



Woensel West district  
Eindhoven

URBAN C:Lab

Can liveability be affordable?

ACADEMY OF URBANISM | CONGRESS 2019

BURO HAPPOLD  
ENGINEERING

THE ACADEMY  
OF URBANISM

## Can liveability be affordable? A PLACE TO CALL HOME

**I**n June 2019, a group from BuroHappold's C:Lab programme attended the Academy of Urbanism's annual Congress in Eindhoven. The focus of the Congress was urbanism and affordable housing. The C:Lab team ran a workshop exploring the tensions between affordability and liveability within neighbourhoods. This document summarises the workshop, its outcomes and possible next steps.

The Congress brought together urbanists from a range of backgrounds to explore the housing crisis facing many towns and cities across the world. Urban areas are increasingly the engine for economic growth but successful places often encounter social and financial inequalities, particularly in relation to housing affordability. If key workers and long-term residents can no longer afford to live within a place, how long before the factors that made it attractive and successful are undermined?

Eindhoven was an excellent place to explore these issues. This former industrial powerhouse reinvented itself to become a vibrant city of

technologically driven innovation and collaboration, focusing on technological solutions for worldwide challenges such as mobility, energy and health. Today it is a bustling city in transition, with a constant flow of new developments in creativity, innovation, technology, design and knowledge.

Like C:Lab, the Congress is collaborative. Throughout the week, attendees explored the issues presented along with established and emerging responses to these problems from across the globe. Topics included the changing role of the public sector as an affordable housing provider, different community-led housing models, and the ways of achieving affordability through innovative design solutions. The applicability of various regulatory and policy mechanisms, new financial and partnership models used around the world to secure delivery of affordable housing as a key component of great placemaking was discussed.

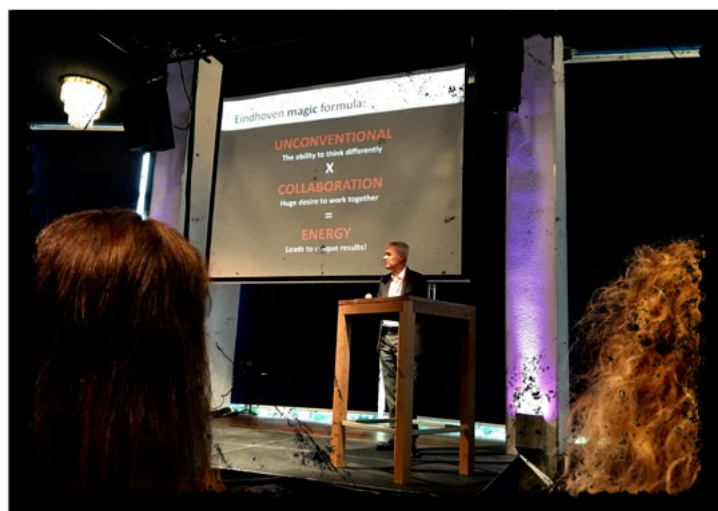




A SNAP-SHOT FROM THE TOURS TO ONE OF TRUDO'S SOCIAL HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS



A SNAP-SHOT FROM THE TOURS TO ONE OF TRUDO'S SOCIAL HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS



MARTIJN PAULIN GIVES THE CONGRESS AN INSIGHT TO EINDHOVEN'S CREATIVE DNA



DR ERIC CORJIN PRESENTS HIS TAKE ON GROWING URBANITY IN EUROPE AND ITS IMPACT ON THE HOUSING MARKET

## Can liveability be affordable?

### WORKSHOP CONTEXT

**L**iveability can be defined as “the degree to which a place is suitable or good for living in”<sup>1</sup> Such a definition poses interesting questions: Mars may, one day, be a suitable environment within which to live, but will it be good?

Despite this, there are a growing number of indices that aim to rank and compare cities based on their “liveability”. In each index, liveability is defined differently. For example, The Economist focuses on five broad categories: infrastructure, stability, education, healthcare, and culture and environment. Monocle, meanwhile, focuses on 11 ranging from safety and crime through to climate and sunshine. What is consistent across these indices is an apparent lack of focus on affordability.

