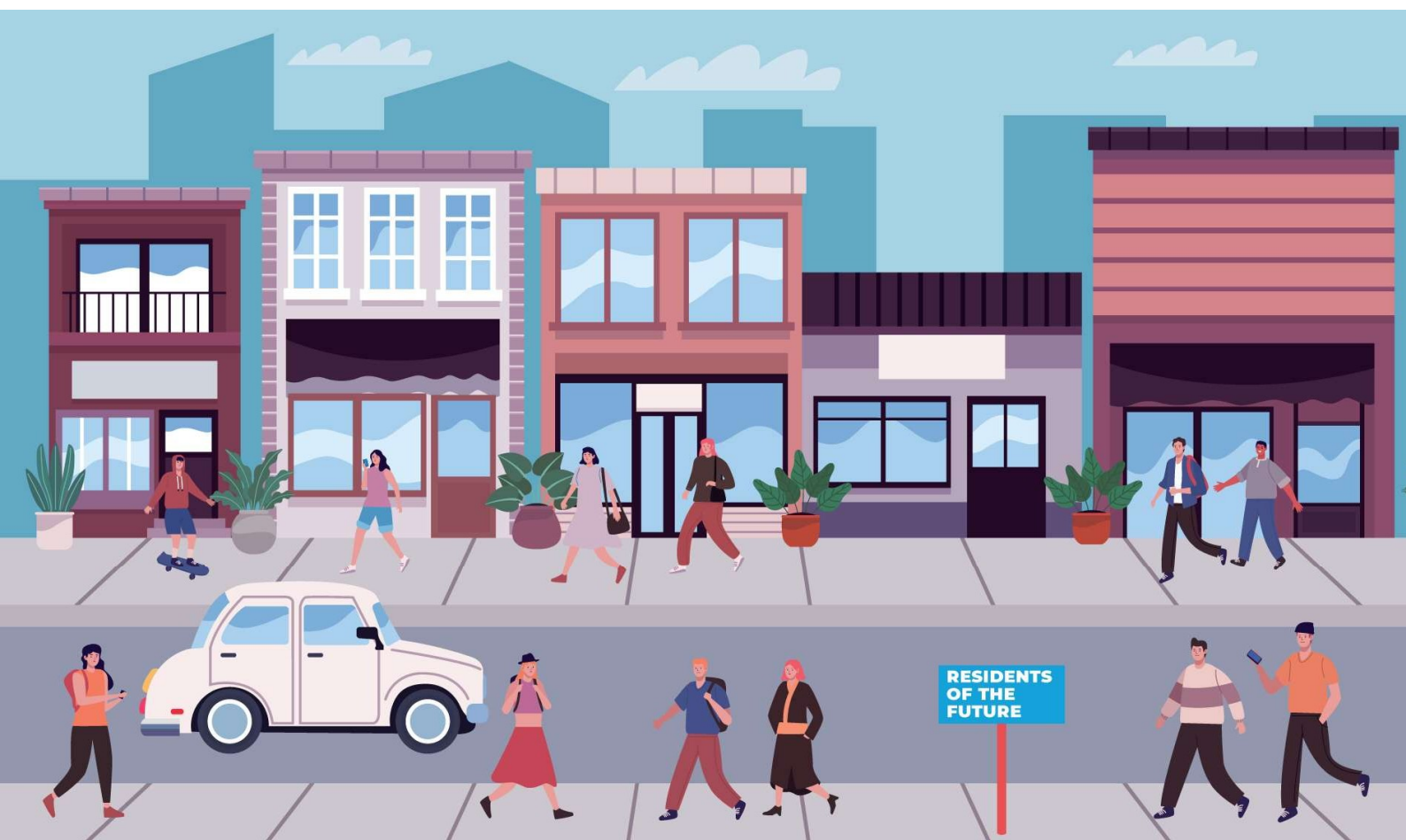


5th Quarterly Report

Residents of the Future



URBACT



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5th Quarterly Report

Residents of the Future

January to March 2025

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1. Welcome to Residents of the Future

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
- Mungualde - Portugal
- Mantova - Italy
- Plasencia - Spain
- Saint-Quentin - France
- Saldus – Latvia
- Sibenik – Croatia | **Lead Partner**
- Trebinje - Bosnia-Herzegovina

2.

3. What is new on Residents of the Future?

3.1 Residents of the Future Shaping Urban Solutions

This chapter highlights the most recent developments across the *Residents of the Future* network, as partner cities continue to transform local experimentation into long-term strategies. With testing actions concluding and Integrated Action Plans taking final shape, each city is advancing tailored responses to the shared challenges of demographic change, territorial attractiveness, and inclusive urban development.

In Alba Iulia, partners gathered for a dynamic transnational meeting that deepened the network's reflection on quality of life, while the local team advanced its youth engagement agenda through the Romania Youth Capital program. Iisalmi has finalized the "Bridge to Iisalmi" campaign, targeting international newcomers with a bold housing incentive, while also preparing to host the project's final transnational meeting. Mangualde continues to align education, inclusion, and strategy, reinforcing its IAP with direct input from immigrant communities and young residents.

In Plasencia, the city is building a strong identity around belonging and local pride, using personal stories and a new branding challenge to foster engagement. Saint-Quentin has advanced its urban innovation agenda, launching its micro forest and digital welcome tools, while laying the foundation for new economic and educational infrastructure. Saldus has successfully converted its business incubator from a pilot into a permanent asset and is now shaping broader support strategies through regional cooperation.

