HOW TO SUCCEED BY DARING TO FAIL

URBACT ROOF Cities testing context specific actions to end homelessness

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ROOF
Ending homelessness

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PROTOTYPING, testing, minimum viable products (MVP) are a consolidated way to verify ideas in the creative fields. Designers, programmers, entrepreneurs and others understand that one should "Fail faster, succeed sooner" (as well put by David Kelley, founder of IDEO). They give themselves the possibility to try out, and most importantly to fail. Every test, whether a success or a failure, allows us meaningful insights and opens up new points of view or direction. Making the best out of failing, as important as it may be, is not easy. For one to actually integrate it into its development process, it takes a change of mindset and a realisation of the potential advantages. Is it imaginable for a public administration to take this path? Could a big bureaucratic machine adopt agile ways of acting and be able to test ideas for sustainable change before creating long term action plans? The latest public administration strategies and programs have actually been working in this way. Tactical urbanism may be the most known one in urban design, where the city invests a small amount of money to change an urban area like a square, a street or a building block. Temporary changes are tested for a short time by the citizens and then, if the change proves to be for the better, it becomes permanent. Hilary Cottam structured her latest book 'Radical Help' all around experiments redefining and designing a new welfare state. She describes how these experiments focus on the human side of services, on care networks and always try to look at the bigger picture and vision while acting small and now.

The European URBACT program recognized the potential testing can offer its cities and adopted the right to fail in the current round of financing for Action planning networks. URBACT has integrated the requirement of Small Scale Actions (SSAs) the cities are to conduct before confirming their action plan. By integrating SSAs in the program financing, URBACT facilitates the change of mindset both through financial means (each city has a small budget dedicated to these actions) and guidance. Below you find a description of the SSAs carried out by the ROOF network, and the story of how to test actions towards Ending homelesness.

The ROOF network on ending homelessness
Ending homelessness is the aim of the ROOF network and the heart of the integrated actions plans that will be written during the

next year. 9 cities are exchanging and learning from one another. A great opportunity that is bringing new ideas, tools and methods. All cities have decided at the beginning of the project to focus on Housing First (HF) as a guiding method to end homelessness and on data collection. The different size, nature and experience of each city, though, is calling for a tailored approach and often for making choices and adaptations to the specific context.

Housing First is a proven method, but it also takes long to implement and requires infrastructure like housing and a stable welfare system.

In some cities with no experience in the field the aim often looks pretty unattainable. Other cities have a long tradition of staircase model systems with recent investments (Braga, Timișoara, Poznań, Liège and Thessaloniki) which makes it difficult to take a different road. The same cities also lack public housing and the private market has become non-accessible. In all five cities, some tests have been done in the direction of Housing First but, due to the challenges mentioned above, they have remained small scale for a long time.

Some cities are more experienced with Housing First Programs, like Ghent and Toulouse Métropole, where Housing First programs are up and running. But they face challenges regarding scaling up without losing quality and accessing more housing.

Even cities that have forgotten what a shelter is, and where HF is not a program but the standard, such as Glasgow and Odense, are still feeling the need to work on guaranteeing the quality and the involvement of all stakeholders, from operators to the neighbourhood citizens.

All cities need better public opinion and advocacy, and all cities are struggling with collecting good data, being able to compare data on a European level and using available data in an effective way. In ROOF, these issues are divided in 5 main areas of opportunities to act within the ongoing implementation of Housing First:

1. Mobilizing with data – Test tools to collect data, test storytelling strategies, try open data platforms...

2. Making affordable housing – Test new tools to use with private owners/housing developers, preparatory actions for social rental agencies...

3. Improving the support system – Test if we deliver the right support according to the Housing First Thinking, test if technology may improve HF users connectedness and integration...

4. Pulling change – Test if we are organized in the best possible way to make HF sustainable, Work with a small group of support givers to create ambassadors...