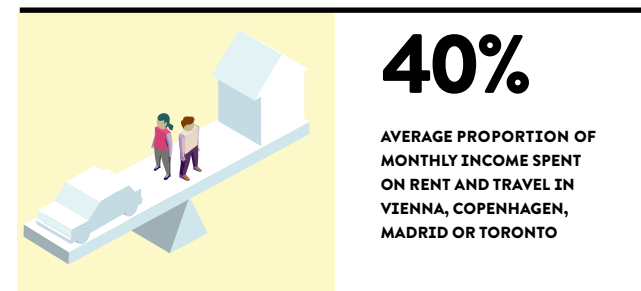
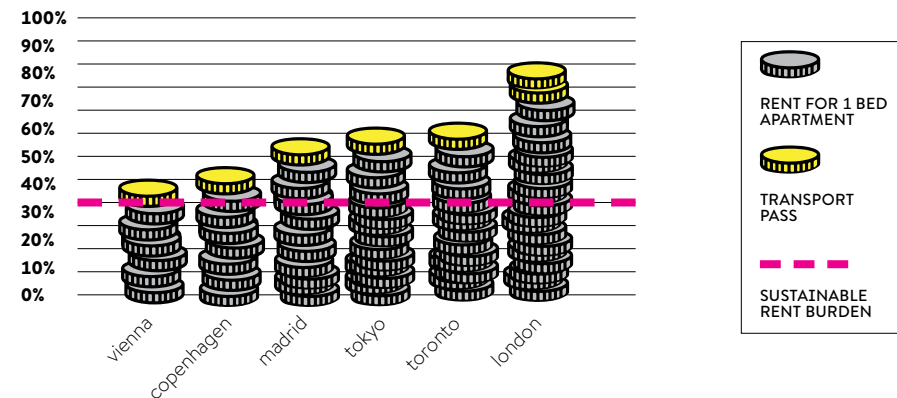
Like liveability, defining affordability is equally contested. A key observation, however, is that based on the average income of a citizen and the proportion of their income spent on rent and a monthly travel pass, those cities ranked as most liveable are also among the most unaffordable.

For example, the average single person in Vienna, Copenhagen, Madrid or Toronto will spend 40% or more of their monthly income on rent and travel. Some social scientists and real estate experts consider a rent burden of over 30% of household income as unsustainable as it does not leave sufficient money for other expenses, especially for those on lower incomes.

So, can liveability be affordable?

The challenge posed to workshop attendees was to rapidly generate ideas for interventions that we, as urban practitioners, could make at the neighbourhood scale to improve liveability and affordability. The diverse backgrounds of attendees in the session, from engineers to planners, landscape architects to municipalities, helped to stimulate the generation of innovative proposals.

RENT AND TRANSPORT COSTS AS A PROPORTION OF SALARY<sup>3</sup>



1. Cambridge Dictionary (undated) Liveability. Available here: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/liveability>

2. Thom Aussems, Housing: For Investment or Homes, AoU Journal No.13, Spring 2019

3. All financial data extracted from Numbeo.com



A MEMBER OF OUR URBAN C:LAB PROGRAMME SETTING OUT THE CONTEXT OF THE DESIGN SPRINT



GROUPS DEBATING THEIR IMPORTANCE VS INFLUENCE MAPPING



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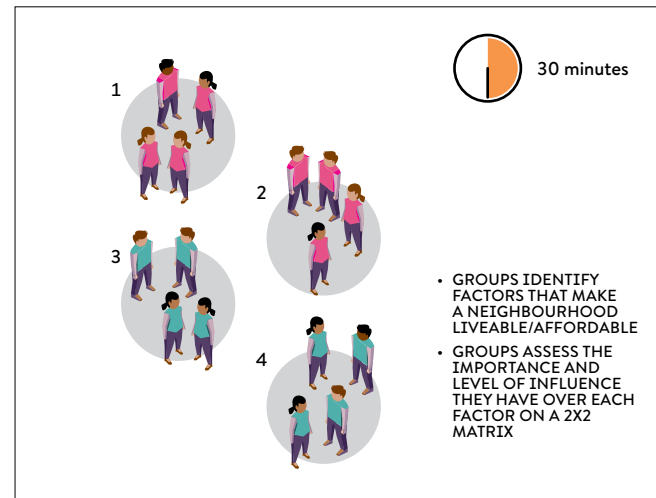
## Can liveability be affordable?

