

URBAN LAB - SYNTHESSES 2024



Credit : EUI

FOOD GOVERNANCE

URBACT CITY LAB

**MASTER Governing Ecological
Transitions in European Cities**

Nicola Candoni
Ben Eibl
Matilde Pereira Rocha
Eva Timsit

URBACT



Co-funded by
the European Union
Interreg

SciencesPo
URBAN SCHOOL

PREFACE

Sciences Po students were an opportunity for URBACT to think outside the box. And there was a real need, given the ambition of URBACT and EUI (European Urban Initiative) to develop a series of City Labs on sustainable food systems. The stakes were high: how to help European cities learn from each other? City Labs are not a new meeting and discovery tool, but they are too often top-down. At the origin of this partnership between URBACT and Sciences Po students, there is therefore the desire to overcome the shortcomings of the City Labs and to put four lucid and novice minds at the service of creative ideas so that the participants leave the City Labs with the tools to move forward.

But what exactly is a City Lab? Above all, what do the potential beneficiary cities expect from it?

The use-based approach characteristic of design applied to the conception of services and public policies guided Capstone's work, starting with a survey of a sample of potentially participating cities: This involved designing a series of contrasting scenarios for possible programming, preparing fictitious invitations to get the cities to react, co-designing the schedule for the two days of the City Lab with the URBACT Secretariat, collecting around fifteen case studies to feed into the first two themes of transforming population's food practices and activating strategic public procurement in order to feed into the strategic conversation during the City Labs and in the Food Knowledge Hub on the URBACT website, etc.

Last but not least, during the City Lab the Capstone really came into its own, organising a veritable Press Office for the event: publication of articles throughout the sessions, regular press briefings and co-hosting of certain sessions, printing on the spot and posting on an online in real time to feed the interaction between participants, etc. In short, what are we going to do without them for the third and final city-lab!

François Jégou,
Tutor of the Capstone team

THE PARTNER(S)

URBACT, our partner, is a European Union program that promotes sustainable development within cities and in pursuit of this goal favors the networking of European municipalities.

The first budget (URBACT I, 2002-2006) followed several versions until the URBACT IV that is currently in force (2021-2027). This latest version of URBACT's budget emphasizes territorial cohesion, one of the major priorities of the European Union. In practice, this program uses funding from the European Fund for Regional Development (ERDF) and that of Member States to create urban networks where experiences, issues and solutions can be shared.

The main precepts of URBACT are the three aspects of sustainable development: environmental preservation, social cohesion and economic growth. The program's areas of focus are mobility, access to affordable housing, gender equality, digital transformation, public procurement and sustainable and local food. It is these last areas of focus, food and public procurement, that have kept us busy this year.

By connecting several hundred cities, URBACT stands out from other European programs by highlighting cities of all sizes. From Milan to Mouans-Sartoux, via Liège and many other cities, URBACT stresses the importance of governance that is not only horizontally integrated - considering all stakeholders locally - but also vertically integrated - constructive relations with municipalities, the State and the EU.

Several tools, such as City Labs, the Knowledge Hub, and the Transfer Network, bolster integration, action learning and participation. Decision-making guidelines are provided by the Monitoring Committee, which represents member states, the European Commission and regional institutions.



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METHODOLOGY

Interviews were at the heart of our work since this method of gathering information was most pertinent to one of our partner's principal requests. The way we designed the interview guidelines and the interviewees we sought echoed URBACT's desire to adapt one of its flagship tools, the City Labs, to the needs of participating cities. We conducted our first round of interviews with civil servants of cities who were not necessarily aware of the concept of a City Lab and who were sometimes unfamiliar with URBACT, though they always had a marked thematic interest in food governance. We presented each interviewee with different scenarios for a hypothetical City Lab in order to identify the format closest to the expectations of cities.

Interviews were also the basis of our endeavor to update the Knowledge Hub and for the creation and animation of educational activities during the City Labs. These exchanges allowed us to familiarize ourselves with the good practices of each city by spotlighting the real impact on people's behavior and the total environmental impact of city food systems - aspects too often overlooked by brochures and other official reports. When interviews were not attainable, we supplemented our work with desk research.

