



C4TALENT

# Quarterly Network Report 5

January - March 2025

URBACT



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# Introduction

**W**elcome to the fifth edition of the **C4TALENT Quarterly Network Report** – your essential update on how 10 small- and medium-sized European towns are teaming up to reverse brain drain and build thriving, talent-friendly local economies. This document offers a behind-the-scenes look at the journey of the **C4TALENT URBACT Action Planning Network**, tracking progress, sharing insights, and highlighting the most relevant developments in our mission to attract and retain talent through stronger entrepreneurial ecosystems.

By now C4TALENT is more than a project – it's a strong community of cities committed to transforming local brain drain into brain gain. Our network, supported by the URBACT IV programme, focuses on **empowering towns to create the right conditions for talent to stay, return, and thrive**.

This report dives into the key activities and outcomes from the **first quarter of 2025**, capturing a important phase in the project's evolution. We begin with a **network level status review** and **partner-by-partner snapshot** of where each city stands in developing its Integrated Action Plan. Then, we present the highlights of our **State of the Action Report**, a network-wide reflection on progress, roadblocks, and emerging patterns across our partner cities.

You'll also find a detailed overview of our latest **transnational network meeting**, held in **Roeselare, Belgium**, in March – an event that blended learning, feedback, and collaboration. As part of this gathering, partners also participated in an inspiring **study visit to Kortrijk**, offering valuable lessons on ecosystem development and inter-city cooperation. One of the key intellectual highlights of the quarter was our **Place Branding Masterclass** led by the internationally renowned expert **Martin Boisen** – whose insights sparked fresh thinking on how cities can better shape and communicate their identity to attract the right people.

Finally, we close this issue with a **look ahead at Quarter 6**, as we enter the final stretch of our action planning journey. Partners are getting ready to test local actions, fine-tune their IAPs, and prepare for the final months of implementation – with some exciting milestones on the horizon.





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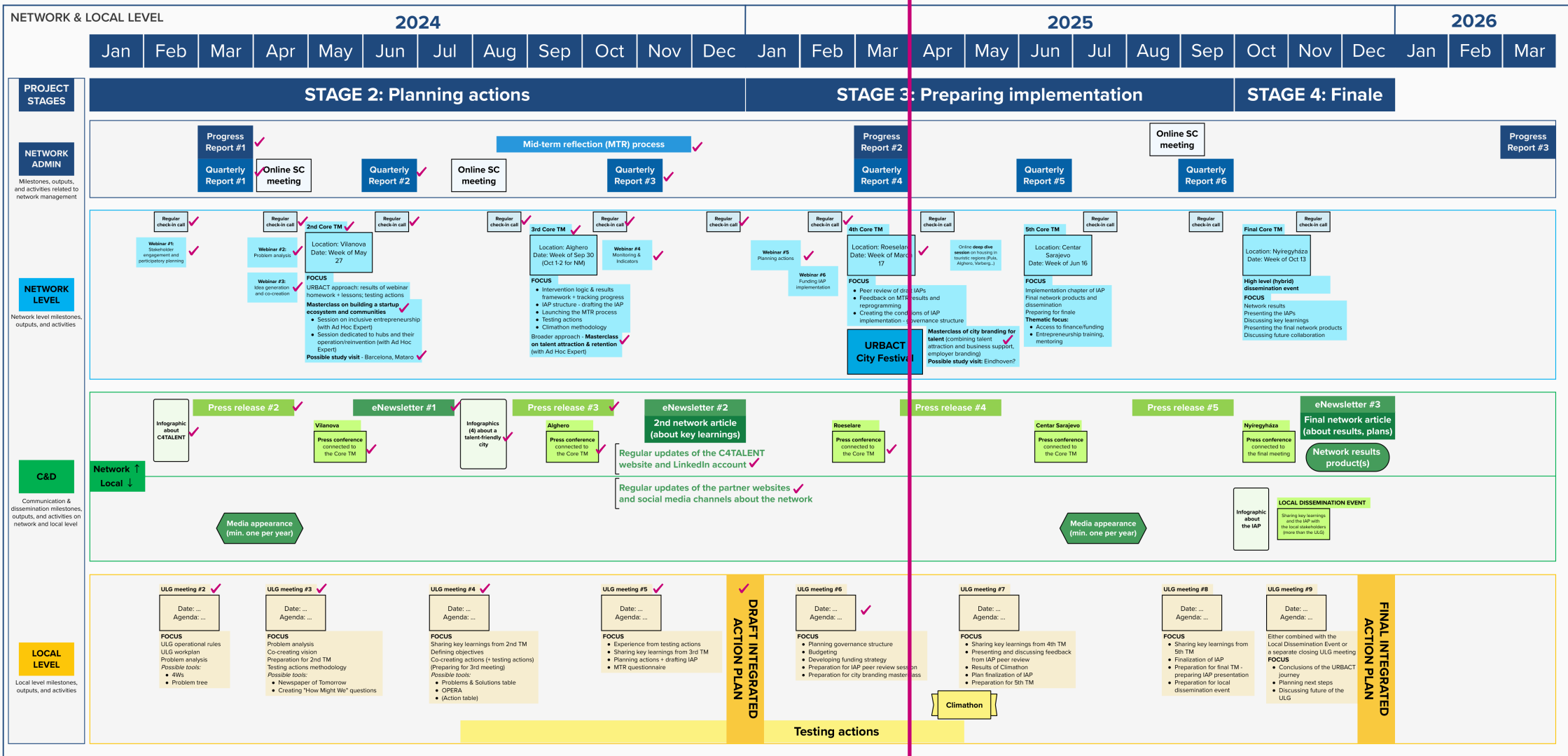
# Project Progress

# C4TALENT ROADMAP



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# Highlights from transnational activities

# Expert Review of Integrated Action Plans

**A**t the heart of every URBACT Action Planning Network lies a simple, goal: to help cities create concrete, locally rooted action plans. Thus, In C4TALENT as well, the integrated action plans of the partner cities represent the most important output. These plans reflect how each partner city intends to tackle its most pressing local challenges related to brain-drain, talent attraction, and startup ecosystem development.

