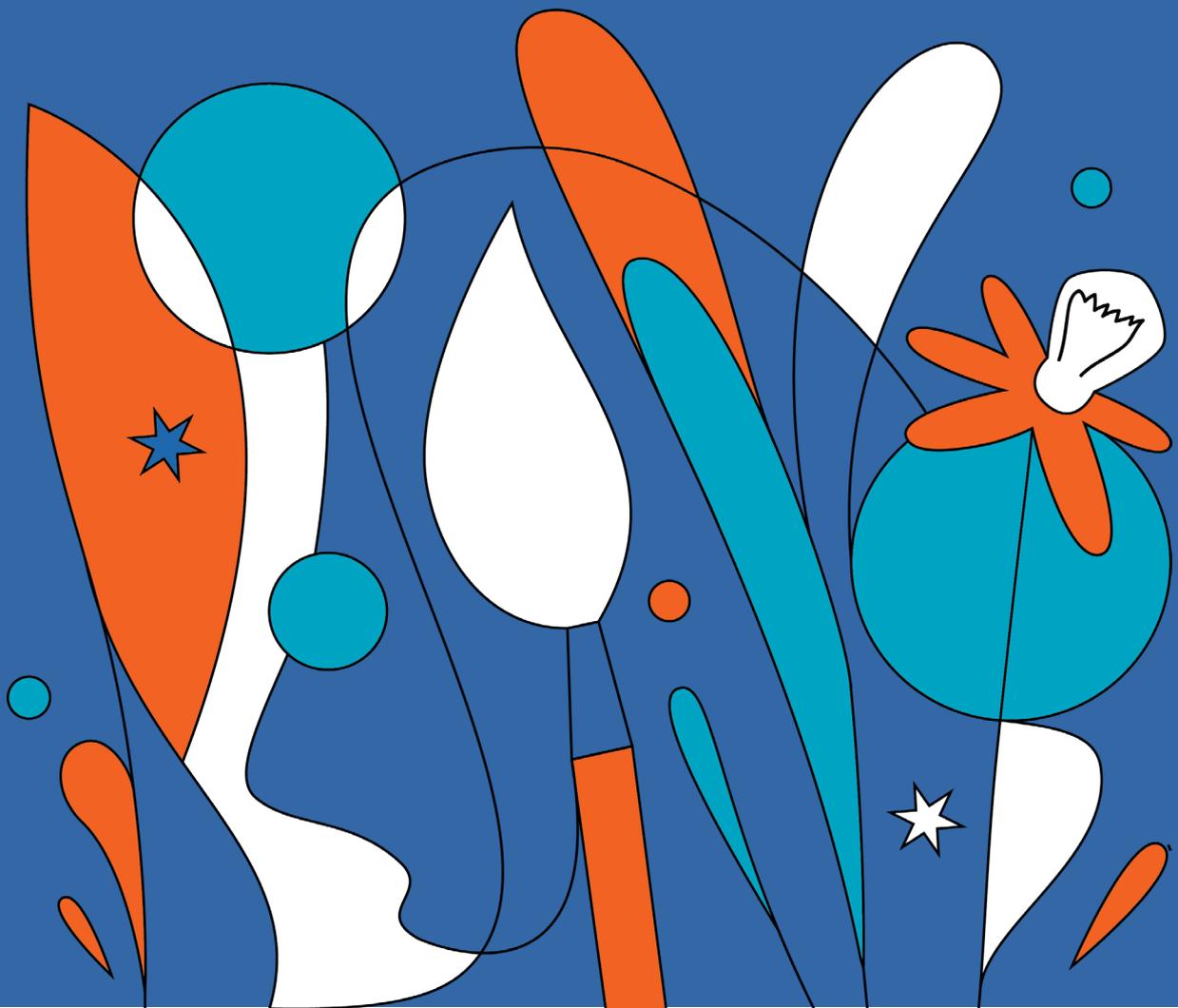


Testing Action Report

U.R. Impact Network



As part of the UR IMPACT network, partner cities conducted a series of testing actions to explore innovative ways of strengthening social impact in their local contexts. These small-scale experiments aimed to engage communities, assess urban challenges, and refine approaches for their Integrated Action Plans (IAPs). By testing different strategies—ranging from youth engagement events to urban mobility interventions—each city gathered valuable insights to shape their long-term initiatives. This report presents a summary of the testing actions, highlighting key learnings and their implications for future urban strategies.

