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CITISENSE: SCALING PARTICIPATORY URBAN SECURITY THROUGH INNOVATION AND GOVERNANCE

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ABSTRACT

This research note outlines the objectives, structure, and methodological contributions of [CITISENSE | urbact.eu](https://urbact.eu), an URBACT Innovation Transfer Network built around the transfer and adaptation of the [“Be Secure – Feel Secure” \(BSFS\)](#) project developed in Piraeus, Greece. With a focus on multi-stakeholder governance, data-driven tools, and community-centred interventions, CITISENSE addresses the growing urban challenge of perceived insecurity across European cities. This paper summarises the network’s integrated model, its transferability strategy, and policy implications for inclusive urban security governance.

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CITISENSE

DRIVING INNOVATION FOR SAFER CITIES

Funded by URBACT, CITISENSE is an innovation transfer network led by the City of Piraeus, dedicated to enhancing urban security through innovative approaches. Building on the success of the Urban Innovative Actions BeSecure-FeelSecure project, it focuses on transferring effective tools, implementing pilot actions, and fostering advanced governance models to address safety challenges and improve urban living environments

➤ **Network Duration:**
01/09/2024 – 31/08/2026

➤ **Total Network Budget:**
€ 543 345.40

➤ **EU Funding:**
€ 394 865.13

NETWORK PARTNERS

- Piraeus (GR)
- Naples (IT)
- Liepāja (LV)
- Fót (HU)
- Geel (BE)
- Manresa (SP)

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1.1. Background: Security beyond crime control

Urban security today extends beyond crime rates to encompass perceptions of safety, social trust, and access to inclusive public spaces. Despite declining crime statistics across many European cities, public anxiety about safety persists—driven by factors such as social exclusion, urban degradation, and the politicization of migration and marginality. The CITISENSE network directly confronts this paradox through an integrated, transferable model of urban security.

The CITISENSE project emerges from the UIA-funded "Be Secure – Feel Secure" (BSFS) initiative in Piraeus, which piloted a holistic security framework addressing environmental, technological, and social risk factors. Recognizing its success, CITISENSE was created to replicate and scale this model across five other European cities: Naples (Italy), Liepāja (Latvia), Fót (Hungary), Geel (Belgium), and Manresa (Spain).



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1.2. From Piraeus to Europe: The BSFS legacy

BSFS was notable for combining hard and soft security interventions within a participatory governance structure. Key innovations included:

- **Local Council for Crime Prevention (LCCP):** A multi-agency body coordinating crime prevention strategies.
- **CURiM Platform:** A digital urban risk management system aggregating police data, citizen reports, and environmental metrics.
- **Victim Support Unit:** A holistic service offering legal, psychological, and social assistance, especially targeting victims of gender-based violence.
- **Spatial interventions:** Including CPTED-based upgrades like improved lighting, reactivated public spaces, and secure play areas.
- **Community initiatives:** From student campaigns to business training, aimed at embedding a shared responsibility for safety.

These components reflect a shift from enforcement-led models to a co-productive approach where communities are integral to designing and sustaining urban safety.

1.3. The CITISENSE Transfer Model

CITISENSE structures its transfer strategy around four interlinked modules, each adaptable to the local context:

1. Digital Solutions

Use of real-time data platforms like CURiM to enable proactive, transparent, and participatory risk monitoring.



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2. Spatial Interventions

CPTED-aligned urban design ensuring accessibility, visibility, and communal ownership of space.

3. Social Initiatives

Awareness-building and local partnerships to address the root causes of fear and exclusion.

4. Governance Arrangements

Institutionalising multi-level coordination and community engagement through local security councils and stakeholder networks.

Each partner city implements these components in context-specific ways, addressing distinct policy challenges such as youth delinquency (Liepāja, Fót), antisocial behaviour (Geel), or marginalised neighbourhoods (Naples, Manresa).

1.4. Key insights and urban crime relevance

Perceived vs. actual insecurity

Across all cities, a common thread is the mismatch between statistical crime data and citizens' sense of insecurity. CITISENSE recognises fear as a socio-spatial phenomenon shaped by exclusion, neglect, and media narratives—not merely the presence of crime.

Participatory security

Community engagement is not simply a consultation tool but a governance pillar. From stakeholder roundtables in Naples (Tavoli di Osservazione) to youth engagement in Liepāja and digital reporting platforms in Fót, localised dialogue is reframed as strategic co-production.

Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED)

Security-enhancing urban planning is central to the network. Enhancing lighting, reclaiming



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underused spaces, and fostering mixed-use zones have reduced antisocial behaviour while improving public trust.

Digitalisation and risk management

Platforms like CURiM operationalise data from diverse sources to facilitate predictive, targeted responses to risk. While digital tools cannot replace on-the-ground engagement, they greatly augment situational awareness and institutional agility.

1.5. Transferability and Institutional Learning

CITISENSE is not a one-size-fits-all model; its strength lies in its adaptability. The modular architecture ensures that partner cities can tailor components to their specific needs. However, several factors influence successful transfer:

- **Political commitment:** A prerequisite for multi-sectoral cooperation and resource allocation.
- **Capacity building:** Especially in cities less familiar with participatory governance or data integration.
- **Stakeholder diversity:** Expanding beyond traditional actors (e.g., police, planners) to include NGOs, educators, and informal groups.
- **Institutional memory:** Ensuring continuity across electoral and administrative cycles through robust governance frameworks.

1.6. Conclusion: Towards resilient, inclusive urban security

CITISENSE offers a replicable and evidence-based response to the complex urban challenges of insecurity. Its emphasis on community, technology, and integrated governance speaks to a new paradigm in urban crime prevention—one that repositions citizens not as passive subjects of protection, but as co-authors of safer cities.



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As cities worldwide contend with intersecting crises—ranging from economic hardship to environmental risk—the CITISENSE approach demonstrates that sustainable urban safety is inseparable from social justice, spatial equity, and digital inclusion.

For a comprehensive analysis of how the CITISENSE model was structured for adaptability and replication, see:

Verga, P.L. (2025). *CITISENSE Transferability Study*. URBACT. Retrieved from <https://urbact.eu/networks/citisenese> .