5. Integrated action planning – Test new tools for participatory decision making, test dissemination methods...

To make the most of the exchange and before finalizing the action plans, the cities are now in the process of implementing small scale actions. URBACT has defined small scale actions (SSA) as "an experiment. It is an idea or a concept, perhaps already tried in another city, which can be tested to check the relevance, feasibility and added value of its implementation in different local contexts. The Small-Scale Actions are limited in time, scale and space and by their nature have the right to fail".

In the design field these could be called prototypes. Minimum Viable Product perhaps in the lean approach. The aim of these actions is to learn from the tests, measure the results and either adapt, upscale or reject actions to be included in the Integrated Action Plan based on this experience.

The cities have chosen their SSA in relation to their actual status and to fit one or more opportunity areas. All cities had their idea peer reviewed by another city to allow insights and warnings. Here is what is happening in the ROOF cities:

# Improving the support system, pulling change from and within existing systems

Braga, Ghent, Thessaloniki

House of skills
Design and test an effective approach to train, place and retain homeless individuals in gainful employment.

Braga recognizes in lack of employment one of the most influencing factors of not being able to leave the shelter and find new autonomy. Today, no project or service works with homeless people to provide training for the work field, however there is a successful project for people with disabilities. While the target group has different needs, there is a general agreement that a similar program could work for some people living in the shelter today. The SSA will therefore build on the experience of the "skills academy". They will begin a program called "house of skills" (without a house in the beginning) to test the method before going into big investments. A website will be put in place to communicate the activities and a dedicated project manager will be assigned to the project. The idea is to test whether people will be able to find a job and if companies will be willing to join and offer the opportunity for training and internship. It will be interesting to observe how this changes the reality of the homeless person in the short and long term, as well as the change in mindset of job providers.
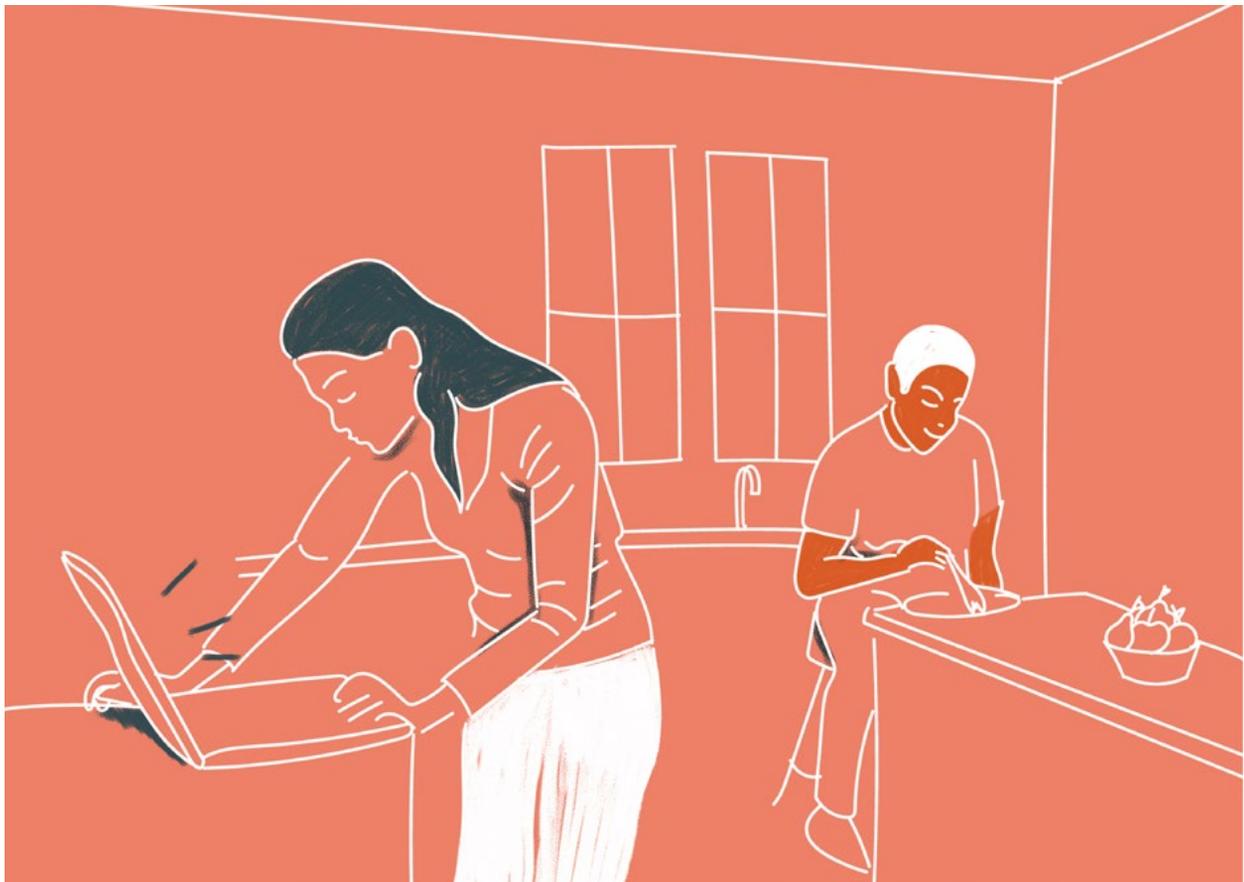
Housing First meets "Housing and Employment"

