

Hydro~Heritage Cities



HYDRO-HERITAGE CITIES JOURNAL

Journal nr 1



Sandra Rainero

Hydro-Heritage Cities ITN Lead Expert

URBACT



Co-funded by
the European Union
Interreg

Uncovering hidden streams: highlights and insights from the Hydro-Heritage Cities journey

How can cities reimagine ancient water systems as living assets for sustainability, culture and community resilience? This question lies at the heart of the [Hydro-Heritage Cities Innovation Transfer Network](#), inspired by the innovative Cultural H.ID.R.A.N.T. UIA project in Chalandri. In addition to Chalandri, the protagonists are Elche (ES), Serpa (PT), Sombor (SR), Roeselare (BE) and Rome (IT). In this journal, we share our initial collective exploration of how hydro-heritage can be a powerful vehicle for urban regeneration, civic participation and environmental innovation. Through deep dives, peer exchanges and local testing actions, we document key moments and reflections from our first immersive experiences in Halandri and Roeselare to experiments in citizen science, participatory budgeting and cultural storytelling. We take a sneak peek of the ULG in [Sombor](#) and the first testing action in [Serpa](#).

With videos, photos, and interactive media, this journal captures both the spirit and substance of our journey, setting the stage for what comes next.... Keep reading!

The condensation phase begins!

