



**URBACT Guide**  
**“Writing about  
Integrated Urban Development”**



**Second Edition - June 2017**

What's your story?



# **URBACT Guide to Writing about Integrated Urban Development**

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## Introduction

For URBACT, print and digital communication can be a powerful tool to inspire cities. Information about other cities — or activities in their own city — can make policymakers think differently, consider new ways of approaching their work, try out or adapt practices from other places and improve their own policies.

By sharing their knowledge, experience, and above all, their stories, URBACT stakeholders — National URBACT Points, Lead Experts, Communication Officers and cities involved in URBACT networks and Programme Experts — are key players in this process.

In order to improve their writing skills and thus strengthen their ability to play this vital role, the URBACT Secretariat has produced this guide covering the fundamentals of writing about integrated urban development. The guide was prepared by Citiscope ([www.citiscopes.org](http://www.citiscopes.org)), a non-profit media outlet that specialises in urban journalism with the help of the URBACT Secretariat.

The guide includes information about:

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# 1. Before you write

Good writing starts with good preparation. There's a lot to think through or discuss with colleagues before you pick up a pen or tap a keyboard. Here are a few things to think about and tools you can use to organise your thoughts.

## Know your audience

Be clear about who you are writing for. URBACT's audience includes a wide range of stakeholders working in and for cities like mayors, elected officials, staff working in municipalities and councils, urban planning agencies, urban experts and consultants working for cities, universities working on urban development, regional policymakers, national authorities in charge of urban affairs as well as policymakers at the EU level in charge of cohesion policy, urban policies and structural funds.

As you gather your thoughts, consider the following questions: What are they most interested in? What do they want to hear or learn about? What do they care about? What lessons should they learn from your story in order to make the information useful?

Integrated urban development is a technical concept and has its own set of jargon — terms like “transit-oriented development” or “sustainable mobility”, for example. Don't assume your audience knows the meaning of those concepts — or even “integrated urban development”, for example. You need to explain more. A brief explanation will make sure that everyone is on the same page without alienating readers who do know what the concept means.

Likewise, consider the geographic reach of your audience. When writing for URBACT, you are aiming for a national and international readership, but sometimes you are writing about a specific city. In that case, you'll need to give some context. For example, when referring to a local park, you might add that it's close to the city centre and popular with families on weekends.

## Find a story

To start with, the URBACT community and city networks are loaded with good stories to tell, so give **first priority to URBACT cities, practices and experience** especially when you write on the URBACT website and blog. If a non URBACT story has caught your attention, think about how you can link it with URBACT- are there any URBACT networks or cities working on the same topic you can mention as good examples or compare with? There are initiatives bubbling up from the ground, consolidated practices and ideas that

*Tip: Once you have a story idea, try writing a preliminary headline or tweet for it. As you get to work, use that preliminary headline or tweet as a sort of mission statement to remind yourself what story you're trying to tell.*

people in other cities across Europe want to know about. There is also news of common interest to the entire community, such as policy debates at the EU level, funding opportunities, and updates from the URBACT secretariat.

Generally speaking, what you write should be timely and relevant to discussions and debates taking place **now**. It also should be useful to your audience.

## Gathering background information

The research you do will depend on the story you're trying to write. For some stories, you'll want to interview people involved in URBACT networks you're writing about, and possibly even subject-matter experts who can offer valuable background or context. If you are writing about a new tramway line that will connect an underserved neighbourhood to the rest of the city, then consult an expert, like an academic or transportation consultant, who has studied similar tramway lines in other cities and can offer some context.

Other stories might lean more heavily on press releases, reports and other written documentation. In some cases, you can draw on your own observations or experience as a participant in a project or meeting.

Not all stories are “news” but if that's what you're working on, be sure to answer the six standard questions of any news story: **Who, What, Where, When, Why and How?** Make sure you get the answers from authoritative sources, whether that's a person you interview, a press release, a report or some other document.

## Be able to explain your story in one paragraph

Starting from a blank page can be difficult. To get your thoughts organised, try writing your story in one paragraph. Include in that paragraph why you think readers will care about the story. If you can't state the essence of your story in 2 or 3 sentences, then you're not done thinking through what story it is you're trying to tell.

Here's one example from a [recent Citiscope feature story on Mexico City](#).

*This week, Mexico City approved a new city constitution. The “crowdsourcing” process used to draft the document shows an exciting new direction in citizen engagement. The new constitution also boosts the mayor's power and decentralizes some decision-making to local councils — governance innovations that city leaders around the world should watch closely.*

This one-paragraph summary can be useful as either a “chapeau” or a “nut graph.” See below under section 4, “General writing tips.”

## Know why your story matters

A story about integrated urban development can’t just be interesting. It also has to matter to your readers. Imagine that your readers are asking you: “**So what?** Why should I care about this?” **You need to tell them why.**

For example, if you’re writing about an innovative city programme for welcoming refugees, you should note that it’s of interest to city leaders across Europe as they wrestle with the challenge of integrating a growing number of refugees. Or maybe the programme represents an innovative way of accessing EU funds to deal with the problem. Or perhaps it’s a programme that has demonstrated good results and is easily replicable in other cities.

## 2. Narrative formats for solutions stories

Many URBACT stories are “solutions” stories, meaning case studies of innovative practices in one city that other cities can learn from too.

In the media world, “solutions journalism” as practiced by Citiscope is considered a relatively new field. Journalists covering cities tend to focus on what’s broken or corrupt. By contrast, solutions journalism focuses on fixes — and understanding what works, doesn’t work and how things can be done better.

*Tip: To find out more about solutions journalism, check out the Solutions Journalism Network. They have a solutions journalism toolkit and a database of sample stories at [solutionsjournalism.org](http://solutionsjournalism.org)*

This section focuses on key elements of solutions stories about integrated urban development and some pitfalls to avoid. It also covers different narrative formats within the solution stories lens.

### Define the solution

This can be harder than it sounds — especially when writing about integrated action plans, which are usually urban policies that have multiple dimensions and touch on the work of many individuals. However, it’s really important to define what the “solution” is — what’s the innovative policy or programme or approach? The more narrowly you can define the solution, the easier it will be to write a coherent story about it.

For example, in the Citiscope story noted above about Mexico City’s new constitution, there could be 100 things to write about in a complex document that covers a range of urban issues. However, Citiscope narrowed the focus to two specific innovations: first, the participatory process used to draft the new constitution, and second, the approach to decentralised governance.

