



# RAVENNA'S SOLUTION STORY: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE STAKEHOLDERS

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<b>Subject</b>	The story of how Ravenna used 'common storytelling' to overcome the challenge of involving stakeholders.
<b>Network</b>	Creative Spirits, Implementation Network
<b>Author</b>	Hen Gerritse, Lead Expert

Participative processes are a core aspect of integrated urban development, that's why URBACT uses ULGs. However, it's one thing to have a group on paper and another to have a group in real life, one that is self-propelling and can take the initiative. Ravenna solved this challenge by borrowing 'common storytelling' from the world of fantasy tabletop games. The city's ULG now stands on its own two feet as a key contributor to the implementation of the city's strategy.

Let's start with the context. Ravenna is working to implement the Darsena City Operative Plan (POC Darsena). This plan is targeted at the 136 ha that make up the Darsena district, a former harbour and industrial area that connects the centre of Ravenna to the Adriatic Sea via the 12 km Candiano Canal. Historically, this area was dedicated to industrial production and manufacturing; however, in recent decades it has fallen into disuse. Therefore, despite the Darsena being a central and significant section of the city with a fascinating urban landscape comprised of historically significant industrial buildings, for many years now citizens have perceived it as on the margins, far away from everyday life. POC Darsena aims to change this by regenerating the Darsena, transforming it into a new integrated and compact district with a strong CCI sector, making it a public space that the city can enjoy once more.

One of the challenges the city has had to overcome in its work to implement the POC Darsena was the involvement of stakeholders. That is, the individuals, groups, or organisations that have some level of interest in the implementation of Ravenna's plan. Stakeholders should be distinguished from delivery partners. Delivery partners are the individuals, groups, or organisations that have a direct role to play in the implementation of an implementation plan. Of course, delivery partners can also be considered as stakeholders (after all, they also have an interest in the successful implementation of the project), but they should nonetheless be treated as a group distinct from stakeholders. This distinction becomes particularly important when it comes to transitioning from the planning phase to the implementation phase. In the majority of cases, the work required from stakeholders and delivery partners is significantly different in each phase.

The involvement of stakeholders is a crucial aspect of the participatory approach to urban development. In URBACT, this is ensured through the use of URBACT Local Groups. Composed of representatives from the social, economic, and environmental sectors (e.g., city staff, NGOs, SMEs, universities, citizens, etc), these groups have the objective of finding solutions to their city's needs. By bringing together partners to collaborate on a specific issue, and by exchanging their experiences at the transnational level, URBACT Local Groups guarantee a more rigorous and innovative result.

The challenge in Ravenna was to overcome the general widespread scepticism of participatory processes. Without doing this, the ULG would not be a success. This challenge was made more difficult by the necessary heterogeneity of the ULG members: from the Port Authority to collectives of creatives. The city needed a way of bringing these sceptical and disparate stakeholders together so that they could chart a common pathway. This is the story of how Ravenna found its solution.

Ravenna started Creative Spirits with significant experience of participatory processes. In fact, the Darsena (the city's aforementioned target area) had been the subject of such a process just a few years previously. This process, 'la Darsena che vorrei' ('the Darsena I would like'), consisted of several focus groups conducted with a diverse range of participants. These were then used to produce a 'group vision' that identified the resources, critical points, and priorities for regeneration. As part of this, neighbourhood walks and meetings were organised where the outputs of the focus groups were analysed. Additionally, seven open training sessions were organised for the public on the seven issues identified as being key. These meetings aimed to give participants information about the Darsena area and the nature of its mobility potential, spaces, public services, and private services. Finally, a two-day seminar was organised with an innovative and inclusive

technique (viz. Open Space Technology). The final result was a broad vision for the area and a set of concrete proposals that were then fed into the strategy being implemented as part of Creative Spirits, the Darsena City Operative Plan. This process finished in 2012. However, until Creative Spirits, very little of this strategy was actually implemented. This had the unfortunate effect of increasing scepticism amongst stakeholders regarding participative processes. The situation was further complicated by the necessary transition from planning to implementation. The citizens of Ravenna are clearly important stakeholders regarding the regeneration of the area; however, because much of the Darsena is still in private ownership, they are not as relevant when it comes to delivery as this requires the direct involvement of owners.

This was the situation Saveria Teston found herself in when she took over the role of ULG Coordinator in October 2017. A general air of scepticism coupled with an incomplete and ill-suited set of stakeholders. She needed to build a group, and she needed to do it fast. She needed a solution.

Inspired by her previous academic work with a world-leading games researcher, Saveria had the idea of borrowing from the fantasy tabletop role-playing game Dungeons and Dragons. In this game, a group of friends guide their self-created heroes as they work together to find treasure, win battles, stage daring rescues, engage in courtly intrigue, and get up to much more besides. This process often involves 100s of hours of game time and can be spread out across many months. Almost as a by-product, they naturally co-create a common story with great depth and breadth, and this helps further bind the group together — both as a group of adventurers in the fantasy world and as a group of friends, creators, and collaborators in the real world. Saveria's idea was to use this basic mechanism to do the same for her newly constructed ULG. However, instead of constructing a fantasy tale of orcs and trolls, her 'fellowship of stakeholders' would build a common story for the Darsena. And, instead of using a tabletop as their base, they would use the preparations for the Creative Spirits Case Study Meeting Ravenna was due to host in May 2018.

With a plan in place, Saveria began organising. She brought the nascent ULG together for a series of informal meetings. As one large group, they shared their many and diverse stories of the Darsena and used these to construct a coherent narrative. This was an incredibly valuable exercise in mutual education. They were several occasions where participants learnt of actions — and even places — in the Darsena they had no idea existed. They then split into three smaller groups and planned three separate tours (based on the common story they had already developed) for the visiting cities of Creative Spirits. This involved the places they wanted to go, the people they wanted to talk to, and the order in which they wanted to do it all. Once they had the three tours, they came back together to negotiate one big hybrid tour that merged all three. The final stage was to allocate responsibilities for organising the tour: who had to do what to turn their plan into reality? Every single ULG member played a significant role in the organisation and realisation of the tour and, therefore, every single member was involved in a process of common storytelling.

And what of the results? First and foremost, it strengthened the ULG's sense of belonging and provided a focus, helping it to decide on common objectives and related actions going forward. Concretely, this jump-started several actions which had stalled, or were in the danger of stalling. For example, the municipality had previously attempted to join the USE-IT network, a mapping project that covers 40 European cities and is designed by young people to be used by young people. Inclusion in the network would both literally and figuratively put the Darsena on the map. Unfortunately, the attempt failed because the municipality didn't have the capacity to support the project. However, the newly invigorated ULG recognises the initiative's potential and has pledged to provide the necessary resources. Furthermore, the ULG has started its own action, the creation of a thematic artistic tour. The ULG developed this idea, found the artists that will help make it happen, and it is now spearheading the crowdfunding campaign that will finance it.

Common storytelling as a solution to the challenge of stakeholder involvement doesn't break the mould for participative processes. However, it is another string in the bow for any city that is struggling to get its ULG off the ground. And, because ULGs are at the core of the URBACT method, it surely deserves attention from other cities.