

# CITIES@HEART

TOWARDS A BALANCED CITY CENTRE

## 6th QUARTERLY NETWORK REPORT ♥

April 2025  
June 2025



URBACT



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Interreg

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## ♥ 1. Cities@Heart

**Cities@Heart** mobilises ten European urban areas. Led by the Greater Paris Metropolis (a public entity with a sound track record in downtown revitalisation policy), network partners work together to understand the way **city centres** function and create a new framework to be used in city centre improvement initiatives.

**Quadrilátero Urbano**  
(Portugal)

**Granada** (Spain)

**Sligo** (Ireland)

**Greater Paris Métropole**  
(France)

**Fleurus** (Belgium)

**Cesena** (Italy)

**Celje** (Slovenia)

**Osijek** (Croatia)

**Krakow Métropole** (Poland)

**Amfiktyonies** (Greece)



## ♥ 2. Where are we in our pathway to the City Centre toolbox?

Our roadmap proposes to exchange best practices and define indicators for public policies deployed in the city centre to generate a series of thematic objectives.

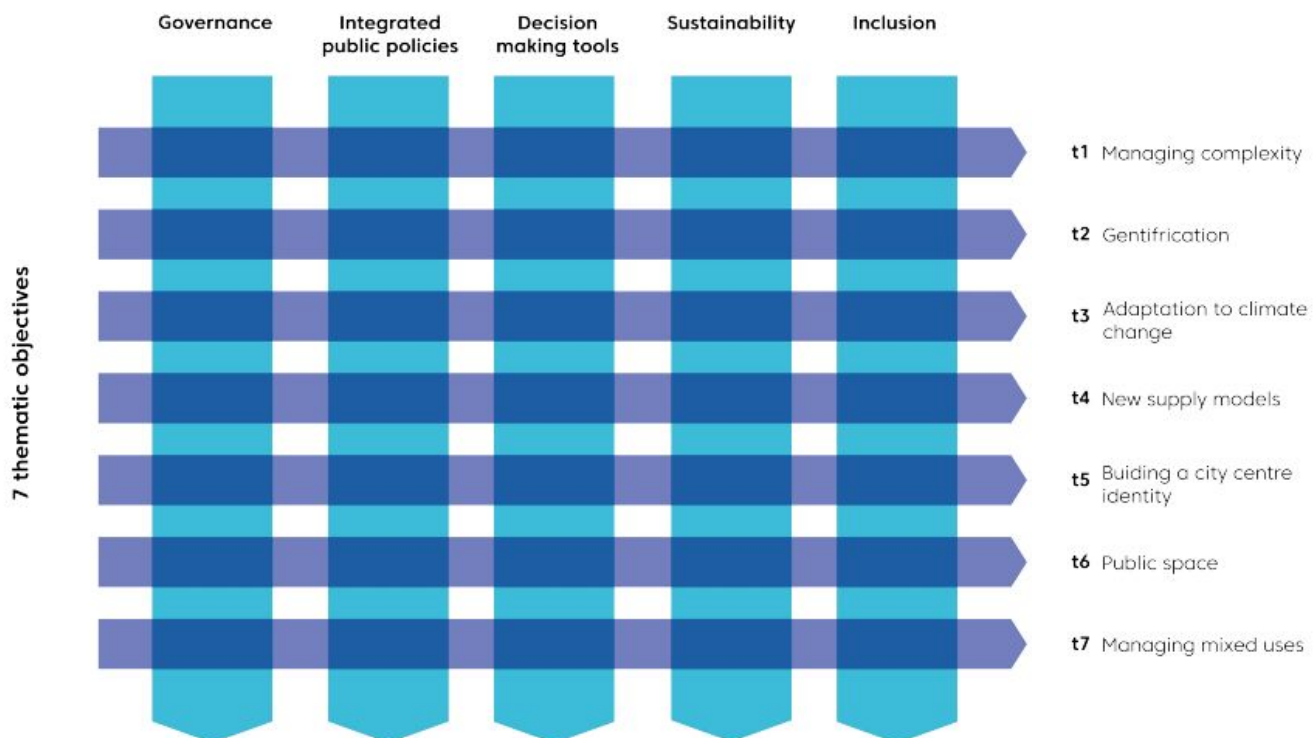
After more than a year and a half of network activity (meetings and dedicated workshops), we have explored all the topics proposed in the Baseline Study. The knowledge generated around these thematics will help us structure the final guidelines through a series of levers and their associated actions and indicators.