As you assess solutions to write about, ask yourself: What are the main ideas? What is the key thing here that someone in another city could take away from this experience? That’s likely your solution.

*Example: [Turin: A European success story with URBACT and Urban Innovative Actions](#)*

### Balance the solution with integrated urban development

One of URBACT’s main goals is to promote integrated urban development — not just isolated policies, but initiatives that connect with broader goals to improve a city. For example, a story

about a new transit line might seem like a mobility story on the surface, but it can also be a story about economic development (connecting people to jobs), climate change (reducing greenhouse gas emissions) and social equity (access for a poor neighbourhood where there used to be none).

This line of thinking should come naturally when writing about a city involved in an URBACT network, where the objective is to produce, implement or transfer an integrated strategy or set of actions. Questions like “Is the city’s approach integrated?”, “Will this provide multiple benefits for the local community?”, “If not, what are the missing elements?” and “What can be improved?” are all questions that could be easily addressed in your story. An URBACT story should touch on these integrated aspects, but it should not let those connections overwhelm the core of the innovation.

In order to avoid a formulaic approach to writing that would spell out the integrated aspect the same way every time, people quoted in a story can help — for example, a transit official describing the benefits a new tram line provides in a previously underserved area.

## Address collaboration

In addition to asking how integrated a given project was, your story should also attempt to address how participatory it was. Collaboration between city leaders and different local stakeholders to co-produce or follow-up the implementation of an integrated strategy or action plan is another key principle in URBACT’s work. Since URBACT Local Groups are required for cities participating in the URBACT networks, it is worth following up on their steps, decisions, actions and expected results from the beginning until the end of the URBACT network collaboration.

Even in the absence of an integrated action plan, the URBACT Local Group’s bottom-up approach involving citizens, NGOs and local stakeholders working with local authorities is still new for many municipalities. It is an example of city leadership and social innovation that can serve as a model for other cities.

In addition, these stakeholders provide a ready source of people to interview in order to get different perspectives on a project. They can also provide balanced critiques of the initiative, so that you do not only have the positive perspective of the protagonist. For example, a neighbourhood leader may have wanted a tram line to make slightly different stops, even if he or she supports the new line overall.

*Tip: Attending an URBACT Local Group’s meeting is a great way to get quotes for your story directly from multiple key sources. It will save time from tracking down different people individually when they might all be in the same room together for a meeting.*



## ‘Humanise’ your story

Policy stories can get boring fast. Always be thinking about how you can “humanise” the story. Here are a few ways to think about writing about people, not just programmes:

- *Find a protagonist.* Is there a person recognised as the driving force behind a project you are writing about? Make that person the story. Along the way, readers will learn plenty about the programme as well. Why did he or she take on this project? What problem is he or she trying to solve? How is he or she trying to solve it? What motivates him or her? Mayors make great protagonists, but so do other city officials, community leaders and citizens with a cause. Just make sure that if you’re giving this person credit for an initiative, he or she deserves it.
- *Write about the impact on people.* Integrated urban development seeks to create economic, social and environmental benefits that citizens should be able to feel. Find the people who are impacted by these policies, programmes and projects and tell their stories.

*Tip: Lower-level officials may feel like they have to defer to their bosses. But if a mid-level civil servant was the real brains behind an initiative, don’t be afraid to give credit where credit is due.*

## Write about challenges and how they were overcome

Cities are very complex, and making positive change in them is hard. Yet that’s exactly the work URBACT is engaged in. Your audience will identify with this struggle. So when writing about integrated urban development, be sure to say what some of the challenges were — and how they were overcome.

## Look for lessons learned

URBACT is about city-to-city learning. So when writing about an action plan, policy or project, one of the most important things to include is what lessons a city has learned along the way. What didn’t work as planned? What were the success factors? What worked better than expected? What was surprising? What would the people behind it do differently next time? What recommendations can they offer for other cities? This is valuable information to include in your story.

## What's not working is also important

“Solutions” stories aren't simply about touting success. They're also about understanding what didn't work and why. Your readers deserve a realistic assessment of the policy, programme or approach you're writing about. That's an important part of how cities learn from each other.

*Tip: Consider writing about “cautionary tales” of solutions that did not work out in the end.*

Example: [Why Helsinki's innovative on-demand bus service failed](#)

## Look for evidence

The kinds of urban projects you'll be writing about are always born with good intentions. They are efforts to make cities more healthy, inclusive and prosperous. The people behind these initiatives are almost always working toward positive change. What's not to love?

Yet readers may not believe a “success story” if there isn't any proof. So if your story is arguing that a city has found an effective strategy to, for example, encourage homeowners to make energy-efficiency improvements, you'd better have some evidence.

There are two kinds of evidence you're likely to use:

- *Anecdotal evidence* uses a story, rather than hard data, to show one case of something. In the above example, you tell the story of how a homeowner in the city was inspired by the city's energy-efficiency strategy to add insulation to his or her house. The anecdote doesn't necessarily prove that the city's strategy is successful. But it shows that it worked with somebody.
- *Data* uses hard numbers to demonstrate larger trends. In the above example, you might cite statistics from the city showing that 300 homeowners took action to insulate their homes, saving them an average of EUR 20 a month on their energy bills and reducing greenhouse-gas emissions by 2 tonnes. It's important that you only cite data you believe to be credible. Whenever possible, use data from independent sources that don't have a stake in the project being viewed as a success.

If the project you are writing about is brand new, it's likely there won't be any evidence to show whether it's a success. In such cases, it's OK to say that it's too early to know whether it will work or not. This may often be the case with your stories because URBACT cities work within a network for 2.5 years, and only at the end of that cycle do they have an action plan ready, proven examples of pilot projects of implementation or transfer of integrated strategies/actions.

In the current post-Brexit political climate of Euroscepticism, evidence may also be an effective tool for pointing out the importance of collaboration within the EU and the efficacy of EU funds and programmes. While you don't want to be too explicit about this, simply providing evidence of a success story that is supported by EU collaboration will speak for itself.

A number of organisations keep data that may be useful for comparing your city with others. Here are some of them.