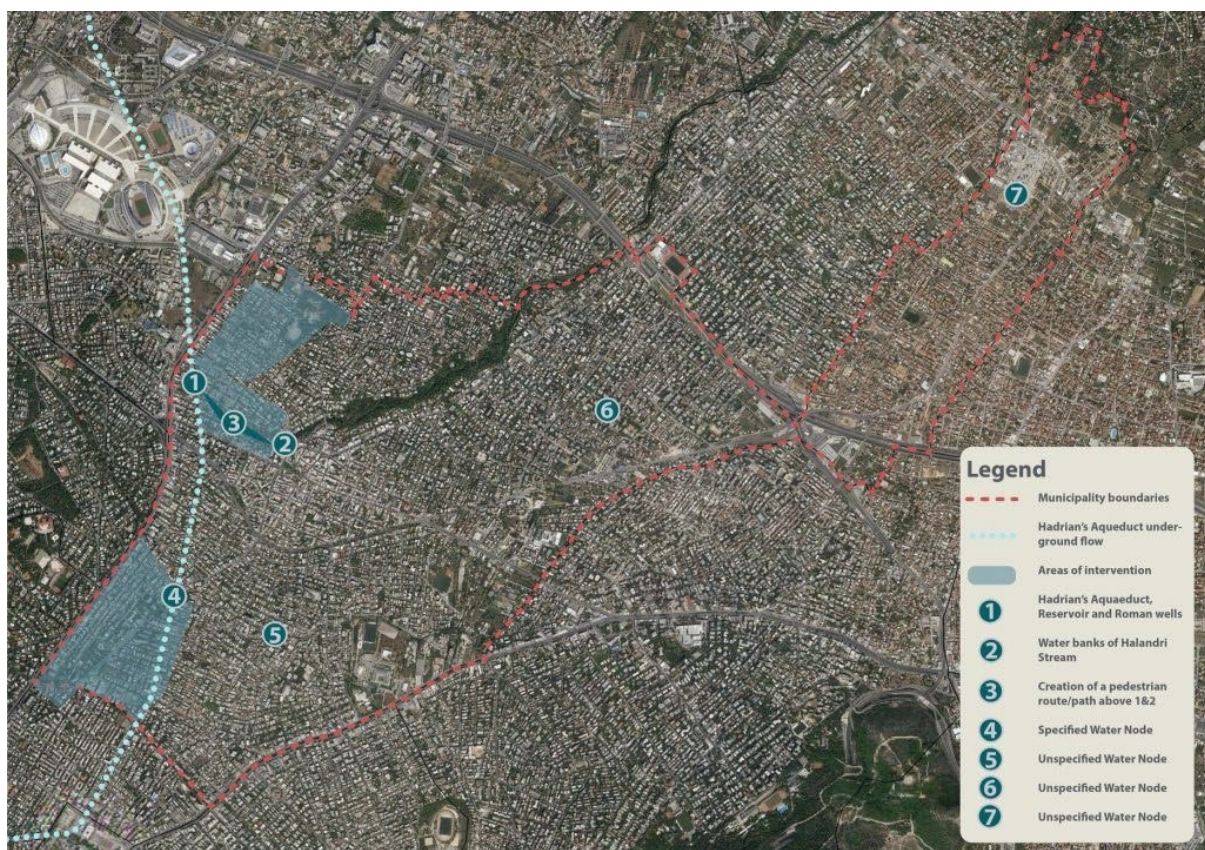


When we thought about the methodology of our network, the first thing that came to mind was the water cycle, and that's how we have renamed our understand - adapt and start to reuse stages of the URBACT Innovation Transfer Networks framework.

Here's what you'll find in this journal, highlights, insights and ambitions from different perspectives of our journey, during the first phase, called condensation when ideas and inspiration that have evaporated during the first months begin to crystallize into shared understanding, adaptations, strategies and actions that will ultimately lead to the definition of the Investment Plans.

-
1. **Highlights from the deep dive in Halandri**
 2. **First core meeting in Roeselare**
 3. **Magic happens at local level**
 4. **The Lead Expert corner**
 5. **Coming soon on Journal 2**
-

1. Into the depths of the Hadrian Aqueduct



1.1 Our Deep Dive in Halandri

In January 2025, the Hydro-Heritage Cities network gathered in Halandri for a powerful [two-day deep dive](#) into the roots, both literal and symbolic of the Cultural H.ID.R.A.N.T. project. This meeting marked a pivotal moment in our condensation phase. **Seeing is believing!** The deep dive helped us understand the

logic (or the philosophy) behind the innovative practice, and reminded us that successful urban transformation is as much about governance and care as it is about pipes and stone.

We quite literally went “into the depths” by walking along the regenerated path of the Hadrian Aqueduct and descending into the underground infrastructure.

What made the experience truly valuable was **hearing directly from the many actors** behind the project - municipal staff, cultural organisations, water authorities, schools and community groups. Their stories represented different perspectives on what it takes to *blend hard infrastructure with community ownership and imagination*.







