

September/December 2025

QUARTERLY NETWORK REPORT #6

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LAST QUARTERLY NETWORK REPORT...

The ECONNECTING network is proud to share that all partner cities have now published their **Integrated Action Plans**. These documents mark the final milestone of a two-year collective journey, during which partners worked side by side to rethink mobility across their territories. Together, we explored challenges, tested ideas, and co-designed innovative - yet above all sustainable - solutions aimed at bridging today's mobility gaps and shaping climate-resilient, people-centred territories. We hope this report will serve as a source of inspiration for all those who are now embarking on similar paths toward more connected communities. Enjoy the read!



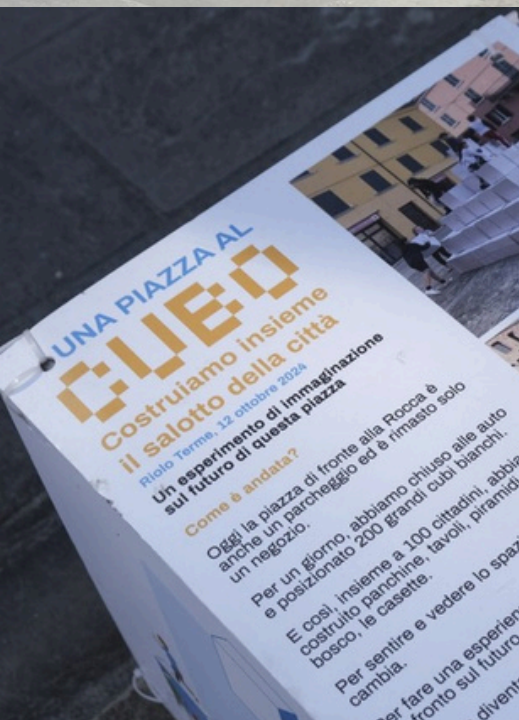
Final Transnational Meeting in Faenza

From 16th to 18th September 2025, Faenza (Italy) became a European laboratory for rethinking mobility and the relationship between cities and their surrounding rural areas. the Italian town hosted the 9th and final transnational meeting of the ECONNECTING network. The two-day programme began with a **study tour**, which gave participants the opportunity to experience the Romagna Faentina territory and its best practices first-hand. On the second day, the International Museum of Ceramics hosted the **final conference**, which brought together institutional representatives, international experts, administrators and local stakeholders to reflect on the three-year project that prioritised accessibility, sustainability and community participation.

With small town comes great potential

The hands-on study tour - titled “Urban–Rural Connection” - aimed demonstrate how local initiatives and heritage can be linked to sustainable mobility and participatory planning.

The first stop was **Riolo Terme**, where urban-rural linkages were explored. The day began with welcome remarks from Mayor Federica Malavolti and included a visit to the historical centre of Riolo Terme. During a mid-morning break at the **Zappi Cycling Hotel**, participants were given a practical insight into tourism-friendly mobility services and local stakeholder engagement through a presentation of local smart mobility solutions and an on-site co-creation session led by the Romagna Faentina’s team. Riolo Terme is located in the heart of a thermal area on the hills between Imola and Faenza — a perfect location for cycling enthusiasts and sports lovers — and has focused its strategy on becoming a cycling-friendly town to attract visitors who appreciate contact with nature.






Last Transnational meeting in Faenza

One of Italy's most beautiful villages: Brisighella

After a networking lunch, the group visited Brisighella, a medieval village recognised as one of Italy's "Most Beautiful Villages" and certified as a "**Slow City**" from the "**Cittaslow**" **consortium**, which approaches tourism through authentic and sustainable experiences. Massimiliano Pederzoli, Mayor of Brisighella, and Karen Chiarini, Councillor for Culture and Tourism, accompanied the participants on a guided walk through the town's heritage-rich streets, illustrating how local cultural assets and sustainable tourism can reinforce one another.

Local networks for sustainable rural tourism



The afternoon concluded in Torre di Oriolo, a tower representing the last remains of an ancient medieval castle, with a meeting of the local association responsible for promoting sustainable tourism in this rural area. The association is mainly composed of local agricultural producers, restaurateurs, artisans and winemakers who are united not only by proximity, but also by a desire to work together to promote the historical, natural and cultural heritage of Torre di Oriolo. The municipality and the Union strengthened their relationship with the association, pursuing the shared goal of bringing a spotlight to this rural area and breathing new life into it.

The ECONNECTING team ran another co-creation workshop at this location, during which the EU Office of Romagna Faentina presented several European projects on sustainable tourism, linking mobility, local identity and visitor management.



The final conference in Faenza

The final conference provided an opportunity to reflect on the results achieved during the two-year implementation of the ECONNECTING project and to explore future prospects at local and European levels. Key topics covered included 30-minute territories, sustainable mobility, integrated urban policies, and the role of local communities in the ecological transition.

