



Cordoba Path Focus Group - Strategy

Krakov Workshop (11-12 June 2025) Report

INTRODUCTION

The four Focus Groups (Narrative, Success Factors, Strategy and Projects) are one of the activities of the Cordoba Path, the final step towards the adoption of the New Urban Project (NPU) at the 18th World Congress of the OWHC in Marrakech in 2026. Their overall aim is to define the Reference Framework that will formalize the mayors' political vision and commitment to Habitability, as well as the Operational Framework that will equip cities with the tools, methodologies and mechanisms needed to bring this vision to fruition.

The specific aim of the Focus Group - Strategy is to define the strategic approach of the OWHC's New Urban Project. It is coordinated by the Advisory Group.

The Krakow workshop, the first in a series, included representatives from Bordeaux, Colonia del Sacramento, Krakow, Luxembourg and Puebla in the Focus Group¹. They discussed the ways in which cities conceive, structure and implement urban strategies in their historic centers, with the aim of determining the form and content of a “Global Strategy”. The Wesola Management Plan in Krakow served as a case study. The site of the former hospital complex illustrates the scale of the challenge of transforming 10 hectares of obsolete monofunctional hospital activities into a revitalized ecosystem including housing, local services, cultural and entrepreneurial infrastructures, etc. In line with the OWHC's Strategic Axes, the approach promoted by the Management Plan aims to “change the symbolic charge of the site”, while preserving its remarkable architectural heritage and taking into account its privileged location in the buffer zone of the World Heritage perimeter.

The Krakow workshop enabled the Focus Group - Strategy to draw useful lessons for the definition of a Global Strategy for the regeneration of habitability in historic centers, which, within the framework of the future NPU, articulates the OWHC's Operational Objectives and integrates Habitability monitoring indicators.

1. LESSONS LEARNED

Participants' presentations of their experiences, methodologies and strategic governance conditions confirmed a wide diversity of approaches, due to the specific cultural and legal realities of each city. However, discussion was facilitated by the use of a framework of questions that enabled a systematic analysis of practices, revealing commonalities and differences. The main issues addressed included the coherence and hierarchy between the different levels of plans, the competencies and responsibilities of those who draw them up, the monitoring of their effects and relevance over time, and so on.

¹ See the list of participants in annex



It emerged from the discussions that the sum total of planning documents and tools, whatever their status and quality, whether sectoral or cross-sectoral, is not enough to guarantee the regeneration of the habitability of historic town centers. Faced with the current challenges and issues identified by the OWHC, there are still obstacles and areas for improvement. The Focus Group - Strategy is therefore in a position to assert that the OWHC's future NPU represents an opportunity to propose a "Global Strategy", focused on Habitability, facilitating the design of holistic planning tools that may not yet exist, or are too little implemented, or that could make what does exist more effective. The emerging "Global Strategy" is based on the following expectations:

- a. It must embody a political vision and be underpinned by competent, consistent and inclusive governance.
- b. It must guarantee the transversality of the Operational Objectives, articulating them in such a way as to create synergies and offer a holistic reading of the city and its future.
- c. It must be able to be implemented through existing planning tools, specific to each city, improving them and making them more effective.
- d. It must ensure that the application of these tools is monitored in relation to the improvement of Habitability, measured and evaluated on an ongoing basis.

2. PREMISES

The main questions of the reference framework used at the Krakow workshop underline some essential elements for defining more precisely what the NPU Global Strategy will be. The following premises are the results of the Krakow workshop. They may be the subject of further work by the Focus Group – Strategy:

1. Legal status.

Urban planning processes are often determined by national, regional and municipal legal and procedural frameworks. These frameworks establish a set of conditions that determine the competencies of the various players involved. The constraints imposed lead to strategic documents being given different legal statuses and hierarchies. This is the case for enforceable documents such as those of Bordeaux or Puebla. On the other hand, as in the case of the "management plan" for Krakow's Wesola sector, planning processes are carried out without any legal or statutory obligation. Whatever the case may be, there is always a need and an opportunity to formulate a transversal vision for the enhancement/protection of the historic center that establishes a consensus between actors and sectors, transcending particular interests for the common good. This common reference, with no other necessary status than consensus, the fruit of wide-ranging debate, is sufficient to guide and orient the development of documents.

