



RPS

Rapid Planning Studio

CONCEPT NOTE

FEBRUARY 2023

ABOUT RPS

The Rapid Planning Studio (RPS) simulates a full planning process in a fast-paced, collaborative format.

DEFINITION

The RPS is a 12-week 'rapid' planning process aimed to quickly harness the knowledge of city stakeholders and identify actionable outcomes. It focuses on essential strategic elements to direct future development and investment to achieve sustainable outcomes. Based on UN-Habitat principles for sustainability, it integrates three basic pillars of sustainable development: urban legislation, urban finance and economy, and urban planning and design. Critically, the RPS includes a 1-2 week workshop to strengthen planning capacity at the local level and provide an evidence-based planning methodology and an actionable road map to manage and steward rapid urban growth.

The RPS focuses on sustainable urban development and discusses approaches to more sustainable urban forms, such as compact cities, walkable streets and open spaces, high forms of density and mixed-use developments.

RPS IS A UNIQUELY
COLLABORATIVE,
EVIDENCE-BASED
PLANNING PROCESS
RESULTING IN A **STRATEGIC
SPATIAL PLAN**

RATIONALE & NEED

Cities and municipalities in rapidly urbanizing countries often do not have adequate resources to plan strategically in advance and at scale for population growth. Cities do not have capacity to prioritise sustainable projects or proactively steward investment. This can result in unsustainable urban growth leaving governance structures unable to respond with adequate public infrastructure and services.

Still, cities will continue to grow. In the long-term, overall efficiency of settlements is reduced and sustainable city development



hindered, resulting in heightened social, economic and environmental challenges. These can accrue by means of environmental abuse, negative social and public health outcomes, higher demand for mobility and energy, inadequate public space and infrastructure services, escalating sprawl and slums, economic opportunity losses, and repeated lapses on preserving and promoting cultural diversity. Thus, there is demand for improving the capabilities of cities in strategic urban planning.

OBJECTIVES

1. Assist cities to quickly define a strategic spatial strategy to guide sustainable investment, whether through extraction from an existing planning framework (complement) or by providing a basis for future planning processes (steward).
2. Build local capacity and share knowledge of best practice sustainable urban development.
3. Undertake an evidence-based process that lead to well-informed political decisions.

WHO IS INVOLVED

RPS is a collaborative effort *with* cities that need enhanced competencies in urban planning in the short-term or on a trial basis. Inclusion of national government representatives and active participation from local and/or international academic experts has proven to be a valuable addition.

Partners

- Technical and senior staff from a city's Planning Department

Stakeholders

- Representatives from other municipal technical departments
- Relevant national ministry representatives
- Local communities, leaders and interest groups
- Academia

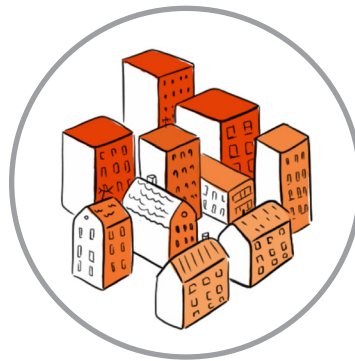
Primary Audience

- Financiers, donors, key high-level decision makers

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

RPS is underpinned by UN-Habitat's 5 urban development objectives for sustainable, inclusive urban growth. These directly align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the New Urban Agenda.

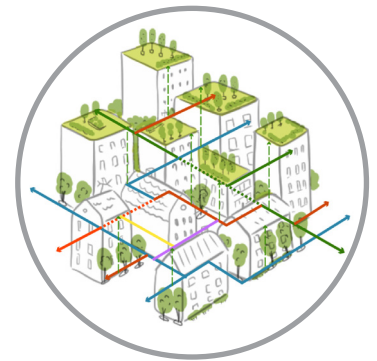
COMPACT CITY



Residents of the Compact City enjoy a highly efficient urban form characterized by walkable distances (15 minutes), and efficient accessibility to services and infrastructure. A highly walkable environment encourages walking and cycling, provides opportunities for people to interact and local businesses to emerge. Efficient public transport systems provide better accessibility for all, bringing multiple economic and environmental benefits. A Compact City is safe, comfortable and attractive for all residents.

- SDG Alignment: 2.4, 6.6, 11.2, 11.3, 11.6, 11.7, 15.1, 16.1
- New Urban Agenda: 34, 36, 37, 39, 43, 62, 67, 68, 69, 70

CONNECTED CITY



Residents of the Connected City leverage opportunities to thrive from a highly permeable, safe and pleasant street network where walking and cycling infrastructure is prioritised. This promotes walkable distances to key services, a variety of route options available and convenient travel between destinations and public transport secured. The Connected City is also integrated with blue and green grids to support the functionality of the ecosystem and recreation amenity.

- SDG Alignment: 3.6, 4.A, 9.1, 11.2, 11.6, 11.7, 16.1
- New Urban Agenda: 34, 36, 37, 39, 54, 62, 67

INCLUSIVE CITY



The residents of the Inclusive City have equitable access to the city, to services, employment, public space, public transportation and any other opportunity provided. The urban environment supports physical, economic, cultural and social needs of all people and abilities, of all background and income level. Public spaces of the Inclusive City are welcoming to all the visitors and housing is affordable to attract a diverse range of residents.

