

CITIES@HEART

TOWARDS A BALANCED CITY CENTRE

5th QUARTERLY NETWORK REPORT ♥

January 2025
March 2025



URBACT



Co-funded by
the European Union
Interreg

♥ Table of contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| 1. Cities@Heart | 3 |
| 2. Where are we in our pathway to the City Centre toolbox? | 4 |
| 3. What is going on in the network? | 6 |
| 4. The Fifth Transnational meeting: Celje | 8 |
| 5. Our quarterly best practices | 20 |
| 5.1. Celje's best practices | |
| 5.2. Thematic webinars | |
| 6. Integrated Action Plan Review | 38 |
| 7. Upcoming milestones | 40 |

♥ 1. Cities@Heart

Cities@Heart mobilises ten European urban areas. Led by The Greater Paris Metropolis (a public entity with a sound track record in downtown revitalisation policy), network partners work together to understand the way **city centres** function and create a new framework to be used in city centre improvement initiatives.

Quadrilátero Urbano
(Portugal)

Granada (Spain)

Sligo (Ireland)

Greater Paris Métropolis
(France)

Fleurus (Belgium)

Cesena (Italy)

Celje (Slovenia)

Osijek (Croatia)

Krakow Métropolis (Poland)

Amfiktyonies (Greece)



♥ 2. Where are we in our pathway to the City Centre toolbox?

Our roadmap proposes to exchange best practices and define indicators for public policies deployed in the city centre to generate a series of thematic objectives.

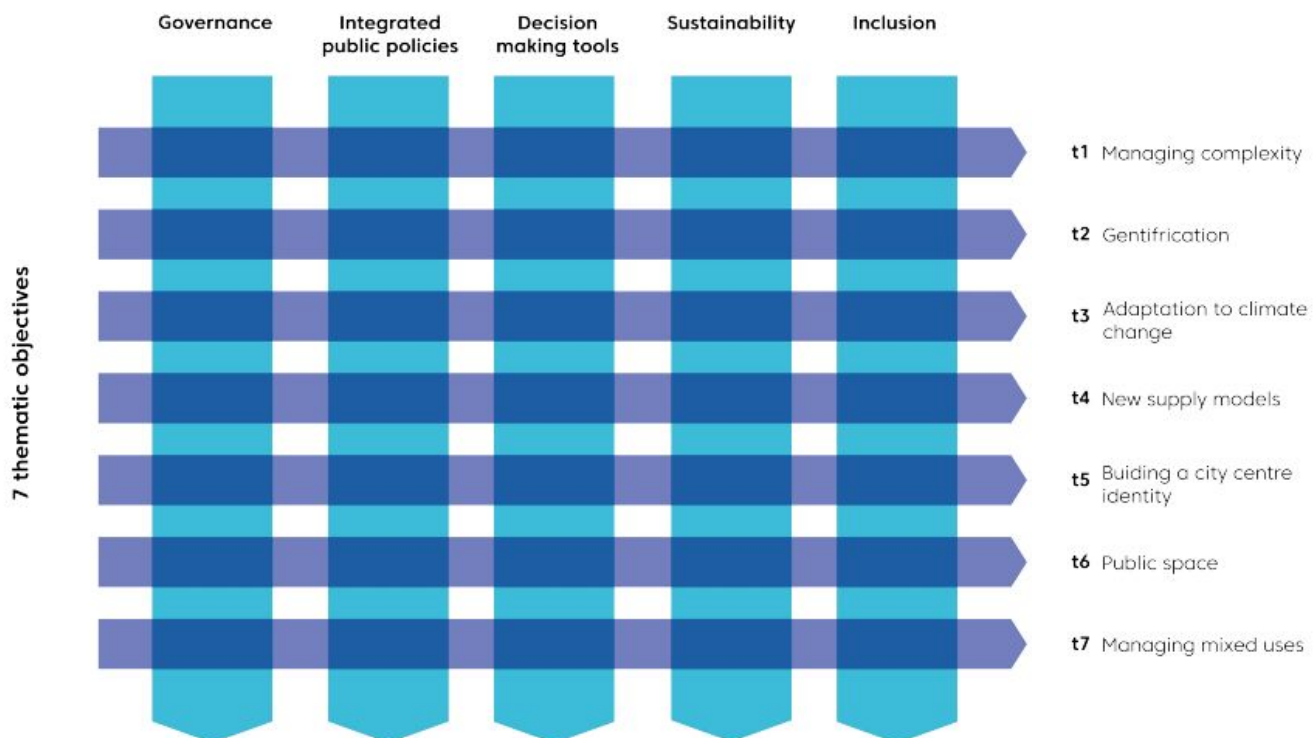
After more than a year and a half of network activity (meetings and dedicated workshops), we have explored all the topics proposed in the Baseline Study. The knowledge generated around these thematics will help us structure the final guidelines through a series of levers and their associated actions and indicators.