All our interviewees were city administrators and representatives which meant that preparation was necessary on our side. It was crucial to ensure that we could start the conversation without spending too much time explaining basic notions, and jump right into specific puzzles that came up for us amidst our research. We elaborated catalogs of questions for each round of interviews that we then used to standardize (as much as possible) the interview process and our output. Concurrently, we made sure to give prominence to the distinguishing characteristics of each city and practice.



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FIELD(S) STUDIED

On one hand, our field of study consisted of numerous interviews and desk research. We did not conduct fieldwork in the course of the preparation and analysis phases.



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On the other, we proactively took part in two of the three City Labs centered on food governance. The first City Lab on changes in eating habits took place in March in Mouans-Sartoux (France), while the second City Lab on public food procurement followed in May in Liège (Belgium). The third City Lab of the series on food governance will come about in the fall of 2024 on the topic of land use.

The former two events combined interventions from experts and cities that have already implemented good practices, site visits and workshops engendering dialogue among attendees. It is on the latter point that we have been the most enterprising since we have conceptualized and led, with the help of our tutor, some of these workshops. At the venue itself, we also assembled a Press Wall, i.e. a continuous report of the City Lab's activities, accessible for reading to all the participants on a feature wall and online (by scanning the QR code or entering the link we provided into a browser). This Press Wall was enriched by the comments of speakers and participants during workshops, interventions, visits, and informal interviews, in English and French.



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The field we worked in was significantly shaped by the professionals and representatives of cities we met at the City Labs. The atmosphere at these workshop events was determined by specialised knowledge of the subjects discussed, especially by the experts and leading/presenting cities. Therefore, the workshops and visits offered a multitude of knowledge-sharing components that coalesced into a fertile working ground for attendees (including us) to operate.

ISSUES

The primary objective of this capstone was to develop educational tools intended for city practitioners and all beneficiaries of the URBACT networks under the umbrella goal of sharing good practices in food governance effectively. This initial mission was remodeled, amended or pruned several times.

Pedagogy is the very essence of URBACT, whose mission is to propagate useful ideas, connect and provide expertise to cities wanting to make a tangible commitment. City Labs are a dynamic vehicle for this because they bring together all the participants in the same location. Thus, synergies and earnest emotional commitments are formed for a few hours or a few days. These are also privileged moments to establish your own network, to meet other cities to draw inspiration from, or to form partnerships with.



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However, URBACT noted a limited impact of City Labs in the medium and long term. Picture this: after the immediate excitement of discovery, meetings, promising resolutions and the trip, the city practitioners who were at the gathering return home. They report their learnings to their colleagues and elected officials who have not undergone the excitement of the City Lab, and then all the propitious ideas that hatched during the City Lab quickly fade away. How can we ensure the impact of a City Lab beyond two weeks after the end of the event? This is the question we have been laboring over.



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The axis of the second City Lab was public procurement. Initially, we were proposed to collaborate in the elaboration of an online course (MOOC type) on this subject. Eventually, we set aside this excessively ambitious mission to focus our work on the design of activities for the City Lab. These activities included the preparation of a Press Wall whose purpose was to facilitate the assimilation of the City Lab content by the participants.

Progressively, an initially secondary task took on increasing importance over the weeks: updating the Knowledge Hub. URBACT has developed a Knowledge Hub easily accessible on its website, always in the spirit of transmitting knowledge, bridging cities and highlighting good practices. In terms of format, this resource is divided into three main categories (then into

multiple subcategories), where the cities that have taken part in at least one URBACT Transfer Network are represented. Permanent links lead to reports (or parts of reports) that detail the good practice achieved and diffused by the cities.

This Knowledge Hub presented several gaps that we were responsible for filling in. Firstly, it had not been updated since 2017, while best practices had evolved, some disappeared, and many others emerged.



Secondly, the content of the Knowledge Hub was speckled with inconsistencies and imprecisions, paired with a visually unattractive layout. This made it difficult to navigate and read the Knowledge Hub. Moreover, some of the reports were available only in the language of the city in question, mounting an unjustified language barrier. Simply linking to reports was no longer an option.