A genuine pilot of the Housing First approach linked to the national homeless program "Housing & Employment".

Thessaloniki already has an employment program for homeless people in place. This is a national program that gives an opportunity to homeless people to be integrated in the job market and get a stable living condition (similarly to what Braga is seeking to do). It is a good program, but today it addresses those homeless people that may be integrated more easily, thus people with no addiction or mental health issues. With this SSA the city would like to test if the same program could host homeless people with complex problems, which are the main target group for HF generally. 5 cases will be activated with a new collaboration between stakeholders. The SSA is designed with 2 NGOs and the ministry of labour is in charge of the program. The first step is to create a network of service providers to new beneficiaries entering the program. The second step is to create the right tools, with a focus on the development of a tool for caseload and a follow-up methodology for social workers.

One person will be employed through the SSA and will be trained to then train the social workers.

This SSA will give way to a change of mind set on the "type" of people that can be assisted and will hopefully prove that the existing program is even more powerful.

Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) team simulation

A local innovative collaboration between partners from mental health, drug care clinics, housing support and general social work. Clever re-arrangements of existing FTE that have a big caseload already.

With Housing First up and running, the city of **Ghent** feels the need to improve the support system especially through collaboration between different support sectors. Today mental health, drug care clinics, housing and social work are not collaborating close enough. Time is lost on passing information, information is lost in privacy protection and users still need to answer to too many different service providers. With the opportunity of working with 3 beneficiaries, who usually drop out of the housing system, this SSA will simulate a new team working together for the first time. The team will use the Open Dialogue approach that will be brought by a dedicated trainer. It will test new ways to arrange timetables, visits, communication and collaborative work generally. Based on the experiences of those 3 first beneficiaries, a team will be formed for 11 people that will be living in Robust Houses (Skaeve Huse). The results will also affect the formation of ACT teams that can be assigned where needed in the larger Housing first system.

Testing new communication tools for awareness and engagement

Timișoara, Liège, Toulouse Métropole

Increase knowledge on Housing First and testing HF approach in Timișoara

Special Training sessions for a specific group of employees. A website about HF with available materials, tools, links.

Timișoara has no previous experience in Housing First and most of the local stakeholders have no knowledge about the method and its benefits. The city joined ROOF to have the opportunity to exchange with other European cities and bring the experience to the local context. Through the SSA there will be training offered to a specific group of employees that may become ambassadors of the method and spread it in their organizations. The work will be completed with a dedicated website collecting information, materials, tools and links translated into the local language and making it more accessible.