### Highlights!

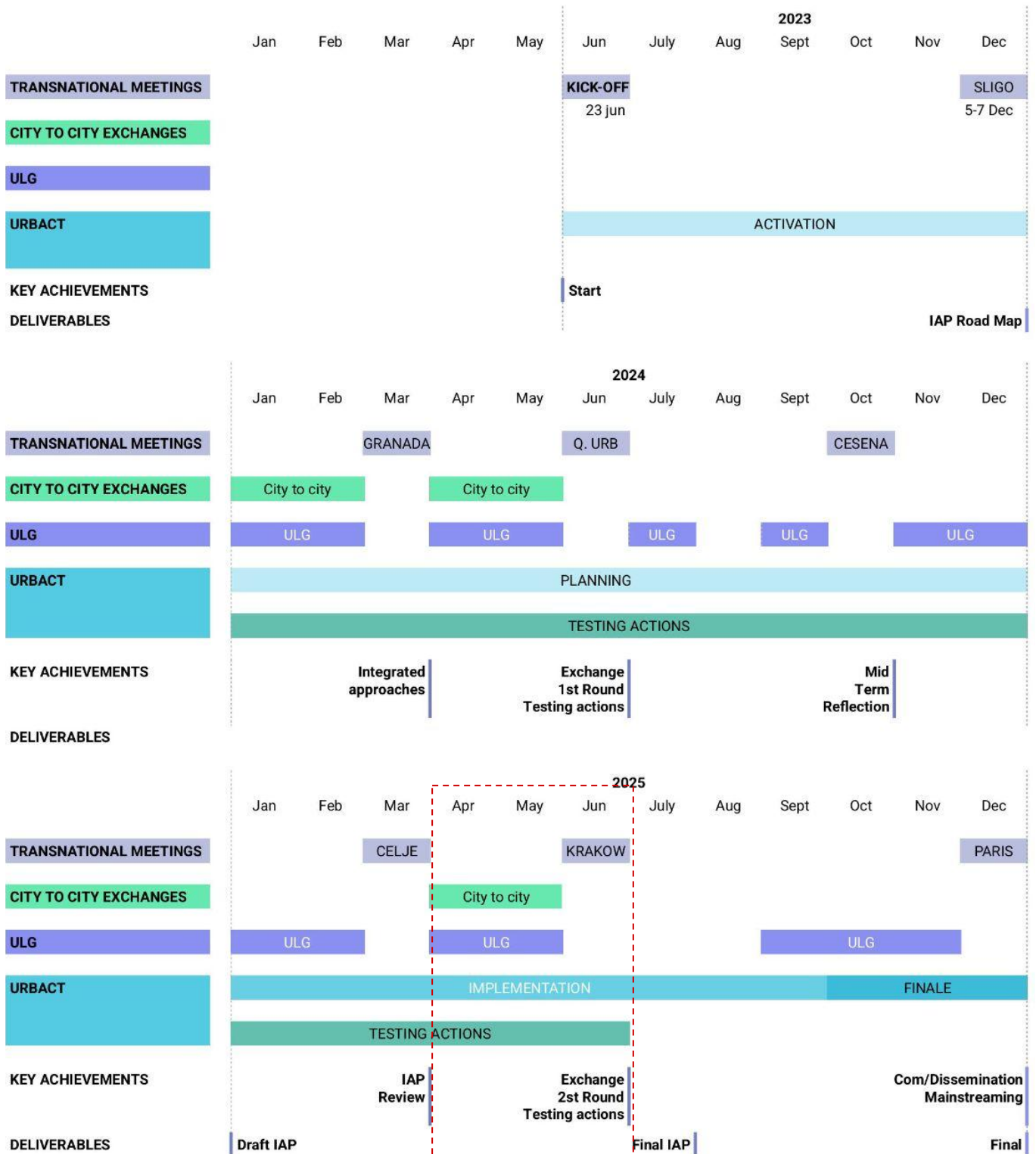
- 7 strategic objectives
- 5 Transnational meetings
- 8 online meetings
- 3 online webinars

### Coming soon!

The partners have also proposed to make in-depth focus, organised by clusters of cities.



