Urban & Regional Stories

IURC
INTERNATIONAL URBAN AND REGIONAL COOPERATION

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Citizen Participation for Urban Regeneration

From Co-creation to Validation

The following factsheet covers sessions 2 and 3 of the Deep Dive Exchange series followed the participatory cycle from listening to building. Session 2 (6 July 2026) focused on needs collection and co-design; & Session 3 (28 July 2026), focused on project validation and execution. Bologna, Buenos Aires, Concepción, Salvador de Bahia and Rome (ANCI Lazio, with Co-design Toscana) shared how they turn residents' input into design decisions, and where that process meets technical, financial and maintenance limits. Rather than presenting each city in turn, this factsheet follows the key decisions cities face at each step and sets their proposals side by side; to understand phase 1 and look further into co-design and citizen participation, please see the previous factsheet: *"Citizen Participation for Urban Regeneration"*

Phase 1 Information → **Phase 2 Listening and needs collection** → **Phase 3 Co-design** → **Phase 4 Validation** → **Phase 5 Collaboration**

Session 2 · Co-creation | **Session 3 · Validation**

Co-creation: from needs to design

Deciding where to act and whose needs count

- **Buenos Aires** selects green streets using quantitative and qualitative indicators, such as surface temperature, proximity to public space and socio-economic vulnerability. It then validates the data through *caminatas sensibles* (sensitive walks) with local actors.
- **Concepción** plans a needs assessment across segments (youth, elderly, persons with disabilities, indigenous residents), participatory walking audits along the riverfront, and collective mapping of perceptions, barriers and the uses people most want.

Co-design session with residents. Picture provided by Concepción.

- **Bologna** uses needs collection tools for schools (worksheets, mobile diaries, interactive surveys). It addresses representativeness through statistical identification of participants and the "personas" method.
- **Rome**'s GREENGAGE app lets residents map needs and points of interest, giving administrations citizen-collected data to prioritise interventions.

Making technical choices understandable: card-approach

- **Bologna**'s Nature-based Solutions (NBS) cards pair each solution with an image, usage guidelines and conditions, and symbolic "superpowers" that convey its benefits.
- **Start Park**, presented by *Co-design Toscana*, are card decks are also used to make co-design sessions more "playful". These lead to technical pre-feasibility studies. In Rome's Municipio IX, the same process at the Matteo Ricci school took them from siloed data to a built raingarden.
- **Concepción**'s "NBS menu" for non-experts was inspired by Bologna's cards and the Start Park tool; it lets residents choose and combine green and blue solutions, while experts ensure they work.

Left: NBS card, Bologna Verde. Picture provided by Bologna. Right: Start Park Game. Picture provided by Co-design Toscana.

Deciding how much power residents hold

Buenos Aires takes residents through Palermo Railway Park in successive meetings, from the first co-creation workshop to the co-design of the next construction phase, with a fourth meeting planned before construction starts (timeline below). In its separate green streets programme, resistance over the loss of parking was largely addressed through participatory design sessions and tactical urbanism: closing Ramón Falcón street for a weekend showed the potential of the new space, and the street's green surface rose from 5% to 26%.

PALERMO RAILWAY PARK · MEETINGS WITH RESIDENTS

29-01	10-03	17-06	Date TBD	Date TBD
1st Co-Creation workshop	2nd Informational meeting	3rd Informational & co-creation meeting	4th Community Meeting	Start of construction

Concepción grades every phase of its participatory framework against the IAP2 spectrum, the international scale that runs from Inform and Consult up to Involve, Collaborate and Empower. Needs collection sits at "Involve", co-design at "Collaborate", and participatory budgeting is the step towards "Empower", where residents allocate real funds across competing green-infrastructure options through Decidim. Each community proposal is documented and tracked into the final decision..

> ***"Not only participate, but shape the design."*** *Concepción*

Keeping the process open to everyone

- **Concepción** mirrors every digital step with an analog channel. It uses low-connectivity Decidim with facilitator-assisted entry, content in Spanish and Mapudungun, digital-literacy training for 200+ residents, and 15+ local facilitators.
- **Bologna** combines digital tools with worksheets and paper supports in its workshops.
- **Rome** stresses that digital tools must be supported by physical engagement with schools and associations. It also notes that platform costs, around €10,000 a year to maintain and host IDEAM, are a real barrier for small municipalities.

