Urban Maestro

New governance strategies
for Urban Design

Urban Design Governance

Valencia, ES

13-14 June 2019 Workshop #1 Report

Informal tools
of urban design
governance utilise
the soft powers of
government

UN@HABITAT
UNITED NATIONS HUMAN SETTLEMENTS PROGRAMME

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1. INTRODUCTION

Urban Maestro's first workshop took place across two linked sessions within the Placemaking Week Europe 2019 in Valencia. The aim was to begin exploring key aspects of the project's main themes of soft power and informal tools, with the help of relevant actors & experts, as well as to start a collective learning process within the project consortium and beyond - getting interested parties to engage with the project and contribute with their experiences to the development of Urban Maestro's core ideas.

Each workshop session was structured in two parts, the first with 10-minute presentations from team members and invited speakers, followed by discussion in breakout groups. Three groups were formed in each session, each exploring a different question related to the day's presentations - as outlined below and further summarized in the next section of the report.

Session 1, on Thursday June 13th, introduced the project and explored the notion of soft power in urban design governance. What do we mean by soft power, and why is it needed? Which actors of urban design governance employ soft powers and in what ways? **Session 2** on the 14th focused on the challenges and opportunities of informal tools in urban design governance, in a discussion organised around three themes: the *politics* of urban design governance, the *finance / design* governance interface, and the *context* within which informal tools are employed.

In between the two sessions, Urban Maestro also organised the first meeting of its Support & Advisory Group in Valencia, focused on the project's analytical framework draft. This is not detailed further in this report as it is part of a semi-independent process open only to the project consortium and invited experts.

1.1.   Workshop programme

Session 1 - 13.06.19

Soft power in urban design governance: why, who & how?

• Frédéric Saliez – UN-Habitat (UM), introduction to the project

• Matthew Carmona – UCL (UM), informal tools of urban design governance

• João Bento – UCL (UM), survey of informal tools across Europe

• Christina Haas – Swiss Federal Office of Culture, informal tools at the national/trans-national scale: Baukultur

• Sándor Finta – former Budapest City Architect, informal tools at the city scale: Budapest

• Aurélien Delchet – atelier georges, externalizing design governance: Caserne Mellinet, Nantes

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• Maria Yeroyanni – EC / DG Research & Innovation, concluding remarks / links to the EC research agenda

Breakout groups discussion:

• When are informal tools preferable to formal ones?

• At what scale is urban design governance best delivered?

• How should governmental & non-governmental actors interact to deliver urban design governance?

Session 2 - 14.06.19

Challenges & opportunities of the informal tools of urban design governance

• Matthew Carmona – UCL (UM), involving the market in design governance: the English case

• Frederik Serroen – BMA (UM), achieving political support: bouwmeester maître architecte

• Amparo Tarazona Vento – University of Sheffield, entrepreneurial design governance: Valencia waterfront

• Tommaso Gabrieli – UCL (UM), incentivising design quality with financial tools

• James White – University of Glasgow, translating ideas between contexts: Vancouver & Toronto

Breakout groups discussion:

• Bottom-up or top-down, how can a culture of design be secured?

• Can financial & design governance tools be compatible?

• How contextually specific are the tools of informal urban design governance?

2. WORKSHOP SESSIONS

2.1. Session 1 presentations

<u>Chaired by:</u> Kristiaan Borret, BMA (introductions, session line-up, concluding remarks)

Frédéric Saliez introduced the Urban Maestro project and the key question: why is UN-Habitat working on urban design governance?
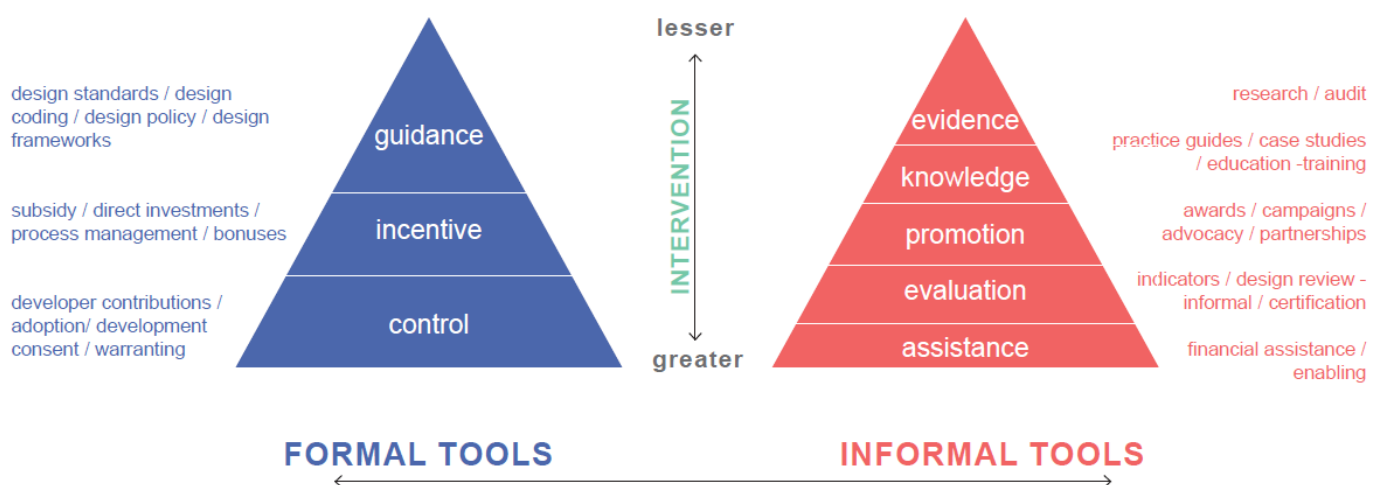
There have been important changes in the last years, and particularly since 2015 when the Sustainable Development Goals were formulated, in at least two aspects; one is related to SDG 11 & its specific target on 'universal access to public space'. It was a shift towards an understanding that local issues do matter and that design matters. The other aspect is the universality of the Agenda 2030 (and the Urban Agenda), which applies not only to developing countries or situations of crisis but to all the countries and governments that have signed up. So, *does* design matter? While a lot depends on the disciplinary perspective one is coming from (e.g. architecture or sociology, etc.), urban design is both a lever for socio-economic transformation and an indicator of how a society works