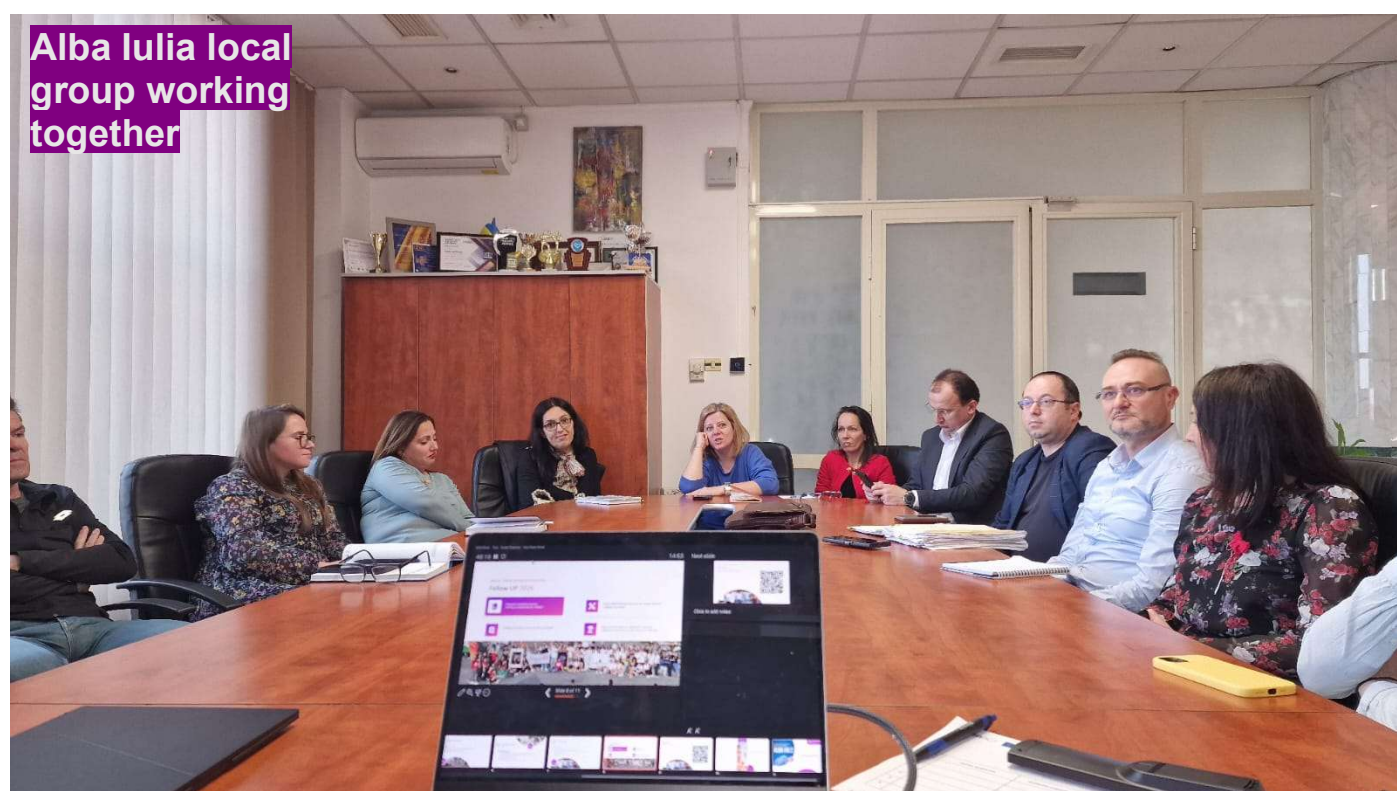
Šibenik has focused on project consolidation contributing to transnational sessions while preparing a second round of its student surveys to better inform local policy. Meanwhile, Mantova has strengthened ties with local companies and temporary residents, using participatory surveys and cultural co-creation to enrich its action planning. In Trebinje, a new testing action on digitalization was approved, marking a fresh step forward after recent internal restructuring.

Together, these stories show how the network is evolving from pilot initiatives to strategic vision rooted in community, strengthened by collaboration, and guided by a shared commitment to creating vibrant, future-ready cities.

Alba Iulia Reinforces Youth Engagement and Coordination through ULG Development

In the first quarter of 2025, Alba Iulia intensified its commitment to youth empowerment and participatory governance by consolidating the structure and activity of its URBACT Local Group (ULG). This effort aligns closely with the city's broader ambition to become the European Youth Capital and to establish a lasting youth ecosystem.

On 3 March, a ULG meeting was held at Alba Iulia City Hall, gathering a diverse team of municipal staff to refine the strategic direction of the city's youth agenda. The session focused on the ongoing work around the Youth Capital of Romania 2026 programme, as well as preparations for a future application to the European Youth Capital initiative.



Key themes included:

- The consolidation of the Flight HUB centre as a space for youth innovation and collaboration.
- The integration of a growing network of local NGOs into the city's youth development strategy.
- The implementation of vertical programmes focused on information campaigns and neighbourhood activation, with a particular interest in sports initiatives for young residents.

To improve internal coordination and communication, the team decided to create a dedicated WhatsApp community and launched the development of information collection tools with a submission deadline of 24 March 2025. Additionally, the group initiated a participatory naming process for the Local Action Group, inviting members to vote on a shortlist of proposed titles.

