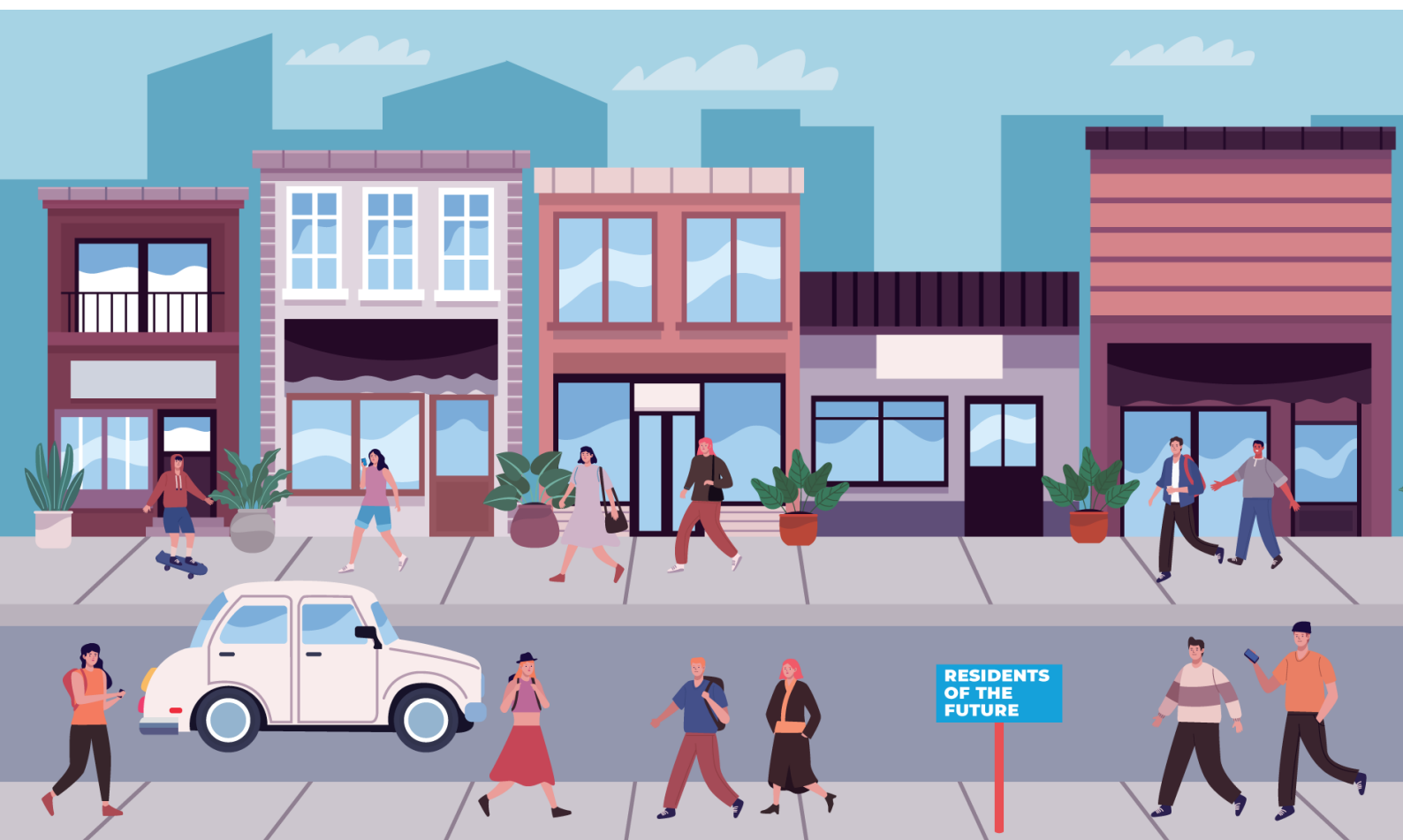


7th Quarterly Report

Residents of the Future



URBACT



Co-funded by
the European Union
Interreg

7th Quarterly Report

Residents of the Future

July to September 2025

URBACT



Co-funded by
the European Union
Interreg

Index

- 1. Welcome to Residents of the Future4
- 2. What's new on Residents of the Future?5
- 3. What's Next on Residents of the Future? 19
- 4. Final remarks20

1. Welcome to Residents of the Future

Residents of the Future is an action plan URBACT network that wants to address the issue of urban depopulation within small and medium-sized cities. By focusing on digital transformation, economic diversification, and city branding, it will explore innovative approaches towards evolving trends in work, lifestyle, and communication, to enhance the cities' attractiveness for prospective investments and inhabitants.

The network enables cities to redefine their advantages in comparison to larger metropolitan areas, and develop holistic, citizen-centric solutions that support demographic revitalisation and sustainable urban growth.