- [UN-Habitat's Global Urban Observatory](#)
- [Dataforcities.org](#) (World Council on City Data — ISO 37120)
- [The Economist Intelligence Unit: Hot Spots 2025](#)
- [World Bank Urban Development Data Indicators](#)
- [Understanding Global City Rankings](#) (Chicago Council on Global Affairs)
- [EUROSTAT](#) (indicators relating to quality of life in EU cities)
- [Global Human Settlement Layer](#) (tool for assessing human presence on the planet)
- [OECD Regional Statistics and Indicators](#) (database covering 2 000 regions and 281 metropolitan areas in the 34 OECD countries, which include 25 European countries)

In addition, the European Commission's DG Regional and Urban Policy often publishes studies and reports on the State of Play of European Cities at [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/information](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information)

## Pitfalls of solutions stories

Solutions stories sometimes fall flat. Here are some traps to avoid:

- *Being too much of a "cheerleader"*: Writing about solutions still demands a critical eye. Don't gush unless there's solid proof that the programme or project you're writing about is a total success. Your readers deserve the most realistic and honest assessment you are able to give them.
- *Trying to say too much*: The art of storytelling is not telling the reader everything you know. Often, it's knowing what to leave out. Have a clear focus about what your story is trying to accomplish — and what it's not.
- *A one-time, one-place story*: If circumstances are so unique to a specific context that they can't be replicated elsewhere, it's not much of a solution. If a wealthy philanthropist and prominent local citizen agrees to pay for a fancy pedestrian bridge designed by a 'starchitect' because he or she wants to leave a civic legacy, that's not a financing source most cities have readily at their disposal.

### 3. Other narrative formats that work

Solutions stories aren't the only way to tell a story about integrated urban development. Here are a few other “story frames” and narrative formats that work well.

#### ‘Explainer’ stories

An explainer is a story that takes a complex subject and breaks it down for readers in an easy-to-understand way. Done well, these are both popular with readers and can bring in a lot of web traffic via search engines.

Ideally, the subject of the explainer is both topical and something your audience cares about deeply. (For example: “What is the Urban Agenda for the EU?”). Citiscope structures these stories around questions that readers are likely to have — and then answers those questions in simple language. The result often reads like a Frequently Asked Questions page. URBACT has also attempted to break down complex ideas in this fashion.

*Citiscope example: [What is Habitat III?](#)*

*URBACT example: [Triple Helix \(3H\): Where are Europe's cities standing?](#)*

#### ‘City on a hill’ stories

Sometimes one city is the acknowledged leader at something. Think Copenhagen and bicycling. Or Rotterdam and flood control. Or Barcelona and waterfront development. A “city on a hill” story looks at one of these cities and what leaders there did to become a leader on this issue. Then it asks: What can our city learn from their example? There are surely dozens of stories like this within URBACT's various city networks.

*Citiscope example: [How Mysuru became India's 'cleanest' city](#)*

*URBACT example: [How Eindhoven unlocks the collaborative capacity of the city through social service delivery](#)*

## Comparison-city stories

Like a “city on a hill” story, this narrative format aims to inform one city’s leaders by looking at another city’s example. But the emphasis here is not necessarily looking at the very best city at something. Rather, it’s to find another city of roughly the same size with a very similar situation, and see how they do things. For example, two cities of 100 000 people might have a lot to learn from each other on how to boost retail in the city centre. Or two post-industrial cities might have stories to swap about cleaning up polluted land or rivers. Again, many stories like this could come from within URBACT’s various city networks.

## Idea exchange stories

Within URBACT and around Europe, cities are increasingly looking to identify, adapt and reuse policies or programmes that have been successful elsewhere. Learning from others’ mistakes and success factors saves cities time, money and energy in the development and implementation of similar local projects or policies.

The idea behind “Idea Exchange” is to catch cities in the act of learning — and to tell the story of how it happened. How did the idea spread? And most importantly, how was it adapted to suit the political, legal, cultural or economic context of a new city?

These stories aim to inspire city leaders to do more of this kind of city-to-city learning, and also to inform them about the rewards — and challenges — it involves. Ideally, an Idea Exchange story would be built on at least two interviews — one a leader from “City A” (the city that had the idea/practice/policy in the first place), and another from “City B” (the city that is learning/adapting/transferring the practice/idea). The sources — especially from City B — need to be very familiar with the implementation and the lessons learned. If you have room to do additional reporting, it should be from the perspective of City B, as that’s where the act of learning is happening. The narrative form, as always, will vary depending on what you learn from the interviews, as well as any other supporting information and “colour” you have to tell the story. But an Idea Exchange story should always try to answer the following questions:

- What made City A a leader (or at least a noteworthy example) in whatever policy/programme we’re writing about? What are the main results/benefits of this policy at local level?
- How did City B get the idea/practice/policy from city A?
- What problem is City B trying to solve?
- How did City B adapt and implement the idea/practice?
- What changes were necessary to adapt City A’s policy/programme to City B’s context?(i.e., were any changes necessary to fit City B’s politics, legal structure, culture, economy, geography, etc.?)
- What’s working? What’s not working?
- When relevant, what were the results at local level after adapting the practice/policy in City B?
- Did City A actively help City B to learn? How? (i.e., through site visits, conversations, sharing written materials or software code, etc.)

- What did both cities learn through this exchange? What comes next?

Idea exchange stories take place almost daily within URBACT networks but few are captured and communicated as such to a wider audience. One of the roles of URBACT stakeholders is to find these stories and illustrate the added value, results and benefits of cooperation amongst cities.

Example: [Detroit looks to Berlin to reclaim its title of ‘Techno City’](#)

## ‘Listacles’

Listacles were made for the internet. The term is slang for an “article made up of a list”. And you’ve probably seen a million of these: “Seven ways to eat healthier”. “Ten cat videos that will keep you laughing all weekend”.

Listacles have gotten a bad name due to the fluffy subject matter that is often associated with them. However, it’s possible to write one that is extremely informative and substantive. (See: [“Five things mayors want to see in a Paris climate agreement.”](#)) And the format remains popular with busy readers who are drowning in too much information: it makes a clear promise to deliver a finite amount of information, in small chunks.

*Tip: Headed to a conference or meeting? Your audience probably does not want to read a long account of who said what. Instead, synthesize your top “takeaways”. Here is a great example of this from Devex: <https://www.devex.com/news/4-growth-trends-in-impact-investing-89311>*

## Interviews / Q&As

You can make a good story from one interview — sometimes. There are two things you need to keep in mind.