Highlights!

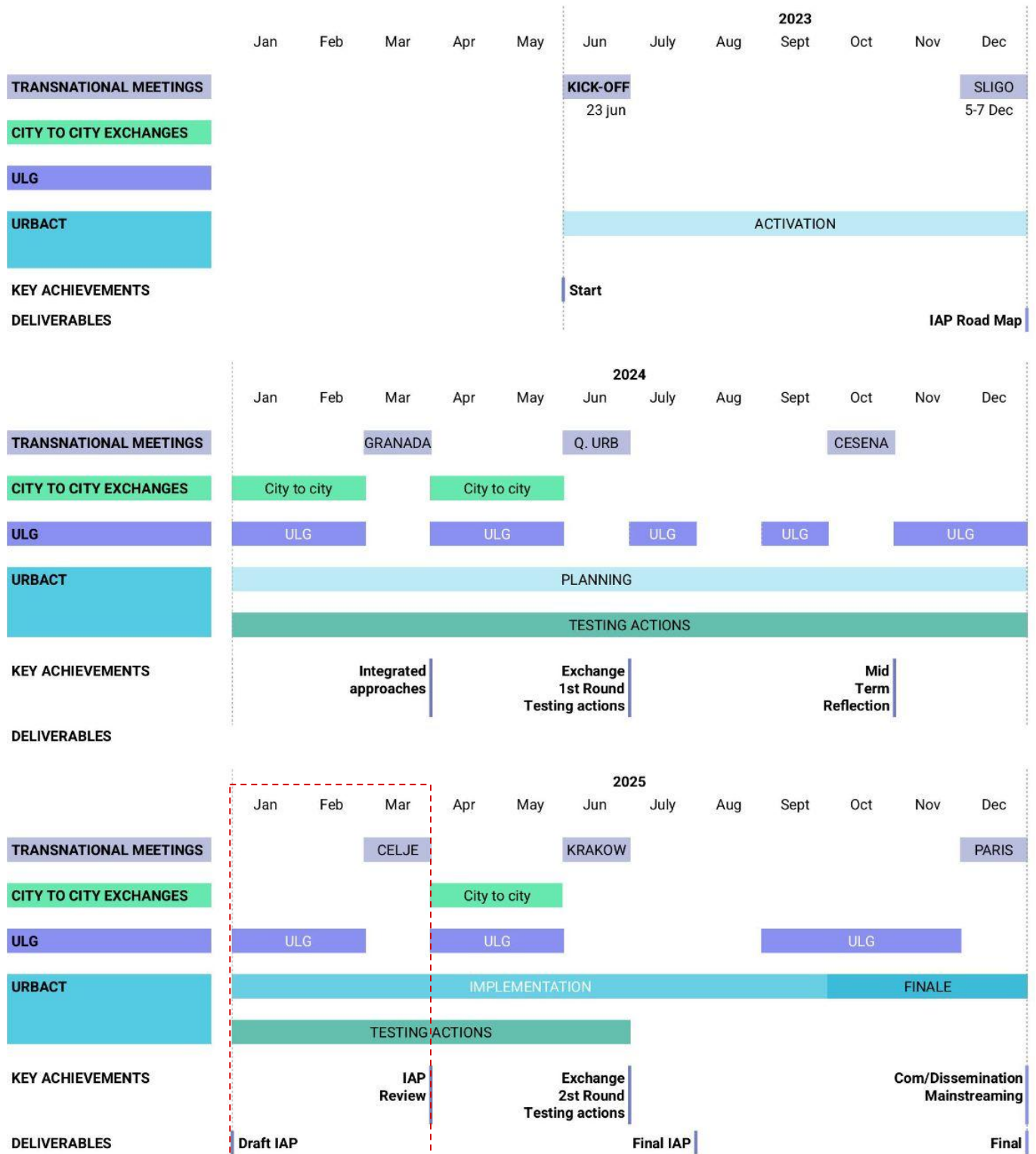
- 7 strategic objectives
- 5 Transnational meetings
- 7 online meetings
- 3 online webinars

Coming soon!

The partners have also proposed to make in-depth focus, organised by clusters of cities.