2. Objectives.

Planning strategies serve specific objectives (increasing population, managing tourism, improving accessibility, limiting heat islands, etc.) according to the particular challenges or political priorities in each city. The OWHC has obtained a consensus from the mayors on 4 main Strategic Axes to be developed in order to respond adequately to the issues identified. Operational Objectives are currently under discussion (5 have already been identified during the Community of Practice in Evora). What can already be emphasized in the perspective of the NPU is that the Operational Objectives need to be considered together and articulated within the framework of a Global Strategy aimed at regenerating the habitability of historic centers, which implies considering the design of structuring projects that guarantee to act on all the targeted objectives.



3. Coordination

Beyond the question of who leads the planning process (the mayor, elected officials or department heads), one thing is clear. The success of any approach depends on a real cross-functional approach that goes beyond the usual silos.

4. Thematics

The thematics addressed vary according to the nature and scope of the planning documents: housing, mobility, land use, trade, biodiversity, green/blue infrastructure, social cohesion, etc.).

5. Integrated approach

Planning processes take account of different scales: the site, the neighbourhood, the rest of the city. This enables the benefits of projects to be extended beyond the boundaries of the targeted area. The Wesola site in the buffer zone, for example, will relieve congestion in the historic core and provide another cultural destination in the city.

6. What is its geographical scope and time horizon?

Like the themes addressed, the geographical scope and timeframe of planning vary from one approach to another. Some documents focus on the heart of the historic center, as in the case of Puebla, while others, such as the Wesola management plan, target a specific sector of the buffer zone. Some of these plans are based on a given timeframe, with short-term revisions - Colonia del Sacramento's plan is reviewed every 4 years - while others take a long-term view, such as Bordeaux's plan for the year 2050.

7. Citizen participation

Public consultation is a process for informing and adapting the project, placing the project's vision in a context of general interest for all by:

- including in the consultation process people other than local residents, such as future users of the site, and neighbours both near and far.
- associating the consultation with an event-based process, as culture is important for establishing social relations in a sector in the making.

8. Follow-up

Action plans must be accompanied by indicators to measure their achievement, as in Colonia del Sacramento. Their implementation must also be subject to periodic review in the light of this assessment or a change in context. In Bordeaux, this monitoring is based on a “multi-criteria radar” that measures the project's economic and social impact. An annual report is drawn up.

9. Evaluation

Beyond the Wesola project, Krakow plans to apply this learning to other urban regeneration projects, particularly in the historic center. The “innovation laboratory” approach could, for example, be generalized with the creation of a municipal budget dedicated to urban experimentation.



3. OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES

Placed in a strategic perspective, the first 5 Operational Objectives identified by the Community of Practice in Evora help to compare methodologies, raise awareness of obstacles, and reveal mutual reinforcement between objectives.

Methodical examination of strategic approaches in the cities in the light of the five objectives revealed remarkable convergences despite the distinct cultural contexts. The objectives are partly taken into account systematically, not necessarily together (in the case of sectoral approaches). Interrelationships, synergies and economies of scale need to be better identified in order to generate momentum. The inclusion of these Objectives in a Global Strategy should, in particular, enable the generation of structuring projects capable of triggering urban dynamics based on Habitability.

