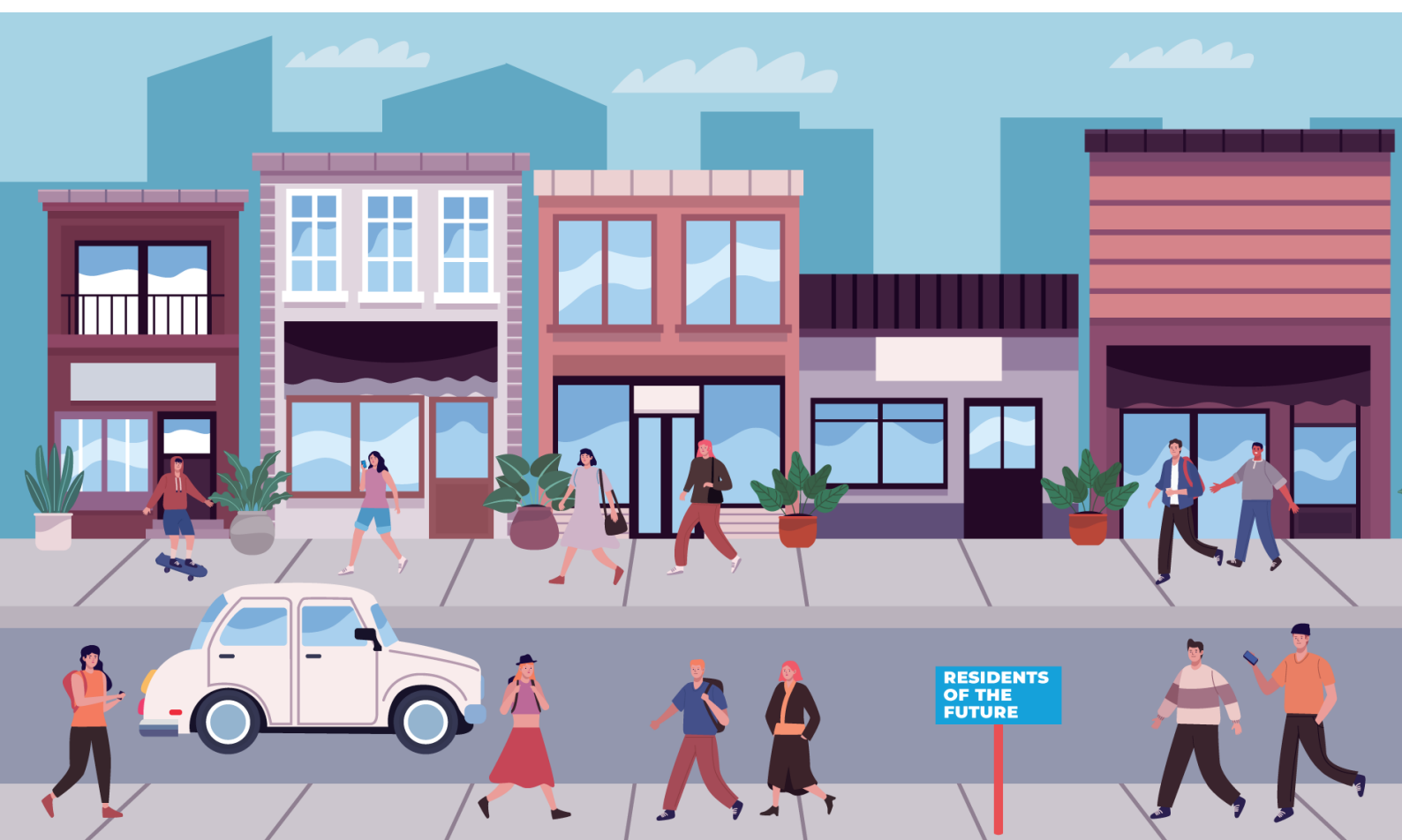


6th Quarterly Report

Residents of the Future



URBACT



Co-funded by
the European Union
Interreg

6th Quarterly Report

Residents of the Future

April to June 2025

URBACT



Co-funded by
the European Union
Interreg

Index

- 1. Welcome to Residents of the Future4
- 2. What's new on Residents of the Future?5
- 3. What's Next on Residents of the Future?23
- 4. Final remarks24

