

MAKING LIVEABLE STREETS HAPPEN

Insights from the DUT Knowledge Hub

Practice recommendations

June 2026

15-minute City





About this working paper

This DUT Practitioner Brief brings together thoughts and inspiration from across the Driving Urban Transitions Knowledge Hub on making liveable streets happen — written for urban practitioners working to reallocate street space toward people.

Authors

Katrin Hagen (TU Wien) | **Maria Paipai** (MAAS Lab) | **George Liu, Benjamin Büttner** (Technical University of Munich) | **Lucy Sadler** (Sadler Consultants Europe GmbH) | **Stefania Zourka** (CluBE) | **Maria Schnurr** (RISE) | **Maximilian Jäger** (AustriaTech GmbH)

KEY MESSAGES

- European cities are key arenas where economic, social, and cultural transformations play out, making the use of streets and squares highly contested. Although practical tools for reallocating road space already exist and are increasingly adopted, progress remains uneven due to political hesitation, limited funding, and concern about sufficient public support.
- The text emphasises that making liveable streets happen requires sustained effort, clear and inclusive communication, and meaningful stakeholder involvement. It highlights four key approaches: aligning interests through engagement, fostering positive and creative participation, communicating policies effectively, and using temporary measures to make changes tangible and build public acceptance.
- It builds on activities and learnings from projects funded in Driving Urban Transitions, offers quick and relevant examples as well as further reading materials for an interested audience.

THE CHALLENGE

European cities are centres for economic, societal, and cultural change, where global trends and policies from all levels of government materialise at the local level. Therefore, use and function of streets and squares are in constant contestation by diverging groups and interests. This becomes even more relevant for activities that set out to transform urban spaces, building toward liveable climate-resilient neighbourhoods.

Tools and instruments to manage and reallocate road space to people and offer alternatives to dominance of private cars are widely tested and available. While many cities are embracing this transition, in others progress is constrained by limited political will, lack of financial resources or community support. Reducing negative effects of urban transport is not optional; it is central to meeting climate commitments, improving air quality, and protecting public health, meaning that more cities need to make the transition away from individual vehicles to sustainable mobility modes.

Policies that redistribute public space from cars to sustainable mobility offers carry significant potential for conflict because they directly affect daily routines and established interests. When reallocating road space, drivers are most vocal about the inconvenience that they experience, yet we hear less about the accessibility and safety improvements for those who walk, bike, and use public transit. Even where there is broad agreement on the desired outcomes, the pathways to achieving them can cause controversy. The process of change requires time, persistence, and resilience.



Yet behind the loud proponents of the status quo hides the cost of inaction, which can leave a city unattractive and plagued by the negative transportation externalities. Politicians may hesitate, concerned about potential backlash from voters. Nowadays, every city knows examples for a public discourse getting out of hand, often due to an insufficient focus on explaining urban policy to people, or on giving them a voice in the process. When it comes to street-level change, language matters – as does the offer to engage in local projects on eye-level.

This text brings together insights from project partners, funded by the Driving Urban Transitions Partnership, and tailored for urban practitioners. It offers examples and further reading material to dig deeper on four central recommendations to making liveable streets happen:

- **Aligning interests:** Engaging stakeholders on eye-level is critical to achieving street-level change.
- **Why shouldn't it be fun?!** Joy, curiosity and elements of surprise can foster deeper engagement, creativity and approval.
- **Communicate!:** Effective communication of sustainable mobility policies is critical and relies on clear, positive messaging that also sparks interest.
- **Make it tangible:** Temporary experiments or pilots can allow stakeholders to experience change, interact with, and reflect new constellations.

ALIGNING INTERESTS

Building a dynamic to make local change possible requires engaging and aligning interests among key stakeholders. Essentially, those looking to make changes need to understand throughout the process, which stakeholders bear power to influence the project, who is affected, and what their concerns and interests are, thus mapping out the constellation of central actors for the task at hand.

NetZeroCities collection of materials on stakeholder engagement

This platform supports European cities on their path to achieving urban climate neutrality. An essential question for them and the 112 cities in their network is how to bring citizens and stakeholders on board and engagement in context of one of the biggest challenges of our time. To this end, NetZeroCities created an online Portal, which offers a huge number of resources – between other on participation. There, materials can be found from a collection of articles, tools and methods, as well as case studies from across Europe.

