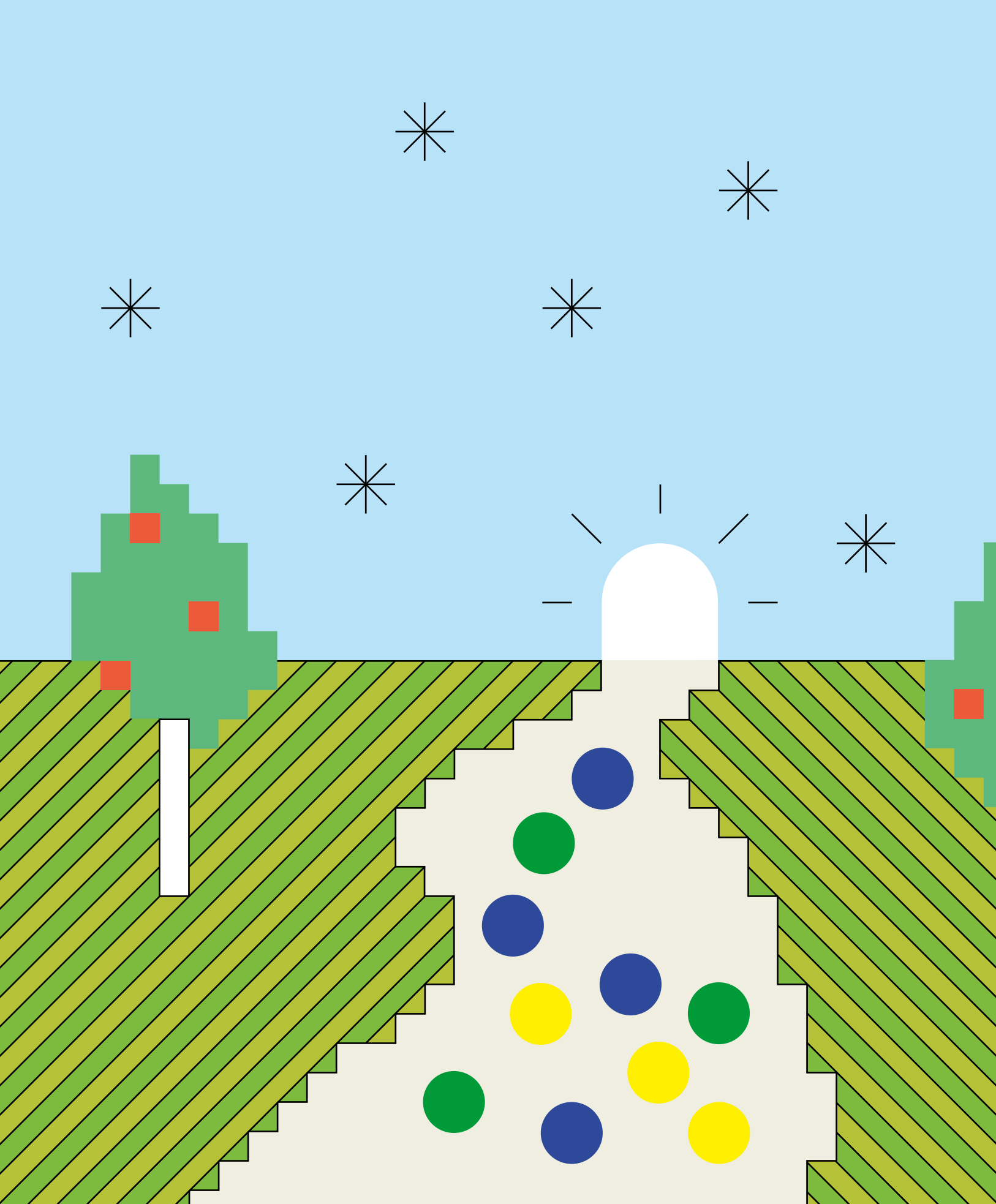


Part 3

Conclusion



Lessons from the Journey

By Robin Houterman

In the year 1322, the English knight John Mandeville left home and embarked on what would become one of the most famous journeys of the Middle Ages. During the next three and a half decades, Sir John visited countless kingdoms, lands, and isles. He served the Sultan of Egypt, fought for the Great Khan of Cathay, and even travelled to the mythical Land of Prester John...

