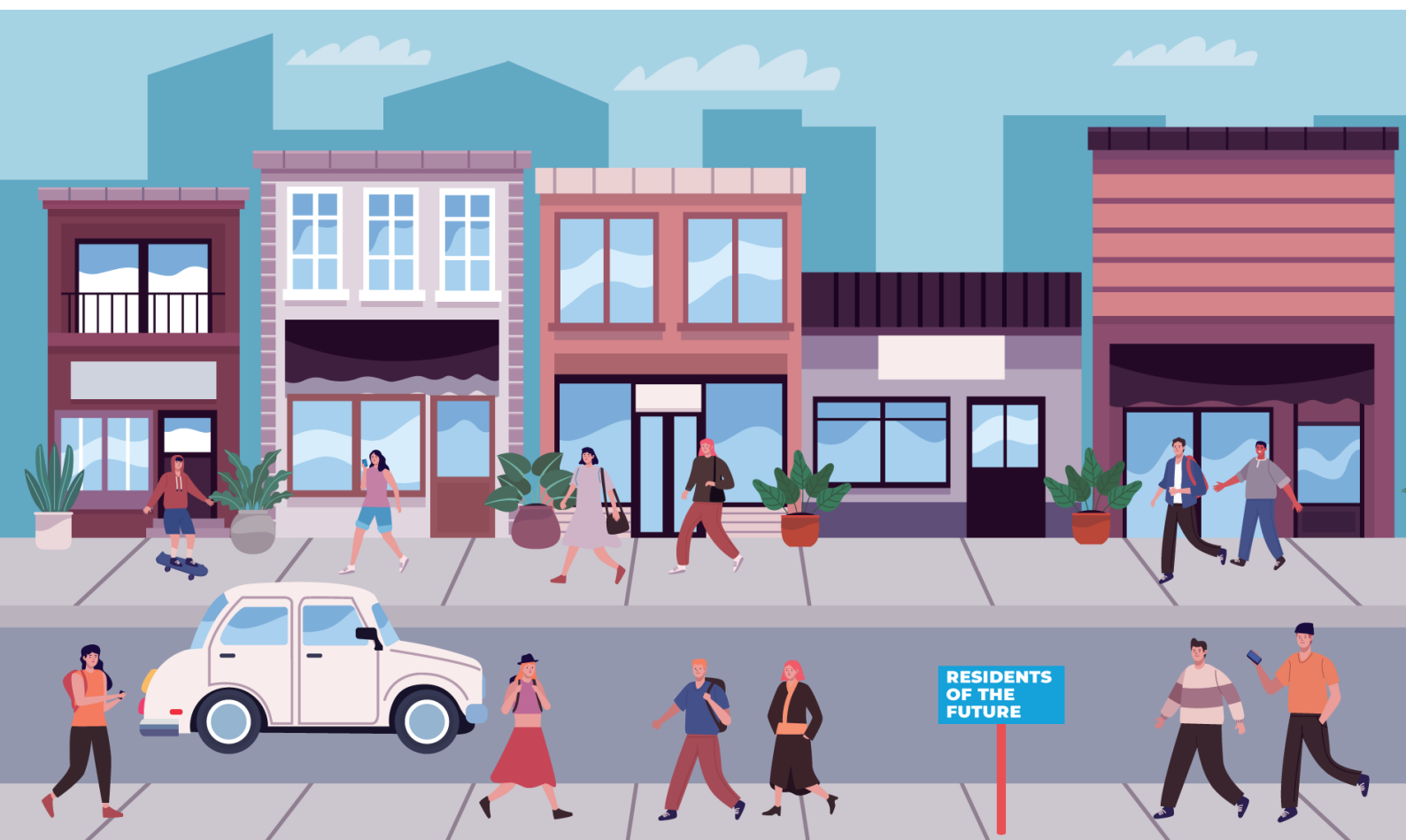


4<sup>th</sup> Quarterly Report

# Residents of the Future



URBACT



Co-funded by  
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# Residents of the Future

October to December 2024

URBACT



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## 1. Welcome to Residents of the Future

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Residents of the Future is an action plan URBACT network that wants to address the issue of urban depopulation within small and medium-sized cities. By focusing on digital transformation, economic diversification, and city branding, it will explore innovative approaches towards evolving trends in work, lifestyle, and communication, to enhance the cities' attractiveness for prospective investments and inhabitants.

The network enables cities to redefine their advantages in comparison to larger metropolitan areas, and develop holistic, citizen-centric solutions that support demographic revitalisation and sustainable urban growth.

### Network members:

Alba Iulia - Romania

Iisalmi - Finland

Mangualde - Portugal

Mantova - Italy

Plasencia - Spain

Saint-Quentin - France

Saldus – Latvia

Sibenik – Croatia | **Lead Partner**

Trebinje - Bosnia-Herzegovina



## 2. What is new on Residents of the Future?

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### 2.1 Residents of the Future accelerating the URBACT Local Groups

This chapter highlights the latest strides within the Residents of the Future project, showcasing how cities across Europe are tackling urban challenges with innovative solutions to attract and retain residents. Each city's journey reflects its unique priorities, from strengthening local economies to fostering social inclusion and improving quality of life.

