Lessons from the Urban Maestro workshops

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INTRODUCTION

The Urban Maestro project used four research / learning approaches to gather and capture information about the diverse approaches to urban design governance across Europe.

- Survey: a European-wide survey or urban design governance practices, primarily at the level of nation states
- Panorama: a review of published materials (largely online) to gather data on a wide variety of known approaches to urban design governance used across Europe leading to the publication of around 80 fact sheets
- Case studies: more in-depth analysis of a range of practices backed by interviews and the commissioning of papers from experts associated with particular practices
- Workshops: a series of curated conversations with a diverse range of practitioner audiences at a sequence of carefully structured events throughout the lifetime of the project.

The four approaches were carefully coordinated with the workshops providing opportunities to consider in greater depth and in a comparative manner, practices that had been revealed in the survey and through the identification and articulation of the various factsheets, case studies and expert papers. In turn, the workshops offered an opportunity to identify further practices and refine the understanding of those already identified through the other streams of work.

This paper focusses on learning from across the range of workshops and other events that sat at the core of the Urban Maestro project. Workshop 1 and 2 took place, respectively, in Valencia (June 2019) and Porto (February 2020) and attracted a mixed audience of practitioners, academics, policy-makers and others to talk about urban design governance practices both in those cities and elsewhere. Both workshops were structured around a series of formal presentations and break out groups. Workshops 3 and 4 took place after the Coronavirus pandemic had taken hold (respectively in June and November 2020) and were therefore hosted online, again with featured speakers and practices, and time for collective reflection. These workshops were also structured around formal presentations and discussion with workshop 3 featuring online breakout sessions.
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Note: events are referenced throughout the paper using the acronyms in brackets in column 1 above.
Workshops were between one and one and half days in length, and each concluded with a closed meeting of the project advisory group in order to reflect on the workshop discussions and begin the process of extracting key findings. In addition, Urban Maestro hosted a Brussels launch event in February 2019, a dedicated session at the World Urban Forum (WUF) in Abu Dhabi in February 2020 and conducted a Masterclass for students over three weeks in September 2020.

Each event (collectively referred to as workshops in this paper) was carefully curated around a theme and a complimentary set of practices in order to subject the individual experiences to rigorous analysis and to reflect on the conceptual framing provided by the Urban Maestro team, see: https://urbanmaestro.org/tools/. All the Urban Maestro workshops were recorded and systematically written up in a sequence of event reports. These reports provide the primary source materials on which this paper is based. They can be accessed at: https://urbanmaestro.org/events/.

The intention here is not to focus on particular urban design governance practices in-depth, but instead to look across the range of Urban Maestro workshops to reveal key cross-cutting themes, critiques and insights that were revealed by the discussions between approximately six hundred participants over the seven events. The paper is divided into six sections examining:

1. The culture and commitment to design quality
2. Building the toolkit for urban design governance
3. The governance of urban design governance
4. The power and people of urban design governance
5. The economics of urban design governance
6. How practices travel

Each section is further divided into a series of propositions that are supported by the evidence gathered during the workshops. These twenty propositions are brought together in the conclusions to the paper.
1. THE CULTURE AND COMMITMENT TO DESIGN QUALITY

A first set of propositions focus on the drive across many cities, regions and countries in Europe to build a culture of place quality underpinned by a focus on design:

There are widely shared aspirations to build a local culture of quality

The focus of Urban Maestro has been on ‘New governance strategies for urban design’. Urban governance and urban design are both contested concepts and the subject of much debate about what constitutes ‘good’ governance and ‘good’ design, with urban design, in particular, understood very differently in different parts of Europe (Carmona 2014; 2016). Against this backdrop it was surprising that few questioned the scope or legitimacy of either concern during the workshops, and therefore of the practices under discussion.

Whilst individual experiences and practices had different foci, collectively underpinning them were two broad beliefs:

- First, that the benefits associated with improving the quality of urban places are manyfold, extending across economic, social, health and environmental remits. There is consequently a need to expand our understanding of design beyond narrow aesthetic considerations to these broader ‘place value’ remits.
- Second, design ‘quality’ does not happen by accident, by itself or under the auspices of the free market acting in isolation. There is an important role for the state in helping to shape the decision-making environment within which buildings, spaces and places are themselves shaped.

The workshops confirmed that such beliefs apply both to how we design and integrate new areas, infrastructure and interventions in urban areas, but also to how we handle the existing urban fabric.

This notion of extending what might be seen as a narrower and more traditional view of design is encompassed in key concepts that underpinned many of the practices reviewed across the workshops, e.g. circularity, urban metabolism, health, habitability and Baukultur. Baukultur, for example, advances a holistic approach to the built environment that encompasses all human activity that changes the built
environment across the scales from spatial design to architectural detail across areas – old and new – not just to the tangible built environment but also to all the processes that create it (WS1) (Conference of Ministers of Culture 2018).

Beyond Europe, these broader notions of the value of high quality urban design and the importance of its proactive pursuit through good governance have been increasingly reflected on the international stage, including explicitly through the 2015 re-formulation of the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals; explicitly in Goal 11: Sustainable cities and communities and implicitly in many others relating, for example, to climate action, gender equality, good health and well-being, etc. (WS1). The Urban Maestro workshops revealed that whilst it is not important to have definitive common definitions of what design quality means (which will inevitably vary across contexts), it is vital to promote the idea that quality is important (WS2), and that urban design governance concepts can be applied from the largest spatial scales of strategic projects (e.g. the Room for the River project in the Netherlands) to the smallest scale of individual public spaces (e.g. BIPZIP in Lisbon) (MC). This notion of building a ‘culture of quality’ is widely shared across Europe and Urban Maestro confirmed that the continent has much best practice to share with the world (WS2).
Building a culture of quality is a long-term project requiring sustained commitment and influence over the key levers of delivery, whilst persuading others to join.

Fundamental change can only occur if investment processes are maintained over long periods of time, requiring attention across different spatial scales, from small scale everyday interventions to large scale strategic projects. Underpinning these scales are careful strategic planning, smart infrastructure investment, and ongoing investment in the public realm exemplified in cities such as Copenhagen where quality-led investment both in new and existing areas has been sustained for decades (WS4).

A long-term approach can help cities ride development waves and crises of all sorts and remain confident about delivery. Taking a ‘quality-led’ approach from the start of key projects and sustaining it throughout can help to reduce risk and provide confidence for investors – including government – whilst building value. This implies both the provision of up-front infrastructure and a clear vision for the place being shaped. A key lever is control of land, and maintaining a controlling interest on public land can help public authorities to ride a rising wave of value and increasingly push for greater quality using a combination of soft and hard powers. The alternative is to sell land and leave the market to deliver with only relatively crude regulation to hold the design quality line (WS4).

