

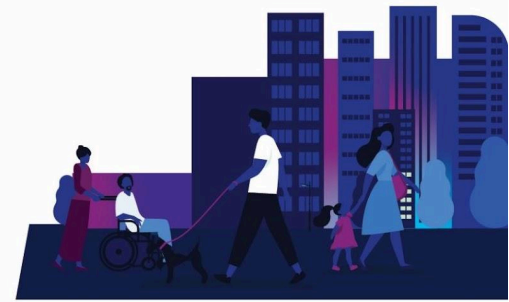


IcARUS

IcARUS Policy Brief

Fostering Community Involvement in Safe Public Spaces





Welcome to the IcARUS Policy Briefs, where the project's partners present their key findings

These policy briefs are designed to provide political decision-makers at local, regional, national, and European levels with insights and recommendations from the EU-funded and Efus-led IcARUS project. They cover the five areas that were explored through the project and are of primary concern for crime prevention policy-makers and stakeholders, i.e., social innovation, juvenile delinquency, organised crime, public spaces, and radicalisation leading to violent extremism.

Fostering Community Involvement in Safe Public Spaces

Introduction

Safeguarding urban public spaces and managing them in ways that promote safety, inclusivity and accessibility remains one of the top priorities of local and regional authorities, and a key mandate from the public. Urban public spaces are central to the attractiveness and quality of life of cities. They are vital to urban life and wellbeing: places for communication, gatherings, political demonstrations, artistic and cultural performances and all sorts of entertainment.¹ They are places where people come together and interact with other people from all backgrounds and walks of life.

Yet the quality and sustainability of public spaces face a range of threats, and ensuring that they remain safe, inclusive and open to all is a complex challenge.² As the level of governance closest to citizens, local and regional authorities are best placed to understand their concerns in relation to safe and open public spaces and implement appropriate measures to reduce feelings of insecurity.

What is a public space?

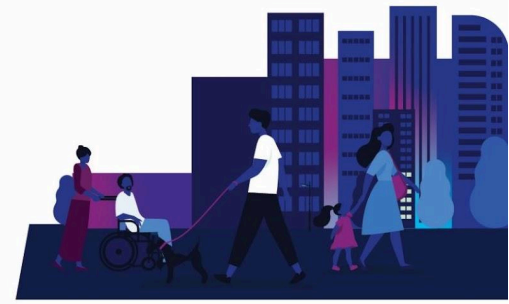
As defined by UN-Habitat, “*public spaces are all places publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all for free and without a profit motive.*”³ They are a key element of individual and social wellbeing, the places of a community’s collective life, expressions of the common natural and cultural richness in all its diversity and a foundation of cities’ and hence citizens’ identity, as expressed by the European

¹ Low S. (2023). Why Public Space Matters. Oxford University Press.

² Efus (2022). Safe and inclusive public spaces: European cities share their experience.

³ UN-Habitat (2015). Global Public Space Toolkit: From Global Principles to Local Policies and Practice.





Landscape Convention.⁴ Public spaces can be defined as any open place that is accessible to all without direct cost, such as streets, roads, public squares, parks, shopping centres and beaches, as well as closed places accessible to citizens, such as government and official buildings.

United Nations Sustainable Development Goal #11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

By 2030, two thirds of the world population (5 billion people) is expected to live in cities. Making cities safe and sustainable means ensuring access to safe and affordable housing, investment in public transport, creating green public spaces, and improving urban planning and management in a participatory and inclusive manner.⁵

Problem context

Research has shown that there is a tendency to prefer technological to human-centred solutions for the protection of public spaces with less concern for the intersection between social and technological processes.⁶ This preference often leads to an oversight of non-technological innovations by local practitioners, security researchers and evaluators.⁷ While technology can enhance surveillance and help collect, analyse and represent data for decision-makers, it is insufficient on its own to address the complexity of this issue. Effective security strategies must incorporate the human element, understanding how individuals interact with both the space and the technology within it.

Another challenge lies in collecting inclusive data to enhance the safety and inclusivity of public spaces. By addressing the experiences and vulnerabilities of diverse groups, especially those most at risk, local and regional authorities can ensure that public spaces are managed more effectively and equitably. This further helps adapt city policies and improve police doctrines to better meet the needs of all community members.

The role of citizens in the management of public spaces and in particular the importance of community involvement in (co)designing solutions that create a sense of ownership and

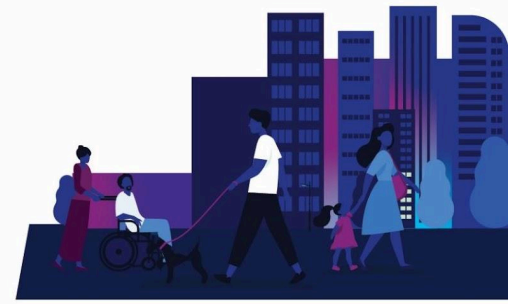
⁴ The first international treaty devoted exclusively to all dimensions of the landscape, the Council of Europe Landscape Convention promotes the protection, management and planning of the landscapes and organises international co-operation on landscape issues.