To determine the extent to which the various strategic plans actually contribute to the regeneration of Habitability, and therefore how the Strategic Objectives should be organized, the Krakow workshop reassessed and generated avenues for improving the 5 Évora Objectives:

1. Transform historic centers into innovation laboratories: introduce the notion of promoting historic centers as innovation laboratories, to suggest a more gradual approach.
2. Establish permanent cross-functional governance: specify that this desired governance is based on the creation of integrated decision-making teams.
3. Involve citizens in co-construction: give priority to qualified involvement, based on the citizen ambassador model.
4. Retain existing residents and attract new ones: consider a systemic approach to Habitability, focusing on service provision, nuisance reduction and incentives.
5. Rethinking public rights-of-way and public spaces: remove the reference to public “rights-of-way” to emphasize the importance of a broader vision, opening up all public spaces to a wide range of possibilities.

The Krakow workshop also proposed the addition of a sixth objective:

6. Ensure sustainable financing of heritage interventions: aim for predictable, long-term financing, in particular by diversifying funding sources. To this end, demonstrate the economic viability of the interventions to be carried out.

These proposals will be submitted to the next meeting of the Community of Practice for further consideration and adaptation.

4. POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

The Krakow workshop and the dynamic exchanges between participants highlighted a number of ideas that can be considered as Possible Solutions. The examples mentioned below can also be treated as Good Practices to be replicated in various contexts. These operational advances provide material for further use in the NPU development process, in particular by the Focus Group – Projects:

- Land ownership by the municipality, as a tool for guaranteeing interventions in the public interest.
- Innovative participatory methods in addition to traditional consultations (“four-helix” method: government, residents, NGOs/science, business, citizen workshops). local partnerships (public institutions, NGOs, universities,



private sector) in creating and implementing plans/strategies increase the sustainability of projects and relieve municipal authorities of the burden of implementing all activities on their own, e.g. in the form of:

- urban councils/teams for revitalisation or redevelopment of space,
- long-term sectoral agreements (housing, climate, culture),
- joint funds for the implementation of local projects.
- The use of temporary occupancy to preserve buildings until their final destination.
- Reintegrating biodiversity by planting in the open ground and increasing soil permeability.
- Monitoring a project's energy balance.
- Habitability indicators based on Bordeaux's "multi-criterion radar" to measure a project's economic and social impact.
- Incentives such as Puebla's "zero tax rate" to attract new residents.
- Long-term participative governance, inspired by Colonia's "developer group" model, to ensure continuity after completion.
- Integrated governance with multidisciplinary teams with decision-making authority for historic centers.
- Support for innovation, with a dedicated budget for experimentation.
- Training and contracting of citizen ambassadors for strategic citizen participation.
- A periodic review of objectives based on the evolution of indicators.
- An integrated dashboard to monitor Evora's six objectives simultaneously.
- Pilot projects designed and implemented with the population, integrating several objectives (e.g. public spaces, participation, economy).
- Heritage Impact Assessment of planned changes/investments/transformations in the historic city centre/listed area.

5. HBITABILITY INDICATORS

Monitoring the implementation of projects arising from the strategy and their impact on the city is an essential part of responsible governance. Evaluating the impact of actions enables plans and public policies to be constantly adjusted to maintain consistency with a changing context, while preserving their social acceptability.

The impact on the city is expressed in the improved habitability of historic city centers. The Krakow workshop initiated reflection on the indicators to be included in the Global Strategy and produced this first series. This process needs to be continued in order to complete the identification of these indicators, the way they are collected and the way they are periodically updated.

I. Demographic trends :

- Resident population
- Age distribution
- Residential vacancy rate
- Ratio of owner-occupied/rented housing
- Short-term rental housing/total housing

II. Access to local services and the historic center :

- Daily retail outlets/total retail outlets
- Daily shops and municipal services within walking distance
- High-frequency public transit service to and within the historic center



- Daily shops/tourist businesses
- Housing/general commercial offer in the historic center

III. Improving the environment and well-being:

- Area of green space per inhabitant
- Permeable surfaces impervious surfaces
- Noise levels

VI. The economic behavior of the center and cost of living:

- Comparative cost of living
- Number of residents benefiting from tax incentives

V. Social ties and public participation:

- Rate of citizen participation in public consultation and participation activities
- Number and frequency of local community events organized by residents

