

POLICY RECOMMENDATION PAPER

REGENERATION

I. ABSTRACT

This Policy Recommendation Paper is one the results of a contributive, plural and transdisciplinary process of research, listening, public and participatory actions in five different cities/ countries in the scope of the ERASMUS project - [RegenerAction](#). Promoting the development and professionalization of Urban Community Builder (UCB) profile in an European context, this document presents a set of proposals for general public policies regarding the way we would like to live our cities and territories. It also presents proposals for amplifying the different voices that constitute our communities: human inhabitants, new residents, bio- and geo-diverse forms of life and matter in a collective and common approach.

II. INTRO

This Policy Recommendation Paper emerges from a two year of continuous work of research, international and transdisciplinary discussion, development of participatory methodologies with local communities, stakeholders and public authorities in the context of the international ERASMUS project RegenerAction. The need to reuse disused, dormant or neglected public spaces in urban contexts is increasingly emerging. In that sense, more people are interested in urban regeneration as a process not only for making spaces more beautiful, lively, sustainable, diverse and inclusive but as a real tool for engagement with the community. Urban regeneration actions are sometimes mistakenly confused

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with processes of mere revalorisation of physical infrastructure of cities, aimed at increasing the value of real estate assets and attracting residents from the upper-middle income bracket. This interpretation refers to beautification, disneyfication or gentrification processes. These processes result in an increase in inequalities and a progressive forced and massive displacement of vulnerable population groups, also driven by local and global economic interests.

In RegenerAction, the social and cultural components are recognized as crucial for the regenerative processes of urban disused spaces (both built and open air). Without a solid community attending spaces, making them lively and contributing to a participatory planning, co-design, and ideally, co-management, there would not be a truly regenerated place, or it would not last in the long run. As understood in this project, regenerative processes respond to social, urban and environmental needs perceived as urgent by the communities, with which the urban community builder, in their role– whether as an active citizen or as a professional profile, cooperates and interacts.

Urban Community Builders are agents of change, creating relationships, collaborating and cooperating, through a holistic and multidisciplinary approach, embracing the new challenges of participation as an opportunity. UCBs interacts with different kinds of actors and aims to facilitate processes and mediate interests. Several public and private actors operate in the field of urban regeneration and we continue to wonder about the potential forms of a complementary and systemic collaboration, directed in a synergistic way to the same goal: the improvement of living conditions.

We've worked with several people from 5 different european countries (Portugal, Spain, France, Italy and Croatia) through an experimental training program in the form of living labs. The program aimed to reflect about the important role that UCBs can have in the cities of the future and define a competence framework based on their needs that can inform the design of a training program. This information, as well as the description of the different profiles of UCBs, is systematized in the [RegenerAction Path Handbook](#). We've also discussed and stated some claims and recommendations for our cities in the form of a

collective open [Manifesto](#).

III. Approaches and Research

If one were to look at a map of Europe and beyond, it would be hard to find areas without initiatives aimed at fostering social cohesion, improving quality of life and nurturing more-than-human relations. Such projects and activities are growing widely, with initiatives - bottom-up, top-down and in-between - varying in principles, methods and goals. The understanding and terminology surrounding the concept, however, differs - with terms like urban rehabilitation, reconstruction, regeneration and revitalization being used interchangeably.

The main principle of our work in this project, as a team, was to keep a contributive approach and a collective decision-making process.

Besides, it was very important a first part of desk research, readings, a brief data collection and identification of good practices in the different cities/ countries and discussion sessions between all the partners in our monthly meetings.

The process of development of the *RegenerAction Path Handbook* was achieved through a combination of desk research and focus group discussions conducted by project partners in Croatia, France, Portugal, Italy and Spain. It aimed to develop a definition of the Urban Community Builder professional profile, as well as the essential competencies necessary to successfully drive transformative urban regenerative actions.