More information: [NetZeroCities Portal \(n.d.\)](#), [Citizens and urban stakeholders engagement](#), updated on 15 January 2026

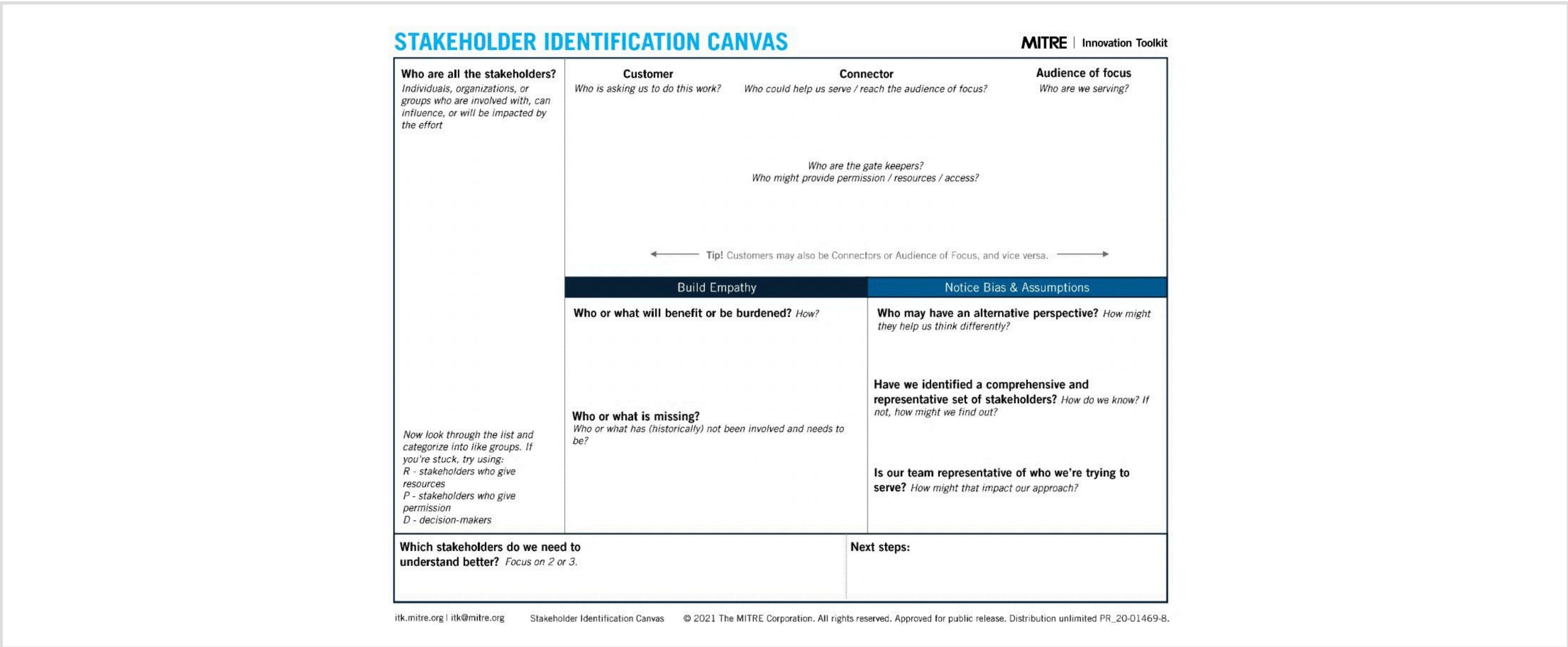


Fig 1. Stakeholder Identification Canvas as one of many tools available on the NetZeroCities Portal. From Citizens and urban stakeholders engagement, by NetZeroCities, 2026.

Engaging stakeholders is critical but also challenging. Achieving broad and representative participation can be difficult, particularly when progress may take time to materialise or the ambition pursued goes far beyond everyday experience of inhabitants. Furthermore, delayed visibility of results can lead to frustration and demotivation among both the public and decision-makers. In this context, committed local champions – inspiring individuals or local communities who strongly believe in the vision and can come from different societal sectors (but are ideally politicians with the power to take the measures forward) – can play a decisive role in sustaining momentum, building support and acceptance. Each context requires an adapted approach to involvement that is well embedded in the local situation and circumstances.

