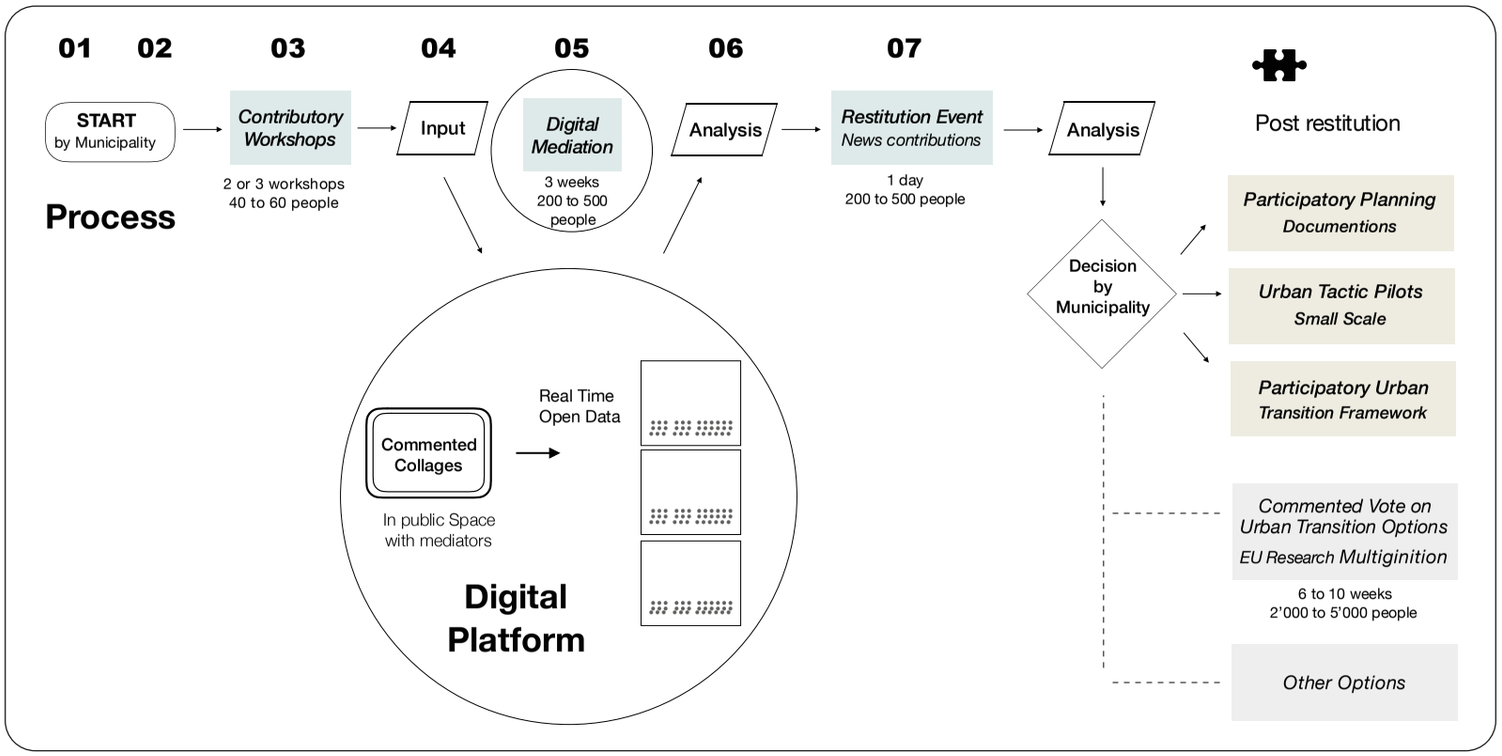
Unlimited Cities Tool: Process co-built with cities



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design & production by Claire Germain, atelier Maison Gong - printed on recycled paper

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Unlimited Cities

Process

Co-built with Cities

Forged in the field

Endlessly adaptable



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A living process built with cities,

for inclusive urban transitions

The multi-phase process described below draws on feedback from cities using the in-situ collage method, across a wide range of cultural and geographic contexts. Shorter versions, spanning days rather than months, are also used for research projects and university masterclasses.

The process presented here was invented over time, piece by piece, with different designers and municipalities deploying Unlimited Cities on their urban transition projects. We observed that the 7 phases described here emerged consistently and are increasingly adopted. It is this progressively built consensus that we share here.