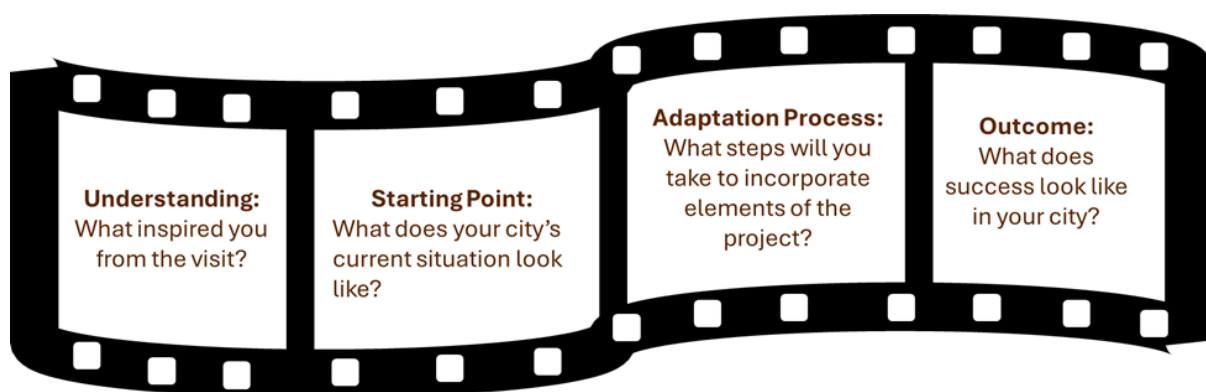




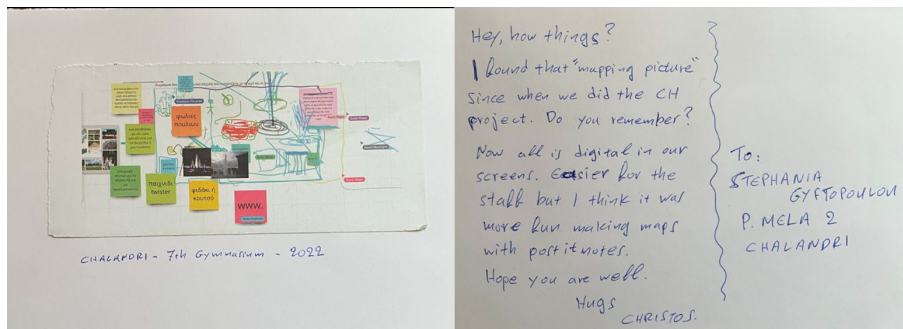




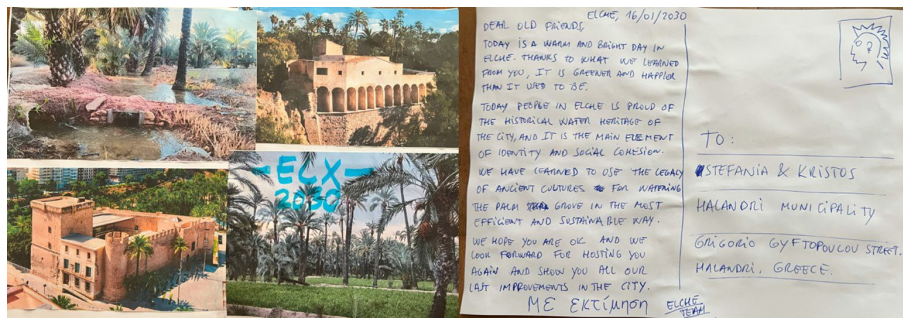
1.2 Reflections on transferability, pains and gains of the Transfer process



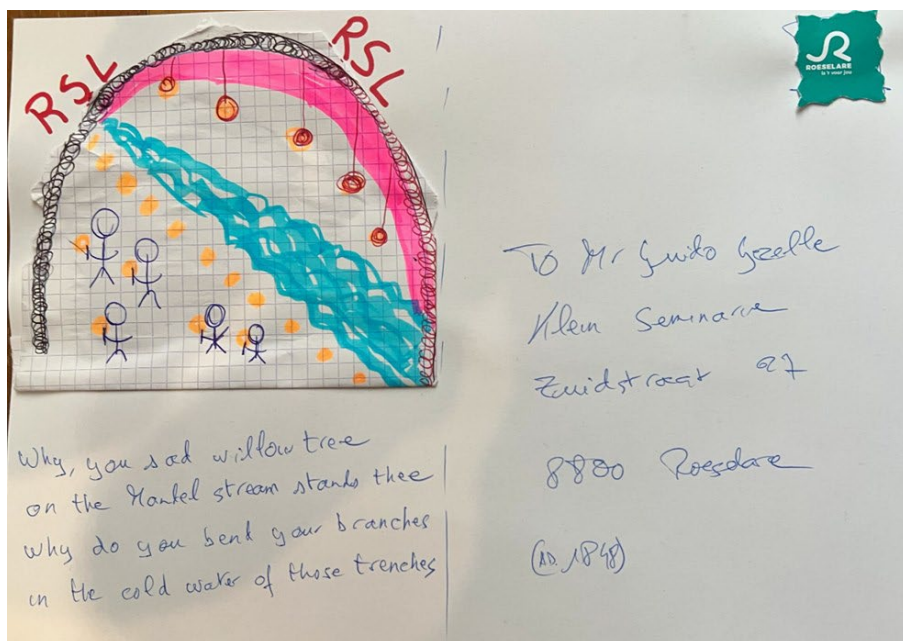
*Partners also took part in reflection and interactive exercises. In “**Postcards from the Future**,” each city reimagined its hydro-heritage site, using real postcards to illustrate the long-term impact of their plans.*