Spaces of Belonging

1.

Cities: Bovec, Longford, Broumov

Voices of the People

2.

Cities: Murcia, Mértola, Bielsko Biała, Kamza

Signs of Change

3.

Cities: Hannut, Cinisello Balsamo

1.

Bovec

Longford

Broumov

Spaces of Belonging

Cities: Bovec, Longford, Broumov

These cities explored how physical spaces—whether newly created or reclaimed—can foster a sense of belonging, inclusion, and social cohesion. The actions focused on transforming public areas into community hubs and testing governance or programming models to make these spaces sustainable.



Activating Youth in Bovec: From Social Spaces to Coworking Futures

What if combining creative events and flexible workspaces could empower Bovec's young people to see their town not just as a place to grow up, but also as a place to stay, create, and thrive?

Challenge:

Bovec faces the key challenge of retaining and attracting young residents amid limited housing and off-season job opportunities. Its vision centers on creating a sustainable, youth-friendly environment by offering affordable housing, diverse employment, and community-oriented spaces like Buška Izba. Through initiatives fostering intergenerational ties, modern workspaces, and youth engagement, Bovec aims to ensure a vibrant and balanced future for the municipality.

Testing Action:

Set of Activities for Youth at Buška Izba & Coworking Pilot "WCA HUB"



Activating Youth in Bovec: From Social Spaces to Coworking Futures

Objective:

Bovec tested how youth-oriented spaces and programming could foster social engagement and professional development. The aim was to assess Buška Izba's potential as a hub for youth gatherings and to pilot a coworking model that responds to emerging freelance and non-seasonal work needs.

What Happened:

From December 2024 to March 2025, a series of seven youth events took place at Buška Izba, organized by ARC NGO. These included gaming nights, a film screening, and hands-on workshops covering digital skills, solo travel, and even Valentine's messages—designed to explore interests and life skills in a safe, inclusive setting. In parallel, from February to July 2025, Bovec piloted a coworking space (WCA HUB) in the former tourist information center next door. The space, equipped with borrowed materials and managed by the ULG with PRC's support, hosted entrepreneurial workshops and offered flexible workspace for locals, seasonal workers, and remote professionals.

Key Findings:

Both actions confirmed that Buška Izba can function as a valued youth space, while peer-to-peer outreach proved most effective. The coworking pilot attracted steady but modest usage, showing potential for seasonal demand. Challenges included limited equipment, insufficient coordination, and lack of multilingual support for international users. Nonetheless, the actions validated Bovec's direction and sparked new ideas among youth and stakeholders for future initiatives.

Impact on the Integrated Action Plan (IAP):

These testing actions supported key goals of Bovec's IAP and Youth Strategy by offering platforms for socialisation, skill-building, and new work models. They provided early validation for the adaptive use of Buška Izba and laid the groundwork for integrating coworking and youth programming into the long-term urban strategy.

Longford exploring Community Spaces and Governance

What if testing various governance and social space models, such as reopening the Men's Shed and engaging youth in facility design, could provide a sustainable, community-driven model for creating inclusive and active spaces for local residents?

Challenge:

Longford, and specifically Ballymahon, faces significant challenges such as population decline, youth outmigration, poverty, and strained trust between residents and local authorities. Despite a surface-level appearance of prosperity, the town struggles with high deprivation and rising demand for social services, particularly mental health support. The vision is to build a town that fosters pride and belonging for all residents, focusing on inclusive community engagement and a strong, sustainable governance model through the Pobal le Chéile initiative.

Testing Action:

Men's Shed, Youth Facilities, and Governance Models



Longford exploring Community Spaces and Governance

Objective:

Longford tested three key initiatives:

- The feasibility of reopening a Men's Shed and launching a Women's Shed.
- Exploring models for youth facilities and gathering input from young people.
- Examining governance structures for local facility management.

What Happened:

- Public meetings were held to discuss reopening the Men's Shed and creating a Women's Shed, with input from the Irish Men's Shed Association.
- Youth engagement activities included visits to towns with youth facilities and facilitated workshops to explore design preferences.
- Governance discussions brought key stakeholders together to explore collaborative management models for social infrastructure.

