Health Impact assessment (HIA) might contribute to reducing social inequalities in health (SIH), through their impact on social determinants of health but also as a real decision-making tool. However, even if HIA is attracting for an incrementally growing part of local authority stakeholders, in France, it has been developed mainly expensive and time-consuming projects. Furthermore, although Equity is a main value of HIA, it’s often a theoretical aspect rather than a reality. The research project assesses the feasibility of a systematic use of HIA, in a relevant and adapted way by querying all urban design projects, on health and SIH: « the screening ».

The research is based on a partnership between a multidisciplinary research team and urban professionals, which provides a strong asset to know and understand the world of urban planning. Together, the teams have created an adapted screening grid which helps identify potential, differential impacts of urban projects on population very quickly, thus making informed decision about starting a HIA or not. During screening meetings, researchers observe the use of the screening grid in different settings, with voluntary project managers, local urban planners and actors aware of public health, on different types of urban projects.

The screening grid contains about twenty questions on health determinants. By distinguishing different populations (well-to-do, average, modest people) it enables urban planners to evaluate differential, positive or negative impact and therefore the grid can show a social gradient of health if it’s induced by urban projects. Screenings meetings last around one hour. They have been organised on six different types of Toulouse’s urban projects at a different stage of development, and on urban renewal projects, which allow the grid to be tested in different contexts.

The first results show a real interest from urban planners to health and tools to highlight differential impacts of urbanism on population’s well-being. However, they express their uncertainty about a new scope of thinking, such as health and equity, in a world already overbooked by regulatory demands.

The research is still ongoing but forward it attempts to establish the favourable conditions to a systematic health questioning on any urban project and detect which need a more or less complex HIA.