## 2. Our pathway to the city centres toolbox





### ♥ 3. What is going on in the network?

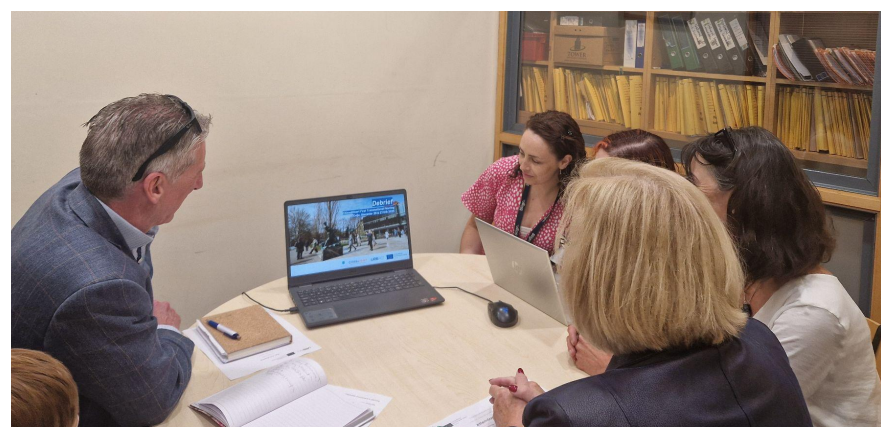
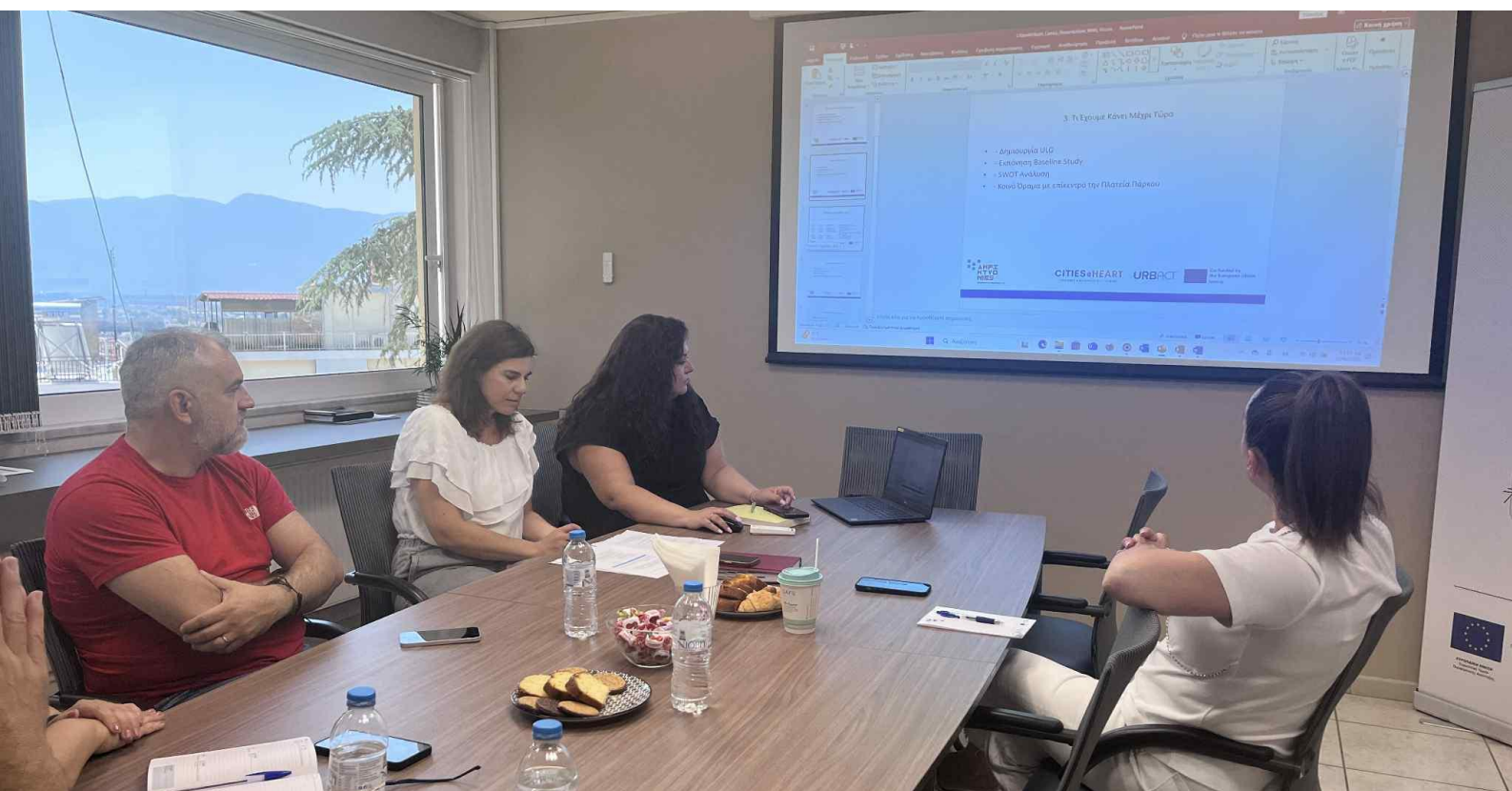
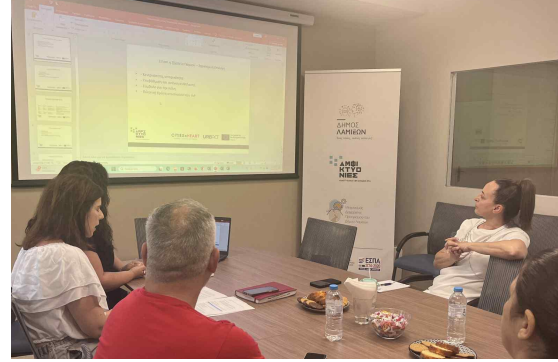
Throughout this second quarter of the year, the URBACT Local Groups (ULGs) in each city have been deeply involved in a series of collaborative meetings. These sessions have served as a valuable forum for co-creating IAP visions and objectives and defining the Action Tables together with the local stakeholders.