Over the course of the past year, all activities—from peer exchanges to thematic masterclasses—have been carefully designed to support and guide this action planning journey. By January 2025, every partner had submitted a fully updated draft of their IAP, reflecting both prior expert recommendations and peer feedback received during the peer review session at the previous transnational meeting in Alghero.

Each draft was then reviewed by the network's Lead Expert, with findings shared during tailored one-to-one sessions with each partner. These reviews served to both validate progress and offer targeted guidance for the next steps. Below are the

general observations, main conclusions from this expert review and feedback process.

Across the network, the draft IAPs show **substantial progress** and growing maturity. Most partners now have a clear intervention logic, a well-structured narrative, and an emerging portfolio of actions. That said, **three common areas need further attention**:

- ➔ **Balance between ambition and intervention:** Many plans articulate strong visions, but the actions proposed are not always aligned in scale or scope.
- ➔ **Integrated approach in action:** While social, environmental, and gender aspects often appear in analysis sections, they are less visible in the actual action plans.
- ➔ **Cohesion and clarity:** Improving structure, simplifying narratives, and enhancing visual communication will help make the plans more accessible and impactful.

Each city is now refining its IAP using the updated template, preparing for the final phase: testing and implementation. This phase will not only bring plans to life but also showcase how tailored, locally driven actions can reshape urban talent ecosystems.



# State of the Actions Report

**A** key milestone in the C4TALENT network's action planning journey was the Mid-Term Reflection (MTR) process. As outlined in the URBACT IV Guidance for Networks, the MTR serves as a structured opportunity “to pause and reflect on the progress being made at the midpoint of the Action Planning Network (APN) journey, in relation to the proposed roadmap.”

In C4TALENT, the MTR process unfolded between August and December 2024, combining a partner-wide survey with a dedicated interactive reflection session. These activities encouraged honest self-assessment and open dialogue among partners about achievements, challenges, and the road ahead.

The outcomes of this process were consolidated in the State of the Action Report, published in January 2025. This report offers a snapshot of where each partner stands in the action planning journey, identifies common themes across the network, and pinpoints areas where additional support or focus is needed.

The following section highlights the main insights and conclusions drawn from the report.

## 1. Overall Network Progress

The C4TALENT network is on track, with partners making steady progress in developing their Integrated Action Plans (IAPs). While there are minor differences in progress among cities, all partners are moving towards realistic and feasible action plans. The network has maintained alignment with its roadmap, with only minor adjustments in timing. Importantly, beyond network and partner-level progress, individual learning and capacity-building have been significant, ensuring long-term impact beyond the project timeline.

## 2. Strength of the Network and Learning Experience

The quality of the network experience has been overwhelmingly positive. Partners have built a strong, collaborative community, actively engaging in transnational meetings, knowledge-sharing, and peer learning. Masterclasses, study tours, and expert support have been particularly valuable in strengthening thematic knowledge and practical skills. The unique URBACT methodology—with its

# State of the Actions Report

structured, interactive, and applied learning—has been a highlight, particularly for partners new to the programme.

## 3. Key Challenges in IAP and ULG Development

- ➔ Framing the core problem and identifying root causes have been the most challenging steps for partners in developing their IAPs. Many had a tendency to jump to solutions before fully understanding the complexities of their local challenges.
- ➔ Stakeholder engagement remains a significant challenge, mainly due to time constraints and competing priorities. While many stakeholders are committed, their availability is limited, making coordination difficult.
- ➔ Political commitment is uneven, with some partners struggling to maintain decision-maker engagement. This has implications not only for IAP completion but also for long-term implementation.

## 4. Gaps in the Integrated Approach of IAPs

- ➔ Economic and social dimensions are well-integrated, but the environmental aspect is often secondary rather than fully embedded.
- ➔ Policy alignment across governance levels is inconsistent. While most IAPs connect with local policies, many lack clear regional and national alignment, limiting long-term scalability and support.
- ➔ Gender equality is largely absent, with no meaningful integration into action plans.
- ➔ Digital transformation is covered in some IAPs but remains inconsistent across the network.

## 5. Key Risks and Mitigation Strategies

Partners perceive higher risks in implementation than in completion. The main concerns include:

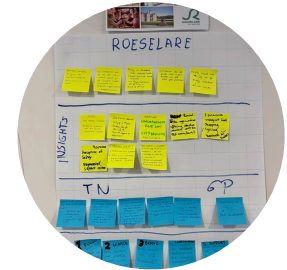
- ➔ Lack of political support—essential for securing long-term commitment.

# State of the Actions Report

- ➔ Funding constraints—delivering IAPs will require clearer financial strategies.
- ➔ Capacity gaps—some cities lack the institutional and human resources to execute their plans effectively.
- ➔ Project timescales—tight schedules add pressure to both completion and execution.

To mitigate these risks, targeted strategies include:

- ➔ Hands-on expert support to finalize IAPs.
- ➔ Focused learning events on governance, funding, and stakeholder engagement.
- ➔ More peer learning and study tours, incorporating practical implementation experiences.
- ➔ Encouraging long-term collaboration beyond the project, allowing cities to continue exchanging knowledge and support.