2. Our pathway to the city centres toolbox



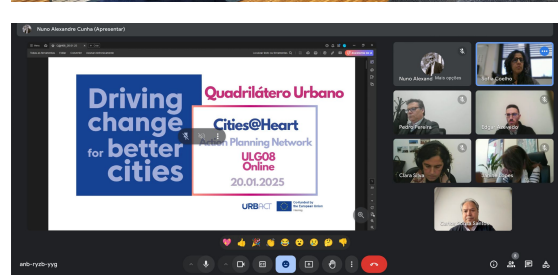
♥ 3. What is going on in the network?

Throughout this first quarter of the year, the URBACT Local Groups (ULGs) in each city have been deeply involved in a series of collaborative meetings. These sessions have served as a valuable forum for co-creating IAP visions and objectives and defining the Action Tables together with the local stakeholders.

ULGs seek to drive meaningful progress that aligns with the overarching objectives of the network while addressing the unique challenges and opportunities within their respective cities.

Developing partnerships involving local authorities, beneficiaries/users, NGOs, public agencies, the private sector and the civil society has proven to be a key component in the design and implementation of efficient urban policies.





♥ 4. The Fifth Transnational meeting: Celje

Day 1

The day began at City Hall with Mayor Matija Kovač, Saša Heath-Drugovič (Deputy Director for European Affairs) and Maja Voglar (Director of the Celeia Celje Institute). They all highlighted Celje's historical significance, the value of EU projects, and the efforts to revitalize the city centre and support local communities.

We learned about key city centre projects, including municipal initiatives to promote local economic development and create a family-oriented urban environment. The morning featured presentations on business activation, historic building renovations, and housing strategies, followed by a walking tour that showcased urban interventions and Celje's cultural heritage.

Cities@Heart organised the fifth URBACT transnational network meeting in Celje, exploring the city's initiatives aimed at revitalizing its urban spaces and strengthening local communities.