ULGs seek to drive meaningful progress that aligns with the overarching objectives of the network while addressing the unique challenges and opportunities within their respective cities.

**Developing partnerships involving local authorities, beneficiaries/users, NGOs, public agencies, the private sector and the civil society has proven to be a key component in the design and implementation of efficient urban policies.**







## 4. Our Quarterly best practices

The best practices of this period are synthesized from those presented in a webinar.

**4.1. Amfiktyonies: Smart crossings**

**4.2. Fleurus: Evolution underway**

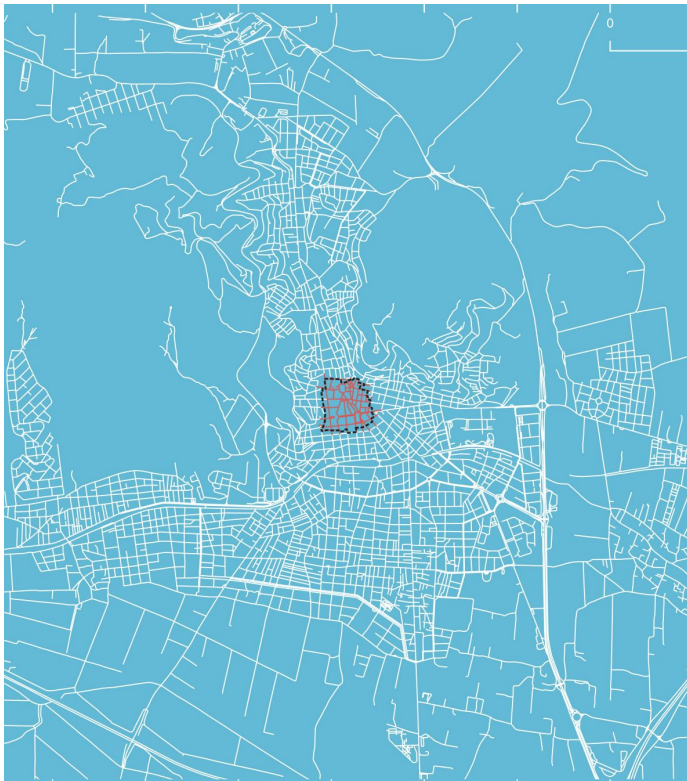
**4.3. Osijek: Implementation of New European BAUHAUS principles**



## ♥ 4.1. Amfiktyonies: Lamia Smart crossings

Lamia is located in the region of Central Greece, on the slope of Mount Othrys near the river Spercheios.

