

The Urban95 Challenge: crowdsourcing ideas to improve city livability for caregivers and kids

- ▶ *Urban95 Challenge resulted in 26 small-scale ideas being funded in 18 countries.*
- ▶ *Potentially replicable ideas include Tirana's appointment of a Chief Child Development Officer.*
- ▶ *Nine of the ideas were included in the Foundation's draft *Urban95 Starter Kit*.*

Ardan Kockelkoren
Urban95 Coordinator
Bernard van Leer
Foundation, The Hague,
Netherlands

Urban95 is the Bernard van Leer Foundation's groundbreaking initiative to focus the attention of urban leaders, designers and planners on the needs of infants, toddlers and their caregivers. As they have historically been so often overlooked in urban planning and design, there is a shortage of ideas for practical, small-scale projects to improve the livability of cities from their perspective. In 2016, we launched the Urban95 Challenge to gather those ideas.

We suggested that the proposed projects could touch on aspects of city planning such as green public space, mobility for families and data-driven decision making – but the key requirement was that they address the core aim of Urban95: encourage thinking about how city life is experienced from an elevation of 95 cm, the average height of a healthy 3 year old. We received 151 ideas from 41 countries, and funded 26 of them, with grants averaging around EUR 17,000.

The projects came from 18 countries (Albania, Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Gabon, Greece, India, Indonesia, Italy, Kenya, Mexico, the Netherlands, Turkey, and Vietnam) and addressed a range of issues including public space, data collection, community engagement, temporary street closures, traffic accidents, play design, correlation research, informal childcare, and air and noise pollution.

Our main aim with the Urban95 Challenge was to stimulate new ideas from a wide range of sources – the selected projects came from academic institutes, municipalities, established NGOs, and also many bottom-up community groups – and to get a sense of what might be scaled or replicated elsewhere. Around half of the projects have now concluded and the others are well underway, making it possible to reflect on what we have learned.

Three selected examples

Many of the projects show some potential to be replicated in other contexts. The latest status of all 26 can be explored on the Urban95 Challenge pages of the Foundation's website.¹ The three presented briefly here are chosen to illustrate the range of approaches.

¹ More about the Urban95 Challenge can be found at <https://bernardvanleer.org/urban95-challenge/>

In a *favela* in **Santos**, a coastal Brazilian city south of São Paulo, Instituto Elos adapted their 'Oasis Game' methodology to involve the community in thinking about how public space could be made more family-friendly, and in working together to put plans into effect. The response was enthusiastic, with 350 local residents helping to clear litter, paint murals, create a space for play, plant a vegetable garden, and turn an abandoned shipping container into a toy library.

One helpful insight from this project was the important role played by older siblings: parents were often too time-pressed to participate, as they struggle to balance childcare with earning money, but many older children appreciated how the project could help their parents and younger siblings and took responsibility for representing their family.

The municipal government of **Tirana**, Albania, created a new position to assess and advise the mayor on the impact of policies across the city administration on families with young children. A challenge for any city that aims to become more family-friendly is that every municipal department – from health to public transport, to social care, to parks and recreation – has some effect on urban livability for infants, toddlers and caregivers. Each city needs to find its own administrative solution for getting a holistic view that can inform policy.

Tirana's model of a Chief Child Development Officer is going well, and Mayor Erion Veliaj has become a champion for a children's perspective in the city. We have since funded additional activities to produce 'birth to age 5'-centric design guidelines and plans – currently being implemented across Tirana – to locate kindergartens and community centres on primary school campuses as part of a long-term strategy to upgrade the infrastructure of schools and integrate them into local neighbourhoods.

Based in **Rotterdam**, Netherlands, STIPO is an urban development and placemaking organisation that produces *The City At Eye Level* – an internationally recognised collection of resources, available in multiple languages, that explore how streets and other public spaces can be created or changed to work well at human scale. With our support, STIPO has developed a new publication, *The City at Eye Level for Kids*, which centralises the perspective of young children and their parents in this process.

Vivian Doumpa, Placemaker-Trainer at STIPO, says:

The project has been an eye-opener to our team on the importance and great potential for creating better and more equitable places for all through the inclusion and active participation of caregivers and young children. We feel like we have been given the opportunity to advance our work and impact as an agency further.

'Our aim was to stimulate new ideas from a wide range of sources and get a sense of what might be scaled or replicated.'

The Urban95 Starter Kit

The Urban95 Challenge informed our *Urban95 Starter Kit*, the first draft of which was published in 2018. The 90-page document provides a collection of 29 promising ideas that we have encountered in our Urban95 work so far. Nine of those ideas came from the Urban95 Challenge, with others suggested by our partners and network. The *Starter Kit* includes practical advice on implementing these ideas, which cover four categories – public space, mobility, early childhood services and data-driven management.

- 2 If you would like to receive updates on the availability of the second draft, and to stay abreast more generally of our thinking and knowledge on Urban95 – which continues to evolve quickly – we invite you to join our LinkedIn group at [linkedin.com/groups/13644197/](https://www.linkedin.com/groups/13644197/) or subscribe to our Urban95 newsletter at bernardvanleer.org/urban95-newsletter/.

We asked for feedback to inform the development of a second draft, and received 23 thoughtful responses from a range of experts in urban planning, policy or design, some working in governmental agencies, others in civic organisations, academia, foundations or architecture practices. As many of these ideas are new, users were keen for as much additional information as possible on practicalities such as costs and implementation processes, and templates for tools such as worksheets that can be adapted to local circumstances. The updated version is scheduled for publication in Summer 2019.²

→ Find this article online at earlychildhoodmatters.online/2019-23