⁵ UN (2015). Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

⁶ IcARUS (2022). The Changing Face of Urban Security Research: A Review of Accumulated Learning, University of Leeds. p. 30-31.

⁷ Davey, C. L. and Wootton, A.B. (2017). Prospects for EU-funded security research – The ethics of impact outside the EU discourse. International Perspectives of Crime Prevention 9, Contributions from the 10th Annual International Forum 2016, within the German Congress on Crime Prevention, Germany. Forum Verlag Godesberg, pp. 171–196.





participation is therefore crucial. Indeed, citizens play a role both in preventing crime and as active bystanders or ‘capable guardians’.⁸ Research also highlights the value of strategies that decentralise the role of police by involving informal actors, civil society mediators and methods such as persuasion, self-regulation and capacity building.⁹ This approach contrasts with relying solely on coercive law enforcement, prosecution and punishment. Participation processes are planned or already taking place in several areas in European cities, including the assessment of citizens’ perceptions of safety and feelings of insecurity, citizen surveys to develop strategies, regular information and consultations with citizens, and involving vulnerable groups in the development of crime prevention and urban security strategies to strengthen a whole-of-society approach.¹⁰ Findings suggest that feedback and assessment from the community is a necessary element of any crime prevention strategy or initiative to improve the design and management of safe(r) public spaces.¹¹ Security is not only the responsibility of the police but of a myriad of actors that help contribute to a more inclusive and safer city.¹²

By empowering the community, a sense of ownership and protection over public spaces can emerge. In particular, research has shown that people tend to feel unsafe in empty public spaces and that ensuring that there are a range of activities available in such spaces can create a sense of safety and belonging among its ‘users’. Attracting more people to public spaces increases natural surveillance and tends to prevent criminal and undesirable activities.¹³

Recommendations

Local and regional authorities, as the level of governance closest to citizens, have a key role to play in protecting public spaces and should be better supported by national governments and European institutions. **There is a need for a comprehensive and integrated approach to making public spaces safer and more inclusive, in which the involvement of citizens is at the core.**

⁸ Jacobs, J. (1961). *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York: Random House.

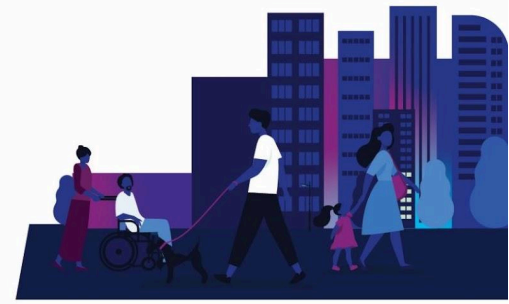
⁹ Barker, A. (2017) ‘Mediated Conviviality and the Urban Social Order: Reframing the Regulation of Public Space’, *British Journal of Criminology*, 57(4): 848–866; and Barker, A., Crawford, A., Booth, N. and Churchill, D. (2019) ‘Everyday Encounters with Difference in Urban Parks: Forging ‘Openness to Otherness’ in Segmenting Cities’, *International Journal of Law in Context*, 15: 495–514.

¹⁰ IcARUS (2022). Report Describing The Results From The Workshop For Assessing Requirements, CAMINO, p.14.

¹¹ IcARUS (2022). Report Describing the State of the Art and Cross Analysis of the Focus Areas, University of Leeds.

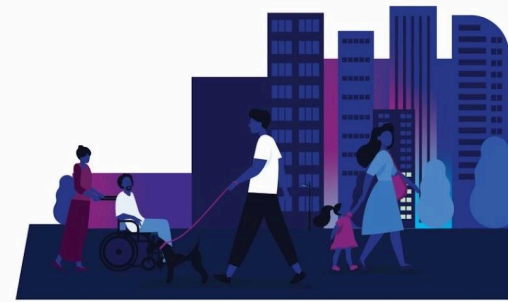
¹² The 2022 Brussels Declaration encapsulates Efus’ position on this issue, which it has developed over the years through multiple exchanges with its member cities, as well as with partners and experts and through EU-funded projects such as PACTESUR, IcARUS, Secu4All, and PRoTECT.

¹³ IcARUS D2.1 Report Describing the State of the Art and Cross Analysis of the Focus Areas, p.28.