Repeatedly examples of delivering high quality design outcomes were presented and discussed where the key difference was the state’s control of the land, in effect putting the public sector in the controlling seat or at least buying a seat at the table as visions for places are generated. How that position is then utilised to secure public benefits brings the potential of soft powers to the fore, notably through the vital tool of persuasion, for example convincing real estate partners and public authorities to invest in (longer-term) public goods by demonstrating the reality of patient capital leading to enhanced public and private returns (WS4).

Political commitment, with flexibility, is key

Whilst commitment to building a quality culture is broad, sometimes this is absent or can be flaky in the context of other priorities or when regimes change. The innovative
Czech programme for providing national subsidies for the running of architectural and urban design competitions locally has suffered in this way, with shifting national priorities leading to a turning on, then off and then on again of the funding tap for this initiative. In this case, the reliance on a single funding source for the initiative has led to its vulnerability, and discussions have been had about diversifying the funding to create a more comprehensive and significant system for supporting competitions in the future. However, in a field where small steps are often more feasible than larger ones, efforts have concentrated on trying to ensure this small subsidy remains in place and then building from there. The efforts look to be successful (WS2).

Urban Maestro’s session at the Word Urban Forum 10 (WUF) focused on the “Soft-power in the governance of urban design: a new approach for achieving quality in cities” and took place on the 10th February 2020, in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

Given the slow pace of urban transformation, where present, greater political continuity in the application of public policy has paid dividends, leading to continuity (in ideas rather than leadership) beyond the standard duration of political terms. Political leaders seem more likely to build on the work of their predecessors in cities where there is a consensual urban and political culture, such as in Vienna or, beyond Europe, in Medellin. Rather than spending time re-inventing formal plans and associated regulations from one administration to the next, in such places soft powers seem to allow a more evolutionary process focused on quality (WUF). But not all regimes make the use of such powers easy to deploy. It was noted, for example, that in Rotterdam the mayor does not have formal powers to shape the built environment and therefore there is an incentive to use informal tools. In this case, the political authority of the office gives legitimacy to the informal tools and makes
them work more effectively. By contrast, in Budapest, the tradition is for a very formalised mode of urban governance, and bringing forward informal processes such as experimental temporary interventions are particularly challenging under the public procurement framework (WS1).

In the global south, the opposite can be the case. In Kigali, for example, the flexibility that informal tools allow because of the soft forms of power they rely on has been important in overcoming the limitations of more formal (hard power) mechanisms. Engagement with the community to promote regular voluntary collective works – “community days” – are one such example, allowing inhabitants to take an active role in both the design and construction of interventions from which they will directly benefit (WUF). A world away, the Samoa île de Nantes developments have relied upon a strong political vision for setting the level of ambition that both public and private actors will need to reach, but the masterplan that this vision gives rise to is also flexible enough to allow for incremental delivery and experimental interventions, often underpinned by co-design processes, across the island (WS3).

A snippet from Marika Frenette’s presentation on the Samoa Île de Nantes project during one of the Workshop 3 “Innovative Development Tools” (WS3) sessions on the 16th June 2020.
2. BUILDING THE TOOLKIT FOR URBAN DESIGN GOVERNANCE

The second set of propositions looks at the urban design governance tools being used across Europe and in particular at the role of informal tools within that mix.

From design culture to design delivery, and design delivery to design culture, the two are mutually reinforcing

Whilst the focus of the Urban Maestro project has been on tracking, understanding and sharing how European aspirations for a better quality built environment are being delivered through the active interventions of public authorities in the governance of design, from the start the focus was on the informal tools of urban design governance that derive from the use of the soft powers of the state, typically beyond the constraints of regulatory systems. As was said at the launch of Urban Maestro: “All stupid buildings have got a building permission. If we want a better built environment, we need other tools” (LM). The need, it seems, is for more intelligent tools that can inform decision-making and lead to better decisions, rather than limiting processes to the formally defined possibilities encompassed by legislation.

The workshops revealed a widespread acceptance of the power of informal tools and associated soft powers to shape agendas, from the international stage (e.g. the Global Public Space Toolkit – UN-Habitat 2015), to the local, notably the countless guides, systems of design competition, review and support invented by regimes across Europe. Early on, the Urban Maestro (2019) project conceptualised a division in the category of informal tools between tools designed primarily to build a culture of good design, and those focussed more on shaping the delivery of individual projects. Whilst such a division will never be absolute – delivery tools can help to reinforce the culture, and culture tools underpin the delivery – a broad acceptance was apparent through the workshops that both roles are necessary in order to respond to and embrace the complexity of the city and the range of actors involved in or impacted by development. The guidance produced by the Bouwmeester Maitre Architecte (BMA) in Brussels provides a case-in-point. This goes much further than simply articulating legal regulations, instead it strives to influence the environment within which quality is negotiated at the beginning of projects. As with any form of soft power, it is never absolute but serves to convince others in a variety of informal ways (WS2).
The masterclass concluded by stating a chicken or egg problem: Which should come first, quality culture or quality delivery tools? The remainder of the workshops suggested that as they are mutually reinforcing the problem sets up a false dichotomy – they work together and need each other to be truly effective (MC).

Urban Maestro Masterclass (MC) brought together a group of 40 international students from a variety of disciplines to work with a range of academics, practitioners and other invited experts, examining real-life case studies as a way to explore issues surrounding the topic of urban governance. September 2020

Creative (even visionary) not bureaucratic tools are required to deliver place quality

Informal tools tended to push professionals and indeed administrations into new ways of working e.g. placing architects within the realm of mediators, and local authorities as promoters of visions or as their implementors (WS1). As was observed in workshop 2, it is important to offer a “perspective in which people can dream” as it mobilises positive forces and can help to contribute to a greater alignment of stakeholders’ otherwise uncoordinated interventions. In part, this relates to the potential for informal tools or urban design governance to help to underpin, establish, articulate, promote and deliver place-based visions, beyond those that the market would deliver working in isolation (WS2).

