

CITIES@HEART PU IAP

Towards a balanced City Centre



INTEGRATED ACTION PLAN

By Pentágono Urbano

URBACT



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TOWARDS A BALANCED CITY CENTRE



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Associação Pentágono Urbano

The Pentágono Urbano Association was created in September 2025, with the inclusion of the city of Viana do Castelo among the founding cities of the Quadrilátero Association, Braga, Barcelos, Famalicão, and Guimarães.

This work was carried out between 2023 and 2025 with the founding cities.



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SECTION 01

Policy Vision



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MESSAGE FROM PENTÁGONO PRESIDENT

RICARDO RIO, MAYOR OF BRAGA

In a time when our cities face increasingly complex challenges, like social, environmental, economic, and spatial, the need for bold, coordinated, and citizen-centered urban strategies has never been greater.

The Integrated Action Plan of the Pentágono Urbano represents a decisive step in our collective ambition to shape city centres that are more inclusive, sustainable, and alive.

This plan is the product of genuine collaboration between the municipalities of Barcelos, Braga, Guimarães, and Vila Nova de Famalicão, in close partnership with our (ULG) communities, academic institutions, businesses, and civil society. Anchored in the Cities@Heart network, it reflects not only our shared vision but also our ability to learn and innovate alongside other leading European cities.

As President of the Pentágono Urbano, I take particular pride in how this IAP combines local identity with global ambition. It positions our region at the forefront of urban transformation, through evidence-based policymaking, participatory governance, and a clear commitment to improving mobility, proximity, and quality of life.

The launch of the Competence Centre for Urban Innovation, and flagship actions like the Cities in the City seminar, demonstrate that our vision is not confined to paper, it is already taking shape in the real world, through leadership, experimentation, and trust.

This document is both a roadmap and an invitation. It invites all those who care about the future of our cities to join us to co-create, to challenge, and to contribute to the cities we believe in.

Together, we are building city centres at the heart of a better urban future.

SECTION 02

Cities@Heart



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Cities@Heart

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APN CITIES@HEART

Cities@Heart brings together ten European urban areas with diverse profiles but one common goal: achieving a balanced and inclusive city center for all users. By gathering relevant indicators and using a common methodology, this @URBACT IV APN network aims to create a holistic policy framework for lasting and meaningful change in the heart of the city.

Working hand in hand with local stakeholders and users, Cities@Heart is here to develop tools that foster happy, healthy and harmonious places.

Network members:

Lead Partner: The Greater Paris Metropolis

Amfiktyonies, a business development organization representing Lamia, Greece

The City of Celje, Slovenia

The City of Cesena, Italy

The City of Fleurus, Belgium

The City of Granada, Spain

The Krakow Metropolis Association, Poland

The Pentágono Urbano Association, Portugal

The City of Osijek, Croatia

The City of Sligo, Ireland

SECTION 03

Integrated Action Plan



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WHY AN IAP ON URBAN INNOVATION

An URBACT Integrated Action Plan (IAP) is a key element of the URBACT methodology. It is a city-level output that defines actions to be implemented within the city in order to respond to a specific urban policy challenge, reflecting the lessons learned from local stakeholders, transnational partners and the testing of actions at local level.

IAP's thus provide both a focal point and end goal of the action planning journey that cities undertake within their URBACT Action Planning Network (APN). IAPs help to ensure that both local-level discussions (within the URBACT Local Group) and transnational exchange (between the network partners) have a practical focus on planning a coherent set of actions to address the local policy challenge in each participating city, embedding an integrated and participative approach.

IAPs are future oriented – setting out the actions that cities will implement beyond the life cycle of the URBACT network. For this reason, each IAP not only sets out what the city intends to do on its specific topic, but also has a strong implementation focus, for example through the identification of specific funding opportunities, governance structures and timelines for how the actions will be implemented and monitored.

SECTION 04

Context Needs and Vision



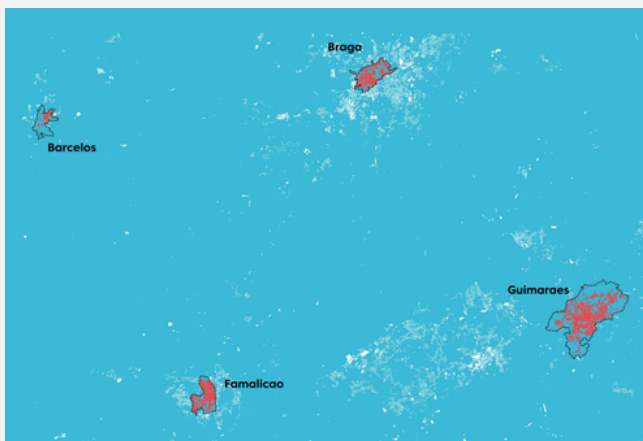
Context

OVERVIEW OF PENTÁGONO URBANO

Pentágono Urbano comprises five municipalities located in the north of Portugal, within the Minho region. These municipalities include Barcelos, Braga, Guimarães, Vila Nova de Famalicão and Viana do Castelo. Collectively, they form a significant urban area with a combined population of approximately 700,000 residents and a population density of roughly 650 inhabitants per square kilometer. The region aims to be a center of territorial competitiveness, fostering urban and business innovation through cooperation between businesses, the scientific community, local administration, and end-users.

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

The demographic composition of Pentágono Urbano indicates an ageing population, with 19.3% of inhabitants aged over 65 years and 13.0% under the age of 15. This contrasts with national figures, where 23.4% are over 65 and 12.9% are under 15. The population trends and age distribution are critical in planning for healthcare, social services, and community engagement initiatives.



ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

The economy of Pentágono Urbano is predominantly driven by key industries such as textiles, manufacturing, commerce, ceramics, and tourism. The average income in the region is €14,322.12 per capita, significantly lower than the national average of €23,588. This economic landscape highlights the need for targeted interventions to boost economic growth, job creation, and income levels within the region.

HOUSING AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Pentágono Urbano is experiencing a generalized housing shortage, exacerbated by rising housing prices in city centers and the deterioration of certain buildings. Public spaces in the cities are associated with facilities such as hospitals, schools, courts, and shops. However, there are challenges related to inclusivity and accessibility, particularly for individuals with reduced mobility and older adults. The region also faces conflicts between pedestrian and vehicular traffic, despite efforts to pedestrianize certain areas.

STRATEGIES AND POLICIES

Pentágono Urbano aligns with several local, regional, national, and European strategies and policies focused on urban revitalization and sustainable development. Notably, Braga and Guimarães are involved in initiatives such as Eurocities, Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities, and NetZeroCities, aiming for climate neutrality by 2030. These strategies provide a framework for integrating local development plans with broader sustainability goals.

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

The region's public spaces include squares, gardens, and areas for public interaction, but there are ongoing issues with ensuring these spaces are inclusive and accessible. The environmental quality, particularly air and noise pollution, and the availability of green spaces are areas requiring continuous monitoring and improvement to enhance the overall quality of life.