# Webinar5 - Planning Actions

**T**he learning content of C4TALENT project exceeds the capacity of relatively short in-person transnational meetings. Therefore, as important tools of capacity development, webinars have been organised in-between TN meetings since the start of the project. As defined in the Baseline Study, “webinars are relatively short online learning sessions dedicated to specific topics either linked to the network themes (subthemes) or to the building blocks of the URBACT method.

On 16 January, 2025 - in line with the progress of partners along the action planning journey Webinar 5 focusing on Planning Actions has been delivered.

When organising this webinar, we relied on existing URBACT capacity development content and used a hybrid approach:

→ Partners were asked to watch the

recording of Ian Graham’s excellent presentation on planning actions delivered at the URBACT eUniversity prior to the webinar

→ During the webinar, first we have revisited the key concepts from Ian’s presentation - in the context of the partners’ action planning progress.

→ Then we delivered a workshop where partners self-assessed the actions of their IAP using a set of criteria derived from the key concepts of the presentation (they worked in a pre-designed assessment sheet in Google Docs).

The self-assessment and the subsequent peer and plenary discussion enabled partners to pinpoint weaknesses, scope for improvement in their actions. The learnings from the webinar proved valuable inputs to planning the details of their actions.

Varberg  
[#Cover page](#)

Self-assessment of actions

Actions	Does it address an identified problem?	Does it follow a clear intervention logic?	Is it SMART?	Is it the appropriate size / scale?	Was it identified with stakeholders?	Notes
1.1 Create a network of companies in the region who wants to collaborate around student project, internships and research/development projects	Good -	Good -	Good -	Good -	Yes -	
1.2 Invite local influencers and successful individuals from Varberg for inspirational lectures in schools	Good -	Poor -	Could be ... -	Too small -	Yes -	
1.3 Organize inspiration days focused on technology and innovation	Good -	Good -	Good -	Good -	Yes -	
1.4 Bridging the gap between students and	Good -	Could be ... -	Could be ... -	Good -	Yes -	

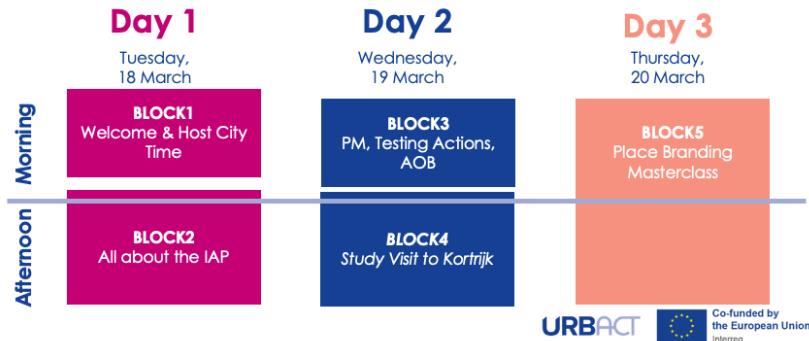


# 4th Core Network Meeting - Roeselare

**T**he fourth C4TALENT Core Network Meeting took place in Roeselare, Belgium, between March 18 and 20, 2025. This highly interactive three-day event focused on peer learning, action planning, inspirational local good practices and exploring how city branding can best support talent attraction.

## ➔ Day 1: Setting the Stage & Peer Review

Following the official welcome and agenda overview, the local team introduced Roeselare's context, focusing on its ongoing place branding journey. Partners gained insights into how the city is shaping an authentic brand identity



[Click here for meeting video](#)

to attract not only tourists and investors, but also new residents and entrepreneurial talent. A guided walkshop through the city centre allowed participants to experience first-hand some of the key urban challenges and local innovations. In the afternoon, the spotlight shifted to the Integrated Action Plans (IAPs). Partners presented their draft plans and took part in small-group peer review sessions, offering each other structured, constructive feedback to improve the logic and coherence of their proposals.

## ➔ Day 2: PM. Admin, Testing actions,& Study Visit

The second day opened with a brief project management and administration session, followed by a roundtable exchange on the progress and dilemmas related to testing actions. A series of quick interactive sessions followed, including a forward-looking ideation on the network's final product and expectations for the next transnational meeting in Centar Sarajevo.

Three partner cities—Alytus, Nyíregyháza and Roeselare—shared their validated URBACT Good Practices, prompting a fruitful discussion on future collaboration.

# 4th Core Network Meeting - Roeselare

In the afternoon, participants travelled to nearby Kortrijk for an in-depth study tour, where they explored how local stakeholders are working together to foster entrepreneurial talent—particularly in the tech and design sectors.

## → Day 3: City Branding Masterclass

The final day was dedicated to the third C4TALENT Masterclass, focusing on City Branding. Delivered by place branding expert Martin Boisen, the session introduced key principles of place branding, showcased a variety of good practices, and emphasised the importance of proactively building and managing an authentic place brand. Martin shared actionable methodologies and frameworks that partners can adapt and apply in their own local contexts, equipping cities with the tools to align branding with their broader talent attraction strategies.





# 4th Core Network Meeting - Roeselare



# Key takeaways from the IAP peer review

## Inspirations, Learnings, Ideas

Women in tech and creative fields	Clear city context, which helped me understand the current situation.	Interesting intervention areas that inspired me to see more possibilities
Vibe of the city is important » We should examine the city from that perspective	Stakeholder engagement!!!!	It reminded us of the importance of teamwork
Soft interventions are at least as important as infrastructure development	In addition of the direct and obvious causes of the challenge we need to look into the indirect causes.	Cohesion between objectives and actions
The importance of clear connection and coherence between policies and challenges	Evidence (especially data and statistics) as starting point	We received an innovative idea about the development of our hub