The municipality covers a surface of 413.5 km<sup>2</sup> and is home to 66,657 inhabitants, equivalent to a density of 193.5 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>. Despite a predominantly youthful demographic, the city's population has declined by 12.9% between 2011 and 2021, and today less than half of its residents live in the city centre.



## ♥ 4.1. Amfiktyonies: Lamia Smart crossings

The city centre of Lamia faces multiple interconnected challenges of congestion, commercial decline, deteriorating infrastructure, scarce public green space, and limited digital capacity. All of which hinder progress toward a more livable and smart urban environment.

**The strategy focuses on developing public-private partnerships, improving pedestrian and green infrastructure, updating public transportation, and fortifying Lamia's identity to drive urban regeneration and tourism development.**

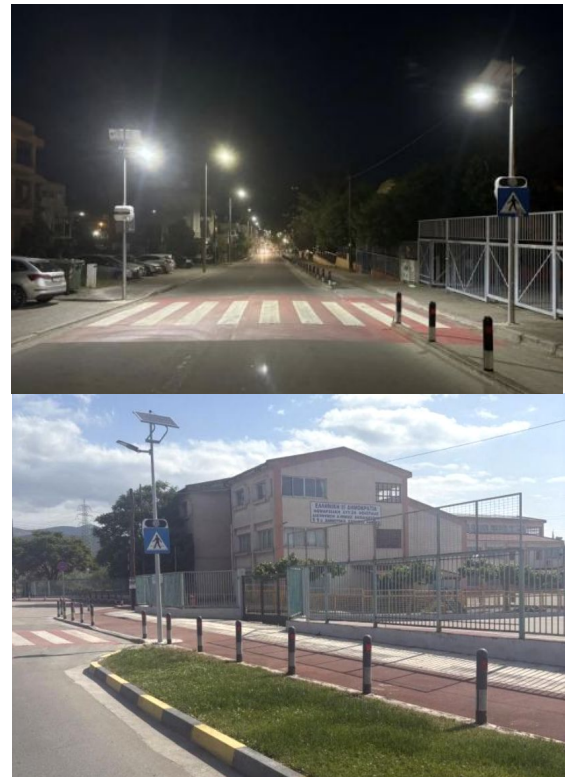




## ♥ 4.1. Amfiktyonies: Lamia Smart crossings

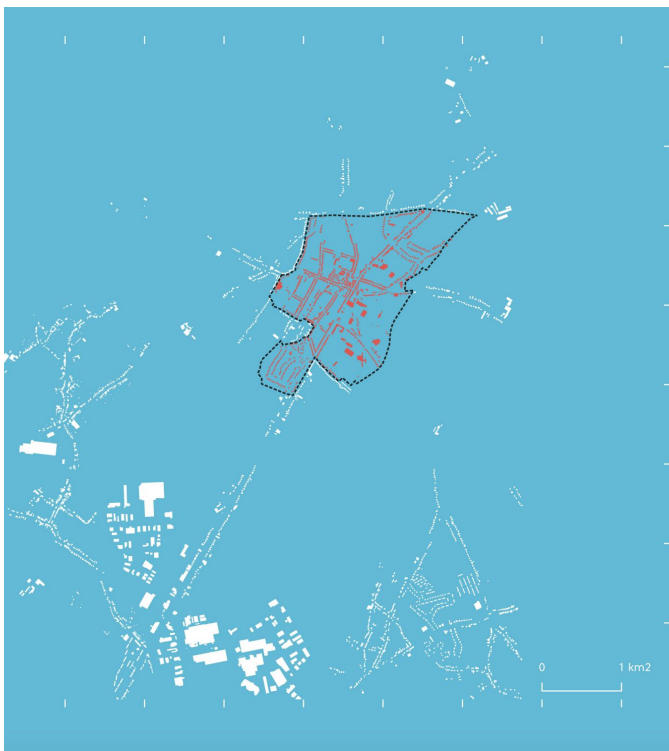
The smart crossings incorporate advanced technological systems, such as motion sensors and LED lights, to improve visibility and pedestrian recognition, while also communicating with vehicles and infrastructure. Furthermore, the crossings are equipped with visual and auditory features to ensure safety and accessibility for people with disabilities, guaranteeing full access and information for citizens regardless of their individual needs.