After a first phase of research and mapping in each territory, each partner organized a local Living Lab - citizen laboratory - (taking place between March and May 2024) with a set of 10 participants who have already developed work with communities, in their relationship with the public space and urban regeneration processes. These Living Labs took on a horizontal training format, based on practical challenges of the territory of each partner and on the shared knowledge and experiences of all participants. Each partner prepared a thematic dossier within the central areas in which discussions and practical exercises took place: Social; Digital; Ecology; Partnerships; Communication.

These Living Labs resulted in drawings/documents that call upon concepts,

practices and cases of study, but also a critical, civic and political perspective on these processes.

IV. Recommendations

Based on the Manifesto built in a contributive way between partners, participants, local agents, Urban Community Builders and local community members, we recommend four approaches to public policy for effective and inclusive urban regeneration:

a) Resist Commodification

We need space to make dreams come true.

- Create socialization zones in public spaces not dependent on consumption or negotiate the existence of free socialization zones in the concession contracts of esplanades and terraces

We don't want homeless cities.

- Develop partnerships with social organizations in the investment or recovery of infrastructures/buildings as reception centers for homeless people with programs to support social reintegration

We don't want to be gentrified.

- Create observatories that monitor areas at risk of gentrification and contribute with actions and recommendations that minimize or counter its effects.

b) Grow Relationships

We miss being with each other.

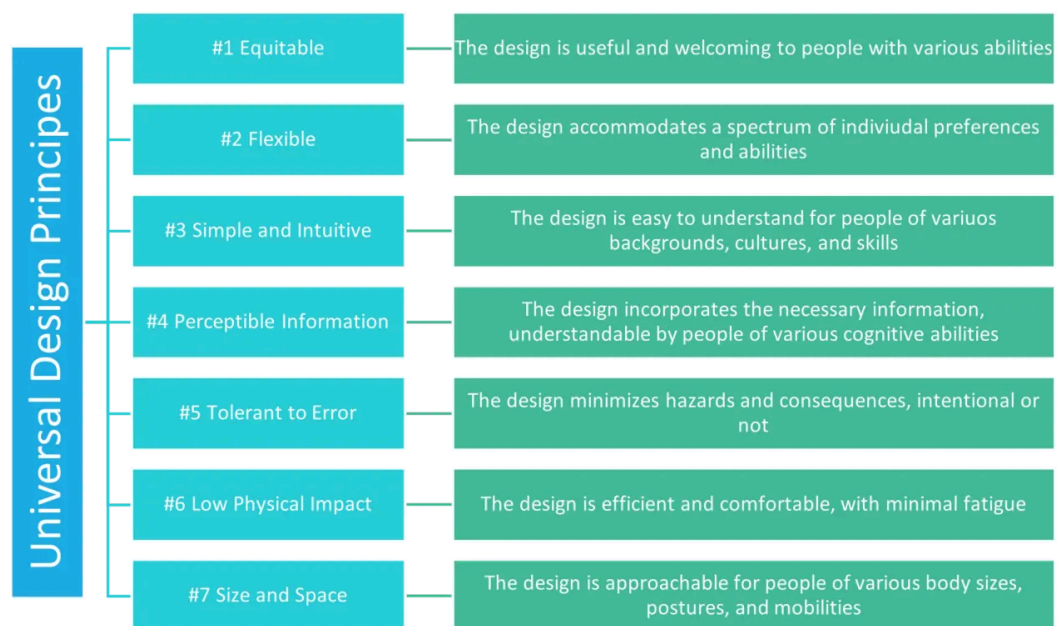
- Create legal and management mechanisms that facilitate temporary occupations of outdoor public spaces with cultural,

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educational and circular economy activities organized by informal groups or community members;

We want everybody to feel welcome.