Alba Iulia is making bold moves in youth engagement, refining its Youth Capital 2026 initiative and forging new partnerships to amplify young voices. Iisalmi, on the other hand, is redefining its marketing strategy with the launch of the "Bridge to Iisalmi" campaign, aiming to attract newcomers and boost the city's visibility. Meanwhile, Mangualde is focusing on education and cultural integration, using a student-driven approach to assess inclusivity within its schools and explore ways to enhance the learning environment.

Plasencia continues to refine its Integrated Action Plan, with a renewed emphasis on city branding and housing solutions, while Saint-Quentin is improving its welcome infrastructure, launching a new digital platform to ease the transition for newcomers. At the same time, the city has celebrated the reopening of its revitalized basilica square, reinforcing its commitment to urban renewal.

Saldus has seen promising results in entrepreneurial support, with its small business hub attracting tenants and fostering local enterprises, while also testing new approaches to community building through regular public events. Šibenik, meanwhile, is tackling one of the biggest challenges for small cities—youth migration—by engaging university students in direct conversations about their career expectations, quality of life preferences, and what it would take for them to consider smaller cities as a viable place to live and work.

Through testing actions, strategic initiatives, and cross-city collaboration, each network member is learning, adapting, and refining solutions that contribute to a more vibrant and sustainable urban future. This chapter celebrates their progress and ongoing commitment to making their cities places where people not only choose to stay but thrive.



## ALBA IULIA

### Alba Iulia's National Recognition and Green Innovation Efforts

Alba The last quarter of 2024 was a defining period for **Alba Iulia**, as the city progressed significantly in its efforts to become **Romania's Youth Capital 2026** while also pioneering sustainability initiatives under the European Commission's **Smart Cities Challenge** program.

### Youth Capital of Romania 2026 – National Selection and Engagement

During this quarter, Alba Iulia's **Youth Capital 2026 application** underwent national selection, marking a crucial milestone in the city's youth engagement strategy. The pilot project, which serves as the foundation for Alba Iulia's vision, received **optimization feedback** from an expert jury comprising **27 professionals** from public, private, and non-governmental sectors at local, national, and European levels.



Several **impact events** highlighted Alba Iulia's commitment to youth involvement:

- **October 3** – The public announcement confirming Alba Iulia's selection for the **Youth Capital of Romania 2026** application.
- **October 16-20** – Active participation in the **Romanian Youth Summit and Romanian Youth Gala**, where the city showcased its commitment to youth-driven initiatives.

- **December 13-15** – A working meeting in **Vaslui**, refining strategies to further strengthen the city's application.

Alba Iulia also leveraged national media to enhance visibility. On December 1, Romania's National Day, the city's pilot project was featured in "Road with Priority", a program aired by the national radio station Europa FM. This platform helped communicate the initiative's vision and objectives to a broader audience.

### **Smart Cities Challenge – Advancing a Local Green Deal**

Beyond youth initiatives, Alba Iulia took significant steps toward green innovation. On December 9-10, the city participated in a working meeting with European Commission experts to test and develop a Local Green Deal package as part of the Smart Cities Challenge program. This initiative positions Alba Iulia as a forward-thinking city, embracing sustainable urban development and fostering eco-friendly policies.

On December 10, the city also presented the Local Green Deal concept to stakeholders from the tourism sector and various national organizations, ensuring broad engagement and strategic input for the program's future implementation.

### **Did you know that...**

### **Smart Cities Challenge – Advancing a Local Green Deal**

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## IISALMI

### **lisalmi Strengthens Marketing Strategy and Regional Collaboration**

In the last quarter of 2024, lisalmi continued making strides in its Residents of the Future initiatives, with a strong focus on marketing development and regional networking. Key activities during this period included participation in the URBACT Nordic National Campus and refining the city's "Bridge to lisalmi" marketing concept.

#### **Strengthening Regional Cooperation at URBACT Nordic National Campus**

On November 7-8, two representatives from lisalmi participated in the URBACT Nordic National Campus in Stockholm, Sweden. This event provided a valuable opportunity to connect with Nordic cities facing similar urban challenges, fostering knowledge exchange and strengthening regional cooperation. The campus focused on best practices in city branding, community engagement, and sustainable urban development, offering insights that will directly inform lisalmi's local initiatives.

#### **Advancing the "Bridge to lisalmi" Marketing Concept**

Marketing was a central theme in November, as the city held a dedicated workshop on November 26 to further refine its "Bridge to lisalmi" concept. This collaborative session, organized in partnership with the ULG (URBACT Local Group) members and the marketing agency Avidly, focused on developing an effective campaign strategy to attract new residents and promote lisalmi as an appealing place to live and work.



In December, the city reached a milestone in its marketing efforts. On December 17, lisalmi held its sixth ULG meeting, where Avidly presented the finalized version of the marketing concept. The meeting, attended by 10 ULG members, provided a platform for discussion and feedback, ensuring that the marketing strategy aligns with lisalmi's long-term goals. Avidly's team participated remotely via Google Meet, engaging in a dynamic exchange with local stakeholders.