- **Prioritise the development of a prevention culture** as regards security in order to improve public perceptions and strengthen citizen participation in the decision-making process.
- **Encourage data collection that includes citizens' priorities, experiences and feelings of insecurity** to adapt and improve police doctrines on the management of public spaces.
 - Data collection must take into account gender factors and the perspectives of the most vulnerable groups (LGBTQIA+, women, homeless people) who are more likely to feel unsafe in public spaces. This will ensure that such spaces are shared equitably and helps prevent avoidance behaviour.
- **Consider technological solutions as a complementary element** that is part of a global security policy for the protection of public spaces. Such policy involves all the competent local services and not only local security actors.
 - Respecting privacy regulations, accountability, transparency and reliability in operating security technologies are the foundations of public trust.
- **Engage the community in (co)designing public space management solutions.** This creates a sense of ownership and responsibility, leading to more sustainable and accepted security strategies.
- **Raise awareness on the fact that security is not the sole responsibility of police** but of a myriad of actors that help contribute to a more inclusive and safer city.
 - Train a variety of actors (security personnel, bar and restaurant managers, nighttime public space workers, etc.), for instance, to prevent gender-based and sexual aggressions, to collectively fight against harassment in the street, and to be aware of available resources to address these issues effectively.
- **Encourage civil society initiatives** by promoting solutions that are creative, add an artistic or cultural value, or are seamlessly integrated in the urban landscape, and by paying particular attention to solutions that have an impact on attractiveness, accessibility and openness.
- **Implement robust evaluation and monitoring mechanisms.** Regular assessments, including feedback from residents, businesses and other stakeholders to continuously adjust and adapt these strategies. This will ensure that interventions respond to the evolving needs of the partners and the community.
- **Develop practical decision-making tools and guidance for public space supervisors, managers and designers.** Principles of security and inclusivity should be embedded in such tools. A multidisciplinary approach - i.e., 'secure by design' and Green Flag Award (see below) should be adopted in the use of equipment and technologies such as surveillance cameras, as well as the related legal and administrative procedures.





How the recommendations can be implemented in practice

In practice: Par drošu Rīgu! (For a safe Riga), City of Riga (Latvia)

The Par drošu Rīgu! tool provides an evidence-based approach to modifying and adapting neighbourhood policing tactics by analysing both police records and citizens' perceptions of security. The tool involves multiple stakeholders — municipal police, municipal services and NGOs — who analyse police records, collect citizens' feedback on their feelings of insecurity, fear of harm, trust in police and disorder and compare both sets of data in order to inform and shape policing tactics.

> More information on

<https://icarus-site.dev.loba.com/tools-insights/icarus-tools/riga-toolkit/>

In practice: Demandez Angela (Ask for Angela), City of Nice (France)

Demandez Angela is a scheme providing assistance to anybody who is being harassed in the street or feels insecure, whatever their age, gender or condition, either during the day or at night. Demandez Angela in Nice is therefore not gender-specific; it is aimed at anybody who is or feels victim of harassment or unsafe in the streets or other public spaces. Its objective is to establish a safe network of solidarity venues (such as bars, hotels, shops) that can assist and support people. Thanks to the code sentence “Where is Angela?” and the sticker displayed by partner venues, any person can discreetly come in and ask for help. A duly trained staff member can assist the victim in a non-judgmental and non-discriminatory way.

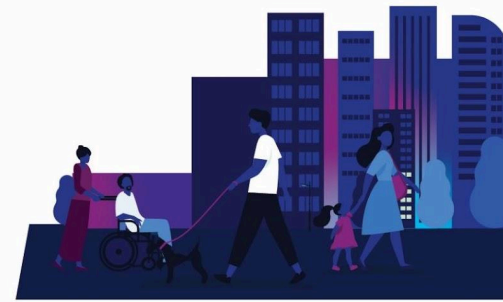
> More information on

<https://icarus-site.dev.loba.com/tools-insights/icarus-tools/nice-toolkit/>

In practice: Casting a gender lens as we go on an exploratory walk (Efus/WICI), city of Les Lilas (France)

In March 2023, Efus organised an exploratory walk in Les Lilas to discuss how to incorporate gender perspectives into city planning to enhance safety. Representatives from Efus, the city of Piraeus and Panteion University shared experiences and strategies, emphasising the importance of inclusive spatial design and the need to





address systemic inequalities. The exploratory walk is a method of field observation and participatory research carried out by a small group of city users. It consists of a walk through one or more neighbourhoods in order to identify the difficulties that generate insecurity and feelings of insecurity, to encourage discussions and to consider solutions. Participants may identify factors of insecurity such as insufficient or lack of lighting, negative messages in graffiti and other elements that make them feel unsafe. They then produce a report that is used as qualitative data to support a safety diagnosis.

