Urban Releaf

Embedding citizen observations in urban policy for greener, healthier and more inclusive cities

Gerid Hager, Bárbara Coelho, Ilia Christantoni, João Dinis, Johanna Dörre, Nora Gagane, Jeanet Hekhuis, Albin Hunia, Viola Marx, Sabine Skudra, Esther van Leeuwen, Georg Pins, Dimitra Tsakanika, Todd Harwell, Inian Moorthy

ECSA conference 2026, Oulu, Finland

Funded by the European Union

UK Research and Innovation

Urban Releaf

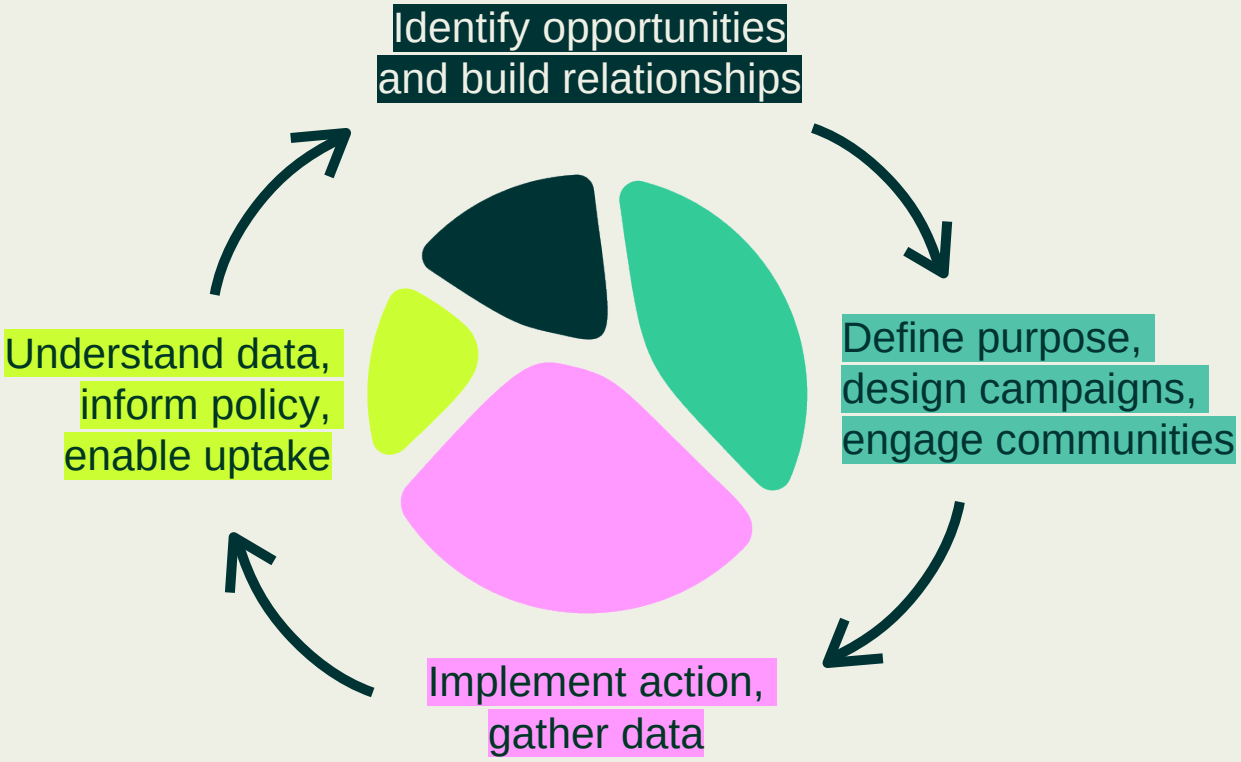
Innovating together for just and green urban transitions

Enable public administrations and local communities to address urban climate and wellbeing challenges together

Expand and complement the knowledge base for urban policy and resilience planning with citizen observations, data and collective sense-making

Ensure inclusive participation across diverse urban populations

Urban Releaf



City authorities – project partners and **pilot leads**

Co-development of **citizen observation campaigns**

Collection and uptake of citizen observations in **public information systems for urban policy and planning**.

Urban Releaf 12+ Campaigns

Evidence-based policy: Data is shaping climate adaptation strategies, heat mitigation plans, mobility measures & greenspace planning.