This project then addresses the question of what we can do about design. The quality of urban places is, in practice, far from being perfect, for many different reasons. From the perspective of governments, and of local authorities, what can be done? That is how we come to the notion of discussing the decision-making process of urban design. We see some places that are successful in designing urban spaces - how do they do it? What are the ingredients for success? How can this be more widely promoted, within and beyond Europe?

Matthew Carmona began with the notion of urban design governance - "an intervention in the means and processes of designing the built environment, in order to shape both processes and outcomes in a defined public interest". We have been at this question for a long time - of how the state engages with design - but we still struggle with creating places that people really love. The design governance conundrum: can state intervention in the processes of designing the built environment positively shape design process and outcomes? And if so, how?

An important distinction is the one between designing projects / places and designing a governance framework within which design can be shaped. Urban design governance is about the environment within which decision-making happens - and that in turn influences buildings, spaces, infrastructures etc. It uses a variety of different tools, some of which are formal - expressing the 'hard' powers of the state. In that, we have guidance (regulation standards, codes etc.), incentive (direct financial contribution to a project, or provisions such as infrastructure) and control (the criteria for & process of approval of projects).

However, there is also a whole set of potential informal tools, the focus of the Urban Maestro project. These are perhaps less used but, the project argues, very important, and better suited to dealing with multi-faceted policy problems such as global warming etc. - because they are about changing mindsets, not only in public authorities but also in the private sector and amongst community interests. In a hierarchy of lesser to greater intervention, these can be defined as evidence (researching & understanding the urban environment), knowledge ('spreading wisdom' via publications, training etc.), promotion (proactively advocating for particular types of places, via awards, campaigns etc.), evaluation (indicators, reviews, certifications, competitions) and assistance (direct engagement with / enabling of projects and the process by which they are designed).

design standards / design coding / design policy / design frameworks

subsidy / direct investments / process management / bonuses

developer contributions / adoption/ development consent / warranting

guidance

incentive

control

lesser

INTERVENTION

greater

evidence

knowledge

promotion

evaluation

assistance

research / audit

practice guides / case studies / education -training

awards / campaigns / advocacy / partnerships

indicators / design review - informal / certification

financial assistance / enabling

FORMAL TOOLS

INFORMAL TOOLS

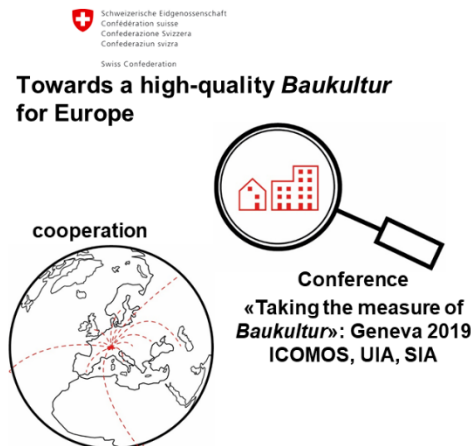|	Governmental (national/regional level)
	Governmental (local level)
	Non - governmental

João Bento reported on the progress of the Urban Maestro European survey ('informal tools for improving design quality in the built environment'). The survey is the first step towards the project's objective of mapping out the 'urban design governance landscapes' in Europe, and is built on the basis of the typology of tools presented by Matthew Carmona - examples were given for each category to illustrate potential entries under the typology.

The survey was sent out to three types of organisations in each country (28 EU + 4 EFTA): national & regional governmental departments responsible for architecture & urban design matters, local governments / city architects, and non-governmental bodies such as professional associations, architecture centres etc. So far 57 replies have been received, which represents roughly a 46% response rate; with 26 replies from national-level governmental organisations, 6 from the local level and 25 from non-governmental ones.

Christina Haas spoke about two Baukultur initiatives that the Swiss Federal Office of Culture is undertaking. First, the Davos Declaration, adopted in 2018 by the European Ministers of Culture, with the aim to politically and strategically promote the concept of a high quality Baukultur in Europe, and to promote the concept of Baukultur itself beyond German-speaking countries. Baukultur is a holistic approach that encompasses any human activity that changes the built environment, at any scale from architectural detailing to spatial planning. Old and new (existing and contemporary creation) are considered a single entity, while the concept refers not just to the built environment itself but also to the processes that create it.