## Weaknesses, Needs for Improvement

Women in tech and creative fields	Clear city context, which helped me understand the current situation.	Interesting intervention areas that inspired me to see more possibilities
Vibe of the city is important » We should examine the city from that perspective	Stakeholder engagement!!!!	It reminded us of the importance of teamwork
Soft interventions are at least as important as infrastructure development	In addition of the direct and obvious causes of the challenge we need to look into the indirect causes.	Bring in actions to integrate non-lithuanian citizens and companies.
The importance of clear connection and coherence between policies and challenges	Cohesion between objectives and actions	Adding tables comparing local data with national and European averages
Evidence (especially data and statistics) as starting point	More thorough research into the topic of our IAP	We received an innovative idea about the development of our hub

## Steps to Take to Improve my IAP

Strengthen the integrated approach (too much focus on the economy, social and environmental aspects are not present)	Shorten certain parts, add more data & visuals	Explore more the demographic processes as well as national / EU strategies to place the IAP into a wider context
Support key conclusions with evidence / data	Include more soft elements	More local networking, asking for feedback from colleagues, other departments
Collect and incorporate data on tech and digital sector and companies	Further elaborate and detail the main intervention areas, consider a stronger (sectoral) focus	Bring in actions to integrate non-lithuanian citizens and companies.
Adding tables comparing local data with national and European averages	Engage stakeholders better also in drafting the IAP	Include branding as an additional intervention area
Start working on the city's identity		More thorough research into the topic of our IAP

## Support I need

Support in identifying / fine-tuning indicators	More meetings / sessions with ULG and local team	Explore more with our ULG
Talk to our statistical guy & look more into existing strategic documents	Involvement of a branding expert	Branding knowledge - Branding Masterclass in Roeselare
Critical review by an external expert	Inputs from City Council members (The designated ULG member doesn't share information properly)	External expert support - providing objective assessment (which parts are OK and what needs more improvement)
Inputs and support from cross-sectoral stakeholders	Support in facilitation	



# Kortrijk - Building a Talent Ecosystem

**O**n the second day of the Roeselare Transnational Meeting, C4TALENT partners embarked on a study visit to Kortrijk, a city renowned for its integrated approach to nurturing and retaining creative and entrepreneurial talent. The visit highlighted three pivotal institutions.

## Hangar K: a Hub for Digital Innovation

Established in 2018, Hangar K serves as a dynamic co-creation hub focusing on the digital, EdTech, and gaming industries. Housing approximately 50 companies and 150 individuals, it offers flexible co-working spaces at an affordable monthly fee. Start-ups and scale-ups typically stay for about 18 months, benefiting from a vibrant community that fosters cross-pollination of ideas. Hangar K also hosts the Flanders Game Hub, supporting game developers and



companies in scaling their operations and enhancing international growth opportunities.

## Howest University of Applied Sciences: An Ecosystem Approach to Education

Howest University in Kortrijk exemplifies an ecosystem-driven model of higher education. With a significant increase in international students over the past decades, the university

emphasizes mission-led research aligned with regional development goals. Its programs, such as Digital Arts and Entertainment, Creative Technologies & AI, and Cybersecurity, are designed to meet industry demands. Notably, Howest's StartUp School allows students to dedicate 50% of their time to developing their own start-up projects, integrating practical entrepreneurship into the curriculum.

# Kortrijk - Building a Talent Ecosystem

## Designregio Kortrijk: Fostering Creative Collaboration

Since 2005, Designregio Kortrijk has been instrumental in promoting design and creativity within the region. By facilitating collaborations between companies, public institutions, and designers, it drives projects focusing on circular economy, digitalization, and social innovation. Initiatives like the WONDER Creativity Festival transform the city into a canvas for creative expression, engaging both professionals and the broader public.

## Key takeaways

- ➔ **Integrated Ecosystem:** Kortrijk demonstrates the power of aligning educational institutions, innovation hubs, and design organizations to create a cohesive talent ecosystem.



- ➔ **Practical Entrepreneurship:** Programs like Howest's StartUp School highlight the importance of embedding entrepreneurship within academic curricula.
  - ➔ **Creative Collaboration:** Designregio Kortrijk showcases how cross-sector collaboration can lead to innovative solutions addressing societal challenges.
  - ➔ **Talent Retention:** By providing supportive environments and practical opportunities, Kortrijk effectively attracts and retains both local and international talent.
- This study visit offered valuable insights into how mid-sized cities can cultivate vibrant ecosystems that support innovation, entrepreneurship, and creative industries.

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# Local Activities

# Alghero

IAP Progress:  60%

## Local progress highlights

### ULG Activity

On March 6, Alghero's URBACT Local Group reviewed initial findings from the city's skills and sector mapping, initiated in late 2024. Discussions focused on aligning the data with previous inputs, validating priority intervention areas, and identifying key stakeholders for the next phase.

### Testing Actions

Following the mapping results, the ULG launched preparations for a series of stakeholder interviews (April-May) to refine pilot actions and better connect them with local needs and resources.

### Mini Hub Pilot Launch

Encouraged by peer feedback during the Roeselare meeting, Alghero committed to an additional pilot: the activation of a Mini Community Hub.

### Next Steps

A follow-up ULG session is planned for May 22 to validate

ULG meetings:  8

interview insights and co-design the operational framework for each IAP action through dedicated working groups.

## Testing action(s)

### Skills & Opportunities Mapping

Between December 2024 and March 2025, Alghero carried out a mapping of local skills and job demand through surveys and stakeholder input. Results helped identify key development areas and validate priorities for the city's IAP.

### Mini Community Hub Pilot

Alghero is activating two renovated spaces on Via Carlo Alberto (Atelier#4 and #5) as a Mini Community Hub. The pilot aims to foster collaboration among young professionals, creatives and artisans, supporting local talent retention and inclusive community building.