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

2. What is new on Residents of the Future?

2.1 Residents of the Future: From Planning to Readiness

As the Residents of the Future network enters its final stretch, this quarter marks a decisive transition from planning to readiness. With Integrated Action Plans nearing completion and testing actions concluded or consolidated, cities are now focusing on how to embed their learnings into concrete, feasible strategies for the future. The themes of digital transformation, inclusive governance, and community engagement continue to guide local action, while transnational collaboration adds momentum to the final phase.

In Alba Iulia, the Local Volunteer Centre pilot took centre stage during Alba Fest, offering a practical space for youth engagement and civic participation. Iisalmi, as the host of the network's sixth transnational meeting, shared its strategic focus on demographic resilience through the "Bridge to Iisalmi" campaign and welcomed partners with learning sessions rooted in education, entrepreneurship, and innovation.

Mangualde advanced its inclusion agenda with expanded consultations involving immigrant adults, which helped refine key priorities for its IAP, particularly in housing and support services. Plasencia launched its new city branding campaign, "Plasencia to Live In," combining video storytelling, creative design, and literary heritage to attract new residents and boost local identity.

In Saint-Quentin, the renaturation of brownfield sites emerged as a flagship IAP initiative, with micro-forest testing paving the way for broader ecological transformation. Saldus continued to reinforce its planning with the integration of testing results and peer learning, while also preparing for a European knowledge exchange on housing policy.

Šibenik finalised the first draft of its IAP, grounded in strong demographic analysis and community dialogue. It also shared progress during key URBACT events and national-level dissemination activities. Mantova launched a set of interactive testing actions, including youth debates and digital information platforms, designed to engage residents under 35 and amplify their role in shaping the city's future.

Finally, in Trebinje, a Digital Readiness Assessment became the city's designated testing action, revealing essential insights about administrative capacities and access to e-services. The findings were shared publicly during the "Open the Doors of the City" event, reinforcing the city's shift toward participatory and transparent digital governance.

These developments illustrate a network maturing in both strategy and spirit. As final IAPs take shape and preparations for implementation begin, Residents of the Future stands as a collective testament to how small and medium-sized cities can act boldly, think long-term, and place people at the heart of their urban future.

ALBA IULIA

Alba Iulia Pilots Local Volunteer Centre and Advances Youth Ecosystem Planning

In the second quarter of 2025, Alba Iulia continued to strengthen youth engagement and participatory formats through a new wave of pilot activities and strategic planning under the URBACT “Residents of the Future” project. The municipality placed particular focus on testing the concept of a Local Volunteer Centre and advancing the drafting of its Integrated Action Plan (IAP).

Two key URBACT Local Group (ULG) meetings were held to shape a local support structure for young people, targeting both engagement and coordination across sectors. These meetings reinforced the collaborative governance model Alba Iulia is cultivating as it builds toward a resilient and inclusive youth ecosystem.



Key themes included:

- The pilot testing of a Local Volunteer Centre during Alba Fest, which explored its potential as both a civic space and a mobilisation mechanism for youth.
- Reflections from National Volunteering Week, offering strategic insights into the infrastructure and continuity needed for long-term volunteer engagement.
- The definition of core IAP priorities such as youth coworking spaces, digital engagement tools, and volunteering frameworks.

