

\\ Quarterly Report 04 ///

Stories and updates from U.R IMPACT Network



In this report we speak about the progress of the IAPs, we share our experience during our Transnational meeting in Mertola and offer some tools and methods for impact planning

March 2025



NETWORK OVERVIEW

U.R. Impact, co-funded by the URBACT IV European program, is spearheaded by the Municipality of Cinisello Balsamo. Its primary aim is to craft an Integrated Action Plan assessing the societal impact of urban revitalisation initiatives.

Emphasising the significance of social impact and community engagement, this project seeks to reconceptualise urban renewal endeavours. This entails reorienting these actions to prioritise the welfare of citizens—addressing their social, economic, and environmental well-being at the core of these transformative processes. Additionally, by fostering a greater sense of belonging and encouraging civic involvement, the initiative aims to enhance community participation in these efforts.

Three key components for impact

The network core object is to learn and implement social impact management in their cities. the methodology around this aim is divided into three main elements:

Intentionality puts impact evaluation ex-ante, allowing planning designing for impact and includes constant monitoring and replanning

Additionality Taking into account various areas and stakeholders involved in the process.

Measurability Collecting valuable data and showcasing the impact.

City identity and key themes

Across the ten diverse cities engaged in this transformational journey, several key themes emerge, reflecting common challenges, innovative approaches, and distinctive characteristics intrinsic to each location.

Crafting a unique identity and safeguarding local heritage hold utmost significance for all U.R IMPACT cities. While some aim to establish a distinct identity and allure to draw in new permanent residents, others prioritise enhancing the sense of place for current inhabitants.

Social Inclusion	Sustainable Tourism
Brain drain and youth policy	Heritage and innovation
Governance models	Local commerce and proximity economy

- IAP -

Theories of change and Smart Goals

UR Impact network had the opportunity to participate in the masterclass and coaching sessions Led by [Dr. Lidia Gryszkiewicz](#), focusing on [impact data collection in urban regeneration](#). The sessions provided practical guidance on aligning Integrated Action Plans (IAPs) with Theories of Change (ToC), understanding different impact levels, and refining data collection methods. Through tailored feedback, cities worked on strengthening their indicators and ensuring a coherent approach to measuring social impact. Following the masterclass, individual coaching sessions were conducted between February and March 2025. These sessions provided tailored support to each participating city, with a primary focus on reviewing the alignment of IAP Section 2 with their Theory of Change and examining their proposed adapted impact indicators and data collection methods

4 Key Considerations When Planning for Impact

1. Ensure Alignment Between IAP and Theory of Change

The topics and scope of the Integrated Action Plan (IAP) and the Theory of Change (ToC) should be consistent to create a coherent framework for impact measurement. This alignment ensures that planned actions lead to meaningful and measurable change.

2. Differentiate Levels of Impact

Clearly distinguish between activity, output, outcome, and impact to maintain a logical impact chain. Indicators should be refined to reflect the correct level of change, preventing confusion between short-term actions and long-term transformation.

3. Structure the Theory of Change Logically

A well-structured ToC should have a clear and logical flow from inputs to activities, outputs, outcomes, and ultimately impacts. Each stage must build upon the previous one, demonstrating a realistic pathway to change.

4. Develop Meaningful and Measurable Indicators

Indicators should effectively track progress toward desired impacts, focusing on broader, cross-cutting measures rather than being overly tied to specific activities. Additionally, appropriate data collection methods should be identified to ensure reliable measurement.

- IAP -

Peer Review Session:

How to help yourself and the other cities through a IAP review



As part of the U.R Impact network, cities are developing their Integrated Action Plans (IAPs) to address urban challenges in a structured and strategic way. To ensure their plans are as strong and actionable as possible, a peer review session was organized, providing an opportunity for collaborative feedback, cross-learning, and refinement.

The session aimed to:

- Facilitate constructive feedback on each city's draft IAP
- Identify common challenges and inspire solutions from peers
- Strengthen the clarity, feasibility, and impact of planned actions

Session and tools used

The session followed a structured format to ensure productive discussions and meaningful feedback. It was divided into three key phases: peer exchange, collective reflection, and expert insights. Each phase contributed to refining the IAPs by addressing gaps, sharing best practices, and integrating strategic improvements.

0) Pre-session

To facilitate more focused discussions, the cities were divided into three groups:

Group 1: Broumov - Bovec - Mértola

Group 2: CB - Kamza - Longford

Group 3: BB - Hannut - Murcia

Each city was assigned the task of reviewing the IAPs of the other cities in their group before the session and preparing feedback using a structured template.