GOVERNANCE AND DECISION-MAKING TOOLS

The cities within Pentágono Urbano are committed to digitalizing processes and enhancing interactions with citizens through digital platforms. Guimarães and Famalicão have established Urban Management Platforms and data observatories, while Barcelos and Braga are in the process of acquiring similar capabilities. These tools facilitate comprehensive data collection and analysis, informing decision-making processes across various urban management domains.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Stakeholder engagement is a cornerstone of the planning process in Pentágono Urbano. The Urban Local Group (ULG) comprises representatives from the public sector, private sector, academia, and civil society. This diverse group ensures that various perspectives are considered in the decision-making process, fostering a collaborative approach to urban development.

KEY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

KEY CHALLENGES



Ageing population and demographic shifts.



Economic disparities and lower-than-average income levels.



Housing shortages and rising prices.



Inclusivity and accessibility issues in public spaces.



Conflicts between pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES

Leveraging historical and cultural heritage
for tourism



Promoting creative and social innovation
industries.



Enhancing digitalization and smart city
initiatives.



Aligning local strategies with national and
European sustainability goals



CITIES@HEART LEARNING

The data collection and analysis for Pentágono Urbano provide a comprehensive understanding of the region's current context, identifying key needs and challenges. This foundation is crucial for developing a vision and strategic objectives that guide the Integrated Action Plan (IAP) towards sustainable urban revitalization. By addressing demographic, economic, housing, infrastructure, and environmental aspects, the IAP can effectively enhance the attractiveness and functionality of Pentágono Urbano, ensuring a higher quality of life for its residents.

Needs

NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR QUADRILATERO URBANO

DEMOGRAPHIC NEEDS

The demographic profile of Pentágono Urbano highlights an ageing population, with 19.3% of inhabitants over 65 years old, compared to 13.0% under 15 years old. This demographic trend necessitates targeted social and healthcare services for the elderly, as well as programs to attract and retain younger populations. Addressing the needs of an ageing population will involve:

- **Healthcare Services:** Enhanced healthcare facilities and services to cater to the growing elderly population.
- **Social Services:** Programs and facilities to support social inclusion and active ageing.
- **Youth Retention:** Initiatives to create job opportunities, affordable housing, and social activities to attract and retain younger residents.

ECONOMIC NEEDS

Pentágono Urbano's average income of €14,322.12 per capita is significantly lower than the national average of €23,588. To address economic disparities and stimulate growth, several key areas need attention:

- **Job Creation:** Programs to create jobs in key industries such as textiles, manufacturing, commerce, ceramics, and tourism.
- **Economic Diversification:** Initiatives to diversify the local economy and reduce dependency on traditional sectors.
- **Support for Local Businesses:** Financial and technical support for local businesses, including digitalization and market expansion.

HOUSING NEEDS

The region faces a generalized housing shortage, with rising prices in city centers and deteriorating buildings. Addressing housing needs involves:

- **Affordable Housing:** Development of affordable housing options to cater to low- and middle-income families.
- **Housing Renovation:** Programs to renovate and repurpose deteriorating and vacant buildings.
- **Inclusive Housing Policies:** Policies to ensure housing accessibility for all demographics, including the elderly and disabled.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUBLIC SPACE NEEDS

The existing public spaces, while fostering a sense of community, are sometimes lacking inclusivity and accessibility. To improve the quality and functionality of these spaces:

- **Inclusive Design:** Redesign public spaces to be inclusive and accessible to individuals with reduced mobility and older adults.
- **Conflict Resolution:** Implement measures to mitigate conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles in urban centers.
- **Green Spaces:** Increase and improve green spaces to enhance environmental quality and provide recreational areas.

ENVIRONMENTAL NEEDS

Ensuring a high quality of life requires addressing environmental challenges such as air and noise pollution and the availability of green spaces. Environmental needs include:

- **Pollution Control:** Measures to monitor and reduce air and noise pollution.
- **Climate Resilience:** Initiatives to enhance climate resilience and sustainability practices.
- **Sustainable Mobility:** Development of sustainable mobility solutions to reduce traffic congestion and environmental impact.

GOVERNANCE AND POLICY NEEDS

Effective governance and strategic policies are crucial for urban revitalization. Needs in this area include:

- **Digitalization:** Continued digitalization of processes to improve efficiency and citizen engagement.
- **Integrated Strategies:** Development of integrated urban management strategies that align with local, regional, and national policies.
- **Stakeholder Involvement:** Ensuring ongoing stakeholder engagement in decision-making processes.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL NEEDS

Pentágono Urbano has a rich cultural heritage that can be leveraged for social and economic development. Addressing social and cultural needs involves:

- **Cultural Programs:** Initiatives to promote and preserve cultural heritage, including festivals, events, and educational programs.
- **Social Inclusion:** Programs to promote social inclusion and cohesion, particularly for marginalized communities.
- **Creative Industries:** Support for the growth of creative industries and social innovation, providing platforms for collaboration and innovation.

CITIES@HEART LEARNING

The needs assessment for Pentágono Urbano identifies critical areas that require targeted interventions to enhance the region's attractiveness and functionality. By addressing demographic, economic, housing, infrastructure, environmental, governance, and social needs, the Integrated Action Plan (IAP) can effectively support sustainable urban revitalization. These interventions will ensure that Pentágono Urbano can meet the evolving needs of its residents and create a vibrant, inclusive, and prosperous urban environment.

SECTION 05

Overall logic and integrated approach



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Vision

VISION FOR PENTÁGONO URBANO

PU CITIES@HEART VISION STATEMENT

Pentágono Urbano envisions itself as a vibrant, inclusive, and resilient urban hub that harmonizes its rich historical heritage with modern living standards. Our vision is to create a sustainable, equitable, and dynamic environment where all residents and visitors can thrive, fostering social cohesion, economic innovation, and environmental stewardship.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- ♥ **Sustainability:** Promote environmentally sustainable practices across all urban activities to enhance climate resilience and reduce ecological footprints. This includes improving air quality, increasing green spaces, and implementing sustainable mobility solutions.
- ♥ **Economic Innovation:** Foster a diverse and resilient local economy that supports innovation, job creation, and economic growth. Encourage the development of creative industries, support local businesses, and attract new investments to boost the regional economy.
- ♥ **Social Inclusion:** Ensure that all residents, regardless of age, gender, or socio-economic background, have access to the resources and opportunities they need to thrive. Promote social inclusion through affordable housing, accessible public spaces, and community engagement programs.
- ♥ **Cultural Vitality:** Preserve and celebrate the rich cultural heritage of Pentágono Urbano while fostering new cultural and social activities. Support cultural programs and events that enhance the cultural identity and vibrancy of the region.
- ♥ **Quality of Life:** Enhance the quality of life for all residents by improving public spaces, infrastructure, and services. Ensure that the urban environment is safe, accessible, and conducive to healthy living and social interaction.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

INTEGRATED PUBLIC POLICIES

Develop policies that cut across various domains such as housing, public services, mobility, public space, and commerce to create a holistic and integrated approach to urban development.

INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE

Establish participatory governance models that involve all stakeholders, including residents, businesses, and community organizations, in the decision-making process. Promote transparency and accountability in governance.

DATA-DRIVEN DECISION MAKING

Use data and technology to inform and guide urban planning and policy decisions. Implement robust data collection and analysis mechanisms to monitor progress and adapt strategies as needed.

SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCE

Prioritize sustainability in all aspects of urban development to ensure long-term environmental health and resilience. Implement nature-based solutions, promote energy efficiency, and support climate adaptation measures.

EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Ensure that urban development initiatives promote equity and inclusion, addressing the needs of marginalized and vulnerable populations. Foster a sense of belonging and community for all residents.

ACTION AREAS

HOUSING



Develop affordable and diverse housing options to cater to various socio-economic groups. Implement policies to renovate and repurpose vacant and deteriorating buildings to increase housing availability and quality.

PUBLIC SPACE



Redesign public spaces to be inclusive, accessible, and conducive to social interaction. Enhance green spaces and recreational areas to promote environmental quality and community well-being.

MOBILITY



Develop sustainable and efficient transportation systems that reduce reliance on private vehicles. Promote public transport, cycling, and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure to improve mobility and reduce environmental impact.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



Support local businesses and startups through financial and technical assistance. Foster innovation and entrepreneurship by creating hubs for creative industries and social innovation.

CULTURAL AND SOCIAL PROGRAMS



Organize cultural events and activities that celebrate the region's heritage and foster social cohesion. Develop programs that promote social inclusion and community engagement.

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT



Implement measures to monitor and improve air quality, reduce noise pollution, and enhance the overall environmental quality of the urban area. Promote the use of renewable energy and sustainable practices in all sectors.

CITIES@HEART LEARNING

The vision for Pentágono Urbano is to create a balanced, inclusive, and prosperous urban environment that leverages its unique historical and cultural strengths while addressing contemporary challenges. By focusing on sustainability, economic innovation, social inclusion, and quality of life, Pentágono Urbano aims to be a model for integrated urban development that benefits all residents and visitors.

This vision sets the foundation for the Integrated Action Plan, guiding the development and implementation of strategic objectives and actions that will transform Pentágono Urbano into a thriving urban hub.

VISION FOR PENTÁGONO URBANO C@G IAP

PU CITIES@HEART IAP VISION STATEMENT

Pentágono Urbano has an effective system of data-driven, participatory governance that allows for high quality decision-making on the path to a more balanced, inclusive and prosperous urban environment

Urbact Method

FROM A VISION STATEMENT TO A SERVICE DESIGN

The Pentágono Urbano | Cities@Heart ULG was/is the core brain of the Integrated Action Plan as it brings together all the voluntary participation of Stakeholders related with City Centre management. From Stakeholders map to the Problem Tree, the Urbact Method was the road to co-design and co-create our IAP.

The key factor was/is the collaboration with ULG Members/Stakeholders to develop the QU C@H IAP inner Vision. Several tools were used like;

1. Collaborate with Stakeholders to Develop the Vision

Method: Newspaper of Tomorrow

- Process:
 - a. Engage Stakeholders: Gathering of key stakeholders for a visioning workshop.
 - b. Imagine the Future: Participants created a future newspaper headline reflecting their vision.
 - c. Discussion: Shared and identified common themes.
 - d. Craft the Vision: Develop a vision statement based on collective aspirations.

Outcome: A shared, long-term vision reflecting community goals.

2. Set Overarching Objectives

Method: Action Table

- Process:
 - a. Define Results: Outline expected results aligned with the vision.
 - b. Set Objectives: Establish SMART objectives for sustainability, inclusion, innovation, and quality of life on European City Centres Management.
 - c. Prioritize: Rank objectives by importance and impact.

Outcome: Clear objectives guiding the realization of the vision.

3. Draft Vision Statement

Method: Refining an Action

- Process:
 - a. Synthesize Themes: Identify the core message from previous discussions.
 - b. Draft Statement: Create a concise, inspiring vision statement.
 - c. Review: Refine the statement with stakeholder feedback.

Outcome: A concise vision statement that encapsulates the future goals of Quadrilatero Urbano.

This approach ensured a clear and actionable vision, grounded in community input, to guide our future planning and development.

QU C@G IAP

From the Competence Centre for the Attractiveness of the Urban Centres of the PU Municipalities to the PU Competence Centre for Urban Innovation.

Redefined QU Vision

The “Pentágono Urbano” as a centre of attraction for people, resources and urban knowledge.

Redefined IAP Vision

Pentágono Urbano has an effective system of data-driven, participatory governance that allows for high quality decision-making on the path to a more balanced, inclusive and prosperous urban environment.

Co-construction

In order to codesign an integrated action plan for the PU, taking into account the topics explored in the TNM's of the Urbact Cities@Heart Network, such as "City Placement", "Participatory Planning", "Urban Citizen Learning", "Town Centre Management" and "Urban Economy", from a co-creation perspective with a ULG made up of 5 Municipalities, it is essential to combine urban planning strategies, community involvement, economic development and sustainable management and the sectoral expectations of the different forces present in the Quadruple Helix of this Region.

This plan should be comprehensive, covering several areas of interest and integrating the perspectives and contributions of a wide range of stakeholders.

We present an intervention structure for the co-creation of an integrated action plan comprising the Strategic Lines of the Cities@Heart Network:

1. **Diagnosis and Assessment of the Current Situation:** Start with a comprehensive diagnosis of the metropolitan area, identifying challenges for boosting attractiveness and opportunities in areas such as urban planning, economy, and management of urban centres.
2. **Definition of Vision and Objectives:** To establish a clear vision for the future of the PU metropolitan area, with specific objectives in areas such as sustainability, social inclusion, economic innovation and urban quality of life.
3. **Development of Integrated Strategies:** Formulate strategies that link the different themes of the Integrated Action Plan in an integrated way.
4. **Citizen Participation and Involvement:** Implement participatory planning processes to involve citizens, businesses, academic institutions and non-governmental organisations in the formulation and revision of the plan.
5. **Fostering the Urban Economy and Urban Innovation:** Develop strategies to stimulate the local economy, supporting innovation, start-ups and local businesses, and promoting the training and attraction of talent.

6. Sustainable Management of Urban Centres: Implementing urban management practices that promote vibrant, accessible and sustainable centres, with a focus on revitalising urban areas and improving mobility and infrastructure.