Status of testing action(s):

In progress



IAP Progress:  70%

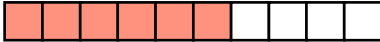
## Local progress highlights

On February 27, Alytus held its sixth ULG meeting, where members reviewed and discussed the third draft of the city's Integrated Action Plan (IAP). Feedback focused on refining key elements of the plan based on previous consultations.

In early April, three architectural teams presented their concepts for the future Alytus HUB – a co-working and innovation space. Proposals included shared work areas, labs for engineers and developers, conference halls, private offices, and social zones. The selected concept is expected to be developed into a full project by autumn 2025.

## Testing action(s)

To address youth outmigration, Alytus launched a new municipal support scheme encouraging young people (under 29) to start or grow their businesses. The city amended its business support programme in August 2024, enabling subsidies for business registration, equipment, rent, and training.

ULG meetings:  6

A call for applications ran from September to October, supported by a dedicated promotional event, Innovation and Entrepreneurship Camp Night. By the deadline, 10 applications were received, including two from young entrepreneurs. Two subsidy agreements were signed, with €7,700 in support awarded in total.



Status of testing action(s):

Completed

# Centar Sarajevo

IAP Progress:  90%

## Local progress highlights


In the first quarter of 2025 Municipality of Centar Sarajevo - together with ULG members - worked actively on finalising the integrated action plan, progressing, with the document now in its last review and refinement phase.

In addition, preparations have been underway for the testing action,

Finally in March the local team attended the excellent transnational meeting organised by the city of Roeselare, Belgium.

## Testing action(s)

The testing action of the Municipality Centar Sarajevo aims to address the challenge of limited digital content creation skills among local entrepreneurs and startups, which hinders their ability to effectively promote their businesses and attract talent. In response, the Municipality—through the Center for Excellence in Entrepreneurship Sarajevo—plans to organize targeted Help Desk sessions under the theme “CANVA FOR BUSINESS USERS.” These

ULG meetings:  5

sessions would focus on two key areas: creating short-form videos and developing engaging content for social media platforms. The workshops will be led by Samra Kalajdžić, a young entrepreneur and tenant of the Hub Center, supported by the Municipality.

The main activities will include hands-on training sessions using Canva, a user-friendly design tool, to equip participants with practical skills in visual storytelling and brand promotion. While the full testing action is still in development and implementation is ongoing, early feedback indicates strong interest and positive reception from potential participants. These sessions not only enhance participants' digital competencies but also contribute to a stronger entrepreneurial ecosystem, aligning with the broader goals of the C4TALENT project.

Status of testing action(s):

In progress

# Nyíregyháza


IAP Progress:  70%

## Local progress highlights

New stakeholders were engaged within the local planning process and also transnational activities - two employees of the municipality (the Press Agent of the city and the person responsible for the social media communication of Nyíregyháza) travelled to Roeselare with the project team to participate in the Branding MasterClass on the 3rd day of the meeting.

## Testing action(s)

It is important for the companies and institutions operating in Nyíregyháza that after talented young people complete their studies and gain a few years of experience, they return and settle here, contributing their knowledge to the continuous development of the city and its businesses. It is only possible to motivate them to do so by maintaining regular contact. The purpose of the Youth Portal is to keep the city in contact with its talented young people, even when they are currently studying or working elsewhere. Users registered in it can (1) find out about job

ULG meetings:  5

offers that match their qualifications, (2) learn about local cultural events, and (3) form an opinion on the city's development ideas and formulate proposals through surveys. Negotiations are taking place with the Vocational Training Centre in order to reach young people who might potentially be interested in being part of the database - an attractive value proposition is needed to ensure high participation. Since the project team is not sure what the best way is to promote the Portal, a testing action could be used to do some school visits and measure the response and whether this hands-on approach would be enough to generate enough response.

Status of testing action(s):

Not started

# Piraeus


IAP Progress:  60%

## Local progress highlights

During this period, the Municipality of Piraeus focused on reinforcing its local startup ecosystem and promoting the activities of its Business Hub. One new business has successfully launched operations within the Hub, and efforts are ongoing to attract further tenants. The team is also advancing the development of the Hub's identity by collecting offers from graphic designers for a new logo, accompanied by increased communication via social media and the municipal website.

To extend knowledge-sharing and strengthen collaboration, the team is in dialogue with the Municipality of Chalandri to organize a ULG meeting and share action planning experiences. Outreach efforts included a press conference featured in a local newspaper, where the C4TALENT initiative and the programme's broader goals were publicly discussed (source).

Finally, the team participated in the transnational meeting in Roeselare, Belgium, which was a valuable occasion for peer learning and IAP refinement. The participation of Manolis

ULG meetings:  5

Dofianopoulos, manager of the Blue Lab and a key ULG member, further underlined the city's commitment to embedding entrepreneurial support in its action planning process.

## Testing action(s)

Piraeus's testing action centers on the operation of its newly renovated Business Hub, developed in response to survey findings revealing that young entrepreneurs face major challenges in accessing affordable workspace. The Hub offers low-rent office space to support early-stage businesses, with the aim of testing its attractiveness and potential to foster a collaborative entrepreneurial environment. The first tenant—an architect—has already launched her business within the Hub and is working in cooperation with the municipality. The initiative will help assess whether such a setup encourages co-working and meets the needs of emerging entrepreneurs.

Status of testing action(s):

In progress

# Pula

IAP Progress:  80%


## Local progress highlights

On February 28, Pula's sixth ULG meeting took place with an on-site workshop in the Vallelunga area. The session focused on gathering first-hand insights from ULG members and brainstorming ideas for the area's revitalization.

Participants explored the site in detail, discussing existing structures, hidden potentials, and how proposed interventions align with city development strategies. Working materials were distributed during the tour, with members submitting their feedback afterwards to inform the next steps. The outcomes will feed into the next ULG session scheduled for June.