Data collection & *engagement* metrics

- 330.000+ air quality measurement hours
- 3.500+ citizens engaged
  59% female participants
- 450.000+ temperature & relative humidity observations
- 110+ parks, greenspaces, neighbourhoods, sites investigated
- 2.500+ surveys completed
- 350+ sensors installed/deployed
- 1.000+ tree updates
- 600+ app downloads/users

6 Cities

Athens, Cascais, Dundee, Mannheim, Riga, Utrecht

4 Themes

- Greenspace perception
- Urban Trees
- Air quality
- Heat stress

Perceived value and costs of adopting citizen science practices in city administrations

3-day co-inquiry

X ~~Quantified cost-benefit analysis~~

→ **Qualitative, judgement-based exploration**

Innovation diffusion and adaptation literature (public sector):

→ Individuals' perceptions of value are **critical** and **interlinked** with other key factors (organisational structures, institutional process etc.)

→ **Gatekeepers, translators, and amplifiers** in public administrations

Urban ReLeaf

What does it cost you as city administrations to engage in citizen science activities** (Urban ReLeaf), **what value do you get in return, and does it – overall – feel worth it?

Perceived value and gains

1. Policy impact and strategic relevance

Support in policy making, data valuable for policies, validation and evaluation of policy decisions and implementation, short-term prioritization, reach cross-policy impact

2. Closing the government–citizen gap, trust building

Citizens feel heard, listening in a new way, activation of citizens, enthusiastic response, citizens invested despite technical problems, mutual understanding

3. Organisational learning and internal transformation

Align departments, better collaboration across departments, streamline processes, internal learning, gaining experience in citizen science, learning by doing, strengthening internal partnerships, network development, improve data management and analysis

4. Innovation, experimentation and external synergies

5. Awareness raising and environmental stewardship

Perceived costs and risks

1. Staff time and internal capacity

Field work time, coordination time, volunteer recruitment and training, legal/data protection efforts, technical issues and maintenance, SharePoint/Teams internal effort, individual consultations, communication delays, no additional personnel

2. Reputational and political risk

Political risk if no implementation follows, reputational risk if data not used, innovative tech failing, technical problems reflecting badly on the city, exposure of institutional vulnerabilities, risk of creating but not meeting expectations, accountability risk (towards city leaders as well as citizens)

3. Technical complexity and data risk

Need for data scientist, lack of relevant software and skills, difficulty linking different datasets, maintenance burden, sensor reliability, opportunistic data collection may result in unusable data, apps not developed enough, target groups cannot use tools

4. Structural cost of internal scaling

5. Legal and data protection complexity

6. Communication failure

Perceived cost is highest

Staff capacity, reputational expectations, technical reliability, implementation follow-through

Perceived value is highest

Policy integration, trust-building, organisational learning, cross-collaboration (internal and external)

Municipalities are complex political and administrative organisations, where **space for experimentation is limited and the role of Citizen Science is undefined**, creating internal friction and value.

Robust data insights and speed of information feedback are critical.
Municipalities need sound technologies with high TRLs, defined data strategies and data with clear usability/readiness thresholds.

Citizen Science with public administrations becomes **strategically relevant when institutional learning is triggered and absorption capacity is high.**

Citizen Science with public administrations is not primarily a data or research activity **– it's a governance and public sector intervention where stakes of engagement are high because public exposure translates into political exposure.**

Urban ReLeaf

THANK YOU

@ECSA 2026

06/03/2026, 09:00

Tech-Enabled Citizen Science for Urban Futures: Lessons from Urban ReLeaf

06/03/2026, 09:00

An Inclusive Approach to Demographic Data Collection in the Urban ReLeaf project

06/03/2026, 11:15

Opportunities for citizen science within the Global Urban Monitoring Framework

06/03/2026, 11:15

From tension to collaboration: cross-sector learning in urban citizen science

Urban ReLeaf

Project Partners

IIASA · VUB Vrije Universiteit Brussel · ESSEX ICCS · CIBOS · ICLEI · CLS · (0.0) OREM · Gemeente Utrecht · Provincie Utrecht · CASCAIS · STADTMANNHEIM · Riga Planning Region · University of Dundee · Dundee City Council Changing for the Future

Illustrations and Urban ReLeaf brand design by Agency of None

Funded by the European Union · UK Research and Innovation

Urban Releaf

hager@iiasa.ac.at

Funded by the European Union
UK Research and Innovation