Improving Housing First awareness and communication between local stakeholders

New Communication channels to improve the knowledge of local HF actions and the ROOF project. Improve communication on social strategies implemented in local fields.

Through a survey with local stakeholders the city of **Liège** saw a need to work on internal and external communication tools. The local group of service providers for the homelessness is very strong but it is also very much related to the staircase model. There is a significant resistance to change and to move towards Housing First. The SSA therefore is focusing on better cooperation between the different organizations to then communicate as a collective. The SSA will consist of developing new solutions both for communication and for housing solutions. This will be done through a new collaboration with the Master of social design and the Master in architecture.
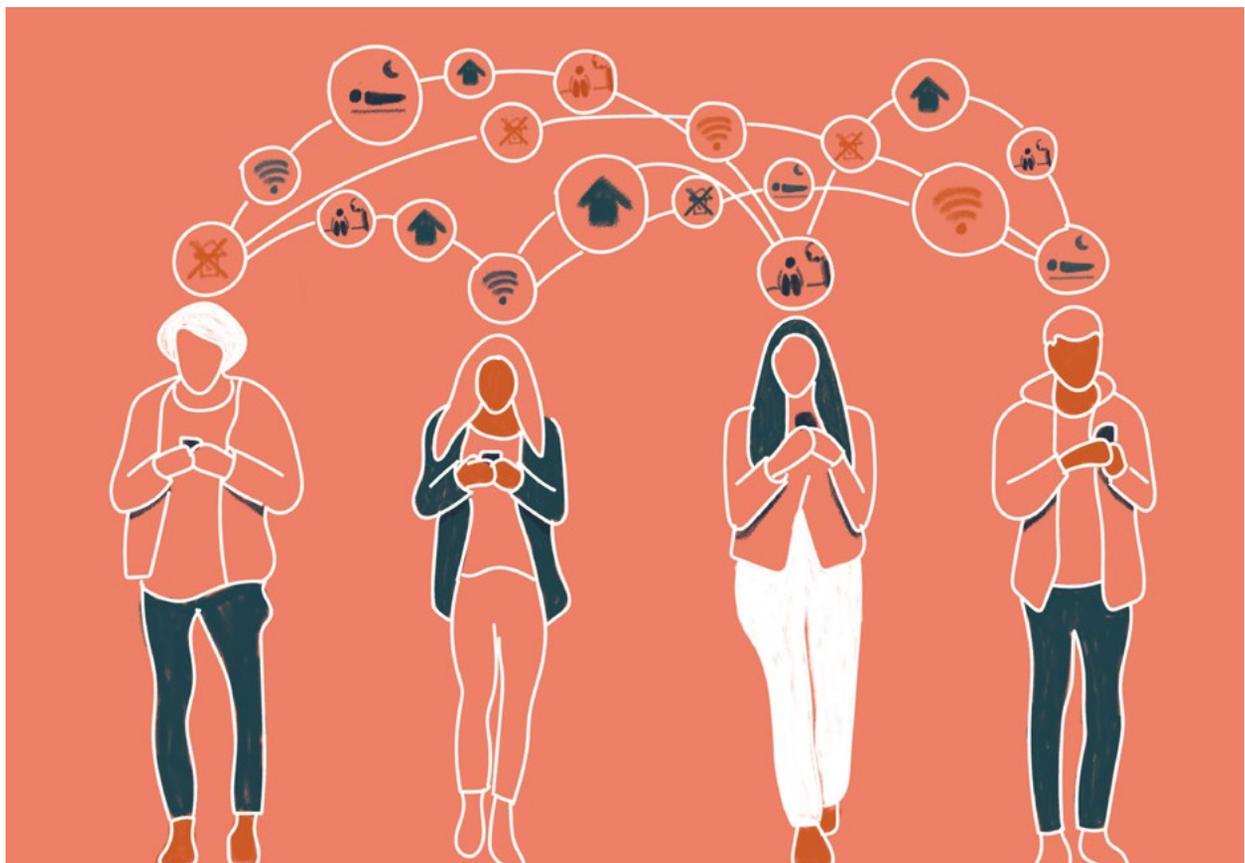
Communication campaign towards the private rental sector

Homogenization of the message to promote all the different existing tools used by the different stakeholders.