Whenever helpful and appropriate for the context, stakeholder involvement can move beyond traditional town-hall consultations, and aim toward more interactive and collaborative formats, such as neighbourhood or urban living labs. Here, residents, entrepreneurs, planners, and decision makers can define, explore and together experience how to make liveable streets happen. Such formats can help bridge the gap between administrative realities and public expectations, while also building ownership, commitment and public acceptance for further steps to implementing ambitious urban policies.

Examples from the European Network of Living Labs

Following the European Network of Living Labs (ENoLL), living labs are open innovation ecosystems that bring together stakeholders through systematic co-creation and integrate research and innovation processes with local challenges. They actively involve diverse groups in design, testing, and development of solutions, ensuring that outcomes are practical, relevant, and grounded in real-world needs. ENoLL features in-detail description and a database on successful living labs.

More information: [ENoLL – European Network of Living Labs \(n.d.\)](#), [Living Lab Stories](#)

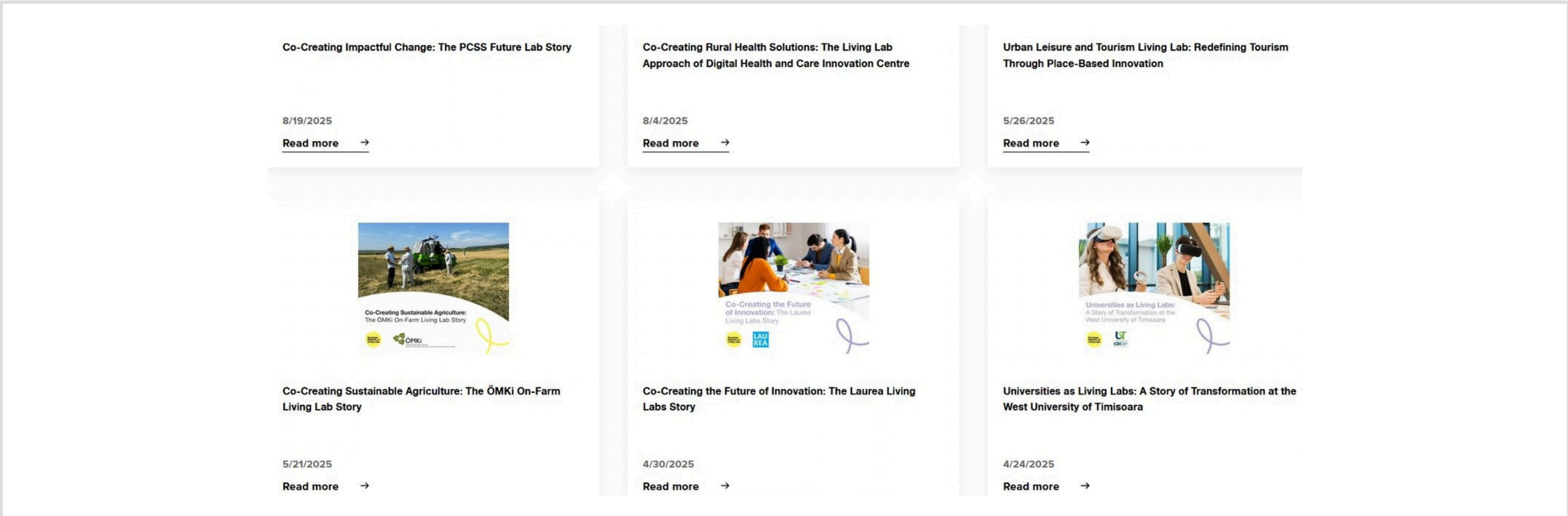


Fig 2. Examples of urban living labs on the ENoLL website. From *Living Lab Stories*, by ENoLL, European Network of Living Labs, n.d.

Where stakeholders have widely varying viewpoints, framing policies around widely shared goals, such as safer street for children, healthy neighbourhoods or vibrant public spaces can help cultivating common ground among stakeholders. Broad engagement is important to avoid portraying distorted perceptions of public opinion. Some debates tend to become strongly polarised, with groups or individuals who feel adversely affected being often more vocal than those who stand to benefit. Without proactive engagement, this imbalance can distort perceptions of public opinion and discourage political action.

Leuven 2030 network

Leuven 2030 demonstrates co-implementation through a shared governance model at the local level. The initiative brings together a wide network of 600 stakeholders – including local government, research institutions, businesses, and citizens – who jointly work on designing and implementing actions towards achieving carbon neutrality. It aligns diverse interests around a common vision through collaboration and consensus-building, thus strengthening stakeholder ownership and enhancing policy effectiveness.