With the marketing concept now finalized, lisalmi is well-positioned to launch impactful outreach initiatives in 2025, reinforcing its commitment to attracting new residents and fostering a vibrant, sustainable future.



## Did you know that...

### ) Unexpected funny cultural revelation

At the URBACT Nordic National Campus in Stockholm, the Iisalmi team had not only productive discussions but also an unexpectedly funny cultural revelation!

While networking with Nordic partners, the Finnish delegation quickly noticed similarities in urban development challenges and planned actions across different cities. However, an amusing inside joke emerged among the Finnish participants—despite being in an international environment, they naturally gravitated towards each other, forming an almost unbreakable Finnish alliance.

The reason? The well-known Finnish traits of being reserved and a bit shy! While surrounded by Swedish and Danish colleagues, the Finnish attendees found comfort in their shared cultural mindset, creating a humorous moment of self-awareness.

The takeaway? Even in cross-border cooperation, cultural nuances shape interactions, sometimes in unexpectedly bonding ways. And in the case of Iisalmi's team, their experience in Stockholm proved that even "shy and stiff" Finns can build strong international collaborations—especially when they stick together!

## **MANGUALDE**

### **Mangualde's Pilot Action: Understanding Student Experiences for a More Inclusive Educational Environment**

In the last quarter of 2024, Mangualde took an important step in understanding the experiences of students from diverse backgrounds through a pilot action aimed at improving integration, social belonging, and academic support.

The initiative engaged 130 students across different educational levels, using targeted questionnaires to assess school experiences, challenges, and opportunities for improvement. The results offered valuable insights into how students perceive their environment and what changes could enhance their learning and social integration.

#### **Key Findings: A City That Welcomes, but Gaps Remain**

The study confirmed that Mangualde is widely seen as a good place to live, with 98.3% of middle school students and 81.3% of high school students expressing a positive view. However, one in three high schoolers felt they might seek opportunities elsewhere, signaling a need to strengthen youth engagement beyond school life.

Inside the classroom, the results were encouraging:

- 84.5% of middle schoolers and 70% of high school students described their classroom environment as welcoming.
- 88% of younger students found it easy to make friends, and 91.4% of middle schoolers reported feeling included in their school community.

Despite these positive trends, some key challenges emerged:

- Language barriers were a significant hurdle, with 50% of immigrant students in early education struggling with Portuguese.
- Extracurricular activities were lacking for 40% of middle schoolers and 50% of high school students.
- Cultural adaptation remained an issue for 20% of younger students, while 34% of high schoolers noted a lack of support outside school.

#### **Moving Forward: What Students Want**

Students have been clear about their needs. Among the key suggestions:

- More multicultural activities, requested by 50% of middle schoolers, to foster a stronger sense of community.
- Infrastructure improvements and increased technology in classrooms, a priority for 25% of high school students.
- Enhanced psychological support, highlighted by 15% of students, to promote emotional well-being.

This participatory approach has provided Mangualde with a valuable roadmap for improving inclusivity in education. By addressing these insights, the city is taking steps to ensure that schools not only educate but also empower students, fostering a stronger, more connected community for the future.

**Did you know that...**

**) Mangualde hosted the Residents of the Future transnational meeting**

The 4th Transnational Meeting of the Residents of the Future network, held in Mangualde on October 8-9, was a milestone event that brought delegations from partner cities together for three days of collaboration, learning, and cultural exchange.

With an ambitious agenda, the meeting focused on peer networking sessions, where cities engaged in peer-review exercises to refine their Integrated Action Plans. Discussions also highlighted effective communication strategies, with Mangualde showcasing its approach to engaging local communities and promoting city initiatives.

Beyond the formal sessions, what truly defined the event was the commitment and enthusiasm of all participants. The meeting reinforced the collaborative spirit of the network, providing valuable space for idea exchange, shared learning, and deeper connections.

And, of course, no visit to Mangualde would be complete without experiencing its rich culture, traditions, and welcoming community. The social interactions throughout the event played a key role in strengthening the network's sense of unity, proving that transforming cities starts with strong partnerships and shared vision.



## **MANTOVA**

### **Mantova Maps Temporary Residents and Strengthens Local Networks**

In the past three months, Mantova has been actively working to connect local initiatives, engage new stakeholders, and enhance the city's attractiveness for potential new residents, entrepreneurs, and young professionals. The municipality has focused on building bridges between different actors, many of whom had not previously collaborated with the administration, reinforcing the URBACT approach of integrated urban development.

One of the most significant achievements of this period has been the launch of a mapping initiative to better understand temporary residents in Mantova—university students, trainees, and young professionals. This effort aims to identify who they are, their experiences in the city, and what they perceive as the strengths and weaknesses of living in Mantova. Importantly, this project has also helped to involve local organizations in the mapping process, with the goal of integrating them into the URBACT Local Group (ULG). A unique opportunity to amplify positive narratives about life in Mantova emerged through a collaboration with a young editorial start-up specializing in Instagram journalism. The initiative focuses on showcasing success stories and opportunities in the city, helping to reshape perceptions and highlight what makes Mantova an appealing place to live.