Toulouse Métropole needs affordable housing solutions on the private market. There are many tools available for the private rental sector but there is a lack of one single communication channel that makes them all comprehensible and accessible. The different tools include: fiscal deductions, rental intermediation, rental management mandate, social rental agency, sliding rental contract and more. The SSA will create a unique campaign to attract private renters and guide them to the single communication channel with the overview of solutions. This will test if better communication tools actually increase the affordable private housing offers and if it is possible to work on the whole metropole area with the same tools. The same informative tools may also have a communication and advocacy effect on the general public. This will also be verified by the SSA.

Collecting and using data in a better way

Poznań, Glasgow

Test an application to monitor the situation of homeless people

An app to collect data in a more efficient way to show the actual state of homelessness and to improve the services.

The city of **Poznań** has the idea of testing an app which will assist them to collect better data and integrate different data of the different stakeholders. They rely on municipal centers for families that work with homeless people for data collection, and it is important to give them a better tool to gather this data. The SSA will allow them to understand how many people there are and where they stay. Today, this information is being gathered on paper which makes it more difficult to share the data and use them for advocacy. The SSA will not fully develop an app, but a mock-up to begin and explore the use of this new tool.
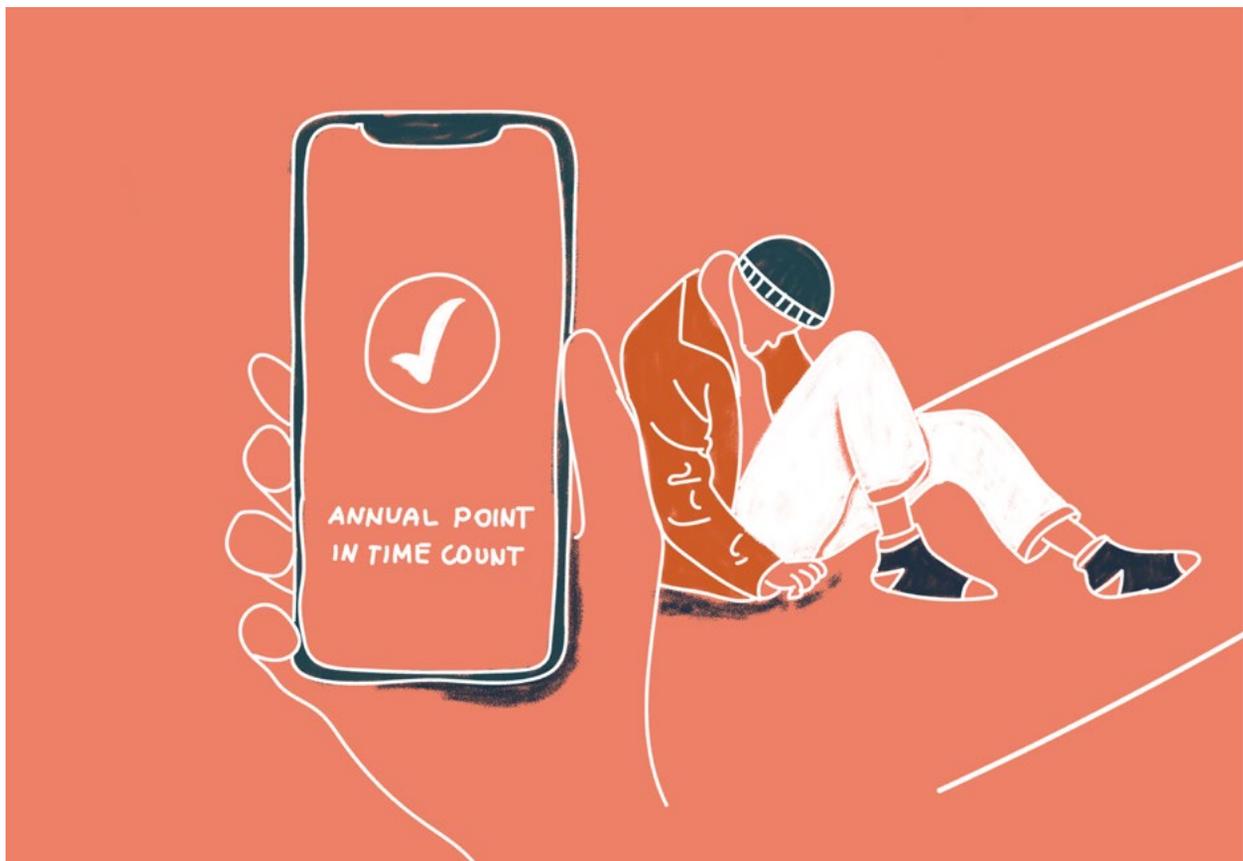
Closer to home - a place-based approach to ending homelessness