**Lamia has implemented 41 smart crossings across schools, the city center, and key public buildings, significantly improving safety and accessibility.**



## ♥ 4.2. Fleurus: Evolution underway

Fleurus is situated in the north of Wallonia, the southern region of Belgium, placing it near the country's geographic centre and under the metropolitan influence of Charleroi. The municipality covers a surface of 59.28 km<sup>2</sup> and is located in a primarily agricultural area, bordered by expansive urban zones. Functioning mainly as a 'bedroom community', most of its residents commute to work outside Fleurus. With approximately 22,293 inhabitants (19.3% aged over 65 and 22.6% under 20), the population has recently increased by around 1.8%, largely as a result of new urban developments.





## ♥ 4.2. Fleurus: Evolution underway

### Governance Structure

The municipality, under the leadership of the Mayor, defines priorities in social support, public services, and community development.

### Key Challenges

The strategy includes the revitalization of Albert ler Square through green and placemaking interventions, the activation and management of vacant commercial units, and the integration of art into the city center via murals and creative installations. Additionally, it outlines a six-year Tourism Development Plan structured around the municipality's key thematic priorities: Nature and Leisure, Memory and Heritage, and Folklore and Events.

During the last mandate, the City Council administration has developed different plans for the revitalisation of the centre of Fleurus. The most important strategy is the 'Transform Fleurus' plan, which aims to restructure the fabric of the city's heart via real estate operations and interventions in public space.



## ♥ 4.2. Fleurus Shop in Fleurus

“**Shop in Fleurus**” is a local initiative designed to promote city-center businesses and strengthen community engagement through events and partnerships. The program addresses commercial vacancy and service improvement via two grant schemes: *Je m’installe*, which supports the creation of new businesses in the city center, and *Je me réinvente*, which helps existing shops modernize their offer. With a municipal budget of €15,000, the initiative has contributed to the economic revitalization of the city center. Nonetheless, challenges remain, particularly the small size and poor condition of many commercial units and the municipality’s limited ability to compel private owners—who control most vacant spaces—to carry out necessary renovations.

**The city center of Fleurus has changed little over the past century, the most significant difference being the slow but steady disappearance of local shops. The Shop'in Fleurus initiative aims to counter this trend.**





## ♥ 4.2. Fleurus Château de la Paix

### Transformation of the old city hall into a new major touristic asset

The transformation of the old City Hall into a new major touristic asset represents a flagship project for Fleurus. The initiative involves the construction of new high-efficiency buildings to accommodate administrative services, alongside the creation of a museum, festive spaces, a tourist information center, and visitor facilities within the historic Castle of the Peace. With an annual investment of €100,000 over five years from the municipal budget, complemented by contributions from the Walloon tourism budget through grants and subsidies, the project seeks to establish this site as the departure point for all touristic activities in the city. Key challenges remain, particularly in positioning Fleurus as a tourist destination beyond national borders and in reshaping perceptions to build confidence in the city as a leisure and cultural destination.



## ♥ 4.3. Osijek: Implementation of New European BAUHAUS principles

### City Center Profile

Osijek, the fourth-largest city in Croatia with a population of around 96,300 (2021), is the dominant urban center of eastern Slavonia. It stands out for having the most green spaces in the country, including 17 parks covering 394,000 m<sup>2</sup>. The city center, spanning 0.87 km<sup>2</sup> (1.5% of the total 59.1 km<sup>2</sup>), combines residential, commercial, and institutional uses, while facing ongoing population decline due to out-migration—an issue the city seeks to reverse.

Osijek faces significant urban challenges, including the decay of Austro-Hungarian and Yugoslav-era buildings that demand costly renovation, and economic constraints that require balancing investment in the city center with pressing needs in education, health, and suburban areas. Further difficulties arise from the lack of a coordinated urban vision, while issues of mobility—marked by car dominance, parking shortages, and fragmented transport links—continue to limit accessibility and sustainable development.





## ♥ 4.3. Osijek: Implementation of New European BAUHAUS principles

### Best Practice 1

Green Courtyard Revitalization“Green Courtyards” Initiative: Osijek has embarked on an innovative project to revitalize historic inner-city courtyards as green, climate-resilient public spaces. Under the EU-funded RE-PUBLIC SPACES program.