Over the last quarter, Mantova has worked with five local organizations, two of which were new to the ULG, to collect data, conduct surveys, and define key themes for storytelling and engagement. This work will culminate in:

- 10 video interviews featuring diverse success stories.
- 6 public events and workshops, structured in an Oxford-style debate format, bringing inspiring professionals to the stage.

Originally planned as a series of four public events, the municipality, recognizing the high potential of engaging temporary residents, has decided to support two additional events as Testing Actions. These activities, set to launch in early spring, mark an important step toward strengthening Mantova's appeal and fostering a more inclusive city narrative.

By listening to temporary residents and amplifying their voices, Mantova is making a concerted effort to enhance its attractiveness, create stronger local networks, and ensure that those who come to the city—even for a short time—feel welcomed, valued, and engaged.



## PLASENCIA

### Plasencia Advances Its Integrated Action Plan and Strengthens Institutional Support

The last quarter of 2024 was a pivotal period for Plasencia in the Residents of the Future project, with renewed momentum in planning, collaboration, and strategic discussions. After the summer break, activities resumed with a strong focus on city branding, housing challenges, and the development of the Integrated Action Plan (IAP).

#### National-Level Engagement and Strategic Partnerships

Beyond the international scope, Plasencia also reinforced its national collaboration by participating in November's URBACT National Point event in Villena. This gathering was particularly significant as it provided crucial insights into funding opportunities, an essential component for ensuring the effective implementation of planned initiatives.

#### Institutional Backing and Local Coordination

At the local level, a major milestone was achieved in November when the Plasencia project team met with the city's political leaders. During this session, municipal authorities expressed their support for the work being done by the project coordinators and the URBACT Local Group (ULG). This backing strengthens the project's institutional foundation, ensuring alignment between technical planning and political decision-making.





## **Next Steps: Testing Actions and Implementation Strategy**

December saw the resumption of ULG activities, with a key meeting focused on advancing the design of the city's first testing actions. The session also helped define specific objectives and action areas for the Integrated Action Plan, setting the stage for concrete steps in 2025.

With the transnational learnings, national funding insights, and local government support now in place, Plasencia is well-positioned to translate planning into action, ensuring that the Residents of the Future project delivers meaningful and lasting change for the city.

## **Did you know that...**

### **) Plasencia Showcases Culture and Heritage as Key Drivers of City Attractiveness**

At the transnational meeting in Mangualde, Plasencia had the opportunity to showcase how it has leveraged heritage, culture, leisure, and tourism to strengthen its city branding and attractiveness—not just for visitors, but for residents as well.

Through a dedicated workshop, the team highlighted key policies and initiatives that have shaped Plasencia's identity in recent years. The session provided a moment of reflection, allowing the city to assess past successes, recognize impactful decisions, and identify areas for improvement.

The response? Overwhelmingly positive. The workshop was well-received by partner cities, reinforcing Plasencia's role as a city that values its history while actively shaping its future. The experience left the team proud and motivated, further proving that culture and heritage can be powerful tools for urban revitalization and community engagement.

## **SAINT-QUENTIN**

### **Saint-Quentin Strengthens Its Efforts to Attract and Support New Residents**

In the last quarter of 2024, Saint-Quentin focused on making the city more welcoming and attractive to new residents through a series of targeted initiatives. These efforts align with the city's broader strategy to enhance urban appeal, improve environmental sustainability, and address key community needs.

#### **A Digital Welcome for Newcomers**

One of the key developments this quarter was the draft of a new website dedicated to welcoming newcomers to Saint-Quentin. Designed as an accessible and user-friendly platform, the website consolidates essential information for individuals considering relocation, offering guidance on housing, services, job opportunities, and community integration. This initiative reflects the city's commitment to making relocation as seamless as possible for potential new residents.

#### **Greener and Healthier Communities**

In addition to digital accessibility, environmental sustainability was a major focus. Saint-Quentin advanced its micro-forest project, an initiative aimed at increasing green spaces, improving air quality, and enhancing urban biodiversity. This aligns with the city's long-term environmental goals, contributing to a healthier and more sustainable living environment.

#### **Welcoming Health Professionals**

Recognizing the importance of healthcare services in community well-being, Saint-Quentin also planned a dedicated welcome day for health professionals. This initiative seeks to attract and retain medical professionals, addressing local healthcare needs while ensuring newcomers and long-term residents alike have access to quality medical services.

By investing in digital accessibility, environmental sustainability, and healthcare engagement, Saint-Quentin is reinforcing its commitment to growth, inclusivity, and long-term urban resilience, making it a more appealing destination for both newcomers and long-term residents.

Did you know that...

### ) Saint-Quentin Reopens Basilica Square, Attracting Visitors

After two years of work and an investment of over €8 million, the square in front of Saint-Quentin's iconic basilica has officially reopened to the public, marking a major milestone in the city's revitalization efforts. This transformation restores one of the most significant urban spaces in the town center, offering beautifully designed, welcoming areas for both residents and visitors to enjoy.