1) Peer Exchange in small groups

The first phase focused on peer exchange in small groups, where each city received live feedback from two assigned peer cities. The discussion aimed at identifying strengths, uncovering unclear areas and suggesting improvements. This process helped pinpoint key themes, common challenges and good practices, fostering a collaborative learning environment.

2) Collective Reflection

In the second phase, all participants came together for collective reflections and to discuss the biggest takeaways from the peer feedback. Each city shared a major insight gained from the session, highlighting recurring issues and common challenges among

participants. This phase also provided an opportunity to outline planned changes and refinements before finalizing the IAPs.

3) Key Insights from the Lead Expert

The third and final phase consisted of expert insights on improving urban regeneration proposals. Recommendations focused on strengthening social impact, embedding sustainable urban development principles and enhancing integration and funding strategies. Some key recommendations included:

Strengthening Social Impact

- Ensuring additionality, measurability, and intentionality in urban regeneration efforts.
- Defining clear social impact goals and integrating them into city planning.

Embedding Sustainable Urban Development (SUD)

- Aligning challenges with climate resilience, circular economy, and social inclusion.
- Ensuring urban regeneration contributes to long-term sustainability goals.

Deepening ULG Engagement

- Move beyond consultation—how are stakeholders actively shaping decisions?
- Use the participation ladder to integrate actions that enable real co-creation with the ULG.

Enhancing Integration & Funding

- Strengthening links between local initiatives and national/EU strategies.
- Securing diverse funding sources, including EU, national, local, and private investments.
- Ensuring realistic and sustainable financial planning in project proposals.



Overview of insights from the Peer Review Session

Hannut needs to align actions more clearly with its vision and improve stakeholder engagement, especially by diversifying the ULG. This will help ensure broader support and successful implementation.

Hannut

Murcia should clarify stakeholder roles and focus on long-term financial sustainability. It was also advised to incorporate the Social Impact methodology (Additionality, Measurability, and Intentionality) to enhance the plan's effectiveness.

Murcia

Bielsko Biała should Focus on engaging stakeholders in defining the vision and impact indicators. Keeping citizens informed and involved will help build support and ensure the regeneration process is understood.

Bielsko Biała

Mértola needs to define how impact will be measured and collect data to assess effectiveness, particularly regarding youth retention and local commerce, which are key challenges.

Mertola

Kaměz should better integrate participation and inclusion across activities. Highlighting more U.R. Impact themes as separate goals or sub-activities would ensure a more inclusive approach.

Kaměz

Longford should strengthen the connections between sections of the plan and align them with the theory of change. It's also crucial to integrate social impact elements into governance and embed sustainability and inclusion across areas.

Longoford

Broumov needs to ensure ULG members and the public are fully on board with the plan. Developing an internal communication strategy will help build support and engagement.

Broumov

Cinisello Balsamo's plan presents a strong vision for social impact. It's essential to view it as a cohesive whole rather than isolated parts. Clear communication will also be key to securing greater political support.

Cinisello Balsamo

Bovec should balance actions more evenly across the timeline and better integrate sustainability across social, economic, and environmental dimensions to enhance the plan's impact.

Bovec

- EXCHANGE -

The power of peer visits:

Longford and Cinisello visiting the city of Milan

The peer visit to Milan brought together representatives from Longford and Cinisello Balsamo to explore innovative approaches to **citizen engagement, governance models, and service innovation**. Over a day and a half, participants engaged with Milan Municipality to learn about participatory tools such as civic crowdfunding, participatory budgeting, and public space regeneration. They visited community-driven initiatives in Bovisa-Dergano—including L'amico Charlie, We Make, Nuovo Armenia and Rob de Matt—where they gained insight into local social enterprises and cultural projects that foster inclusion and economic sustainability. The visit also included neighborhood revitalization efforts in San Siro, highlighting models that strengthen social cohesion and collaboration between citizens and public institutions.



Takeaways from Longford

The Peer visit to Milan was a very beneficial trip for both the Executive of Longford County Council and our ULG members. It was very useful in building relationships and giving the ULG a better insight into the UR Impact project and what we are trying to achieve through the project and through the ULG.