The agenda included two notable international contributions. **Catherine Gall**, Executive Director of the ETI Research Lab at the University of Sorbonne, presented successful examples of proximity-based mobility models adopted in several European cities. Furthermore, **Shelley Bontje**, a project manager at the Dutch Cycling Embassy, presented the latest policies introduced in the Netherlands to promote soft mobility, emphasising their positive effects on people's well-being and the environment.

During the conference, Roland Krebs, the project's lead expert, presented the **ECONNECTING Manifesto**: a synthesis

of the network's lessons learned and a shared commitment to future action. Conceived as a call to municipalities, regions, and communities, the manifesto urges stakeholders to strengthen territorial connections and shape resilient rural futures. It proposes concrete pathways for action grounded in **six guiding principles** designed to foster cooperation, political support, and long-term commitment.



Above: Catherine Gall
On the right: Shelley Bontje



The ECONNECTING Manifesto is launching a set of principles to help territories build better connections. It is extremely inspiring.

— **Irina Rotaru**, Project Officer URBACT Secretariat



International projects like ECONNECTING demonstrate that European collaboration can drive real change in our cities.

— **Moira Rotondo**, Italian URBACT National Contact Point



The end of the project is not a conclusion, but the beginning of a phase where ideas become concrete actions.

— **Simone D'Antonio**, urban development expert and moderator of the conference



The key message that we must convey in Europe and in our territories is that small and medium-sized towns matter, and that the urban-rural divide can be overcome through the innovations we can implement.

— **Nadia Carboni**, Lead Partner and Project Manager ECONNECTING network

The ECONNECTING Manifesto

European cities and regions are undergoing major transformation. An ongoing urban crisis of climate change, demographic change and population loss in rural areas, but also opportunities of rapid digitalisation are reshaping urban and rural areas profoundly. In light of these developments, the cities and regions involved in URBACT ECONNECTING Action Planning Network elaborated the “**ECONNECTING Manifesto**” in a joint effort that calls for joint, long-term solutions that build on cooperation across the urban-rural spectrum. In this context, urban-rural linkages are central to forward-looking regional (mobility) development. Both the New Leipzig Charter and the EU Territorial Agenda 2030 emphasize the importance of strengthening connections between cities, towns, and the villages through integrated, place-based, and multilevel governance approaches. This policy framework underlines that inclusive and sustainable regional development depends on coordinated planning between the urban and surrounding rural territories, ensuring that all places can realize their unique potential.

The ECONNECTING manifesto is a call to municipalities, regions and communities to connect territories, and shape resilient rural futures. We offer ways of action guided by six principals that inspire cooperation, political support, and long-term commitment.

It is a reminder that change begins locally - with people and places - and grows stronger through regional and national collaboration, guided by sustainable mobility planning and mobility shift that leads to more a sustainable zero carbon regional development. Based on the ECONNECTING network's sustainable mobility solutions and urban regeneration actions that are following the Integrated Action Plans (IAP), the manifesto outlines **six key principles** for thriving villages and regional hubs with strong urban-rural linkages.

1. *Modern and inclusive mobility as a backbone of territorial cohesion*
2. *Intact centres as catalysts for liveable villages, towns and cities*
3. *Strategic regional planning for compact and polycentric development*
4. *Digital connectivity as a key to inclusive regions*
5. *Resources and needs as drivers of local economic development*
6. *Strengthening decision-making and governance structures through new regional partnerships*

Let's spread the Manifesto throughout Europe!

[Read Roland Krebs' full article](#)
or [download the ECONNECTING Manifesto](#)

*Towards a more sustainable urban mobility
and better connected urban areas!*

Integrated Action Plans

All Integrated Action Plans (IAPs) developed by the ECONNECTING partners are freely available for download in the “**Network outputs**” section of the project’s webpage.

These documents provide a concrete overview of each partner’s **strategies** for sustainable mobility, urban–rural connections, and proximity-based services, designed through inclusive, digital, and green approaches.

By making the IAPs openly accessible, ECONNECTING reinforces its commitment to transparency and supports wider engagement, co-design, and the exchange of good practices across European communities.

UNIONE ROMAGNA FAENTINA

Safety School Islands

This initiative seeks to foster a more welcoming and secure environment, encouraging walking, cycling, and other forms of active transportation for students as they arrive and depart from school.



TORI VALD

Eco-tourism Trail Development

The absence of eco-tourism trails limits the opportunities to showcase Jõesuu’s unique biodiversity, cultural heritage, and recreational potential.

CIM VISEU DÃO LAFÕES

Mobility Digital Twin

The already existing analytical platform for mobility management will be implemented with new data collection and analysis systems features to assist the decisions of the Transport Authority.