An established neighbourhood wide training initiative to increase the capacity of multiple stakeholders, practitioners and community members to identify what drives homelessness and act on early prevention strategies.

In **Glasgow**, where street homelessness is almost eradicated (there are only about 5 people sleeping rough while requests for emergency accommodation are still ample), the city would like to work on better prevention and involve the surrounding community with an upstream approach. It is about collaborative data collection and about storytelling, creating a larger involvement and a collective understanding of thehomelessness phenomenon. The SSA will be a wide place-based training to the

community of a specific neighbourhood, in collaboration with 2 NGOs. One NGO is a national one and will create a training program on how to use available data to recognize a fragile situation and on what local organizations and citizens can do about it. The second NGO is focused on storytelling as a way to evaluate the training and value the collaborative work done. The Centre for Civic Innovation will also be working on this, collecting small stories of change from the action.

Evaluating Existing Housing First services and engaging stakeholders

Odense

Large stakeholder meeting to evaluate and create a sense of ownership

A meeting with key people from all areas, to reflect on the work done and optimize the future work in Odense

Housing First was implemented and has been working for quite some time now in **Odense.** However, a lot has been done during the last year with the COVID pandemic and it is important to share and internally evaluate the efforts and recognize things that they have not done yet. Furthermore, even though HF is well implemented, there are still some stakeholders who are not experts in the field. The SSA will aim at evaluating the past work and at creating a larger group of experts–stakeholders that will have an ownership of the project making sure the quality is maintained over time. Practically, the SSA will consist of a large meeting and the activation of new communication channels.