- SDG Alignment: 5.1, 6.1, 10.3, 11.1, 11.2, 11.7, 16.1
- New Urban Agenda: 25, 26, 27, 31, 32, 33, 34, 36, 37, 39, 40, 43, 62

VIBRANT CITY



Residents of the Vibrant City have access to a diversity of activities, urban services and economic opportunities. Vibrant urban environments forms a place identity, facilitates social interaction, physical and learning activities and attracts people to live, work and spend time in a vibrant neighbourhood. Vibrant city provides an enabling environment for social, cultural, and economic capital, where urban character is emphasized, fostering a sense of local identity.

- SDG Alignment: 6.6, 8.3, 8.9, 11.2, 11.7, 16.1
- New Urban Agenda: 26, 27, 34, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 45, 53, 62, 68

RESILIENT CITY



Residents of the Resilient City are secure from immediate and chronic stresses within urban systems, while also being prepared for future challenges. The Resilient City provides continuous functionality of services and systems that are able to withstand potential crises and facilitate the recovery process. In addition to building adaptation to a rapidly changing world, resilient economic and urban forms are aligned with community resilience and well-being.

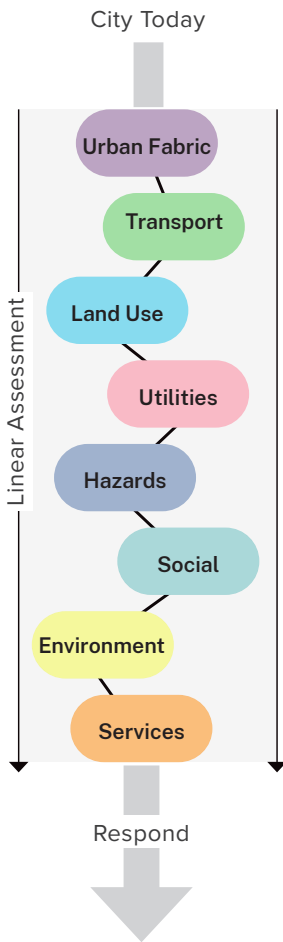
- SDG Alignment: 1.5, 2.4, 3.6, 6.1, 6.3, 6.6, 7.3, 9.1, 11.2.2, 12.5, 13.1, 15.1
- New Urban Agenda: 25, 31, 32, 34, 36-39, 43, 44, 62, 65, 67-70, 73, 77