Through this renewed coordination effort, Alba Iulia is laying the groundwork for more structured, inclusive, and youth-oriented urban governance, ensuring that young voices remain central to the city's strategic transformation.

lisalmi Prepares to Launch “Bridge to lisalmi” Campaign and Advances Its Integrated Action Plan

In early 2025, lisalmi made significant strides in preparing its testing action, developing campaign materials, and further refining its Integrated Action Plan (IAP). The city’s work continues to focus on strengthening its appeal to international talent and creating a welcoming environment for newcomers.

Marketing for the Future: Bridge to lisalmi Takes Shape

A major milestone this quarter was the finalisation of the “Bridge to lisalmi” marketing campaign, which is set to launch on 28 April 2025. This campaign will test the city’s new communication approach, aimed at attracting international individuals to live and work in lisalmi. It combines digital advertising, social media outreach, and real-life testimonials to communicate the city’s career and housing opportunities.

The campaign includes a unique housing benefit: the City of lisalmi will cover 50% of the rent for the first three months for newcomers who move for work and sign a lease with local housing provider Petterinkulma Oy. This benefit is available to the first five applicants, making it both attractive and exclusive. Materials for the campaign have been produced in both Finnish and English to ensure accessibility for Finland’s international population.

Importantly, local international residents were interviewed and photographed to feature in the campaign, giving it authenticity and helping to build a sense of belonging among the target group.



Testing in Action

The “Bridge to lisalmi” campaign marks the city’s primary testing action under the Residents of the Future project. As the campaign runs this spring, lisalmi will gather insights and performance data to evaluate the effectiveness of the marketing concept. While a single campaign won’t provide a complete picture, it is

expected to yield valuable first impressions and learning outcomes. A full report will be shared with the Lead Partner and Lead Expert once the campaign concludes, likely in May or June.

Looking ahead, lisalmi is exploring a second testing action: an enhanced version of its existing “Meetings in Everyday Life” event. The aim is to transform it into a “Get Together” event a warm and inclusive space for newcomers and long-term residents to network, discover local opportunities, and strengthen community ties. This concept is currently under discussion within the URBACT Local Group and may be delivered in collaboration with the city’s international services team.

Progress on the IAP

lisalmi has finalized the third chapter of its Integrated Action Plan and updated earlier sections in response to feedback from the Lead Partner. The final chapter is set to be completed on schedule, with a focus on enhancing the document’s layout and visuals to improve accessibility and reader engagement.

Working Locally and Transnationally

On 12 February, lisalmi hosted its seventh ULG meeting, which focused on preparations for the upcoming Transnational Meeting (TNM) and the finalisation of campaign materials. From 24 to 26 March, a four-member team represented lisalmi at the TNM in Alba Iulia, where they participated in peer learning sessions and contributed to discussions on quality of life, marketing, and youth engagement.

With its eyes on implementation and learning, lisalmi continues to position itself as an attractive, inclusive, and forward-thinking small city ready to welcome the residents of the future.

MANGUALDE

Mangualde Deepens Strategic Vision with New Insights on Integration and Inclusion

During the first quarter of 2025, Mangualde made significant progress in advancing its Integrated Action Plan (IAP), particularly by structuring and drafting Chapter 2, with strong contributions from the URBACT Local Group (ULG). This phase was characterized by rich collaborative work and analysis of newly collected data, notably from adult immigrant residents, which complemented earlier insights gathered from the local school community.

A cornerstone of this period was Mangualde's participation in the Transnational Meeting held in Alba Iulia, Romania (25–26 March). The event proved to be an essential moment of collective learning within the network. Particularly impactful were sessions led by Lead Expert Tiago Ferreira, focused on strategic project development, and José Costero, who introduced methodologies for assessing and enhancing urban Quality of Life themes directly relevant to Mangualde's priorities.

Listening to New Voices: A ULG Meeting That Opened New Doors

One of the most inspiring moments of the quarter occurred during the ULG meeting on 20 March 2025, hosted at Mangualde City Hall. For the first time, members of the local immigrant community joined the group, contributing directly to the project and reinforcing its inclusive spirit.

The group reviewed the findings from recent surveys with adult immigrants, which confirmed Mangualde's reputation for safety, quality of life, and affordable living. At the same time, it revealed clear challenges in language learning, bureaucratic navigation, and access to affordable housing. These insights have sharpened the city's understanding of how to strengthen integration strategies.

In response, a proposal for a promotional video titled "Living in Mangualde: First-Hand Testimonials" was presented and approved. The video will spotlight residents, returnees, and newcomers, showcasing real stories and reinforcing Mangualde's image as an attractive, diverse, and welcoming place to live.

Testing Actions and Future Planning

Building on its 2024 testing actions, Mangualde broadened its diagnostic approach to include adult immigrants' perspectives. The city identified key barriers such as language, bureaucracy, and housing shortages and gathered concrete suggestions, including:

- Creating an Immigrant Support Centre,
- Expanding Portuguese language courses,
- Promoting inclusive cultural events.

These insights are now guiding the next phases of testing and implementation.

IAP Development on Track

Chapter 1 of the IAP has been finalized and validated. During this quarter, the team initiated Chapter 2, which covers:

- The integrated approach of the plan,
- Strategic objectives,
- Areas of intervention,
- Priority actions, and
- Coherence with existing policies.



The March ULG meeting was instrumental in aligning stakeholders around shared priorities—particularly in social inclusion, education, and culture.

MANTOVA

Mantova Expands Partnerships and Deepens Understanding of Temporary Residents

In the first quarter of 2025, Mantova continued to make steady progress within the *Residents of the Future* project, with a strong emphasis on stakeholder integration and data-driven strategy development. New alignment efforts with other ongoing local projects led to the official inclusion of additional partners in the **Urban Local Group (ULG)**, reinforcing a shared vision for inclusive urban growth.