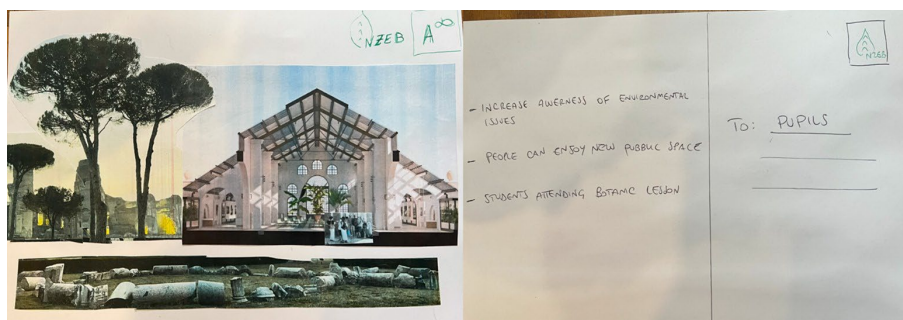
1 - Greetings from Halandri



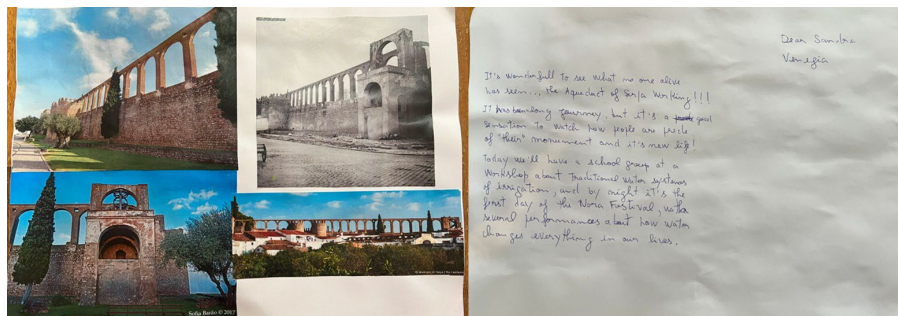
2 - Greetings from Elche (Elx)



