

Finalists named in Bloomberg European city contest

April 23 2014, by Jennifer Peltz

Amsterdam wants to create an online game to get unemployed young people engaged in finding jobs across Europe. Schaerbeek, Belgium, envisions using geothermal mapping to give households personalized rundowns of steps to save energy. Gdansk, Poland, is proposing to require officials to debate ideas from citizens.

The cities are among 21 finalists vying for millions of euros in a new government-innovation contest devised by former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, his foundation announced Wednesday. The finalists come from 11 European countries and include sprawling capitals and modest-sized cities, their climates and cultures as different as those of Stockholm, Sweden, and Barcelona, Spain.

Asked for projects that could solve major social or economic problems or make government more effective, the cities "stepped up with bold and creative ideas," Bloomberg said in a statement.

After the finalists hone their proposals, winners of a 5 million euro—nearly \$7 million—grand prize and four 1 million euro awards will be announced in the fall.

Modeled on a competition that Bloomberg Philanthropies held for U.S. cities last year, the European contest was open to cities of 100,000 or more residents and drew 155 entries.

Several European finalists looked to technology's potential to improve

residents' lives: auditory alerts to help blind people get around Warsaw, Poland; new systems for Londoners to monitor their health; and methods for making energy out of the heat thrown off by Madrid's underground infrastructure, for example.

Other proposals are more interpersonal. Barcelona aims to make aging less lonely through [social networking](#) the old-fashioned way: identifying a team of relatives, friends, social workers and volunteers for each elderly person. Sofia, Bulgaria, suggests dispatching "mobile art units" where local residents could lend a hand to rejuvenating underused public spaces. Kirklees, in England, imagines getting citizens to pool resources ranging from cars to unused space to untapped expertise.

The Welsh city of Cardiff intends to help residents take small steps to be more productive, the Dutch capital of the Hague is proposing to let citizens choose how part of their taxes will be spent, and Stockholm wants to get people producing biochar, an organic, charcoal-like material that can improve soil quality and purify water, among other environmental benefits.

Like the U.S. applicants last year, many European cities aimed to tackle economic growth, obesity and citizen engagement. But the European submissions put more emphasis on aging and social exclusion, while the American cities trained more focus on making government more efficient and customer-service-oriented, said James Anderson, who oversees Bloomberg Philanthropies' government innovation work.

A billionaire businessman-turned-politician, Bloomberg often casts cities as breeding grounds for new approaches to governing. His 12 years in office ended Dec. 31.

"We need city leaders to continually reach for innovative new ways to address urban challenges—and then share what's working with the

world," he said Wednesday.

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