Linked to that is the development of the new policy on Baukultur for Switzerland, at the national level - currently at public consultation and due to be approved by 2020. The policy introduces 7 strategic goals: engage the wider public more with the built environment via education & mediation / create normative bases for high quality spaces / introduce minimum standards for construction projects and financially support high-quality ones / enable capacity-building on Baukultur amongst experts & decision-makers / advance research on the built environment / create exemplary practices in the Swiss Confederation / promote networking and cooperation. 41 measures have been specified to help advance those goals, with the aspects of public engagement, interdisciplinarity, capacity-building, and cooperation being particularly based on the use of informal tools.

Sándor Finta firstly outlined the two main challenges that he encountered when taking up office as Budapest's City Architect: the local municipality is a very formal-centred organisation and bringing informal processes in the work was particularly tricky; and more importantly, Budapest is a 'double-layered' municipality with one overarching office and 23 districts, all with their own chief architects and separate administrations - which means the municipality as such is overseeing all but has no actual territorial remit.

The presentation then focused on one particular initiative that he put in place in his former role, the TÉR_KÖZ funding programme / competition for interventions in public spaces. The municipality found the starting money, set up the framework and called the districts to submit proposals, in the form of consortiums between authorities, private investors & citizen organisations. Proposals were judged on multiple criteria including partnerships built, complexity & innovation of ideas, economic impact and maintainability. The initiative proved popular and has been repeated multiple times.

Key lessons learned from that process: all participants need to, at some point, undertake roles beyond the strict limits of their filed (e.g. architects as mediators); experimentation & adaptation is particularly difficult under the public procurement framework; and promotion is of key importance.
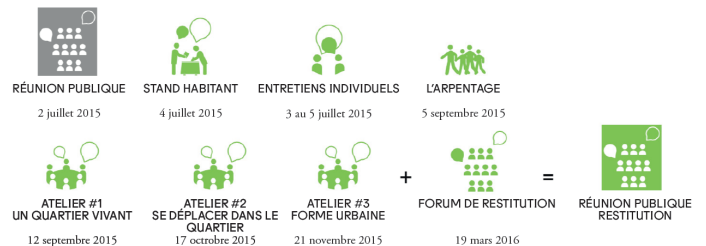
Aurélien Delchet told the story of the caserne Mellinet project in Nantes; the re-purposing of an old military base that his office, atelier georges, undertook in cooperation with other practices, the local authority & the community. The novelty of the approach was in that an architectural practice took the lead in the public consultation process; thus (from the perspective of the local authority) externalizing a core function of urban design governance. This was a new idea in a context where consultation usually means just publicizing plans once the key decisions have been made.

atelier co-conception

With the help of the municipality, atelier georges put together an 'expert panel' of locals to advise on the site's purpose & function in the area and hosted a large initial public event. A second phase included a series of interactive, collaborative events to learn from and use local knowledge - including, for example, using local businesses to activate the site before & during development, organising site visits with locals & public officials, and workshops focused on specific design elements (access, built form etc.), aided by professionals. The process was very well received; its conclusion, the residents' panel expressed an interest in continuing to have an active role in the project and, enabled by the municipality, atelier georges worked with them to design & construct urban furniture prototypes for the site.

2015
Le diagnostic partagé

RÉUNION PUBLIQUE
2 juillet 2015

STAND HABITANT
4 juillet 2015

ENTRETIENS INDIVIDUELS
3 au 5 juillet 2015

L'ARPENTAGE
5 septembre 2015

Les ateliers de co-production

ATELIER #1
UN QUARTIER VIVANT
12 septembre 2015

ATELIER #2
SE DÉPLACER DANS LE QUARTIER
17 octobre 2015

ATELIER #3
FORME URBAINE
21 novembre 2015

+

FORUM DE RESTITUTION
19 mars 2016

=

RÉUNION PUBLIQUE
RESTITUTION

2016
Le ré-emploi et le chantier

VISITE DE SITE

DÉMARCHE DE RÉ-EMPLOI

CHANTIER COLLECTIF
automne 2016

Maria Lina Yeroyanni from the European Commission concluded the session by drawing links between Urban Maestro and the current and future policy of the EC. Issues discussed in the workshop are closely linked to the EU research agenda particularly around themes of urban regeneration, circular cities, quality of urban spaces, education & training, public-private partnerships and citizen engagement in urban issues.

Urban Maestro's questions are also part of discussions at the 'Innovating Cities' High Level Expert Group chaired by Charles Landry, and the project will be invited to comment on the EG's report due to be delivered in July 2019 and discussed in upcoming Research & Innovation Days. Other potential links might be found with the Mission Board for Cities that the EC is creating - a group of 15 experts that will, over one year, work to draft content to direct future research & funding, in cooperation with Directorates-General – as well as with the European Urban Living Labs and the 'Open Living Labs Days' event in September.

2.2. Session 1 breakout groups discussions

When are informal tools preferable to formal ones?

• Participants began by stating that virtually **every stage** could have an informal dimension. As the discussion developed in more depth it was made clearer that typically both formal and informal tools are needed and complementary

• In times of **crisis**, informal tools may be more practical or even the only available option

• Projects may require both formal and informal tools at different stages or to achieve different objectives

• Informal tools are particularly useful in the more **creative / visionary / initial planning phases**. At the delivery phase formal ones are needed. Informal are also extremely useful in order to **engage** groups or individuals, as some may not even know that there are formal ways to engage

• Examples from **Switzerland**: Baukultur initiatives face the challenge to **transfer actions to canton level**. Cantons' administrations may not accept those initiatives or too rigid/bureaucratic to action them. For this reason, informal tools seem to be very effective to engage directly with towns, which may be interested in Baukultur actions but not have ideas on how to implement them. The Baukultur foundation may give them advice or training on how to do it.