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We thenceforth continued and improved the renewal of the Knowledge Hub already started in Good Practices. Now the information sheets are homogeneous and well-structured, yet the layout remains austere. So we had to envisage more appealing infographics whilst updating and adding new best practices. This work required plentiful interviews which were also used to develop activities for the City Labs.

A joint conviction of URBACT and the Urban School is that cities possess both the problems and the solutions, or in a word, the issues. This is true in a plurality of areas and remarkably in the ecological transition because the transition implies a change in way of life. The city is precisely a way of life, overwhelmingly that of the majority of the European population, with innumerable facets. URBACT believes in the capacity and likewise in the responsibility of cities, whatever their size, to change our diet, the impact on the environment can vary extensively depending on our practices.

Can cities produce their own food? No (or very little). Nevertheless, they can partly decide what they eat, where it comes from, how it was produced, and by whom, thanks to public procurement, sensibilization campaigns and dialogue fostering. Plentiful aspects of food sovereignty overlap with critical dilemmas for students of the Urban School and, in particular, with those of our graduate degree, the Master Governing Ecological Transitions in European Cities.

MAIN RESULTS

The main lessons drawn from our experience with URBACT on the City Labs have been on both the strength of food policies as a propeller for the transition of a territory, as well as on the potential that lies in peer-to-peer learning for city practitioners.

Undeniably, food is a transversal topic that compounds environmental challenges to social and inclusiveness matters, along with the vitality of the local economy and concerns about food security. If food is a compelling starting point for a broad and integrated transition, the questions of how and where to begin a local food strategy can be complicated for city practitioners.



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There are paths of action directly tied to food, like transforming school canteens, making healthy sustainable food accessible, creating a fabric of local sustainable producers, and co-constructing food policies with local stakeholders. Past such food policy aspirations, lie the prevalent complexities of leveraging public procurement, fostering a participative dimension and nurturing the resilience of projects, so that they may withstand political shifts.

The topics are numerous, and all intertwined. City networks, like URBACT, besides European Urban Initiatives, and ICLEI among others, are powerful arenas to connect actors that might struggle with similar obstacles and to provide a platform where they can learn from each other, contributing to a wider capacity-building within public administrations.

Role of Urbact for city practitioners

Cities use the EU and URBACT to get resources + some kind of political legitimacy
Still, on the other hand, a lot of cities don't even know URBACT and find partnerships otherwise.

City Labs: An innovative learning and networking tool?

The rationale behind this round of Food City Labs is to enrich URBACT's method for capacity-building of city practitioners looking to cultivate an integrated transition of their food system towards more sustainability and inclusiveness. This trilogy of City Labs is directed at food governance and further targets the sub-topics of change in food habits, public procurement and land use. The aim is to diverge from a traditional conference by centering the program agenda not only on comprehensive site visits of the Good Practices of the host city but also on workshops where participants are invited to voice and examine their challenges together.

Each City Lab had a duration of 2 days, composed of three half-days. The first morning focused on more conventionally formatted conferences, with expert speakers and city representatives introducing their experiences. Then, the afternoon session was dedicated to site visits, with different professionals from the host city going in-depth into the story behind their practices, as well as the know-how reaped. The last morning was made of workshops for collective thinking regarding the learnings from the past day, with facilitating tools inviting participants to reflect on the lessons, as well as crossing it with their pending challenges. One of the pedagogical tools was a “Quote Book” (wall would be more accurate) they would fill in small groups with



quotes, key lessons, as well as questions or challenges remaining. Another example of educational activity was the Press Wall where we would write articles in real-time, wrapping up summaries, catching quotes, controversies, points of view or difficulties raised. All this was intersected with communal meals, an opportunity for everyone to discuss and connect together.

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The aim was to provide an event tailored around city practitioners' needs, provide concrete answers to their challenges but also be a moment where participants would connect with each other. This round of City Labs was using the URBACT network of BioCanteens as an entry point, and thus the two we attended took place in participating cities. This allowed to make the City Labs a vivid learning encounter for participants, immersed in a concrete example of integrated action which kicked-off a systemic food transition. Although the number of participants was a little lower than expected, we saw a lot of participants from the first City Lab who came back for the second, and the feedback seemed to be very positive. Indeed, these events managed to wrap up, in a small – yet very dense – time, lessons on key technical topics, as well as containing a hot spot of inspiration for cities to learn from.