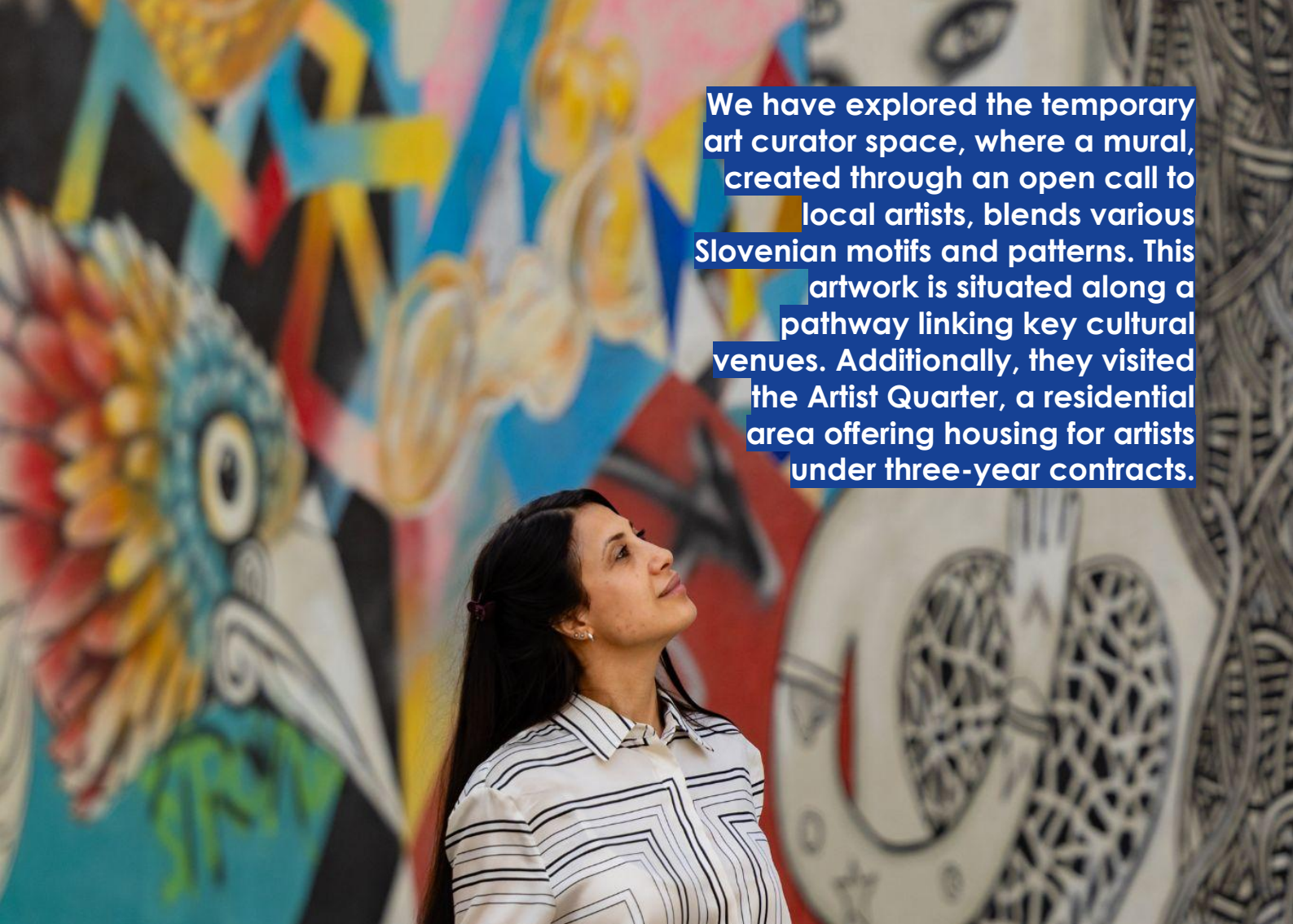


We had the opportunity to visit Library Square, a vibrant cultural hub where public events take place amidst a network of scattered buildings. This central space hosts exhibitions and activities, embodying a dynamic connection between urban life and cultural engagement.





We have explored the temporary art curator space, where a mural, created through an open call to local artists, blends various Slovenian motifs and patterns. This artwork is situated along a pathway linking key cultural venues. Additionally, they visited the Artist Quarter, a residential area offering housing for artists under three-year contracts.





We also had the opportunity to explore the 1995 Children's Museum in Celje, a dynamic space that caters to preschool and primary school children. The museum offers a variety of interactive workshops, performances, and theatrical activities, making it an engaging destination for families and a key player in the city's cultural life.

- 
- 01 | Living in Celje
02 | Children's Museum Herman's Den
03 | Dentistry Collection

Prešernova 17, Celje

open: Tuesday — Friday 9.00 — 17.00
Saturday 9.00 — 13.00
Sunday and holidays 14.00 — 18.00

closed: Monday, 1 and 2 January, Easter Sunday,
1 and 2 May, 1 November, 25 and 31 December

otroški muzej Hermanov brlog
Svet Hermanovih prijateljev
| 10. oktober 2024 - 31. december 2026



Day 2

The second day of the Transnational Meeting in Celje began with a workshop at Technopark, where participants engaged in discussions around common tools and indicators (aimed at strengthening the framework for future urban development initiatives). Following the workshop, we enjoyed a coffee break at the Pelikan Photo House before reconvening for a second workshop on the Integrated Action Plans (IAP).

Cities@Heart organised the fifth URBACT transnational network meeting in Celje, exploring the city's initiatives aimed at revitalizing its urban spaces and strengthening local communities.

The afternoon offered a cultural experience as we visited the iconic Celje Castle, exploring its rich history and enjoying the breathtaking views of the city. The day concluded with some free time (allowing participants to explore the city at their leisure), followed by a group dinner where conversations about urban regeneration and sustainable development continued in a more informal setting.



The visit to Celje Castle was a captivating journey through history, offering a unique opportunity to explore one of Slovenia's most significant medieval landmarks.





Our fifth transnational meeting in
Celje, Slovenia came to a close
but we took all that inspiration
back in our suitcases!



5. Our Quarterly best practices

The best practices of this period are summarized by those presented during the transnational meeting in Celje, as well as those shared in the two thematic webinars held during this quarter.

5.1. Management of business premises in the city centre

5.2. Support for local entrepreneurs

5.3. Co-financing of the renovation of buildings

5.4. Regulation of the appearance of pub/coffee shop terraces

5.5. Restriction of advertising in public spaces

5.6. Closing streets to cars, opening them to people.

5.7. Active management of the city centre

5.8. System of a joint city centre voucher

5.9. Support for artists and the artists' quarter

5.10. Murals

5.11. Temporary use space – GT8

5.12. DOM: Center of urban happening

5.13. Tehnopark Celje

5.14. Nepremičnine Celje/Local Housing Agency

5.15 Creating a home in the city

♥ 5.1. Management of business premises in the city centre

The City of Celje manages 115 premises owned by the municipality, including both ground-floor and upper-floor units. Of these, 108 are currently occupied—many for several decades—accounting for roughly one-third of the commercial offer in the city. These spaces are rented on a long-term basis, with rental rates determined by the profitability of the businesses. To ensure quality and coherence in the urban landscape, the city has established regulations on the appearance of shop windows, terraces, and advertisements.

Placemaking is a guiding principle in the management of municipal commercial spaces.