Key Findings:

Interest in the Men's Shed was strong, but concerns emerged about finding a suitable location. The youth facilities discussion highlighted the need for a dedicated youth officer. Governance talks revealed gaps in coordination due to staff turnover at the Family Resource Centre.

Impact on the Integrated Action Plan (IAP):

These testing actions directly informed Longford's IAP by identifying challenges and opportunities for community-driven initiatives. The findings will shape the next steps in co-designing sustainable social spaces and governance models.

Revitalizing Broumov: Strengthening City Centre Activities

What if improving communication between local businesses, activating public spaces through events, and enhancing visibility through simple, functional interventions could boost local engagement, making the city center a more vibrant and connected community hub?

Challenge:

Broumov faces familiar rural challenges such as population decline, youth outmigration, poverty, and social inequality, including limited social housing and educational opportunities. Despite these obstacles, the city is revitalizing its center by fostering local vibrancy, safety, and cultural activity, and by promoting strong civic participation. Through its first major international collaboration, Broumov aims to empower residents as co-creators of urban renewal, making the city center more inclusive, attractive, and representative of community needs.

Testing Action:

City Centre Coordinator, Public Furniture, Community Events, and Information Mats



Revitalizing Broumov: Strengthening City Centre Activities

Objective:

Broumov tested several initiatives to enhance city centre engagement, improve communication with local businesses, and increase public space usability.

What Happened:

A City Centre Coordinator was introduced to strengthen collaboration, and uniform tables and chairs were installed to create a cohesive urban aesthetic. Public events activated the main square, and informational mats promoted local businesses.

Regular feedback confirmed positive community engagement, though challenges such as coordinator selection and furniture logistics emerged.

Key Findings:

- The City Centre Coordinator position was successful in improving communication and involvement of local businesses.
- The tables and chairs initiative was positively received by residents and tourists, though the process of standardizing the furniture could be simplified.
- Community events, particularly flea markets, were well-attended and contributed to social interactions.
- The information mats were praised for providing valuable local business details but required regular updates.

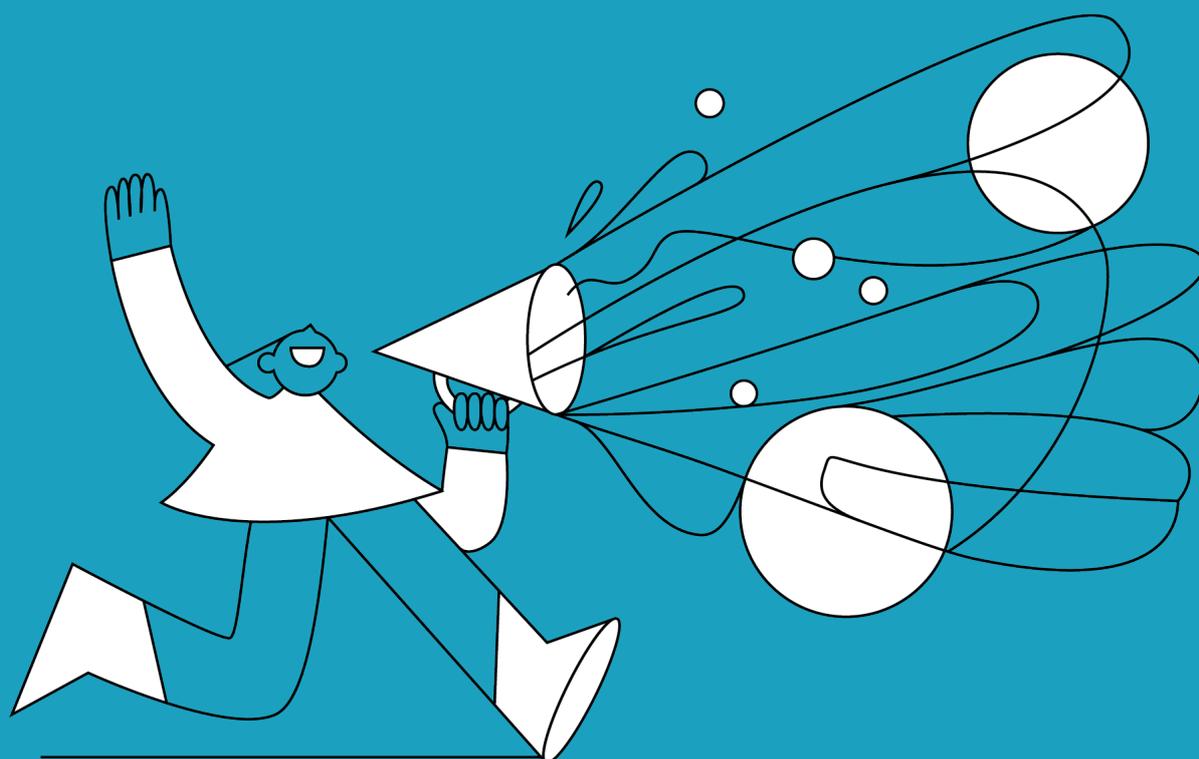
Impact on the Integrated Action Plan (IAP):