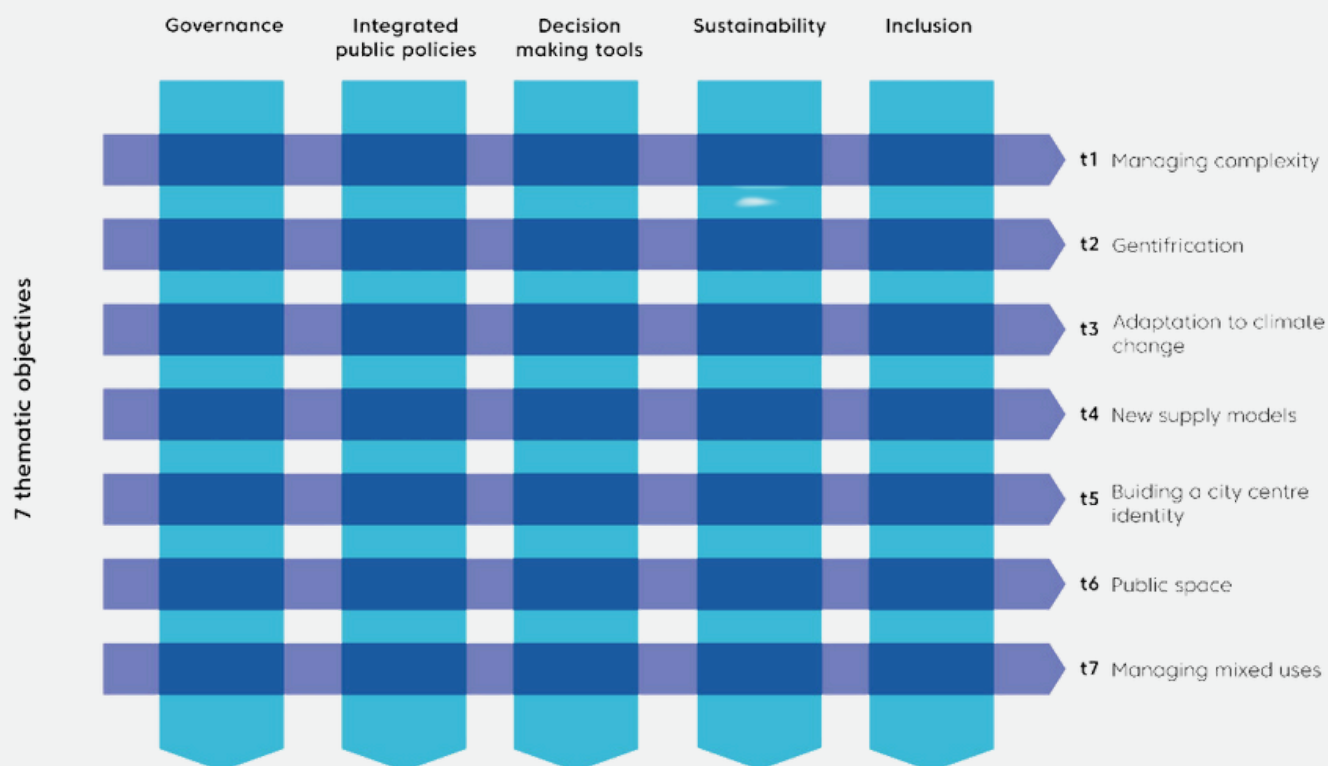
7. Continuing Education and Training: Promoting urban education and learning initiatives to empower citizens to actively participate in the development of the metropolitan area.

8. Implementation and Monitoring: Define detailed action plans for implementing the strategies, including timetables, responsibilities and performance indicators, as well as mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

9. Adaptation and Flexibility: Ensure that the plan is adaptable and flexible, able to respond to changes and emerging challenges.

10. Communication and Transparency: Maintaining effective and transparent communication with all stakeholders throughout the process, publicising progress, challenges and successes.

5 strategic learning objectives



SECTION 06

Implementation framework



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PU Competence Centre for Urban Innovation

This integrated action plan aims to create a metropolitan area (Pentágono Urbano) that is resilient, inclusive, prosperous and sustainable, combining aspects of urban planning, community participation, economic development and sustainability.

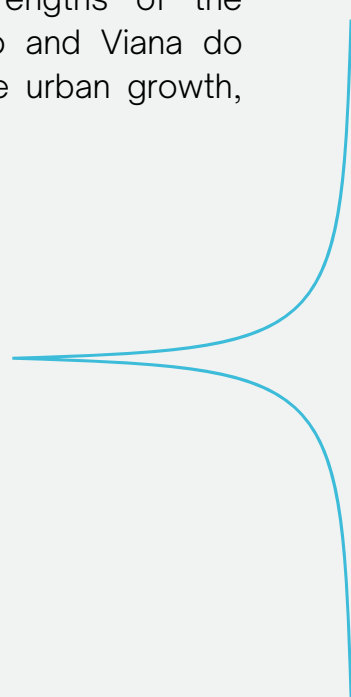
As a result of this approach and taking into account the IAP objective of the urbact Cities@Heart network, Pentágono Urbano and ULG PU opted to implement collaborative work to co-design and co-construct a Competence Centre for the Attractiveness of the Urban Centres of the PU Municipalities.

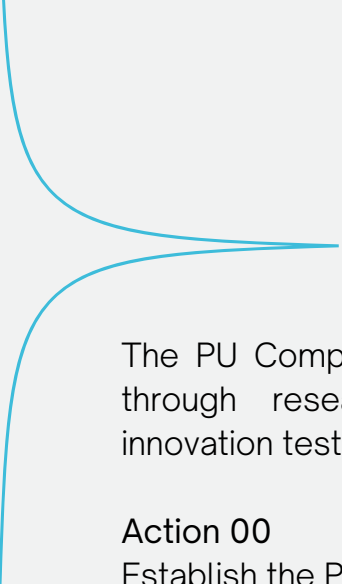
The Competence Centre will be structured with a focus on urban areas, organised around four central axes - Urban Observatory, Research Agendas, Training of Actors, Laboratory for the co-production of Urban Attractiveness Policies.

Pentágono Urbano believes that this plan is a robust and comprehensive approach that not only guarantees the contractual commitment to the Cities@Heart Network, but is also an added-value proposal for the PU, as well as for the cities of Barcelos, Braga , Famalicão and Viana do Castelo.

It is a differentiated, pioneering and integrated proposal that enables the transfer of knowledge, the improvement of the internal and external communication processes of the Municipalities and a better relationship with the Citizens and Users of the Urban Centres in terms of co-production of Urban Centre management policies.

The Pentágono Urbano (PU) Competence Centre for Urban Innovation is a strategic initiative aimed at positioning the region as a hub for cutting-edge urban research, development, and implementation. By leveraging the collective strengths of the municipalities of Barcelos, Braga, Guimarães, Vila Nova de Famalicão and Viana do Castelo the Centre will serve as a focal point for fostering sustainable urban growth, economic innovation, and social inclusion.





The PU Competence Centre will focus on addressing contemporary urban challenges through research, data-driven decision-making, capacity-building, and real-world innovation testing. It will be structured around four main actions:

Action 00

Establish the PU Competence Centre for Urban Innovation

Action 01

PU Urban Traction Observer – A data observatory designed to monitor and analyze urban trends in areas such as mobility, housing, and climate, providing actionable insights for policy and decision-making.