Design competitions are a good example of this, as tools able to generate debate and innovative ideas for high-profile prestige projects and for ordinary places and common design problems where the output may be generalisable lessons for sites beyond those that are subject to the competition, e.g. the Panorama Lokaal scheme.
used in the Netherlands. In this respect, competitions as a design governance tool are not about defining winners and losers (although that is necessary to encourage involvement) but are instead part of a learning culture in which innovative solutions for different problems can inform ongoing practice. Therefore, whilst competitions need infrastructure and resourcing to make them work, the outcomes may be less important than the process if that process helps to build the long-term quality culture (WS2).

Turning to public space projects and the case of Pretoria discussed at the World Urban Forum, the municipality has sometimes hesitated between a general laisser-faire and the adoption of strict control measures, both proving relatively ineffective. In a few cases, at the initiative of a local community or the private sector, the public authority has looked to these local actors to establish an urban design vision in order to crystallise a broad collective aspiration amongst stakeholders. This can cut through sometimes stifling top-down regulation and help to fill the gap between public and private expectations, ensuring continuity of urban development policies over longer periods of time and over different public administrations. In such circumstances, the need is for the hard powers of the state not to stifle the bottom-up initiatives of communities and private stakeholders (WUF).

Other forms of informal tool such as forms of audit, guidance, and persuasion may be less focussed on individual sites or localities and instead aimed at establishing a narrative for the place around which actors can coalesce (WS2). Copenhagen’s strong narrative of success in reshaping its public realm for pedestrians and cyclists builds on tried and tested approaches that in turn build on a consensus around a clear vision of what sort of city Copenhagen should be; one clearly understood and favoured by investors (WS4). Elsewhere, design quality is too often still viewed as a luxury rather than a necessity and remains in search of a new narrative encompassed in the search for equity, vitality and sustainability (LM).

In this regard, the workshops demonstrated how storytelling plays an important role in urban design governance, although transfer of the ideas contained therein is not always easy (WS2). Those responsible for Switzerland’s Baukultur initiatives, for example, face the challenge of how to transfer this new national priority into action at the canton level. Cantonal administrations do not always accept such centrally imposed initiatives and / or can be too rigid and bureaucratic in how they implement them (WS1).

In such cases, soft powers are limited by the willingness of state authorities to embrace the message, although the recent experience of the Covid-19 pandemic may have greatly extended that number. The experience has shown how in times of crisis, the use of informal tools may be the more practical and perhaps the only
available option given the time and complexity required to adopt formal regulations in the face of acute pressures. The use of temporary public space guidance and temporary public realm interventions have been widespread across Europe during the pandemic and demonstrate the potential power and effectiveness of such informal tools (WS1).

**Informal informs and formal formalises: formal and informal urban design governance works together**

One of the strongest messages from the workshops was the complimentary nature of formal and informal tools and the need for them to be used together, perhaps at different stages in a project's evolution and to meet different objectives. Informal tools, for example, seem particularly effective at:

- Helping to build a culture of quality
- Underpinning formal processes with evidence and experience
- Facilitating more creative / visionary thinking in early development phases
- Engaging groups or individuals who would otherwise be turned off by formal processes (WS1)

At the delivery phase, formal tools are needed to provide the ultimate guarantee of the public interest through the implementation of regulations with legal authority (WS1). The use of formal instruments (land use controls, taxation, etc.) also underpin the use of informal tools, making them viable as governance approaches. For example, maintaining a control through hard power regulations on the proportion of dwellings available for Airbnb in touristic locations such as Porto is central to preserving the character and identity of such places, which can then be enhanced through informal tools (WS2). Success comes from aligning formal and informal processes towards the same ultimate objectives.

In practice, there is no strict barrier between soft and hard power in urban design governance but instead they are often used together, for example design review processes feeding into formal development consent regimes (WS1). The support of the London Plan (building on national policies), for example, had a very significant influence on the take-up of design review in London, in effect by requiring design review for certain proposals. Now, there are 31 active panels in the city, with research suggesting the model is proving very effective when implemented (Carmona 2018). The panel advice is non-binding and it's take-up discretionary (less
than 1% of planning applications are currently reviewed in London) but when available is used both to develop and refine design proposals in the run up to their formal consideration by development management, and as part of that formal process alongside all the other inputs to that system (WS3).

There is also a continuity of approaches from more formal to less formal, including formal processes that have a discretionary dimension (as in the London case) and which may be more akin to informal tools than to strict regulatory variants, as well as tools in which informal mechanisms are embedded in the formal tool (WS1). In Germany, the concept tendering procedure utilised to deliver greater public value during the public disposal of land represents a case-in-point. The process is divided into two stages, the selection procedure and the options phase in which the architectural, legal and financial conditions are clarified. This second stage has the potential for informal tools to be used alongside the formal mechanism of concept tendering in order to guide decision-making. The financial incentive to do this is provided for by the potential to purchase land below full market value providing the opportunity space for delivering higher quality developments and a more considered design process (WS3).

The most sophisticated approaches use tools in combination and in multiple ways

Urban design governance tools are rarely used in isolation with the most sophisticated jurisdictions utilising a combination of tools, including formal and informal approaches and both quality-delivery and quality-culture tools. By way of example, BMA utilises four primary tools. Design competitions are the dominant tool, with a two-stage process and the transparent publication of jury reports to assist both the public sector and private developers make better design decisions. Quality chambers deliver design review in a systematic manner for key sites, with review now compulsory (since 2019) for any projects with a coverage exceeding 5,000 square meters. Research by design (an explorative design process) helps to generate initial design guidelines for projects before they go into the formal regulatory processes of the municipality. Finally, BMA uses diverse communication channels to promote and raise awareness about the importance of architectural and urban design quality in Brussels (WS2).
During the Workshop 2 “Design Environment” (WS2), Kristiaan Borret introduced the position of Brussels Bouwmeester Maître Architecte and the tools employed in order to supervise, inspire, and promote the quality of urban developments. 29-31st January, Porto, Portugal

In Riga, the City Architect's office is tasked to give design advice to stakeholders involved in the planning process. This advice is complementary to, but independent of, the mandatory regulatory processes and is provided through an Advisory board mechanism comprising the city architect and a board of 16 professional experts, mostly from NGOs. Supplementing this, the office organises an annual architecture award in Riga; an annual conference on design quality (open to all); and is regularly involved in research projects, both those seeking a better understanding of development practices and research by design aimed at feeding directly into the development process (WS3).

These and other successful cases of integrated urban transformation discussed in the workshops make use of a powerful combination of formal and informal approaches to urban design governance. Beyond Europe, in Kigali, neither formal nor informal approaches were proving very effective until then were combined. According to one observer they could “not do top-down, nor do bottom-up” when attempting to transform the city's slums. Instead, by creating mechanisms of urban design governance that mixed soft (bottom-up) community engagement and participation approaches, backed, when necessary, by hard regulatory approaches, they were better able to deal with the nuances of the complex situations (physically, social, economically) that they were facing (WUF).