City Lab Deliverables

Structured around changes in dietary behavior, the first City Lab in Mouans-Sartoux served as an entry point for participants (nearly a third of whom were also present at the second City Lab). For the Capstone team, this event was the baptism of fire for our Press Wall and for the activity we had engineered with our tutor, called “Doggy Bag activity”, which constitutes the conclusion of the City Lab.

Regarding the Press Wall, the results were mixed. On one hand, we met this demanding challenge competently, by assorting ourselves into alternating roles: one person takes the notes, another writes and another still prints and props up the materials. We managed to retain

substantial information, process it in real time and put our different articles into dialogue. In addition to the summaries of the sessions, we supported the Press Wall with quotes, controversies and short informal interviews with the attendees. Furthermore, we took the feedback from the first City Lab into account to improve our performance in the second. For example, by reducing the length of articles so that they were more visible from a distance, by avoiding displaying articles at a height less than a meter, and by arranging the articles by half-day (chronologically) rather than by typology.

On the other hand, we struggled to make the Press Wall a hub for discussion and reflection to the extent we would have liked. In Mouans-Sartoux as in Liège, we were poorly placed spatially, as opposed to the meals which occupied the rare and short breaks. Granted, our installation aroused a certain curiosity, but the digital version of the Press Wall version was a real success. Indeed, although participants do not necessarily need to read summaries of the sessions they have just experienced, they appreciated having access to our summary product in the days and months that followed the City Labs.

The Doggy Bag activity developed for the first City Lab went smoothly and thus was reproduced to wrap up the second City Lab. The idea of this workshop is to bring together participants in small groups and steer debates probing into inquiries such as: what will you need to do as soon as you return to apply what you have learned? What questions remain unanswered? These discussions were stimulating and we received very positive feedback on them. This allowed everyone to summarize what they had learned over the three days and plan for the future.

Throughout the City Labs, we were assigned additional tasks. We were asked to commence the last day with an energizing introductory session. As editors of the Press Wall, we selected gripping samples of our work and prepared several short presentations in advance to open up the assembly. URBACT also called upon our unsuspected acting talents to devise a clip to announce the next round of calls for partnerships.

City Lab Learnings

Trying to summarize the learnings from the City Labs is the task we have tried to fill with our “Press Wall”, available online after the events to maximize the impact and durability of these moments of collective reflection.

The first City Lab, happening in Mouans-Sartoux (Fr) on the 21st and 22nd of March, was focused on “Changing Habits for a Healthy and Sustainable Food System” and highlighted the challenges towards building a systemic and participative approach towards transformation of the food system.

Pioneer city in matters of transition of their local food system, the deputy mayor Gilles Pérole emphasized the importance of involving a large community, as well as having a core relentlessly carrying the project. They decided in 2008 to move to 100% organic food for their canteens, since then achieved with 85% of locally produced vegetables in their municipal farm. They managed to do that without increasing costs, with an impressive 80% reduction of waste and switching half of the meals 100% vegetarian. Beyond what's happening in schools, this sensitization of children to the impact of their food brings change into families, involved with initiatives such as "families can cook" challenge. A social grocery with organic products has also been developed, for people to access sustainable food at low costs. Finally, with "citizens feeding the city", auto-managed initiatives like shared gardens, hives, and forests are flourishing around the city in undervalued spaces, all autonomous and managed by groups of 10 to 20 people. All those projects, the municipal farm, the citizen spaces producing food, the social grocery and the school canteens have been thought in synergies with each other, supported by a "Sustainable Food Education Center " piloting the food transition. Impact



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assessments have also been the foundation of this practice of sharing that Mouans-Sartoux has championed, with evaluations from universities and a diploma developed within the city. The results are impressive: 71% of residents have changed their eating habits, 28% eating organic everyday (twice the national average), etc.