The city also actively contributed to the transnational dimension of the project. It prepared and presented key deliverables—including the IAP draft, a city poster, and local updates—during the network meeting in Iisalmi

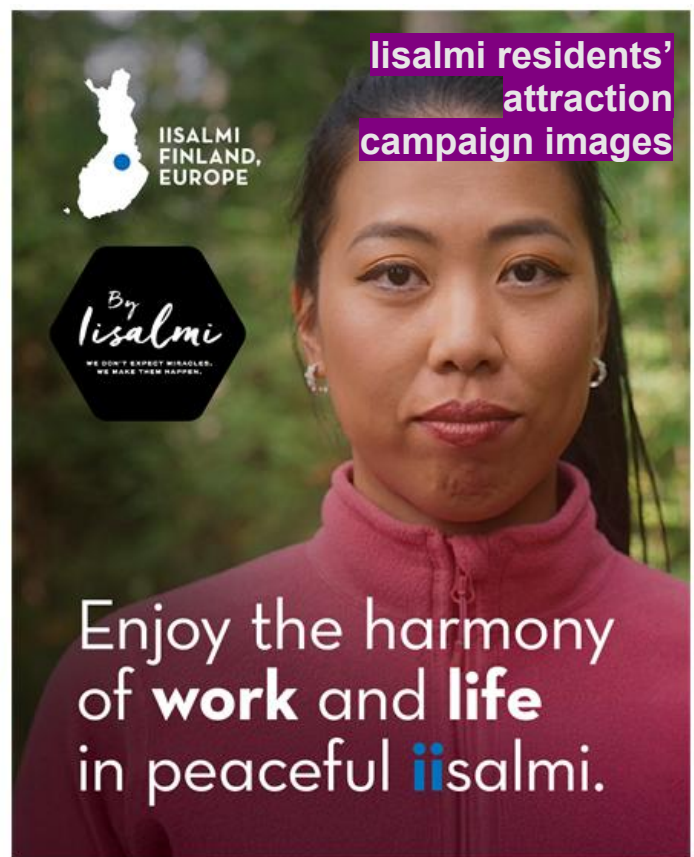
(23–26 June). Participation in thematic webinars and funding workshops further enriched the local planning process with new tools and approaches.

Through this series of coordinated actions, Alba Iulia is reinforcing its long-term vision for youth empowerment and participatory urban governance, ensuring that young residents play a central role in shaping the city's future.

Iisalmi Hosts Transnational Meeting and Expands “Bridge to Iisalmi” Outreach

In the second quarter of 2025, Iisalmi took important steps forward in the “Residents of the Future” project, combining international visibility with strategic local action. A key focus of the period was hosting the Transnational Meeting (TNM), which brought network partners to the city from 23 to 26 June. Preparations for the event were discussed during the 8th URBACT Local Group (ULG) meeting, held on 12 May, alongside reflections on pilot actions and ongoing work on the Integrated Action Plan (IAP).

The city also carried out a paid marketing campaign using the “Bridge to Iisalmi” concept, aimed at attracting international professionals to relocate. This campaign, which ran from 28 April to 18 May, featured English-language materials across social media and national platforms. As part of the effort, a housing benefit scheme was promoted, offering to cover 50% of rent for newcomers during their first three months, an incentive that remains active.



Key themes included:

- Hosting the URBACT network during the Iisalmi TNM, which fostered peer learning and external feedback.
- Refining the “Bridge to Iisalmi” marketing concept and testing it through real-world outreach.
- Planning inclusive events with multilingual materials to improve the integration of international residents.

Through these coordinated activities, Iisalmi continues to strengthen its profile as a welcoming and forward-thinking city, with a strong commitment to inclusion and internationalisation.

MANGUALDE

Mangualde Deepens Inclusion Through Expanded Consultation and IAP Drafting

Between April and June 2025, Mangualde marked a critical phase in its journey within the “Residents of the Future” project, completing both testing action phases and submitting its first full draft of the Integrated Action Plan (IAP). The quarter was shaped by a broader participatory process, notably a consultation session on 4 April with adult members of the immigrant community who had not previously been involved. This engagement widened the range of voices informing the IAP, with a strong focus on intersectional inclusion.

Throughout the quarter, the Mangualde team maintained close coordination with the Lead Expert through Keep in Touch calls, ensuring alignment with network expectations. On 16 June, the IAP draft was submitted, followed by the completion of the network questionnaire on 17 June. These milestones positioned the city to actively contribute to peer learning during the 6th Transnational Meeting in lisalmi (24–25 June), where Mangualde presented its process and received valuable feedback.