- Give visibility to diversity: invite new inhabitants or international communities to co-organize multicultural events in the city, with the aim of sharing their culture: food, social dance, poetry, music.
- Use clear, gender-sensitive language, avoiding all types of cultural stereotypes in the city's official communications
- Explore alternative narratives to the dominant ones, involving the community and new residents in processes of reinterpreting public heritage
- Development of a deep diagnosis of accessibility problems of the city involving people with disabilities or reduced mobility in the process.
- Work with cultural and tourism agents to create positive narratives that promote feelings of trust and belonging as opposed to narratives of fear and division;
- Follow the Universal Design Principles:



We want to listen to each other

- Develop public participatory programs focused on the city and neighborhoods (for example, Urban Labs) that make use of consensus negotiation mechanisms among citizens, including children, teenagers and seniors, and other stakeholders such as cultural, social and economic agents.
- Encourage the development of professional training and job offers for professionals with an Urban Community Builders profile.
- Apply effective forms of participatory decision-making, such as participatory budgets, logistical or financial support programs for urban intervention projects by local communities;

c) Embrace Nature

We want climate just cities.

- Develop information campaigns on soft mobility, public transportation and the symptoms of climate crisis in daily life in our cities;
- Invest in cycle or shared paths in the city and communal repair workshops for bicycles;
- Promote coexistence areas, particularly in the historic center or busier areas (pedestrian priority);
- Promote partnerships with local agents with green jobs;

We want to plant our future.

- Allow urban emptiness and green areas in each neighborhood and include this priority in the city urban planning;
- Prioritize the use of indigenous plants, more adapted to the local climate and biodiversity, when planning the urban landscape.

- Build green corridors between natural and urban areas to allow the mobility of species within the city and between it and the surrounding natural space;
- Build democratic shadow spaces avoiding artificial or hard technological devices: each square needs a shadow!
- Promote the existence of natural spaces with minimal human intervention, promoting the rewilding of certain urban areas.

We want circular sustainable cities.

- Develop public regulation and action on Urban Food, such as:
 - Urban agriculture:** cultivating food within cities, including rooftop gardens, community gardens, and urban farms.
 - Local food systems:** shortening the distance between food production and consumption to reduce environmental impact and support local economies.
 - Food waste reduction:** Implementing strategies to minimize food waste at all stages of the food supply chain and create composting programs.
 - Community food initiatives:** Empowering communities to take control of their food systems through initiatives like community gardens, farmers' markets, and food cooperatives.
- Promote community workshops to share resources and tools, repair cafes, sharing of goods and services (time banks).

d) Nurture Commonality

We want to participate in decision-making.

- Create an Office to support community and participatory initiatives, which can provide information on regulations for activities, occupation of public space, spaces available for provision, information on the formalization of formal or informal groups and

- Provide platforms for information and sharing opinions on decision-making processes in each parish;
- Clearly develop all phases of civic participation in urban regeneration processes, such as:

Informing: Share information to keep stakeholders aware of project goals and updates. **Suggested Approach:** One-way communication (newsletters, websites, social media).

Consulting: Gather stakeholder feedback to understand community concerns and insights. **Suggested Approach:** Two-way communication through surveys, public forums, and focus groups.

Involving: Actively engage stakeholders in project development and decision-making. **Suggested Approach:** Participatory workshops, planning sessions, and interactive events.

Collaborating: Build partnerships where stakeholders co-manage and co-decide project aspects. **Suggested Approach:** Close collaboration through committees, working groups.

Co-governance: Share responsibility with civil society in the management of common resources. **Suggested Approach:** create legal bases and public mechanisms for demonstrating interest from people or civil organizations to share the management and decision-processes of identified urban commons (buildings, green areas, squares, etc), promoting shared care actions.

We advocate sharing and caring.

- Communicate changes to public space clearly, transparently and in advance;
- Develop an Absence Mapping: digital platform for people mapping expectant public buildings with potential for social, cultural and community-based projects and create legal mechanisms for classifying urban commons - public spaces of common interest that are managed by civil society;

- Encourage spaces for experimentation and maker culture, open-source resources, tools and knowledge sharing;

We want to try new ways of living collectively.

- Allow all public buildings that have not been used for more than 6 years to be made available for community use or occupation;
- Allow that Public spaces which can be used for meetings, social and cultural activities, sociability can be managed by their own communities, ensuring a rotation regime in the management of these spaces;
- Develop co-living experimentation programs in housing at controlled costs or affordable rents.

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