These actions supported Broumov's IAP, with all initiatives set to continue in 2025. Key lessons included the need for strong stakeholder relationships, simplified administrative processes, and sustained updates for informational materials.

Voices of People

Cities: Murcia, Mértola, Bielsko Biała, Kamza

This group prioritized elevating community voices, gathering citizen feedback, and showcasing local narratives through exhibitions, participatory photography, and public dialogues. The goal was to strengthen the connection between residents and decision-making processes, fostering inclusive urban development.



Murcia's South Connection: Engaging Citizens in Urban Regeneration

What if an itinerant exhibition could successfully raise awareness about urban regeneration, fostering active citizen involvement in shaping the future of their neighborhoods and helping to bridge the gap between local authorities and the public?

Challenge:

Murcia is addressing deep-rooted urban divides caused by railway infrastructure that has limited access to services and created social disconnection. The vision is to transform this barrier into an opportunity for regeneration by improving mobility, creating green and cultural spaces, and promoting inclusive urban development. By prioritizing civic participation and equitable access to resources, the plan aims to foster cohesive, thriving communities and ensure long-term sustainability through shared ownership and collective action.

Testing Action:

South Connection Itinerant Exhibition



Murcia's South Connection: Engaging Citizens in Urban Regeneration

Objective:

Murcia sought to inform and engage residents in the large-scale “South Connection” urban regeneration project. The testing action aimed to assess community awareness, collect feedback, and explore effective communication strategies.

What Happened:

An itinerant exhibition featuring architectural plans, 3D renderings, and photographs toured southern neighborhoods. Citizen forums were hosted at each location, where residents could ask questions, provide feedback, and submit suggestions via dedicated boxes.

Key Findings:

The exhibition successfully raised awareness, with high participation and numerous suggestions collected. However, challenges included sustaining engagement, addressing conflicting community interests, and moderating discussions. External factors like weather conditions and logistics also affected participation.

Impact on the Integrated Action Plan (IAP):

This testing action directly influenced Murcia's IAP by refining community engagement strategies. Lessons learned will shape future participatory planning efforts, ensuring a more inclusive and responsive urban development process.

Youth Perspectives in Mértola: Exploring the Historic Centre

What if engaging young people through photography and creative workshops could provide fresh insights into the Historic Center's future and foster their long-term involvement in urban development?

Challenge:

Mértola's historic center faces intertwined challenges including demographic decline, climate vulnerability, aging infrastructure, and limited economic opportunities. The tension between preserving cultural heritage and modernizing for inclusivity is further complicated by risks of over-commercialized tourism and weak civic engagement. The vision is to create a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable urban environment where heritage preservation aligns with social and economic development. By empowering local stakeholders through participatory planning, Mértola aims to become a model of balanced, community-driven regeneration.

Testing Action:

Look at the Historic Center – Olhar o Centro Histórico



Youth Perspectives in Mértola: Exploring the Historic Centre

Objective:

Mértola aimed to engage young people in reimagining the Historic Center by exploring their perceptions and testing creative methods for urban reflection. The action sought to bridge generational perspectives while fostering youth involvement in urban development.