Validation: from design to delivery

1 Validating the design with residents

- **Bologna** validates designs through plenary workshops with architects, using a world cafe methodology, and on-site validation workshops in the spaces being transformed.
- For temporary projects due to become permanent, **Bologna** runs online and on-site surveys as a second validation phase. It adjusts the design before long-term implementation.
- **Concepción** plans tactical-urbanism pilots at the park's access points: test interventions quickly and cheaply, measure before and after, then adjust before permanent construction.

On-site validation workshop, Bologna Verde pilots. Picture provided by Bologna.

2 When residents' wishes meet technical limits

- **Buenos Aires** explains its decisions with quantifiable data, such as the percentage of permeable surfaces and the number of trees planted. This shows residents why proposals were modified or rejected. At Palermo, neighbourhood identity called for a more conservative approach and more meetings, leading to a redesign of the initial project.
- **Joint on-site walks** with technical teams and residents were proposed to show maintenance limits and design constraints in practice. Participants agreed on their double function: technicians understand residents' expectations, and residents see interventions already working elsewhere.
- **Bologna and Buenos Aires** proposed training municipal offices on the requirements of innovative interventions, to make projects more flexible.

3 Keeping trust between validation and construction

- **Bologna** fills the waiting period by building temporary structures in parks and school squares together with children and families, with continuous activity programmes and free games. Communication is a dedicated phase in Bologna's process. It uses flyers in mailboxes and on-site signage with maps and graphics of the transformation, and it links NBS to the site's historical and climatic context.
- **Salvador de Bahia** keeps participation going through construction with an itinerant social office touring the work fronts, weekly integrated meetings between construction and social teams, the *Mulheres do Dendê* programme, and residential working groups that helped improve the final technical designs. A Solid Waste working group of community leaders, residents and government representatives selects the areas for the mini-points and the Sorting Warehouse.
- **Salvador de Bahia's Escritório de Cooperação Internacional** proposed permanent spaces for dialogue between technical teams, local authorities and the community, and stronger local capacities to sustain the transformation after the project ends.

4 Budget and maintenance

- **Bologna** proposed including initial maintenance costs in the project budget, so municipalities can test how to manage new interventions.
- **Buenos Aires and Concepción** reported that budget limits lead them to scale down or build in phases. For Concepción, this means residents may first see only part of the park.

Common challenges and possible solutions

CoP 6's cities have created a common Miro board, which is fed throughout the cooperation. In this case, cities have written their common challenges and solutions identified thanks to deep dive sessions two and three.

Common challenges | Possible solutions

NEEDS COLLECTION AND CO-DESIGN

Co-design with vulnerable groups	**Accessibility of technical content**	**Accessibility of tools (digital gap)**	**Representativity of the group**
Engaging underrepresented groups	**Staff capacity and lack of resources**	**Stakeholder coordination and position**	**Obtaining actionable outputs from community input**
Associations, intermediate bodies and social institutions (welfare)	Co-design with citizens, associations and schools	Combine digital tools with worksheets to avoid the digital gap	Open-source platforms
Selected statistical sample, and personas	On-site surveys where people gather	Strong local partnerships, try to increase trust	Provide incentives for people who participate

PROJECT VALIDATION AND EXECUTION

Managing the waiting period between validation and implementation maintaining community trust	**Compromising between technical advice areas, project ideas and expectations**	**Compromising with the Commune's maintenance limitations**	**Aligning priorities with available financial resources**
Managing social uncertainty related to complex urban changes			
Proximity and on-site communication before and during the transformation	Place activation activities for different ages: walks, games, culture	Permanent spaces for dialogue between technical teams, authorities and communities	Training municipality offices on the impact of innovative solutions
Raising citizens' awareness about technical constraints	Technical training for maintenance commune teams	Site walkthroughs to explain recurring maintenance limitations	Include the first step of maintenance in the project's budget

Still open, carried across sessions: replicability in different contexts; monitoring the social impact; identifying the right KPIs with the participants; balance between citizens' expectations and constraints.

Key insights to carry forward:

1. **Evidence comes first, gathered with residents.** Data checked on foot (sensitive walks, walking audits, citizen-science apps) grounds design choices in shared facts.
2. **Choice needs a shared language.** Cards, menus and games put NBS options that would otherwise stay in technical hands within residents' reach.
3. **Decision power should be explicit.** IAP2 positioning, tracked proposals and participatory budgeting make clear what residents can decide, and where the limits are.
4. **Validation does not end at approval.** Temporary uses, second validation rounds and continuous dialogue carry trust through the waiting period, when budget and maintenance limits surface.

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