Action 02

PU Urban Research Agendas – A platform to drive collaborative research in key urban areas like sustainability, urban planning, and mobility, facilitating partnerships between academic institutions and municipalities.

Action 03

Municipality Actors & Agents Empowerment – A capacity-building initiative aimed at equipping municipal stakeholders and urban actors with the skills and tools needed to implement innovative urban policies and solutions.

Action 04

Urban Innovation Living Lab – A space for testing and co-creating urban innovation solutions in partnership with citizens, businesses, and municipal actors, fostering inclusive and sustainable urban development.

Together, these actions will ensure that the PU Competence Centre acts as a catalyst for urban transformation, enhancing the region's competitiveness and quality of life for all residents through innovative and collaborative approaches.

Action 00

ESTABLISH THE PU COMPETENCE CENTRE FOR URBAN INNOVATION

Action	Activities	Intended results	C@H Guidelines	Lead Agency	Key Partners	Times cale
00.01	Define CCUI Office Space	Have a Centre of Operations and physical space do deliver operations	not applicable	QU Board	PU Municipality that will provide space	2026
00.02	Define CCUI Human Resources Office	Have a quality level of HR and Operational staff	not applicable	QU Board	PU Board	2026
00.03	Define CCUI Agenda and Start of Operations	Define Agenda and Begining of Activity	not applicable	QU Board	CCUI Manager	2026

Action 01

PU URBAN TRACTION OBSERVER

Action	Activities	Intended results	C@H Guidelines	Lead Agency	Key Partners	Times cale
01.01	Set up the Observer to track and analyze urban trends (mobility, housing, climate)	Real-time data collection for evidence-based urban policies	Data-driven decision-making: Using urban data to enhance sustainable decision-making.	PU Board	PU SMART Cities Platform	2026
01.02	Create data dashboards for public and private sector use	Improved urban policy based on real-time data	Sustainability: Improved urban policy for climate resilience and environmental quality.	PU Board	PU SMART Cities Platform	2027
01.03	Integrate citizen input via participatory platforms	Increased community involvement in urban planning	Inclusion / Participation: Engaging citizens for a participatory approach to urban planning.	PU Board	PU SMART Cities Platform	2027

Action 02

PU URBAN RESEARCH AGENDAS

Action	Activities	Intended results	C@H Guidelines	Lead Agency	Key Partners	Time scale
02.01	Define strategic research areas: sustainability, smart mobility, and urban planning	New knowledge and solutions for key urban challenges	Integrated Public Policies: Informing municipal policies through research on key urban challenges.	PU Board	Region Universities UM IPCA UCB	2026
02.02	Develop partnerships between universities and municipalities	Closer ties between academia and municipal governance	Governance: Strengthening multi-level collaboration for sustainable urban innovation.	PU Board	Region Universities UM IPCA UCB	2026
02.03	Organize knowledge-sharing events (conferences, workshops)	Dissemination of cutting-edge knowledge on urban issues	Sustainability and Inclusion: Creating shared knowledge to support sustainable policies.	PU Board	Region Universities UM IPCA UCB	2026

Action 03

MUNICIPALITY ACTORS & AGENTS EMPOWERMENT

Action	Activities	Intended results	C@H Guidelines	Lead Agency	Key Partners	Times cale
03.01	Implement training programs for municipal actors and urban stakeholders	Empowered municipal actors with the skills to innovate	Capacity-building for Governance: Developing skills to manage urban challenges effectively.	PU Board	HR Offices QU Cities	2026
03.02	Develop and distribute toolkits for implementing innovative urban solutions	Practical toolkits used by municipalities to apply new policies	Integrated Urban Policies: Ensuring municipalities have tools for cross-cutting solutions.	PU Board	HR Offices QU Cities	2026
03.03	Organize regular workshops on urban innovation and smart governance	Governance : Fostering continuous learning in urban management.	Increased expertise in municipal actors and agents	PU Board	HR Offices QU Cities	2026

Action 04

URBAN INNOVATION LIVING LAB

Action	Activities	Intended results	C@H Guidelines	Lead Agency	Key Partners	Times cale
04.01	Create a physical/virtual lab for testing urban innovation (smart mobility, sustainable infrastructure)	Proven solutions for urban challenges tested in the field	Innovation for Sustainable Cities: Developing tested solutions for urban challenges.	PU Board	External Facilitators and Civic Society	2026
04.02	Co-create solutions with stakeholders: citizens, businesses, and municipalities	Collaborative development of urban solutions	Participatory Innovation: Co-creating inclusive urban policies for sustainability.	PU Board	External Facilitators and Civic Society	2026
04.03	Launch smart city initiatives (e.g., mobility, energy-efficient buildings)	Smart city solutions implemented to improve urban quality	Sustainability and Smart Cities: Implementing future-ready infrastructure solutions.	PU Board	External Facilitators and Civic Society	2026

SECTION 07

Action planning details



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THE OPERATIONAL HEART OF THE IAP: FROM CONCEPT TO TRANSFORMATION

The Integrated Action Plan of the Pentágono Urbano (PU) is not simply a document, it is a transition strategy.

At the center of this transition lies a strategic instrument: the PU Competence Centre for Urban Innovation.

Rather than dispersing energy across multiple isolated initiatives, this section defines a convergent operational architecture, one that positions the Competence Centre as the engine for innovation, coordination, knowledge generation, and policy impact across the four cities of the PU.

It does so through a coherent set of four strategic actions, each addressing a core urban governance challenge: knowledge, research, capacity, and experimentation.

Objective: PU Competence Centre for Urban Innovation

Action: Create and launch the PU Competence Centre for Urban Innovation

Expected results: A Regional Hub for Innovation, Research, and Urban solutions

Action 00

ESTABLISH THE PU COMPETENCE CENTRE FOR URBAN INNOVATION

Based on the Policy Change URBACT Cities@Heart Baseline Study and its key themes, we can further design the PU Competence Centre for Urban Innovation action table to better align with the strategic objectives outlined in the framework. This section emphasizes:

- Sustainability and the challenges of urban centers in adapting to climate change.
- The need for social inclusion, ensuring equal opportunities for all citizens regardless of socio-economic background.
- The importance of integrated urban policies that address overlapping challenges such as housing, mobility, and public space.
- The use of data-driven decision-making and participatory approaches for more effective governance.



Objective: PU Competence Centre for Urban Innovation

Action: Create and launch the PU Competence Centre for Urban Innovation

C@H Guidelines: Align and promote Multilevel governance

Expected results: A Regional Hub for Innovation, Research, and Urban solutions

Strategic Purpose:

This action focuses on the creation, formalization, and operationalization of the PU Competence Centre for Urban Innovation — the key structural outcome of the IAP. It transforms the momentum of Cities@Heart into a permanent, cross-municipal structure capable of leading innovation, coordinating projects, and embedding strategic thinking into the day-to-day governance of the Pentágono Urbano.