We have always conceived of Human Cities as a journey as well. It has been a journey to eleven cities across Europe, and within each city it has been a journey from an initial idea to a fully-fledged experiment. Interestingly, the starting points of the experiments were very different. Experiments took place in disadvantaged inner-city areas, post-industrial zones, modernist housing areas, a university campus, and a range of other locations. As set out in Alice Holmberg's chapter on co-creation, all experiments were based on a thorough analysis of an area. Looking at how the experiments took shape, it could be said that each of them tried to answer one of the following questions:

1. Is there something missing in the area?

Some of the experiments originated from a sense that something was lacking in a part of the city. This is perhaps most clearly illustrated by Pool is Cool in Brussels, where a group of like-minded people with a passion for open-air swimming came together. Realising that many similar-size cities in Europe had open-air swimming facil-

ities, they felt this was a case worth fighting for. Judging by the success of their pop-up swimming pools and dry swimming events, they had a point.

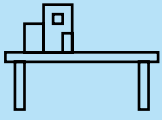
2. Is there a particular problem in the area?

Other teams decided to deal with a specific issue. For example, both Saint-Étienne's experiments addressed the problem of disused space. Ici Bientôt focused on empty shops in a historically important part of the city. The empty shop windows were a blight and the streets were less lively than before. By experimenting with new activities, the experiment improved the situation for landlords and residents. In the Crêt de Roch neighbourhood, the focus was on abandoned land. Here, the Hypermatière collective worked with residents and students to transform a vacant wasteland into a thriving community space.

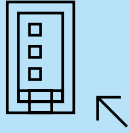
3. Are there assets that could be developed?

Finally, some teams focused on existing assets that could be built upon. Assets can be thought of in different ways: they can be economic assets like the maker community in London, neighbourhood networks like in Bilbao, or public spaces or buildings. The team from Aalto University focused on the latter. The university's Otaniemi Campus is a vibrant learning environment with cutting-edge resources, but the Aalto team noticed that some of the buildings were relatively underused. Since they had already been researching the relationship between education and architecture, they felt this

Creative tools



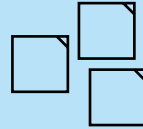
Workshop



UX-UI design



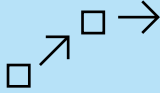
Party



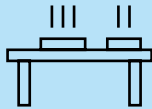
Process design



Public talk



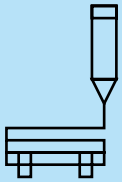
Service design



Giant picnic



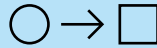
Graphic design



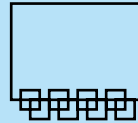
Urban design



Barbecue



Visual design



Open-air cinema

Human citizens



Citizens



Creative people



Public authorities

was a good opportunity to test their School as a Service concept. They invited a local high school suffering from a lack of space to start using Otaniemi Campus. This made the campus much livelier and helped high school pupils and university students interact with each other in a way that proved beneficial for both.

In the course of his travels, Sir John came across "many divers kinds of folk of divers laws and shapes." He saw yellow and green people dwelling near the Indus and people with heads like dogs in Natumeran. In the land of the Pigmens, he met little men who were only two feet tall and were engaged in a perpetual war with cranes.

The Human Cities experiments have also involved a wide range of people, from children in Belgrade to artists in Bilbao. The evaluation of the project carried out by Politecnico di Milano showed that local organisations were involved in 6 of the 11 experiments, public institutions were involved in 8, and individual citizens were involved in 10. Students played an important role in nearly all the experiments. They carried out research and mapping work in London, contributed their design skills in Milan, and helped prototype solutions in Graz.

It is clear that most projects cannot be implemented by a single person. Other people need to be involved. In fact, a study among initiators of bottom-up initiatives conducted by the Urban Planning Institute of the Republic of Slovenia (UIRS) and Saxion University of Applied Sciences in The Netherlands¹ showed that project initiators considered human resources more important than financial resources. So who are some of the possible partners in a project?