Key themes included:

- Expanded engagement with underrepresented immigrant groups to refine integration-related priorities.
- The inclusion of gender equality perspectives following participation in a thematic webinar.
- Completion and submission of the full IAP draft, encompassing six thematic areas and a draft implementation framework.

These efforts reflect Mangualde’s commitment to equity and inclusive planning, reinforcing its role as a proactive and collaborative partner in the URBACT network.

MANTOVA

Mantova Engages Young Residents through Testing Actions and Finalises IAP Draft

Between April and June 2025, Mantova made significant progress in the “Residents of the Future” project, launching three targeted Testing Actions aimed at deepening engagement with young people under 35. These actions not only provided valuable data for refining the city's Integrated Action Plan (IAP) but also tested participatory methods that could be scaled in future initiatives.

The first Testing Action featured a series of Oxford-Style Debates held on 9–10 May and 22 June, offering young residents a platform to express their perspectives on local challenges and aspirations. The second focused on young employees in local enterprises, collecting in-depth data through co-designed surveys exploring areas such as housing, wellbeing, and personal development. The third action adapted a university Welcome KIT into thematic articles for “Mantova Soon”, a new digital platform designed to guide newcomers and prospective residents.



Key themes included:

- Active listening to youth through structured debate formats.
- Collaboration with local businesses to assess the experience of young workers.
- Enhancing accessibility to city services and opportunities via digital innovation.

During this quarter, Mantova also submitted a final draft of its IAP to the External Expert for review. Feedback received during the Transnational Meeting in Isalmi proved highly valuable, helping to refine a strategic and actionable plan that reflects the city's long-term vision. With this work, Mantova continues to position itself as a city committed to inclusive growth and civic innovation.

PLASENCIA

Plasencia Launches City Branding Campaign and Finalises IAP Draft

Between April and June 2025, Plasencia made major strides in the “Residents of the Future” project with the launch of a city-wide promotional campaign and the completion of the draft Integrated Action Plan (IAP). The city also continued its active engagement with the URBACT network, participating in the Transnational Meeting in Iisalmi, the URBACT City Festival in Wrocław, and the Cities Forum 2025 in Kraków.

On 5 June, Plasencia hosted the event “Open the Doors of the City”, where it unveiled the “Plasencia to Live In” campaign an initiative designed to attract new residents. This multifaceted campaign included a promotional video, a new city image and logo, social media materials, and a poetic work titled “In the Forest, THE LITTLE LIGHT” by local writer Iván Hernández Montero. The campaign was met with great enthusiasm from the public, with strong early engagement both in-person and online.



Key themes included:

- The launch of a city branding campaign that connects lifestyle, nature, and identity.
- Community participation through local creatives and spontaneous citizen engagement.
- Strategic external networking to build partnerships, such as joining the “Theatre for All” transfer project.

Plasencia also submitted the first draft of its IAP, which received constructive feedback during the Iisalmi TNM. Recommendations focused on clarifying the city’s baseline context, strengthening the vision, and refining action prioritisation and funding strategies. With 80–90% of the work already in place, the city aims to finalise the plan over the summer, solidifying its commitment to inclusive urban development and long-term growth.

SAINT-QUENTIN

Saint-Quentin Advances Brownfield Renaturation through Micro-Forest Pilot

In the second quarter of 2025, Saint-Quentin continued to pursue its vision of ecological transformation by advancing one of the cornerstone initiatives of its Integrated Action Plan: the renaturation of brownfield sites. Building on a legacy of industrial development, the city is now turning its attention to repurposing derelict urban land into self-sustaining natural areas. This effort not only improves quality of life for current residents but also supports broader goals around biodiversity, climate resilience, and urban attractiveness.

A key testing action within this strategy has been the Micro-Forest Pilot, designed as an early-stage model for converting underutilised sites into regenerative ecosystems. The pilot involved students in the planting of a micro-forest on a former university brownfield site demonstrating both ecological and educational value. This small-scale initiative is paving the way for a larger renaturation programme, with a full-scale test planned on the 22,000-square-metre Velifil wasteland in 2026, and replication across four other identified sites in 2027.