## Testing action(s)

Pula's testing action, the "Vallelunga Walkshop", engages students as future users of the revitalized Vallelunga zone. The event will feature a 1.5–2 hour guided walking tour, led by an architect, with stops at key sites across the large, currently underused area.

ULG meetings:  6

Following the walk, participants will complete a detailed survey designed in collaboration with ULG members and a university faculty representative. The survey will collect students' opinions, comments, and suggestions on the area's potential and needed improvements, ensuring that their perspectives directly inform future plans.

The Walkshop aims to increase awareness of Vallelunga's opportunities, actively involve the next generation, and test whether the goals and activities outlined in the Integrated Action Plan are properly aligned with the needs of the target group.

Status of testing action(s):

Not started

# Roeselare

IAP Progress:  70%


## Local progress highlights

One of the main focuses of team Roeselare the last quarter was the organisation of the transnational meeting in March 2025: the practical organisation, the city presentations and the communication deliverables.

We were also working on our (testing) actions and had several brainstorm sessions with stakeholders about those actions (21/01/2025, 30/01/2025, 31/01/2025, 04/02/2025, 07/02/2025, 28/03/2025). There was also a meeting with a new ULG member: Travi who is the central information point and the expert in training (candidate-)temporary workers (31/01/2025). The survey with 4000 respondents about the brand of Roeselare was presented to the mayor and management team of Roeselare (21/03/2025).

## Testing action(s)

Testing action 1: Roeselare works together with ULG-member VOKA, the Chamber of Commerce, about an activity in the

ULG meetings:  10

International House. This is a place where people who work in Roeselare coming from abroad can get information about the living in Roeselare and where they can meet with other expats. There is a meeting planned with VOKA about this on 18/04/2025.

Testing action 2: Related to the action to build a strong connection between the last year students of high school and Roeselare, we would like to test this with one school. They will visit a company in Roeselare and get an explanation about possible jobs in that company. We hope to do a survey afterwards with the students to test whether they knew already about these “cool” jobs in Roeselare.

opportunities, actively involve the next generation, and test whether the goals and activities outlined in the Integrated Action Plan are properly aligned with the needs of the target group.

Status of testing action(s):

In progress



# Rzeszów


IAP Progress:  60%

## Local progress highlights

In the first quarter of this year, we held the first in-person meeting of URBACT Local Group members (in 2025), during which we discussed both the past international meeting in Roeselare, as well as analyzed the suggestions and recommendations received from our project partners for the Integrated Action Plan. We also discussed suggestions for changes to be made to the document in relation to the suggestions received. Among other things, we also discussed Hangar K in Kortrijk as an example of good practice for building and developing a local entrepreneurship and startup ecosystem.

## Testing action(s)

The first quarter of 2025 in Rzeszów was highlighted by the delivery of the second testing action: the "BusinessUP! Green Actions" Seminar, held at the end of February in collaboration with a local university and ULG members. The event successfully

ULG meetings:  7

gathered a large group of students alongside experts from the local entrepreneurial ecosystem.

During the seminar, five students presented their business ideas, which were evaluated based on both the quality of their presentations and the potential of the business concepts. Importantly, the event's purpose extended beyond promoting entrepreneurship and pitching skills – it also aimed to emphasize the importance of incorporating pro-environmental principles into future business activities.

In addition to the student presentations, participants attended two focused lectures on public speaking: the first covered practical strategies for presenting confidently before an audience, while the second addressed content-related aspects crucial for crafting pitches that capture and maintain investor interest.

Status of testing action(s):

Completed

# Varberg


IAP Progress:  70%

## Local progress highlights

In this quarter,, we organized a study visit to Linköping with the aim of drawing inspiration from their work in creating an attractive and innovative city. During the visit, we had the opportunity to explore how Linköping approaches urban development, supports entrepreneurship, and fosters a vibrant local ecosystem. By learning from their strategies and best practices, we gained valuable insights that can help shape our own initiatives in Varberg. The visit sparked meaningful discussions and new ideas on how we can continue to build a city that not only encourages innovation but also offers a dynamic and inclusive environment for both residents and businesses.

## Testing action(s)

During this period, we in Varberg carried out our second testing action, marking an important step forward in our ongoing efforts to support entrepreneurship and innovation for young talents in the city. On April 10th, we hosted the very first edition of Våga,

ULG meetings:  7

Väx & Vinn – a vibrant and energizing event designed to inspire individuals who are curious about starting their own businesses, as well as those looking to take their existing ventures to the next level.

The event offered a dynamic mix of activities, including hands-on workshops, creative idea development sessions, and insightful discussions around the journey of entering an incubator. A strong focus was placed on the opportunities that come with thinking big and growing digitally – encouraging participants to view the world as their playground.

Throughout the day, attendees had the chance to engage with experienced entrepreneurs, exchange ideas with peers, and explore practical strategies to turn their visions into action. Many left the event not only with new tools and fresh perspectives, but also with renewed confidence, motivation, and valuable connections to help them along their entrepreneurial journey.

Status of testing action(s):  Completed and assessed

# Vilanova i la Geltrú

IAP Progress:  70%

## Local progress highlights

During this quarter, we advanced the testing action "Redesigning Neàpolis: A Terrace to Inspire" under the C4Talent initiative. Students from EMAID worked in teams to develop different design proposals for the rooftop space at Neàpolis. The objective was to create a multifunctional area for co-working, networking, and informal meetings, while considering sustainability and enhancing the building's external visibility. The final presentations scheduled for April 7th.

Additionally, follow-up meetings were held with ULG members to define the local entrepreneurial journey aimed at promoting talent creation.