### WORKSHOP STRUCTURE

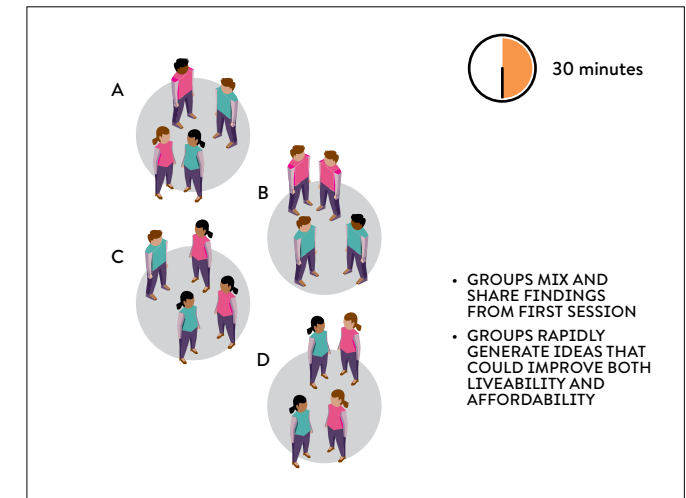
**T**he workshop structure was a shortened version of the design sprint process. A design sprint is a process for rapidly prototyping solutions to big challenges.

In order to work within the time constraints of the workshop, it was important to provide boundaries to what the participants would consider. The scope of the workshop focused on the neighbourhood scale – an urban district with a mix of land use types and a population in the region of 2,000 to 10,000. The solutions developed were to fall within the influence of practitioners at the Congress (designers, developers, municipal government officials) and were at this neighbourhood scale. For example, changes to a country's land laws would not be an appropriate solution.