What Happened:

A group of young participants explored the Historic Center, capturing five photos of elements they appreciated and five they wished to change. This visual exercise was followed by creative workshops on design, drawing, and writing, where participants expressed their ideas. The final output was a folded creative book, encapsulating their perspectives on the area's aesthetics, challenges, and potential improvements.

Key Findings:

The testing action revealed that young people value greenery, well-maintained buildings, and aesthetics while expressing concerns over neglect, garbage, and excessive car presence. Their insights differed from older residents, highlighting a generational contrast in urban perception. Engaging youth proved effective in generating fresh ideas, though maintaining their interest in municipal issues remained a challenge. Digital tools, particularly smartphones, played a crucial role in sustaining engagement.

Impact on the Integrated Action Plan (IAP):

This initiative demonstrated the potential of youth engagement in urban planning and confirmed that creative methodologies could enhance participatory processes. Given its success, Mértola's ULG plans to integrate and scale up this approach in future community-driven urban development efforts.

Bielsko Biała: Strengthening Local Identity through Historical Walks

What if organizing historical walking tours, combined with a photography exhibition, could strengthen local identity by fostering a deeper connection to the area and empowering residents to actively participate in shaping the future of their downtown?

Challenge:

Bielsko-Biała's city center has faced persistent decline marked by depopulation, loss of commercial appeal, and emerging social challenges, despite years of revitalization efforts. The vision is to reverse this trend by transforming the center of Biała into a vibrant socioeconomic hub by 2030. Key interventions include converting underused spaces into community hubs and repurposing post-industrial buildings into a medical university campus, aiming to attract residents, especially youth, and stimulate economic and social revival through inclusive, stakeholder-driven planning.

Testing Action:

A Walk through the Centre of Biała and a Photography Exhibition Featuring Photos Taken by its Participants



Bielsko Biała: Strengthening Local Identity through Historical Walks

Objective:

The initiative aimed to strengthen local identity and showcase the history and revitalization potential of Biała's downtown. A photography exhibition enriched the project by presenting the perspective of walk participants on the area and highlighting what they appreciate and what needs improvement.

What Happened:

In collaboration with the Urban Local Group (ULG), a historical walking route was designed, allowing participants to explore the area's architecture and heritage. Despite weather-related rescheduling, the event successfully engaged participants, who took photos reflecting their perspectives on the city. A survey at the end of the walk confirmed increased awareness and appreciation of the area. The most compelling photos were selected for an exhibition, which served as both a celebration of local identity and a tool for future engagement.

Key Findings:

- The testing action was considered very successful, as the available spots for the walk filled up quickly.
- All walk participants found the walking route attractive, rated the quality of information highly, and expressed interest in participating in similar walks.
- The majority of participants stated that their knowledge about the area had increased, they felt a stronger connection to the area, and the area was more attractive than they had initially thought.
- The survey method was considered effective for assessing participants' subjective feelings.

Impact on the Integrated Action Plan (IAP):

- One of the IAP goals is to strengthen Biała's downtown identity through community engagement by 2030.
- This pilot action supports this goal and has been partially achieved.
- Survey results show that the action helps build local identity.
- By 2030, it is planned that similar events should be organized more frequently, with modified walking routes.

Kamza's Green Dialogue: Co-Designing Urban Nature

What if involving young citizens and city officials in hands-on, co-design experiences could spark long-term collaboration and community ownership of sustainable urban spaces?

Challenge:

Since the collapse of Albania's communist regime in 1991, Kamza has undergone rapid demographic and urban transformation due to internal migration, particularly from the country's northeast. This growth brought both opportunities and significant challenges, including unregulated urban sprawl, strained infrastructure, and insufficient planning. The U.R. Impact initiative focuses on transforming a riverside area into a multifunctional park, improving quality of life, biodiversity, and public spaces. By 2030, Kamza aims to become a model of sustainable, inclusive urban development, using green infrastructure and social innovation as tools to address the challenges of rapid growth and enhance residents' everyday lives.

Testing Action:

Creating Green Spaces to Empower Communities and Advance Sustainable Growth



Kamza's Green Dialogue: Co-Designing Urban Nature

Objective:

Kamza's testing action aimed to explore how young people and municipal officials engage with the vision of new multifunctional green spaces in the city, and to promote participatory dialogue around sustainable urban development.