Consider this process as guidance, not as a rule. Do not hesitate to adapt it, remove steps, add new ones, and share your approaches with the user community. In doing so, your territory will contribute to Unlimited Cities, a tool that no one owns alone, that anyone can improve, and that grows stronger with every new use.

Getting started

01

Getting to know the process and the digital platform

The simplest way to become familiar with the process is **to explore a few case studies** relevant to your subject. Is this a project led by a municipality, a civic organisation, a university, or a research project? Examples exist for each of these contexts, across different stages of a process.

To understand how the digital platform works, simply **test the creation of annotated collages on a tablet** by connecting to an existing territory's project. You will then be in exactly the same position as a mediator or a contributor.

Finally, this initial overview allows you **to explore the platform's different modules**: Will you want participants to build on pre-established scenarios at specific locations (an approach often chosen by municipalities), or will you let contributors identify the sites to be transformed themselves (often preferred by universities and research projects)? There is no need to decide immediately – these choices can be made later as your process develops. Additional modules include surveys, specific tags, and psychogeographic questionnaires.

02

Defining a process suited to your objectives and territory

The selection of sites to serve as the settings for annotated collages is a significant step. From among the locations representative of the forthcoming transformations, those where Unlimited Cities will be most relevant need to be identified. In practice, certain sites tend to emerge naturally. It also happens that participants suggest additional locations during the process.

The second task is **to identify the organisations** and individuals to invite to the contributory workshops, which bring together around twenty participants. The ideal is to achieve a mix - civil society, private businesses, technical staff, researchers. However, homogeneous workshops have also worked very well. What matters most is meeting organisations and explaining the approach as early as possible.

A structured timeline covering the different phases should be established. Municipalities most commonly run the digital mediation phase over three weeks, which allows for the collection of at least 200 annotated collages. School holidays and public holiday periods should be carefully anticipated.

Weather conditions must be taken into account, since annotated collages are created in public space; contingency solutions for unfavourable conditions should be planned in advance.

Complementary venues - not strictly public spaces, but places where valuable participants are likely to be found - should be included in the planning: schools, shops, public or private organisations, cultural venues, and sports facilities.

03

Organising contributory workshops

Contributory workshops are designed to introduce the process and the digital platform to the various stakeholders: civil society, public and private organisations, researchers. Their distinctive feature is that the organisers present examples of the tool's use in other territories, and then invite participants to suggest **elements to be integrated into the platform that reflect the local context.**

Participants thus become co-designers of the process. By explaining why they consider it necessary to add certain new elements, **natural dialogues arise** - between participants, with the organisers, and with the municipality.

The preparatory work involves identifying participants and finding a suitable venue in the neighbourhood concerned by the transformations. It is useful to publish information online in advance covering the context, the municipality's objectives, the process being used, and the upcoming steps. These same elements can form a simple spatial layout **for participants to explore at their own pace**, avoiding a top-down presentation format.

A4 prints of the sites to be transformed, tracing paper, pens, and coloured pencils should be prepared to enable participants to develop and share their ideas. An effective way to capture proposals is **to film the drawings or notes of those presenting**. Audio recording preserves a trace of the exchanges; avoiding filming faces protects anonymity.

It is always valuable to conclude with a convivial moment: this is an opportunity to discuss upcoming steps, and people wishing to become more actively involved in the process often identify themselves at this point.

Contributory workshop in the field

photo1: Grenoble, France
photo2: Anière, Suisse

Participants in contributory workshops come from very diverse backgrounds. Depending on municipal choices, they may be invited by a neighbourhood centre and come with their children, or be approached within a public transport company and participate in workshops alongside city staff and researchers.





04

Preparing the digital platform, integrating contributory workshop data

The starting point is creating the platform's home page. This simply requires uploading a representative image of the project, adding logos, creating a title, and inserting a descriptive text with links to relevant websites if desired.

The selection of elements for use in annotated collages is based on analysis of the contributions gathered during the contributory workshops: annotated drawings and video recordings of presentations. The aim is to extract the ideas expressed - whether relating to spaces, street furniture, features, or services potentially useful to the neighbourhood.

These ideas are then used to **select elements from the platform's community library**, built from contributions by an international community of more than thirty municipalities across several continents that have already used the tool.

Where gaps are identified, project-specific elements can be added by creating objects on a transparent background; the technical process is straightforward today and can be supported by the Open Urbanism Foundation if needed. In keeping with the digital commons philosophy, any organisation adding project-specific elements **shares** them **with the broader user community**.