Operational framework:

- Institutionalisation
- Move from ad hoc collaboration to a formalised inter-municipal entity or joint program, defined by:
 - A clear governance model (e.g., steering committee, executive coordination unit, technical advisory board)
 - Legal and administrative recognition within each municipality's governance framework
 - A shared vision and mandate formally adopted by the political leadership of Barcelos, Braga, Guimarães, Vila Nova de Famalicão and Viana do Castelo.
- Shared Ownership & Long-term Commitment
 - Design and approve a multi-year cooperation protocol or memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the municipalities
 - Secure dedicated human and financial resources (e.g., technical staff seconded from municipalities, EU funding, national programs, or pilot budgets)
 - Define rotating leadership or hosting responsibilities to ensure political balance and commitment from all four cities
- Functional Capacity
 - Develop a clear operating model for the Centre: what services it will provide, to whom, and how it will deliver value
 - Identify initial thematic priorities and programs (e.g., digital public services, city centre regeneration, civic engagement)
 - Establish internal protocols for knowledge sharing, communication, decision-making, and evaluation

Expected Outcomes:

- A fully operational structure that anchors the IAP and ensures its continuity beyond URBACT
- Institutional legitimacy for coordinating transmunicipal strategies and projects
- A platform for urban experimentation, knowledge production, and civic collaboration
- Increased capacity to attract external funding and partnerships, leveraging the Centre's cross-city scale and integrated vision

Action 01

PU URBAN TRACTION OBSERVER

Objective: To monitor and analyse urban trends and challenges, providing relevant data and information.



Actions: Set up the Observer to track and analyze urban trends (mobility, housing, climate

C@H Guidelines: Data-driven decision-making: Using urban data to enhance sustainable decision-making.

Outputs: Real-time data collection for evidence-based urban policies.

Expected results: Provide valuable insights for decision-makers and the general public, improving understanding of urban dynamics.

Strategic Purpose:

This action focuses on the design, development, and activation of the PU Urban Traction Observer — a cross-municipal data observatory and insight platform that will serve as the analytical backbone of the Integrated Action Plan.

The Observer enables the municipalities of the Pentágono Urbano to move from reactive planning to predictive and evidence-based governance, by continuously monitoring the urban dynamics that shape proximity, mobility, vitality, and livability in their city centres.

More than a technical dashboard, the Observer is a tool for strategic alignment, public accountability, and innovation monitoring, allowing QU to adapt its actions to real-world change.

Operational framework:

Operational Intelligence

Develop a region-wide observatory that provides:

- Timely, harmonised, and comparable data on key indicators (mobility flows, housing pressure, retail patterns, environmental quality, public space usage)
- Insights into urban trends, bottlenecks, and emerging needs
- Data visualisation tools (e.g. dashboards, maps, heatmaps) that support day-to-day decision-making and long-term strategic planning

Transparency & Citizen Trust

- Make selected data and indicators public-facing, helping citizens and stakeholders understand the challenges, priorities, and performance of local government
- Use storytelling with data to increase awareness and participation in urban transformation

Cross-Municipal Alignment

- Establish common definitions, formats, and methodologies for data collection across the four municipalities
- Enable regional benchmarking and strategic comparison between city centres
- Foster a culture of shared learning and continuous improvement

Expected Outcomes:

- A centralised, accessible data platform to support the IAP's design, monitoring, and evolution
- Increased data literacy and capacity within municipal teams
- Improved policy targeting and evaluation
- Enhanced public engagement through transparency and trust-building
- A shared evidence base to guide regional coordination and transmunicipal collaboration

Action 02

PU URBAN RESEARCH AGENDAS

Objective: To develop advanced research in urbanism, urban planning, sustainability and related themes.



Actions: Carry out studies and applied research, collaborate with universities and research centres, publish articles and reports.

Purpose: Define strategic research areas: sustainability, smart mobility, and urban planning

C@H Guidelines; Integrated Public Policies: Informing municipal policies through research on key urban challenges

Outputs: New knowledge and solutions for key urban challenges

Expected results: Production of innovative and relevant knowledge for the PU metropolitan area and the field of urbanism in general.

Strategic Purpose:

This action establishes a structured and sustained research framework, the PU Urban Research Agendas, to connect the IAP with the region's academic and scientific ecosystems. It ensures that policy is grounded in evidence, and that complex urban challenges are approached with both strategic foresight and technical depth.

The Research Agendas create a bridge between knowledge production and policy innovation, allowing the Quadrilátero Urbano to become both a laboratory and a reference territory for applied urban studies.

Rather than being reactive, this action allows PU to co-design solutions, evaluate interventions, and anticipate future needs through systematic collaboration with universities, think tanks, and research institutes.

Operational framework:

Strategic Knowledge Production

- Define priority research domains aligned with the IAP (e.g., 15-minute city models, green mobility systems, housing accessibility, behavioural urbanism)
- Commission or co-produce applied studies, policy briefs, and thematic analyses that inform local decision-making
- Support longitudinal and comparative studies across the four municipalities to generate a deeper regional knowledge base

Academic–Municipal Collaboration

- Develop formal partnerships with local universities and research centres (e.g., University of Minho)
- Create a two-way channel between researchers and practitioners to ensure that academic insights are policy-relevant, and that municipal challenges feed into academic inquiry
- Invite student and early-career researchers to contribute through thesis work, internships, or living labs

Evidence-Informed Governance

- Use research findings to design, adjust, and evaluate interventions within the IAP
- Ensure that each major thematic axis (mobility, housing, proximity, governance) is supported by up-to-date evidence, not assumptions
- Contribute to the broader Cities@Heart knowledge ecosystem and influence national or European policy dialogues

Expected Outcomes:

- A regionally grounded but internationally relevant body of urban knowledge
- Stronger evidence-based policy capacity across QU municipalities
- Sustained cooperation between local government and academia
- Increased visibility of PU as a territory of innovation and research
- Contribution to the European urban agenda through URBACT, Cities@Heart, and beyond

Action 03

MUNICIPALITY ACTORS & AGENTS EMPOWERMENT

Objective: To train professionals and citizens in issues related to sustainable urban development and participatory planning.



Actions: Offer courses, workshops, seminars and training programmes; develop educational materials.

Purpose: Implement training programs for municipal actors and urban stakeholders

C@H Guidelines; Capacity-building for Governance: Developing skills to manage urban challenges effectively

Outputs: Empowered municipal actors with the skills to innovate

Expected results: Based competence and knowledge of stakeholders involved in urban development processes.

Strategic Purpose:

This action focuses on developing a resilient, informed, and collaborative human ecosystem that can implement and sustain the Integrated Action Plan. Through tailored capacity-building and empowerment programs, it equips municipal staff, local organisations, and community stakeholders with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to co-drive innovation in the city centres of the Pentágono Urbano.

