmt.

3 Buenos Aires: Palermo Railway Park

First design and integration of different solutions and proposals into the final draft of the Palermo Railway Park Picture provided by Buenos Aires Gvmt.

The Palermo Railway Park project converts a former railway yard into a new green public space for nearby residents. Citizen participation has been **organised through three open, registration-based meetings**.

1) An **initial co-creation workshop**, where participants identified priorities for landscape, uses and heritage (e.g. native species, sports and cultural amenities, reuse of the warehouse)
2) A second **informational meeting** presenting the proposal and collecting feedback.
3) A **third meeting presenting adjustments and advancing co-design** for the first construction stage of roughly 9,000 m². These meetings structure the process of informing, gathering input, and refining design choices with residents of Commune 14.

4 **Concepción:** Parque Los Españoles

Concepción's *Parque Los Españoles* project proposes a 15-hectare riverfront park where historically excluded neighbouring communities are treated as co-designers rather than passive recipients. The city explicitly positions itself on the IAP2 spectrum, aiming to move beyond the legal minimum of Inform/Consult towards Involve/Collaborate/Empower, backed by a 12-month participatory framework in five phases: Foundation, Visioning, Co-design, Validation and Monitoring.

A 15-member Citizen Advisory Committee, five Technical Working Groups, a Neighbourhood Steering Committee and 15 local facilitators together form a distributed proximity infrastructure, tasked with reaching at least 3,000 people and ensuring that 40% of the community can measurably influence decisions. Tools such as multi-channel digital platforms, VR stations, mobile units and tailored protocols for low-connectivity areas are used to bridge territorial and digital divides, with the facilitators acting as recognisable faces who connect these instruments to everyday residents.

A 5-PHASE CO-DESIGN PROCESS OVER 12 MONTHS

1. **Foundation** · **Months 1-2** ***Set up & engage***
   stakeholder map, Citizen Advisory Committee, platform launch.
2. **Visioning** · **Months 3-4** ***Listen & prioritise***
   needs assessment, community-endorsed vision, ranked priorities.
3. **Co-Design** · **Months 5-8** ***Design together***
   charrettes, five technical working groups, participatory budgeting.
4. **Validation** · **Months 9-10** ***Decide & endorse***
   public exhibition, community voting, formal endorsement.
5. **Monitoring** · **Months 11-12** ***Steward & document***
   oversight, satisfaction surveys, IURC documentation.

The MUA's contribution

Rome did not present a specific regeneration case but raised several participation-related challenges directly on the Miro board: sustaining data collection for digital platforms, providing training on data tools, identifying open-source participatory solutions suitable for small towns and rural contexts, and using gamification to overcome the digital divide. Implicit in these concerns is the need for a proximity function that can bridge technical infrastructures and ordinary users – a role comparable to Bologna's Proximity Agents or Salvador's social offices, but oriented towards data literacy and platform stewardship in smaller municipalities.

> ***Flavio Rosa (IURC) summarized trust itself as "the most important KPI", once established, it carries a community into later, harder phases.***

Main Contributions from the Discussion

The workshop grouped individual city challenges into five shared themes, each paired with proposed solutions:

Common challenge	Proposed solutions
Engage vulnerable groups	Working with municipal consultancy bodies representing vulnerable groups, flagged as still "intermediate and hard to reach"
Trust	Listening and transparency as the key to trust; proximity communication; territorial identity; local social offices
Engage everyday residents, locals and future users	Proximity communication; outreach through intermediate bodies, associations, schools; platforms to gather data
Engage a younger audience	Empowerment; communication tools adapted to them; young ambassadors; understanding their needs
Dealing with political interference	Transparency; clearly communicating the framework and limits of the participatory process

Open challenges deferred to future sessions

Three items were explicitly parked for later sessions rather than resolved here: replicability of participatory tools in small towns and rural areas (raised by Rome); monitoring the social impact of participation; and co-designing with vulnerable groups specifically (with open questions on whether third-sector organizations and local associations are fully involved in process management).

Key Insights about citizen participation methodologies

1. **Separate "project challenges" from "participation-method challenges" in future CoP reporting** Salvador de Bahia's resettlement/pollution history and Concepción's own five-challenge framing are genuinely city-stated; most other challenge attributions come from the workshop, not the presentations, and should be documented as such.
2. **Institutionalize a trust-building role:** Bologna's Proximity Agent and Salvador de Bahia's mobile social offices are the two clearest models for a standing, recognisable point of contact.
3. **Adopt Concepción's quantified target model (≥40% incorporated input on the IAP2 Spectrum) as shared CoP practice,** since it's currently the only city converting "we listened" into an auditable commitment.
4. **Treat the Buenos Aires opposition episode as a case study, not an anomaly:** it directly evidences the Miro-tagged challenge of "balancing diverse stakeholder positions" and should inform how other cities plan communication once designs get concrete.
5. **Make the KPI/social-impact measurement gap the explicit agenda item for the next session (July 26, per the meeting notes):** every city that raised it flagged it as unresolved, and Rome's digital-platform and rural-replicability questions could be folded into the same discussion.

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": Deep Dive Exchange, Session 1 (18 June 2026): presentations by Bologna, Salvador de Bahia, Buenos Aires and Concepción, Rome's workshop contribution, and the Miro-board synthesis. Speakers: Cecilia Segal (Buenos Aires), Juan Patricio Boyle (Buenos Aires), Chiara Ferioli (Bologna), Noemi Julian (Bologna) Sandra Sanchez (Salvador de Bahia), José Gilson (Salvador de Bahia), Christian Paulsen (Concepción)