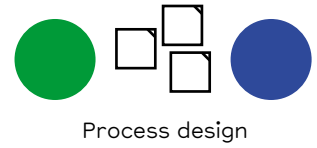
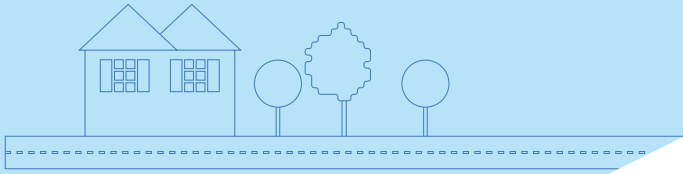
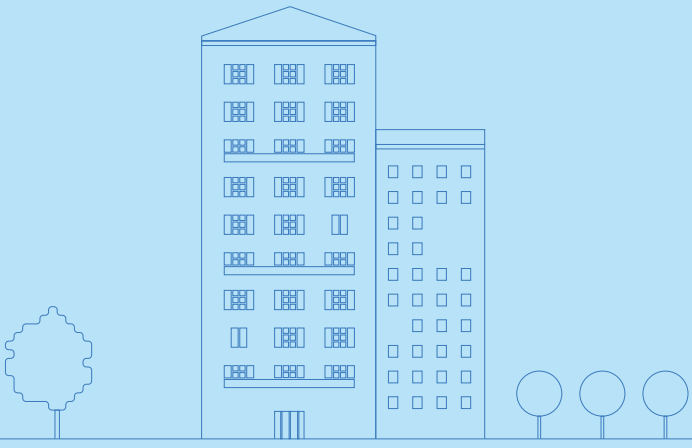
First, there are likely to be other individuals who share similar concerns or see similar opportunities. The collective 'Skupaj na ploščad!' in Ljubljana is a case in point. The collective consists of dedicated, like-minded neighbours who believe that the use of public space in the area should be increased. Their combined networks made it easy to reach out to other neighbours as well as local organisations and institutions, such as the schools their children attended.

Second, there may be other groups and organisations who are already working in the area. These organisations often have crucial local knowledge. They know what is at stake in a community, including the nuances not mentioned in the standard reports produced by local authorities and other external bodies. In addition, they often have strong local networks already. The experiment in Bilbao provides an example of this. By linking up with UrbanBat, Bilbao Ekintza was able to build their experiment around an issue that had been identified in previous workshops: namely, the insufficient presence of women in the streets of the San Francisco, Bilbao La Vieja and Zabala neighbourhoods.

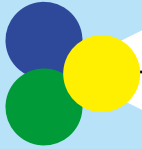
Third, it is often essential to involve larger public and private institutions, especially if a project aims to have a large impact. The team at Belgrade Design Week certainly set itself an ambitious target when it decided to build 100 playgrounds across Serbia. Communicating this grand vision played a key role in securing the support of large partners such as the NIS energy company, the Dragica Nikolić Foundation, and leading manufacturers of playground equipment.

1 See Matej Nikšič's article 'Civil Initiatives Improving Urban Public Spaces' in *Human Cities_Challenging the City Scale: Investigation*, published by Cité du design Saint-Étienne, 2018.