Even individual tools can be used in multiple ways for multiple purposes. Competitions, for example, are used primarily to select a designer for projects and for gathering different creative ideas for significant projects, sites or design challenges.
They can also be used to:

1. identify new design talent, in a market that tends to favour tried and tested teams
2. stimulate a public debate on sites and projects
3. garner involvement in helping to define particular projects or address defined problems
4. help build a culture of good design – locally, nationally or internationally
5. stimulate a pedagogic role allowing those involved to learn and evolve
6. conduct research by design
7. input into more transparent processes for the development / sale of key sites based on maximising public value rather than financial return (WS3).

Informal is more flexible and reactive to local and immediate needs

The intervention of the Covid-19 global pandemic into the research also helped to demonstrate the value of soft urban design governance in emergencies. It is well accepted that crises of various forms can lead to innovation in governance approaches and to new links and networks among different actors (citizens, public administrations, etc.). When facing crises, agility, and adaptiveness are great assets which favour the use of soft powers. The widespread adoption of tactical urbanism solutions across Europe and elsewhere to deal with the impact of the crisis on public space has proven to be very effective and more responsive to short-term and changing needs than the use of harder regulatory approaches (WS3).

Explorative co-creation processes fall into this category and can be more effective than top-down models in meeting immediate local needs and opportunities (WS3). The Grands Voisins project, in Paris, provides an example which was never conceived in terms of a set of pre-conceived outcomes but instead as a process that is constantly changing and, therefore, always flexible: responding to the urgent needs of the locality through a time-limited collaboration of landowners, investors, businesses and residents (WS2). Such projects can facilitate experimentation and enable the building of long-term vision in a more collaborative manner.
3. THE GOVERNANCE OF URBAN DESIGN

GOVERNANCE

Next came a set of propositions concerned with the structural and administrative contexts into which urban design governance is situated:

Public sector-led urban design governance is the rock on which place quality is built, but is not the whole story

Whilst regimes of urban design governance will largely be shaped by the public sector, the very notion of ‘governance’ implies that the state is not the only actor involved in the process and may not even be the initiator of initiatives. This may be particularly the case in emerging economies and developing countries, as discussions at the WUF 10 session revealed, because of the reduced reliance in such places on the state to deliver local environmental quality solutions, matched by a greater reliance on community-level bottom-up initiative. Occasionally where coherent public interest focused administration is available, the state can provide a strong vision that harnesses other stakeholders. In both circumstances, the use of informal tools of urban design governance utilising the soft powers of the state can offer a greater flexibility leading to more local buy-in over time. Examples in South Africa, Rwanda and Columbia showed that such tools provide the means to create and deliver more coherent urban quality visions that aren’t stifled by an over-reliance on hard regulations, and that can facilitate positive initiative from wherever it comes – communities, politicians, the private sector or universities (WUF).

In Europe, the most obvious examples of this sort of bottom-up design governance came in the various temporary use schemes explored by Urban Maestro. Given their localised and tangible nature, these represented powerful instruments to mobilise community forces, demonstrate the value of specific design solutions, get buy-in to future development, reinforce neighbourhood cohesion and – ultimately – quality. However, temporary interventions – whether top-down or bottom-up – can also lead to local conflicts if their limits and operation are not sufficiently defined from the start, namely as regards their duration, governance arrangements, responsibilities, objectives, and so forth, or if they are not sufficiently supported by the local political leadership.
Other, organisations can also play important roles in helping to instigate, underpin (with their knowledge and networks), and deliver urban design governance. This way of working came to the fore in the UK following the austerity-led withdrawal of the state in the 2010s. Applied university research (e.g. the work of the Place Alliance) and the move of the private and not-for-profit sector into the delivery of design review in England both provide examples, although ultimately, their impact would not have been so decisive unless the state was a) receptive to such ‘external’ inputs and b) in the case of design review, willing to actively encourage through policy the diversity of providers (WS2). In the Caserne Mellinet project in Nantes, an architectural practice took the lead in the public consultation process concerning the future re-purposing of this old military base providing a further example of a public authority externalising what many might regard as a core function of urban design governance (WS1).

The right structures and the right people are both necessary to shape the most effective urban design governance

Together, the Urban Maestro workshops reinforced the vital importance of local leadership determined both by structure (the organisations, capabilities and policies in place to deliver design quality) and agency (the individuals engaged in the
process and their abilities to act independently), although the diversity of arrangements across the continent lead to different mixes of influence.

The case of design review in England represented a case of fundamentally changing the structure within which design quality considerations were being considered, breaking the traditional understanding of urban design governance as a state-led activity; it is a case where political choices were made to invite market players in to deliver certain key services, via the particular tool of design review. The UK government also published policy that created a space for this market by requiring local authorities to have design review arrangements in place. By bringing in a new set of actors and a model to finance them (by private developers) the move has reinvigorated the practice, including encouraging many more local authorities to set up panels, whilst the panels themselves consist of varying combinations of independent professional experts – agency made all the more powerful through a defined structure through which to feed-in its knowledge (WS1).

Elsewhere, key individuals have been appointed to drive forward practice, including city architects, bouwmeesters, design champions, and the like. These positions influence the quality of architecture and city development through varying levels of independence (some are part of government whilst others are arms-length positions from government, although all are ultimately accountable to government). Their roles sometimes have a direct link into formal regulatory functions (e.g. plan-making) but often rely on soft stimulating, convincing and advising powers – powers born of the authority of the position and the respect given to the individual who holds the role (WS1).

The Brussels Bouwmeester Maître Architecte commented that the power of the expert only comes through finding and maintaining political capital, and through five ways of working:

- By a rope dancer – being prepared to criticise public authorities when necessary, but not to the point where you are seen as “the perpetual opposition voice”
- Building coalitions – creating alliances with the private sector, civil society, other local authorities and international organisations
- Be a creative bureaucrat – by empowering local administrations to be more independent and to get relevant actors out of their silos
- Be transparent – gain support and build trust by letting the public see the internal logic behind decisions
- Choosing your battles – not making enemies all the time but being critical enough to have a meaningful opinion on important spatial decisions.
In this, the role of the Bouwmeester (defined in legislation), the back-up provided by his team and the relation to the range of organisations and processes engaged in decision-making are all key – structure and agency working together (WS1).