First, you need to interview the right person: It should be a person who is positioned to speak with authority on the subject. Mayors make good interviewees, but so does anyone leading an innovative urban project with lessons to share.

Second, the person you interviewed has to say something your readers will find insightful or meaningful. That may

*Tip: Conduct interviews verbally (in person or over voice communication) rather than e-mail, if possible. Interviewees are more dynamic when speaking off the cuff rather than writing considered responses. You can always edit what the person says to make it read clearly — just acknowledge that the interview was edited.*

sound obvious, but some politicians especially are good at speaking without actually *saying* anything.

Some interviews can easily be told as Q&As — the interview must be coherent and follow a clear narrative arc. If you choose this structure, you'll want to write a short introduction to the topic and the person you interviewed. After that, the story is essentially structured around your questions and the person's answers to those questions. Q&As always require some editing for length and clarity — although be careful to never add words the person did not say.

*Example: [What's a 'biophilic city'? Let Timothy Beatley explain](#)*

Other interviews are better told as stories in your “voice”, but using many quotes from the interview. You may want to take this approach if the person you interviewed had a few scattered meaningful things to say but the full interview would be more than anyone would care to read. In other cases, you might choose this approach because readers will require a lot of background and context in order to understand what the person you interviewed is saying.

*Example: [Why Pope Francis keeps reaching out to mayors](#)*

## Roundtables

Why do a Q&A with just one person when you can get input from many people? Consider prompting a group of people with a question and make your “story” a compilation of their answers. Spread this on social media to get a wider conversation going. *The Nature of Cities* [does a really nice job at this](#). Another example is Citiscope's [Question of the Day series from Habitat III](#).

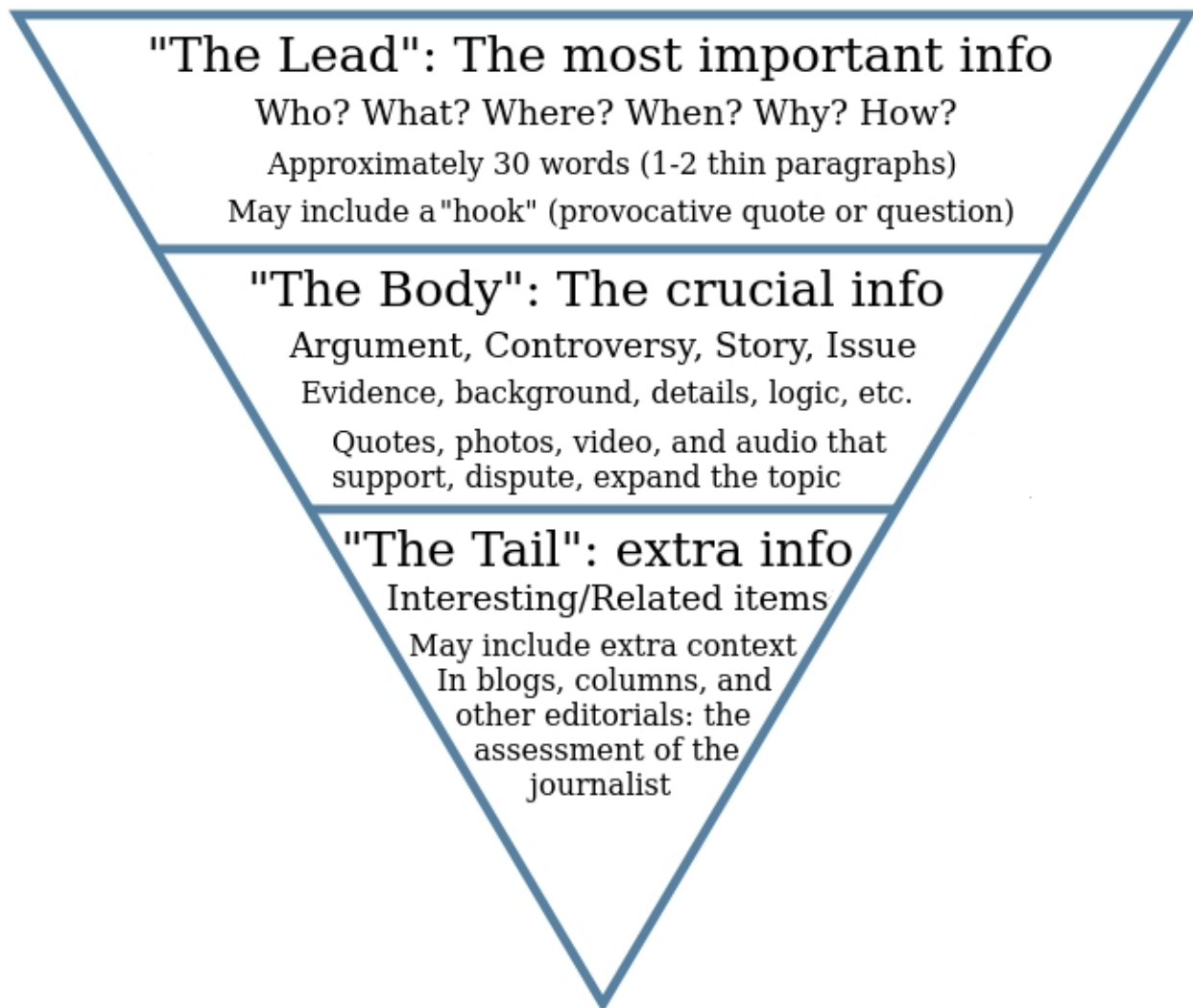


## 4. General writing tips

Whether you already know these tricks or not, here are some strategies to always keep in mind when you write.

### Inverted pyramid

The most basic way to structure a news-style article is through what's called the inverted pyramid. Start with the lead, which answers the six standard questions described in section 1. Then it moves into the body that provides more detail to flesh out the particulars of the lead. Finally, it concludes with the tail, which wraps up the story with interesting context.





However, URBACT articles are not necessarily striving to emulate a newspaper, so while you can use the inverted pyramid as a structure to guide your writing, don't feel like it is the only way to tell your story. In fact, other methods might be preferable.

## Chapeau VS nut graph

Remember the one-paragraph summary from section 1? Don't throw it away! Stories need a summary that will clue in readers as to the main points. This summary serves both to keep readers oriented about the overall purpose of the story and to draw them in further — the summary should intrigue them, so that they want to read the rest of the piece.