The goal is to turn them into attractive community micro-parks that are accessible to all residents (including those with limited mobility).



## ♥ 4.3. Osijek: Implementation of New European BAUHAUS principles

### Best Practice 2

**The Eyes-Hands-Hearts Urban Revolution** applies the New European Bauhaus principles of sustainability, inclusivity, and beauty to transform four locations in Osijek. The initiative actively engages local authorities, entrepreneurs, associations, and residents in co-design processes, ensuring that the reconstructed sites reflect community needs while becoming functional, inclusive, and attractive public spaces for social interaction.

### Best Practice 3: Modernization of urban transport

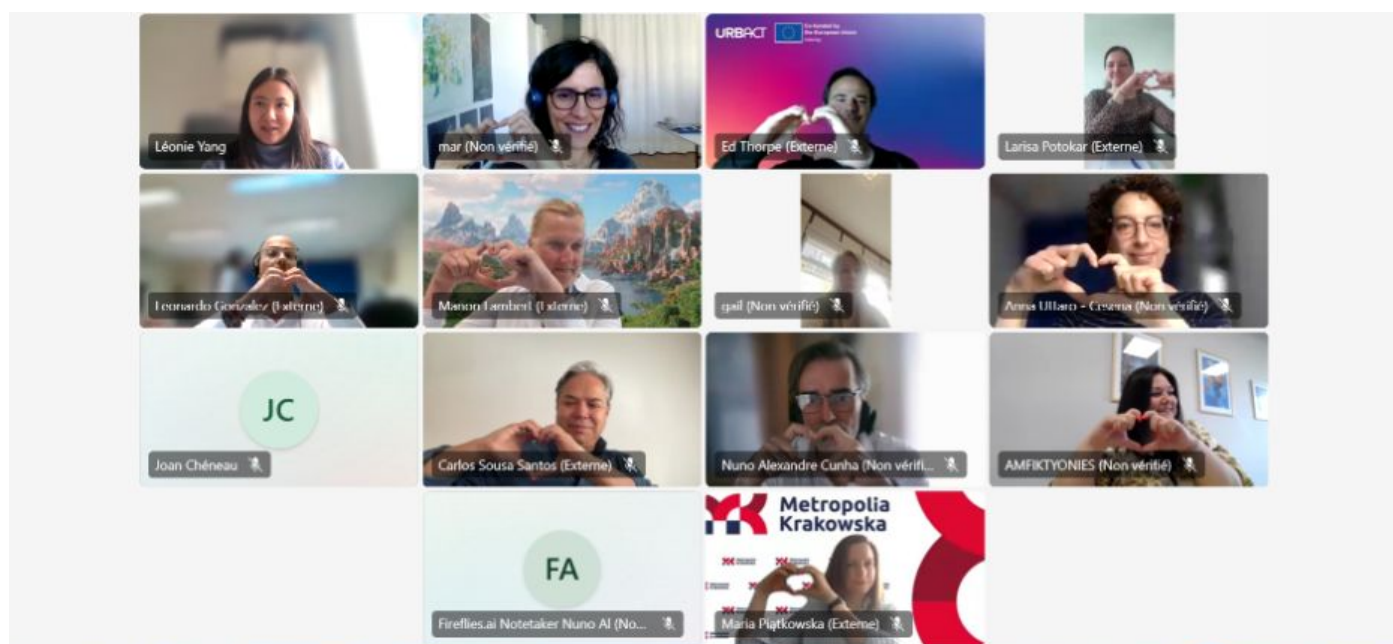
Osijek is modernizing its urban transport system to reduce car dependency and emissions, investing €45 million in tram infrastructure, procuring 10 new low-floor trams (with an option for 10 more), and expanding its fleet with 20 new low-floor electric buses—representing the city's most significant public transport investment in over a decade.



## ♥ 5. Integrated Action Plan Review

During this quarter, the cities in the network refined their IAP visions and objectives. These drafts were reviewed in two key sessions.

In the online session, partners shared progress on their IAPs and SSAs, integrating feedback and addressing local challenges, while the Lead Expert emphasized clarity, prioritization, and governance in IAP development.