RPS APPROACH

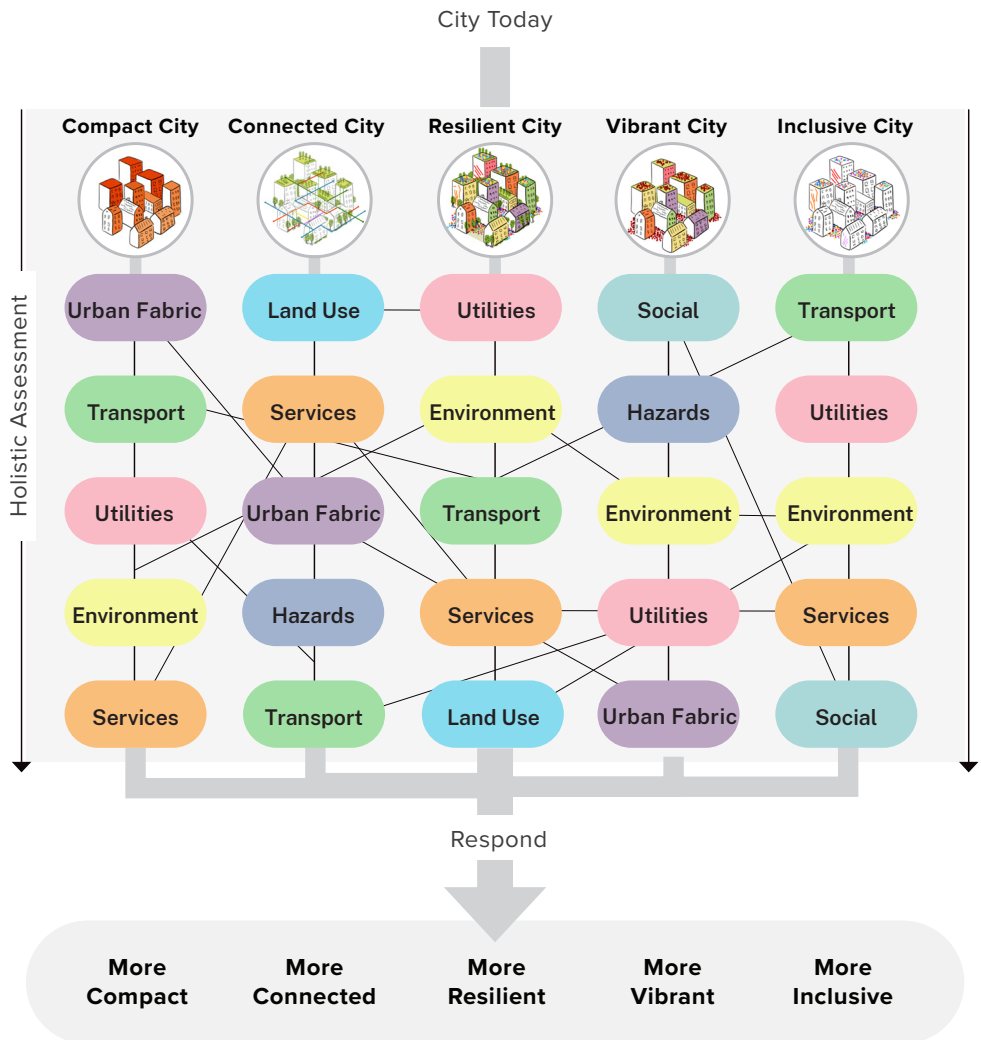
FROM THIS

TO THIS

'Siloed' Assessment



'Holistic' Spatial Assessment



BENEFITS

The myriad benefits of the RPS approach are as follows:

- Enhance strategic urban planning capacity of municipal governments;
- Imbued UN-Habitat's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and New Urban Agenda (NUA) into local planning processes;
- Entry point to identify quick wins, priority projects and strategic projects within a sustainable urban development framework;
- Steward capital investment towards sustainable outcomes;
- Quick response to rapid growth challenges focusing on thematic areas (migration, hazard mitigation, climate change, mobility etc.);
- Enhanced local capacity on best practice urban planning; harnessed and shared participants' knowledge of urban development and planning;
- Effective way to link capital investment with spatial planning;
- Evidence-based, un-siloed approach to urban planning;
- Strategic baseline for initiating a future participatory process if required;
- Strategic direction to inform initiation or review of masterplanning and land use planning process; and
- Baseline for utilising additional UN-Habitat tools, including: Our City Plans, The Spatial Development Framework and Capital Investment Planning (CIP).

PROCESS SUMMARY

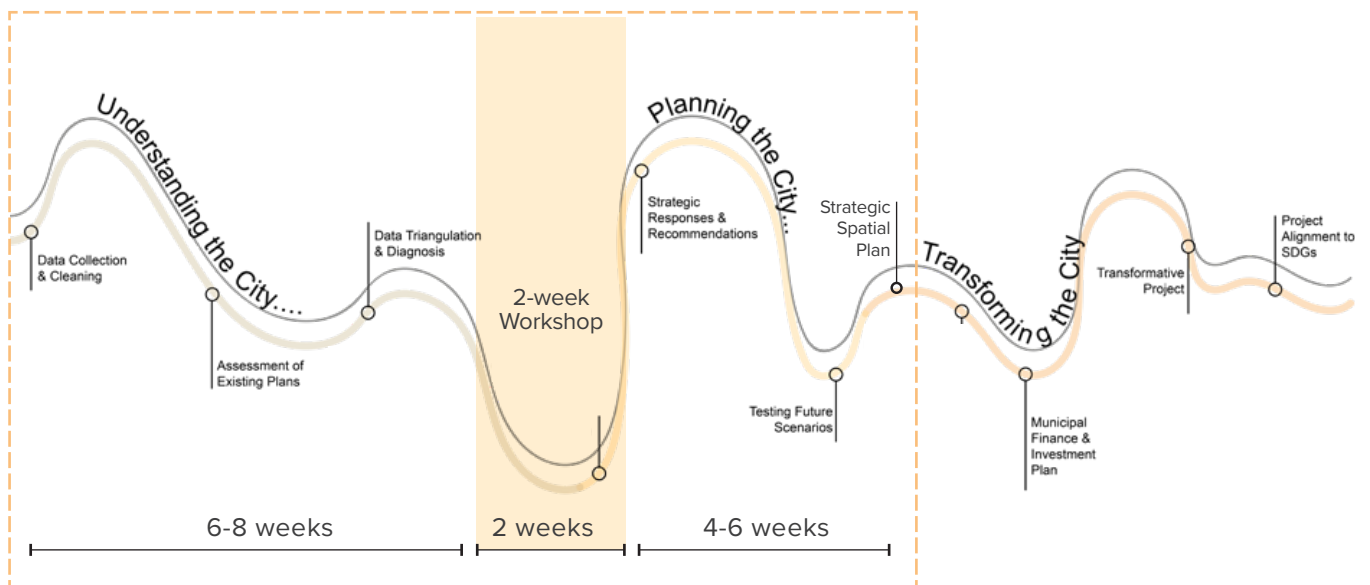
THE OVERALL PROCESS

The Urban Lab has developed a series of planning building blocks that together enables UN-Habitat to partner with cities and respond to the growing demand for transformative solutions to complex urban challenges. Although each project is diverse in context, approach, length of time and scope, there are several core activities that the Urban Lab promotes. The RPS is based on this approach, but focuses on delivering strategic outputs in a quicker and more agile way. These activities are summarised briefly in the following section. Each component should be tailored to the context at the project initiation, to ensure that the process is embedded within the institutional and spatial realities from the start.