• Examples from **Budapest**: A distinction was made between design projects in the city centre versus small towns. In the city centre many people/institutions would be affected by a project, so it is difficult to have all those interests incorporated by an informal approach. In the small towns it seems easier, because the community is more cohesive and easier to reach. It was noted than in general **informal engagement takes time**, whereas formal directives happen as they are decided and actioned. In Budapest the political responsibility on projects is on the city district so it is the city district that needs to involve actors. In terms of financial tools, public-private partnerships were mentioned

• It was noted that in **Rotterdam** the mayor does not have formal powers on the built environment, therefore there is an incentive to use informal tools; but **the political institution gives legitimacy** to the informal tools and makes them work more effectively

At what scale is urban design governance best delivered?

• Urban design governance should be **multi-level** and delivered at all levels of state intervention (national, regional & local)

• The **local scale** (below the city level – neighbourhood, quartier etc.) is the most relevant for residents. Accordingly, processes of public participation regarding the renewal of local areas are richer than similar ones on national informal policies, leading to better decisions

• Informal planning tends to not be very specific. Specificity is a general issue - some policies tend to be too generic and not specific to places. It's a key question, how to transform design policies into operative tools **adapted to local needs** of citizens

• It is important to incorporate design-led planning at the local – neighbourhood level. At the same time, informal tools & design tools specifically should **not be limited to use by design professionals only** or just in processes of participation

• **Urban design** has been getting a more prominent place in **higher-level spatial planning** policy documents (e.g. city or regional level, with design-based elements such as green corridors)

• Examples mentioned: the participatory process in the **Amsterdam waterfront** redevelopment, the **German neighbourhoods'** management, **Scotland's "Place Standard"** (helps to improve communication and involve local communities in design processes, while in formal processes this tends to get blocked) and the **Scottish Design Review Panels** (good to improve quality of places, but their advice is not mandatory and can be ignored)

How should governmental & non-governmental actors interact to deliver urban design governance?

• From the beginning the discussion gravitated heavily towards **consultation processes**. The importance of those was a common base, but it was stressed that is it the way they are conducted that makes them effective or not. How should these processes be designed to be truly effective? How to actually involve communities, and not just superficially?

• Key issues are: **the level of governance** at which participatory processes are placed, and the **actual methods and tools** used to engage and work with people. The latter is what makes or breaks a participatory process

• Identified obstacles: **political balances** & motivations of public officials, **lack of capacity** / competences and/or motivation to engage from the side of local

authorities, and **lack of trust** from the side of citizens, often resulting from the perception (or reality) that participatory processes do not lead to tangible / implemented results

• Consultation can be treated as **'bringing people together'** – the administration being part of the people, and including bringing institutions/organisations together. In other words, to subvert the authorities – citizens power structure

• Often the key is finding the right people to act as **contact points**, as the interface between different actors. This can also be an in-house capacity of local authorities

• Different examples were mentioned, where 'the city is following the citizens' in terms of initiative, **reversing the traditional consultation structure** – with groups bringing alternative proposals forward or being 'commissioned' by local authorities to produce alternatives to developments

• Athens was proposed & briefly discussed as a potentially interesting example, both for municipality-initiated funding competitions & for the Urban Dig Project (by participant Matina Magkou)

2.3. Session 2 presentations

<u>Chaired by:</u> Frédéric Saliez of UNH (introductions, session line-up, concluding remarks)

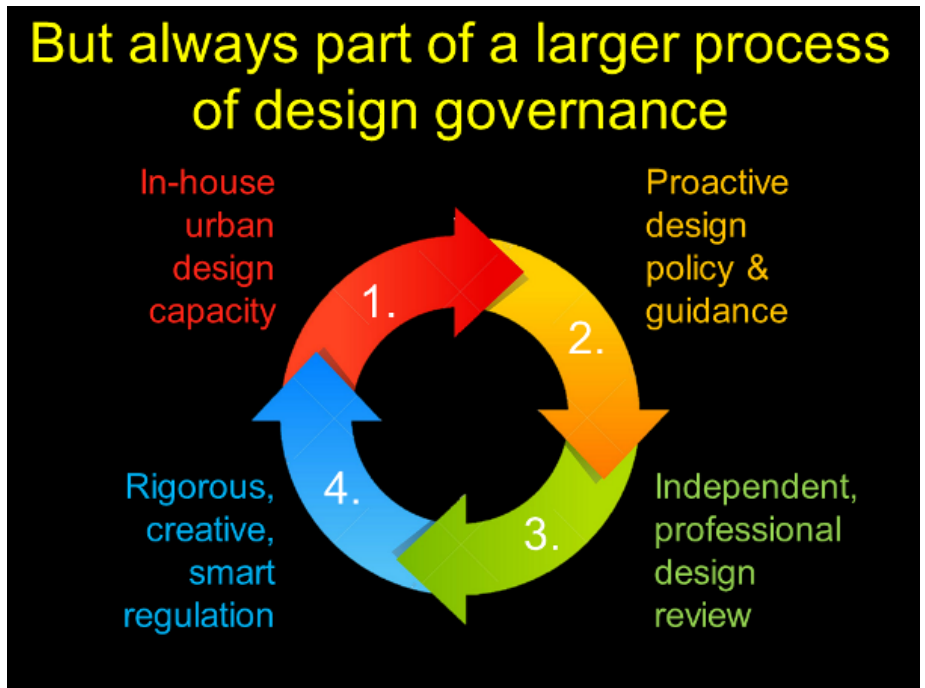**THE POLITICS OF URBAN DESIGN GOVERNANCE**

Matthew Carmona explained how the case of 'design review' in England questions our traditional understanding of urban design governance as a state-led activity; it is a case where political choices were made to invite the market in to deliver certain key services, via the particular tool of design review. This is the formal peer review process for built environment projects, essentially a panel of professionals advising a local authority about the quality of design of a particular project seeking approval.