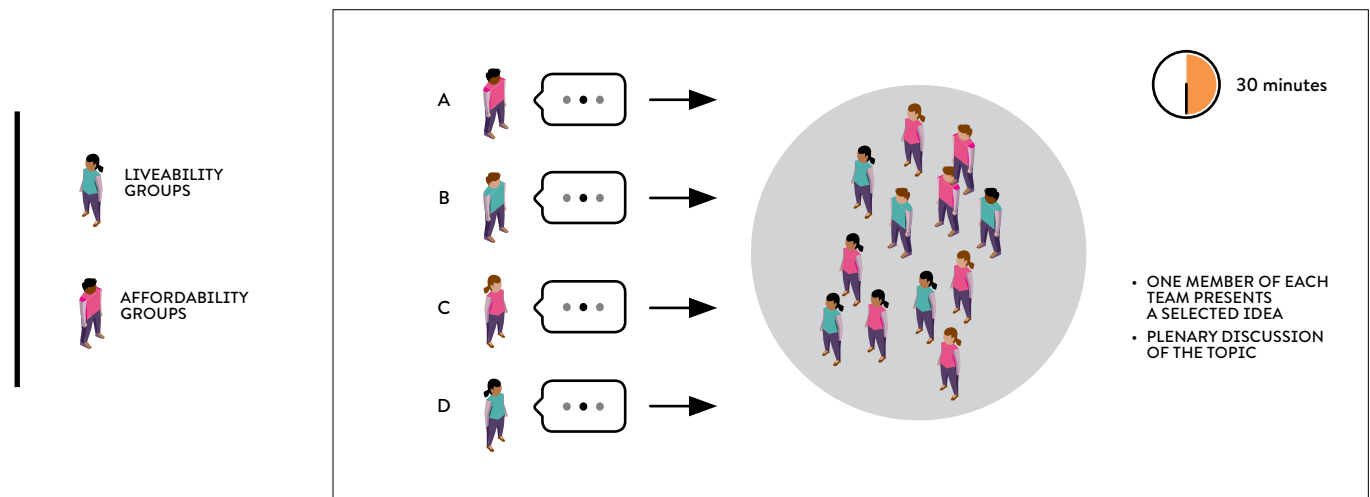
#### PART 1: understand the issues



#### PART 2: develop solutions



#### PART 3: share the outcomes with all the participants



## Can liveability be affordable?

# WORKSHOP OUTCOMES: PART ONE 'UNDERSTAND THE ISSUES'

The outcomes from each liveability and affordability group are illustrated in the adjacent diagrams. The key headlines are summarised below:

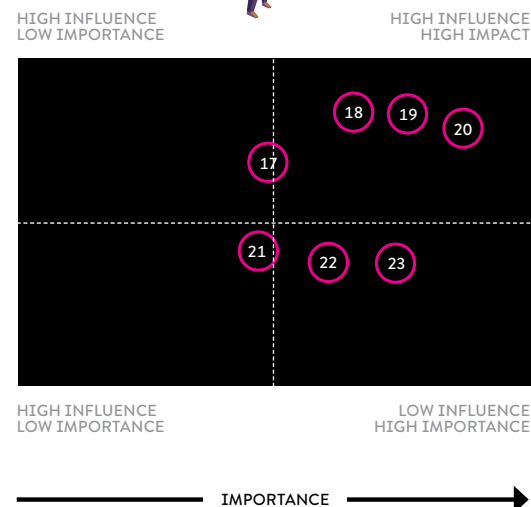
- Across the two liveability groups, housing quality, transport and mobility, and sense of community emerge as common themes.
- The level of influence each group believed they had over the issue varies. One liveability group identified the crucial links between mobility and access to economic opportunities, healthcare and education.
- Housing and transportation are important issues for both affordability groups; they are also areas where the groups can have significant influence.
- Less important are retail, services, leisure and entertainment, and utilities, whereas the importance of access to affordable food and drink is mixed.

| Liveability groups  | Affordability groups  |
|---|---|
| 1. Access to green space                                      | 17. Retail & services<br><i>Local supplies and demands</i>  |
| 2. Sense of community   | 18. Utilities<br><i>Planning, building, maintenance</i>   |
| 3. Transport & mobility                                       | 19. Transportation<br><i>Never needing to own car</i>   |
| 4. Housing quality  | 20. Housing<br><i>Policy -<br/>Procurement &amp; delivery<br/>Individual x city<br/>Communities<br/>Alternative funding</i> |
| 5. Safety & security  | 21. Food & drink<br><i>Growing food</i>   |
| 6. Education  | 22. Health<br><i>Individual health<br/>Access to health care</i>  |
| 7. Cleanliness  | 23. Education<br><i>Two incomes household through<br/>childcare supervision</i>   |
| 8. Climate conditions   | 24. Leisure & entertainment   |
| 9. Access to green space                                      | 25. Retail & services   |
| 10. Transport & mobility<br><i>Prioritise walking/cycling</i> | 26. Health  |
| 11. Housing quality   | 27. Education   |
| 12. Access to jobs<br><i>Reducing need to travel</i>          | 28. Transportation  |
| 13. Sense of community<br><i>Knowing your neighbour</i>       | 29. Telecommunication   |
| 14. Education<br><i>Equality of access</i>                    | 30. Utilities   |
| 15. Safety & security   | 31. Food & Drinks   |
| 16. Healthcare<br><i>Equality of access</i>                   | 32. Housing   |

### Liveability groups



### Affordability groups



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## WORKSHOP OUTCOMES: PART TWO 'DEVELOP SOLUTIONS'

**P**rior to the final part of the sprint, attendees were tasked to develop as many big and bold ideas as they could in response to the challenge.