1. UNDERSTANDING THE CITY

For an effective planning process in any city, developing responses based on sound evidence is crucial. The aim of this phase of the project is therefore to obtain and illustrate a thorough overview of the city context quickly and efficiently.

Using existing data and knowledge from the city and targeted stakeholder engagement, the steps taken under this phase of the process focus on acquiring and developing the core evidence base for developing a strategic spatial plan. Starting by getting familiarised with the city's priorities and plans and mapping the



▶ Over 12-16 weeks, The RPS rapidly covers the first two phases of the planning process and sets a project up for transformational change

key stakeholders in the city, is then followed by data gathering and cleaning (quantitative & qualitative) using both official and open data sources where relevant and sufficiently reliable.

Once sufficient data is gathered, data triangulation, GIS mapping and analysis exercises are undertaken to generate a series of maps which illustrate the current urban dynamics and provide spatialised evidence for planning recommendations. Site visits and interactive stakeholder workshops to optimise and validate the evidence base conclude this phase and open the door to the Planning the City phase of the project. This phase culminates in a diagnostic report that highlights the critical urban challenges to be addressed.

2. PLANNING THE CITY

The analysis and findings once validated will form the basis of the planning exercise. Closely sequenced to follow on from the city analytics workshops, the planning visioning workshop brings together similar stakeholders to rapidly develop a set of outline spatial responses to address the challenges mapped. This will then be consolidated by the technical team to form a set of integrated, evidence-based, spatial and non-spatial strategic responses, to address critical issues and provide clear growth direction and a future vision. Depending on the project, these could include regional or city-wide strategies.

Through shifting land use, movement and connectivity, city growth areas etc., these strategies inform key investment areas and interventions to achieve transformation, to shift the indicators of sustainable development for the better.

Projection maps can be made to test a set of scenarios considering migration and projected population growth, environmental considerations, alternative locations for the provision of housing, services and infrastructure etc. Testing scenarios together with strategic recommendations can inform on opportunities for job creation, local economic development etc, but also to show potential impacts of proposed developments over time.

3. TRANSFORMING THE CITY

Whilst not a part of the RPS process, there are multiple steps and activities, such as project prioritisation and action plans, as well as many tools which can be applied during this phase, which would use the outputs as a starting point for the respective processes. This final phase highlights the key interventions that can ensure urban transformation and have been identified through the first two phases. These include:

- The Spatial Development Framework
- Capital Investment Planning Process

PROCESS STEP BY STEP

1. 'UNDERSTANDING THE CITY'

1.1. City Inception Interview

Through an inception interview with technical officials within the city an initial overview of the city's key planning documents, ambitions and challenges should be identified. These could relate to climate change, housing, access to public services and facilities, governance structures, planning capacity, migration and displacement, finance and economy, among others. This will also provide entry points for identifying key stakeholders and data custodians to inform further analysis.

1.2. Stakeholder Mapping

Urban contexts are typically characterised by numerous actors with competing interests and influences. For the data, analysis, and findings to be reliable, validated and the outputs owned by the city, a vital step is to understand who the key stakeholders are. A simple process of identifying who the interested actors are and to what extent they have influence over the project should be carried out to ensure that the correct people are in the room when workshops take place, and that the process is rooted in the local institutional structures. Annex 2 offers an example mapping process that can be used.

1.3. Assessment of Existing Plans

The analysis and understanding of the city must be rooted in the cities existing plans and policies as they exist. A swift review of these should be carried out to frame the data collection and analysis. It will shed light on the approach to planning the city has already undertaken and reveal strengths and weaknesses of the plans and the overall approach. When linked to the findings from the city inception interview, this will reveal a reliable set of city priorities, challenges, and opportunities that city is responding to. It will also enable the strategic planning

recommendations developed later to respond accordingly. The [Plan Assessment Tool \(PAT\)](#) can be applied here as part of a more detailed process.

1.4 Data Gathering and cleaning

To obtain as full a view of the city, the team should aim to make maximum use of existing and official data and information and adopting appropriate data collection methods. A tailored selection of data should be requested from the city as well as relevant partners as early as possible in the process. Depending on the availability and quality of data, additional activities such as stakeholder interviews and community engagement could be considered, the outcomes of which can be mapped, to create a visual reference of information gathered and facilitate validation within broader forums. Key datasets to be requested include population data, cadastral maps, topographic surveys, built area footprint, land use maps, infrastructure maps among others. An important note is to focus on core datasets which, when combined, will be able to measure key indicators of cities performance to avoid overwhelming the city with requests for data, some of which may not ultimately be used. See Annex 1 for a core dataset list.

Additional data can be gathered through:

i. Stakeholder Interviews- The relevant stakeholders are identified after the first steps and the city's challenges and opportunities are discussed with each interviewee.

ii. Community Engagement and Field Studies- Less formalised and more context specific data gathering can be through community engagement sessions (coffee mornings, walking tours), or question and answer sessions with community leaders.