There is a dark side to informal urban design governance e.g. gentrification and the potential for corruption

Whilst overwhelmingly the workshops revealed a positive picture of the potential of soft urban design governance, there was also a recognition that potential downsides were also possible if these forms of influence were used for less altruistic purposes, particularly given the absence of the sorts of checks and balances associated with more formal processes. The use of soft powers offers no guarantee of an ethical approach to urban development.

The spectre of gentrification, for example, regularly surfaced in the workshops with concerns that the benefits of urban design quality improvements would be captured through gentrification (WS2). Others argued that gentrification is inevitable as part of the economic restructuring of cities and that design quality is a symptom of such processes rather than its cause. As such, it is gentrification that needs to be ‘inoculated against’ rather than development discouraged wholesale (WS4).
Few believed, for example, that the solution to the dilemma was to leave disadvantaged communities living in sub-standard environments. Instead, initiatives such as Zurich's Cooperative Housing system and the Community Land Trust in Brussels were advanced as examples of retaining property for social housing in transforming areas whilst delivering design quality (WS2), whilst the increasing problems of gentrification in Copenhagen have been met with the recent inclusion of a safeguard that 25% of new housing should be affordable (WS4). Like formal tools of urban design governance, funding can have ‘design strings’ attached (see below) to ensure design quality is delivered alongside social sustainability (WS2).

A further potential dark side of informal urban design governance was identified at WUF10 in the potential for non-regulated forms of governance to be more susceptible to corruption and a lack of transparency, notably in the global south. Whilst corruption in any form of governance is always a threat, the potential for soft power approaches to also engage bottom-up community interests may provide the antidote in an increased engagement from citizens than typifies many formal governance approaches (WUF). At the same time, soft-power relations can be difficult to grasp, and whilst, on paper, relations between actors may seem clear, in real-life, the interaction and power-play between actors is often more complex. As the masterclass suggested, there can easily be a gap between ‘how it works’ and ‘how it is supposed to work’ (MC).
4. THE POWER AND PEOPLE OF URBAN DESIGN GOVERNANCE

The fourth group of propositions focussed on the stakeholders engaged in and affected by urban design governance and on the balances of power between them.

Informal tools offer great potential for inclusive and engaging decision-making on design

Another tension played out across the workshops was the balance between input to decision-making from the top-down (political and administrative) versus the bottom-up (from or within local communities). The first workshop, held during European Placemaking Week in Valencia brought a particular emphasis on themes of co-creation and participatory and citizen-led processes, reinforcing the notion that whilst the public sector might be the ultimate arbiter of urban design governance regime, citizens, private companies and the third sector all have critical roles to play in feeding into, sometimes contesting, and generally helping to deliver on quality ambitions (WS1).

A moment from Placemaking Week Europe 2019 event that gathered numerous activists, researchers, decision makers, and experts to discuss and explore alternative ways of improving the place quality in cities (WS1).
In particular, discussion highlighted the need to put citizens’ voices at the centre of design governance processes, whether through traditional participative mechanisms, via new technologies, or through more active and engaging co-design and co-implementation arrangements (WS1). On all these fronts, there is potential for innovation to secure a greater involvement of communities across the operation of many informal tools: in relation to design competitions, for example, how competition briefs are defined, the nature of juries and their deliberations, how discussions and results are disseminated, and whether the general public can vote or otherwise express an opinion, all provide means to democratise the process. In design review, despite a widespread concern that the focus on professional expertise too often failed to include the community voice, instances were highlighted where that was not the case. These include Q-Teams in the Netherlands, which have the potential to include one or more ‘non-expert’ citizen, and some design advisory boards in Austria (e.g. Salzburg) which is open to the public at all stages of deliberation (WS3).

Mainstream practice, however, is dominated by professional voices, which raises issues about the value of different forms of knowledge – professional versus lay knowledge – and the weight that should be attached to each. Related to this are questions of transparency and equal opportunities to get involved in design governance processes, both as regards the ability to take part (e.g. to be selected for a panel), and to have access to ongoing decision-making (WS3). There is also a question of resources as opening up processes can make them more costly and lengthy to administer, potentially less effective, and can raise untenable expectations. On the flipside, they can help to deliver more acceptable schemes, locally, and assist in building trust between the local community and the public administration, both because of the process and as a precondition for successful implementation (MC).

On this front, the younger participants engaged in the Masterclass were bullish about the need to involve communities early and in a more fundamental manner, and optimistic about the role of new technologies such as crowdsourcing and social media platforms of all sorts to facilitate this. Processes with citizen engagement at their heart rather than as an add-ons have the potential to turn on its head the way some of the formal and informal tools of urban design governance are used, facilitating a more iterative and ongoing conversation about urban change (MC). Citizens’ assemblies, for instance, are being experimented with as a means to secure such an ongoing conversation about place (WS4).
Power and power imbalances shape processes and outcomes, but design governance processes can shift thinking

A key question implicit in this discussion is where does decision-making power lie? The evidence presented in the workshops suggested that not only do patterns of power and influence vary from country to country and city-to-city, but also across and within the tools of urban design governance. Nevertheless, because, by their nature, soft power tools are more flexible and less directive, they have the potential at least to more equitably distribute power, although power imbalances, notably between development interests and communities, will typically remain.

There is a wider concern that civil society is not always engaged in design governance processes, which tend to engage professionals, dominated by architects. Architects themselves complain, however, that informal tools can unduly impinge on their role, requiring their involvement, for example, in competitions, juries and other forms of evaluation for which their time is poorly compensated, and which therefore fail to appropriately value their expertise (WS3).

Ultimately, any tool is limited by how willing stakeholders are to engage with it and by where real decision-making power lies, whether at the level of the actors involved at the coalface or, as put by one contributor to the debate, “higher up the food chain of government” and / or amongst private development interests (MC). Design review provides a case-in-point as tool limited by the authority and credibility of the panel. The authority of the panel is determined in turn by how its recommendations are used, for example whether a municipality takes notice of them when granting development consents, whilst its credibility will be determined by who is on the panel, whether their opinion is valued by those receiving the advice and by the expertise (lay or professional) that they bring to the process (WS3).