There are two ways of employing such a summary. One way is through a “chapeau”, a summary that comes at the very beginning of an article, oftentimes set apart from the rest of the text (usually 3 lines long and not more than 10 lines). This approach is common in academic and legal settings. Think an abstract before an academic article, or a summary at the head of a treaty.

Another way is through a “nut graph”, which does not open the story, but rather comes a few paragraphs in. If you have successfully humanised your story (see section 4), then you hopefully have a strong character. That person could lead the story (Zoom In).

For example, “Jane Smith used to travel 75 minutes by two buses in order to reach her job as a cleaning lady in downtown Sheffield. But the newly opened Tramway Line D has reduced her commute to a mere 20 minutes. That allows her more time to spend with her kids, where she takes them to the popular park that runs alongside the new tramway, which opened last year.”

After a few paragraphs of this kind of material, including quotes from Jane Smith and description of the park and the shiny new tramway, you can provide the nut graph that will summarise the point of the story (Zoom Out).

With this approach, the character-driven story will draw in the reader, who will then learn the necessary info through the nut graph.

See also the example of [People power behind Mexico City's new constitution](#)

## First Sentences

The blank page can be intimidating and sometimes the hardest part about writing is just getting the first sentence out. If you have that problem, consider skipping the first sentence and going straight to the nut graph, chapeau, or body of the article – then come back to the first sentence. By then, you might have found some inspiration.

As for what the first sentence should do, it's less important than the headline (see below), so it doesn't have to grab the reader's attention at all costs as much as begin to set the scene. Oftentimes, the opening salvo requires two sentences, almost like a joke – one to set up an idea, the other to deliver the punchline.

A few tips:

- Do you have a protagonist? Introduce him or her from the outset:  
*“As cars and taxis whizzed by on Second Avenue, Joan Clos hunched over a curb.”*  
[For a [profile of Joan Clos](#)]
- Alternatively, if the focus is really a specific city or neighbourhood, you can describe the place in general terms:  
*“Kibera has long been the African poster child of slums, a household name that conjures images of overcrowded shacks, poor sanitation, and grinding poverty.”*  
[For a feature on [slum upgrading in Kibera](#)]
- Or describe a slice of life in very specific terms, especially if you reported on the ground:  
*“On a recent weekday night in the town gazebo here, a half-dozen teenage boys trot out a speaker and begin blasting bass-heavy hip-hop as they try out fresh breakdancing moves in the shadow of an ornate Neo-Gothic cathedral.”*  
[For an article [reporting from Cuenca, Ecuador](#)]
- Introduce the main idea with a pivot, i.e. “you might think x, but actually y”:  
*“When you think about people drafting a constitution, it might conjure a bunch of white statesmen in powdered wigs. Francisco Fontano Patán doesn't fit that description.”*  
[For the story of [Mexico City's new constitution](#)]
- Condense the nut graph into one sentence:  
*“From the Syrian civil war to post-earthquake Haiti, countries around the world are in need of rebuilding — a process planners believe must start with sound land-use decisions to avoid planting the seeds of future conflicts.”*  
[For a news article about the [Global Alliance for Urban Crises](#)]
- Make a then and now comparison:  
*“More than 250 years ago, France proved instrumental in delivering a political revolution to what became the United States of America. Now, the European country hopes to revolutionize U.S. cities through a crowdsourced effort prepared by the French-American Foundation.”*  
[For an article [summarizing a report](#)]
- Start at the beginning of the chain of events that tell your story:  
*“In 2009, a submarine fiber optic cable landed on the beaches of Mombassa, about 500 kilometers (310 miles) east of here.”*  
[For a feature on the [high-tech industry in Nairobi](#)]
- Ask a question:  
*“What does Grenada, a speck of an island that can be circumnavigated in a day, have in common with a continental-size country such as Brazil?”*  
[On the [role of the Caribbean in Latin American policy discussions](#)]

## Headlines

Headline writing is an art. Thanks to Google, it's also partially a science. And thanks to Facebook, there are some new no-no's.

In the digital context, the key thing to remember is this: Your readers are scanning thousands of headlines a day. They're making lightning-fast decisions about what is worth their time to click on. On many websites or in social media feeds, your headline will be seen without any photo or context to help "sell" the story.

Above all, your headline should deliver a clear and accurate statement of the promise you are making to the reader. Resist the urge to be clever. You don't want to make your readers work too hard to 'get it'. If your headline doesn't instantly make sense, it will be skipped.

A few tips:

- If you've really thought through the story you're trying to tell, writing a headline should be easy. For example, if you've set out to write a story about lessons Turin learned while revitalising an old industrial area, then — voilà! — "Lessons Turin learned while revitalising an old industrial area" makes a perfectly good headline.
- A number can help a headline, particularly if your story is a "listicle". For example: "Six ways to get the community engaged in your project". The number makes a clear promise about what the reader can expect.
- Words like "Why", "How", and "What" can help start a headline. For example: "Why London's traffic congestion is worse than ever" or "How Paris is reducing air pollution" or "What Madrid learned by closing a street to traffic". These words help make a clear promise — that the story you are about to read has answers.

Search engine optimisation. Sometimes, using specific keywords that people are searching for will help you with search results. For example, "Why Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo thinks cities can deliver on climate change" offers a few specific keywords ("Anne Hidalgo and climate change") that people might reasonably be searching the internet for. (As opposed to "Why this big-city mayor thinks cities can deliver on global warming".) Don't overdo it on the keywords, though. Loading up a headline with lots of keywords might make it attractive to Google but it's more important that it be clear and accurate to humans.

Avoid 'clickbait'. We've all seen headlines like this: "You'll never believe what happened in Rome this weekend". Or: "He had three drinks and then THIS happened". These kinds of headlines make a vague promise, and rarely deliver. That's why Facebook is cracking down on them. Stories with headlines like these no longer surface in our news feeds as much as they used to.



Clever headlines work in print, but not online

For more on how to write good headlines, see this post on Poynter.com: [“10 questions to help you write better headlines”](#).

## Show, don't tell

Use actions, motions and dialogue to make a point. Paint a picture.

Avoid *telling*: “Joan Clos has an eye for urban detail.”