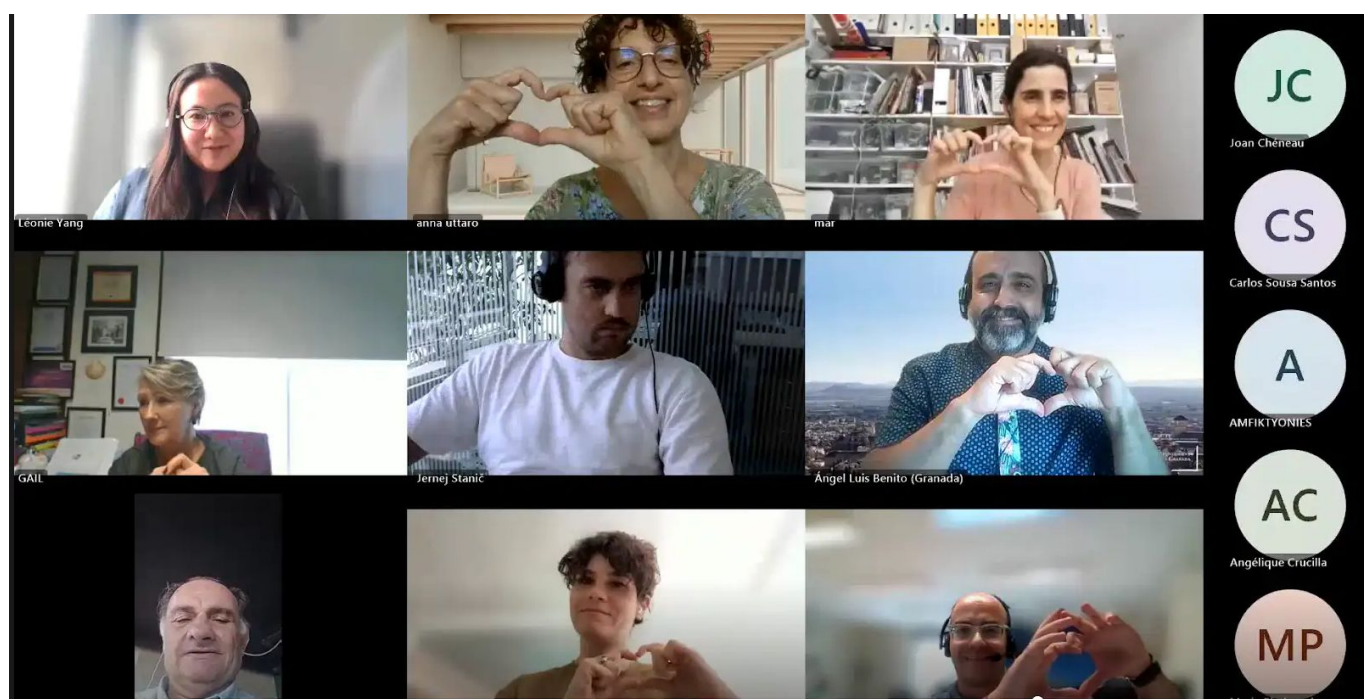




## ♥ 5. Integrated Action Plan Review

In the other online session, it gathered 16 participants and focused on IAP finalization, SSA progress, governance, funding, and citizen engagement. Partners shared updates on their local projects, ranging from Fleurus' mural pathway and Krakow's metropolitan integration, to Quadrilatero's governance challenges, Celje's new administrative body, and Granada's postponed SSA.

Additional highlights included Sligo's vacancy data verification, Paris Métropole's citizen workshop, Cesena's World Café, Amfiktyonies' new expert support, and Osijek's façade and library renovations. Across cases, governance structures, stakeholder engagement, and financing strategies emerged as critical issues. The meeting concluded with next steps on best practice identification and toolkit development to strengthen the final deliverables.





## ♥ 6. Upcoming milestones

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### **SIXTH TRANSNATIONAL MEETING** **Krakow - July 2025**

The **upcoming transnational meeting in Krakow** will begin the final phase, focusing on refining and testing activities (second round), detailing actions (identifying resources and clarifying stakeholder responsibilities), and conducting risk analysis to ensure the effective implementation of the Integrated Action Plan (IAP).

In Krakow, we will **focus on the challenges of over tourism and urban regeneration.**

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### **LEARNING ACTIVITIES**

In addition to the transnational meetings, we will be organising webinars on specific topics of interest to the partners.

**Thank you,**  
**And stay posted for more!**



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