1.5 Data Triangulation & Strategic Spatial Analysis

Once sufficient data is gathered, a GIS mapping exercise follows, using an Evidence-based Planning Methodology, involving the consolidation and examination of data sets as part of a comprehensive spatial analysis process to formulate a set of conclusions. These conclusions will help to articulate and give clarity to the spatial aspects of challenges that must be addressed as well as informing potential strategic responses.

The resulting spatial analysis produce spatial indicators that test the city's performance on UN-Habitat's 5 objectives for sustainable cities namely compactness, connectedness, inclusiveness, vibrancy, and resilience. The analysis should overlay datasets in relation to these various lenses, aiming to understand how the various sectors perform. The output should be dynamic, and people centred, using population information to normalise the findings. The analysis and supporting narrative should include a description and findings in relation to the main structuring elements, urban form, land use, transport, energy, water supply and sewage networks, social facilities, natural and ecological elements, vacant land etc. This should also include:

- Strengths & Weaknesses of the current urban system
- Main development issues and themes that need to be addressed
- Critical development constraints & opportunities

The Workshop Phase

The workshop phase provides an intensive one - two week phase of stakeholder engagement. It also bridges the work process from Phase 1 to Phase 2. Delivering the workshop activities over one - two weeks ensures greater collaboration, knowledge retention and more targeted outputs.

See Annex 3 for a suggested agenda structure and participant list. This should be tailored depending on the stakeholder mapping and the specificities of the relevant partner city.

1.6 Workshop 1 – Introduction & Scene Setting

This workshop is optional, and can either be done in person, or online - time and resource dependent. The key aim of this session is to ensure that stakeholders who have yet to be engaged are fully aware of the objectives of

the process. A joint site visit to strategically important locations in the city, or where analysis has revealed particularly relevant findings should be carried out.

1.7 Workshop 2 - City Spatial Analytics Validation

The workshop aims to work with the participating stakeholders to share and validate data sets and to gain broad agreement of the identified opportunities and challenges that have emerged from spatial analytics. This provides the opportunity to share experience and enhance capacities of participating authorities by refining the key city challenges. It also helps to identify the way forward in phase 2. Following the workshop, additional data/amendments should be briefly consolidated into the findings, in the form of a diagnostic report, in preparation for the Planning the City phase.

Recommended: A presentation on the urban legislation and urban finance context using the assessment tools outlined on the next page.

2. 'PLANNING THE CITY'

The findings from the Spatial Analytics workshop will be used to initiate a co-design process of engaging stakeholders to develop a strategic spatial plan. These should be linked to the SDG and NUA principles, stakeholder endorsed goals and priorities for the city and embedded within the 5 city objectives. Through a series of back-to-back workshops, and bilateral working sessions as necessary, the team will facilitate a process of stakeholder led inputs.

2.1. Strategic Responses Workshop

This workshop will deliver a set of integrated, evidence-based, spatial and non-spatial strategic responses. Depending on the project, these are either regional, city-wide or at the district scale. Maps created within the 'Understanding' stage that highlight development options, should be evaluated with stakeholders, to agree a set of spatially elaborated zones that will address the city or region's shortcomings, and indicate strategic investment areas to focus interventions for maximum transformative effect given limited resources, to enable the city to grow effectively on a sustainable development trajectory.

Recommended: Specific urban legislation constraints as well as relevant municipal finance proposals should be addressed. These are key enablers for plan implementation and are particularly relevant for the Capital Investment Planning process.

2.2. Strategic Planning Workshop

The follow-on workshop should take the spatial responses and formulate them into a coherent strategic spatial strategy. This could relate to existing plans where relevant, but focus on identifying the priority areas for action within the city in the next 2-5 years. It also is a core component input for a capital investment planning process (if that is planned), as it will identify priority zones for potential project investments at a later stage. The identification of projects can either focus on identifying major catalytic projects, or a more rigorous process of comprehensive project identification. This strategic plan should be broadly endorsed as an agreed way forward by the relevant city authorities. The strategic spatial plans provides a fast track to evidence-based development direction to inform existing and future plans that are required by the legislative planning framework (such as land use or masterplans).

2.3. Plan Consolidation

Following on from the workshop phase, the analytics will need amendments based on the feedback from stakeholders with some processes needing to be re-run and maps updated. Minor adjustments will already have been made between the validation workshop and the planning workshop. The strategic responses and spatial plan that were developed during the workshops will also need refining with any updated analytics also being fed in to ensure accuracy. This process may require a targeted bilateral session with a focal point from the city to ensure the final document remains aligned to the outline strategy endorsed during the workshops.

2.4 Plan Submission & Dissemination

Once the information has been updated and the spatial plan refined, the document should be submitted to the partner city. An on-line presentation and follow up session could be offered as necessary.

What is key is to identify the follow-on actions and engagement between the city and UN-Habitat, e.g. the linkage to the Capital Investment Planning process etc.