Network members:

Alba Iulia - Romania

Lisalmi - Finland

Mangualde - Portugal

Mantova - Italy

Plasencia - Spain

Saint-Quentin - France

Saldus – Latvia

Sibenik – Croatia | **Lead Partner**

Trebinje - Bosnia-Herzegovina

2. What is new on Residents of the Future?

2.1 Residents of the Future: From Final Plans to Shared Stories

As Residents of the Future enters its final phase, the July to September 2025 period marked a shift from strategic consolidation to public visibility and shared ownership. With all nine Integrated Action Plans (IAPs) now finalised, each partner city has moved from planning to preparing for implementation equipped with local commitment, stakeholder validation, and a growing communication effort to ensure lasting impact.

This quarter was defined by three pillars: completion of IAPs, strategic engagement at the local level, and the amplification of the project's message through new communication formats and cross-network learning.

In Alba Iulia, the city concluded its IAP and confirmed its five strategic pillars, with clear flagship actions such as a new business and innovation park, digital urban platform, and green transition interventions. Iisalmi deepened its internationalisation strategy, tested multilingual resident engagement activities, and integrated its “Bridge to Iisalmi” concept across city communications. Mangualde finalised its IAP with detailed governance and financing structures and advanced its housing rehabilitation programme into technical preparation. A dedicated podcast recording helped convey the vision to a wider audience.

Mantova focused on reflection and participation, hosting the Brunch del Policy Makers, a dialogue event that explored city branding, housing, and innovation through co-creation. Plasencia completed its action catalogue and finalised its IAP, aligning it with its new city branding campaign “100% Plasencia” and a strong emphasis on quality of life as an attraction factor.

In Saint-Quentin, a full governance system was set up to monitor implementation, alongside flagship projects like the Digital and Innovation Hub and the newcomer Welcome Platform. Saldus defined 22 actions and prioritised nine for immediate implementation, building on lessons from its local pilots and community mobilisation. Šibenik advanced student engagement and finalised its IAP, while also securing national funding to improve educational infrastructure and reinforce the city's family-friendly offer.

Trebinje showcased its strategic commitment to digital transformation by aligning its IAP with recent events such as the EchoStone Festival and the Mediterranean Gaming Festival, further connecting youth engagement and urban innovation.

The quarter also saw the release of the Residents of the Future podcast series, a nine-episode journey across the network, giving voice to local stakeholders and stories. Each episode highlights the challenges, hopes, and solutions shaping the future of small and medium-sized cities, and is now available on Spotify and YouTube.

Complementing this were two ad hoc masterclasses developed with fellow URBACT networks: one with WELDI, on migration and newcomer integration; and another with Cities After Dark, on the night-time economy as a tool for attractiveness, retention, and well-being. Both contributed new dimensions to the network's toolbox and deepened its connections across URBACT.

As we move toward the final transnational event in Mantova, the network stands on solid ground: with tested solutions, collaborative energy, and a growing community of cities determined to shape their demographic future, not by resisting change, but by embracing it with creativity and care

ALBA IULIA

Alba Iulia Concludes Its Integrated Action Plan and Consolidates a Strategic Vision for Combating Urban Decline

Between June and September 2025, Alba Iulia reached a major milestone in the URBACT Residents of the Future project with the completion of its Integrated Action Plan (IAP). This achievement marks the culmination of extensive local collaboration and transnational learning, positioning the city to respond more decisively to demographic challenges and the need to strengthen its attractiveness for young people and families.

During this quarter, the URBACT Local Group (ULG) met on multiple occasions to validate the final components of the plan and ensure that its priorities reflect the needs and aspirations of the community. The process brought together representatives from local institutions, civil society, youth organisations, academia, and the private sector, reinforcing Alba Iulia's commitment to participatory and cross-sector governance.

Key themes from this period include:

- The consolidation of the IAP's five strategic pillars: youth attractiveness, economic revitalisation, urban regeneration, green transition, and digital innovation.
- The definition of flagship interventions such as affordable housing for young families, a new business and innovation park, major urban regeneration zones, expanded cycling infrastructure, and a digital urban platform.
- The formal integration of green transition measures, including urban forests, a photovoltaic park, and nature-based solutions along the Ampoi River.
- The strengthening of the digital and innovation agenda through proposals for a technological hub, smart public services, and expanded digital literacy programmes.

