



European Commission
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Initial Project Ideas

Call Title	Understanding inhabitant's experiences of neighbourhoods to support their health and well-being
Topic ID	HORIZON-NEB-2026-01-PARTICIPATION-03
Programme	Horizon Europe New European Bauhaus Facility
Type of Action	HORIZON-RIA HORIZON Research and Innovation Actions
Application Model	single-stage
Link	https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/topic-details/HORIZON-NEB-2026-01-PARTICIPATION-03
Deadline	01/12/2026
Funding budget per project	€5M
Number of funded projects	3
Consortium Composition	min. 3 organisations in different countries

Project Concept

The project will develop and validate a participatory and transdisciplinary research methodology for understanding how inhabitants experience their neighbourhoods, and how these experiences affect physical health, mental health and overall well-being.

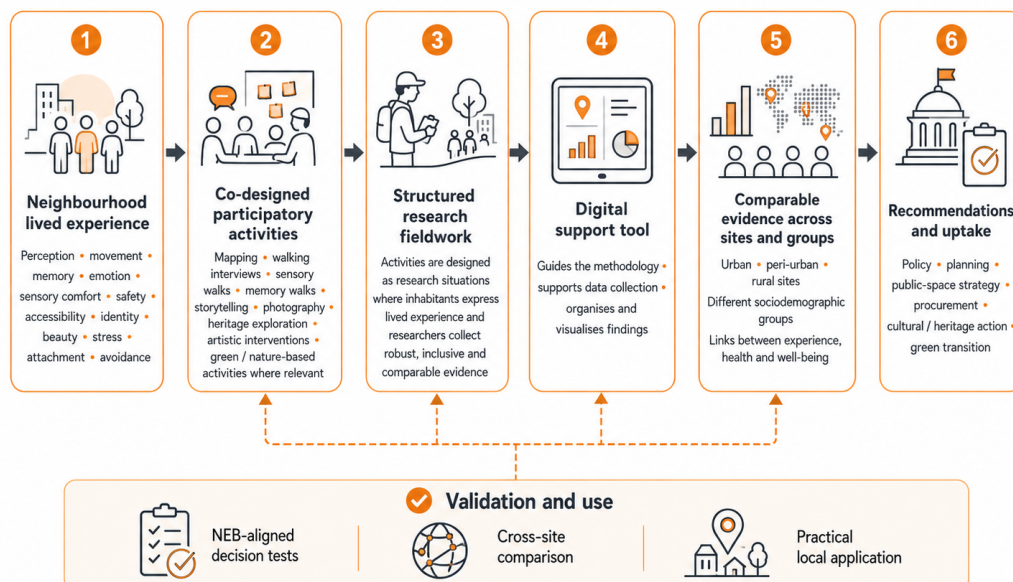
The project will treat neighbourhoods as human-social constructs and environments, shaped by complex interconnections between human and non-human actors in the natural and built environment. The neighbourhood will therefore not be treated only as a geographic unit, a planning perimeter or a physical design object, but as a lived environment where social, cultural, sensory, emotional, ecological and spatial dimensions interact. The project will examine how inhabitants react to and identify with their neighbourhoods, and how these experiences affect physical health, mental health and overall well-being.

The core problem is that neighbourhoods are often assessed through physical, environmental, planning or statistical indicators, while the lived experience of inhabitants remains weakly captured and difficult to translate into policy and planning. Yet people do not experience neighbourhoods as abstract planning units. They experience them through perception, movement, memory, emotion, sensory comfort, social interaction, safety, accessibility, identity, beauty, stress, attachment and avoidance. These dimensions shape physical health, mental health, social well-being and overall quality of life. The research will also draw on relevant work on the relationship between people and the built environment, including neuro-architectural aspects of space, atmosphere, ambiance in urban design and planning, and the perception of beauty.