05

Organising digital mediation in the field

Who should act as mediators? Experience shows they vary considerably from one territory to another, and are consistently well received by participants. They may be local residents, students in sociology, urban planning, or architecture, sustainable development engineers, or social workers within municipalities or public organisations such as neighbourhood centres.

Their role is both crucial and straightforward: to approach prospective contributors, explain the purpose of the project, support the creation of the annotated collage, and communicate upcoming milestones. Training mediators takes less than two hours, including context briefing and familiarisation with the tool.

Mediation schedules are tailored to the rhythms of neighbourhood life, in order to reach a diverse cross-section of residents. Experience across projects consistently points to the value of having two teams of two mediators in the field simultaneously, each equipped with one tablet.

A three-week duration is ideal: the first week establishes initial contacts; the second embeds the mediation as a convivial neighbourhood event; the third allows time for activities with interested organisations such as schools.

Organisers benefit from holding a daily check-in with mediators to verify that all population groups are being reached and, where this is not the case, to adjust schedules and locations accordingly. Mediators can also be interviewed: they bring a complementary perspective to the contributions collected.

Digital mediation in the field

Asnières village, Switzerland



Outside the village grocery and café, a mediator waits for a customer to turn around and offer them the chance to create their annotated collage. The display boards were a municipal initiative. It was at the mediators' suggestion that they were enriched each day with prints of new collages, creating a dynamic exhibition where participants could show their creations and draw in new contributors.

A resident creates her annotated collage about access to the shore of Lake Geneva - a sensitive subject, since it falls under cantonal and federal jurisdiction, leading the municipality to consider it outside its remit for consultation. During the contributory workshops, residents and stakeholders argued that the future of the village could not be imagined without addressing the lakefront. The municipality ultimately agreed to include it, specifying that proposals would be brought forward by the municipality and citizens to the relevant decision-making bodies. This decision contributed to building trust between the different actors in the project.



06

Analysing and structuring contributions

The data produced by the process and the platform are both qualitative and quantitative. They are freely downloadable in CSV format - a universal format allowing each organisation to analyse them using its preferred tools. The sources include: graphic collages and their accompanying comments, questionnaire responses, and information attached to the elements used in collages - usefully supplemented by data from the contributory workshops and mediator interviews, which are best conducted promptly in the days immediately following the end of the digital mediation phase.

These data enable concrete and precise applications. Some municipalities use them to refine an initial programme: certain public facilities may prove unnecessary or poorly calibrated; others, missing entirely. Projects anticipated as sources of opposition may turn out to be strongly supported - provided certain adjustments are made, which often prove to be genuine improvements. In other cases, entirely new projects can emerge (see Booklet 3: Territories in Real Conditions). Some municipalities incorporate this data as additional documents in calls for tender issued to designers.

Engaging civil society at the heart of territorial transitions requires a transparent approach: sharing raw data, making explicit the objectives of the analyses, and explaining the methods employed. The possibility for organisations other than the municipality - and for citizens themselves - to study the data according to their own objectives reinforces trust in the results. It is this free sharing of knowledge between professionals, elected representatives, and citizens that accelerates inclusive territorial transitions.

07

The restitution event and the next steps

The restitution event is a significant moment, not as a conclusion to the process, but as a step that gives concrete form to the transformation of relationships between municipalities, experts, and civil society at large.

Its distinctive character lies in the presence of the various contributors - those from the contributory workshops, and those who created the annotated collages - who come to see both what they contributed and what the municipality and its experts have drawn from those contributions to enrich the urban planning projects. A simple spatial arrangement in three sections is effective: the municipality's general objectives, citizen contributions, and the meeting of these two approaches within the projects to come.

What follows depends on each municipality. Some organise a project fair. Others launch design competitions drawing on citizen contributions. Others organise votes on the main planning options, thereby extending the strategies for inclusive transitions.

> *« Before, it seemed obvious to us that we had to bring solutions to the citizens. We now have the evidence before our eyes that from this point forward we must run all city projects, whatever their scale, in collaborative mode.»*
>
> David Samzun, Municipality of Saint-Nazaire, after six months of the Unlimited Cities process — remarks made at the restitution event.

Restitution event in the field

Rennes, France

A white cube in the night. Ten metres high, twenty metres wide. Suddenly an image of a city appears on its facades: the city transforms in real time, to the rhythm of music sampled by artist Nicolas Gougeon. Pedestrians and even cars come to a stop. Inside, residents create their annotated collages on tablets connected to a video projector. **This is what a restitution event can become with creativity:** a celebration of the process, bringing a broad population into the urban transition project.

