



IcARUS

IcARUS Policy Brief

# Unveiling the Power of Social Innovation in Urban Security





**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.*

## Unveiling the Power of Social Innovation in Urban Security

### Introduction

The evolution and/or transformation of problems related to urban security makes it necessary for public policy-makers to continually adapt their services to new challenges to be able to respond to citizens' needs in a timely manner. Re-thinking the way in which urban security policies are having a positive impact on the quality of life of all citizens, especially today as public policy processes strive to better align with citizens' expectations, should be a priority for policy makers. Many design-based innovation methodologies, including design thinking, human-centred design and strategic foresight<sup>1</sup>, can support local authorities in exploring possibilities without constraints. These processes can inform urban security policies making them more inclusive and truly co-produced, and oriented towards citizens' needs. They can also speed up their implementation.

### What is social innovation?

Innovation, particularly in a social context, can be defined as the process of developing and implementing novel solutions to address social problems or challenges with a focus on effectiveness, sustainability or justice. It encompasses both the creation of new approaches or models and the deployment of solutions to bring about positive and meaningful change in society. Key criteria for defining innovation include novelty, where solutions are new to the user or context, and improvement, where the innovation is more effective or sustainable than existing alternatives. Additionally, innovation often involves collaboration among diverse stakeholders and aims to empower individuals or marginalised groups. Unlike traditional innovation, which may focus primarily on technological advancement or business processes, social innovation places emphasis

<sup>1</sup> European Committee of Regions (2023), Strategic foresight as an instrument of EU governance and better regulation, 157th plenary session, 9-11 October, CIVEX-VII/022



on addressing social needs and creating value for society as a whole.<sup>2</sup> Importantly and for this context, we can consider public safety as a public value. Hence, it is crucial to understand how key stakeholders in society can contribute to the governance of public value. Social innovation in the public safety context takes into account the creation and protection of public safety as a public value too, especially through tailored approaches and methodologies such as design.

As illustrated by key documents, such as those produced by the European Commission's Bureau of European Policy Advisers (BEPA, 2011; 2014), there are high hopes for social innovation.<sup>3</sup> The European Commission European Social Fund (ESF) suggests that the social innovation approach can "*find new solutions to entrenched issues facing our shared society*" by involving a range of key stakeholders, including civil society, public authorities and businesses.<sup>4</sup>

## Problem context

Urban security policies for modern urban environments face multifaceted challenges that hinder their effectiveness and resilience. Contemporary overarching trends exacerbate these challenges: a decline in confidence in public institutions; drastic cuts in public funds; the rapid pace of technological advancement that introduces new security threats urban policymakers may struggle to anticipate and address; the rapid spread of misinformation and disinformation, undermining trust in institutions and sowing discord within urban communities, and various crises affecting local, regional and national authorities that further strain resources and impede effective urban security measures.

In addition, practical learning from urban security strategies is impeded by short-term political cycles, hindering the effective implementation of evidence-based interventions. The prevailing governance culture fails to acknowledge and learn from past failures, perpetuating a cycle of ineffective practices. Institutional memory is weak, leading to repeated reinvention of solutions and the overlooking of valuable knowledge. Furthermore, a general decline in citizens' trust in institutions, local elected officials and other security and prevention actors exacerbates the challenges.

Investing in the delivery of effective innovation, particularly social innovation, can provide valuable tools and approaches that support local security actors in overcoming challenges and understanding and acting on future, emergent challenges.<sup>5</sup> These approaches

<sup>2</sup> IcARUS (2023). Deliverable 3.7-Tools defined with a design approach – Version 2, University of Salford.

<sup>3</sup> Hubert, A. (2010). Empowering people, driving change: Social innovation in the European Union. BEPA report, available [here](#).

<sup>4</sup> IcARUS (2023). Deliverable 3.7-Tools defined with a design approach – Version 2, University of Salford

<sup>5</sup> Observatory of Public Safety Innovation, Available [here](#)



prioritise collaboration, citizen engagement and holistic problem-solving, making them well-suited to address the multifaceted nature of modern societies. However, this is only possible when there is an organisational mindset for transformation from the executive management level down. Staff and other stakeholders must be supported to trust the process<sup>6</sup> — and ultimately to own it. Here, the concept of ownership and responsibility are paramount: stakeholders — be they citizens, NGOs, or authorities — should acknowledge their role in steering public safety initiatives. The more people feel the initiative is their own and that they are an active part of the process, the better and the more frequently they engage. In turn, this creates and fosters a trustful environment where users care about the success of the initiative and assume their active responsibility. In social innovation, social ownership of processes can indeed create not only successful inclusive policies, but also sustainable ones.

## Recommendations:<sup>7</sup>

### 1. Learning from the Past, Exploring the Future, and Taking Action Today:

- o Recognise the importance of learning from past experiences and exploring future trends in urban security. Value an evidence-based and problem-based methodology that involves Scanning, Analysis, Response and Assessment. Nothing can replace a safety audit, which should be the starting point for the formulation and re-framing of the problem to be addressed.<sup>8</sup>
- o Encourage a proactive approach to addressing emerging challenges by investing in innovation and forward-thinking strategies.
- o Foster a culture of continuous learning and adaptation to ensure urban security policies remain effective and resilient in a rapidly changing environment.
- o Make policies less rigid and more agile, and able to adapt to changes and evolving issues.