♥ 5.2. Support for local entrepreneurs

Since 2015, Celje has distributed over 2 million euros in co-funding, including 400,000 euros for businesses in the city centre, 300,000 for rent support, and 85,000 for business investments, boosting local economic vitality.





5.3. Co-financing of the renovation of buildings

Celje's urban revitalization journey began with the EPO Urban project in 2014, resulting in the renovation of 40 buildings—mostly facades and roofs—through about 800,000 euros in public co-funding. Uniquely, the local government supports restoration of privately-owned cultural heritage, aiming to change perceptions and foster pride among city centre residents. The city also mediates between property owners and tenants, ensuring alignment with its placemaking goals through a formal selection process. Priority is given to maintaining occupancy, generating mutual benefits, and preserving essential services, often offering lower rents and targeted co-funding to stimulate vibrant and sustainable use of historic spaces.

Heritage-led urban regeneration through public-private cooperation.



♥ 5.4. Regulation of the appearance of pub/coffee shop terraces

The renovation of the old city centre, which began in 2012, aimed to breathe new life into the area while preserving its historical charm. Key to this revitalisation was the establishment of simple but effective guidelines for local businesses, covering aspects such as the size of terraces, the use of colours, and restrictions on promotional materials. These rules were designed to foster a cohesive visual identity and ensure the space remained welcoming. To support businesses, the city introduced a fixed fee for terrace occupation, priced at €365 per year for every 100 m², balancing economic viability with urban regeneration goals.

Revitalisation of the Old City Centre through Public Space Renovation and Guidelines for Local Businesses.



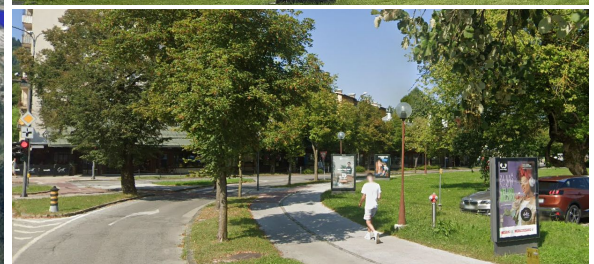
♥ 5.5. Restriction of advertising in public spaces

All advertising, whether on private or public land or buildings, must obtain a license according to our decree, even if the advertisement is placed by companies on their own property. Advertising in public spaces is only permitted through a public call, where decisions are made regarding the locations and types of ads. The majority of advertising licenses are granted through these public calls, with only 4-6 additional licenses issued per year. Despite this system, illegal advertising remains a significant issue. One of the challenges is that the exact locations for permitted advertising are not clearly defined, making enforcement difficult for inspectors. This gap highlights the need for changes to improve the effectiveness of the decree.

Future goals:

- **Finishing inventory of all existing advertising.**
- **Making a document that will place all the possible locations and make it part of the decree**

Good moment to implement it because businesses are doing well.



♥ 5.6. Closing streets to cars, opening them to people.

Health & Well-being

Encourages walking, running, cycling, and other physical activities.

- Reduces air pollution, lowers noise pollution, creating a more peaceful urban environment.

Community & Social Connection

- Transforms streets into social spaces where people can interact, play, and engage in cultural events. Strengthens community bonds by fostering a shared, vibrant space for residents.
- Supports local businesses by attracting more pedestrians who are likely to explore shops and cafés.



♥ 5.6. Closing streets to cars, opening them to people.

Environmental Impact

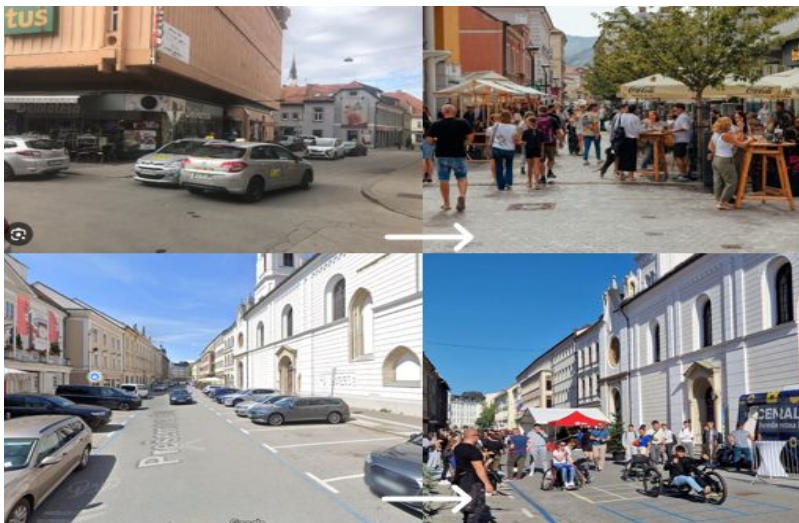
This approach reduces carbon emissions by encouraging alternative modes of transportation, such as walking and cycling. It also promotes greener urban design, prioritizing pedestrian- and bike-friendly infrastructure. Additionally, it enhances biodiversity by creating spaces for trees, plants, and other green areas, fostering a healthier, more sustainable urban environment.