OTHER MODULES

The RPS process articulates a quick synthesised version of an integrated spatial planning process but does not elaborate in detail the components on urban legislation and urban economy and finance. These are of course critical enablers for plan implementation. The interaction between urban planning, urban economic development and urban legislation is vital. If these components are not included, the exclusion of this should be made clear to the relevant city partners at the outset of the project. It should also be noted that a planning process is not complete unless these issues are considered. The partner city may wish to carry out these processes internally using the spatial documentation developed by the team or include the components as part of the RPS process. If the components are to be included, there are several key points where these should be factored in as recommended in the steps above. The basic processes of these additional components are elaborated below.

Urban Legislation Assessment

The technical team should examine the current urban legal framework and the institutional structure of the urban planning system. This can be linked to the review of the existing planning documents and the minimum national/local requirements to develop a plan within the specific context. This will ensure alignment between the international, national, regional and local agenda. This step is crucial, as the aim of the RPS is not to substitute any local planning system. Instead, it should complement, support and integrate with the existing planning system, whilst adding UN-Habitat's recommendations into the existing local framework, ensuring inclusive, strategic, and cost-effective processes.

The aim of this assessment is to support a plan which further builds upon or establishes a system of rules and regulations that provide a solid and predictable long-term legal framework for urban development. Special attention should be paid to accountability, implementability and the capacity to enforce the legal framework where applicable.

The [Urban Legislation Assessment tool](#) has been developed for a high level urban legislation assessment. If more detailed urban legislation assessments are required, the relevant branch/experts should be engaged.

Municipal Finance Assessment

During this activity, the technical team should analyse the financial health of the city to understand how robust the budget is in terms of revenue and expenditures, if it has access to loans or credit markets, as well as the financial management of its funds, etc.

The successful implementation of an urban plan depends on its sound financial basis, including the ability of initial public investments to generate economic and financial benefits and to cover the running costs. Financial plans should contain a realistic income plan, including the sharing of urban value between all stakeholders, and an expenditure provision to address the requirements of the urban plan.

This activity includes a preliminary step towards identifying the most suitable financial mechanisms to finance and fund the implementation of the plan and projects.

The [Municipal Finance Assessment](#) tool has been developed for a high level urban legislation assessment. If more detailed urban legislation assessments are required, the relevant branch/experts should be engaged.

Our City Plans

In addition to the finance and legislation components, other toolboxes and guides developed by the Urban Lab, or other teams within UN-Habitat may be applied, depending on the project scope, context and needs. An example of this is Our City Plans, which has an online platform and links closely with the activities outlined above. Our City Plans covers the whole Rapid Planning process, as well as the activities in the 'Transforming' third phase. It provides additional tools and methods that can be referenced.

DELIVERABLES

- Evidence-based assessment of existing urban conditions
- Identified urban development opportunities & challenges
- Deficit Areas with lower than average amenity and urban services
- Strategic Spatial Plan, with recommendations
- Framework for prioritising urban projects and investment
- A set of interventions (actions) that can provide a framework for capital investment and/or additional planning studies
- Summary document outlining process, findings and recommendations

What This Process Doesn't Deliver

- Full Scale Community Participation Process
- In-Depth Urban Qualitative Assessments
- In-Depth Analysis of Institution or Legislation Frameworks
- A Replacement for a Comprehensive Planning Process

ANNEX 1

TYPICAL DATA & ANALYSIS

Minimum Required Data Sets		Critical Attributes
EXISTING	Population Distribution	Location & Quantity
	Street network	Location & Hierarchy
	Public Transit Network & Stations	Location & Type
	Landuse	Location & Category
	Natural Hazards	Location & Severity
	Infrastructure Networks	Location, Type & Hierarchy
	Public Open Spaces	Location & Category
	Environmental Features	Location & Category
	Building Footprints	Location
	Administrative Boundaries	Location & Hierarchy
PROPOSED	Planned Landuse	Location & Category
	Planned Transit Networks	Location & Type
	Planned Infrastructure Networks	Location, Type & Hierarchy
	Additional Major Planned Projects	Location & Type

The analysis carried out in each context needs to be decided upon on a case by case basis dependent on the issues most relevant in the city. The key parameter is to ensure that the analysis uses a dynamic people centered base to analyze the urban morphology and functionality: This will provide an understanding of how the city functions in terms of various indicators and parameter. Example factors to consider include