Design review had a long history as a government function in England, in different forms; but it was brought into the spotlight with the creation of CABE (the Commission for Architecture & the Built Environment) in 1999. CABE deployed a range of tools to engage with design, all informal, but design review was both the headline and, as it turned out, the only one with the potential to be marketised when the economic and political climate shifted in 2008 - leading also to the dismantling of CABE in 2011. In the CABE era, design review was not always popular amongst designers and developers - but looking back its impact was undoubtedly positive, both in the schemes it helped shape and in the ones it managed to stop. So when CABE was swept away design review survived, by means of a small amount of funding being directed into creating the 'Design Council', an organisation that aimed to create a market for design review services, and a loose alliance of non-profits to sell these services. The government also published policy that created a space for this market by requiring local authorities to have design review arrangements in place. In the first years some of these actors disappeared but others developed a financial model that worked and expanded, while fully private players emerged as well, creating a variety of design review providers.
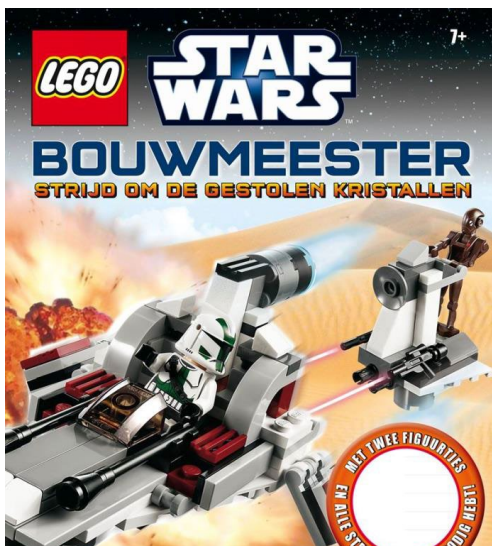
Research seems to conclude that this transition from a state-led & -funded activity to a privatised one has been positive and that design review can, alongside its various other capacities (jury, mediator, educator etc.), function as a business as well. There is more review happening with no apparent diminution in the quality of services provided, the market is settling into the price it is willing to pay for those services, and standards of design have not fallen. It is not a free market but rather an oligopoly, with a small number of players dominating, and local authorities can still choose to deliver these services in-house if they are able to. There are no clear exemplary practices and no clear rights and wrongs; rather the essence of the practice is now diversity.

?

2011, Free market

2002, Regional panels

1999, CABE

1924, Royal Fine Arts Commission

1841, Fine Arts Commission

1802, Committee of taste

Marketizing the governance of design

Urban Maestro

Most importantly, design review should be part of a larger process that engages both formal and informal practices of design governance - alongside in-house & proactive public sector capacities and creative regulation.

But always part of a larger process of design governance

1. In-house urban design capacity
2. Proactive design policy & guidance
3. Independent, professional design review
4. Rigorous, creative, smart regulation

Frederik Serroen spoke on the role and political position of the Brussels Bouwmeester's office. The formal mission statement is that the Bouwmeester supervises the quality of architecture and city development projects, from an independent position. Unpacking that sentence: 'supervising' is about stimulating, convincing etc. as much as about controlling; 'spatial' signifies that the work is not just about architecture and not judging on aesthetic terms, but rather encompassing of all built environment aspects; and 'independent' means a hybrid position where the office is only accountable towards the government while the Chief Architect is independent and the sole supervisor of the Bouwmeester Team. The key task is to smooth the urban planning process and to make sure that high quality is delivered, under the basic premise that political support needs to be acquired as early as possible within the process.

To that end, the Bouwmeester's office employs a number of tools, starting with design competitions - as a collaborative process that allows for less obstructions later on in the project. 'Quality chambers' that include public authorities and developers are used to further ensure consensus on quality before the final permit. Research by design is used to bring in evidence on spatial choices in a convincing manner, and communication methods utilized as means of engagement.

All this requires a fair amount of political support or, rather, finding and maintaining political capital. Four (plus one) main lessons towards that: be a rope dancer; build coalitions; be a creative bureaucracy; be transparent - and one cross-cutting point: choose your battles. 'Rope dancing' refers to being critical towards public authorities, but not to the point where you are seen as the 'perpetual opposition voice' - the first instance of choosing your battles. 'Building coalitions': creating alliances with the private sector, civil society, other local authorities and international organisations. The 'creative bureaucracy' angle is about empowering local administrations to be more independent and to get relevant actors out of their silos, while the 'transparency' element is, beyond other things, also a way to gain support and build trust - by letting the public see the internal logic behind decisions. At the end of the day, choosing your battles is key - not making enemies all the time but at the same time being critical enough to have a meaningful opinion on important spatial decisions.