### 2. Promoting Collaboration:

- o Problems need to be defined and validated through effective collaboration. Encourage local stakeholders to collaborate on co-produced solutions, fostering communication and knowledge sharing, especially those representing civil society. This will facilitate citizens participation.

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<sup>6</sup> Olukunle, A. (2019). Still in doubt with the power of design thinking? You need to think again. Design. Available here.

<sup>7</sup> These recommendations have been listed based on the different deliverables of the IcARUS project, which report on the process of applying the design thinking methodology in the design and demonstrations of tools that help respond to urban security problems in six European cities.

<sup>8</sup> IcARUS (2022). The Changing Face of Urban Security Research: A Review of Accumulated Learning, University of Leeds. Available [here](#).



- o Break down silos by promoting cross-functional collaboration between different departments and agencies involved in urban security.
- o Cultivate an organisational culture that values collaboration and promotes innovative thinking across all levels of the organisation.
- o Share data and information in ethically responsible and appropriate ways.
- o Promote a culture of collaboration between the different levels of governance with a distribution of responsibilities and resources in line with the needs of the local community.

### 3. Ensuring contextualisation

- o Consider the local context when implementing public security and safety initiatives, starting from how to engage with end-users.
- o Conduct research to understand the needs, requirements and operational contexts of end-users and stakeholders.
- o Find out what are the risk factors and protective factors regarding the defined problem. Prevent the risk factors (weaknesses, threats, lack of resources, etc.) and promote the protective factors (strengths, supporters, existing infrastructure, etc.).
- o Be sure to adapt the methodologies and approaches proven successful in other contexts to the local stakeholders, practitioners, *modi operandi*, hierarchies and social structures.
- o Adapt performance indicators and definitions of success to the context where the measure is being implemented: it is important to contextualise public safety management approaches.

### 4. Mindset Shift Towards Solution-Oriented Thinking:

- o Engage security practitioners in the design and implementation of solutions to encourage a solution-oriented mindset.
- o Provide training and support to help practitioners embrace innovative problem-solving approaches.
- o Foster openness to new ideas and prototyping / experimentation, recognising that innovative solutions often arise from diverse perspectives and approaches.

### 5. Adopt a design research and innovation approach:

- o Emphasise empathy for end-users or citizens in the design process, encouraging participants to deeply understand user needs and experiences.
- o Integrate and adapt design research and innovation methodologies to urban security projects to ensure solutions are tailored to the needs and preferences of the community.





- o Highlight successful examples where a human- or user-centred design approach has led to more effective and inclusive urban security solutions.

## **6. Encourage Experimentation and Iteration:**

- o Promote a culture of experimentation, prototyping and iteration in solution development to encourage innovation and adaptation.
- o Encourage practitioners to take calculated risks and learn from both successes and failures.
- o Provide support and resources for testing and refining prototypes with end-users to ensure solutions meet the real-world requirements of their operational contexts.
- o Ensure evaluation and monitoring for the purpose of organisation learning, improvement and knowledge generation.

## **7. Leadership Support and Organisational Buy-In:**

- o Ensure strong leadership support for innovation with a focus on user-centric solutions and design-led strategies.
- o Foster organisational buy-in by promoting understanding and appreciation of the value of social innovation and user-centred design methodologies.
- o Celebrate and publicise successful innovation initiatives to inspire confidence and encourage widespread adoption within the organisation.

## **8. Addressing Fixation on Technology-centric Solutions:<sup>9</sup>**

- o Recognise the importance of the social dimensions of innovation alongside technological advancements in urban security.
- o Promote the adoption of successful and cost-effective practices from diverse contexts, including those that prioritise social innovation and human-centred design.
- o Encourage a balanced approach to innovation that considers both technological solutions and social interventions to effectively address urban security challenges.

## **9. Promote Ethical and Responsible Innovation:**

- o Define ethical frameworks that ensure innovations in urban security are developed and deployed with transparency, accountability and citizens involvement.
- o Address ethical dilemmas and ambiguities in innovation processes to ensure that the benefits of innovation are maximised while minimising potential harms.

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<sup>9</sup> IcARUS (2022). Roadmap for the Improvement and Definition of Tools, University of Leeds





- o Establish frameworks that require innovators to assess the social desirability and public interest of their projects.

## How the recommendations can be implemented in practice

### In practice: Improving Community Policing in Lisbon – example from the CCI project

In adopting a human-centred design approach, the Cutting Crime Impact (CCI) research focused on the vital role played by community policing officers in their local communities. CCI developed tools tailored to end-user needs and operational contexts ([www.cuttingcrimeimpact.eu](http://www.cuttingcrimeimpact.eu)). Community Policing in Lisbon is a preventive and participative policing approach. It differs from traditional models of policing by being jointly planned and operated by a partnership established between the Lisbon Municipal Police, local partners and residents. This close cooperation between the police, partners and residents is ensured through regular partnership meetings and daily patrolling on foot by dedicated police teams assigned to specific neighbourhoods. This enables Community Policing teams to gain recognition and acceptance by the population, fostering a trusting relationship between police and citizens.