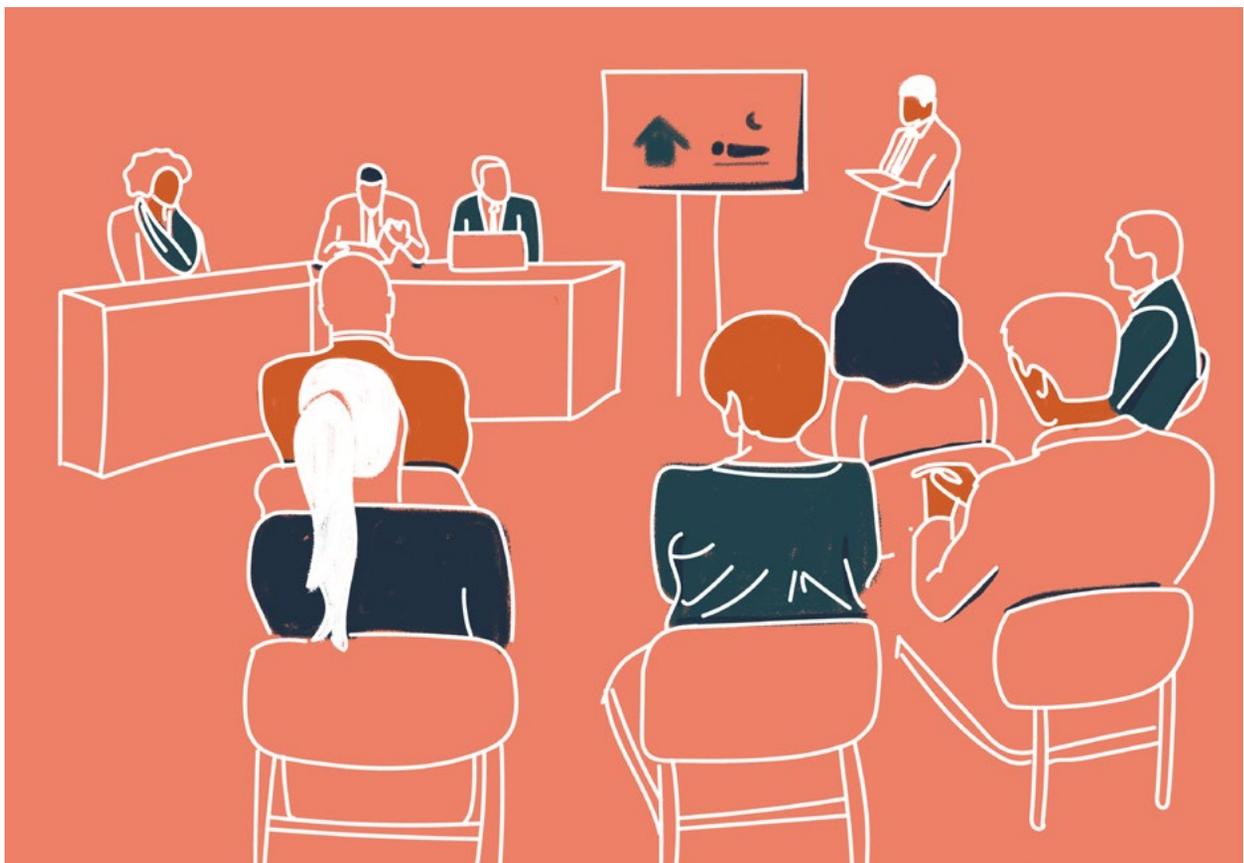
In conclusion

URBACT is giving the ROOF cities a great opportunity to test. The actions described above are all tests shaped to try-out, evaluate and verify what direction to take so that the road towards implementing HF or data collection in each city could develop in the best way. Failing or succeeding, the small scale actions all help the cities to make more effective action plans.

Setting up an action with a "right to fail" is often not easy for a public administration. Conducting the SSA not only allows them to confirm the specific actions but even more so does it bring a new approach to the city to address future issues (with a moderate budget).

Through the specific SSAs of the ROOF network the cities will test new tools and methods for providing better services, new communication and advocacy tools, and different ways to collect and use data. Beyond that, the testing itself will give each municipality the rare opportunity to become agile in their way of working and to activate all relevant local stakeholders with a vision in mind and a concrete first step to take. Working in a network and constantly exchanging and reviewing each other's actions allows the cities to learn, not only from their own SSA but also from others. There is a real strength in the opportunity to iterate through one's own experience and that of others. It will be important to evaluate and monitor the changes that this method of working brings to each city. The progress and results of the ROOF cities' small scale actions will be published in a final report and will become public through the ROOF network final event of spring 2022.

This article was written based on constant exchange with 9 European municipalities, participating in the URBACT ROOF network.

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