What Happened:

The municipality brought together youth and staff in a dedicated field session focused on a future green area. Through structured conversations and interactive activities, participants explored themes of co-design, sustainability, and the social role of public space. The session tested both awareness and attitudes toward integrated urban planning and the value of shared spaces for sports, arts, and culture.

Key Findings:

The initiative successfully introduced participatory tools and created a new space for dialogue between youth and municipal staff. Participants felt more engaged in decision-making and more aware of urban sustainability goals. However, limited diversity and participation were noted as key challenges. Future actions will prioritize broader outreach and more structured facilitation.

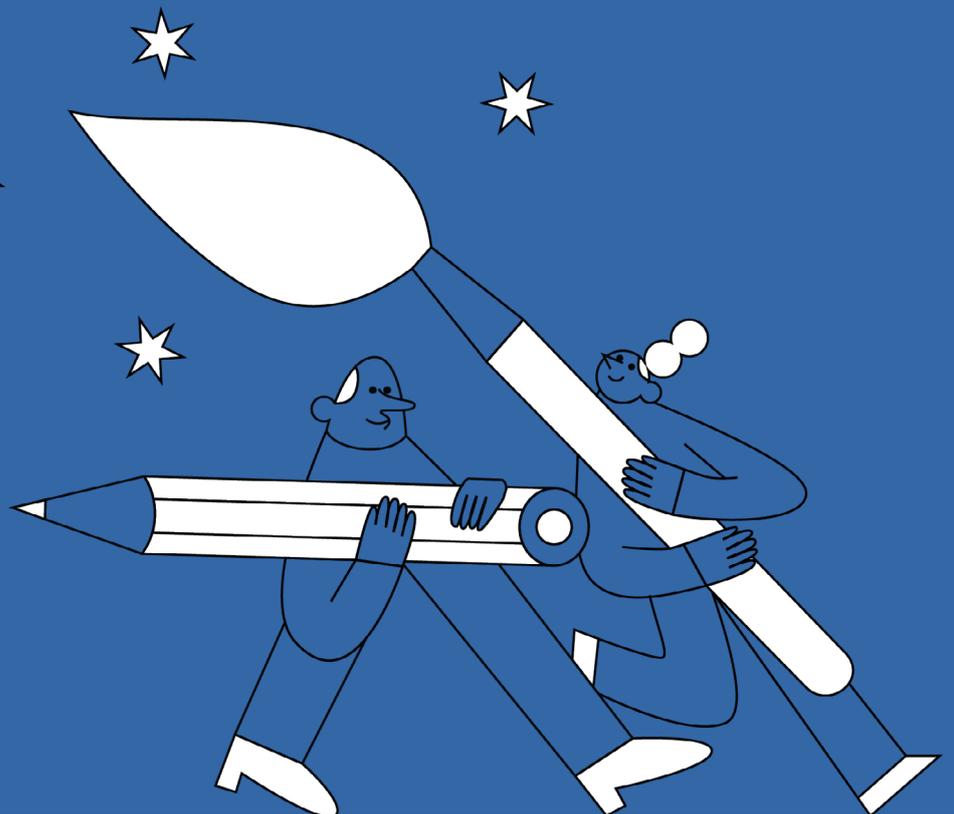
Impact on the Integrated Action Plan (IAP):

Though held in a different location from the IAP target area, this action directly informed the approach to community engagement. It validated the need for participatory planning and highlighted the importance of involving diverse groups in shaping multifunctional public spaces.

Signs of Change

Cities: Hannut, Cinisello Balsamo

These cities experimented with visual cues, urban art, and temporary interventions to provoke shifts in community behavior and urban space perception. Their actions tested how simple, visible changes could influence mobility, local business engagement, and public awareness.



Connecting Hannut: Testing Movement and Visibility Strategies

What if small-scale interventions like visual shopfronts, picture - boards, and clear signage could enhance the connection between key areas of Hannut, encouraging more foot traffic and awareness of the city's development plans?

Challenge:

Hannut, known for its quality of life and cultural appeal, recognizes that retail alone is no longer enough to draw people to its city center. To remain vibrant and relevant, the city aims to diversify its attractions by embracing the “15-minute city” concept, ensuring that essential services, leisure, and cultural experiences are accessible within a short distance. This approach seeks to reinforce Hannut’s role as a model for other small cities striving for livable, multifunctional urban centers.