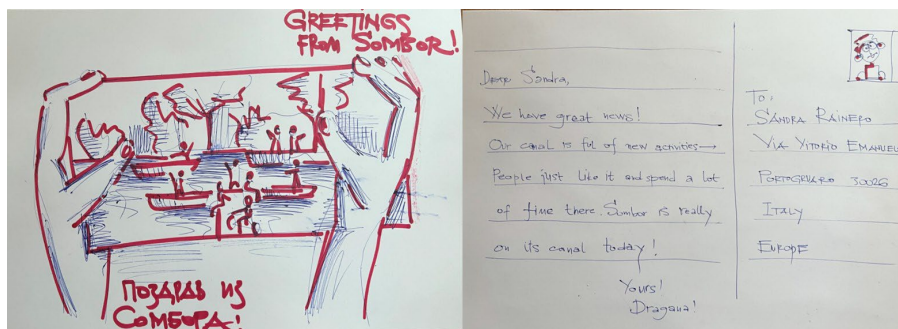
3 - Greetings from Roeselare



4 - Greetings from Rome



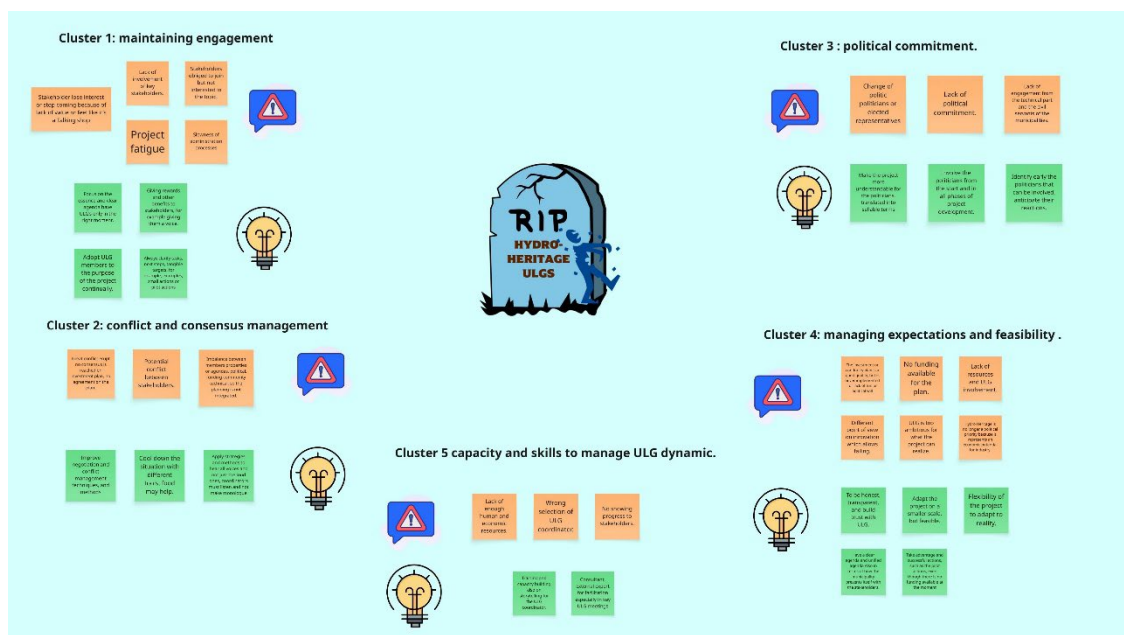
5 - Greetings from Serpa



6 - Greetings from Sombor

Participatory, yes....

In the ULG “premortem” exercise, we explored common risks in local stakeholder groups: low engagement, unclear goals, political change and lack of capacity. Together, we identified strategies to avoid these pitfalls, such as simplifying participation, showing quick wins and providing clear roles and feedback loops.



2. "There once the beautiful Mandel..."



The first network's core meeting in Roeselare (8-9 May, 2025)

*The city of Roeselare combines its industrial strength with a commitment to cultural heritage. Roeselare features several UNESCO-protected heritage sites, including the city hall, market hall and belfry. The city's literary heritage is enriched by figures such as **Guido Gezelle**, a renowned Flemish poet, author of the poem "De mandelbeke" about the Mandel river.*



On 8–9 May 2025, in the charming historic (and renovated) city Hall of Roeselare, partners met and focused our meeting on **community-driven engagement** and participatory regeneration, one of our transfer pillars. We combined presentations on stakeholder strategies, the citizen's budget in Krottegem and interactive tools for cultural event design. Partners shared their transfer roadmaps and explored local hydro-heritage through a guided visit. A workshop led by UrbanDig's Giorgos Sachinis showcased creative methods for

participatory storytelling. The meeting concluded with hands-on work on the Investment Plan Canvas and testing action templates, marking a key step forward to each city's local adaptation strategy.



7 - Our site visit on hydro heritage in Roeselare : <https://youtu.be/7IPNo954u1I>

2.1 Citizen science as participation strategy : <https://youtu.be/MujvgRB2iQQ>



2.2 Participatory budget in Roeselare: welcome to Krottegem

Once a traditional working-class neighborhood, The Krottegem district of Roeselare is now home to a diverse community and social contrasts, and it's here that the city chose to test a powerful tool for participation: the Citizen's Budget.

With a budget of €200,000, residents of all ages proposed small-scale projects under three key themes: green, meeting, and connection. The process included inspiration sessions, project development, feasibility checks, and finally, a public vote.

Citizens led the implementation of small-scale projects that go beyond what had already been planned by the city, bringing real ownership and pride to the district.