Key themes included:

- Reclaiming post-industrial land through ecological restoration.
- Engaging residents, especially youth, in hands-on environmental action.
- Redefining the city's image by bringing nature back into urban spaces.

By transitioning from traditional “green space” management to the creation of authentic, autonomous natural environments, Saint-Quentin is reshaping its urban landscape with a focus on sustainability, health,

and well-being. The Brownfield Renaturation initiative stands as a powerful example of how shrinking cities can use ecological innovation to reimagine their futures.

Saldus Showcases Innovation and Wraps Up Testing Actions

Between April and June 2025, Saldus reached a key milestone in the “Residents of the Future” project by completing both of its testing actions and advancing its Integrated Action Plan (IAP). The quarter was also marked by strong engagement at the European level, with Saldus proudly representing Latvia at the URBACT Cities Festival in Wrocław.

The testing actions, which are now finalised, generated valuable insights that are being used to shape the next stages of the IAP. In parallel, the city conducted an online survey targeting new residents, laying the groundwork for upcoming qualitative interviews. Chapters 3 and 4 of the IAP were developed and submitted for expert review, with personalised feedback received during the Transnational Meeting (TNM) in lisalmi.



Key themes included:

- Participation in European-level events, with Saldus being the only Latvian city showcased at the URBACT Cities Festival.
- Completion of testing actions that informed future planning.
- Continued progress on IAP development and stakeholder engagement.

With strong visibility, valuable peer learning, and a solid base of local research, Saldus is positioning itself as a bold and collaborative municipality, ready to implement innovative solutions for resident retention and quality of life.

Šibenik Finalises IAP Draft and Strengthens International Collaboration

Between April and June 2025, Šibenik reached a defining point in the “Residents of the Future” project with the completion of its initial Integrated Action Plan (IAP) draft. This milestone was the result of extensive data collection on demographics, housing, and the local economy, as well as sustained engagement with the URBACT Local Group (ULG) and broader network peers.

The city participated in key events across Europe, including the URBACT Cities Festival in Wrocław and the URBACT APN Final Meeting in Paris. Feedback from these occasions, especially from peer IAP reviews and the one-on-one sessions with the Ad Hoc Expert, significantly enriched the strategic focus of Šibenik’s plan. Locally, the sixth ULG meeting blended participatory planning with historical storytelling, creatively anchoring the plan’s ambitions in the city’s past.



Key themes included:

- Submission and external review of the IAP draft, with refinement underway for its final version.
- Regional cooperation and visibility at major URBACT events in Poland and France.
- Continued local engagement through participatory meetings and storytelling.

Šibenik also recorded a series of “Personal Stories” from residents and newcomers, which will feed into future planning. With only one chapter left to finalise, and dissemination activities already being planned,

Šibenik is on track to present a strong, community-informed strategy at the network's final event in Mantova.

TREBINJE

Trebinje Advances Digital Readiness as Cornerstone of Future Governance

Between April and June 2025, Trebinje made major strides in the “Residents of the Future” project, using digital transformation as both a strategic objective and a practical testing ground. The centrepiece of this effort was the Digital Readiness Assessment, an initiative that examined the city administration’s digital infrastructure, staff capacities, and citizen-facing services. This assessment, now formally recognised as the city’s Small-Scale Action (SSA), will serve as the backbone of Trebinje’s Integrated Action Plan (IAP).

The public unveiling of the draft assessment during the “Open the Doors of the City” event on 12 June exemplified Trebinje’s commitment to transparent and participatory urban governance. Citizens, civil society, and professionals were invited to provide feedback, shaping the policy process directly. At the 6th Transnational Meeting in Iisalmi, the city’s digital transition journey was shared with partners, alongside constructive feedback from expert José Costero.



