

Prototyping Innovation Policies with(in) cities

Innovation Area:
Child Friendly City

Bratislava, Slovakia



How does “prototyping...” work?

This City Case Description is the outcome of a policy prototyping exercise within a city ecosystem. Once the ekip research team has explored a policy area and its connection to cultural and creative industries (CCIs) and innovation, we ask: what would this mean in a local city context?

Together with local stakeholders, we test how a draft policy recommendation might stimulate innovation. Using Portfolio Sensemaking, stakeholders simulate an innovation portfolio, analyse the strengths and gaps of the local support system, and identify what resources are needed to realise the portfolio.

Bratislava Context & Area of Focus

Bratislava is the capital city of Slovakia, characterized by rapid urban development, growing suburbanization, and increasing pressure on mobility, public space, and social infrastructure. While the city has made visible progress in urban planning, participation, and public space transformation, children, especially those aged 0–12, are still often treated primarily as dependents rather than as active city users.

Car-oriented mobility, fragmented public spaces, and adult-centered decision-making limit children's independent movement, play, and participation. At the same time, there is strong institutional capacity, engaged civil society, and political willingness to experiment with new approaches, creating favorable conditions for systemic innovation.

AREA OF FOCUS

The main area of focus is the development of Bratislava as a child-friendly city, with specific attention to children aged 0–12. This includes strengthening children's independent and safe mobility, improving the quality and accessibility of public spaces and school surroundings, and embedding children's perspectives into urban planning and policy-making. The focus goes beyond infrastructure to address cultural and systemic change—shifting mindsets from “children as objects of care” to “children as partners.” Key themes include child participation, road safety, inclusive urban design, communication with parents and the public, and cross-sector collaboration between the city, schools, NGOs, communities, and the creative sector.



Portfolio sensemaking

FROM CHILDREN AS CARE RECIPIENTS TO CHILDREN AS ACTIVE CITY USERS AND PARTNERS IN URBAN LIFE

The portfolio focuses on a long-term cultural, institutional, and spatial transformation that positions children aged 0–12 as legitimate users of the city and active partners in decision-making. Its scope spans urban planning, mobility, public space, education, communication, and policy processes, aiming to create safe, inclusive, and stimulating environments that support children's independent movement, play, and participation. By combining soft interventions (participation tools, communication campaigns, education) with structural changes (street design, school surroundings, governance mechanisms), the portfolio seeks to embed child-friendly principles into everyday city operations and long-term policy frameworks in Bratislava.

Key dimensions

- Enabling children aged 0–12 to express their needs, ideas, and experiences, and embedding their voices into local decision-making, planning, and budgeting processes.
- Supporting safe, independent movement of children through traffic calming, school mobility plans, road safety education, and reduced car dependency in everyday routines.
- Creating inclusive, playful, and accessible public spaces and school surroundings that encourage outdoor play, social interaction, and community life.
- Shifting societal and parental mindsets through targeted communication, campaigns, and narratives that normalize children as active users of public space.
- Strengthening formal and non-formal education for children, parents, educators, and city staff on mobility, participation, and child-friendly urban practices.
- Anchoring child-friendly principles in city policies, regulations, and institutional processes to ensure long-term sustainability and cross-departmental coordination.
- Connecting the city, schools, NGOs, communities, experts, and the creative sector to test, scale, and sustain innovative solutions for a child-friendly Bratislava.



Who was there?

A BROAD MIX OF STAKEHOLDERS CO-CREATED THIS CASE

NGO

Znepekojene matky
Cyklokoalicia



ACADEMIA

Faculty of social and
economic sciences



BUSINESSES

Atelier Haus
Studio 21



OTHERS

City of Bratislava
Metropolitan Institute
Old Town Municipality



Analysis

THE LOCAL INNOVATION SUPPORT SYSTEM

The local innovation ecosystem in Bratislava shows strong institutional capacity, led by the Metropolitan Institute of Bratislava and an increasingly progressive municipal administration. There is openness to pilot projects, participatory approaches, and evidence-based urban planning, particularly in mobility and public space.

However, innovation related to children remains fragmented across departments, with limited formal mandates and weak systemic anchoring in policy and long-term funding.

Civil society and community actors form a vibrant but resource-constrained layer of the ecosystem. NGOs, active communities, and experts bring creativity, advocacy, and hands-on experience with children and public space, yet their impact is often limited to short-term projects.

Collaboration exists but is not fully structured, and connections between education, mobility, urban design, and child participation are still underdeveloped.

Culturally, the ecosystem is at a turning point. Public awareness of sustainable mobility and quality public space is growing, but strong parental safety concerns and a car-oriented urban legacy continue to limit children's independent movement.

The main innovation potential lies in better coordination, stable funding, shared data, and communication strategies that support a cultural shift toward seeing children as legitimate city users and partners in shaping Bratislava.