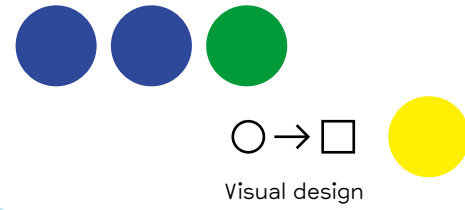
A human cities journey



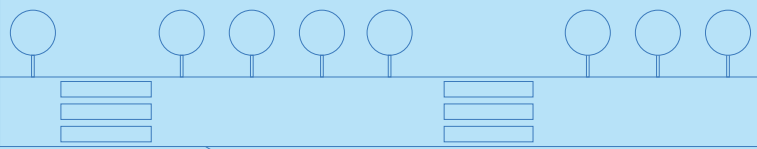
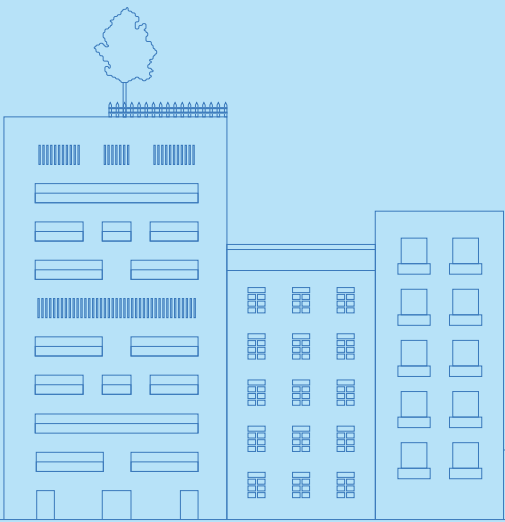
Analysing the site

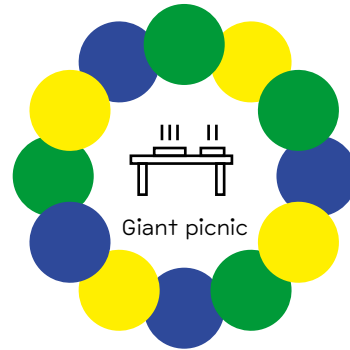
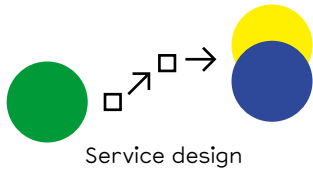


Identifying an issue



Maximising participation

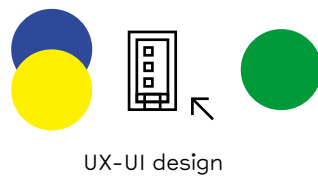
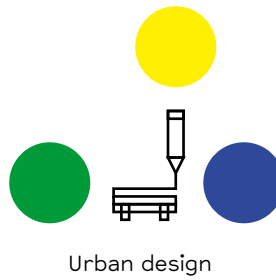


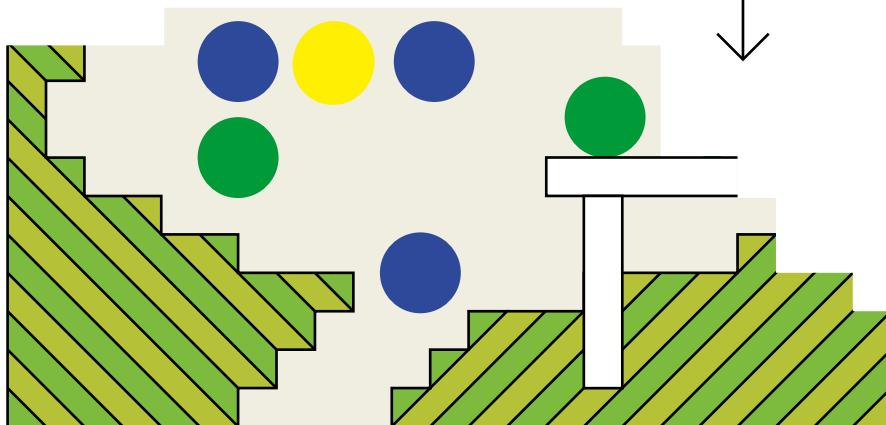
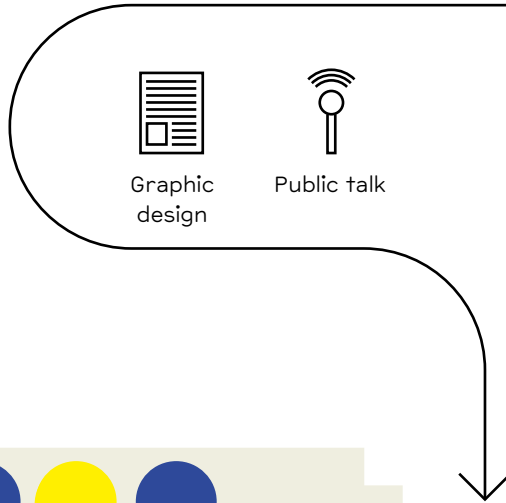
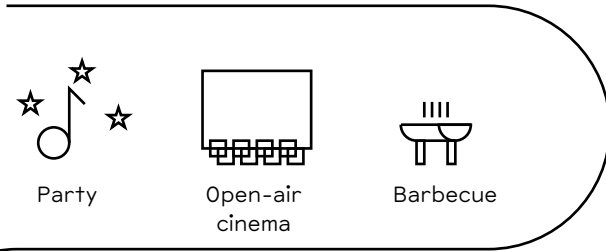
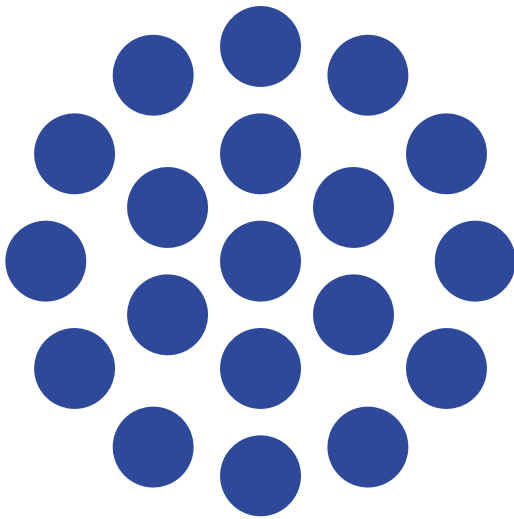


