Creating Public Realm

Specific Challenge

Public space is a space of social interaction that is generally open and accessible to all citizens and is seen as key to urban livelihood. The size and limits of what is public and which stakeholders own the space differ greatly from city to city, depending on economic, political, social and cultural factors.

There are many competing demands for public space. Privatization or commodification of public spaces, for instance, may lead to gentrification of local inhabitants as well as to the loss of authenticity of the place. From a mobility perspective, decades of car-centred urban planning and car-centred behaviours impose another challenge. Parked or moving cars take up considerable part of public space, making the space they occupy exclusive and unsafe. Thus, city stakeholders need to navigate these demands to offer inhabitants liveable spaces, dynamic and reconfigurable streets, free of pollution, where nature can retake its place for environmental benefits and benefits of city inhabitants, while providing inclusive opportunities for social exchange.

The aim of this challenge area is to re-think urban public space by considering competing demands and citizen engagement. Urban planning can be employed to deal with global challenges for the environment and social sustainability. Some approaches may rely on the 15-minute city concept as used in Paris, or the superblocks concept used in Barcelona. Innovative practices come in the form of technical innovations or innovations in governance, regulation frameworks, planning processes or any other new or significantly improved solutions or practices. Collaboration and access to knowledge are increasingly important ingredients of innovation. Public spaces can become new social and economic drivers for local recovery, and improvement of city neighbourhoods. They should represent the collective culture and inhabitant's well-being.

Expected outcomes & impacts

The expected outcomes would be a better use, design and management of public spaces, and reduction of space allocated to cars. The solutions would be socially inclusive, environmentally sustainable, accessible, and provide opportunities for direct and indirect business growth, skills acquisition, and job creation. Projects should demonstrate reduction in air pollutants and noise reduction. The social impact would be healthier, cleaner, and allowing the growth of cities according to the global challenges and environmental issues. The solutions would provide the opportunity of creating value for all users, stakeholders, and inhabitants of the city. The impact would be better use of public space, higher levels of liveability and reduced greenhouse gas emissions for the city.