More information: [Leuven Klimaatneutraal 2030 \(n.d.\)](#), [All across Leuven, we're joining forces for a climate neutral city](#)



Fig 3. Leuven 2030 Climate City Contract. From *All across Leuven, we're joining forces for a climate neutral city*, by Leuven 2030, n.d.

Recommendation 2

WHY SHOULDN'T IT BE FUN?!

Fun can be a powerful driver for building both political support and public acceptance to make liveable streets happen. If the goal is to bring diverse stakeholders on board and activate street-level change, engagement may go beyond traditional consultations. By “gamifying” the street through interactive workshops and playful tools, cities can lower participation barriers and invite residents, practitioners, and decision makers alike to explore mobility challenges creatively. Street experiments can be framed, instead of planning chores, as community-driven creative projects, where people collaboratively test ideas and experience potential futures firsthand.

Asphalt Art project

This participatory urban intervention evolves around principles of gamification and was implemented in Kaisariani, Greece. The initiative transformed a street intersection into an interactive public space by using street painting, temporary installations, and community-led activities. Residents, students, and elderly participants engaged in workshops, where they shared their mobility challenges and contributed ideas for the final design. The intervention was complemented by a public festival with educational games and activities, turning the street into an engaging and experiential environment. As a low-cost, pilot intervention, the project also functioned as a real-life experiment to improve road safety, reduce vehicle speeds, and enhance pedestrian space.

More information: <https://kaisariani.gr/2023/08/07/apologismos-ylopoiisis-programmatos/>



Fig 4. Gamifying Public Space: Community-led street transformation in Kaisariani, an Asphalt Art initiative using tactical urbanism and participatory design interventions. From Review of the implementation of the “AsphaltArt” programme, by Municipality of Kaisariani, 2023.

Interactive workshops are formats that can create engaging environments where mobility challenges are explored through short, human stories, and hands-on activities, rather than abstract policy summaries. Playful and visual tools can make complex concepts tangible and accessible. Community events, such as kick-off meetings in public space that feel rather like street parties than formal consultations, spark curiosity, build trust, and strengthen the collective will needed to move from discussion to implementation.

Flowers of Proximity

The Flowers of Proximity are one way to reimagine everyday urban life in a colourful, non-technical way. It introduces the idea of accessibility planning and emphasises the range of options people have to reach the places they need or want to go to. The flowers can be used as a planning tool building on people's needs and desires and invites participants to envision a liveable, just, and sustainable neighbourhood as well as how they would like to get around it.

More information: <https://www.flowersofproximity.com/about-the-flowers-of-proximity>