Instead, *show* Joan Clos' eye for urban detail in action:

*“As cars and taxis whizzed by on Second Avenue, Joan Clos hunched over a curb. He reached out to touch the steel coating on the curb's concrete corner, something you see on sidewalks all over Manhattan. “If you put in this metallic protection, it's a very good investment,” Clos said, ignoring the loud traffic as his shock of silver hair nearly scraped the sidewalk. “You protect the stone and it can last for much more time.”*

## Make the words ‘for example’ your best friend

Stories about policy and urban management can become very abstract. To help readers understand what a change in policy or strategy really means, you need to bring examples.

For example:

*“Now, UN-Habitat is thinking more at a city scale. The agency under Clos works almost like a consulting firm to assemble a multidisciplinary team that aims to shore up a city's overall urban management.*

*For example, Kisumu County, Kenya's third largest urban area, came to UN-Habitat with a request for assistance on waste management. Clos used it as an excuse to help the county prepare a whole new urban plan. In the city of Nacala, Mozambique, the agency is pushing the municipal government to capture more revenue from its bustling port, planning entirely new neighborhoods and drafting new regulations for buildings and streets.”*

## Beware of acronyms

Just because most reports start with a three-page glossary of “acronyms used in this report” does not mean you should use them. Acronyms destroy writing. And they are easy to avoid. If

writing about the Greater London Authority, don't automatically put (GLA) in parentheses and use GLA on future references. Depending on the context, you can also refer back to "the authority", "local officials", or the name of the actual person at the Greater London Authority who is doing the work.

## Avoid jargon

Words like "sustainability", "resilience", and "smart city" can be hard to avoid. And in some contexts they make total sense. But before you use them, ask yourself if buzzwords like these are really the most precise way of describing what you're talking about. For example, if you're writing about a project that uses sensors to collect data on the urban environment, call it what it is: a data-collection effort. Using the term "smart city" actually blurs the reader's understanding.

*Tip: Sometimes jargon is unavoidable, but if you use a buzzword, you may want to define it for readers.*

## Vary sentence structure

It's always a good idea to write short sentences. Especially when English is a second language for many. Sometimes it is inevitable that you will have to write longer sentences like this one here, when you have numerous ideas that must stay together, for example, or if you need to mention models of programmes in multiple cities such as Paris, Prague and Ljubljana. But be careful. Put two or three long sentences together and it puts readers to sleep!

Similarly, avoid long complex sentences whenever possible. Almost any long sentence can be broken up into shorter sentences.

## Avoid "passive voice" & use "active voice"

Be clear about who is taking action!

Here's an example of a sentence to avoid using passive voice: "The policy was passed by the council."

Here's how to make it active: "The council passed the policy."

## Use the imperative

Compel your reader to action. Instead of the suggestive "one might look at the following Copenhagen city council ordinance when planning a bicycle action plan", be more direct. "Is your city mulling over a new bicycle action plan? Look at what Copenhagen city council did last

month with its new ordinance.” There are three examples of the imperative in this paragraph alone! (“Use”, “compel”, “be”.)



## 5. Special considerations for the web

Every one of your readers shares one thing in common: They're blasted every day with a firehose of information coming through screens large and small. Here are a few tips for getting — and keeping — their attention.

### Web users don't read. They scan.

The Nielsen Norman Group, a web user-experience consultancy studied how people read different kinds of web pages. Below are three “heatmaps” from their “eyetracking” study:



Here's a few takeaways:

- *Get to the point quickly.* Beyond the third paragraph, you'll lose your chance to convince readers to stay with the story.
- *Break up copy into sections.* Readers never want to see a “wall of text” on their screens. Use subheadings to break up pieces that run longer than 400 words.
- *Break up copy.* Use photos and graphics.
- *Use bullet points.* When you have several clear points that can be stated quickly, don't bury them in paragraphs that readers may skim past or ignore.

## Most readers come in the “side door”

The days of bookmarking a website’s home page and returning there frequently are mostly over. Most readers are likely to discover your story through a Google search, social media or email. That means every story has the chance to make a first impression — and hopefully hook readers to come back for more.

- Don’t assume every reader knows what URBACT or its various lines of work are all about — offer enough context that someone encountering it for the first time can follow along.
- Give readers ways to discover other content they may care about. Include links to subscribe to URBACT’s email newsletter or social media feeds.
- “Interstitial links” to related stories can also be helpful for a reader who wants to know more on the subject. But make sure that the text appearing in the body of your story is not the URL, rather the actual title of the linked page or some other description that is self-explanatory. See below:



*Example of an interstitial link*

## Hyperlinks help

Interstitial links are great for redirecting readers to other pages within your website. But oftentimes you want to direct readers to a report or acknowledge an organisation that plays an instrumental role in your story. Web traffic is currency on the Internet, so use hyperlinks judiciously. Include too many and you will send your readers away from your site, but don’t skip out on obvious links to important pages that readers will want to see if they seek more information on the topic.

- Hyperlink to acknowledge organisations and initiatives: “*Fortaleza is tackling the issue with the help of [Vital Strategies](#), a New York-based NGO, and financial support from*



*Bloomberg Philanthropies, which is funding a five-year effort to prevent traffic fatalities called the [Initiative for Global Road Safety](#).*

- Hyperlink to connect readers with a document: *“Several of the city’s projects are featured in the National Association of City Transportation Officials’ [Global Street Design Guide](#).”*
- Hyperlink to attribute a statistic to a source: *“The global market for motorcycles was forecast to expand 7.2 percent this past year, [according to market researcher Freedonia Group](#).”*
- Hyperlink to connect readers to URBACT networks and outputs: *The [URBACT ARRIVAL CITIES network](#) working on migration flows at the local level.*

## Photos matter

A compelling image is often what makes one story pop out in our many feeds and flows of information. It’s especially important on social media. Don’t waste hours writing the perfect story only to use a boring photo to illustrate it.

As a rule of thumb, people make photos interesting. A park with children playing is more interesting than an empty park. A retail corridor filled with shoppers at midday is more interesting than an empty street at dawn. An individual person in the frame can help provide perspective for photographs of large infrastructure like a bridge or a port.

But people aren’t the only way to make a photo interesting. Citiscope’s most-read story ever, about a river cleanup in Manila, went viral on Facebook because it had shocking before-and-after photos to go along with it — even though there were no people in the shots. It was a good story, but the photos (below) are what sold it.