Of course, any informal tool is only one mechanism within a wider urban design governance landscape and will not work in isolation. Nevertheless, when such tools work well, they are able to shift opinions by showing developers and public servants possibilities that they may not have previously envisaged. The right design idea at the right time can cut through uneven power relationships and challenge pre-conceived ways of thinking, although there is also always a role for disruptive, oppositional or subversive thinking in order to challenge the status quo and, in some circumstances, deliver more innovative and / or inclusive solutions, such as those at Samoa île de Nantes, Nantes (WS3).
The quality of the conversation is important to enrich understanding and mutual learning

Rather than focusing on immediate results, some informal urban design governance practices emphasise the importance of stimulating debate about the quality of the living environment. This approach can reinforce the brokerage, mediation, engagement and persuasion roles within urban design governance, opening the development process up for a new kind of leadership based on better mutual understanding. Place Standard, for example, was developed to help inspire constructive conversations between different actors, bringing people together across professional and non-professional boundaries (WS2).

The language used by professionals when talking about architecture, urban planning and development processes is a vital part of this, either inspiring a common understanding or driving a wedge between professionals and citizens. Using common everyday vocabulary and avoiding jargon can help to identify mutual goals and values. Again, the Place Standard tool uses simplified language and clear questions for guiding a discussion and, therefore, can be easily transferred to any context (WS2).
Beyond engaging communities, the discussion in successive workshops revealed the importance of aligning stakeholders – public, private and community – behind a clear set of quality priorities, with processes that allow learning to flow in all directions (MC). Successful examples seem to have created a positive coalition of partners to back an approach, with a common understanding of objectives underpinned by mutual trust and enabling partners to embark on processes even if the final outcomes are not known from the beginning. In other words, trust can enable space to be left for improvisation, innovation, and adjustment through time. Good examples of this are the International Building Exhibitions (IBAs), pioneered in Germany, which use a quadruple approach involving businesses, research and education, public administration, and civil society to deliver complex, often experimental, development processes with shared learning at their heart (WS2).
5. THE ECONOMICS OF URBAN DESIGN GOVERNANCE

The penultimate group of propositions moved the focus to a major secondary focus of Urban Maestro, how urban design governance intercedes with finance to potentially reinforce the delivery of high quality design.

There are design / finance and soft power / finance divides, but also a great potential to bridge these gaps

The Urban Maestro workshops repeatedly demonstrated that in most cases there is a professional disconnect between the worlds of design and finance (or specifically the economics of development). Although the workshops revealed the potential for the innovative use of development funding to create schemes with positive spillovers and synergies, few presenters could fully unpack the economic rationale and business models associated with specific tools (WS2).

Across Europe, the disciplines of real estate development and architecture / urbanism fit within their own schools of thought that interface but rarely truly connect. An obvious conclusion is that the better training of urbanists is needed as their understanding of real estate dynamics is often poor and without such an understanding it is difficult to fully engage real estate interests by bringing ‘asset values’ as well as ‘potential values’ into the shared endeavour of place-shaping. The reverse is also true, that real estate actors – including those working in the public sector – need better means of accounting for place (and not just economic) value. In Cambridge, a carefully organised programme of study tours and visits was enlisted to turn around perceptions and encourage a greater consensus between politicians, planners and key development actors in the city. It is now one of relatively few places in the UK in which a two-way learning culture has been nurtured so that lessons from earlier projects can be continually re-visited and new approaches refined (WS4).

A further disconnect was also apparent in the obvious gap between the use of the informal tools of urban design governance and the finances of development. Thus modes of financial incentivisation can be found primarily in the formal toolbox of development (perhaps because of the need for formalised transparency in the use of public funds) whilst informal / soft power incentives tend not to be explicitly financial.
Here there is an important distinction to be made between funding and finance. Although public funding such as the Czech subsidies programme for design competitions and some private funding, including for design review in England, is provided to support local practices of urban design governance, these forms of financial support are not directly focussed on the financing of development (WS3). They would, however, impact indirectly, for example through encouraging better designed outcomes with a different set of economic dynamics. However, these forces are poorly understood.

During the Workshop 3 (WS3), Josef Morkus, the Senior Ministerial Counsellor and Head of Conception a Methodical Unit at the Ministry of Regional Development introduced the Czech Republic’s national approach to organizing architectural and urban competitions in the country. June 2020

The potential clearly exists, however, to explicitly link design aspirations and the economics of development, using informal tools to encourage what was previously described as good behaviour (good design) and discourage bad (poor design). The workshops explored forms of information (e.g. the Swiss Baukultur policy), rating tools (e.g. Place Standard, Scotland), support (e.g. the expertise of Dutch Q-Teams), and explorations (e.g. temporary public realm improvements in Budapest or occupations in Les Grand Voisins, Paris,) that indirectly impacted on development value and financing through changing the culture, expectations and environment for investment to one in which design was prioritised. This will have long-term impacts on both the monetary and intrinsic value of the places so affected.
This is a relatively under-explored topic and the workshops identified a need for a better understanding of how financial mechanisms are used as part of wider design governance approaches and of the specific impacts they have on the ground (WS1). Nevertheless, a working hypothesis can be proposed that informal tools are effective at creating a good culture of design and at gently nudging proposals towards better outcomes, and that finance can explicitly support these functions alongside any incentivisation through formal governance mechanisms (WS2).

**Formal financial mechanisms can incentivise design quality but they need design strings attached**

Beyond the impact of the more intangible informal tools, the workshops discussed a number of formal financial mechanisms with the potential to attach design strings, in other words which can be used to lever design quality on the promise of i) finance, ii) land or iii) public investment (WS3). An example of each follows.

City makers funds such as Stadmakers Fonds are a formal financing mechanisms that tend to be more focused on quality given that place-based innovation is written into their objectives. Such funds act as matchmakers between socially motivated developers and investors but are still rare in Europe, tending to be associated with places that already have a tradition of social enterprises / development. Whilst many questions remain about the replicability of such initiatives in other contexts and scales, and their financial viability in different economic contexts, they seem to possess the potential for the effective use of financial incentives to deliver enhanced design outcomes (WS3).

Concept tendering is a form of competition used in Germany with a focus on overall site development rather than specifically on design. By transferring public land at a discount price, it provides an explicit financial incentive for the private developer to deliver concepts with defined social attributes. This formal mechanism can be used to encourage good design through factoring design in as a quality factor to be considered when evaluating ‘concepts’. It does not always follow, however, that this is the case as local priorities vary and design quality is not always prioritised (WS3).

Examples in Kigali showed that in a context of limited public resources, informal tools and soft powers can help to encourage investment and a bridge to bottom-up initiatives. At the same time, the case of Medellin indicated how a coherent and
sustained use of public investment in the city’s infrastructure can create the right incentives for private actors to also invest. In the case of Medellin, its economic model allows for funds generated by public utilities companies (water, electricity, mobility, etc.) to be reinvested into its long-term urban transformation (WUF).