The main points I would have as takeaways are:

The role of paid staff in local enterprises

Following on from the projects that we visited and spoke to people involved in the management of those facilities, it would appear that Local Enterprise groups are good examples of governance structure for delivery of these projects but they need paid staff – you cannot rely on volunteers to run a social enterprise on a full time basis. Paid staff can be supported by volunteers

The power of hybrid spaces

A mix of public/private/community is a very effective use of the space and brings a good mix of activity – it means that a space is not overly reliant on one tenant/use but also brings a mix of people into a space, reducing negativity around some services that might be located there.

Be creative around supporting projects and funding

Need to look at European examples, e.g. crowdfunding is a very good example that we saw and if local communities buy into a project, it is more embedded in the community. Philanthropy and support from local businesses could also be utilised more in Longford.

Things don't need to be finished to final detail

Some of the projects we visited were in old buildings, that in some cases were in poor repair but that did not hold projects back, they were able to implement a small element of the project and bring projects forward in stages. I would hope that this would encourage the ULG to bring forward projects on a phased basis and encourage activity in the town.

Engaging local businesses in community development

Need for business/philanthropy support for projects – businesses can support projects and show their support for their town/village. This in particular is feedback from one of the local business people we brought on the trip, he felt that as a business in Ballymahon with the parking problems, they need to be more engaged with the community by organising meetings to discuss community plans and businesses could part fund some projects to show the community that they care for their area.

Takeaways from Cinisello Balsamo

The importance of testing urban interventions to meet neighborhood needs

Specifically, we understood that, before proceeding with the implementation of urban changes, it is essential to preliminarily assess whether such interventions could be positively received and integrated by the community. The 'tactical square' represented, in this context, a particularly stimulating example, offering the opportunity to explore similar actions that allow testing one's proposals in the early stages, thus reducing the

risk of negative consequences.

Considering failures as valuable elements

Not all initiatives, in fact, generate tangible and concrete benefits for the local community, and often these aspects are not brought to light; however, it is crucial to collect and analyze the difficulties encountered during the implementation phase, as well as the subsequent criticisms of the activities carried out. These reflections can lead to design processes that are more attentive to the real needs of civil society.

The value of impact assessment and knowledge exchange

The meeting with the Municipality of Milan was also particularly useful, as it allowed us to learn that they too have previously conducted impact assessments of projects on the territory. This provided an opportunity for the exchange of reflections and documents, which could prove valuable for our work on the IAP.

How some social enterprises build stronger community roots

Often, in the context of social enterprises, it is assumed that, since they are oriented towards pursuing social, cultural, or inclusion goals, every initiative is automatically supported, neglecting the importance of the quality of the services offered. Instead, we had the opportunity to observe that, when a social enterprise is able to combine a strong focus on quality with its mission, its rooting in the community becomes significantly stronger, and the community, in a short time, tends to include and support its initiatives.



- 4TH UR IMPACT TRANSNATIONAL MEETING -

Cultural Heritage, Innovation, and the Path to Implementation

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The fourth transnational meeting of the URBACT U.R. Impact network in Mértola was an inspiring and immersive experience, bringing together partners to explore the intersection of cultural heritage and innovation while advancing our Integrated Action Plans (IAPs). Over three days, we engaged in peer learning, shared progress updates, and refined strategies for moving from planning to implementation. Mértola, with its deep historical roots and forward-thinking community projects, provided the perfect backdrop for meaningful discussions on sustainability, participatory governance, and adaptive heritage management.

- The meeting opened with an insightful introduction to Mértola's unique approach to heritage-led development, followed by a walking tour of its historic center, showcasing centuries of layered history and the town's ongoing efforts to preserve and repurpose cultural assets.
- Key sessions included a peer review workshop, where partners exchanged constructive feedback on their IAPs, and a deep dive into Chapter 4 of the plans, focusing on implementation strategies.
- The Heritage and Innovation workshop further highlighted how heritage can be a driver for local economy and community growth by inspiring contemporary urban solutions, while the night market experience allowed us to witness local community engagement in action.
- The final day brought us to the Mértola Agro Ecological Center, where we explored sustainable food networks and the CARE initiative, reinforcing the importance of integrating environmental and social considerations into urban strategies.



Mertola Regenerative Agriculture

Mértola is creating a sustainable future—where local food systems are strengthened, young people are empowered, and the land is restored through regenerative agriculture.