The bouwmeester supervises the quality of architecture and city development projects in Brussels from an independent position:

- **supervise** = initiate, stimulate, control, plead, convince, be a catalyst, promote,…

- **spatial** = architecture, urban planning & design, infrastructure, public space, landscape design, …

- **Brussels** = all projects on the territory of Brussels Capital Region (public and private)

- **independent** = beside the administration and directly accountable to the government

THE FINANCE / DESIGN GOVERNANCE INTERFACE

Amparo Tarazona Vento elaborated on the case on the Valencia inner harbour transformation, as an example of the challenges of entrepreneurial design governance.

The whole project is particular in that it was instigated by and heavily linked to a major event, the America's Cup sailing competition. In 2003 the Swiss team won the Cup and began a process to select their base and location for the next edition of the event, also creating a private company (America's Cup Management - ACM) to manage the process. Valencia was selected as the venue for 2007 and the decision was well received in the city, as an opportunity for economic and wider transformation particularly around the waterfront, as well as for city marketing. The central government would foot the bill for construction and the port would become a productive financial asset, with little action required from the part of the local authority. The event was an opportunity to release the land from the port authority to the municipality and to receive investment for wider infrastructure improvements.

This being a speculative investment, the public sector assumed all financial risk. A consortium of different levels of government was established, responsible for implementing the infrastructures required as per the contract with ACM and the brief they set (canal & docking places for mega-yachts, team bases and an iconic building). This was, at the end, financed by a loan taken out by the consortium, 70% of which was expected to be recovered via exploitation of the harbour area beyond the event. The projects were finished on time and under budget, rare for this kind of mega-projects, and as a whole were considered a success mainly due to the increased number of visitors. Two years later in 2009 however, when this research was concluded, this success was questionable; the inner harbour remained deserted, the hospitality sector returned to prior, low levels of demand but having increased a lot in supply, while the consortium was declaring significant losses.

In the end, the event was necessary as the catalyst for transformation, but also mishandled in the sense that the spatial needs of the event were prioritised over the long-term needs of the city and over place quality. Planning was lacking in long-term vision and fully driven by short-term profitability, while at the same time no mechanisms were put in place to ensure the economic viability of the area beyond the event. So the question emerges if more creative financial instruments had been used, could the city perhaps have utilized this catalyst in a better way, to bring on a successful urban regeneration?

7

Constraints and challenges

Prioritisation of the needs of the event over the long term needs of the city

• ACM set out the brief for the project for the inner harbour according to the needs of the competition

Lack of holistic spatial planning

• Short term planning

• Only most profitable sites in the area were planned and developed

Excessive dependence on event

• Economic feasibility of the inner harbour area dependent on the crowds brought by the competition


8

Some final thoughts

Although one of the main objectives was the transformation of the inner harbour, good quality place making and long term planning became secondary to ensuring economic returns to pay the loan.

• Could more creative financial instruments have been used?

• Could these have made place making less dependent on event and owners of event?

• Could the event have been used as a catalyst for transformation but within a spatial planning framework with long term objectives?

Tommaso Gabrieli picked up on the question of whether (creative) finance be used to enhance urban quality. If yes, then this should mean that urbanists and economists can work together - this cooperation is indeed possible and has a long history (for example in the Italian Renaissance or in the post-war Europe). Nowadays, when we think about finance for the urban environment, we still struggle with a fundamental tension between monetary value (a.k.a. market price) and intrinsic value (to which built environment professionals usually refer as intangible). This tension is evident whenever developers and urbanists are brought together, but ideally urban design should be something that brings all the different dimensions of values together (even though this is rare and in most cases an economist would describe many urban design projects and processes as 'market failures'). From the perspective of the public sector, the question is not just where to find the finance but also how to use it in fair and economically sustainable way. Factors that complicate the search for answers include the working of the real estate market, different schools and intellectual approaches in economics that lead to different answers, academic or professional silos and general socio-political tensions.
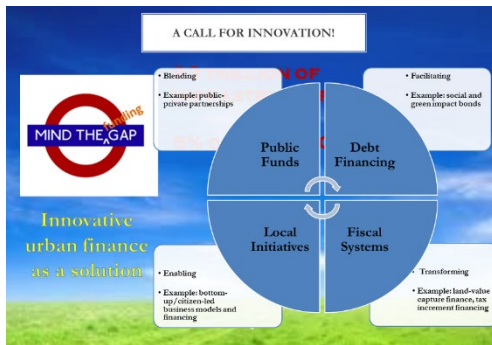
For the Urban Maestro project, the analysis started with a classification of all types of financial instruments available, in the public & private sector, and by looking for potential creative options within traditional typologies such as equity / debt instruments. Financial innovation is seen as the answer to the 'funding gap' -putting private & public resources together in a creative way, to make up for the fact that the public sector alone cannot provide the infrastructure necessitated by current urbanisation rates. For this project however, the core question is not on these innovative tools alone but on their relationship to the delivery of urban quality, and the key methodological choice is to not separate finance form design governance; from the start, we are looking at the interface of financial & design governance tools, or in other words extracting the financial dimension of all the different tools contained in the initial formal / informal toolbox.