To celebrate the reopening, Saint-Quentin hosted a two-week mapping event, which proved to be a huge success in boosting the city's appeal. The event attracted a surge of visitors, with local shopkeepers and the Tourist Office reporting increased foot traffic from people who traveled specifically to experience the spectacle.

This project not only enhances the city's architectural charm but also strengthens Saint-Quentin's position as a cultural and tourism destination space where history, urban design, and community life come together.

## **SALDUS**

### **Saldus Advances Testing Actions to Foster Business Growth and Community Inclusion**

In the last quarter of 2024, Saldus made significant progress in implementing its two Testing Actions, aimed at strengthening entrepreneurship and social cohesion in the city. Both initiatives have gained momentum and visibility, positioning Saldus as a leader in community-driven development.

#### **Turning an Old School into a Business Hub**

The first Testing Action—transforming the former Sātiņi school into the small business community center "Sātiņū DARĪTAVA" (Satini Workshop)—reached an important milestone and is now in its evaluation phase. The goal was to secure seven lease contracts by the end of 2024, a target that has been successfully met. More notably, four out of seven tenants who initially started as private entrepreneurs have formally registered their businesses after just one month in space, proving its impact in fostering entrepreneurship.

This initiative has also attracted strong media attention, receiving coverage on local, regional, and national platforms, including TV, radio, and press. The next steps involve documenting the model of the small business community center for inclusion in the Integrated Action Plan (IAP) and ensuring the long-term sustainability of the space.

#### **Building a More Open and Inclusive Community**

The second Testing Action focused on creating a more inclusive Saldus by organizing small community events every three weeks, bringing together locals and newcomers for collaborative activities and discussions. So far, four events have been held on September 26, October 17, November 7, and December 5, with the initiative set to continue in January.



One key insight from these gatherings is that many community members have great ideas but lack the encouragement to act. The initiative has shown that having a dedicated facilitator—an "engine" to motivate and engage residents—can make a significant difference in turning ideas into reality.

### **Engagement at Local and International Levels**

Saldus has remained active within the Residents of the Future network, participating in the Transnational Meeting in Mangualde in October and the Keep in Touch Call in December. Additionally, two representatives attended the URBACT Baltic Campus event in Riga in November, strengthening regional collaboration and knowledge exchange.

With strong local government support, active media coverage, and promising early results, Saldus is well on its way to building a dynamic business ecosystem and a more connected community. The city's Testing Actions are already proving their value, paving the way for long-term impact and sustainable growth.



**Did you know that...**

### **) Saldus Looks to Fundão for Inspiration in Revitalizing Small Cities**

On October 10, the Saldus team, alongside partners from Saint-Quentin, traveled to Fundão, Portugal, a town recognized across Europe for successfully maintaining its population over the past decade. In a time when many small cities face population decline, Fundão has become a model for sustainable urban development—but what's the secret behind its success?

This visit was part of Saldus's mission within the Residents of the Future project to explore strategies for reversing urban shrinkage. The key takeaway? There's no single solution, and change doesn't happen overnight. However, what stood out in Fundão was the clear, shared vision among its key stakeholders—from the municipality's development department to business support centers and migration specialists.

The experience reinforced a crucial lesson: collaboration, long-term planning, and strategic action are essential to making small cities more resilient, attractive, and livable. Inspired by Fundão's approach, Saldus is eager to apply these insights to shape its own future-proof strategies.

## ŠIBENIK

### Šibenik Advances Testing Action and Strengthens National and Transnational Collaboration

In the last quarter of 2024, Šibenik remained highly active within the Residents of the Future network, engaging in key discussions, capacity-building efforts, and strategic planning. The city participated in the transnational meeting in Portugal and has already begun preparations for the next gathering in Romania, reinforcing its role in the network's collaborative efforts.

#### National Engagement and Knowledge Sharing

Beyond its international activities, Šibenik also took part in the Croatian URBACT Campus, a national-level event focused on action planning implementation. Held over two intensive days, the campus gathered representatives from Dubrovnik, Osijek, Pula, Zadar, Zagreb, and Šibenik, offering valuable lectures, exercises, and discussions on integrating project activities and securing funding.

#### Refining the Testing Action: Engaging Students in City Branding

This quarter also saw Šibenik focus on the final details and implementation of its testing action. Initially, the city aimed to organize a large-scale event to showcase employment and city life opportunities, akin to a job fair with direct municipal involvement. However, as the planning unfolded, the team recognized the complexity of such an initiative and the uncertainty surrounding student interest in this format.

As a result, Šibenik opted for a more focused pilot event, featuring the city administration and two municipal companies—one in culture and the other in entrepreneurship. To assess its impact, a survey was conducted among students at the Zagreb University for Applied Sciences, following a similar local polytechnic survey to provide comparative insights.



Before the event, a URBACT Local Group (ULG) meeting was held to integrate valuable feedback from local stakeholders, ensuring the testing action aligned with community needs. ULG members played an active role in shaping and implementing the initiative, emphasizing the importance of local engagement in city branding efforts.