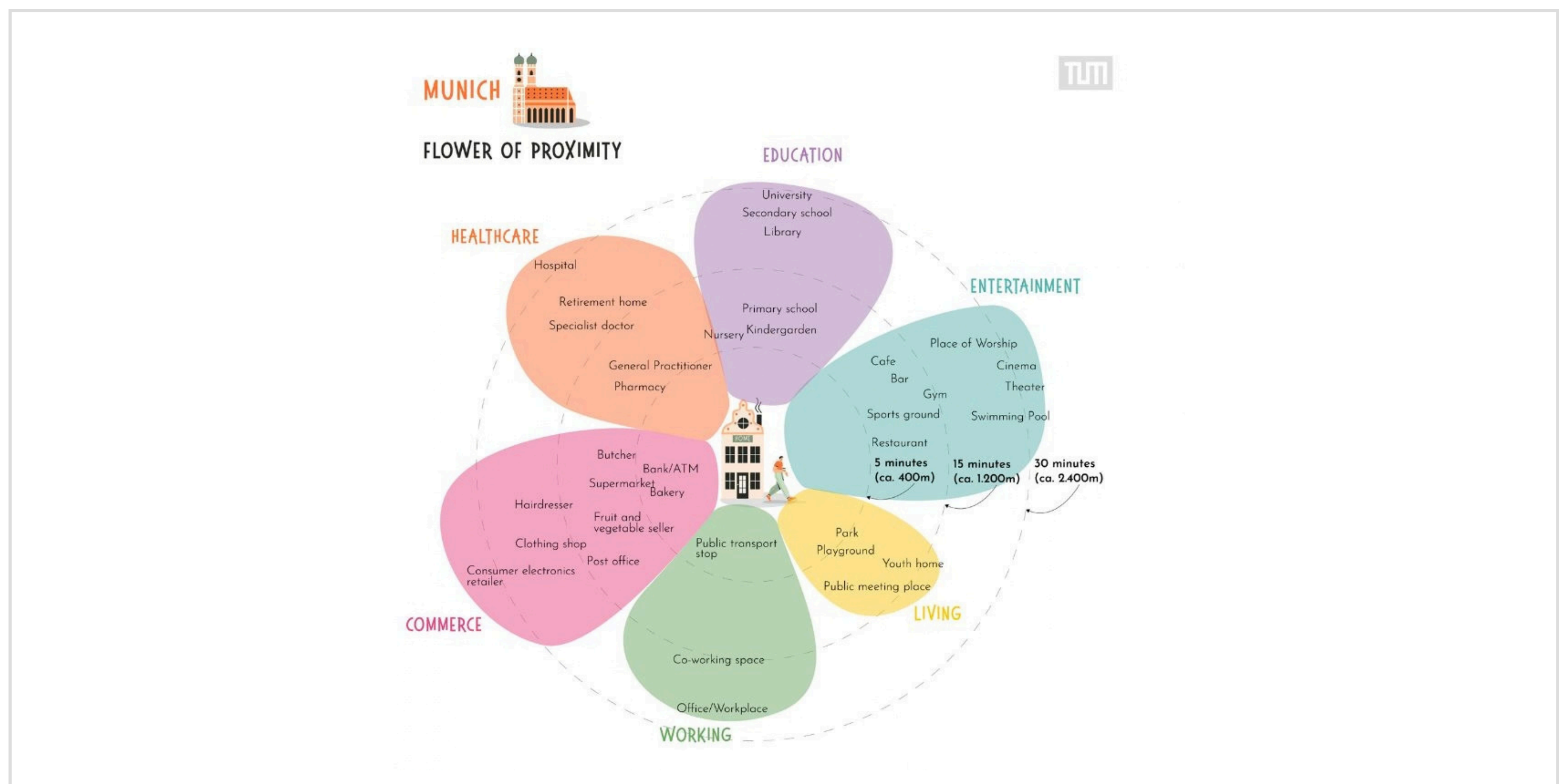


Fig 5. Munich's Flower of Proximity, based on a workshop with local planning practitioners. From *Urban Mobility Next 9: ±15-Minute City: Human-centred planning in action* (p. 35), by EIT Urban Mobility, 2022.

Recommendation 3

COMMUNICATE!

Let's shift the conversation from what is being taken away toward what is being gained for the community at large. While an individual might initially perceive the loss of a personal parking spot as a significant inconvenience, this sacrifice is effectively the small cost that needs to be paid for a much larger neighbourhood gain. By reallocating that parking space from in front of the door to a one-minute walk away, the community can potentially gain a safe playground, a new traffic management approach diverting noise and pollution, or high-quality bike parking at the doorstep. There is a need to build narratives that move from private loss to a shared investment in improvement of liveable streets.

Shared Spaces Programme, San Francisco

Being one of the first of its kind, the Shared Spaces Programme allows to transform individual parking spaces into small public areas, offering seating, greenery, and community functions – so-called Parklets. They are the product of a partnership between the city and local businesses, residents, or neighbourhood associations and usually have a distinctive design that accommodates unmet demand for public space. What may initially be perceived as a loss of convenience for drivers, can become a shared benefit for the wider community, enhancing public space, social interaction, and urban liveability.

More information: [City and County of San Francisco \(n.d.\), Making the Shared Spaces Program Permanent](#)