*Photos sell the story!*

The length of the story will define the number of photos. Above all, avoid a wall of text, which is to say, when scrolling through the article, there should not be moments where the reader can only see text on the screen.

In any case, always start your story with a header image or catchy photograph next or above your introduction.

Here are links to some sites and search engines that can help find free photographs that you may be able to use under a creative commons license or under specific terms of use that you must follow. In most cases, government website photos are open source, but it is best to double check before publishing.

- Flickr [creative commons search](#)
- Creative commons [search engine](#)
- [Wikimedia Commons](#)
- [Pixabay](#)
- [UN Photo Library](#) (note [terms of use](#))
- [UN-Habitat](#) and [UN-Habitat Flickr feed](#)

## Use your analytics

Tools such as Google Analytics offer tons of useful information to guide your work. Pay close attention to what kinds of stories URBACT users are reading — and what they're not. Don't just look at pageviews. Also look at the amount of time readers spent on the page — that's a

measure for how long the content kept readers engaged. Also look at the pages per session. That gives an indication of whether readers are finding other things on URBACT to read after they're done.

## An article for the URBACT website or the URBACT blog? What's the difference?

The URBACT website is the institutional voice of URBACT, its content mostly comes out from the URBACT networks, cities and events. All content on the URBACT website should be related to the work of URBACT. It is organised around 4 thematic pages - environment, economy, governance, inclusion - and gathers all contributions under the theme 'integrated urban development'.

The URBACT blog is designed as a source of inspiration and as the voice for European cities and urban planner community. The tone is personal and the solutions presented may or may not be directly connected to an URBACT project or city.

	<b>URBACT Website</b>	<b>URBACT Blog</b>
<b>Tone :</b>	Institutional	Personal, opinionated
<b>Length of article:</b>	ca. 1 500 words	ca. 750 words
<b>Links with URBACT:</b>	Compulsory content link with URBACT projects and cities	Possibility of external contributions Possibility of Photo Stories, Twitter stories etc..
<b>Categories:</b>	Environment Economy Inclusion Governance Integrated urban development	Inspiration and solutions from cities Ideas, Opinions and theories Urban Explorers European Urban and Regional Policies

If you have any doubts about the URBACT website or blog contact the URBACT Secretariat (as indicated at the end of this guide).

## 6. Technical and style guidance

### ✓ Spelling

Spell in British English (rather than American English). For example, use the *-is- spelling* when you have a word that can be written with *-is-/-iz- spelling* (i.e. capitalisation vs capitalization) as described by the Oxford Dictionary [here](#).

### ✓ Language Term Writing

Attention needs to be paid to the terms of use and for there to be consistency.

- **URBACT** should always be written in **capital letters**.
- **Network Names**

When referring to URBACT networks make sure you respect their exact spelling and writing style and make reference to URBACT as follows:

BoostInno  
CityCentreDoctor  
CityMobilNet  
MAPS  
sub>urban  
AGRI-URBAN  
CREATIVE SPIRITS  
GEN-Y City  
In Focus  
INTERACTIVE CITIES  
Procure  
RetailLink  
TechTown  
Freight TAILS  
2<sup>nd</sup> Chance  
REFILL  
SMARTImpact  
ARRIVAL CITIES  
CHANGE!  
JobTown2  
RESILIENT EUROPE  
VITAL CITIES

When referring to a network it should always be in the format:

URBACT [NAME] Network  
URBACT REFILL Network

- **Title Positions**

**Mayor-** When referring the mayor by name, mayor needs to be capitalised.

Mayor Bloomberg

When just simply referring to the mayor without naming him or her, there is no capitalisation.

The mayor was thoroughly involved in the URBACT Local Group.

When using other official job titles in reference to someone, please capitalise the first letters of the title.

Elaine Williams, Senior Housing Strategy Officer

- **Writing City, Country names**

In article the first time the city is mentioned the two letter code of the country must be used next to it in parenthesis.

Milan (IT)  
Paris (FR)

The full list of country codes is provided here:

<http://publications.europa.eu/code/pdf/370000en.htm>

If the city name is written again, there is no need to add the country code if it has already been introduced.

## ✓ Acronyms

The following list of acronyms is widely used in the URBACT Community. You will encounter these words in most of the project outputs, factsheets as well as when interviewing city partners. Use the whole meaning/explanation rather than the acronym itself.

APN	Action Planning Network
CLLD	Community Local Led Development
EC	European Commission
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
IN	Implementation Network
ITI	Integrated Territorial Investment
IAP	Integrated Action Plan
LE	Lead Expert
LP	Lead Partner
MA	Managing Authority
NUP	National URBACT Point
OP	Operational Programme
PE	Programme Expert
PP	Project Partner
RFSC	Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities
TE	Thematic Expert
TN	Transfer Network
UDN	Urban Development Network
ULG	URBACT Local Group
US	URBACT Secretariat or JTS Joint Technical Secretariat

For other acronyms, spell it out the first time it is used, with the short version in brackets e.g. massive open online course (MOOC). If the abbreviation or acronym is universally well-known, there is no need to spell it out e.g. NATO, PDF

## ✓ Citation

There should not be much citation usage but in case it is needed use Harvard Citation Style. A brief guide can be accessed [here](#). Citations should remain in the text into brackets.

## ✓ Using Quotes

It is important to be consistent when using quotes. To start with, use double quotation marks when directly quoting someone. Before inserting double quotations when directly quoting an individual there should be a comma.

For example, Frederique Calvanus recalls, “The consultation organised by the city of Veria to analyse inhabitants’ satisfaction, or dissatisfaction, with their old buildings compared to others in modern builds was particularly inspiring.”

Please observe all capitalisations of words when quoting such as capitalising the first word when it is a complete sentence and do not capitalise when it is a fragment or a partial sentence.

Frederique Calvanus recalls, “**The** consultation organised by the city of Veria to analyse inhabitants’ satisfaction, or dissatisfaction, with their old buildings compared to others in modern builds was particularly inspiring.”

“For example,” explains Elaine Williams, “past schemes under the Community Energy Savings Programme involved citizens once a project had already been decided, and citizens had little choice in what renovation work was to be undertaken.”

Single quotes are used for emphasis and within a quote.

“When I say ‘immediately’, I mean some time before August,” said the manager.