## Did you know that...

### ) Šibenik Engages Students to Shape the Future of Small Cities

This quarter, Šibenik launched an innovative testing action to address a key challenge—the loss of young professionals to larger cities. Recognizing that university years are critical in shaping future life choices, the city engaged directly with students at Tehničko Veleučilište u Zagrebu (TVZ) to explore their career expectations, lifestyle priorities, and perceptions of small cities.

#### Key Takeaways from Student Conversations

The response was better than expected, challenging the idea that young people are disengaged. Many students:

- They had never been asked about their plans so directly and were eager to share opinions.
- Lacked knowledge about life in small cities and had never considered moving to one.
- Were unaware of Šibenik's career and cultural opportunities but showed interest when presented with initiatives like Fortress of Culture and Trokut.

#### Survey Insights: What Students Want

- Work-life balance matters – 52% prioritize job offers that support it.
- Future remains open – 68% are undecided about where they will live.
- Safety is key – 91% consider it a major factor in choosing a city.
- Salary expectations are high – Students expect €1,500 for entry-level jobs and €2,500–3,000 after 5–10 years.
- Many plan to leave Croatia – 17% aim to work abroad after graduation.

By engaging directly with students, Šibenik is gaining valuable insights into what young professionals need—and how smaller cities can better position themselves as attractive places to live and work.

## 2.2 Mangualde Hosts a Dynamic Transnational Meeting for the Residents of the Future Network

From October 8 to 10, Mangualde hosted the Residents of the Future transnational meeting, bringing together partner cities for peer learning, strategy development, and city branding discussions.

### **Day 1: Project Progress and City Branding**

The meeting opened with welcome remarks from the Mayor and Vice-Mayor of Mangualde, followed by a peer-to-peer session where cities shared progress and challenges. The Mid-Term Review, led by the Lead Partner, provided a structured reflection on the project's achievements.

A highlight of the day was the City Branding and Marketing training by Carlos Brito, which explored strategies to attract residents and businesses. The day concluded with a city center visit and a networking sunset dinner at Quinta dos Cedros.

### **Day 2: Culture, Investment, and Housing**

Plasencia led a workshop on leveraging heritage, culture, and tourism to boost urban appeal. This was followed by a training session on investment attraction, delivered by Tiago Ferreira, offering insights into economic development strategies.

A communication strategy session provided guidance on public engagement, while Mantova shared its housing solutions, addressing urban shrinkage and affordability. The day ended with a networking dinner at Quinta dos Monteirinhos.





The Mangualde Transnational Meeting reinforced the importance of collaboration in tackling urban challenges. Cities left with new strategies and stronger connections, ready to implement their Integrated Action Plans and enhance urban livability.

### **CITY BRANDING AND MARKETING: BUILDING STRONGER URBAN IDENTITIES**

The City Branding and Marketing session, led by Carlos Brito, focused on how cities can define, develop, and promote their brand identity to attract residents, investors, and visitors. Brito emphasized that cities function like brands, shaping perceptions through symbols, messaging, and strategic positioning. A strong city brand is more than a logo or slogan—it is a promise and an asset that adds tangible value by reinforcing the city’s attractiveness and reputation. Participants explored the key components of city branding, including physical characteristics, infrastructure, economic potential, cultural life, and overall quality of life.



The session also included an interactive workshop, where participants worked in teams to assess what their cities currently do to retain and attract residents and propose new marketing actions. Cities were encouraged to move beyond traditional offline and online promotions and focus on innovative engagement strategies that highlight their unique identity and competitive advantages. By the end of the session, participants left with practical insights on how to position their cities more effectively, ensuring that they not only retain their current populations but also attract newcomers and economic opportunities.

More information about this inspiring session could be founded at the [URBACT website](#).

### **INVESTMENT ATTRACTION: STRATEGIES FOR SMALL CITIES TO COMPETE AND THRIVE**

At the Residents of the Future Transnational Meeting in Mangualde, cities explored how to position themselves as investment destinations, using the Investment Attraction Canvas as a practical tool. The session focused on leveraging local strengths, identifying growth sectors, and overcoming key barriers to attracting businesses and talent.