Mobilising resources

Experimenting

Pursuing a long-term strategy





As an experienced traveller, Sir John has some valuable recommendations on what to take on a journey. A piece of the Dry Tree, which grows near Hebron, will protect you from epilepsy and ensure that your horse never founders. And a diamond is more helpful still: it will make you bold, ward off wicked spirits and poisonous animals, and heal you if you succumb to lunacy.

The Human Cities experiments had to make do without diamonds and magical trees and rely on design tools instead. One of the most important challenges in all cities was to involve people and a wide range of engagement tools was used.

Many of the experiments used tools to build a community around their project. Organising a food-related event, as was done for instance in Ljubljana, is an excellent way to bring together young and old. On the other end of the spectrum, digital tools can also be helpful. The London team used meetup.com, for example, to create connections in the Maker Mile.

Other tools, such as tailored workshops, were used to gather input on the project. The Bilbao team hosted two workshops which started with the rather abstract idea of addressing gender issues in the area and developed this into a concrete public space project that could be realised with the help of local artists.

Finally, several teams also used tools to co-design, prototype and test ideas. The team from Politecnico di Milano was particularly successful at engaging a wide range of people from the local community. With the help of tools such as storyboards, role-playing and concept models, student teams co-designed possible interventions which were subsequently staged on La Piana square. This allowed the students to assess how well they had engaged residents and whether their temporary actions might work as permanent interventions.

Two conclusions can be drawn about the tools used in the experiments. First, they originate from a variety of design disciplines, including:

- interaction and experience design
- workshop design
- graphic design
- urban design and architecture
- product design
- service design

Second, most experiments used a combination of tools to achieve the intended outcomes. This requires skill in process design. The key to successful engagement is to design a strategic framework with suitable tools for each phase of the project.