One of the most significant advances this quarter was the **acceleration of the mapping of temporary residents**, supported by new collaborations with two leading local companies **MyNet Internet Solutions** and **Opto Engineering**. Both firms expressed interest in contributing to a better understanding of their younger employees' experiences in the city. In response, Mantova, in cooperation with the Youth Policy Committee, co-designed a comprehensive survey to assess perceptions of housing, services, well-being, leisure, and relationships with local governance.

This survey, currently under review by the participating companies, is expected to be launched in the coming weeks. It represents a pivotal **testing action** that seeks to inform strategic planning with robust, first-hand data. In the long term, Mantova aims to expand this initiative through a broader collaboration with **Confindustria**, engaging more companies and gaining deeper insights into the city's growing population of temporary residents.

Co-Creation and Community Activation in Peripheral Areas

Another meaningful development was the launch of co-creation meetings to design an **outdoor classroom in the garden of R84 Multifactory**, located in a peripheral area of Mantova. This initiative—made possible through the expansion of the ULG to include new civic actors exemplifies how partnerships can lead to tangible, community-driven spaces.

Co-creation into practice at the Mantova's ULG work



With new industries emerging in the area, the outdoor classroom not only enriches the local urban fabric but also supports Mantova's ambition to increase its attractiveness for both permanent and temporary residents. The space will serve as a hub for educational and cultural activities, anchoring the city's broader strategy of inclusion and territorial cohesion.

Integrated Action Plan in Refinement

Mantova's **Integrated Action Plan** is evolving. Chapter 3 is currently under development, while Chapter 1 is undergoing a detailed revision in response to feedback from the Lead Expert. These efforts aim to ensure that the final document is both technically robust and strategically aligned with the project's long-term goals.

PLASENCIA

Plasencia Refines Identity and Prepares for Visibility Phase

During the first quarter of 2025, Plasencia focused on intense strategic planning, coordination with key stakeholders, and the production of communication materials. Although much of this work has remained behind the scenes since the most visible outcomes, such as the testing actions and public launch of the new city brand, are still to come it has laid essential groundwork for the next phase of the project.

Personal Stories that Capture the Spirit of the City

Among the highlights of this period were the personal testimonies recorded in March with John Gaffney and Iván Hernández Montero. John, an English teacher, originally arrived in Plasencia as a language assistant. He stayed not only for love, but because he discovered in the city a fantastic place to live. Iván, a poet and cultural manager, left Plasencia in his youth to study and work in cities like Salamanca, London, and Barcelona. Eventually, he returned leaving behind his job and social circle to reconnect with his roots and the natural and human environment that he considers fundamental. Their stories were powerful and insightful, reinforcing many of the ideas that have emerged throughout the development of *Residents of the Future* in the city.

City Branding and Cultural Challenge as Testing Actions

Significant efforts also went into the preparation of two new testing actions: the design of a renewed **city brand** and the creation of the “**100% Placentino**” challenge. Defining a new visual identity required deep reflection on what makes Plasencia unique not just as a tourist destination, but as a place to live. The city branding process led to a broader understanding of local identity and untapped qualities. In parallel, the “100% Placentino” challenge was designed to be playful and engaging, while rooted in serious exploration of local culture and values that shape a strong community identity.

Plasencia new
testing action on
attracting and
retaining
residents



Laying the Groundwork for Greater Impact

This quarter has been one of thoughtful construction, setting the stage for a highly visible and dynamic phase to follow in spring. With solid foundations in place, Plasencia is ready to step forward as a city proud of its identity and open to welcoming new residents.

SAINT-QUENTIN

Saint-Quentin Advances Green and Digital Transformation to Boost Urban Attractiveness

In the first quarter of 2025, Saint-Quentin focused on initiatives to improve quality of life and reinforce its appeal as a welcoming city for newcomers. The city prioritised sustainability and innovation by launching new local projects and engaging in European-level discussions. A key milestone was the internal consultation held with all directors of the city and conurbation to explore ways to integrate ongoing initiatives into the Integrated Action Plan. Additionally, the city participated in the international event “Nature Restoration in European Cities” (12 March), contributing to the dialogue on implementing the EU Nature Restoration Regulation. The city also took part in the Transnational Meeting in Alba Iulia, reinforcing its commitment to network-wide learning and collaboration.

A Robotics and Digital Hub in the Heart of a New Eco-District

A highlight of the quarter was the **laying of the foundation stone** for Saint-Quentin’s newest digital and innovation building, on 1 February. This construction marks the final addition to the city’s new eco-district, transforming a former industrial site into a vibrant area that already includes housing, a student residence, an intergenerational housing facility, and student services. The upcoming building will feature a **business incubator**, **fablab**, and a new **public engineering school**, further positioning Saint-Quentin as a hub for technological and educational development. This project not only strengthens the city’s economy but also enriches its capacity to retain and attract young talent and entrepreneurs.

Testing Actions: From Micro-Forests to Digital Platforms

During this period, two testing actions were implemented. The first was the development of a **dedicated website for newcomers**, now live in draft form, which will be further enhanced in the coming months. The second was the creation of a **200 m² micro forest**, planted in collaboration with university students. With over 300 species, the micro forest contributes to the city’s environmental goals while enhancing its image as a green and sustainable place to live.