The idea generation process primarily focused on the development of integrated solutions that simultaneously addressed issues ranked as having high importance and high influence in both the liveability and affordability mapping in Part One. Namely housing, transport and sense of community.

Attendees from each group captured their ideas using Post-it notes; the outcomes of this session have been reviewed and summarised below within a number of common emerging themes.

To close the sprint, each group was asked to pick one idea and present this to the group. This was followed by an open debate and reflection on the key themes that emerged. From both the ideas presented and the discussion that followed, BuroHappold has summarised the outcomes into four focal topics.

### Third spaces

- Well-ordered, highly permeable and legible environments that create opportunities for social exchange at no cost.
- Intelligent masterplans that are accessible to all in our increasingly diverse cities, at no cost.
- Integration of places to "meet and discuss" within the public realm (for example, street furniture, shelters), at no cost.
- Creation of spaces that can be adapted in line with the evolving needs of communities.
- Establish minimum standards for private developers to create and provide access to high-quality green spaces.

### Connectivity

- Free digital connectivity for all! Provision of telecoms as a utility, not a service. Enabling access to economic opportunities and social networks.
- Lower dependence on private transportation through creation of cycle highways, reducing travel costs for communities while promoting healthy lifestyles and ensuring access to economic opportunities of the city.
- Mechanisms that enable communities to pool resources, either skills or time, and connect to support one another without financial transaction.

### Food

- Ensuring most marginalised communities have access to high-quality, healthy foods.
- Provision of affordable food retailers, potentially subsidised by local authorities or private investors in the community.
- Creation of allotments for users to increase whilst supporting wellbeing through connection to nature and neighbours.

### Ownership

- More cooperative (or co-housing) led developments as the norm. A solution to decreasing rental costs while building community networks.
- Community lead maintenance programmes as a mechanism to support development of knowledge and skills whilst ensuring high quality placekeeping.
- Proactive and purposeful co-creation with communities to shape project brief and design development.
- Increased provision of co-housing with shared service provision (for example, laundry) and community space

### Social value

- Provision of low-cost spaces for community start-ups and business creation within private development proposals.
- Facilitation of community training schemes by developers and construction teams, enabling skills creation through establishment of places.
- Creation of new metrics for performance against which developers are measures to ensure social return on investment.
- Ensuring the co-benefits and opportunities of proposals are considered in decision-making and maximised. For example, wellbeing, health and resilience opportunities of green infrastructure.



STEVEN BEE SUMMARISES THE FINDINGS FROM HIS LIVEABILITY GROUP



TWO TEAMS WORKING ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROPOSED SOLUTIONS



A THIRD TEAM DEBATING WHICH IDEA TO PUT FORWARD TO THE GROUP



LUKAS SCHAEFER AND PHILIP JACKSON PRESENT THEIR IDEA TO ALL WORKSHOP ATTENDEES

Can liveability be affordable?