A first operational classification revealed six types of financial tools for urban design governance: 1. Direct financing instruments (e.g. the 'revolving fund' for the Energy Efficiency Projects in Stuttgart), 2. Direct public investment (e.g. the UK Affordable Homes Programme), 3. Local taxation supplements (for land value capture - e.g. BIDs - a complex issues at the heart of the 'multiple values tension'), 4. Indirect financing instruments (tax incentives, zoning bonuses etc.), 5. Steering tools (public/private partnerships, e.g. Danish Architecture Centre), 6. Regulatory management tools (e/g/ fast-tracking in exchange for better design quality)

THE CONTEXT FOR URBAN DESIGN GOVERNANCE

James White used his research on Vancouver and Toronto to explore whether and how do 'best practices' travel between places. Learning from best practice, or celebrated examples, is a recurring element in urban design, underpinned also by the foundational model of precedent studies in design education. Vancouver is one of those well-known examples of successful urban renaissance particularly around the waterfront, in what has come to be known as 'Vancouverism' - the product / physical side of which has certain characteristic elements such as the tower-podium model, private amenity spaces and a generous public realm. However, Vancouver's success was also largely due to the process behind those products, with its sophisticated design review system, its strong design-based vision for the city and a thorough-going public participation process, as well as strong leadership with negotiation skills.

The Vancouver model has travelled globally and became part of a larger theoretical discussion on urban policy mobilities - how policy and ideas do not transfer seamlessly from place to place but alter and adjust, travelling as assemblages of images of urban form, techniques, legal arrangements and cultures of practice. Toronto attempted to specifically 'import' Vancouverism and the case study is revealing as to how this complex mobilisation works and where it can go wrong.
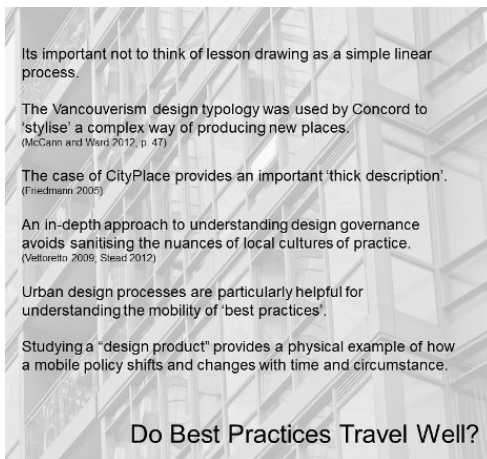
One developer, Concord Pacific, held a key role in delivering much of the original Vancouver schemes that created 'Vancouverism', and they were a key player in Toronto, using their previous success as advantage to secure land and in negotiations with the city. In Toronto, however, the resulting urban development fell short of Vancouver's success; the built form was 'off' in proportions and construction quality; detailing and street-level integration lacked the example's sophistication; the quality of public spaces was not as high. Many of the ideas were only transferred superficially - the image (or style) was there to link to Vancouver but the underlying governance practices were lacking in key aspects, leading to the developer behaving differently and ultimately delivering lower quality results. The physical product of urban design, comparatively examined between the two cities where many other factors were similar (national context, developer, etc.), reveals the deeper differences in the 'invisible' processes as they were (mis-)transferred from one place to the other; and draws attention to the dangers of simplifying knowledge when trying to learn from other places.

Retail-Residential Mix on Pacific Blvd, Vancouver
Concord Pacific Place, Vancouver
(Image Credit: By the author)

Concerns in Toronto:

Inadequate spacing between residential towers

Poor treatment of retail units and street-facing elevation

Retail-Residential Mix on Front St, Toronto
Concord CityPlace, Mafia, 2000-2002
(Image Credit: By the author)

Vancouverism in Toronto: Lost in Translation?

Its important not to think of lesson drawing as a simple linear process.

The Vancouverism design typology was used by Concord to 'stylise' a complex way of producing new places.
(McCann and Ward 2012, p. 47)

The case of CityPlace provides an important 'thick description'.
(Friedmann 2005)

An in-depth approach to understanding design governance avoids sanitising the nuances of local cultures of practice.
(Vettoretto 2009, Stead 2012)

Urban design processes are particularly helpful for understanding the mobility of 'best practices'.

Studying a "design product" provides a physical example of how a mobile policy shifts and changes with time and circumstance.

Do Best Practices Travel Well?

2.4. Session 2 breakout groups discussions

Bottom-up or top-down, how can a culture of design be secured?

• Using both, in complementary ways - and also 'horizontally'.

• The balance between top-down and bottom-up is (or has to be) context-specific (in terms of location, scale, particular conditions etc.)

• Using creativity, showing by example, and constructing positive narratives will be key

• Before all, the first question should be why a culture for design? –i.e. to more clearly set the objectives of such a process and its dynamics (by & for whom?) and to use appropriate communication methods to build trust between different parties.

• It's key to find an organisation, or method / process, to act as the facilitator in-between top-down & bottom up, and to organise and handle follow-ups and monitoring. A well-designed placemaking process could potentially fill that role.

• It was suggested there are certain elements that are better suited for each process: for example, policy (or project) frameworks are better set top-down, but implemented bottom-up (with feedback loops) – as in the example of BIDs frameworks. So a co-creation process should involve different actors / organisations, but not asking them to take responsibility for elements far outside their remit or expertise.

• However other participants disagreed with that view, suggesting there is room for effective 'horizontal' co-creation at all levels (e.g. for policy)

• Linked to that is the issue of tools/methods: they should be suited to, or adapted to, the specific goal that is envisioned, but also to the capacities of the actors involved. The wrong method may bring the opposite result, discouraging people and freezing the process.

• Suggested example: analytical tools, used for instance to understand key elements of best practice examples, are better suited to built environment professionals, who can then bring the right elements forward for further working with authorities & citizens

Can financial & design governance tools be compatible?