The Tool researched, developed and demonstrated in the CCI project addresses the problem of Community Police teams being frequently redeployed from their assigned neighbourhoods to other policing tasks. This leaves officers unable to carry out the activities expected of them by partners and residents in their assigned neighbourhood, which negatively impacts police-community relationships and citizens' trust in policing. The Tool helps decision-makers and senior police officers in managerial positions to better understand and recognise the value of Community Policing and hence better support Community Policing teams by maintaining them in their role in their designated neighbourhoods.

Further information about the Lisbon Tool is available [here](#).

This practice was awarded in 2023 a 'Security Innovation Award' by the European Commission: it received the prize in the 'Best Innovation with a Strong Societal Impact' category in recognition of its role in improving the safety and wellbeing of Lisbon's communities.

### In practice: The Kings Cross nightlife neighbourhood, City of Sydney (Australia)





The neighbourhood of Kings Cross in Sydney faced a common urban challenge: managing its vibrant nightlife while ensuring safety and convenience of both revellers and residents. Collaborating with the University of Technology Sydney's (UTS) Design Out Crime Centre, they adopted a novel approach rooted in Design Thinking. Recognising the diverse mix of well-meaning partygoers, akin to any young adult, they identified key issues affecting the quality of local nightlife: the lack of transport, limited resting spots, and safety concerns.

Drawing inspiration from music festivals, renowned for managing large intoxicated crowds, the solution focused on enhancing amenities and crowd management. Improvements in transport services expedited crowd dispersal, reducing congestion and potential violence. Safe spaces staffed by volunteers provided respite and security, particularly for women. Strategic signage subtly guided partygoers towards exits and safe zones. This holistic approach transformed Kings Cross into a safer and more enjoyable space for all, setting a precedent for Sydney's long-term nightlife strategy, OPEN Sydney.

More information [here](#)

## IcARUS tools

The IcARUS six partner cities – Lisbon (Portugal), Nice (France), Riga (Latvia), Rotterdam (Netherlands), Stuttgart (Germany) and Turin (Italy) – designed and demonstrated six tools inspired by Design Thinking and a human-centred approach to tackle security challenges they had identified as a priority in their local context. Even though each city has distinct issues and characteristics, meaning that there are no fit-for-all solutions, the creation of these tools shows that listening to citizens and thinking out of the box can lead to solutions that really work and don't need to be overly expensive or complex.

More information [here](#)

## In practice: Point Information Laïcité et Citoyenneté”, City of Toulouse (France)

Set up in the market of La Faourette, in the French city of Toulouse, the “Point Information Laïcité et Citoyenneté” (“Secularism and citizenship information point”) provides information on France's democratic system to residents and visitors. Local associations took this initiative in association with local authorities as an answer to the growing number of market stands being set up by fundamentalist religious







organisations. One of the main advantages of this primary prevention initiative is that these “information points” reach a wide public.<sup>10</sup>

More information [here](#)

## Conclusion

Addressing the complex challenges of urban security requires a multifaceted approach that integrates innovation, collaboration and user-centred design that starts from the very beginning of the problem definition and takes into account the needs, expectations and interests of different stakeholders. The evolution of urban security problems requires public policymakers to continually adapt and to shift towards solution-oriented thinking and a commitment to learning from past experiences in order to understand future trends. Embracing social innovation methodologies, such as design thinking and strategic foresight, offers promising avenues for co-produced, inclusive, and effective urban security policies. The inspiring practices implemented in cities like Lisbon and Sydney as well as the IcARUS project partner cities – Riga, Rotterdam, Turin, Nice and Stuttgart – show the transformative potential of these approaches when implemented with leadership support, organisational buy-in, and a focus on addressing the social dimensions of urban security. By promoting collaboration, fostering a culture of experimentation and prioritising the needs of citizens, local authorities can navigate contemporary urban challenges and create safer, more resilient communities for all.

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<sup>10</sup> Berner, Heiko, (2023) “From the bottom to the top. Empowerment as social innovation hub”, Public Administration & Regional Studies, 16(1), 165-179, Available here.





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# IcARUS

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### Consortium



European Forum for Urban Security (Efus)



FH Salzburg

Fachhochschule Salzburg (FHS) Salzburg University of Applied Sciences



Plus Ethics



Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR)



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



University of Salford



University of Leeds



Landeshauptstadt Stuttgart Municipality of Stuttgart



Riga Municipal Police (RMP)



City of Rotterdam



City of Nice



Lisbon Municipal Police - Lisbon Municipality (LMP - CML)



Local Police of Turin (PLTO)



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Camino



Idiap Research Institute



KEMEA



LOBA



University of York

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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### Website

[www.icarus-innovation.eu](http://www.icarus-innovation.eu)

### Contact us

[info@icarus-innovation.eu](mailto:info@icarus-innovation.eu)

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