The project's central idea is to turn participatory activities into structured research fieldwork. Instead of treating participation as consultation, the project will design accessible and inclusive activities as research situations where inhabitants can express how they perceive, feel, use, avoid, value, remember, and move through their neighbourhoods, while researchers collect robust and comparable evidence.

From participatory activities to robust evidence and recommendations

Participatory activities become structured research fieldwork, supported by a digital tool, producing comparable evidence and decision-ready recommendations.



Methodological Innovation/Approach

The methodological originality of the project lies in combining SSH research with artistic, cultural, heritage, health, planning, and green/environmental expertise. The purpose is to produce meaningful and significant societal impact by making SSH-led research usable for neighbourhood planning, public-space strategies, cultural and heritage action, green transition and procurement.

SSH researchers will define the conceptual framework, research questions, indicators, and evidence logic. Health and well-being experts will help connect lived experience with physical health, mental health, and overall well-being. Artistic and cultural partners will help create expressive, accessible, and attractive fieldwork formats. Heritage actors will connect neighbourhood experience with memory, identity, local history, and place attachment. Local authorities and planners will ensure that findings can be translated into planning, regeneration, public-space and procurement strategies.

The participatory fieldwork formats may include mapping, walking interviews, sensory or memory walks, storytelling, photography, drawing, crafting, heritage exploration, temporary artistic interventions, gardening or small place-based experiments, including green or nature-based activities where relevant. Their role is not only to engage people, but to create structured settings where sensory, emotional, social, cultural, environmental, and health-related dimensions of place can be observed, documented, and analysed.

Participatory fieldwork as research environment

Participatory activities are designed as structured research situations where different actors contribute to evidence generation.



Specialised Innovation Lens: Green-Blue Environments and Everyday Nature Contact

Within the broader methodology, the project will use green-blue environments and everyday contact with nature as a specialised research lens. The project remains fundamentally about sensory and emotional neighbourhood experience, health and well-being. It contributes to the green transition by showing how nature-positive and climate-resilient neighbourhood transformation can be better informed by inhabitants' lived experience.

Trees, parks, gardens, street greenery, rivers, canals, shade, biodiversity, seasonal change, cooling, air quality and contact with nature can affect comfort, stress, restoration, belonging, safety, accessibility, social interaction and perceived beauty.

The project will therefore investigate not only whether green-blue infrastructure exists, but how it is experienced, accessed, used, valued, or avoided by different inhabitants. This allows the project to connect health and well-being with environmental quality, climate comfort, nature-positive transformation, and inequalities in access to high-quality neighbourhood environments.

Digital Support Infrastructure

A digital platform will support the methodology. Its role is to operationalise the research process and make the methodology easier to apply, compare, and reuse for new actors across different neighbourhoods and countries. The platform will support digitalisation as a way to understand, map, and enhance how inhabitants experience the built environment. The platform will support three functions:

- First, it will guide local teams through the methodology by providing activity templates, fieldwork protocols, inclusion checklists, ethical guidance, common indicators, integration of the NEB self-assessment method across research design, fieldwork, validation, reflection, and impact assessment.
- Second, it will support data collection during participatory fieldwork. Depending on the activity, inhabitants, and researchers may use maps, smartphones, tablets, photos, audio notes, routes, ratings, short forms, sensors, or observation templates to document lived experience (including identity, attachment, perceived beauty, security, belonging, cultural identity, stress, comfort, avoidance, social interaction and everyday use of place). This may include geo-located observations, narratives, sensory impressions, emotional responses, perceived barriers, valued places, avoided places, accessibility issues, memories, safety concerns, social interactions, and relationships with green, cultural, or public spaces.
- Third, it will help organise, visualise, and translate findings. The platform can produce maps, dashboards, indicators, visual stories, comparison views and before/after material. It can connect lived experience data with contextual information such as public-space quality, accessibility, greenery, heat, noise, air quality, demographic characteristics, and health/well-being indicators. The aim is not to reduce lived experience to data points, but to make it visible, comparable, and usable for decision-making.