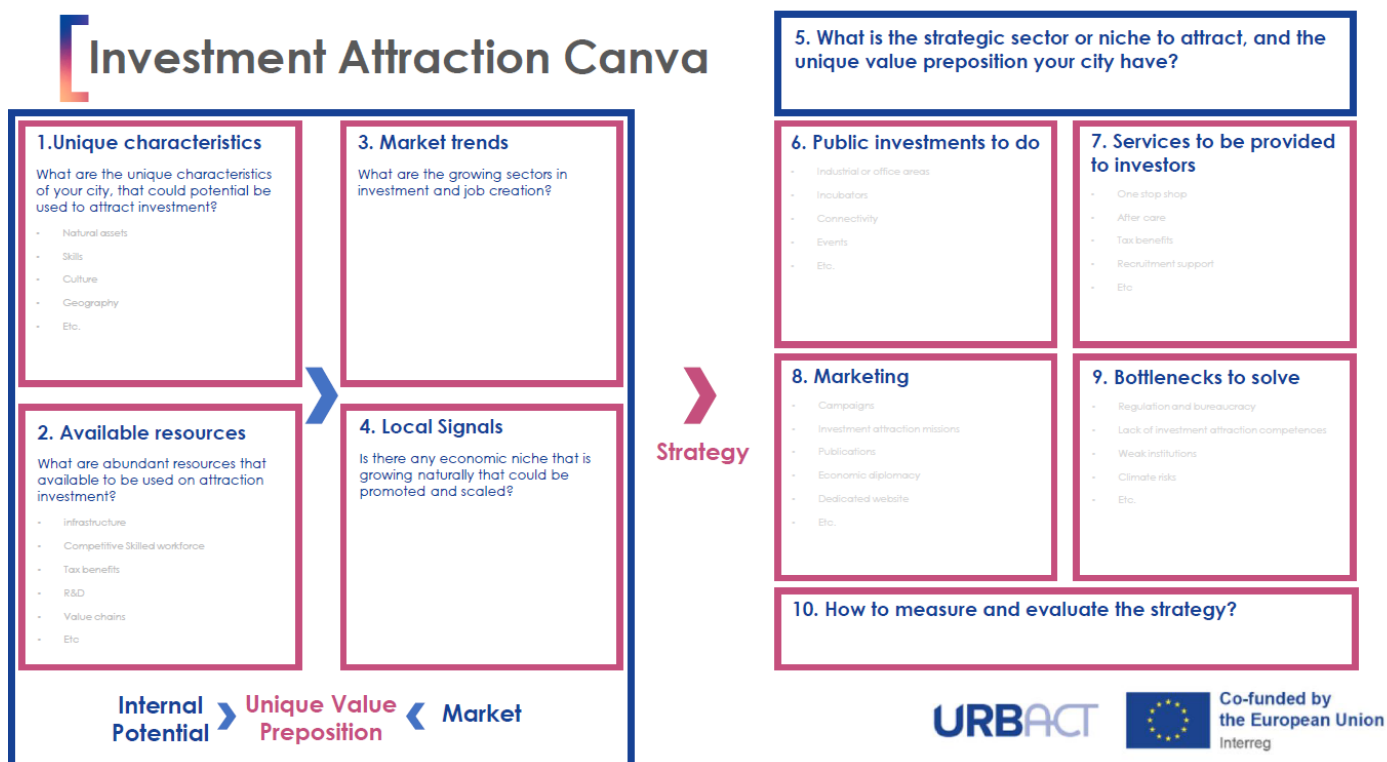


Small cities often struggle to compete with major hubs, but their lower costs, quality of life, and specialized workforce can be strong assets. The training emphasized the importance of defining a unique value proposition, aligning investments with local strengths, and ensuring long-term benefits for residents.

### Investment Attraction Canvas

Participants worked through key steps:

- ✓ Identifying unique characteristics (natural assets, skills, culture).
- ✓ Recognizing internal potential (infrastructure, R&D, skilled workforce).
- ✓ Targeting strategic sectors based on market trends and local economic signals.
- ✓ Defining an investment pitch to differentiate their city.
- ✓ Planning infrastructure and investor services, from incubators to one-stop investment hubs.
- ✓ Overcoming bottlenecks, such as bureaucratic hurdles or workforce shortages.
- ✓ Promoting the city through investment missions, marketing, and economic diplomacy.



### Key Takeaways

- **Play to Your Strengths** – Not all cities need big industries; niche markets and innovation hubs can be just as effective.
- **Be Proactive** – Investment doesn't happen by chance—cities must market themselves and build networks.
- **Balance Growth and Sustainability** – Attracting investment should align with long-term livability and environmental goals.

By applying these strategies, cities can attract the right investments, retain talent, and strengthen their local economies, ensuring sustainable growth for the future.

More information about this training session can be found at the [URBACT website](#).

### **PLASENCIA WORKSHOP: HERITAGE AS A DRIVER FOR URBAN VITALITY**

The Plasencia workshop at the Residents of the Future Transnational Meeting explored how heritage, culture, and leisure can enhance tourism, quality of life, and investment appeal. Participants examined how cities can preserve and repurpose historic buildings, transforming them into vibrant, functional spaces that serve modern needs while honoring local history.

By integrating architectural preservation with contemporary urban planning, cities can boost cultural vitality, strengthen community identity, and attract investment. The discussion emphasized that heritage sites should not be viewed as static relics but as active contributors to a city's growth, ensuring that tradition and innovation go hand in hand.

### **MANTOVA'S HOUSING STRATEGY: ATTRACTING NEW RESIDENTS THROUGH SMART ALLOCATION**

Mantova's innovative housing initiative aims to address local demand while attracting new residents. With 400 applications for available housing, 54% of applicants came from outside Mantova, highlighting strong interest from surrounding regions and beyond.

The program prioritizes young households, with 70% of applicants under 36 being residents. However, projections indicate that over 80% of allocated apartments will go to newcomers, reinforcing Mantova's role as a destination for new talent and families. By strategically managing housing supply and demand, the city is ensuring sustainable growth and greater social diversity in its residential landscape.