• The objective is to bring the public sector, the population of a place and the private sector together to design the city

• In small cities, the private sector tends to be very interested in engaging

• Marika Frenette (Wigwam Conseil) explained what they do with private firms in order to fund environmental projects – using a diagram developed by the City of Portland with three types of interested supporters (circles, from the closest to the more distant):

• Their private investors do it on a voluntary (pro-bono) basis, but they are much happier to fund if they see some financial literacy in the project presentation, if the public initiatives are financially sound. They are also happier to engage when the project affects their immediate community, so again small villages seem to work more effectively for informal engagement

• René Sommer Lindsay (R|S|L|ENT) explained some interesting examples on Copenhagen. The municipality can change the zoning system and give permission to developers (formal tool), but they can involve residents' groups from the planning phase in order to agree private management of a public accessible space (semi-informal tool)

• It was noted that in Hamburg, something similar was done, but the outcome may have been leaning too much towards a private space (accessible but not really "free"); similar approaches were mentioned for Berlin but for spaces owned by housing associations where residents are renting.

• Examples noted from France: the "Hôtel Dieu" in Rennes, by the developer Linkcity (regeneration of heritage site) & the "Prairies aux Ducs" project in Île de Nantes (housing)
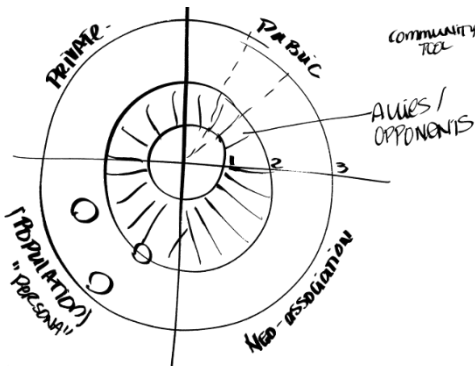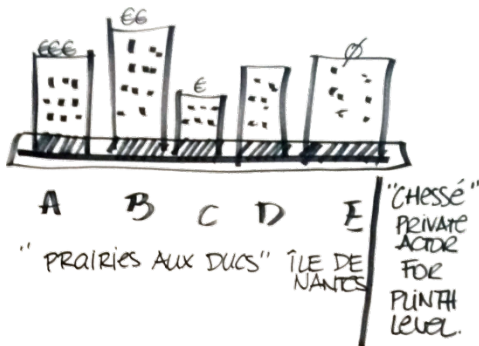
How contextually specific are the tools of informal urban design governance?

• There many and good reasons to keep borrowing ideas from elsewhere – other places can inspire, motivate, and challenge us to think differently. First we need to identify what we have, and what we are doing well – the particular strengths of a place. You do not always have to bring in a complicated model from elsewhere

• Planning approval processes differ and awareness of this need to always be there when trying to import a model from elsewhere. Differences may range from subtle to very profound. Local design cultures will also differ

• We can learn a lot from failures too – by looking at less successful or badly done examples and reflecting back on our own practices and failures

• Beyond physical things (as in the classic example of 'starchitect'- designed buildings), we can learn from and transfer processes, conversations and ways of doing

• Differences aside, we can find a common value base in dealing with public space

• There is a link starting from values to all the things one place can learn from another: values to process and process to both projects and to discovering new modes of conduct or unexpected solutions

• Examples noted: the "public charrette" process (from the US to the UK) as a policy for public engagement, Design Champions in the UK and Bouwmeesters in Belgium

3. Workshop 1. Key takeaways and conclusions

Soft power / why, who, how

The effectiveness of soft power and informal tools in urban design governance came through strongly across all presentations, not just for building a culture for design but also for delivering real projects on the ground, and often including the involvement of diverse interests.

In practice, there is no strict barrier between soft and hard power in urban design governance but rather a continuity of approaches from more formal to less formal, with financial tools incorporated in it (e.g. a continuity from guidance tools to financial assistance tools). Urban Maestro will continue to explore this practical overlap between tools as it can be found in case studies, and as it can be reflected in a theoretical framework of urban design governance tools.

Challenges & opportunities

The transferability of tools, or how to best adopt lessons from other places, was particularly highlighted. The Vancouver example shows that transferring a particular design solution, even as a broad decontextualized concept, may not succeed if there is no transfer of the underlying urban design governance arrangement. Understanding the challenges of adapting models to local contexts is an issue that the project will need to address.

The finance/design interface was also highlighted as a very promising aspect of the research, with diverse stakeholders taking a keen interest in the topic and bringing forward examples of innovative schemes. At the same time, it also seems this is a relatively under-explored topic – we need a better understanding of how financial tools are used as part of wider design governance approaches and of the specific impacts, they have on the ground.

Creating engagement

This workshop was the first public event of Urban Maestro and, as such, a key aspect was to present & discuss the building blocks of the project with a wider audience, create awareness of the work and start bringing together a network of people and organisations to be part of the process in the long run. Follow-up is already underway, beginning with this report, and over the following months we will be using material from the workshop to continue building our online 'knowledge

base' on urban design governance that began with the kick-off meeting presentations (at urbanmaestro.org)

The 'placemaking' context

Beyond the networking and discovering opportunities, being hosted within the Placemaking Week also brought on a particular emphasis on themes of co-creation, participatory and citizen-led processes to our workshop - as in other sessions and following a dominant theme of the whole event. Although the basic premise of Urban Maestro is to refer to the perspective of the public authority, the importance of participation and leadership issues was reinforced and with it the need to further explore how these might fit within a framework of informal tools inn urban design governance.