Validation Sites and Comparative Logic

The methodology will be validated in at least three contrasting neighbourhoods in different countries, covering urban, peri-urban and rural contexts (if strategically useful, coastal or insular areas may also be considered). Each site will apply the same methodological framework, while adapting its participatory fieldwork formats to population groups, local social, cultural, environmental and spatial conditions.

This will allow the project to test whether the methodology is inclusive, scientifically reliable, comparable, practical and transferable. The validation logic should also allow comparison across neighbourhood characteristics, population groups, sensory and emotional experience patterns, health and well-being outcomes, and different forms of access to public, cultural, and green-blue spaces.

The comparison will consider neighbourhood characteristics including geography, quality of the built environment, accessibility, perceived beauty, social, economic and demographic characteristics, population density, social mixing, social infrastructure, property census, reputation, and access to natural, cultural and artistic spaces and offers.

The analysis will assess how experiences and impacts vary across sociodemographic groups and across neighbourhoods with different characteristics.

Expected Results and Outputs

The expected result is a reusable participatory research methodology, supported by a digital platform/tool, for turning lived neighbourhood experience into robust evidence and practical recommendations. The main outputs will be:

1. Robust evidence on how inhabitants experience their neighbourhoods and on the impact of these experiences on physical health, mental health, overall well-being, belonging and everyday quality of life.
2. a validated participatory methodology that can be reused by cities, regions, researchers, and neighbourhood actors;
3. a digital support platform/tool for guiding fieldwork, collecting data, comparing findings, and translating results;
4. tested NEB-aligned improvements in selected neighbourhoods, used to validate whether lived-experience evidence can guide better local decisions;
5. Practical recommendations for local authorities and the artistic, cultural and heritage sector in the selected neighbourhoods, as well as planners, public buyers and neighbourhood-level decision-makers, on how to improve inhabitants' experiences, strengthen sense of belonging, support health and well-being, and guide green transition, nature-positive transformation and climate resilience.

The recommendations will show how to improve inhabitants' experiences and sense of belonging of/in their neighbourhoods, support the health and well-being of neighbourhood inhabitants, and guide the green transition of neighbourhoods, including nature-positive transformation and climate resilience.

Comments on the Work Package (WP) Structure

- **WP1:** Project coordination
- **WP2:** Scientific framework, common indicators, comparative research design
- **WP3:** Participatory fieldwork methodology and inclusion protocols
- **WP4:** Digital support platform/tool and data architecture
- **WP5:** Territorial fieldwork and data collection in validation neighbourhoods
- **WP6:** Cross-site analysis and robust evidence generation
- **WP7:** NEB-aligned decision tests and validation
- **WP8:** Policy, planning, exploitation, dissemination, and impact

Consortium and Partner Profiles

The consortium should combine research excellence, local implementation capacity, digital capacity, community trust, and policy uptake. Key partner profiles include:

- local public authorities or territorial partners from at least three validation neighbourhoods;
- universities or research institutes with expertise in SSH, public health, urban studies, environmental psychology, human geography, participatory research, or well-being research;
- digital mapping or civic technology expertise for the platform/tool, GIS, data integration, dashboards, privacy-by-design, accessibility, and user experience;
- urban planning, architecture or design organisations with experience in public space, regeneration, accessibility, sensory comfort, and NEB-aligned transformation;
- cultural, artistic and heritage organisations rooted in the selected neighbourhoods;
- health and well-being organisations, such as public health agencies, mental health organisations, community health actors, or well-being research centres;
- green/environmental expertise, especially where linked to climate comfort, biodiversity, nature-positive transformation, urban greening, or green-blue infrastructure;
- civil society and community organisations representing vulnerable or marginalised groups;
- policy or procurement expertise able to translate evidence into planning briefs, procurement criteria and practical recommendations.

Each validation neighbourhood should ideally include a local authority, a community or civil society partner, and a cultural or place-based actor. Partners should not only collect evidence; they should also be able to use the findings in real planning, cultural, green transition or procurement decisions.