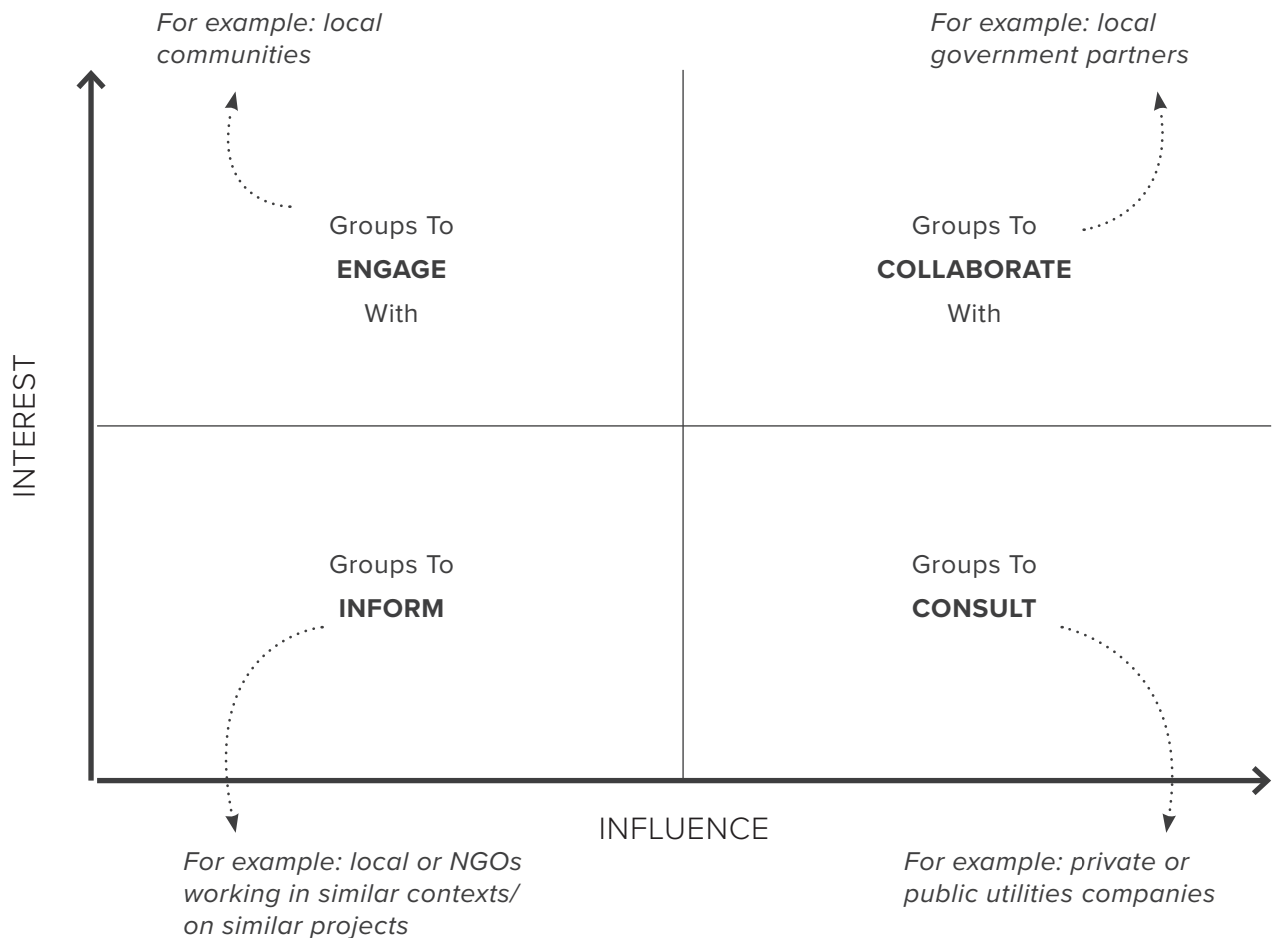
- Demographic factors
- Density distribution
- Income distribution
- Land use distribution
- Concentrations of economic activity
- Distribution of social and community facilities
- Public buildings, spaces, and parks
- Accessibility to jobs, facilities, public transport
- Efficiency of infrastructure
- The efficiency of land and built form
- Environmental and ecological systems

ANNEX 2

STAKEHOLDER MAPPING

Stakeholder analysis can be helpful when assessing a local context, and the potential changes to it as they relate to relevant and interested parties. This information is used to assess how the interests of those stakeholders should be addressed. For the purposes of the RPS, this focuses primarily on those who are key collaborators, as this will be key to driving the process forward.

The sample mapping diagram shown below can be used as a quick process early on to in the data collection process to develop a basic understanding of the decision-making process in a local institutional context.



ANNEX 3

WORKSHOP AGENDA

The following sample agendas offer an outline suggestion on how to go about delivering the intensive workshop sessions as part of the RPS process.

Day 1 – Introduction and Scene Setting *(Presentations can be online)*

Date/Time	Agenda Item
9:00 - 9:15	Opening Remarks
09:15 – 9:45	Presentation on Objectives of the Workshops & Process
9:45 – 10:30	Presentation on Sustainable Urban Development
10:30 – CoB	Joint site visits with city representatives to key locations

Day 2 – Analysis & Findings *“Understanding the City”*

Date/Time	Agenda Item
9:00 - 9:15	Arrival & Registration
09:15 – 9:45	Presentation of Rapid Spatial Analysis Methodology
09:45 – 10:45	Spatial Analysis & Findings Presentations
10:30 – CoB	Tea Break
11:00 – 12:15	Breakout/Interactive Analysis Validation Session
12:15 – 12:45	Reporting Back to Plenary
12:45 – 13:00	Closing Remarks