<https://youtu.be/IuDRfFAMb4I>



2.3 Arts-based engagement and participation: UrbanDig's tools for engaging in Halandri



As part of our exploration of participatory practices we had the opportunity to learn from *Giorgos Sachinis*, theatre director and co-founder of UrbanDig Project, who also serves as Director of Strategy and Innovation at EYDAP, the Athens Water Supply and Sewerage Company. Drawing on his dual role in the artistic and infrastructural spheres, Giorgos presented a compelling set of methodologies used in the Cultural H.ID.R.A.N.T. project and other projects in Halandri to animate hidden heritage and engage local communities.

His talk introduced a wide range of artist-led tools for public participation and cultural co-creation. From interactive festivals and role-playing exercises to sensory walks and citizen-based performances, many are the tools that an artistic approach can adapt for higher engagement. Central to these activities is the belief that urban spaces, even forgotten or invisible ones like underground aqueducts, can be reactivated through storytelling, performance, and shared imagination.

Among the most impactful examples was the Hadrian's Board Game, used in schools to teach water heritage through play, and the "Walkers on Water" methodology, a structured process that invites citizens to reflect on their relationship with water and space through movement and dialogue.

Demos: Collective decision making Game



Hadrian's Board Game for Kids



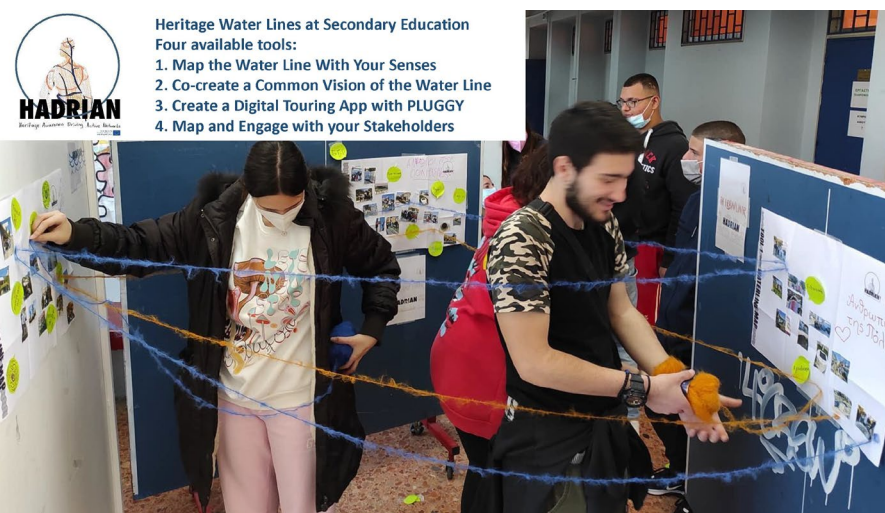
Participatory unveiling of Hidden Urban Elements