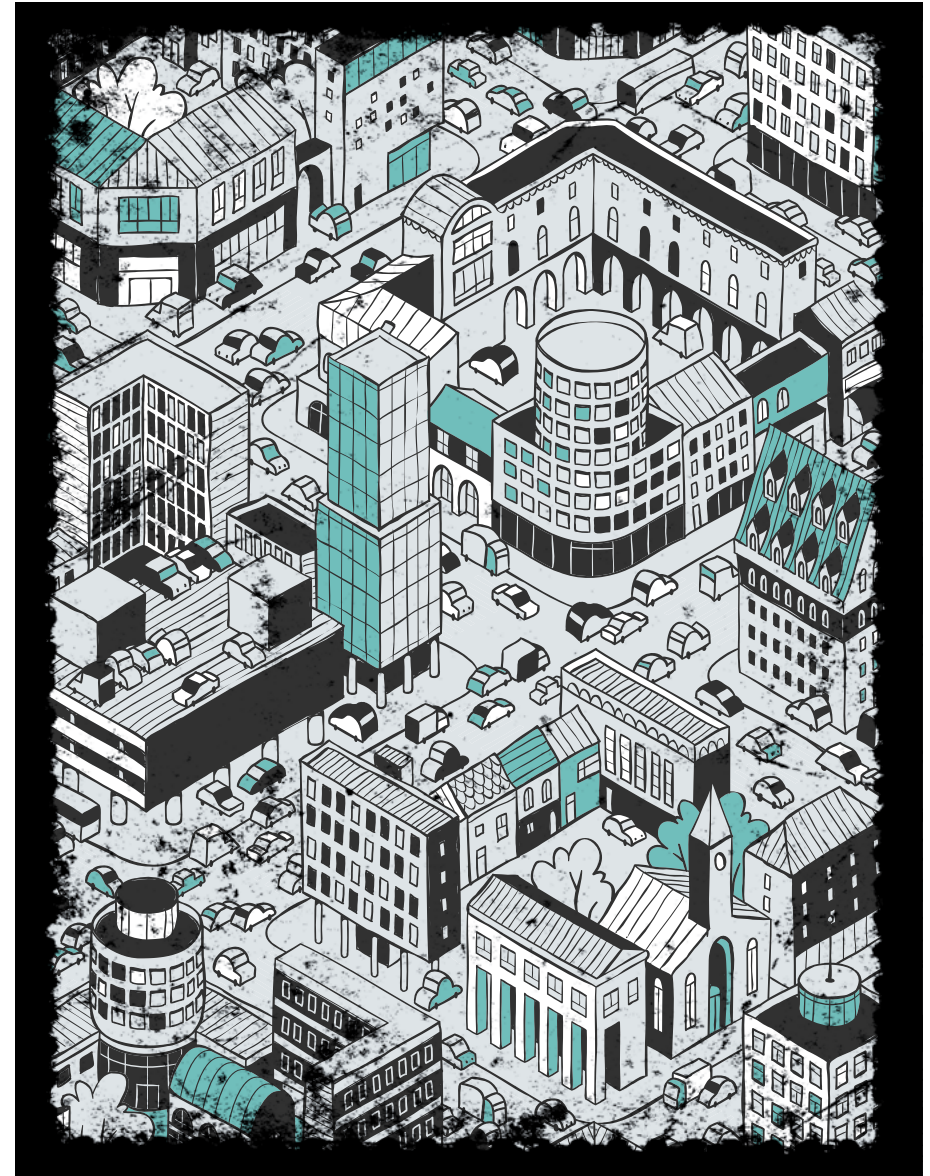
## WORKSHOP OUTCOMES: PART THREE 'SHARE THE OUTCOMES'