Key themes included:

- Launch of the Digital Readiness Assessment as a testing action and key input for the IAP.
- Citizen engagement through an open consultation event that strengthened local ownership.
- Strategic peer learning during network meetings and expert consultations.

Trebinje’s approach goes beyond infrastructure, it reframes digital transition as a cultural transformation rooted in community values. With a data-driven roadmap and citizen input at its core, the city is paving the way for a more inclusive, efficient, and connected public administration.

2.2 Iisalmi Hosts a Strategic and Reflective Transnational Meeting for the Residents of the Future Network

From June 23 to 26, 2025, the city of Iisalmi welcomed partner cities of the Residents of the Future network for their sixth Transnational Meeting. Framed by the themes of innovation, strategic foresight, and local entrepreneurship, the meeting provided a vital platform for reviewing Integrated Action Plans (IAPs), sharing local good practices, and co-creating the network's final milestones.

Day 1: Network Updates, Peer Exchange, and Industrial Heritage

The meeting began with a warm welcome from the host city, followed by a morning session featuring project management updates, communication insights, and city contributions to the "Fresh News" roundtable. Participants then had the chance to experience Iisalmi's industrial legacy first-hand with a visit to the Brewery Museum and a talk on the role of cities in supporting business development, with inspiring testimonials from Genelec and Ponsse, two globally recognised companies born in Iisalmi.

In the afternoon, focus shifted to strategy. Cities engaged in a peer review of the strategic dimensions of their IAPs, complemented by individual feedback sessions with URBACT Ad Hoc Expert José Costero. These one-on-one consultations offered tailored insights to strengthen each city's plan. The day concluded with informal networking at the world's smallest restaurant, Kuappi, and a group dinner at Olutmestari.



Day 2: Innovation Clusters, Event Planning, and Educational Partnerships

Day two opened with a presentation from Trebinje on the Herzog House project, offering a valuable case study in cluster development and cultural innovation. While IAP consultations continued, the group also worked together to shape the upcoming final network event in Mantova, sharing ideas for content, format, and storytelling.

The afternoon featured high-level feedback from José Costero, followed by the project's Steering Committee session. Participants then visited the YHESÄ Competence Development Network, a local educational-

business partnership aimed at preparing future talent. This session highlighted how regional cooperation can anticipate labour market needs and drive inclusive growth.



Throughout the meeting, the lisalmi team ensured a welcoming and engaging atmosphere, culminating in a lakeside dinner and music at Koljonvirran Kartano. While the final day saw partners depart at their own pace, the sense of shared mission and learning remained strong.



With final IAPs now in refinement and preparations underway for the Mantova event in October, the Iisalmi TNM marked a critical step forward. It reinforced the network's core values: peer learning, citizen-centred innovation, and cross-sector collaboration for the cities of tomorrow.

STRATEGIC THINKING AT THE CORE: IAP REVIEW SESSION HIGHLIGHTS SHARED STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

One of the central moments of the Iisalmi Transnational Meeting, held in June 2025, was the in-depth Integrated Action Plan (IAP) Review Session, led by URBACT Ad Hoc Expert José Costero. The session brought together city representatives to reflect on the strategic value, coherence, and feasibility of their IAPs, marking a crucial step in the journey from planning to implementation.

This collective exercise aimed to move beyond checklists and compliance, inviting cities to think systemically about how their action plans align with long-term urban transformation goals. The session was structured around a comprehensive review of common strengths, critical gaps, and forward-looking recommendations.



What Cities Are Doing Well: Local Intelligence and Participation

José Costero began by acknowledging the maturity and ambition shown across most IAPs. Notably, cities such as Šibenik and Saldus stood out for their strategic diagnostics with robust context analysis, well-articulated challenges, and clear links to action priorities.

Another key strength was the identification and prioritisation of actions, with many cities effectively narrowing their broad aspirations into focused, implementable interventions. The use of URBACT's recommended methodologies, such as shortlisting 5–10 priority actions, was widely evident and contributed to plans with operational depth and realism.