It recognises that institutional change only happens when people are ready and supported to lead it. This action builds the human infrastructure behind the Competence Centre, nurturing a new generation of urban changemakers.

Operational framework:

Upskilling Municipal Teams

- Design and deliver training modules on IAP themes: integrated urban planning, data-driven policy, public space design, mobility systems, participatory governance
- Promote peer learning across municipalities, using real PU projects as training labs
- Build capacity for cross-sector collaboration, with a focus on breaking silos between departments and disciplines

Engaging Civil Society & Community Actors

- Extend training and empowerment to non-governmental actors, including neighbourhood associations, youth organisations, cultural institutions, and SMEs
- Provide accessible toolkits, workshops, and mentoring formats to allow civil society to actively contribute to planning and implementation
- Develop a community of practice across PU with shared values of innovation, inclusion, and co-responsibility

Professionalisation of Urban Innovation

- Introduce a certification or recognition scheme for trained actors (municipal and civil society), linked to the Competence Centre's brand
- Encourage innovation in public service through calls for ideas, staff-led pilot projects, or thematic labs
- Promote a shift from project-based to culture-based innovation inside the municipalities

Expected Outcomes:

- A skilled, confident, and collaborative workforce across the PU municipalities
- Increased ability to design, test, and deliver innovative projects and services
- Greater inclusiveness and legitimacy of the IAP through broader community involvement
- Reduction of territorial and institutional fragmentation through shared training and language
- A foundation for long-term transformation grounded in people, not just plans

Action 04

PU URBAN INNOVATION LIVING LAB

Objective: To be a laboratory for innovative ideas and solutions to urban challenges.



Actions: Organize round tables, debates and forums; produce policy recommendations; promote interdisciplinary collaboration.

Purpose: Create a physical/virtual lab for testing urban innovation (smart mobility, sustainable infrastructure)

C@H Guidelines: Innovation for Sustainable Cities: Developing tested solutions for urban challenges.

Outputs: Proven solutions for urban challenges tested in the field

Expected results: Influence public policies and urban development practices with innovative, evidence-based ideas.

Strategic Purpose:

This action creates the Urban Innovation Living Lab, a space where the concepts, ambitions, and strategic priorities of the IAP are translated into real-life experimentation.

The Living Lab functions as an urban testing ground, allowing municipalities, citizens, researchers, and businesses to co-create, prototype, and evaluate innovative solutions in a controlled but realistic environment. It brings the IAP to life, not through blueprints, but through action, iteration, and learning by doing.

This action ensures that innovation is not only conceptual but tangible, visible, and scalable across the Pentágono Urbano.

Operational framework:**From Vision to Field Testing**

- Develop real-world pilot projects in key areas such as:
 - Active mobility corridors
 - Temporary public space interventions (e.g. parklets, street closures)
 - Tactical urbanism and cultural activations
 - Digital services for city centre users
- Test new governance tools, service delivery models, or infrastructure prototypes in selected areas or neighbourhoods

Inclusive Co-Creation

- Engage citizens, local businesses, NGOs, and cultural actors as co-designers, not just end-users
- Use participatory methods such as design sprints, hackathons, urban walks, or co-creation workshops
- Encourage bottom-up innovation, especially from groups typically underrepresented in planning processes

Learning by Doing

- Treat every pilot as a learning opportunity: document the process, monitor impacts, and adjust based on feedback
- Create frameworks to evaluate success and transferability, both within and beyond PU
- Foster a mindset of controlled risk-taking inside municipal teams

Expected Outcomes:

- Accelerated implementation of IAP themes through real-life action
- Increased visibility and momentum for the IAP at local and regional levels
- Strengthened collaboration between municipalities, citizens, and creative sectors
- Validated urban solutions that can be scaled, adapted, or institutionalised
- A culture of experimentation and agility inside local government structures

Cities@Heart Learnings

QU COMPETENCE CENTRE FOR URBAN INNOVATION

By implementing these four strategic actions, the PU Competence Centre for Urban Innovation positions itself as the operational heart of the Integrated Action Plan. It becomes a dynamic platform that not only coordinates projects but drives a culture of experimentation, learning, and transformation across the Quadrilátero Urbano.

The Centre acts as an engine of innovation, capable of turning strategy into practice through a model rooted in sustainability, knowledge, and participation. It anchors urban development in shared data, research-based policy, empowered local actors, and real-world testing, ensuring that change is both meaningful and measurable.

Critically, the Competence Centre is designed in full alignment with the URBACT methodology, and embodies an optimised integration of the Quadruple Helix model:

- Knowledge institutions generate evidence and foresight
- Public authorities provide leadership and coordination
- Businesses and innovators bring agility and applied solutions
- Citizens and civil society ensure legitimacy, inclusion, and co-creation

In doing so, the Centre becomes a European reference point for how small and medium-sized cities can jointly design and deliver resilient, people-centred urban transformation. It shows how integrated action is not only possible, but essential, when diverse urban actors share vision, responsibility, and trust.

Framework for Delivery

The PU IAP is aligning its IAP framework for delivery having in mind operational and function deliveries of interest to the Municipalities of Barcelos, Braga, Famalicão, Guimaraes and Viana do Castelo with the Key Strategic Adjustments Based on the Cities@Heart Guidelines:

Data-Driven Governance:

The PU Urban Traction Observer action emphasizes the need for data-driven governance, a key pillar from the URBACT guidelines. By using data dashboards and real-time urban monitoring, the Observer supports sustainable and evidence-based policy decisions.

Sustainability and Climate Resilience:


The Urban Research Agendas and Innovation Living Lab actions are aligned with the sustainability goals outlined in the Cities@Heart framework. They ensure that research and tested solutions drive climate adaptation, circular economy practices, and energy efficiency.

Inclusion and Participation:

The Actors & Agents Empowerment and Living Lab emphasize participatory approaches and capacity building. By engaging citizens, businesses, and municipal actors, these actions ensure that solutions are co-created and inclusive, addressing the diverse needs of urban populations.

Integrated Public Policies:

The Competence Centre itself serves as a platform for integrated public policies, ensuring cross-cutting solutions across sectors like mobility, housing, public space, and commerce, in line with the Cities@Heart integrated policy approach.



Resourcing

By implementing these four axes/Actions, the Competence Centre will be able to act as an engine of innovation and improvement for Pentágono Urbano, contributing to sustainable, informed and participatory urban development.

This centre can become a point of reference in the generation of knowledge, capacity building, political innovation and urban analysis and is aligned with the URBACT methodology and has in this model an optimised integration of the Quadruple Helix concept, placing, in addition to Knowledge Structures, the Corporate Sector and the Public Sector, a strong presence of Citizens and various civil society movements.

To ensure the successful implementation of the PU Integrated Action Plan, adequate and strategic resourcing is essential. This includes not only financial investment but also human, institutional, and technical capacities.