Testing Action:

Surveys on City Movement, Shop Front Layouts, Picture Boards for Families, and Mobility Signs



Connecting Hannut: Testing Movement and Visibility Strategies

Objective:

Hannut aimed to improve movement between key areas of the city, particularly between the existing concert hall and the city center, while raising awareness about upcoming urban developments. The testing actions focused on understanding pedestrian flow, engaging local businesses, and creating visual attractions to encourage movement.

What Happened:

Four distinct actions were tested:

- Surveys investigated why people do not naturally move between the concert hall and the city center.
- Vacant shop fronts were decorated with layouts and visual materials to raise awareness about future city developments.
- Family-friendly “Urban Life Points,” such as Instagram-friendly Christmas boards, were placed in key locations.
- Directional signs were added to improve wayfinding from the concert hall to the city center.

Key Findings:

The surveys provided insight into movement barriers and the need for improved pedestrian routes. Shop Front layouts enhanced visibility for local businesses, while the picture boards were positively received but lacked widespread participation. Footfall data showed a small but positive impact from the mobility signs, though better placement and additional signs were recommended.

Impact on the Integrated Action Plan (IAP):

These actions contributed to Hannut’s IAP by testing strategies to strengthen the city center’s economic activity. The initiatives helped refine the city’s “Little Thumb Strategy,” which focuses on small but impactful urban interventions. The results will guide future improvements in pedestrian navigation, business engagement, and event communication.

Community Engagement in Cinisello Balsamo: Testing Local Awareness Initiatives

What if community art initiatives like the street art project could create a vibrant, easily recognizable neighborhood identity while simultaneously fostering a stronger connection between residents and local services?

Challenge:

Cinisello Balsamo, shaped by industrial decline and ongoing demographic shifts, struggles with economic disparity, youth unemployment, and a lack of citizen trust in regeneration efforts—especially in peripheral neighborhoods like Crocetta. Despite significant investments, the city has seen limited improvement in socio-economic conditions, largely due to the absence of a system to assess social impact. Its vision centers on building a comprehensive evaluation framework that integrates physical transformation with civic participation, aiming to foster belonging, improve quality of life, and become a model of inclusive and sustainable urban development by 2030.

Testing Action:

“CRX - Colour Regeneration X (for) the Block”



Community Engagement in Cinisello Balsamo: Testing Local Awareness Initiatives

Objective:

Cinisello Balsamo aimed to increase awareness of local services and strengthen community bonds in the Crocetta neighborhood. The testing action explored the effectiveness of visual engagement through street art.

What Happened:

Residents participated in a stencil workshop where they designed colorful markings directing people to key services like the parish activities, a youth web radio in the “Casa della Cittadinanza” building, and a book-lending initiative in the neighborhood senior center. The event concluded with a group photo as a symbol of community collaboration.

Key Findings:

While the visual aspect was engaging, there was little immediate interest in the promoted services. The testing action revealed challenges in mobilizing the community, indicating a need for a more direct approach. Surveys and QR code tracking showed low interaction.

Impact on the Integrated Action Plan (IAP):

This initiative provided insights into community engagement strategies for Cinisello Balsamo’s IAP. Future efforts will focus on direct, face-to-face engagement to improve participation and communication.

This report presents a summary of the testing actions conducted by 9 European municipalities, participating in the U.R. Impact network.

U.R. Impact focuses on addressing a key policy challenge: to develop effective strategies for empowering local communities during processes of urban regeneration. The goal is to prioritize social impact and community-based practices by reimagining the way urban regeneration actions are conducted. This entails placing citizens and their social and ecological well-being at the core of the strategy, and defining a methodology for collective decision-making and civic participation in local urban regeneration strategies.

Partners:

Cinisello Balsamo (Italy - Lead Partner), Bielsko-Biala (Poland), Bovec (Slovenia), Broumov (Czech Republic), Hannut (Belgium), Kamëz (Albania), Longford (Ireland), Mértola (Portugal), Murcia (Spain).

Liat Rogel is the URBACT Lead Expert for the U.R. Impact network. She is a service designer focused on social innovation, collaborative housing and community design.

urbact.eu/networks/ur-impact