Saint-Quentin also plans to host a **Welcome Day for Health Professionals**, aimed at attracting new medical specialists by showcasing the city’s quality of life and work opportunities. Another upcoming initiative is the creation of a **local ambassador network** to support new residents and connect them with active members of the community through the new digital platform.

IAP Development Anchored in Internal Collaboration

Chapters 1 and 2 of the Integrated Action Plan have been drafted and are undergoing revisions for improved clarity and visual presentation. Chapter 3 is currently under development, with a strong emphasis on **co-construction** through continued consultation with municipal directors. This participatory approach ensures alignment between the IAP and the city’s broader strategic vision.

Saint-Quentin
project meeting
with the city
directors



SALDUS

Saldus Transforms Testing Actions into Long-Term Local Solutions

The first quarter of 2025 marked an important transition period for Saldus, where both of its testing actions reached completion and evolved into permanent components of the municipality's local strategy. The city organised three URBACT Local Group (ULG) meetings in January (14, 15 and 21 January) to define the second chapter of the Integrated Action Plan, focusing on concrete action lines. Additionally, Saldus played an active role in network-level events, including participation in the **Transnational Meeting in Alba Iulia** and **Keep-in-Touch Calls** throughout January and February.

On 6 March, Saldus hosted the **“Charged for Growth” Business Forum**, which brought together over 100 participants from the Kurzeme region. This high-profile event provided a platform for dialogue between local entrepreneurs, business development experts, and support institutions. It was also a key opportunity for the Residents of the Future project to gain visibility at the regional level.

Business Forum Showcases Entrepreneurial Spirit and Local Innovation

The “Charged for Growth” forum was a defining moment for Saldus this quarter. Participants heard from experts on topics ranging from artificial intelligence to public speaking. Local entrepreneur stories and state support schemes were also highlighted, including a powerful intervention from the Saldus team about the **Sātiņi Workshop**, the city's flagship testing action. During the forum's second half, a panel discussion and thematic workshops further enriched the exchange of experiences and ideas, reinforcing the collaborative ecosystem in the municipality.

Testing Actions Become Sustainable Community Anchors

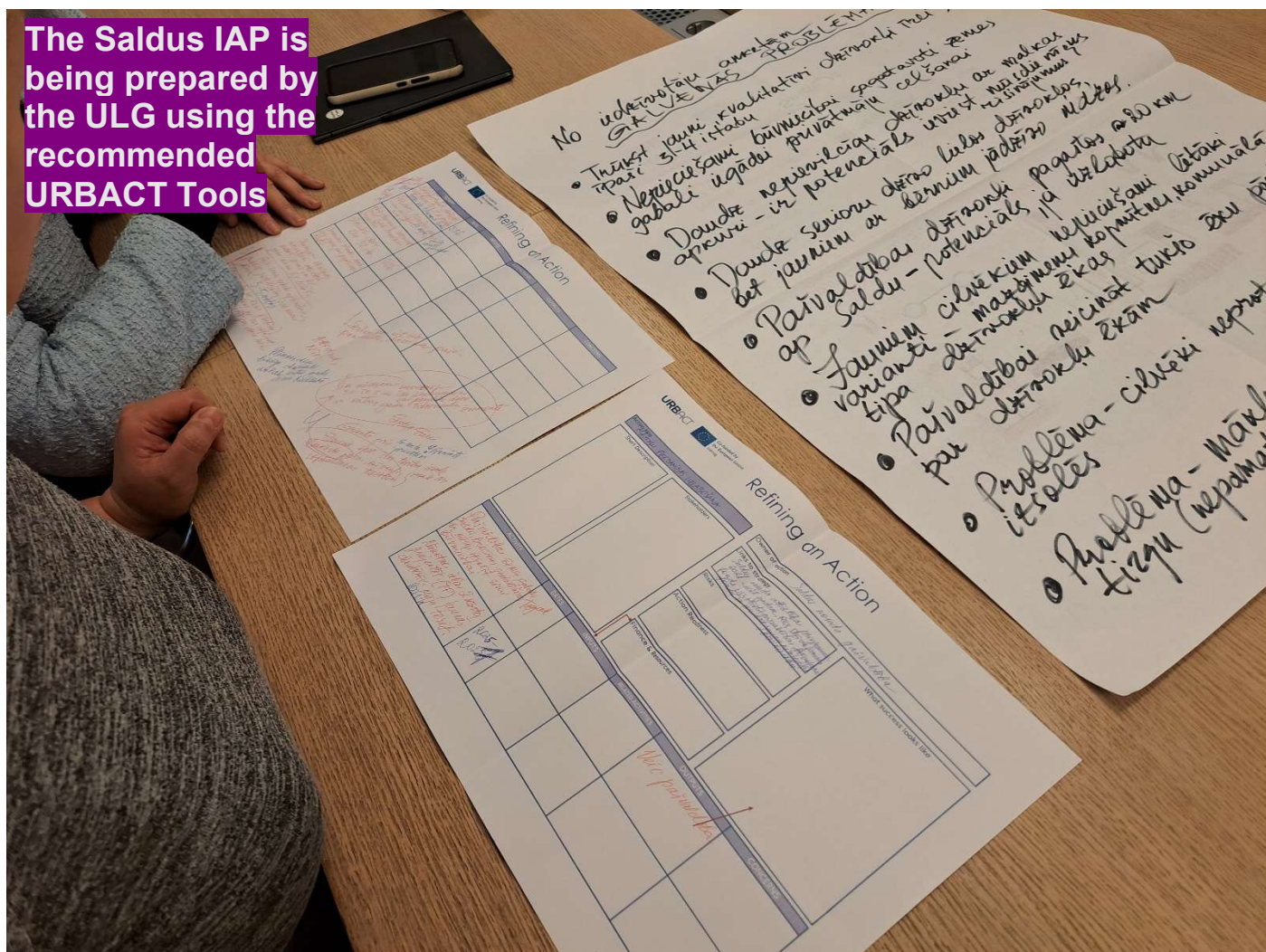
The **Sātiņi Workshop** continued to evolve as a small business community hub. In January and February, two new lease agreements were signed, bringing the total to nine. All current leases have now been extended to two years, indicating a successful transition from pilot to permanence. The space is now officially administered by the Novadnieki Parish Administration, and tenants have initiated the formation of a formal association to seek external funding and represent the interests of small entrepreneurs. Tenants also actively participated in the “Charged for Growth” forum, highlighting their growing role in the local entrepreneurial landscape.