# 1

### Idea one: Co-creation

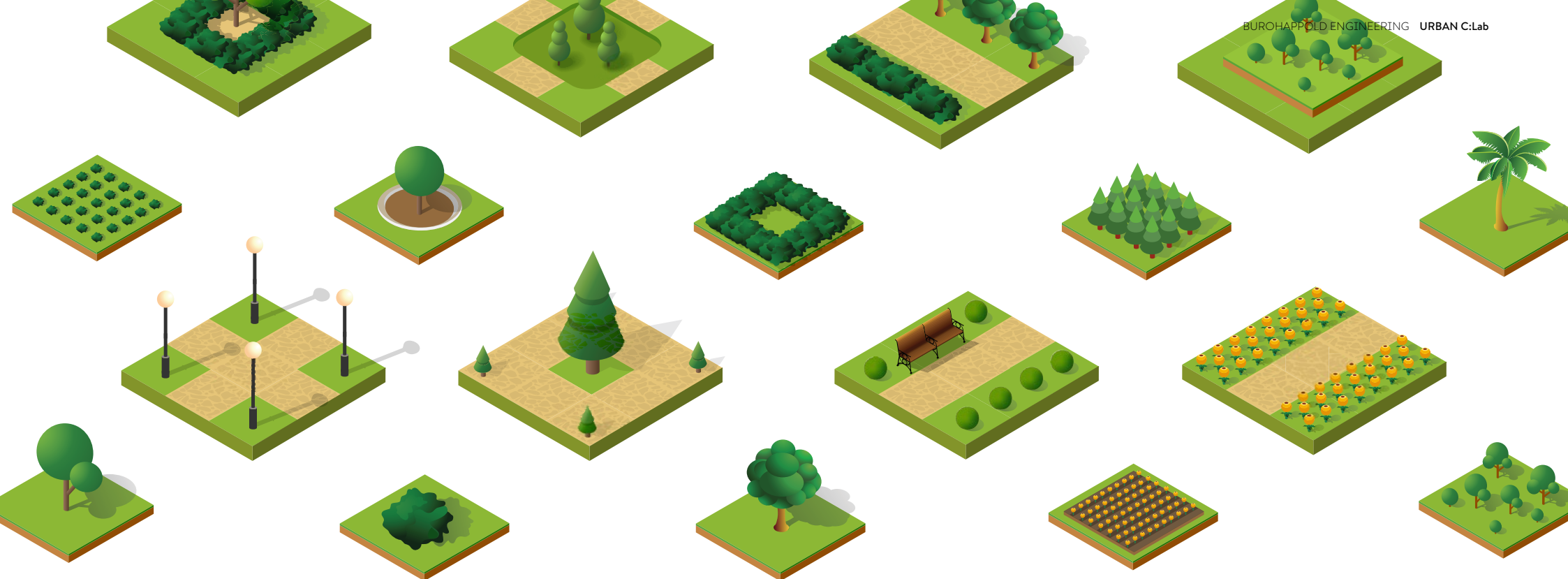
Our traditional planning processes are underpinned by a reactive, rather than proactive, approach to community engagement. The current approach is also not fit for the lifestyles of the majority and is full of techy language that puts people off rather than engaging them. For communities, this is disempowering and results in low participation rates; in the UK, for example, only three percent of those made aware of development proposals engage<sup>1</sup>. If communities are disempowered they cannot influence the creation of places that respond to their needs. Moreover, they are unlikely to feel a sense of place or ownership of the finished spaces.

Proactive, meaningful and purposeful co-creation from the briefing stage was proposed as a solution to help address these challenges. This will enable community needs to be identified while developers and design teams can be held accountable for delivering on these priority outcomes. There is a growing number of examples where such approaches are delivering positive outcomes for communities as well as developers and municipalities. For communities, co-creation helps to create places that are responsive to residents' needs and increasingly liveable. For developers and municipalities, increased tenant satisfaction can reduce turnover while a sense of community ownership can help reduce lifetime costs such as maintenance.



1. RTPI. (2017). Planning and public engagement: the truth and the challenge.

Available online: <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/briefing-room/rtpi-blog/planning-and-public-engagement-the-truth-and-the-challenge/>



# 2

## Idea two: Creating the space

As our cities become increasingly populated and dense, the demand placed upon them intensifies. In this intensification there is risk that we lose vital components of social infrastructure that make our cities liveable, as priority is given to creation of homes and provision of utilities. While the provision of homes and utilities may create suitable places to live, without due consideration to the urban fabric that surrounds them we risk losing these vital pieces of social infrastructure that make them good.

A key proposal was to ensure that all neighbourhood developments are held accountable for providing high quality, inclusive and public space as part of the proposals. These should consist of a range of spatial types and features that support opportunities for social exchange at no cost. Such environments will be productive for social capital. They will also include a range of resources, such as urban agriculture, to help address broader issues of food security and health, for example, in an affordable manner.

To help make the case for productive environments, the social return on investment, or co-benefits, of interventions should be quantified to help developers look beyond capital costs. For example, the opportunities for resilience to the impacts of a changing future climate associated with green infrastructure and the health cost savings this may further incur.

# 3

## Idea three: The street party!

Creating the spaces that facilitate community interaction must be followed by a strong placekeeping strategy. If possible, the ideas set out here would support the development of a sense of communal ownership and for placekeeping to become community led.