## Testing action(s)

### **Awakening Vocations: Creativity and Research for Youth**

Organized a gamified workshop and mentoring sessions for 50 high school students to promote research careers; mapped students' motivations and fields of interest.

### **Neàpolis Gaming Hub: Connecting Young Talent**

Facilitated networking events between EMAID and UPC students, 29

ULG meetings:  7

resulting in the creation of new videogame collectives and collaborative projects to strengthen Neàpolis' youth engagement.

### **Redesigning Neàpolis: A Terrace to Inspire**

Collaborated with EMAID design students to develop a low-cost redesign project for Neàpolis' terrace, revitalizing the space's attractiveness for users.

### **Listening to Entrepreneurs: A Real Needs Assessment**

Conducted a focus group with local entrepreneurs to identify gaps in public services and gather actionable insights for service improvement.

### **Agents and Entrepreneurs: Building Bridges**

Hosted a debate session between public sector representatives and entrepreneurs, leading to the first draft of an entrepreneur journey and proposals for better coordination tools.

### **Creative Talent Residency: Launching Future Careers**

Introduced a residency program at Neàpolis offering workspace, mentoring, and networking to recent graduates, successfully integrating new talent into the local innovation ecosystem.

Status of testing action(s):

In progress

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# Knowledge and Inspirations

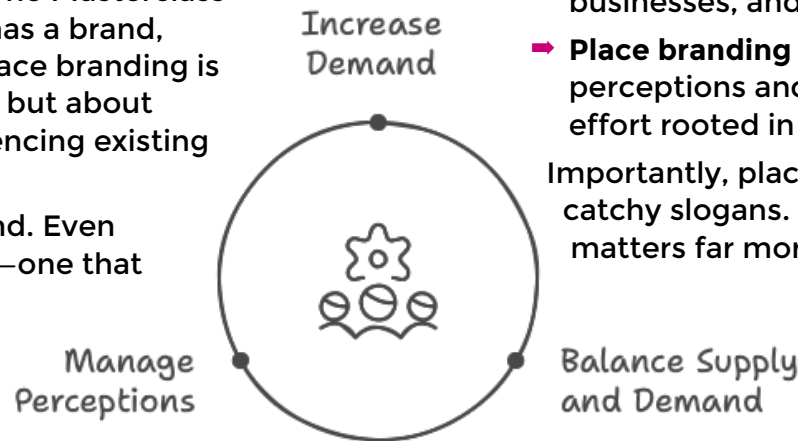
# Place Branding

## Why Place Branding Matters for Small and Medium-sized Cities?

**T**he C4TALENT Place Branding Masterclass, led by Martin Boisen, provided critical insights for cities aiming to tackle brain drain and talent attraction challenges through smarter use of place branding.

In an increasingly competitive environment, how a city is perceived—by residents, businesses, visitors, and investors—has a real impact on its ability to thrive. The Masterclass emphasized that every city already has a brand, whether actively managed or not. Place branding is not about inventing something new, but about understanding, managing, and influencing existing perceptions.

A key takeaway: you cannot not brand. Even doing nothing is a branding decision—one that risks leaving your city's reputation to chance.



## Clarifying Concepts: Beyond Logos and Slogans

The session addressed the widespread confusion between place branding, place marketing, and place promotion.

- ➔ **Place promotion** is about increasing demand for existing supply, mostly through advertising and events.
- ➔ **Place marketing** is broader: it balances supply and demand, adjusting what a city offers to meet the needs of residents, businesses, and visitors.
- ➔ **Place branding** is about managing and influencing perceptions and reputation. It's a continuous, strategic effort rooted in dialogue, co-creation, and authentic actions.

Importantly, place branding is not about designing logos or catchy slogans. Visual identities are simply symbols—what matters far more is the underlying narrative and behavior.

# Place Branding

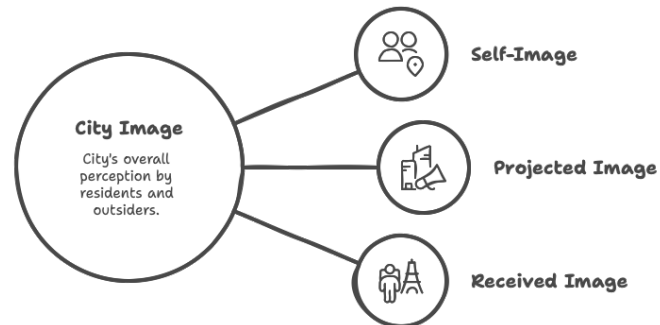
## Managing Reputation - Focus on Residents First

One powerful insight was that cities often think they have an "image problem" abroad, but the bigger issue lies at home. How residents perceive their city deeply affects its external reputation. Engaged, proud citizens are the best ambassadors.

Thus, local perception monitoring becomes essential:

- ➔ Understand self-image (how residents see their city)
- ➔ Track projected image (what is communicated)
- ➔ Measure received image (how outsiders see it)

Strategically, shifting the conversation from "what outsiders think" to "what insiders feel" is fundamental. Building a strong self-image first creates the foundation for outward reputation-building.



## A Strategic, Co-Creative Approach to Place Branding

Effective place branding demands a permanent, participatory process. Rather than one-off campaigns, cities must invest in ongoing dialogue with citizens, businesses, and stakeholders.

Place branding strategies must integrate four key activity fields:

- ➔ Business Climate: how supportive the city is for enterprises.
- ➔ Quality of Life: living conditions, environment, affordability.
- ➔ Leisure Experience: cultural, recreational, and social offerings.
- ➔ Tourism Promotion: balanced narratives that avoid over-tourism.

Especially for talent retention, it's vital to avoid letting tourism narratives dominate. If a city becomes "only" a



# Place Branding

tourist destination, it risks alienating skilled workers and residents seeking vibrant, liveable communities.