## 2.3 Housing Training Session

As part of the Residents of the Future Transnational Meeting, a training session on housing solutions was led by Liat Rogel, a service design and social innovation expert. The session focused on identifying key housing challenges faced by cities in the network and exploring innovative solutions to improve accessibility, affordability, and inclusivity in urban housing.



### **Key Housing Challenges Identified**

Participants analyzed common issues, including:

- ✓ Rising housing costs – Prices and rent are increasingly unaffordable, especially for young people and newcomers.
- ✓ Aging housing stock – Many cities struggle with outdated buildings requiring costly renovations.
- ✓ Short-term rentals – The impact of platforms like Airbnb on housing availability and affordability.
- ✓ Lack of social and affordable housing – Limited options for vulnerable groups and low-income residents.

### **Innovative Housing Solutions Explored**

The session highlighted successful models from across Europe, including:

- Public-private partnerships (PPP) – Examples like Cenni di Cambiamento in Milan and Homes4All in Turin show how cities can collaborate with investors to increase housing supply.
- Co-Housing and Intergenerational Living – Projects such as Porto 15 in Bologna and BiG in Milan promote shared living spaces that foster community and affordability.
- Inclusionary Zoning – Cities like Helsinki (20%) and Milan (40%) require private developments to include affordable housing, ensuring long-term social diversity.
- Short-term rental regulations – Cities like Barcelona and Amsterdam impose limits on Airbnb-style rentals to protect local housing availability.

### **City-Specific Strategies**

Participants worked in groups to identify solutions most relevant to their cities, focusing on strategies such as:

- Public incentives for housing renovations

- Affordable rental programs for young residents and migrants
- Better management of vacant properties
- Integrating housing strategies into economic and urban planning

The training session reinforced the idea that housing policies must be flexible, innovative, and community driven. By applying tailored solutions, cities can create more livable, sustainable, and inclusive urban environments for both current and future residents.

## **2.4 Mid-term Review**

This period was also intense on producing the mid-term review. This process followed the URBACT guidelines, with the lead expert being responsible for producing the final report.

The most important stage of the mid-term review was the workshop. At this session, the results from the questionnaire were presented to the partners and they were discussed. We present here the key conclusions from this workshop.

Before the meeting, partners completed a survey based on the URBACT template, allowing for a structured evaluation. The results confirmed that activities are progressing as planned, with no major deviations.

### **Key Takeaways from the Mid-Term Review Workshop:**

- ✓ **ULG Engagement Challenges:** Some cities struggle to maintain regular engagement with their URBACT Local Groups (ULGs).
- ✓ **Improved Knowledge:** Partners have gained a deeper understanding of the urban challenges addressed by the network.
- ✓ **Support Resources:** Guidance from the Lead Expert, Lead Partner, Secretariat, and Toolbox have been highly valuable.
- ✓ **Funding Risks:** The biggest challenge ahead is securing resources for IAP implementation.

The session reinforced that while the project is on track, continued engagement, strategic testing, and funding solutions will be crucial for successful implementation in the final phase.



### 3. What's Next on Residents of the Future?

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The period from January to March to December will have important moments on the URBACT journey of the Residents of the Future. The transnational meeting at Alba Iulia will be a flagship event, but the project will also have the Keep-in-Touch calls, and partner will be on an intense phase of implementing the testing actions and producing the IAP.

#### **ALBA IULIA TRANSNATIONAL MEETING**

From March 24 to 27, 2025, Alba Iulia will host a Residents of the Future Transnational Meeting, bringing together partner cities for peer learning, strategic discussions, and practical workshops. The agenda includes a walking tour of Alba Iulia's Smart City pilot projects and heritage recovery efforts, showcasing its innovative approach to urban development. A training session led by expert José Costero will focus on defining, promoting, and measuring Quality of Life, providing cities with actionable insights. Additionally, sessions on city branding and marketing strategies, as well as a deep dive into the Romania Youth Capital initiative, will offer valuable lessons for urban revitalization and youth engagement. With a mix of best practice exchanges, training, and hands-on exercises, the meeting will serve as a key moment to advance each city's Integrated Action Plan (IAP) and solidify the next steps for urban transformation.

## 4. Final remarks

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Dear reader,

As we wrap up this Fourth Quarterly Report for the Residents of the Future project, we take a moment to reflect on the progress made by each partner city. This quarter has been marked by bold initiatives, from the development of city branding strategies and testing actions that strengthen community ties, attract investment, and support sustainable housing solutions. The commitment to innovation, inclusivity, and long-term urban resilience has been truly inspiring.

A big thank you to all our city teams, your dedication, creativity, and collaboration continue to shape the success of this project. Each initiative, from microforests and youth engagement programs to entrepreneurial hubs and cultural revitalization efforts, reinforces our shared vision: creating thriving, welcoming, and future-ready cities.

With this momentum, we look ahead with confidence, knowing that each step taken today lays the foundation for a stronger tomorrow. Thank you for being part of this journey, and for your continued passion in reshaping the future of our communities.

Warm regards,

Tiago Ferreira  
January 2025

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