> More information on

<https://efus.eu/activities/exchange-among-peers-2/gender-based-citizen-security/>

In practice: FixMyStreet app, Brussels Capital Region (Belgium)

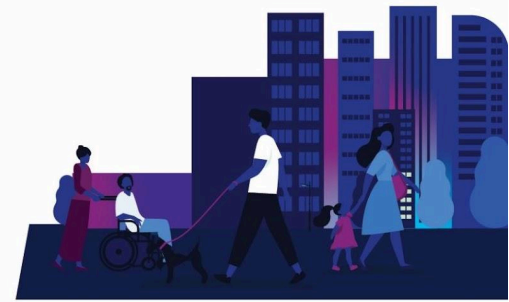
The Brussels FixMyStreet website and application, developed by the Brussels Regional administration in collaboration with different Brussels communes, enables public space users to report to their local authority problems in public spaces and roads, such as potholes, damaged urban furniture, or fly-tipping. Users can upload photos and pinpoint on a map the exact location of the place that needs intervention and through the app, the local authority is informed and refers the problem to the appropriate service. Once the problem is fixed, users are informed through the app. The app is free of charge and accessible in Dutch, English and French. This scheme, which has been adopted in other countries such as Switzerland and the UK, encourages citizens to take part in keeping their neighbourhood clean and well maintained, which contributes to quality of life and enhanced feeling of safety.

> More information on <https://fixmystreet.brussels/>

In practice: Safer Parks – Improving Access for Women and Girls (UK and Green Flag Award), West Yorkshire (United Kingdom)

Urban parks offer substantial health and well-being benefits, yet they are not equally accessible to all groups of population, in particular women and girls who often feel unsafe in them. New state-of-the-art guidance developed by researchers at the University of Leeds in partnership with Keep Britain Tidy, Make Space for Girls and West Yorkshire Combined Authority aims to address these inequities by providing principles, case studies and practical guidelines for designing and managing parks with a gendered perspective. This guidance, rooted in the lived experiences of women and





girls, includes ten case studies from across Europe. It forms supplementary guidance to the Green Flag Award, the only established international accreditation programme for public parks and green spaces, which influences the evaluation of over 2,400 parks in 18 countries.

> More information on <https://www.greenflagaward.org/resources/> and <https://www.westyorks-ca.gov.uk/a-mayoral-combined-authority/mayoral-pledges/the-safety-of-women-and-girls/safer-parks-research-and-guidance/>

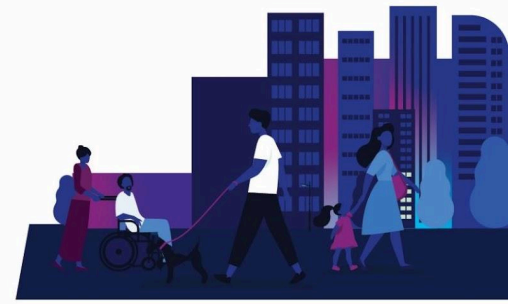
Conclusion

Addressing the management and protection of urban public spaces requires comprehensive approaches that go beyond situational prevention measures, integrating both human and technical resources. This encourages the development of public spaces that uphold the quality of the living environment, enabling everyone to safely enjoy them according to their needs while respecting individual freedoms.

Indeed, Efus' experience and the insights garnered through the IcARUS project highlight that for public spaces to remain vibrant and desirable, citizens need to be and feel safe, and to be able to express themselves regardless of racial or ethnic origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or socioeconomic status. Local and regional governments must commit to investing in public spaces as a means to strengthen social cohesion, improve the quality of life and enhance the image and attractiveness of cities.

Public spaces therefore require a security policy that is based on cooperation between the different concerned civil society organisations, the private sector (shops, bars, restaurants...) and institutions (local authorities, police, emergency services, urban planners and user representatives), in other words, genuine co-production of security that guarantees that public spaces remain both safe and accessible to all.¹⁴ This collaborative approach should integrate both technological and social innovation solutions, combining the strengths of advanced surveillance and inclusive data analysis with the insights gained from human-centred design and community engagement.

¹⁴ Efus (2017). Manifesto: Security, Democracy and Cities – Co-producing Urban Security Policies.



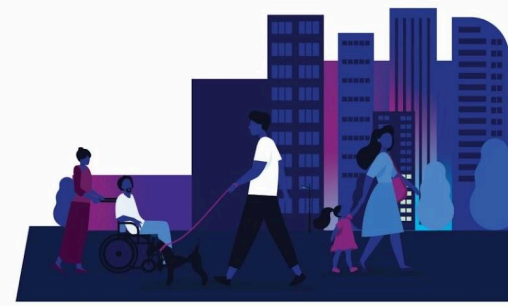
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Consortium



European Forum for Urban Security (Efus)



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Fachhochschule Salzburg (FHS) Salzburg University of Applied Sciences



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Laboratory of Urban Criminology - Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences (Panteion)



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The IcARUS project (Innovative Approaches to Urban Security) aims to rethink, redesign and adapt existing tools and methods to help local security actors anticipate and better respond to urban security challenges. This factsheet is based on the IcARUS Review of Accumulated Learning and cross-analysis of urban security.



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