And one more thing: when trying to reposition or strengthen a place brand, storytelling must be grounded in real action. Telling people “we are innovative” means little without visible proof: new tech hubs, vibrant co-working spaces, or startup-friendly policies.

One crucial recommendation, therefore: show, then tell. Implement concrete actions first—and only then communicate about them.

## Some practical tips for cities

### 1. Clarify Internal Language and Understanding

Ensure everyone—city officials, partners, stakeholders—understands the difference between branding, marketing, and promotion.

### 2. Create a Place Brand Management Framework

Appoint a coordinator or team who can advise, monitor, and support all major public actions in terms of brand alignment.

### 3. Monitor Image and Reputation

Regularly collect data on both internal (resident) and external perceptions to identify gaps and opportunities.

### 4. Link Urban Development and Branding

Urban development projects (housing, public spaces, startup hubs) should be aligned with desired brand narratives.

### 5. Balance Narratives

If tourism dominates your current image, find ways to “hack” it: use tourism content to highlight local entrepreneurship, sustainability, or innovation stories.

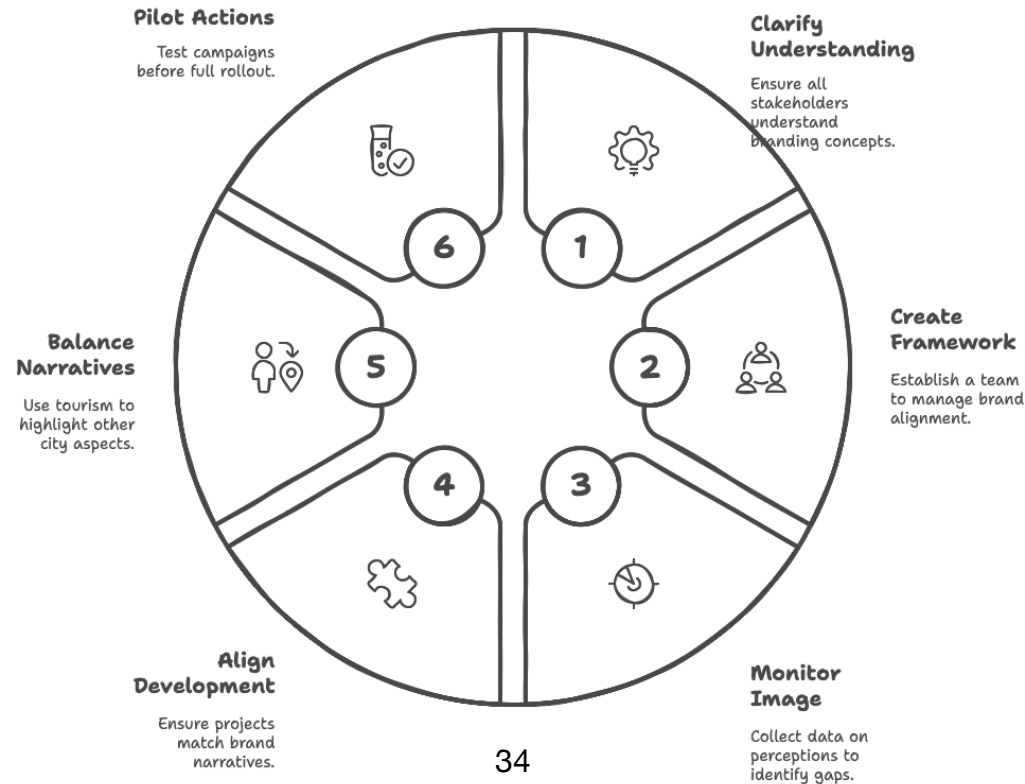
### 6. Pilot Actions and Testing Messages

Before rolling out major campaigns, pilot initiatives and see how they resonate locally and externally.

The key takeaway from the Masterclass is that cities do not “create” brands—they manage existing perceptions. Small and medium-sized cities like those in the C4TALENT network can successfully shape their reputation—not by copying global metropolises, but by building authentic, participatory, action-oriented narratives based on their unique identities and ambitions.

# Place Branding

## What can cities do?



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# Upcoming Activities

# Upcoming Activities (2025 Q2)

**T**he period between April and June 2025 will mark another intense phase of the action planning process. Partners will continue refining their IAP drafts while actively engaging their local stakeholders. As the finish line approaches, the goal for each partner is to have a nearly complete IAP draft – one that includes all necessary chapters and is ready for the next round of expert and peer review.

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## IAP development

**Period:** April 1 - June 1

**Activity:** Partners work locally with their stakeholders on their draft integrated action plan, incorporating comments and suggestions from the peer review session that took place in Roeselare and from the LE. In addition they can use learnings and insights from the Place Branding Masterclass, as well as from the Study Tour to Kortrijk. By the beginning of June all partners are expected to have an IAP draft ready for the final round of peer review and expert feedback.

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## 7th Regular Check-in Call

**Date:** 06 May, 14:00 - 15:30

**Theme:** In addition to the joint review of network level and local level progress by partners, during this check-in call the planned programme of the TN meeting in Sarajevo will be presented and discussed, and the necessary preparation steps for the next round of peer review will also be covered.

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## Possible expert review

**Period:** June 2 - 12

**Activity:** Another ad-hoc expert contribution is planned to support the action planning efforts of partners - this time with a strong focus on making the IAP more accessible and engaging.

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## 5th Core Network Meeting

**Date:** June 17-18

**Theme:** The next C4TALENT transnational meeting will take place in Centar Sarajevo. It will focus on entrepreneurial ecosystem building, IAP peer review, IAP implementation and making the IAP more engaging for different target groups.

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