The second testing action, **Jaudas Krātuve (Power Bank)**, concluded in February after a final ULG session in January. The action included analysis and evaluation of the approach, and a qualitative interview study with newcomers is now being planned to inform future actions related to community engagement and integration.

IAP Development Structured Around Key Intervention Areas

During this quarter, Saldus advanced its Integrated Action Plan by finalising Chapter 2. The city identified its core challenges, defined strategic objectives, and selected three main areas of intervention: **support for small entrepreneurship, suitable and affordable housing, and community engagement**. The ULG played a crucial role in defining the priority actions under each axis, drawing on thematic expertise and collaborative dialogue.

The Saldus IAP is being prepared by the ULG using the recommended URBACT Tools



ŠIBENIK

Šibenik Contributes to Network Development While Advancing Strategic Foundations

During the first quarter of 2025, Šibenik played an active role in supporting the *Residents of the Future* network, while internally focusing on planning, reporting, and budget realignment. The project team participated in the **Transnational Meeting in Alba Iulia**, Romania, and simultaneously began organizing the next network-wide meeting, to be held in **Iisalmi, Finland**. These contributions reflect the city's strong commitment to transnational cooperation and knowledge exchange.

The Šibenik team also joined the first module of the **Gender Equal Cities** online training, coordinated by the URBACT Secretariat, and collaborated with **Ad hoc expert Sally Kneeshaw** in preparing the next session to be delivered in April. In parallel, team members were involved in program coordination with the Alba Iulia hosts and **José Caster**, who led a workshop during the TNM on how to define and measure **quality of life**. This session directly aligned with Šibenik's broader urban development goals.

Strategic Coordination and Reporting Take Centre Stage

A highlight of this quarter was the submission of Šibenik's **second network progress report**, which required detailed monitoring of both content and financial implementation. The city also focused on **budget reprogramming**, ensuring that resources are optimally aligned with the project's evolving needs. These activities, though less visible than public-facing actions, are essential to maintaining the network's operational quality and strategic direction.

Testing Actions Set to Expand with Follow-Up Survey

While no new local testing actions were launched this quarter, Šibenik is preparing to **repeat its previously implemented student survey** at the local polytechnic at the start of the next academic year. The aim is to collect a second round of data, allowing the city to **compare responses over two years** and gain deeper insight into trends, perceptions, and attitudes among young people regarding life and opportunities in smaller cities.

Šibenik is using survey to collect trends and perceptions among young people



Progress Continues on the IAP with Focused Drafting

Šibenik has made solid progress on the **Integrated Action Plan**, completing drafts of the first three chapters. The team held several preparatory meetings during the quarter to structure the plan and consolidate key data and findings. Although fewer local ULG meetings were held during this phase due to the focus on coordination tasks, a new round of local engagement is scheduled for the next quarter to support the co-construction of the remaining chapters.

TREBINJE

Trebinje Reorganises and Regains Momentum Through Strategic Replanning

The first quarter of 2025 was a critical period for the City of Trebinje, marked by a comprehensive effort to realign and accelerate local project implementation. Following delays largely caused by recent local elections, the city initiated a two-day coordination meeting with the Lead Partner on **30–31 January**, focused on troubleshooting key issues, adjusting timelines, and refining deliverables. This meeting resulted in several strategic decisions, including changes to the initial testing action, budget reprogramming, and a renewed commitment to completing the first chapters of the Integrated Action Plan in line with network milestones.

As part of this effort, Trebinje participated in the **Transnational Meeting in Alba Iulia** from **24 to 27 March**, represented by the Deputy Mayor and key members of the local project team. The visit reinforced Trebinje's role in the network and facilitated knowledge exchange with partners from across Europe.

New Testing Action Focuses on Digitalisation of Public Services

In early 2025, Trebinje secured approval from the URBACT Secretariat for a new **small-scale testing action**. This initiative focuses on assessing and enhancing the **digitalisation of City Administration operations**, aiming to improve citizen-facing services and internal workflows. The planned work includes a comprehensive analysis of the current IT portfolio, digital process maturity, and alignment with EU declarations on digital governance and rights. A **SWOT analysis** will help define priority areas and guide future actions, setting the foundation for a more responsive and modern public administration.

Recognition as European City of Sport Celebrated with Local Symbolism

Trebinje also received major national recognition during this quarter, being awarded the title of **European City of Sport 2025**. To mark the occasion, the city unveiled a **commemorative postage stamp**, featuring Trebinje's landmarks and celebrating its identity through visual culture. This symbolic gesture underscores the city's commitment to well-being and active lifestyles—key values aligned with the broader objectives of *Residents of the Future*.