Traffic & Safety

This initiative helps lower the number of traffic accidents and pedestrian injuries by creating safer streets. It also encourages more accessible environments for all, particularly benefiting children, the elderly, and people with disabilities, ensuring that urban spaces are inclusive and safer for everyone.

Economic Benefits

This approach boosts local economies by increasing foot traffic, encouraging people to spend more time in businesses and local establishments. It also promotes tourism, making cities more attractive and livable for both residents and visitors, ultimately supporting sustainable economic growth in urban areas.



♥ 5.7. Active management of the city centre

Active TCM

2012: Creation of a new position at the Mayor's office

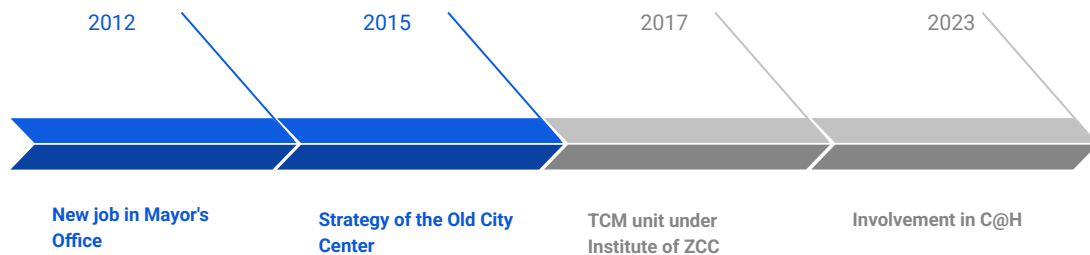
2015: Strategy focused on the old city-centre

2017: Creation of Institute Celeia - tourist+city-centre / one person responsible with an strategic role(Tadeja)

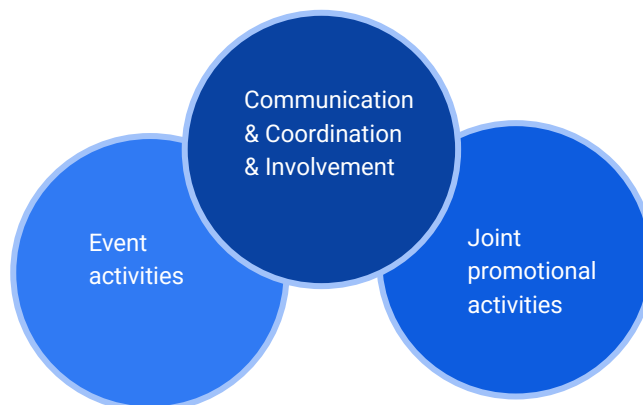
2023: Cities@Heart's Partnership - transversalise municipality departments / new boost / new team work together on the issue

How do they do so ?

- Event/activities+communication
- Involvement+joint promotional activities



This is how we do it with City Center businesses :)



♥ 5.8. System of joint City Center vouchers

The objective of the initiative is to support small businesses by offering loyalty programs they otherwise cannot afford. Vouchers are sold to locals, tourists, and businesses (for workers), with the program being free for businesses in exchange for displaying plates in their windows. These vouchers are also available digitally, though the system needs adaptation to accommodate this. Over 50 different providers are involved, and the program has generated over 350,000 € in sales, with a consistent growth rate of approximately 10% per year.



♥ 5.9. Support for artists and the artists' quarter

The initiative offers free use of art studios in exchange for artwork, fostering a collaborative environment for local creativity. It invites financial support for artistic endeavors and encourages the inclusion of local artists in sales at the Tourist Information Center (TIC) and through tourist guides. Additionally, the program provides support for events in the U4 area, further promoting the city's cultural scene and strengthening the connection between art and the community.

U4 UMETNIŠKA
ČETRTOLET

**PRAZNUJTE
Z NAMI!**

RAZSTAVE, PREDSTAVE,
PERFORMANSI IN KONCERTI

NAJ NE BO UMETNOSTI LE
ZA ČETRTO, AMPAK ZA
CELO MESTO

V SODELOVANJU S KRČMO TAMKOUČIRI

POSKENIRAJ ZA
VEČ INFORMACIJ

♥ 5.10. Murals

Obtaining permissions from the heritage/cultural institute, urban planning authorities, and property owners is essential for ensuring that projects align with regulatory and preservation standards. These efforts have a significant impact on both local inhabitants and tourists, enriching the urban landscape while maintaining cultural integrity. By balancing development with heritage conservation, the city creates an environment that benefits residents and attracts visitors.