6. COMPONENTS OF A GLOBAL STRATEGY

The Krakow exercise was enriched as much by the presentation of the host city and the cities of Bordeaux, Colonia del Sacramento, Luxembourg and Puebla as by the exchanges that took place over the two days of the event. The planning documents presented and studied highlighted the need for each city involved in the NPU to develop and adopt a global strategy. Here too, further work is required, but it has already been established that this overall strategy will be based on :

- a. An ambition and values in response to the challenges: the vision for the transformation/development of historic city centers, supported by elected officials and adhered to by all local players (a mandate/rationale that motivates collective action over the medium and long term).
- b. Stakeholders: Identification/designation/recognition of the various stakeholders, their roles and relationships.
- c. Status: integration of the Global Strategy into the local legal framework / prioritization in relation to plans / definition of whether or not the strategy is legally binding, to ensure the long-term viability of actions.
- d. An action plan: Operational objectives and required actions / criteria / prioritization of actions / articulation and synergies / timetables / funding.
- e. Follow-up indicators: ongoing monitoring of actions / evaluation of results / impacts / reporting - sharing / adjustments - periodic review.
- f. Communication and dissemination of good practices contribute strengthening social and political support for the transformation - it is necessary to:
 - create a platform for the exchange of experiences and materials (e.g. project catalogues, films, 3D models, implementation reports),
 - disseminate the results of activities not only among experts, but also in local media and schools/universities,



- develop local branding of historic centres based on their new function (e.g. 'green heart of the city', 'creative district').

7. CONCLUSION

Regenerating the habitability of historic centers is not a utopian dream, but an achievable challenge. The tools exist, the methods are becoming clearer, the will is converging. Habitability undeniably brings a political and strategic dimension to the city of tomorrow. The New Urban Project must formalize this collective dynamic and provide cities with the concrete tools they need to meet the challenges of our time, by turning historic city centers into laboratories for urban innovation in the service of well-being and living together.

The NPU's appeal is further enhanced by the fact that the Operational Objectives are used to devise cross-functional Strategies, and by the development of indicators for monitoring habitability. Articulation with the four strategic axes (requalifying housing, refreshing the city, transforming mobility, regenerating the urban environment) is clarified and operationalized through concrete coordination mechanisms.



ANNEX 1 : LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Advisory Board: Mr. Yves Gendron, (Strasbourg Upper Rhine Urban Planning Agency) and Mr. Luc Gagnon, (Consulting and Strategy Services – Urban Planning and Mobility)

Member cities: Bordeaux: Mr. Didier Jeanjean, Deputy Mayor for Nature in the City and Peaceful Neighborhoods, Bordeaux.

Colonia del Sacramento: Mr. Walter Debenedetti, Architect, Director of the Planning and Heritage.

Krakow: Ms Dorota Szatała, Deputy Director of the Kraków Greenspace Authority, Ms Katarzyna Olesiak, President of the Krakow Development Agency and Ms Magdalena Ormanty (ARMK), Mr Bartłomiej Kisielewski, Architect coordinator of the Wesola project, Ms Marta Strzelecka and Mr Zbigniew Kwiatkowski from the Department of Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Mr Piotr Wiechrzchoslawki and Mr Piotr Windek from the Department of Strategy and European Funds, Ms Carolina Pietyra, Director and Ms Katarzyna Jakubowiak, press spokeswoman du Kraków Festival Office, Ms Katarzyna Piotrowska, Deputy Director and Ms Monika Szota, Office of city traditions du Department of Culture, Ms Joanna Chwastek, Office for tourism policy in Department for Tourism, Ms Agata Mierzyńska, International Relations ;

Luxembourg: Ms. Shaaf Milani-Nia, UNESCO Site Manager.

Puebla: Ms. Nancy Andrea Diaz Munoz, Architect, Head of the Department of Habitability and Project Implementation, Directorate of the Historic Center and Cultural Heritage.