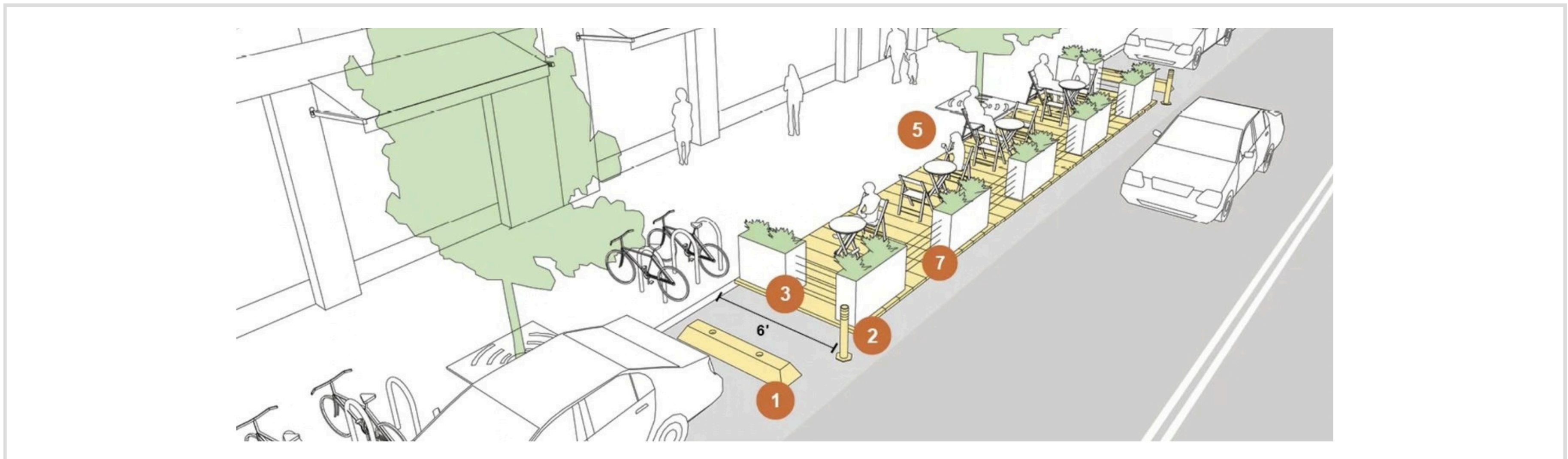


Fig 6. Parklet design elements from the NACTO Urban Street Design Guide. From Urban Street Design Guide, by National Association of City Transportation Officials, 2013.

The greatest challenge to overcome in this regard is the status quo bias. To make truly objective decisions, stakeholders should be encouraged to imagine and experience an improved future before returning to the present-day reality. When people are anchored in the current situation, any change can feel like a threat. However, using visual toolkits and immersive scenarios to let residents perceive future qualities – or even digitally “walk” through a redesigned street – they can imagine much better or even feel the benefits of a quieter environment firsthand. Once this new scenario is established in the imagination as the desired goal, the current car-centric status of urban streets can be seen as the undesirable alternative, where inaction contrarily could lead to a high cost.

While various technical tools are available to simulate and quantify these policy impacts, the data they produce must be translated from analysis into storytelling. A technical report explaining a percentage reduction in CO2 emissions by traffic calming may be too abstract to build public momentum or not linked to the aims that might have to be agreed where there are diverging views. Instead, reframing that same data to show a parent how much more safely their child now can walk to school, or a shop owner that an attractive street leads to increased walking and more frequent purchases, can make benefits more tangible and evident. Focusing on social and health benefits for inhabitants can be effective and promotes the understanding that streets are a public space more than just rapid movement. Framing matters: replacing technical tables with clear imagery and human-scale benefits can help provide the evidence-based confidence needed to turn public contestation into constructive agency.

Recommendation 4

MAKE IT TANGIBLE

Temporary experiments and real-world pilots can help implementing liveable streets making change visible and relatable. Tactical urbanism interventions – such as pop-up bike lanes and pedestrian zones, new street furniture or small-scale playgrounds – allow cities to test fresh uses of road space before committing to permanent changes. These approaches can accelerate street-level change by quickly demonstrating the potential benefits of reallocating road space. Improvements, such as safer and attractive streets, as well as more vibrant public spaces, become directly observable and adaptable through feedback loops, if tweaks are necessary.

Piazze Aperte programme, Milan

Many city administrations around the world have worked with examples of tactical urbanism interventions. One of the best known is the Piazze Aperte programme in Milan, demonstrating how temporary, low-cost measures can transform car-dominated streets into safe, vibrant, and people-centred public spaces. Launched in 2018, the programme reallocates road space through interventions such as street painting, temporary street furniture, greening, pedestrianisation, and the rapid installation of cycle infrastructure. A key strength of the programme lies in its strong participatory approach, engaging residents, schools, local organisations, and businesses in the co-design, activation, and stewardship of spaces.

More information: [City of Milan \(n.d.\), Piazze Aperte: A Public Space Program for Milan, Agenzia Mobilità Ambiente Territorio](#)



Fig 7. Examples of built environment transformations in the Piazze Aperte programme: Via Spoleto / Via Venini. From *Piazze Aperte: A Public Space Program for Milan* (p. 46), by City of Milan, n.d.