Conclusions

& RECOMMENDATIONS

Children Are Still Invisible City Users

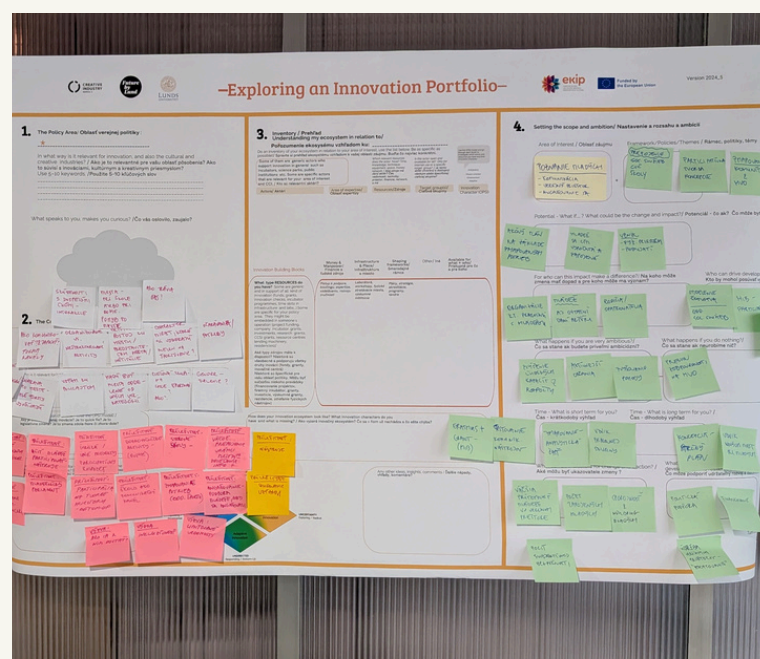
Children aged 0–12 are rarely treated as legitimate users of public space or partners in decision-making; their needs are filtered through adult perspectives.

Recommendation: Formally recognize children as a target group in urban policies and introduce standard mechanisms for child participation in planning and mobility projects.

Strong Institutions, Weak Coordination

Bratislava has capable institutions and experts, but innovation is fragmented across departments and sectors.

Recommendation: Establish a permanent cross-departmental coordination structure for child-friendly city policies led by MIB.



Participation Exists but Is Not Systemic

Participatory activities with children happen mostly as pilots or one-off projects without long-term impact.

Recommendation: Embed child participation into regular city processes, such as planning cycles, consultations, and participatory budgeting.

Mobility Remains a Key Barrier

Car-oriented infrastructure and parental safety concerns significantly limit children's independent movement.

Recommendation: Prioritize traffic calming and school-area interventions, combined with road-safety education and communication with parents.

Public Spaces Are Underused for Children

Schoolyards, streets, and public spaces have high potential but are often inaccessible or not designed for children's play.

Recommendation: Open and adapt existing spaces for everyday use by children through low-cost, quick-win interventions.

Cultural Change Is as Important as Infrastructure

Physical improvements alone will not succeed without shifting public attitudes toward children in public space.

Recommendation: Launch long-term communication campaigns that normalize children's presence, play, and agency in the city.



Data and Evidence Are Missing

Decision-making lacks consistent data on how children use the city and experience mobility and public space.

Recommendation: Introduce regular observation, monitoring, and evaluation focused on children's everyday urban experiences.





Our methods

THE INNOVATION PORTFOLIO POLICY CANVAS

The Prototyping Workshop Methodology and the Innovation Portfolio Policy Canvas guide local stakeholders to analyse their local ecosystem, make an inventory of actors and resources, identify and create a potential innovation portfolio and analyse their local innovation support system.

THE OPSI MODEL

The OPSI-model (Open Public Sector Innovation OECD) is adapted to analyze the innovation character of the policy area. Participants explore whether the policy involves new legislative measures or is more exploratory in nature, allowing for a deeper understanding of how the policy might influence the local ecosystem

THE LIEPT MODEL

The Lund Innovation Ecosystem Portfolio Tracking (LIEPT) model is a tool that provides a framework for tracking changes in innovation portfolios in ecosystems where impact and growth happen not in one organisation but in many. This relies on collaborative efforts by many stakeholders.

What is ekip

The ekip partnership funded by the European Commission consists of 5 universities, 4 consultancies, 4 creative and cultural organisations and 4 cities. Together we develop innovation policies for the cultural and creative industries in Europe. We do that in various ways: through research, consultations and interaction with people in the sector at policy labs and focus groups and assessments in city ecosystems.

Want to know more? Want to do it in your city?

Would you like to explore the topic of Ecodesign further? Visit the [*Fashion Transition: Eco-Design for Circularity*](#) on ekip website, where you'll find relevant policy posters, presentations, videos, and articles.

You can even host your own session in your city! It's an empowering and insightful way to bring together local stakeholders across sectors and disciplines for a focused discussion on a topic of shared importance. The ekip method and approach are open for anyone to use including a Facilitator's Guide and templates available in the ekip Knowledge Bank under [*Tools and Methods*](#).

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Disclaimer:

Each City Case Description reflects the views of workshop participants. It is a perspective from one city context, intended to inspire and ignite action



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