BERANE

Reactivation of the old bus station

The restoration and modernization of Berane’s bus station will serve as a central mobility hub, improving the city’s accessibility and facilitating connections with other regions.

Integrated Action Plans



ENNIS MUNICIPAL DISTRICT

Walking/Cycling Buses for Schools

Ennis plans to enhance walking and cycling bus initiatives as part of the “Safe Routes to School” program. This initiative aims to decrease car dependency, encourage physical activity, improve road safety awareness, and promote independence among children.



WEST MANI

Digital Hub in Kardamyli

Thanks to the restoration and re-functionalisation of the old elementary school in Kardamyli, this space will be used as a coworking space for remote workers and will occasionally host exhibitions.

**AND MUCH MORE
ON OUR WEBPAGE!**



RCC ORMOZ

Revitalization of Kerencic Square

This action aims to transform the central square, which is currently car-oriented and lacks green infrastructure and public amenities, into a pedestrian-friendly, green and multifunctional public space that promotes sustainable mobility and reduces car use.



NAGYKALLO

Multiageing Playgrounds

Currently, there is no community space in the city designed specifically for the needs of elderly residents. Therefore, Nagykálló is planning to establish playgrounds and fitness parks offering opportunities for active recreation for users of all ages.





New episodes on air!



#7 Catherine Gall

The 30-minutes territories explained



#8 Unione della Romagna Faentina

Bike to Work and Faenza's ECONNECTING Journey.



#9 Shelley Bontje

Bike to Work and Faenza's ECONNECTING Journey.

Three new episodes of the ECONNECTING podcast are now available on Spotify. Our lead expert Roland Krebs interviews **Catherine Gall**, Executive Director of the ETI Research Laboratory at Paris Sorbonne, **Nadia Carboni**, Head of Economic Development and Smart City of the Unione della Romagna Faentina in Italy, and **Shelley Bontje**, Project Manager of the Dutch Embassy.

Catherine discusses the concept of 30-minute territories as an integrated regional development strategy, what it takes to meet the needs of people living outside major urban centers, and how to bridge the gap between academic research and real-world challenges. In the episode #7, you may also dive into the increasingly debated 15-minute city model—exploring why, despite its popularity, it has sparked controversy and doesn't resonate with everyone.

In episode #8, Nadia shares the story behind the successful "Bike to Work" initiative, which encourages residents to cycle instead of driving. The conversation highlights the program's impact on mobility habits and offers insights into effective policy design. Nadia also reflects on the ECONNECTING journey, emphasizing the importance of testing actions and learning from communities.

Finally, in episode #9, Shelley explains how cycling can transcend municipal borders to promote regional connectivity. Drawing on Dutch experience and European practice, she shares her thoughts on cross-municipal cooperation, 30-minute territories and integrating cycling with public transport and regional hubs. This conversation highlights how cycling can help shape more connected, resilient and inclusive regions, from city-to-city bike networks to revitalising smaller towns and villages.

News from RRC Ormoz

Day for Sustainable Mobility – Day for the Future

The event “**Day for Sustainable Mobility – Day for the Future**” held on October 10th in Ormož, brought together schools, families, and local experts to explore greener and safer ways of moving through the city.

A central highlight was the **round table**, where the Mayor of Ormož, Danijel Vrbnjak, and the representative of the Ministry for the Environment, Climate and Energy, Jošt Šmajdek, joined Karmen Razlag, Dr Aidan Cerar, Urška Kranjc, headmaster Aleksander Šterman and Dr Nataša Majcen to discuss sustainable mobility and the future of urban spaces.



Schools played a major role: pupils visited stands, learned about traffic safety, tried simple bike repairs and reflected on how their everyday travel choices affect health and the environment. Throughout the day, visitors tested e-bikes, e-scooters, and electric cars, met police and road safety teams, and enjoyed creative performances, music, and dance that demonstrated how sustainable habits can also be fun and inspiring.

[Watch the video to relive the Day for Sustainable Mobility!](#)



Tools of the month

Role play session during our TM in Tori,
Estonia in February 2025
Photo credits: Roland Krebs

ROLE PLAY

Role Play can be used either with other tools during creative design workshops or after creating the urban strategy to gather opinions from different perspectives. Because it is interactive, participants can bring a variety of ideas, visions, perceptions, or related strategies to the discussion. Through role playing, **the suitability of a design can be tested** on different types of stakeholder and modified according to the workshop outcomes.

What are the interests and needs of the groups affected by the proposed project? Do the project proposals and strategies respond to these demands? How can these proposals and strategies be improved to better serve the interests and fulfil the needs of diverse social groups?

We can **define various roles**, such as government officer, entrepreneur, market vendor, old person, child, etc. A handout with a short description of the characters can be prepared to help participants identify with their assigned roles.