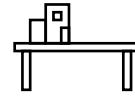
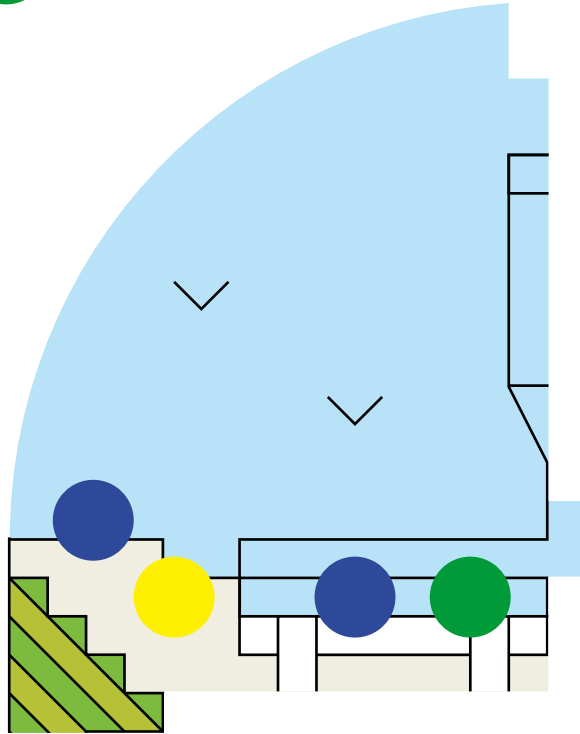
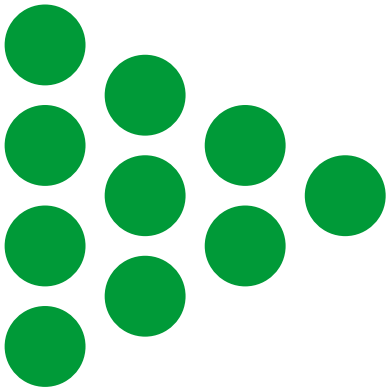
Sir John discovered many different customs and mores as he travelled around the world. In Cana, he met people who worshipped the first thing they saw in the morning. And in Tracota, he came across people who venerated a stone which had sixty colours. He also visited a land where the people were so good and pure that they never had bad weather.

We cannot claim to have been as good and pure as the people John Mandeville met, as is shown by the rain in Milan mentioned elsewhere in this book. But that said, the Human Cities project has had a strong focus on values. It has been built on thirteen shared values defined by the partners at the outset. These are: empathy, wellbeing, sustainability, intimacy, conviviality, mobility, accessibility, imagination, leisure, aesthetics, sensoriality, solidarity, and respect.

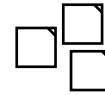
At the evaluation workshop conducted by Politecnico di Milano, we looked at how recognisable these values were in the experiments. Each project team wrote down the three values they considered most important in their own experiment and the three values they considered most important in the other experiments. The degree of overlap when comparing the results was striking. All the experiments had at least one value that was considered important both by the project team and by the other teams. The experiments in Bilbao, Graz, Helsinki, Ljubljana, London and Milan had two values in common. And the experiment in Belgrade had all three values (leisure, well-being and conviviality) in common. We do not believe that too many conclusions should be drawn from these findings, as the data set was rather small. But they do seem to indicate that the values one brings to a project shape its development and are recognisable (and hopefully appealing) to others.

So which were the most and least prominent values in the experiments? Based on how often they were mentioned by project teams and other teams, the most important value was conviviality, followed by sustainability, leisure, well-being and imagination. Conviviality was mentioned particularly in relation to the experiments in Belgrade, Saint-Étienne, Milan, Ljubljana, Tallinn and Graz. Interestingly, these were experiments with a strong focus on public space. This may indicate that re-imagining public space is a good way to create more conviviality and consequently more human cities.

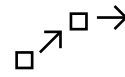
The least mentioned values were intimacy, aesthetics and sensoriality. This allows for two different interpretations. Either the project teams didn't consider these values important and therefore didn't integrate them into the experiments—or the project teams did consider them important but didn't know how to integrate them. If the latter is the case, we will need to be more imaginative and creative in future to make sure that these values also play a role in making cities more human.



Workshop



Process design



Service design



Urban design



UX-UI design



Sir John faced many dangers during his travels, but none was as terrifying as crossing the Valley of Devils near the River Phison. Sir John entered the valley with thirteen companions and was immediately assailed by devils flying around "with great thunders and lightnings." When he and his companions came out of the valley, there were only nine men left.