Regenerative agriculture is a way of farming that heals the land instead of depleting it. By improving soil health, increasing biodiversity, and capturing carbon, it helps restore ecosystems while producing healthy food. Think of it as farming that gives back more than it takes! In Mértola, regenerative agriculture initiatives are revitalizing the land and fostering community resilience. Central to these efforts is Terra Sintrópica, an association dedicated to combating desertification and depopulation through sustainable practices.



Their key projects include:

Food Programs: Strengthening Local and Sustainable Food Systems

One of the standout initiatives is **PREC** (Processo Regenerativo em Curso), a space that blends a vegan café, organic market, and community hub. This initiative prioritizes local,

seasonal, and sustainably produced food, creating direct links between local farmers and consumers while raising awareness about responsible consumption. It also serves as a meeting point for discussions on agroecology, ensuring that knowledge about regenerative food production reaches a broader audience.

Educational Programs: Engaging the Next Generation

Education is central to the regenerative movement in Mértola. [The Forest Gardens Program](#), for example, is an extracurricular initiative where schoolchildren learn by doing—planting, tending, harvesting, and ultimately eating what they grow. This hands-on approach teaches the principles of agroecology, biodiversity, and sustainable land management, helping young people develop a strong connection to the environment.

Additionally, the [Land Exchange Program](#) goes beyond schools by bringing new residents into the region who are trained in agroecology and ecosystem regeneration. This helps counter depopulation while ensuring that knowledge of regenerative food production continues to spread.



- TOOL FOCUS -

Find your EU fund

As cities in the U.R Impact network move towards finalizing their Integrated Action Plans (IAPs), a key challenge emerges: how to secure funding for implementation. To address this, a dedicated workshop was held to help partners explore EU funding opportunities and understand how to align their projects with different funding streams.

The session aimed to:

- Introduce key EU funding programs (URBACT, EUI - Innovative Actions, Erasmus+, Creative Europe)
- Help cities identify suitable funding opportunities for their planned actions
- Encourage a strategic approach to securing resources for long-term implementation



Workshop Structure

The session was structured into three main parts:

1) Setting the Stage

A presentation provided an overview of the funding landscape, highlighting how cities can navigate different EU programs to finance their urban projects.

2) Group Challenge - Funding Simulation:

- Cities were placed in mixed teams and assigned a common urban action (e.g., revitalizing local shops).
- Each team had to adapt the action to fit a specific EU funding program, considering project focus, stakeholders, and expected outcomes.

- Through this exercise, participants experienced firsthand how funding applications must be tailored to program priorities.

3) Presentations & Reflections

Each team presented their funding proposal, followed by a discussion on:

- How projects needed to shift focus to match funding criteria
- Challenges in aligning city actions with funding priorities
- Key takeaways on preparing competitive applications

Key Insights & Outcomes


💡 **Strategic Thinking for Funding:** Cities realized that while their IAPs provide a strong foundation, securing funding requires adapting narratives, identifying the right stakeholders, and demonstrating impact.

💡 **URBACT as a Launchpad:** Many cities saw how their URBACT experience—developing integrated strategies, engaging stakeholders, and testing solutions—positions them well for future EU funding applications.

💡 **Diverse Funding Paths:** Cities recognized the importance of exploring multiple funding streams to implement different parts of their IAPs, from small-scale training initiatives (Erasmus+) to large-scale urban experiments (EUI).

PART 2 60 min

City group:


Instructions:
Work together in your group to adapt the selected action to fit your assigned funding program. At the end, you'll present your concept to the rest of the group.

ASSIGNED EU PROGRAM

THE COMMON ACTION

Revitalizing local shops in city centers.

Group Challenge
The exercise

Project Focus: (How does it fit the program?)

Key Activities:
(List main actions)

Main Stakeholders Involved:
(Who are the key partners?)

Expected Outcomes:
(What impact will this project have?)

05th / Mértola / March 13th

URBACT Co-funded by the European Union Interreg U.R.IMPACT

WHAT NEXT?



The network is entering the final phase of the URBACT programme, with testing actions to complete and reflect on, Integrated Action Plans (IAPs) to finalise and communicate, and a shared commitment to defining next steps to sustain the work beyond the project.

In the coming months, we will continue collaborating with our ad-hoc expert Lidia to further explore and apply impact evaluation tools across the network.

We will gather in Broumov for our next Transnational Meeting, where we will dive into themes of governance and social inclusion, while also taking the opportunity to learn from one another and strengthen our collaboration.

After the summer break, we will prepare for our final network meeting — a moment to consolidate our journey, celebrate achievements, and look ahead.