♥ 5.11. Temporary use space – GT8

The City Council has established a new temporary-use space in the city centre, known as GT8, which is now open to the local community.

In its first year of operation, GT8 has hosted 35 events and projects, including short-term exhibitions and pop-up installations, all designed to encourage public engagement. Additionally, 10 in-house or co-organized initiatives have taken place.

One of GT8's main focuses is cultural activity. For instance, it served as the venue for the Celje Design Days, an event aimed at identifying and nurturing local creative industries. This initiative is expected to grow into a key driver of innovation and development for the local creative community in the years to come.



♥ 5.12. DOM: Center of Urban Happening

The project aims to create a home for culture and creativity, where not just architecture and refurbishment are prioritized, but also the formation of a vibrant community. With 100 active amateur cultural associations involved, the goal is to foster collaboration between cultural managers, communication experts, and user experience professionals. A participatory process is at the heart of this initiative, with infrastructure including rehearsal and production spaces designed to support creative activities. The project will build a community of stakeholders and provide capacity-building and empowerment programs to engage local artists and residents. Temporary use of spaces will be available during the construction period, while efforts to explain the changes to local neighbors will be crucial, with personal engagement through leaflets and word-of-mouth communication. The UIA-Magnet project will explore urban vitality and scalability to larger cities, addressing the challenge of managing tourism saturation in a sustainable way.

Creating a Home for Culture and Creativity through Community Engagement



wide halls connecting the classrooms



the main event hall



one of the classrooms



one of the classrooms

♥ 5.13. Tehnopark Celje

The transformation of the Magic Cube in Celje is a prime example of urban regeneration, turning an abandoned department store into the largest science and entertainment park in Slovenia, the GENERATOR project. As the first modern department store in the city, its revitalization has sparked a new era of creativity and engagement. With a well-curated mix of interactive exhibits, workshops, and hands-on experiences, GENERATOR offers an engaging program that fosters curiosity and inspires families, particularly children, to explore science in a fun and educational way. In 2023, the park attracted 42,429 visitors, and in 2024, that number grew to 55,401. Collaborations with various local partners, including Slovenian Railways, local schools, and universities, as well as restaurants and cafes in the city, have strengthened its impact and appeal. This project exemplifies how creative partnerships and innovative spaces can breathe new life into city centers while providing engaging experiences for local communities.



♥ 5.14. Nepremičnine Celje/Local Housing Agency

Nepremičnine Celje, a non-profit housing organization founded by the Municipality of Celje in 2000, plays a vital role in providing affordable housing to local residents. With a portfolio of 2,000 housing units, housing approximately 4,700 people, the organization focuses on a variety of housing solutions to meet the city's needs. This includes 1,732 non-profit housing units, 38 social housing units, 38 units for the elderly, and 41 housing units for employees. In line with the city's revitalization efforts, Nepremičnine Celje has also spearheaded projects aimed at rejuvenating the old city center. One such initiative, the renovation of 17 apartments, received co-financing from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), targeting young people and families with an emphasis on active citizenship and local employment. Additionally, the Villa Vodnikova project, which offers 12 rental apartments for the elderly, was funded with a 2 million euro grant from the EU's NextGen program, focusing on accessibility, car-free living, and long-term residency in Celje. These efforts highlight Celje's commitment to inclusive and sustainable urban development.

Social and Affordable Housing Initiatives in Celje



♥ 5.14. Nepremičnine Celje/Local Housing Agency

Development challenges

The renovation process of cultural heritage buildings in Celje faces several challenges, including high costs and lengthy timelines. Strict cultural heritage renovation restrictions often limit the scope of improvements, while rent amounts remain impacted by these constraints. Additionally, the lack of resources and the dispersed ownership of properties complicate coordinated efforts for revitalization. The sale of owned apartments, although a potential solution, is hindered by these ongoing issues. Furthermore, the city struggles with a shortage of parking spaces, which adds another layer of difficulty to the urban development process.

Development opportunities

The National Law on housing construction and renovation (2026-2036) allocates 1 billion EUR to boost housing development, aligning with the EU housing policy (2021-2027). Municipal efforts include a new spatial plan and incentives for building renovations. Additionally, changes in cultural heritage protection guidelines will support urban regeneration while preserving historical sites.