The Human Cities journey has also been difficult at times, though fortunately we haven't lost any partners. Everyone without exception encountered challenges in the course of their experiment. The main ones were as follows:

1. Maximising participation

Several project teams struggled to engage the wider public or specific target groups. In London, for example, the Maker Mile team successfully engaged many different groups, but wasn't able to involve local residents as much as hoped. In Brussels, the Pool is Cool team easily reached certain demographics via social media, but had difficulty reaching out to other groups.

2. Pursuing a long-term strategy

Not having a long-term strategy was another challenge. The Milan team regretted not having a clear plan to move from temporary solutions to permanent interventions. Similarly, the Graz team felt that some of their initial actions lacked a follow-up, although in the case of the bench project everything eventually worked out well thanks to the involvement of project partners.

3. Engaging local authorities and decision makers

Finally, some of the project teams struggled to engage local authorities and decision makers in a meaningful way. The Graz team spent a long time trying to contact the local authorities about their experiment, but in vain. Similarly, the Ljubljana team found that the city's central authorities were reluctant to recognise the value of their experiment, let alone provide financial or organisational support. These on-the-ground experiences are in line with the findings of the study conducted by UIRS and Saxion University, mentioned previously. It showed that lack of institutional support and the need to "dance" with the bureaucratic system are among the most demotivating factors for initiators of bottom-up initiatives. The message to politicians and public officials is clear: be open to citizen initiatives and be willing to collaborate.

Sir John's journey wasn't only filled with danger and hardship; there were also occasions of great joy. Perhaps Sir John's happiest moment was discovering the Well of Youth near the city of Polumbum. He drank of it three times and as he reports, he has felt better and healthier ever since and will probably do so for the rest of his life.

Human Cities has also had many happy moments and many successes to celebrate, ranging from a brand new playground in Kragujevac to a popular distributed school in Helsinki. The evaluation of the experiments showed that there were a number of common factors that led to success:

1. Addressing something that matters to people

Choosing a relevant theme for a project is key to creating impact. For example, after initially focusing their experiment on the city's main shopping street, the Cieszyn team discovered that the bus station was a more important issue for people. The team decided to scrap their original plans and adapt their experiment accordingly. This helped get the general public and local authorities interested in the experiment and also allowed the team to broaden the scope. Rather than only looking into the location of the bus stop, the experiment became an ongoing exploration to reinvent the place and prototype new ideas.

2. Building on local resources

It might be a vibrant artistic scene, a close-knit community, or a network of attractive public spaces—but in any case, every area has assets which can form the foundation of a project. They may be tangible or intangible, easy to spot or hard to identify, but every neighbourhood has something that is special. In London, for example, the project team realised that a particular part of the city had a long history of fabrication as well as a dynamic high-tech making scene. The idea of the Maker Mile was born, and it proved to be effective precisely because it didn't originate from a creative brainwave but was rooted in the local context.