Finally, the activation of URBACT Local Groups (ULGs) emerged as a standout feature. Cities like Alba Iulia, Saint-Quentin, and Mantova demonstrated how meaningful stakeholder engagement supports better project design and long-term ownership.

Where Gaps Remain: Governance, Funding, and Monitoring

Despite strong foundations, several IAPs revealed critical weaknesses in areas that directly affect implementability:

- Governance frameworks were often underdeveloped, with vague or deferred descriptions of how implementation would be managed and by whom.
- Funding strategies lacked clarity, with many action plans identifying potential sources but failing to explain how financing would be secured or sequenced.
- Monitoring and evaluation systems were the least defined, with very few IAPs presenting clear indicators, targets, or plans for adaptive learning.

These omissions risk turning well-intentioned plans into aspirational documents, unless cities take further steps to clarify leadership, accountability, and measurement.

Moving Forward: Five Key Recommendations for Stronger IAPs

To guide the finalisation of IAPs in the coming months, José Costero offered five cross-cutting recommendations:

- **Clarify Implementation and Financing Logics**
Define leadership roles, coordination mechanisms, and realistic funding pathways.
- **Build Simple but Effective M&E Frameworks**
Focus on indicators that are practical, trackable, and aligned with learning goals.
- **Make Communication Strategic**
Move beyond logos and campaigns, define narratives, audiences, and mobilisation tactics.
- **Align Vision, Strategy, and Flagship Actions**
Ensure coherence across all sections and identify high-impact projects that embody the plan's ambition.
- **Integrate Cross-Cutting Priorities**
Sustainability, inclusion, gender equality, and digitalisation must be embedded—not added later.

A Shared Purpose, A Shared Challenge

The IAP Review Session served as both a mirror and a map, allowing cities to reflect on their own progress while collectively advancing towards higher quality and more integrated urban strategies. Above all, the session reaffirmed the network's core commitment: to shape cities that are not only smart and sustainable, but also inclusive, grounded, and ready to welcome the residents of the future.

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

As the Residents of the Future network moves into its final months, the learning journey continues—this time through a series of collaborative online Masterclasses in partnership with three other URBACT Action Planning Networks: REMOTE-IT, Cities After Dark, and WELDI.

These Masterclasses, set to take place throughout September 2025, are designed to offer fresh perspectives, specialised expertise, and cross-network inspiration on some of the most pressing issues facing small and medium-sized cities today.

Each session will be led by the expert team of the respective network, offering deep dives into thematic areas that directly complement the goals of Residents of the Future, including digitalisation, inclusion, community resilience, and labour market innovation.

These sessions are not just an opportunity to learn from peers, but also to enrich the final stages of IAP development, spark new ideas for local events, and inform communication and policy strategies ahead of the project's closing in Mantova.

4. Final remarks

Dear reader,

As we close this Sixth Quarterly Report of the Residents of the Future project, we reflect on a phase defined by clarity, connection, and collective purpose. The past months have seen partner cities move closer to finalising their Integrated Action Plans, translating local insights, pilot experiences, and shared learning into actionable, strategic roadmaps for inclusive urban futures.

This quarter brought us together in lisalmi for a transnational meeting marked by sincerity, peer exchange, and deep reflection on what it truly means to build resilient, attractive, and human-centred cities. Through individual feedback sessions, collaborative reviews, and encounters with local innovation, we sharpened not only our plans, but also our shared vision.

With new partnerships on the horizon, including September's joint Masterclasses with REMOTE-IT, Cities After Dark, and WELDI. we enter the final stretch of the project ready to turn plans into momentum. The groundwork laid in this quarter will inform the final stories we share and the lasting legacies we leave.

To every city team, stakeholder, expert, and community member, thank you. Your openness, creativity, and commitment continue to inspire. Together, we are proving that the future is not only something we anticipate, but something we actively shape.

We are together.

Warm regards,

Tiago Ferreira

July 2025

WANT TO KNOW MORE? PLEASE FOLLOW US 😊

We would love to have you following our social media accounts:

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/residents-of-the-future-urbact-apn/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61558026719726>