In order to obtain more precise feedback, **maps** and a **3D model** of the proposed design should be available at the workshop. On each table, a **poster** and **pens** for the participants should be on hand. Each participant is assigned a role as to who they will act out during the workshop. The handout providing the corresponding role description should be distributed to the participants. One role should be given to 4–8 participants in order for them to form a discussion group.

Each group should go to a table and discuss the following questions:

- Does the proposal serve the interests of the group and its individual members?
- How could the strategy be improved to increase positive impacts and decrease negative impacts on group members?
- What dimensions are missing in the proposal?
- Which aspects should be added to the proposal?

Tools of the month

DOT VOTING

This tool can be a very helpful way to elicit the **preferences of stakeholders**. It aims to identify the ideas, scenarios, and solutions that are preferred by participants. Thanks to voting - a simple method - stakeholders can better understand the proposals and share their perspectives about them. The tool can also be a way to **rate ideas** according to the stakeholders' priorities and choices.

The leading questions are:

- what are the stakeholders' main preferences regarding ideas, scenarios, and solutions for the project?
- How do they prioritize them?
- How do the stakeholders rate certain ideas, scenarios, and solutions for the project?
- What are their reasons for the rating?

Options and ideas should be chosen or discussed with the group through another tool prior to the session. The ideas are then presented in such a way that the whole group can see them; this is best achieved by using **one poster per idea**. Posters are then hung up on a wall. Each participant is provided with the same number of **dot stickers**. Though the number can vary, five stickers per participant provides a certain freedom while calling for participants to make individual decisions.

The project ideas or alternative planning scenarios should be presented to the group by the responsible planning team(s). Any questions about the ideas can be answered during the presentations. After the presentations, participants are asked to distribute the stickers as votes for their favorite ideas or projects by placing the stickers on the corresponding posters. Voting can either make use of the posters or of separate sheets handed out to the participants.

There may be **specific rules**, such as no double voting, and the participants should be informed about these before the voting starts. However, voting rules are optional. After each participant has finished voting, the results are compared and the organizer can launch a discussion with the group, asking the reasons why participants voted for a given proposal.

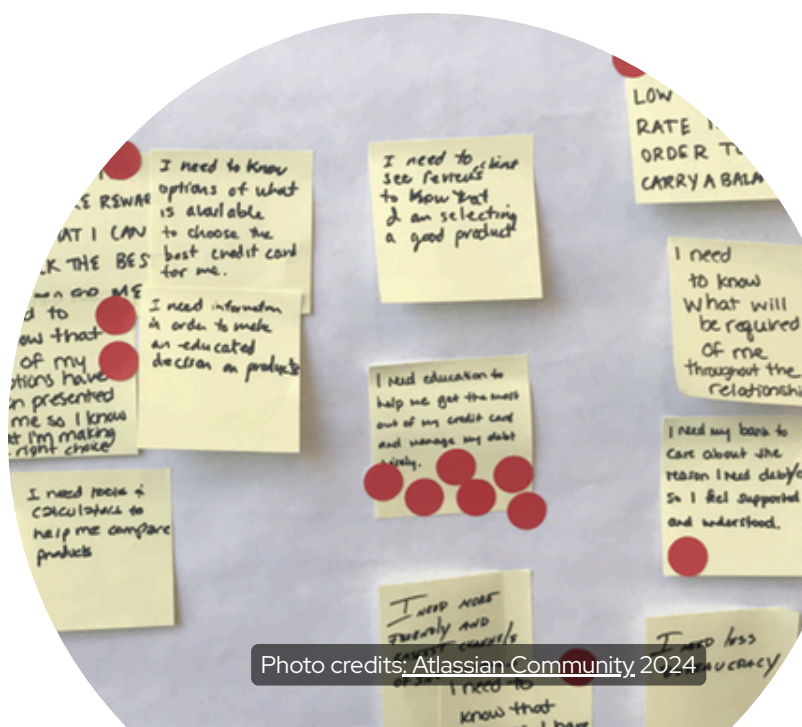


Photo credits: Atlassian Community 2024

Looking ahead... much more to come!



The work of the ECONNECTING network does not end here. The Integrated Action Plans are moving from the vision stage to implementation, turning ideas into concrete actions within our territories. This shared experience will be showcased at the next **URBACT City Festival**, which will take place in Nicosia (31 March - 1 April 2026). There, European cities will present their stories and local actions, including those of the ECONNECTING network. Celebrating the cities and practices that shape our urban communities, the festival provides an opportunity to share knowledge, explore urban trends and establish new partnerships, thereby reinforcing the importance of collaboration in fostering greater connectivity within our territories. ECONNECTING looks to the future with confidence, ready to continue shaping connected communities across Europe.



URBACT



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