Participatory unveiling of Hidden Urban Elements

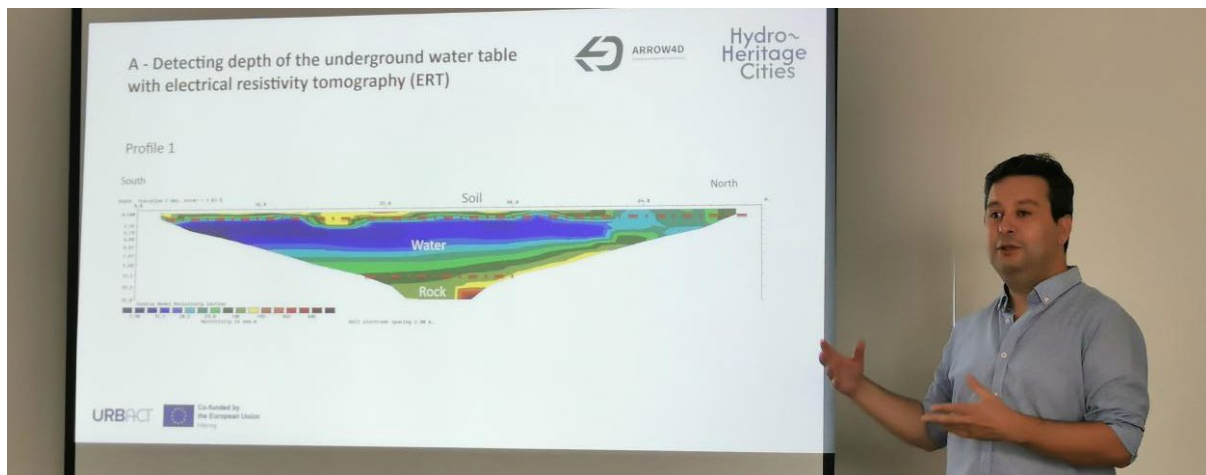


Artist-led World Cafes



Other tools included participatory 3D plans, gamified mental tours, and troubadour-style interviews that transform personal stories into collective songs. These creative practices demonstrate how cultural events, when co-designed with citizens, can reveal new meanings in urban heritage, foster connection and build a sense of ownership, **making the invisible not only visible, but also deeply felt.**

4. Hydro-Heritage magic takes off at the local level



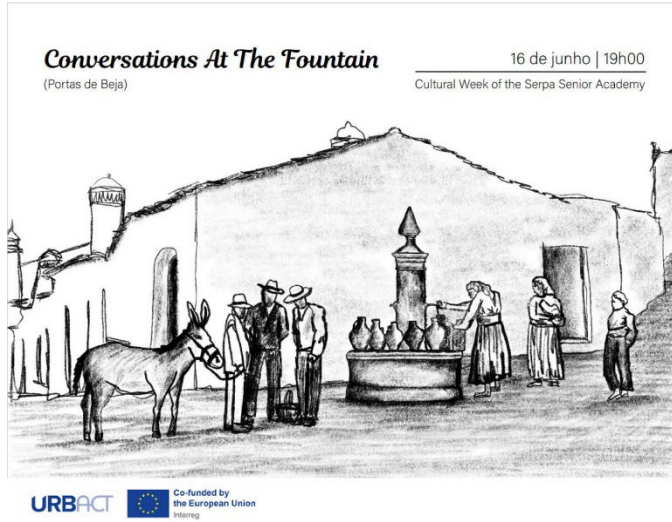
4.1 Testing actions take off in Serpa among stories and studies of shared heritage

As part of Serpa's commitment to the Hydro-Heritage Cities Network, the Senior Academy group, part of the URBACT Local Group proposed a creative and symbolic action to contribute to the city's wider Investment Plan.

Their idea: a street performance titled "Conversations at the Fountain"—a playful yet poignant storytelling event staged during the Serpa Senior Academy's Cultural Week on June 16th, 2025.

The activity recreated scenes from early 20th-century Serpa, where fetching water from the local fountain was a moment for exchange, gossip, and community bonding. These short dialogues—both real and imagined—highlighted how water shaped daily life and collective memory. Organised by the Heritage and Archaeology workshop of the Senior Academy, the event used theatre and storytelling to spark public reflection on sustainable water use, identity, and hydraulic heritage. Audience members also completed a short survey to gauge public sentiment on the rehabilitation of the city's historic Nora (waterwheel) and aqueduct.

Alongside this soft, awareness-raising action, the Municipality of Serpa launched a technical study on the Nora—a 17th-century structure central to its hydro-heritage. The study, carried out by Arrow4D, includes geophysical prospecting to locate the water table and a photogrammetric survey to generate accurate structural models. These findings will directly inform the Investment Plan by offering concrete data to support the restoration project.