Day 3 – Strategic Responses Workshop *“Planning the City”*

Date/Time	Agenda Item
9:00 - 9:15	Briefing on Objectives of the Day
09:15 – 9:45	Recap on Analysis & Findings Workshop
09:45 – 10:00	Responses & Recommendations Presentation
10:00 – 10:45	Responses & Recommendations Discussion
10:45 – 11:00	Tea Break
11:00 – 11:15	Project Identification Presentation
11:15 – 12:15	Breakout/Interactive Project Identification Session
12:15 – 12:45	Reporting Back to Plenary
12:45 – 13:00	Closing Remarks

Day 4 – Strategic Responses Workshop *“Planning the City”*

Date/Time	Agenda Item
9:00 - 9:15	Briefing on Objectives of the Day
09:15 – 9:45	Recap on Findings, Responses and Projects
09:45 – 10:15	Presentation of Outline Spatial Strategy & Scenarios
10:15 – 11:15	Spatial Strategy & Scenario Discussion
11:15 – 11:30	Tea Break
11:30 – 12:00	Feedback Session & Closing Remarks

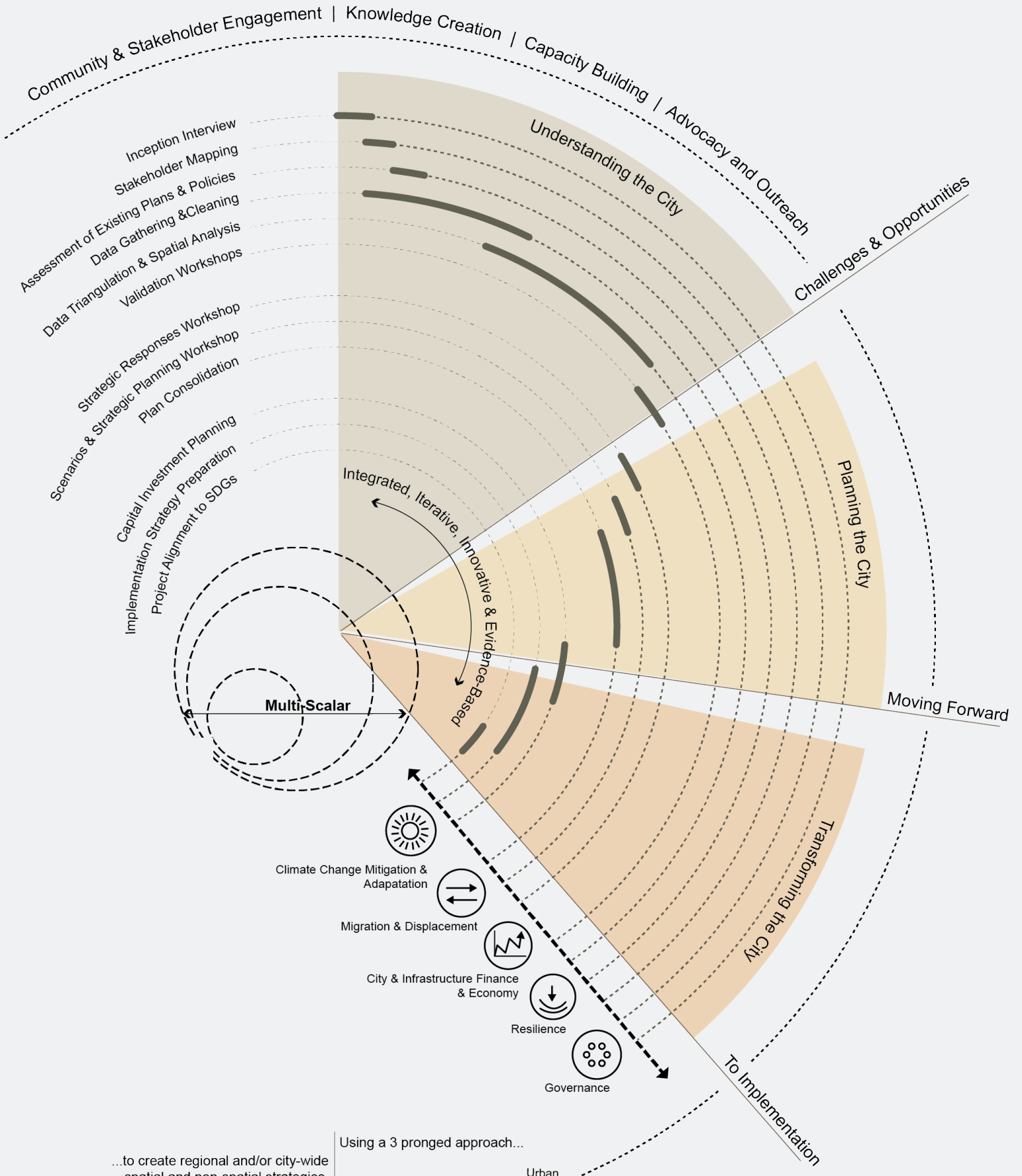
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ANNEX 4

DETAILED UN-HABITAT PLANNING PROCESS

DETAILED PLANNING PROCESS

The RPS covers the first two components of the UN-Habitat's broader planning process (diagram to the right).



...to create regional and/or city-wide spatial and non-spatial strategies, trainings and design guidelines

Using a 3 pronged approach...

