

URBAN MAESTRO

Urban Design Governance in European Cities

Exploring formal and informal means of improving spatial quality in cities across Europe and beyond.

In European cities, we know several kinds of regulations, standards, plans, and permits aiming at spatial quality. Although these formal and mostly legally institutionalized tools are helpful in avoiding really bad projects and safeguarding basic qualities in city development, they are not so strong in encouraging a higher level of urban spatial quality that excels.

That's why we need in urban design governance also other methods than the traditional ones, not so much formal but rather soft power by nature.

Which kind of formal and informal mechanisms in order to improve the quality of design projects do exist in European cities? What are the modalities of these kinds of urban design governance? What would be the financial impact of design quality?

What can we learn, in view of sharing it in a long-term network of professionals and supporting uptake in design quality policies all over Europe?

This research project looks at the ways European cities are being designed and financed, focusing on innovative ways of generating and implementing **urban spatial quality**.

The quality of urban places in cities is typically not the product of a single intervention but results from the accumulation over time of a complex combination of factors, behaviours and decisions of multiple stakeholders.

To realize a spatial quality standard that goes beyond the targets set out in the formal 'old-school' regulatory framework, Urban Maestro will address the issue from the perspective of the decision-making ecosystem that defines spatial quality, here captured in the concept "**urban design governance**", with a deliberate focus on its **soft power modalities**.

Soft power modalities refer to those approaches where public authorities act in a semi-formal or informal capacity as enablers or brokers rather than through regulatory or direct investment powers. In Europe, such approaches typically include running multi-stakeholder design platforms, setting up peer-review mechanisms and design competitions, promoting public understanding of developer's' design options and their social, economic, environmental and cultural implications. Several countries, regions and cities have appointed "bouwmeesters" and city-architects. Others are supporting urban design governance through civil society organizations or specialized institutes for "Baukultur".

New design solutions are of little value if not connected to a legal and economic system that will allow for their implementation and long-term maintenance. An innovative aspect of Urban Maestro is to jointly analyse the two realms of **design and finance** in order to produce policy recommendations that will explicitly assess the financial feasibility, long-term maintenance and effective risk management of design solutions.

To explore these issues the work programme will seek to map out the design governance landscape in jurisdictions across Europe (hard and soft / formal and informal); burrow down into their workings via a series of pan-European workshops; contrast experiences in Europe to international practices elsewhere; use the initiative to build a long-term network for sharing best practice; and support policy uptake focussed on the drive to urban quality across the continent, and globally.

About us

The project is an initiative of a small consortium comprising The United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-Habitat), University College London (UCL) and the Brussels "Bouwmeester Maitre Architecte" (BMA), supported by the European