Hydro~
Heritage
Cities



Hydro~
Heritage
Cities



“Conversations at the fountain”: dissemination and testing action



Hydro~
Heritage
Cities



“Conversations at the fountain”: dissemination and testing action



Hydro~
Heritage
Cities

URBACT Co-funded by the European Union Interreg

“Conversations at the fountain”: dissemination and testing action



URBACT Co-funded by the European Union Interreg

Hydro~
Heritage
Cities



4.2 The ULG in Sombor sets course for the canal's future

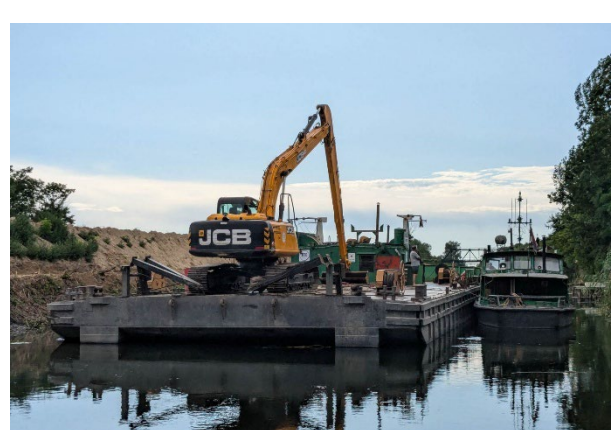
On July 7, 2025, the third URBACT Local Group (ULG) workshop in Sombor took place, hosted on a boat cruising the Great Bačka Canal, placing participants directly in the heart of the city's hydro-heritage.

This immersive setting allowed stakeholders to reflect on the canal not as an abstract planning subject, but as a living landscape with untapped cultural and environmental potential.

Organised by the Sombor team—Dragana Siljanović Kozoderović, Zdravko Pupovac (ULG Coordinator), and Saša Milić (Financial Manager)—the workshop gathered 16 local stakeholders for a hands-on session dedicated to shaping the future of the canal area. While the first two workshops focused on collecting data and understanding the current state of the canal system, this third session marked a turning point: moving from observation to visioning.



Participants collaboratively mapped key micro-heritage sites and spatial assets along the canal—old locks, cultural landmarks, neglected waterfronts—identifying which of these nodes could act as future catalysts for sustainable development. This mapping exercise served as a bridge between the lived experience of the site and the strategic thinking needed for the upcoming Investment Plan and urban study.



The boat setting fostered informal dialogue and fresh perspectives, helping the group recognise the spatial relationships and synergies between potential project sites. This workshop was a first step toward co-designing integrated measures and ideas for regenerating the canal area, setting the stage for deeper planning in the next phases of the Hydro-Heritage journey.

5. Sandra's corner



Being the Lead Expert for the Hydro-Heritage Cities network is a humbling learning journey. From the very beginning, the commitment of Stefania, Christos and Kostas from the City of Halandri set a strong and generous tone offering both structure and motivation, inspired by their first-hand experience in the Cultural H.ID.R.A.N.T. project.

Over the past months, I've had the privilege to visit all five transfer cities: Elche, Rome, Roeselare, Serpa, and Sombor. These visits were more than fact-finding missions. They were

spaces for listening and seeing, where each context reshaped my understanding of what transfer could mean for each of them. Once we were able to see the change made in Halandri, we really started believing we could adapt it to the different situations. We have since leveraged the fact that transfer is never unidirectional but is a shared process of translation, reimagination and mutual influence, which are anchored in a growing trust and built slowly through exchange, site visits, testimonies, lively discussions and informal networking moments.

Our ULGs are still in the chaotic phase of digesting inflows of information, and the discussions are alive and evolving, that's in their human nature. I am not worried if things are still a bit fuzzy for some of them.

What continues to drive me is not only the integrated policy innovation that we are working on, but also the opportunity to create formats for meaningful exchange and to design moments of learning that are both methodologically rigorous and human and arts-based.

The URBACT tools and method have been instrumental in offering a flexible but structured framework for planning and reflection, yet it's the people behind them who are bringing them to the surface.

During this journey I have met many of these real agents of change, and I am proud to be navigating this current with them.

6. Coming up next...



In the next journal, we'll dive into the second core meeting in Serpa and explore how the work of the URBACT Local Groups is evolving across all partner cities. As we move into the "precipitation" phase of the Hydro-Heritage journey, testing actions are unfolding and the drafts of each city's Investment Plan are starting to take shape. Stay tuned for more stories from the ground (and water) about hydro-heritage.