Beyond Mouans-Sartoux's experience, some main topics and challenges that have emerged are the difficulty to access land to produce food around cities, when agricultural land can be significantly less profitable, but also the difficulty of accessing scientific evaluation of cities' ongoing food projects, especially when the scale is important, even though it is crucial to legitimate action. Cork has also shared their experience with traveler women, with whom they have worked to develop a "trauma-informed" approach within social services. More broadly, a challenge is to develop a systemic approach to maximize synergies between different projects and foster resilience, by having a dynamic of both grassroots movements, and top-down political will. Yet it can be difficult to create a space of dialogue between the "thinkers and the doers" (Denise Cahill, Cork), where everyone's voice can be heard, to ensure that the food project is not only relevant to local needs and problematics, but also so that all can feel involved and included in the food transition, key for resilience.

The second City Lab, happening in Liège from the 29th to the 30th of May, was focused on "Public Procurement for More Local, Seasonal and Sustainable Food" and highlighted the potential this tool, by which public-funded structures purchase services or products, can have

towards achieving a food transition, while shedding light on barriers to its use and how to overcome them.

Liège's project has started from the will to create a Food Belt around the city. The first step was to reconstruct the missing links of the food chain, for a local production in the best environmental and social conditions possible. In that purpose, the association of "Ceinture Aliment-Terre Liègeoise", supported by political actions, has followed a double strategy: on the one hand helping the producers come together in 30 cooperatives, while convincing hospitals, schools or elderly homes to go organic, using public procurement. Matthew Baqueriza-Jackson, strategic procurement expert, highlighted both the potential this tool could have towards fostering social, environmental and economic change on your territory, while underlining the barriers that prevent local administrators from using this tool to its full potential. Perceived as too technical, boring, procurement is used by most municipalities with an emphasis on price in decision-making, while €2,000bln are being spent each year across Europe through public procurement. Not only does this imply major potential towards positive social, environmental and economic outcomes if orthodox decision-making is challenged, but also a massive stake of transparency and accountability towards who benefits the most from this public money spending.

Moreover, there is an important legal aspect to public procurement, and it is crucial for cities to build collective advocacy on the European level for food to be recognized as a transversal topic linking an agricultural but also environmental, health and security dimension. For that purpose, European law could also be helpful, for example by developing a certification that would regroup different environmental criterias which would simplify the making of public tenders. Finally, an important issue is to accompany and support the local producers with early and continuous dialogue to co-construct a food planification by identifying the territories' characteristics and then adapting the needs. Different examples of good practices have also been showcased: assessment tools, procurement guidance for public administrations and a label "Good Food" for canteens (Brussels), a city-owned company to reduce the intermediaries (Milano), tools to reduce waste in restaurants (Haarlem)...

To put it in a nutshell, some of the main stakes towards success in food system transformation for cities are horizontality and dialogue with producers, capacity building especially on technical topics like procurement as well as educating and sensitizing the broader public, adopting a systemic approach and trying to maximize synergies between projects, fostering and supporting citizen-led initiatives, and keeping a strong emphasis on social inclusion towards a transition for healthy, sustainable and local food for all.

Knowledge Hub

We knew that URBACT's Knowledge Hub aimed to "...[bring] together, analyse, and synthesise a series of thematic insights. It's the place where initiatives sparked by URBACT cities – and other partnerships – have room to grow and evolve. The knowledge shared is accessible to urban enthusiasts across Europe and beyond". It is an online platform embedded in URBACT's website where practitioners, representatives, scholars and others can find "urban focus areas, stories, city case studies, related events and much more". The focus for our project was the

Food and sustainable local systems section, specifically the Good Practices that illustrate case studies of policies and projects in various European cities.

The benefits of an online repository of knowledge seem immediate and obvious: convenient access, large audience, shareable content, continuous updates, tailored searches, and more. Through their website, URBACT is able to reach cities across Europe, or more often than not, the other way around. Consequently, updating some of the existing Good Practices and supplying new ones to their website was felt by us as a worthwhile part of the project. We composed an Infographic encompassing 12 cities, with a full Good Practice report of 2-3 pages, and a short Infographic slide comprising relevant information about each one. The infographic will be posted on the website soon.



For us, the limitations of the Knowledge Hub were much bound with the difficulty for the average city to find it while browsing URBACT’s website or the Internet in general, coupled with a degree of visual incoherence that periodically made it arduous to navigate the website. Not to mention some missing or failed links. Therefore, we tried to make our infographic as graphically coherent as possible, so that the user experience would be more discernible and intuitive.

