

NEWS

PROJECT

WISH MI - Wellbeing Integrated System of Milan

Milan, Italy

TOPIC

Urban poverty

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BY EDDY ADAMS

## Going Digital: The WISH-MI online platform gets the green light

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The City of Milan has launched a digital platform to offer wellbeing services to its young people and families. The platform is now operational, complementing the opening of the first WISH-MI neighbourhood hubs.

### Introduction

The closing of 2022 has been marked by a rush of activity as WISH-MI, Milan's new youth wellbeing framework, goes live in a range of physical and digital settings. This final update of the year complements the earlier post, focused on the new WISH-MI neighbourhood hubs, and shares the state of play relating to the project's digital platform.

### Now, where were we?

A few weeks ago we joined the new neighbourhood hubs in Spaventa and Cassina Ana, as they opened their doors to local youth. Since then, the projects have started their important task of engaging with young service users, in both cases by mobilising them to help design and decorate the spaces.



This codesign process is identified as being an essential component in promoting a sense of ownership amongst the

young people who will use these facilities. Few of them have much agency in their lives at home and school, so this sends a signal not only that this is 'their space' but also that they are trusted to make decisions.

Engaging youth in these neighbourhoods has faced multiple challenges - not least the pandemic which slowed work on the ground - but with these carefully selected providers it is now taking off. Throughout 2023 as the project draws to a conclusion, we will check in on the hubs to track their progress - and the key lessons this experience is generating both for Milan and for other cities across Europe.

### **Meanwhile, in the digital world...**

The seven neighbourhood hubs will be complemented by a digital platform which will function like a market, connecting service providers with young people and their families across the city. Three major preparatory activities have been under way to enable this ambitious plan.

First, a digital infrastructure has been developed that will host these online activities, providing a shop window for service providers as well as a mechanism to book and feedback on what's available. Second, a process has been designed and implemented to create a digital catalogue, showcasing what's on offer. Thirdly, a voucher system has been created with a variety of functions. This includes a targeted campaign to encourage disadvantaged young people and families to access services, as well as a providing incentives for services providers - at the city-wide and local level - to co-design and offer new provision.

### ***Building and populating the digital platform***

The pandemic provided a stimulus to digital activities. Amongst public service providers, it catalysed an existing process where services were being migrated onto digital platforms to meet citizen's changing lives and shifting expectations. The growth of online public service provision provides one of the cornerstones of EU digital policy, set out in the [Digital Decade](#) and the city of Milan's wider [digital strategic priorities](#).

This driver also sits at the heart of Milan's WISH-MI plans but the city wants to go beyond that, by creating a comprehensive offer for young people and their families that also includes private and NGO provision. One of the key lessons so far has been the challenge to engage non-public actors - particularly those in the private sector, and this remains work in progress.

Meanwhile, the WISH-MI team has made good headway designing the format for the digital catalogue and recruiting service providers onto it. At the time of writing, 85 approved providers have a presence on the platform and the catalogue offers over 200 services and activities. Getting to this point has required a major communications and consultation exercise with service providers, as well as supporting them through the submission process as they repackage their offer through this new digital channel.

Now that this core service offer is available, and young people are starting to select and activate services, it is hoped that this will stimulate other providers to join the party. A critical mass is required if the platform is to realise its transformative potential for Milan's service model. 2023 will be the acid test for this, as the project enters the final stages of its UIA lifespan.

### ***Voucher power***

Milan's new voucher system provides the final piece in this puzzle. It has multiple objectives. One is to raise awareness and ensure that the most disadvantaged young people and families know which services they are entitled to and have an incentive to use them. By the end of November 2022, 5006 vouchers had been assigned and potential users are actively exploring the system to check what is available.

In the meantime, the first 125 vouchers have already been used, demonstrating that the model works. Who is using them - for example which age groups - and how, are amongst the key questions that will be part of the city's analysis in the coming months. We will return to this in the spring of next year to share the initial results.

The other dimension of the voucher scheme is to encourage new youth provision in the city. An open call launched in summer 2023 encouraged providers to propose new services either in response to gaps, or to growing user demand. 41 proposals were submitted and the selected ones will be awarded funding - in the form of vouchers - to work up and launch their ideas.

One of the WISH-MI objectives is to encourage new approaches to service design. Co-design, would be a better word,

because the city wants to see its own departments - and providers from all sectors - involve young service users and their families in designing future services. This transforms the role of 'customers' from passive service users to active agents in evaluating their experiences, feeding back and actively participating to make future improvements. This represents a huge relational shift and this experimentation with the call and the vouchers is supporting the initial steps.

### ***What's ahead? 'Phy-gital' activity and youth volunteering***

Other innovative aspects of the WISH-MI model will help contribute to this shift in relationships, where service users have a more active role. One important element will draw upon gamification principles of missions and rewards to inform the design of a 'phy-gital' (physical and digital) ecosystem. This will be linked to an existing [volunteering platform](#) on the City of Milan's website (add link) that promotes active citizenship through volunteering. A dedicated 0-18 years section of the website will be dedicated to this new strand of activity.

The co-design phase of the missions will start in January 2023, involving registered service providers, supported by project partners. They will be implemented with young people between May and July, after an official launch linked to World Play Day on 28th May. (Add link)

### ***The start of the end and the end of the beginning***

2023 marks the final year of WISH-MI's UIA-funded activity. This will be the time when all of the plans and developments come to fruition, and the platform for sustaining the legacy of the project will begin its work. It will also be the time to stand back and share the lessons of this challenging, ambitious endeavour. Join us then to hear how this first part of the WISH-MI journey concludes.

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