Although important, placekeeping was not simply assumed to be the maintenance and upkeep of public areas. Rather, it is believed that initiatives to activate public spaces should be central to placekeeping strategies. Communities should be given the opportunity and rights to organise and host events, such as a street party within their neighbourhood. This may entail closing down vehicular routes or relaxing particular management policies but would enable individuals within communities to interact and exchange ideas in a celebratory environment, helping to build social capital. There is further scope to support the local economy by providing local vendors and creatives with opportunities to sell food, beverages and other products.



*“Communities should be given the opportunity and rights to organise and host events”*

#### Idea four: Incentivising and normalising behaviours

Between attendees it was acknowledged that community ownership may not happen organically and that other incentives may be needed. Precedents such as Woensel-West, an affordable housing neighbourhood in Eindhoven, were cited as forward-thinking examples of financial incentives to this end. At Woensel-West, residents of social housing were offered reductions in rent in return for a weekly time contribution to the upkeep of community areas. Such incentives improve affordability for residents while helping to maintain a high-quality, liveable environment. During our visit and discussions with residents, it was explained that, over time, residents naturally participated in community activities without incentive. After being incentivised into such activities, individual community members quickly realised the wider benefits for their sense of community and place as well as wellbeing.

Eindhoven



WOENSEL-WEST

— 4

**Below**  
Colourful, hip, dynamic and affordable, the Woensel-West district is located in the west of the centre



Can liveability be affordable?

## NEXT STEPS

The tensions between liveability and affordability are acknowledged to be complex: they will not be solved by one solution alone or without policy and legislative change. The ideas generated during the design sprint however are practical actions that we, as urban practitioners, can take forward now to, or at least lobby for, within our design development processes, to support efforts toward creating neighbourhoods which are both liveable and affordable.

Urban C:Lab is an urban research programme focused on exploring emergent disruption in the built environment. Those ideas explored during the sprint and throughout the duration of the Congress will help inform our research. We are deliberately collaborative and welcome the opportunity to further explore those ideas with yourself.

**Our door is open. Please get in touch.**



## Can liveability be affordable?

### ATTENDEES

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#### Urban C:Lab

Urban C:Lab is a programme within BuroHappold Engineering focused on exploring emergent disruption in the built environment. A collaborative endeavour, Urban C:Lab works with clients, designers, academia, think tanks and institutions.

#### BuroHappold Engineering

BuroHappold Engineering is a world-class, global engineering and consultancy practice. Integrated thinking, highly skilled people and transformative solutions lie at the heart of what we do. Truly multidisciplinary, our interconnected community of experts transforms project outcomes for every one of our clients.

#### The Academy of Urbanism

The Academy of Urbanism is built on the expertise and engagement of over 500 leaders, thinkers and practitioners from a wide range of backgrounds.

Our mission is to recognise, encourage and celebrate great places across the UK, Europe and beyond together with the people and organisations that create and sustain them. We work with places to identify and reinforce their strengths, and recognise constraints on greater success.

#### Workshop collaborators

##### Wessel Badenhorst

Ó Cualann Cohousing Alliance

##### Alexis Butterfield

Pollard Thomas Edwards

##### Art McCoormack

MosArt Architects

##### Sonya Bangle

##### Calbhac O'Carroll

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##### Steven Bee (session chair):

The Academy of Urbanism

##### Elina Eskelä

City of Helsinki

##### David Rudlin

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##### Kim Tae-Hyung

Director-General of Urban Space Improvement, Seoul Metropolitan Government

##### Lucy Seymour-Bowdery

UK Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

##### Barbara Steenberg

International Union of Tenants

##### Philip Jackson

Scott Tallon Walker Architects

##### Fanny Blanc

London School of Economics

##### Sean Kelly

Glasgow City Council

##### Hunhee Cho

Seoul Metropolitan Government  
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##### Henk Bouwman

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##### Helen Quigley

Inner City Trust