**Land value capture and PPPs have the greatest immediate potential to link finance with the delivery of superior design**

Two particular financial mechanisms were selected for in-depth analysis in the fourth workshop based on the potential revealed in earlier discussions and accompanying case study analysis: land value capture (LVC) mechanisms and public private partnerships (PPPs). The former have the potential to capture private resources and direct them towards public urban improvements and the latter can coordinate public and private resources towards urban quality. Over the last decade both mechanisms have been strongly supported by the United Nations, the World Bank and other agencies as important answers to the typical funding gap for delivering urban infrastructure (United Nations 2017; UN-Habitat 2016b), although it is important to note that they take on profoundly different characteristics in different territories (WS4).

LVC and PPP do not generate urban quality themselves, but when properly designed and combined with (formal and informal) tools of urban design governance, they can assist in achieving desirable outcomes by empowering stakeholders that are not motivated solely by the profit motive. Their use can also lead to the involvement of stakeholders motivated to produce better and more inclusive design outcomes, as was the case in Freiburg, Copenhagen and Oslo where careful strategic planning and design and formal mechanisms of land assembly established the conditions for high quality outcomes and for the ABC of: Ambition (combining top-down and bottom-up aspirations), Brokerage and balance between competing interests, and Continuity over time (WS4) (Falk 2020).

As long as land prices allow for financial returns that are viable, there is huge potential for socially motivated development outcomes, but if financial or regulatory incentives do not push in that direction then standard real estate products may prevail. Taxes on capital gains and more broadly incentives towards corporate social responsibility might be considered when encouraging quality and social outcomes from real estate activities. And constraining capital gain (e.g. tax on short-term land...
speculation) may contribute to push investors to focus more on longer-term objectives and financial returns, with knock-on benefits in terms of building places that will continue to deliver a good return over the long-run and which are therefore sustainable (WS4).

Convincing real estate partners to invest in longer-term public good (public space) requires demonstrating the reality of its return. Persuading them requires creating space for using the soft powers of discussion and negotiation, or alternatively bypassing traditional real estate markets all-together in favour of encouraging more socially-motivated (local, small, individual) investors who are looking for projects with more moderate returns but good societal added value. The investments made by Stadmakers Fonds in Utrecht and elsewhere and the work of Miss Miyagi (a socially focussed design / development house) offered good examples. Whether this can be generalized and developed at scale, or will remain a niche opportunity, is unknown (WS4).

Design governance carries a cost which is typically (although not exclusively or always) borne by the public sector

Irrespective of their long-term benefits, all design governance tools carry a cost. While some case studies such as International Building Exhibitions rely heavily on the existence of long-term state-led financial support that may be difficult to mobilize in all contexts, other cases showed that meaningful results can be achieved with
Lessons from the Urban Maestro workshops

relatively inexpensive measures, for example the training programmes offered by Urban Design London average out at just £37 per training place (WS2).

Some complain that costs are not always fairly shared. Professional associations, for example, have complained that architectural competitions needlessly exacerbate competition among design studios, leading to an excessive drainage of resources as design teams are not properly compensated. They call for stricter guidelines on the rules and conditions for architectural competitions, preferably at a pan-European level. Others argue that:

- Open competitions are not mandatory to participate in
- Competitions provide an opportunity for young designers to project their design thinking at a wider scale, and some competitions such as Europan are specifically focussed on achieving that
- Even if participants do not win, the visibility that competitions can give can be beneficial (WS3).

The use of two phases competitions where the first phase requires only a minimal investment in time with a second phase restricted to a limited number of the best candidates is seen by many as striking a fair balance between the need for offering opportunities to emerging talents and for avoiding an unproductive waste of resources (WS3).

A snippet from Robert Temel’s presentation on how land value capture tool has been applied in Germany. Workshop 3 (WS3), June 2020
Competitions (like other tools) also carry a significant cost for their promoters (in the Czech Republic seen as 2-2.5% of development costs), perhaps explaining the divergence in their use across different countries (see above). In Europe, competitions are typically financed by public funds (and by the free or below market rates of entrants). In contrast to practices further afield, notably in Central Sydney (Australia) where zoning bonuses are offered to developers who engage in a design competition process (Freestone et al 2019), in Europe mechanisms to extract the costs of competitions from development value do not seem to exist. Instead, in order to promote their use, two forms of initiatives have been utilised by cities, regions and countries:

1. Offering direct subsidies for the costs of competitions (Czech Republic)
2. Providing indirect subsidies through i) provision of technical, legal or administrative assistance for preparing the competition brief, selecting eligible candidates and juries, provision of legal or administrative assistance, and conducting deliberations (e.g. Cellule Archi, Wallonia); ii) drafting guidelines for a competition's organisers (e.g. the RIBA, London); iii) promoting a specific competition format (e.g. Panorama Lokaal, The Netherlands) (WS3).

In England, the direct payment by developers for design review provides a rare example of the beneficiary pay principle in operation.
6. HOW PRACTICES TRAVEL

The final set of propositions focusses on the diffusion of urban design governance practices between jurisdictions and across contexts.

Softer tools diffuse better across complex and varied contexts

The Urban Maestro project revealed a huge diversity of urban design governance practices across Europe but also very little sharing of practice beyond high-level architectural policies. The geographic disparity of practices is fundamentally shaped by diverse governance contexts locally, and whilst the workshops revealed an obvious strong desire to learn from each other and share experiences, the sheer complexity of practices, which vary at country, regional, city and even local municipality level is an issue. There seems to be a need for some clearer organising concepts to cut through and a new language of urban design governance. At the same time, whilst variations in legal and administrative contexts makes the transfer of hard power tools and approaches particularly challenging, this does not apply to softer forms of tools whose non-statutory nature requires only resources, initiative and ambition to set them up. It follows that softer urban design governance tools are more transferable.

The challenges were illustrated in the very first workshop through the non-European experience of Vancouver. This example showed 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 arrangements and aspirations. That said, the Vancouver model (like the Medellin one in the global south) has travelled globally and became part of a larger theoretical discussion on urban policy which demonstrates how policy and ideas don't transfer seamlessly from place to place but alter and adjust, sometimes successfully and sometimes not. Toronto attempted to specifically import Vancouverism but despite many similar factors (national context, developer, etc.) 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 – not least the lesser determination of the city to deliver quality outcomes – leading to the developer behaving differently and ultimately delivering lower quality results (White & Punter 2017).
The experience draws attention to the dangers of simplifying knowledge when trying to learn from other places (WS1). Discussion at successive workshops suggested:

- There are many and good reasons to borrow ideas from elsewhere as other places can inspire, motivate, and challenge us to think differently
- But first we need to identify what we have, and what we are doing well, recognising the particular strengths of a place and the challenges of importing a complicated model from elsewhere
- We can learn a lot from failures too and reflecting back on our own practices and failures
- Differences may range from subtle to very profound, bearing in mind that local design cultures also differ, and that underlying hidden factors, rather than particular practices might be responsible for the differences in outcomes that we see.