Essentially, pilots enable residents and other stakeholders to experience change rather than just imagining it or seeing images, contributing to reducing uncertainty and counteracting rejection. When people can walk or cycle safely through a redesigned street, observe how public space works differently and discuss their impressions on site, they are better able to reflect on alternative street layout. Therefore, real-life experiments and local pilot implementation bring together many of the aspects discussed so far in this text: they contribute to more positive and joyful perspective on urban transformation, encouraging curiosity and openness. They bring together different stakeholders – including residents, shop owners, planners, and local decision-makers – to engage in the process, participate in decision-making, and test policy mixes in real urban contexts. While pilots are not always possible and images of future options need to be relied on, they can help take the discussion and the change to the people.

Guides and materials on Tactical Urbanism interventions

Tactical Urbanism, DIY Urbanism, Planning-by-Doing, Urban Acupuncture, or Urban Prototyping has gone around the world, inspiring action led by cities, organisations and communities alike. While the homepage has become a bit dated, the open-source materials offered by The Street Plans Collaborative are still very insightful and practical. They focus on guidance about design, materials, and process for all kinds of Tactical Urbanism projects.

More information: [Tactical Urbanist's Guide \(n.d.\)](#), [Guides](#)

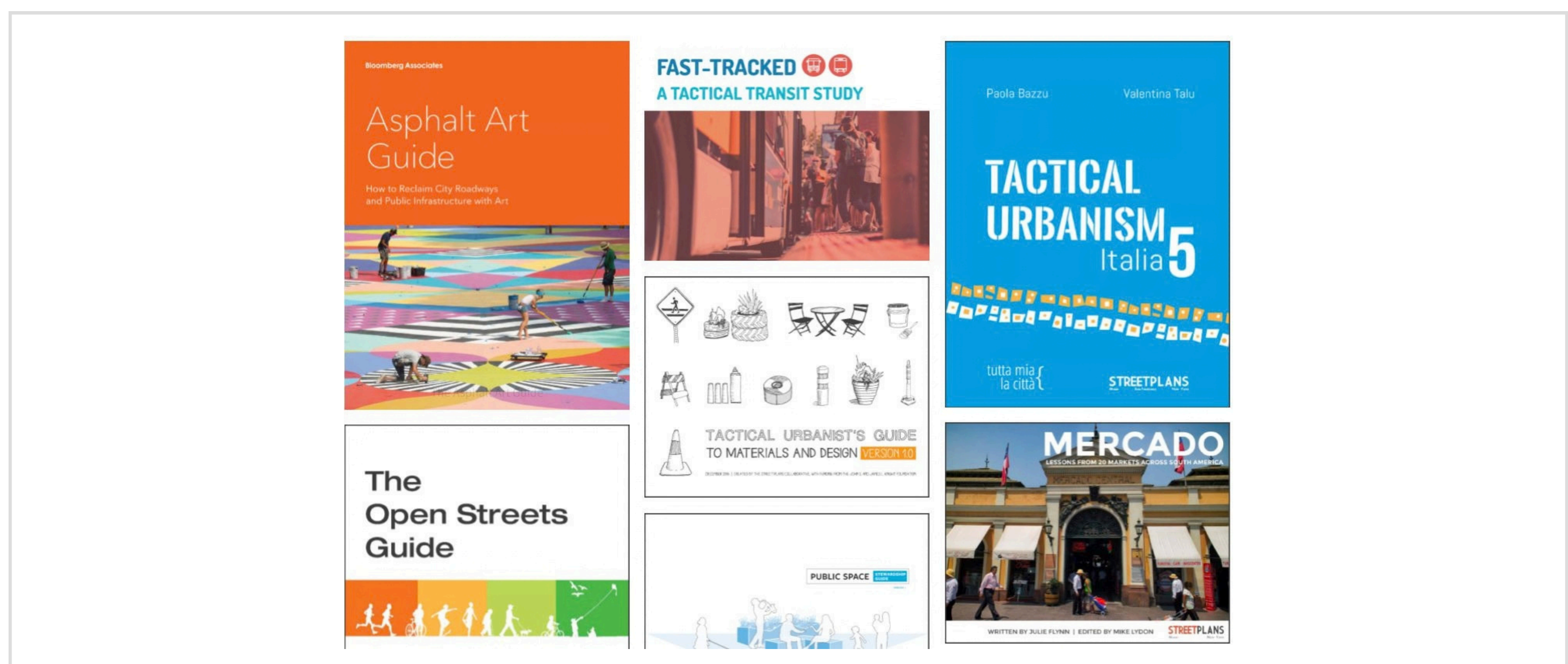


Fig 8. Overview of publications on tacticalurbanismguide.com. Screenshot taken on March 15th, 2026. Source: Street Plans Collaborative