Still concerning the Knowledge Hub, it is our impression that the amount of information scattered across different organizations and platforms rapidly becomes staggering. Such is the case of the European space where URBACT is rooted, which we think is being dealt with through the Portico platform. Bearing this in mind, we hope that there will be a rise in updates coming in the future so that cities can find Good Practices to share, replicate, and adapt.

LEARNINGS

The City Labs are tools that have been used for a long time by all types of institutions and expressively by URBACT; notwithstanding, they occasionally turn out to be tedious, lacking concreteness and not very captivating for the participants. A preponderant part of our work consisted of rethinking the format of the City Labs so that they had a more sustainable impact on the attendees. We have acquired rich lessons from our voluminous interviews with city practitioners, from the personal lived involvement in the two City Labs, and by virtue of the feedback from participants.

Accordingly, we believe that City Labs are one of the best instruments available to URBACT because they enable you to grasp ample learnings. This is accomplished by way of a short learning experience that does not sacrifice educational density, and above all, thanks to a context that takes the participant out of the routine. Nonetheless, City Labs are not merely moments of learning, they empower us to forge links between different cities which, from Ireland to Greece via Spain and Sweden, would never have met otherwise. The exchange of



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different perspectives, and ultimately the establishment of partnerships, make City Labs valuable occasions. Notably, these intensive trips, made up predominantly of visits and meetings, carry strong stirring power. By emphasizing what is feasible and fun about the transition toward more sustainable and local food systems, the host cities motivated the participants to want to follow suit.

Below, are our main recommendations for anyone wanting to set up a City Lab:

- **Engaging activities instead of top-down presentations** (workshops and site visits must not be neglected: without them, there is no incentive to travel to the hosting city and the City Lab is monotonous)
- **Opportunities for networking** (this is why shared meals, including breakfasts, lunches and dinners, are so important: food makes for a great socialisation facilitator and is always the starting point of fruitful meetings)
- **Systemic approaches through different approaches** (participants may come from considerably different backgrounds, be they policy designers or technicians, experts or beginners. Understanding the big picture and adapting to this diversity requires giving the floor to all kinds of stakeholders, from city representatives to municipal cooks to beneficiaries)
- **Provide practical tools and methods** (city practitioners know the general trends and the current state of affairs. They need practical tools to overcome the overwhelming questions: how to do it? Where to start?)

- **Early communication with all dates and City Lab themes** (if you organise a series of City Labs, try to communicate at least the dates and general themes about all of the events at once. This way city practitioners can decide and plan in advance which one(s) they want to attend)
- **Two and a half days is a good length for the participants** (don't think in terms of time spent *at* the City Lab but rather *for* the City Lab. 3 days include 1 day to commute and introduce the event, 1 final morning followed by the way back home and 1 full day in-between)
- **Invite a diverse range of cities so that all can connect** (although Mouans-Sartoux and Milan are very different, both have something to learn from each other. At the same time, it is pertinent for participants to mingle with similar cities, hence the need for the whole spectrum of cities to be represented)
- **Continuous follow-up** (encouraging emotional and professional engagement during the City Lab is easy, but maintaining momentum weeks and months after the event is another challenge. Follow-up contacts or even remote events can help)

FIND OUT MORE

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The Capstone project: an original educational tool

Thanks to this original tool, students are placed in a work situation on a real problem posed by a public, private, or associative organisation. For all the Masters of the Urban School, the structure and management are identical: the project is jointly monitored by the the Urban School and the partners, at all phases of the project, and regular methodological supervision is provided by a professional or academic tutor specialised in the issue. The Capstone projects allow the partners to take advantage of the research and training acquired within the Urban School, to benefit from the production of studies and quality work, and to have a capacity for innovation.

Capstone projects are a great tool to study, diagnose, forecast, lead a comparative analysis, even to prepare for evaluation, and more generally to deal with any problem that can enlighten the organisation concerned in a logic of "R&D ". Each project mobilises a group of first-year students from one of the Urban School's Master's. Students work between 1.5 days and 2 days per week on dedicated time slots, for a period of 6 to 9 months (depending on the Master's concerned). In Executive education, collective projects concern the Executive Master "Territorial governance and urban development" and mobilize professionals for a period of 4 months.