Nevertheless, Europe does have experiences of the successful transfer of soft urban design governance ideas. The Copenhagen model was widely referred to as a model where concerted attention to the public realm has helped to transform the city’s fortunes, lessons not lost on other European cities that featured in the workshops and in the practices shared by Placemaking Europe. The Place Standard tool originated in Scotland but has since been adapted and used across Europe, including in Slovenia, Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania, and the Netherlands and the model of International Building Exhibitions (IBA) has now been adopted outside of Germany in France and Switzerland (WS2).

Varied design and governance cultures mean that some tools travel well and others less so, the key is to choose the mix that is right for local circumstances.

Some tools have been adopted across Europe and are widely considered effective. The use of design guidance of various descriptions exemplifies this, and most of the organisations responsible for delivering urban design governance services that contributed to the workshops have produced guidance of one form or another as a means to encourage better practice and/or disseminate best practice (WS3).

By different names, design review is also widely adopted and considered effective at delivering better design outcomes across Europe. In this position, increasingly panels have moved away from a focus on aesthetic considerations to a broader
Lessons from the Urban Maestro workshops

concern with delivering wider urbanistic benefits. When it operates well, design review acts as a means to challenge and shift thinking, both of developers and of public authorities. Panels operate within a wide variety of contrasting governance and policy frameworks, for which they are not responsible, but all share the need for a strong political mandate to give panels legitimacy (WS3).

The map of Design Review panels in London managed by different public and private structures from Esther Kurland’s presentation during the Workshop 3 (WS3), June 2020.

Other tools, notably design competitions, are strongly favoured in some locations but deliberately eschewed in others. In some countries (e.g. Austria, Denmark, Switzerland), design competitions are widely used for bigger building projects commissioned by governmental bodies (national, regional or local) and for important development propositions. In some, including in Germany and France, there is even a legal obligation to host them for contracts above a defined threshold value. In France, competitions are mandatory for public contracts liable to consultancy fees above €144K – Biau 2020). In others, competitions are rarely used, notably in the UK where they are associated with cost overruns and heightened risk (WS3). So far, there is little cross-European learning beyond ad hoc projects focussed in particular defined practices, notably competitions (Architectuur Lokaal 2017), and Urban Maestro has certainly been helping to fill that gap.
LESSONS FROM THE WORKSHOPS

The numerous presentations and diverse discussions across the seven organised events of Urban Maestro combined to form a robust and rigorous testing bed for the ideas underpinning the project, encompassed in the notion of soft urban design governance. Inevitably, some tools were examined more closely than others were and discussions often resulted in many more questions than answers. Generally, however, the concepts were well understood and found to be widely applicable, both within and beyond Europe, with the research showing that Europe indeed has a great story to tell!

Collectively the results can be summarised in twenty propositions under the six headings that structured this final section of the report:

The culture and commitment to design quality

1. There are widely shared aspirations to build a local culture of quality
2. Building a culture of quality is a long-term project requiring sustained commitment and influence over the key levers of delivery, whilst persuading others to join
3. Political commitment, with flexibility, is key

Building the toolkit for urban design governance

4. From design culture to design delivery, and design delivery to design culture, the two are mutually reinforcing
5. Creative (even visionary) not bureaucratic tools are required to deliver place quality
6. Informal informs and formal formalises: formal and informal urban design governance works together
7. The most sophisticated approaches use tools in combination and in multiple ways
8. Informal is more flexible and reactive to local and immediate needs

The governance of urban design governance

9. Public sector-led urban design governance is the rock on which place quality is built, but is not the whole story
10. The right structures and the right people are both necessary to shape the most effective urban design governance
11. There is a dark side to informal urban design governance e.g. gentrification and the potential for corruption

The power and people of urban design governance

12. Informal tools offer great potential for inclusive and engaging decision-making on design
13. Power and power imbalances shape processes and outcomes, but design governance processes can shift thinking
14. The quality of the conversation is important to enrich understanding and mutual learning

The economics of urban design governance

15. There are design / finance and soft power / finance divides, but also a great potential to bridge these gaps
16. Formal financial mechanisms can incentivise design quality but they need design strings attached
17. Land value capture and PPPs have the greatest immediate potential to link finance with the delivery if superior design
18. Design governance carries a cost which is typically (although not exclusively or always) borne by the public sector

How practices travel

19. Softer tools diffuse better across complex and varied contexts
20. Varied design and governance cultures mean that some tools travel well and others less so, the key is to choose the mix that is right for local circumstances

Whilst the last proposition confirms that all the tools of urban design governance are not appropriate everywhere, the effectiveness of informal tools as a set of practices came through strongly across all the events, not just for building a culture for design but also for delivering real projects on the ground, often enriched by the engagement of diverse interests, including communities (WS1). As one contributor commented: "Governments that are serious about quality reach for the informal toolbox", across all levels of state intervention, national, regional and local.
Soft power and hard power tools are not the same. Soft power tools require us to think differently about urban problems. Instead of ‘requiring’ action, such powers are about ‘nudging’ stakeholders in the right direction through influencing, convincing and even seducing them into action. This can limit their impact as they do not determine the final actions taken, but if used well, they can change long-term cultures and practices and, thereby, have a far greater impact. Because of this, they need to be used alongside and not instead of hard power tools and, when used effectively, they eventually may change how often and in what circumstances regulations and other tools are utilised (WS2).

More research is required to examine how particular tools vary between contexts and a particular challenge lies in how to measure success, what targets, indicators and measures of improvement are appropriate and how should they be built into the operation of tools locally (MC). But as the workshops and Urban Maestro generally has shown, there is a diverse urban design governance toolbox, and tools work best when they are not operating in isolation, but are instead part of a larger system that mobilises a range of informal (soft power) and formal (hard power) instruments to address urban challenges (WS3). This also encompasses expertise in the financial aspects of development, and how hard financial incentives can be tied to the soft strings of urban design governance to deliver quality and place value for all.
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Lessons from the Urban Maestro workshops