## ✓ Authors

Authors should be presented at the end of the article, ideally with a picture, their first names and surnames and roles in URBACT/other organisations. The presentation can include links to their Twitter and LinkedIn accounts. Moreover:

*Programme Experts* should be called with their first name/last name followed by URBACT Programme Experts

*NUP* should be called with their first name/last name followed by National URBACT Point for XXXXX (country)

## ✓ Dates

The most common used format within Europe is Day Month Year. For example: “On 22 May 2014, the aliens landed in Berlin”

Never precede the date with ‘the’.



## ✓ Numbers

You should always use figures for statistics (3 new officials were appointed in 2002, 6 in 2003 and ...), for votes (12 delegations were in favour, 7 against, and 6 abstained), for ranges denoted by a hyphen (see Ranges, 4.12-4.13), and for serial numbers (Chapter 5, Article 9, Item 4) unless you are quoting a source that does otherwise (Part One of the EEC Treaty).

Otherwise, when writing number in sentences, 0-9 should be spelt out in words, figures are used from 10 onwards.

For example: Five cities are involved in the network; the programme has helped over 500 cities

If a sentence includes a mixture of numbers above and below 10, use figures for easier comparison by the reader.

For example: Network A has 10 partner cities, while network B has 5.

Percentage is written: 10%

Numbers are written: 10 000 (space to indicate thousands, dot before cents)

Euros is written: EUR 500 or EUR 500 000 but with millions, billions, trillions it is better to use EUR 55 million

Dollars is: US\$ 500

Use a 'protected space' [Shift + CTRL + Space in Word] so that dates or numbers are not cut between two lines.

Times: in principle use the 24-hour clock, but 12-hour clock use is also acceptable, especially if addressing mainly a UK audience. Make sure use is consistent throughout the text – do not use both. The 12-hour clock has a full stop between hours and minutes, and uses am/pm to indicate morning or afternoon. The 24-hour clock uses a colon between hours and minutes, and omits am/pm.

For example:

- the event starts at 9am and ends at 3.30pm
- the event runs from 9:00 until 15:30

- **More information**

For more information on editing guidelines please consult the [English Style Guide, A handbook for authors and translators in the European Commission, produced by the European Commission](#) (updated December 2016).



## 7. How to publish your article on the URBACT website or the blog?

1. If you are a **National URBACT Point or representative of an URBACT network (Communication Officer, Expert)** you can publish your article directly on the pages you are managing. Before you do so, make sure you have read the following sections related to formatting, final checklist, and to whom you should send your articles.

2. If you are a **National URBACT Point (who wish to write in English), Programme Expert, or network representative** wanting to contribute to the general parts (thematic pages) of URBACT website or to the blog, you need to submit your articles to the URBACT Secretariat. To accelerate the process of validation and publication, here is some advice to take into account:

### ✓ Formatting:

- Name your file after the title of the article and include the name of the writer
- Include all hyperlinks under brackets after the words it is referring to, for instance : URBACT (www.urbact.eu).
- Include as many relevant hyperlinks as you can
- Include a list of TAGS and TOPICS you think most relevant at the end of the article
- Include a list of twitter accounts the article can/should be sent to at the end of the article
- Include an introduction (short)
- Do not include academic references lists! If you want to refer to an academic book or to an academic figure, find the right webpage the article should be linked to. URBACT WILL NOT include an academic reference list in the article
- If you do not already have a profile on the URBACT Website/URBACT Blog, also submit a picture of yourself and a short bio that can constitute your profile as contributor
- PHOTOS: always attach photos, logos, relevant material to the article. Do not include photos in a word document but send them separately, in good quality, if necessary via a free online software such as wetransfer. Photos should be named with the title of the photo, its position in the article (1,2,3,4 etc) and the name of the photographers (for the credit).

## ✓ Final check list

<b>URBACT Website and Blog Submission Check List</b>	<b>✓</b>
Have I informed the relevant person at URBACT that I would submit an article this month and agreed with him/her on the content of the article?	
Does my article correspond to the criteria for the URBACT website/blog?	
Does my article have a catchy title?	
Does my article have a catchy introduction?	
Does my article respect the guidelines provided by URBACT?	
Is the article divided in short parts, introduced by subtitles and an attractive first sentence?	
Does the article have a conclusion?	
Have I included all important hyperlinks?	
Is my file named correctly? (i.e. title of the article, name of the writer)	
Have I submitted my photo and bio for the profile?	
Do I have supporting photos for my article? Is the location of each photo mentioned in the article (with the sentence: 'Photo 1: title, name of photographer, if needed link to the source)	
Are the photo files of good enough quality? Are they named properly? (i.e. Photo1,2,3, title of the photo, location in the article name of the photographer)	
Do I mention the TAGs	
Do I mention the main topics the article refers to?	
Do I mention which part of the website/ blog I see my article fitting to?	
Does my article include academic references? If yes, how can I turn them into hyperlinks?	
Do I know who to send my article to?	
Do I know how to attach the photos if they are heavy files?	
Have I included @twitter and linkedin accounts of people and organisations for the URBACT Secretariat to share the article	

## ✓ Who should you send your article to?

If your article is dedicated to the URBACT blog or the general parts of the URBACT website and has been commissioned:

- **NUP** (only for articles written in English) to Jenny Koutsomarkou. The URBACT editorial line is carefully planned on a trimestral basis. You need to submit your articles ideas as follows:
  - by 15 December to be included in January - March planning
  - by 15 March for April – June
  - by 15 June for July - September
  - by 15 September for October - December.
- **Programme Experts** to Ségolène Pruvot and Simina Lazar. The calendar for submission of the individual editorial plans is as follows:
  - by 15 December for January - March
  - by 15 March for April – June
  - by 15 June for July - September
  - by 15 September for October - December.

The finalised articles need to be sent by the 15 of each month for publication until the 30.

- **Lead Experts, Network Communication Officers** – to the Programme Expert following your network. You can propose an article to the programme expert or they can ask you for one, suggest one and then decide on a submission date together.
- **Other contributors:** to the person who has asked for your contribution or answered positively to your contribution proposal. This person will also agree on a publication date together with you.

If your article is dedicated to an URBACT Network page: discuss with the communication officer of the respective network.

The editorial planning can be flexible and adjusted only in cases of unexpected events or circumstances, major changes and priorities in Europe and in the world.