3. Making engagement creative and fun

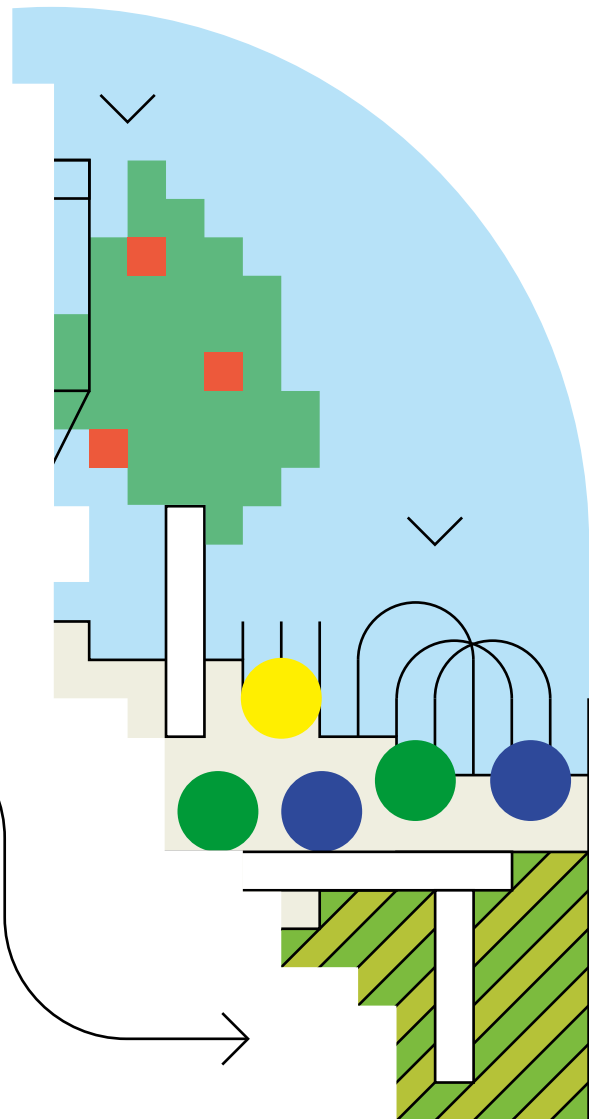
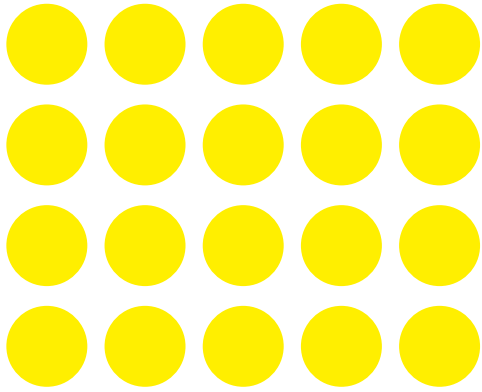
As mentioned in the study conducted by UIRS and Saxion University, having fun is one of the most important motivations for people to take part in local initiatives. Many of the Human Cities experiments were very successful at providing participants with a memorable and enjoyable experience. The experiment in Graz provides a particularly good example of this. The mobile throne that passed through Jakomini Street was an original and entertaining intervention, and using street theatre to communicate the results of a survey made for an excellent alternative to the usual dusty report.

4. Thinking out of the box

Many of the experiments focused on bringing people together, based on the idea that human cities should facilitate interaction. But there is always scope for unexpected approaches. The team in Tallinn, for instance, based their experiment on the human need

Lessons for public authorities

Support experimentation through policies and finance



to get away from the bustle of the city and find a way to decelerate and relax. It is undoubtedly true that cities need more opportunities for people to do things together—but similarly, they also need more solutions like the Hålo pod.

In the year 1356, after "many honourable journeys and many honourable deeds of arms with worthy men", Sir John finally decided to return home. He wrote a book about his travels and passing through Rome on his way back to England, he showed it to the Pope and his council. They examined it and swiftly declared that everything in it was true.

We probably have a different opinion of the veracity of John Mandeville's book. In fact, we might even have doubts about the man himself. There is no historical evidence that there was a knight called John Mandeville, that he came from England, and that he ever travelled at all. Yet amidst the uncertainty, there are some things we do know. The Travels of Sir John Mandeville became one of the most widely read travel memoirs of the Middle Ages. And a little over a century later, it would be a profound inspiration for a more famous traveller who dreamt of sailing to the Indies...

Our Human Cities journey has also come to an end—at least for now. We can't claim that it has been as epic and heroic as Sir John's. But in our defence, it has at least been real. As we can see from John Mandeville's story, journeys often have the virtue of inspiring other journeys. And just as Mandeville inspired Columbus, so we hope that in a small and modest way, Human Cities may encourage others to embark on a journey. Not to look for valleys and wells on the other side of the world, but to discover possibilities and opportunities in our neighbourhoods and cities.

The author would like to thank the team from Politecnico di Milano—Davide Fassi, Annalinda De Rosa, Laura Galluzzo, and Wang Ludanqing—for the evaluation workshop they organised in Cieszyn in January 2018. This chapter is largely based on their findings. I would also like to thank my colleague Frank van Hasselt for his arcane insights into medieval travel literature.