♥ 5.15. Creating a home in the city

Apartments for young people and young families

- They participated in the call for housing after their owners informed them that they were selling the house where they were leaving
- House as a gathering space (living-rooms in Slovenia turn into stages)
- Values of living - cycling and public transport
- Services around - public school, extremely safe, kids can walk around freely.
- Starting to have conflicts with overcrowding of public space and city as a shopping destination.

The Wednesday and Saturday street market, which is experiencing an important phase of renewal generated by the natural generational turnover, is at the center of a branding and marketing project.

“Creating a home in the city is also about creating the city itself”



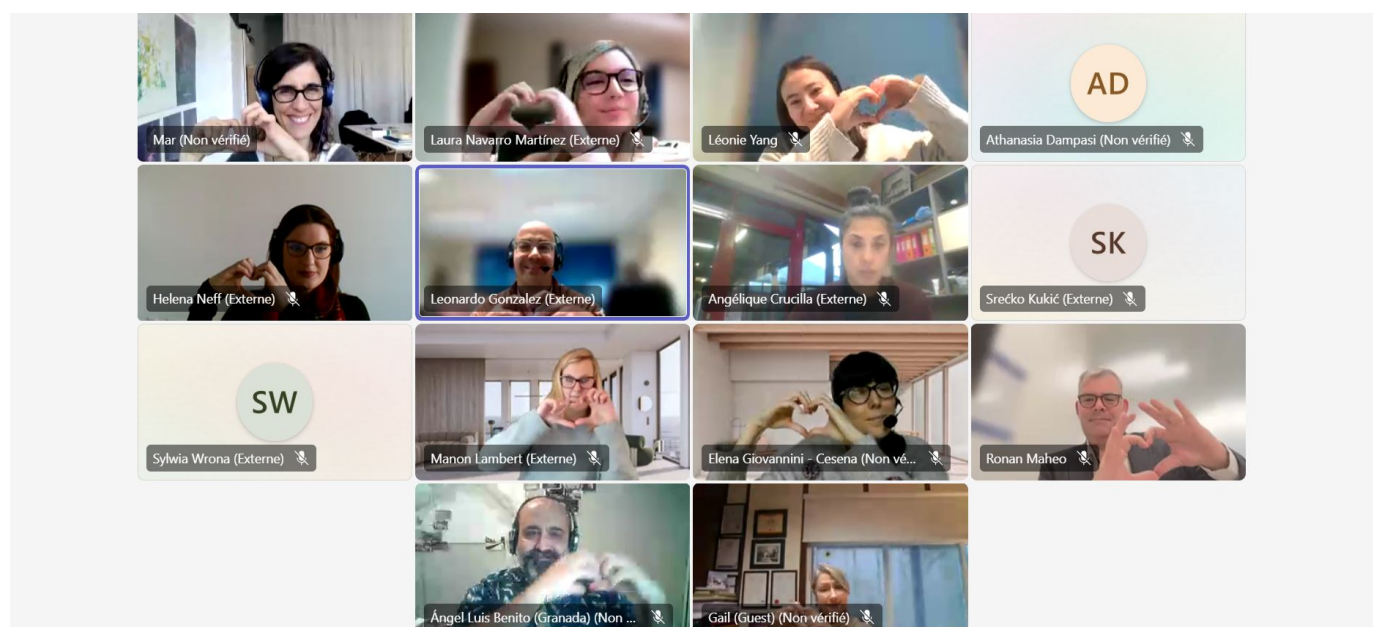
♥ 6. Integrated Action Plan Review

During this quarter, the cities in the network refined their IAP visions and objectives. These drafts were reviewed in two key sessions.

In the online session, facilitated by Ed Thorpe (Ad-Hoc Expert) and the Lead Expert (LE), the focus shifted toward further developing the Action Tables in alignment with each city's vision and objectives.

The Peer Review Process was initiated in Celje, beginning with an exercise designed to promote active listening and facilitate assessments of IAPs among partners. These were grouped according to shared thematic areas.

The IAP framework is a future-oriented, context-driven tool designed to address specific urban policy challenges through a coherent and multi-layered approach.





♥ 7. Upcoming milestones

SIXTH TRANSNATIONAL MEETING Krakow - July 2025

The **upcoming transnational meeting in Krakow** will begin the final phase, focusing on refining and testing activities (second round), detailing actions (identifying resources and clarifying stakeholder responsibilities), and conducting risk analysis to ensure the effective implementation of the Integrated Action Plan (IAP).

In Krakow, we will **focus on the challenges of over tourism and urban regeneration.**

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

In addition to the transnational meetings, we will be organising webinars on specific topics of interest to the partners.

Thank you,
And stay posted for more!



[LinkedIn](#)



[Cities@Heart](#)

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