3.2 Alba Iulia Hosts a Strategic and Reflective Transnational Meeting for the Residents of the Future Network

From March 24 to 27, Alba Iulia welcomed partner cities for the fourth Residents of the Future Transnational Meeting. The gathering focused on deepening strategic thinking around testing actions, exploring concepts of quality of life, and advancing the co-creation of Integrated Action Plans (IAPs).



Day 1: Peer Learning, Smart Cities, and Quality of Life

The meeting began with a network update and project management session, covering topics such as budget flexibility, communication plans, and the reprogramming process. This was followed by a peer-to-peer exercise where cities reflected on challenges, goals, and next steps since the last transnational meeting. Participants were divided into groups to discuss city-level progress and share lessons learned.

A walking visit through Alba Iulia's historic citadel and smart city pilot areas offered a tangible view of urban innovation. In the afternoon, José Costero led a training session on how to define, promote, and measure quality of life, helping cities reflect on both tangible and intangible urban assets. The day closed with networking and social time among partners.

Day 2: Testing Actions, Strategic Planning, and City Branding

The second day focused on translating testing action results into strategic IAP projects. Through group discussions and the "Airplane Challenge," cities examined the effectiveness of their pilot initiatives and began identifying how these experiences could shape more permanent policies and investment-ready proposals. Each group presented its conclusions in a shared plenary session.

Following lunch, participants explored city marketing and branding strategies, using the "Start–Stop–Continue–Improve" method. The session featured the Find Your Greatness good practices case and encouraged cities to reflect critically on how they promote themselves to new residents and investors.

To close the day, participants experienced a special moment of cultural insight with a tasting of the Romania Youth Capital initiative, showcasing Alba Iulia's leadership in youth engagement.



The meeting set the tone for the final phase of the project, with key next steps including the completion of IAPs, preparation for the Iisalmi Transnational Meeting, and reflections on future themes such as the future of work and rural innovation clusters.

FROM TESTING ACTIONS TO IAP: TURNING PILOT EXPERIENCES INTO STRATEGIC URBAN PROJECTS

One of the most valuable sessions of the Alba Iulia Transnational Meeting was dedicated to the transition from testing actions to strategic projects within the Integrated Action Plans (IAPs). This working session invited cities to reflect on their testing experiences not as isolated experiments, but as the seeds of long-term structural change.

Using a structured template and guided peer exchanges, city teams were asked to analyse their testing actions in depth identifying tangible and intangible results, effective approaches, and transferable lessons. The exercise prompted cities to reflect on what worked, why it worked, and how those elements can inform future strategies.

From Testing Actions to IAP Strategic Projects

TESTING ACTIONS

- What tangible or intangible results can we observe?
- Which elements or approaches proved to be effective and why?
- How can we build on this experience to future projects and policies on the IAP?

IAP STRATEGIC PROJECTS

- What strategic projects will you include in your IAP that are directly strengthened or inspired by the Testing Action?
- What partners or resources activated during the pilot can now support a broader project?
- How can the results of the Testing Action strengthen the case for funding this strategic project?

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Each group then shifted focus to the future, mapping out the strategic projects they intend to include in their IAPs. Questions centred on which partners or resources activated during the pilots could be leveraged further, and how testing results could help justify future funding opportunities.

This session reinforced the idea that testing actions are not endpoints but springboards. They serve to de-risk innovation, offer practical insights, and help cities articulate robust and grounded proposals for long-term impact. The peer feedback format encouraged cross-city learning, while strengthening the collective ambition to move from experimentation to transformation.

By the end of the session, cities left with clearer pathways for integrating their pilot experiences into policy frameworks and operational plans—confirming the Residents of the Future network as a laboratory for action-oriented learning and scalable urban innovation.

CITY BRANDING INSIGHTS FROM ALBA IULIA: “FIND YOUR GREATNESS”

One of the standout sessions at the Alba Iulia Transnational Meeting was the presentation of the “**Find Your Greatness**” case study, an **URBACT network** that explored how cities can define, develop, and communicate their identity through strategic branding. Alba Iulia, as one of the original members of the network, shared its long-term experience and achievements in using branding as a tool for urban transformation.

Fifteen years ago, Alba Iulia was a little-known city with fewer than 80,000 inhabitants. Despite its modest size, the municipality recognised the potential of its rich cultural heritage, symbolic importance for Romanian history, and unique local assets. Through a collaborative and visionary process, the city built what became **Romania’s first city brand**, anchored in the concept of “The Other Capital”.



Not *just* a city logo
But one of the *first* city brand
strategies in Europe

This brand narrative reframes Alba Iulia not just as a historic centre, but as a modern city of festivals, culture, youth, science, and spirituality. The strategy was not limited to visual identity, it encompassed infrastructure investment, digital innovation (including smart tourism tools and biofuel public transport), and international engagement. Alba Iulia became the first city in Romania to partner with the World Bank, receive a Big 3 credit rating, and win a European heritage restoration award.

As a direct outcome of the URBACT Find Your Greatness network, the city gained tools and visibility to position itself as a model for place-based development. The strategy led to significant increases in tourism, citizen pride, and investor attention, proving that even mid-sized and lesser-known cities can compete globally if they **dare to define and communicate their uniqueness**.

The session served as both a technical lesson and an inspiration for the Residents of the Future partners, encouraging cities to invest in their narrative, rethink their value proposition, and see branding as a driver for both perception and policy change.