Financial Resources

Securing diverse funding sources is key to supporting the IAP actions. This involves:

- Leveraging national and EU funding programs (e.g., Portugal 2030, EU Green Deal, Horizon Europe, Urban Innovative Actions).
- Encouraging co-investment from private stakeholders.
- Mobilizing municipal budgets to support pilot actions and structural reforms.
- Exploring public-private partnerships for infrastructure and service delivery.

Human Resources

Capacitated staff is crucial for implementation. This requires:

- Appointing dedicated project teams within municipalities.
- Investing in training for urban innovation, project management, and citizen engagement.
- Engaging local academic institutions to provide technical expertise and student involvement.

Institutional Resources

Strong governance frameworks are needed to sustain coordination, including:

- Establishing cross-municipal coordination mechanisms.
- Defining clear roles and responsibilities for implementation.
- Promoting interdepartmental collaboration and stakeholder alignment.

Technical Resources

Digital tools and platforms are enablers of integrated action, including:

- Urban data observatories and dashboards for evidence-based policy.
- Participatory platforms for stakeholder engagement.
- Tools for monitoring, evaluation, and reporting.

The combination of these resources ensures the resilience and impact of the action plan. A continuous evaluation and adjustment mechanism is critical to adapt resources to evolving urban needs and policy landscapes.

Risk analysis

By implementing these four axes/Actions, the Competence Centre will be able to act as an engine of innovation and improvement for the Urban Quadrilateral, contributing to sustainable, informed and participatory urban development.

This centre can become a point of reference in the generation of knowledge, capacity building, political innovation and urban analysis and is aligned with the URBACT methodology and has in this model an optimised integration of the Quadruple Helix concept, placing, in addition to Knowledge Structures, the Corporate Sector and the Public Sector, a strong presence of Citizens and various civil society movements.

Implementing the Integrated Action Plan (IAP) involves navigating several potential risks. Identifying and mitigating these risks is critical to ensure the success and sustainability of the plan.

Financial Risk

Risk: Insufficient or delayed funding may jeopardize implementation.

Mitigation:

- Diversify funding sources.
- Align actions with funding programs timelines.
- Secure co-financing from public and private stakeholders.

Institutional Risk

Risk: Lack of coordination between municipalities and departments could hinder coherent action.

Mitigation:

- Establish clear governance structures.
- Define responsibilities and communication channels.
- Promote regular interdepartmental and intermunicipal meetings.

Stakeholder Engagement Risk

Risk: Low participation from key stakeholders may lead to limited legitimacy and ownership.

Mitigation:

- Maintain active communication and participation channels.
- Involve stakeholders from early stages and throughout implementation.
- Provide capacity-building and incentives for engagement.

Technical Risk

Risk: Inadequate technical skills or tools could affect the quality of implementation.

Mitigation:

- Invest in training and technical assistance.
- Partner with academic and research institutions.
- Use proven digital tools and platforms.

Political Risk

Risk: Changes in political leadership or priorities may affect continuity.

Mitigation:

- Anchor the IAP in long-term policy frameworks.
- Build cross-party consensus on strategic priorities.
- Ensure broad institutional support beyond electoral cycles.

Social Risk

Risk: Inequitable outcomes or resistance from specific groups.

Mitigation:

- Apply inclusive planning principles.
- Communicate benefits clearly.
- Monitor equity impacts regularly.

By proactively addressing these risks, the Pentágono Urbano can increase the robustness and resilience of its Integrated Action Plan, ensuring effective delivery and long-term impact.



Small Scale Action

The Pentágono Urbano Small Scale Action was designed by the ULG and during Cities@Heart transnational meetings and involving all the PU Mayors and PU representatives in order to launch a profound level of reflection about the IAP.

The Small Scale Action (SSA) developed under the Cities@Heart initiative serves as a flagship moment for the implementation of the Pentágono Urbano's Integrated Action Plan (IAP). More than a seminar, this action marks the public emergence of the PU Competence Centre for Urban Innovation as a platform for dialogue, collaboration, and strategic thinking.

“Cities in the City” Seminar

Date: 10 July 2025

Location: Altice Braga Forum

Framed around the themes of Mobility, Proximity, and Quality of Life, the seminar brings together municipal leadership from the PU, alongside internationally recognized experts in urban innovation. The event features contributions from:

- Professor Carlos Moreno, pioneer of the 15-Minute City concept
- Professor José Mendes, expert in sustainable urban mobility and public policy
- Architect Mar Santamaria, co-founder of 300.000 Km/s and digital urbanism strategist
- Dr. Pietro Elisei, urban planner and URBACT expert
- Dr. Simone d'Antonio, journalist and advisor on participatory urban governance

Strategic Value for the IAP

This SSA is designed as a living demonstration of the IAP's ambitions, activating the Competence Centre not through planning documents, but through real-world interaction and political commitment. It embodies:

- Cross-level alignment among municipalities, experts, and civil society
- Visibility for the IAP process, signaling institutional momentum
- A platform for collective reflection on local actions within a European urban agenda
- The first test of the Competence Centre's convening and thought leadership role

Expected Legacy

The outcomes of this seminar will feed directly into the refinement of the IAP's implementation phase, supporting the:

- Consolidation of strategic priorities
- Validation of multi-stakeholder governance models
- Shaping of future programming and capacity-building actions

By situating the IAP within both local political leadership and European expertise, this SSA strengthens the Pentágono Urbano's positioning as an active laboratory for innovative, people-centered city centre strategies.



URBACT

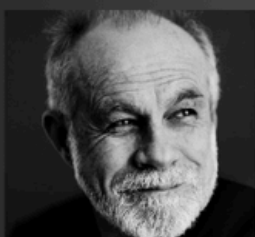


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Interreg

10.07.2025

14h30

ALTICE BRAGA FORUM



CITIES IN THE CITY

MOBILITY
PROXIMITY
QUALITY OF LIFE

Cities@Heart Small Scale Action



CITIES
@HEART

URBACT - GALATZU CITY ACTION



URBACT



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10.07.2025

ALTICE BRAGA FORUM

14h30

CITIES IN THE CITY

PROFESSOR CARLOS MORENO
PROFESSOR JOSÉ MENDES
ARCHITECT MAR SANTAMARIA
DR. PIETRO ELISEI
DR. SIMONE D'ANTONIO

MAYOR RICARDO RIO | BRAGA
MAYOR DOMINGOS BRAGANÇA | GUIMARÃES
MAYOR MÁRIO PASSOS | FAMALICÃO
MAYOR MÁRIO CONSTANTINO | BARCELOS
MAYOR LUÍS NOBRE | VIANA DO CASTELO

**MOBILITY
PROXIMITY
QUALITY OF LIFE**

Cities@Heart Small Scale Action



**CITIES
@HEART**

TRANSFORMING OUR CITIES

SECTION 08

Annexes



Pentágono Urbano
O futuro onde nos ligamos
The future where we connect

THANK YOU



Pentágono Urbano
O futuro onde nos ligamos
The future where we connect

PENTÁGONO URBANO INTEGRATED ACTION PLAN
CITIES@HEART