REFERENCES

Büttner, B., Seisenberger, S., Baquero Larriva, M. T., Rivas De Gante, A. G., Haxhija, S., Ramirez, A., & McCormick, B. (2022). Urban Mobility Next 9: ± 15 -Minute City: Human-centred planning in action. EIT Urban Mobility.

City and County of San Francisco. (n.d.). Making the Shared Spaces Program permanent. Retrieved March 15, 2026, from sf.gov.

City of Milan. (n.d.). Piazze Aperte: A public space program for Milan.

European Commission: European Research Executive Agency. (2025). Sharing evidence with policymakers: Guide on writing policy briefs for impact. Publications Office of the European Union.

European Network of Living Labs. (n.d.). Living Lab Stories. Retrieved March 15, 2026, from enoll.org.

Flowers of Proximity. (n.d.). About the Flowers of Proximity. Retrieved March 16, 2026.

Leuven 2030. (n.d.). All across Leuven, we're joining forces for a climate neutral city. Retrieved March 16, 2026, from en.leuven2030.be.

Municipality of Kaisariani. (2023, August 7). Review of the implementation of the “AsphaltArt” programme.

National Association of City Transportation Officials. (2013). Parklets. In Urban street design guide. Retrieved March 13, 2026, from nacto.org.

NetZeroCities. (2026, January 15). Citizens and urban stakeholders engagement. NetZeroCities Portal.

Street Plans Collaborative. (n.d.). Guides. Tactical Urbanist's Guide. Retrieved March 15, 2026, from tacticalurbanismguide.com.

PROJECT INFORMATION

CoCoNet – Co-creative Cohabitation Network

CoCoNet investigates how co-creative processes and integrated spatial evidence can reveal synergies between mobility, climate, soundscape, and ecological connectivity to support inclusive and sustainable street transformations. By addressing fragmented urban planning, the project develops methods and tools that enable cross-sectoral collaboration and foster resilient, high-quality urban environments.

Contact: Katrin Hagen, katrin.hagen@tuwien.ac.at

Policy mix 4 mobility

Policy mix 4 mobility is a research-oriented project that develops transformative policy mixes to reduce car dependency in European cities. It combines qualitative case studies with transdisciplinary urban labs to provide evidence-based strategies and practical tools for city administrations. The project supports sustainable, climate-neutral mobility transitions centered on social justice and diversity.

LinkedIn: [policymix4mobility](#)

Contact: Florian Kern, florian.kern@ioew.de ; Richard Harnisch, Richard.Harnisch@ioew.de

UNLOCK15 – Empowering people for transitions to UNLOCK the 15-minute City

The aim of UNLOCK15 is to empower citizens and local authorities to overcome the structural, social, and political barriers that prevent cities from moving away from car-centric planning. The project investigates what is “hampering” political and public will, and is currently developing a toolkit to empower cities for change.

LinkedIn: [unlock15](#)

Contact: Benjamin Büttner, benjamin.buettner@tum.de

UVAR4US - Using Urban Vehicle Access Regulations for Reshaping Urban Space

UVAR4US examines how Urban Vehicle Access Regulations (UVAR) can be used to support the 15-minute city concept (15mC). Four Living Labs – Helsingborg (Sweden), Vitoria-Gasteiz (Spain), Ioannina and Kozani (Greece) – will implement and validate UVAR measures, feeding an open knowledge base on UVAR solutions and citizen participation.

Contact: Anna Sager, anna.sager@ri.se

About this publication

This working paper was developed by projects funded under the Driving Urban Transitions Partnership, which has been co-funded by the European Commission. The content and views are the authors’ own, and do not necessarily represent the views of DUT.

Layout: Ana Calvo, IQ Samhällsbyggnad

Editor: Anna Hasenauer, Austria Tech

Photo credit: DUT projects provided images and illustrations. Purchased images from iStock.