UNDERSTANDING AND MEASURING QUALITY OF LIFE: A KEY FOCUS FOR SHRINKING CITIES

A highlight of the Alba Iulia Transnational Meeting was the in-depth training session titled “Quality of Life: What it is, how to promote and measure it”, led by expert José Costero. The workshop tackled one of the most complex yet critical challenges for small and shrinking cities: how to define, evaluate, and enhance the lived experience of their residents.

The session began with a conceptual introduction, reviewing definitions from the World Health Organization, academia, and policy institutions. It emphasized that quality of life (QoL) is not universal, it varies depending on culture, context, and personal values, making it both a subjective and multidimensional concept. Participants reflected on their own definitions of QoL, highlighting factors such as alignment with personal values, inner peace, and meaningful social contribution.

Drawing from practical examples across Europe, the training showed how shrinking cities can use quality of life as a strategic development pathway. Rather than chasing growth at any cost, these cities can focus on affordability, environmental quality, social cohesion, and cultural vitality as competitive assets. Case studies from Ostrava, Altena, Genova, Kaunas, and Chemnitz illustrated diverse approaches from renovating vacant housing to promoting citizen-led initiatives that have successfully enhanced urban liveability despite population loss.



The session also introduced tools and frameworks for measuring QoL, including EU-level reports, city rankings, and survey-based indicators. Participants discussed the strengths and limitations of global rankings, which often favour large cities, and explored how localized indicators can offer a more accurate and actionable picture of well-being in smaller communities.

A hands-on group exercise invited city teams to apply Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs to urban planning. Using this psychological model, teams categorized urban priorities such as housing, health, community life, and self-actualization and proposed local indicators to track progress. This exercise helped cities begin to frame

their own Quality of Life Measurement Frameworks, laying the foundation for more holistic and responsive Integrated Action Plans.

In essence, the session offered cities a powerful reminder: quality of life is not only a goal it is a strategy. By embracing this approach, shrinking and mid-sized cities can shift the narrative from decline to resilience, and position themselves as genuinely attractive places to live, work, and belong.

4. What's Next on Residents of the Future?

The period from April to June 2025 will be another crucial phase in the URBACT journey of the Residents of the Future network. In addition to continuing the implementation of testing actions and finalising the Integrated Action Plans, partners will engage in two capacity-building moments: the **masterclass on Gender Equal Cities**, and the **masterclass on funding strategies for IAPs** both designed to strengthen the quality and feasibility of local plans. This period will culminate in the **Transnational Meeting hosted by Iisalmi**, where cities will share their final IAP drafts, explore the future of work, and reflect on place-based strategies to attract and retain residents.

MASTERCLASS GENDER EQUAL CITIES

In the upcoming quarter, the Residents of the Future network will benefit from a dedicated masterclass on Gender Equal Cities, led by URBACT expert Sally Kneeshaw. This online session, scheduled for late April, will provide cities with tools and insights to integrate gender equality into urban planning and local policy-making. Drawing on practical examples and URBACT case studies, the session will help partners reflect on how inclusive design, service delivery, and participation can contribute to more equitable and attractive cities for all residents.

MASTERCLASS ON FUNDING THE IAP'S

Another key learning moment ahead for the network will be the masterclass on funding strategies for Integrated Action Plans, facilitated by URBACT expert Marion Cugnet. This session will support cities in identifying concrete pathways to finance their strategic projects, exploring sources such as European funds, national programs, and local partnerships. Through practical guidance and peer exchange, the masterclass will equip participants with tools to transform their IAPs from plans into action, ensuring long-term sustainability and impact.

IISALMI TRANSNATIONAL MEETING

From June 23 to 26, 2025, the city of Iisalmi, Finland, will host the final Transnational Meeting of the Residents of the Future network an event set to mark a key turning point in the project's journey. As cities complete their Integrated Action Plans and consolidate the lessons learned from testing actions, this gathering will offer a space for reflection, peer feedback, and forward-looking dialogue.

The Iisalmi meeting will centre around three main themes. First, partners will present and review their final IAP drafts, receiving input from peers and the Lead Expert to ensure alignment, clarity, and implementation potential. Second, a special session will explore the future of work, looking at how digitalization, demographic change, and local innovation are reshaping employment models in small and medium-sized cities. Finally, the meeting will offer insights into cluster development, using Trebinje's experience with the Herzog House.

In addition to technical sessions, participants will engage with the local context through site visits, community encounters, and thematic workshops. As the last transnational milestone before the final event, the Iisalmi meeting is expected to reinforce shared commitments, inspire final refinements, and set the tone for the post-project legacy of the Residents of the Future network.

5. Final remarks

Dear reader,

As we close this Fifth Quarterly Report of the Residents of the Future project, we celebrate a season of consolidation and transition. Over the past months, partner cities have moved from experimentation to strategy refining their Integrated Action Plans, transforming testing actions into long-term solutions, and engaging their communities in shaping a shared urban future.

This quarter has also been a time of connection and reflection. From the powerful learning moments in Alba Iulia—on quality of life, gender equality, and funding strategies to the preparation of our final transnational meeting in Iisalmi, the network continues to grow stronger, more ambitious, and more united.

A heartfelt thank you to all the teams who make this journey possible. Your commitment, innovation, and generosity in sharing have turned challenges into opportunities and ideas into action. From digital transformation to cultural identity, inclusive design to local entrepreneurship, your efforts are helping to build cities that are not only resilient but deeply human.

With the final steps ahead, we look forward with hope and determination. Thank you for walking this path with us and for believing in the future we are building together.

Warm regards,

Tiago Ferreira
April 2025

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