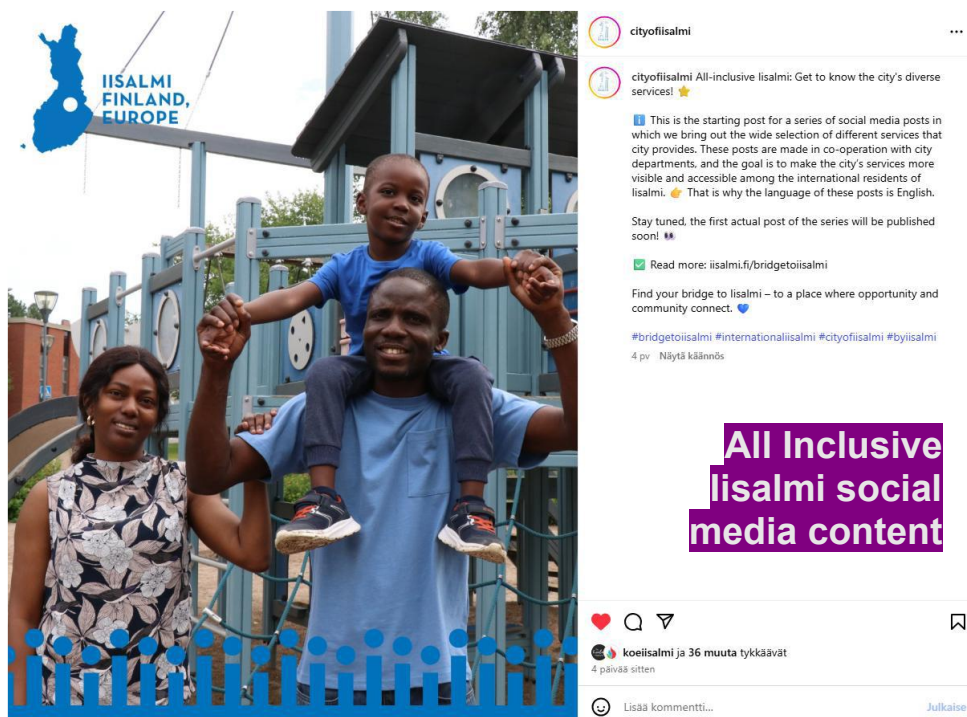
By finalising its Integrated Action Plan during this quarter, Alba Iulia enters the next phase of the project with a clear roadmap and renewed ambition. The city now moves towards implementation, equipped with a coherent strategy to tackle urban shrinkage and strengthen its long-term appeal as a green, smart, and inclusive urban centre.

Iisalmi Advances Internationalisation Efforts and Finalises Its Integrated Action Plan

Between July and September 2025, Iisalmi advanced key actions under the URBACT Residents of the Future project, finalising its Integrated Action Plan (IAP) and expanding internationalisation measures across local services and events.

The quarter saw the successful implementation of the small-scale testing action, which aimed to bring an “international touch” to existing activities. The Iisalmi Hobby Event and the bus tour for new residents (9 August) were marketed more actively and supported with multilingual materials in English, Arabic, Estonian and Russian. An English-speaking guide was also introduced. These efforts resulted in increased participation, particularly among residents with an international background.

The 9th URBACT Local Group meeting (22 September) reviewed the outcomes of the testing action and discussed the final adjustments to the IAP following feedback from the Ad-hoc expert. The meeting also prepared upcoming activities, including the By Iisalmi seminar and Meet & Connect networking event. A new “Bridge Builder” concept, voluntary, low-threshold support for newcomers was introduced and will be piloted at Meet & Connect.



A further highlight of the quarter was the integration of the Bridge to Iisalmi concept into the city's communications. The new All-inclusive Iisalmi social media series, produced in English, presents key municipal services from the perspective of international residents and promotes easier access to local opportunities.

With the IAP refinements completed and new communication tools underway, Iisalmi enters the next phase of the project with strengthened structures for inclusion, engagement, and international visibility.

Mangualde Finalises Its IAP and Prepares Early Implementation Steps

Between July and September 2025, Mangualde progressed into the final consolidation and operational preparation of its Integrated Action Plan (IAP). Building on expert feedback from the previous transnational meeting, the municipality focused on strengthening strategic coherence, refining flagship actions, and aligning the plan with funding opportunities under Portugal 2030 and EU programmes. An internal IAP Implementation Taskforce was formally established to coordinate the transition from planning to execution.

A key highlight of the quarter was the advancement of Flagship Action 1.1 – Rehabilitation of 40 Homes for Families and Young People, which moved into technical structuring, including criteria for selecting vacant units and partnership conditions with the national housing agency (IHRU). Preparations also continued for Action 2.2 – Programme to Support Entrepreneurship, with the design of the 2026 Entrepreneurship Bootcamp and early outreach to industrial associations and incubators.

Although no testing actions were carried out this quarter, Mangualde is now preparing to apply its previously validated consultation methodology to upcoming priority actions, particularly in housing, mobility, and entrepreneurship.

The municipality completed the final version of the IAP, including an updated governance framework, a prioritisation matrix, a phasing logic for 2026–2030, and a monitoring dashboard. Work also advanced on mapping funding lines and drafting a communication calendar.

Communication activities were constrained by the pre-election context, yet Mangualde recorded a dedicated podcast with the Vice-President on 24 September, presenting the IAP's vision and ambitions. The city also initiated extensive outreach to media, resulting in five published articles and an opinion piece in a specialist urban planning journal. Preparations are now under way for Mangualde's participation in the final network event in Mantova.

MANTOVA

Mantova Strengthens Community Engagement and Advances IAP Reflection

Between July and September 2025, Mantova focused on deepening community engagement and advancing collective reflection around its Integrated Action Plan (IAP). The quarter was marked by the completion of two major testing actions and the organisation of a citywide dialogue event involving local stakeholders, young representatives, and citizens.

In July, Mantova concluded the Filo del Futuro cycle with an Oxford-style debate during a popular summer festival (13 July). This format helped attract a broad audience and stimulate new perspectives on the project's themes. In parallel, the city collected and analysed responses from a questionnaire targeting young employees, generating valuable insights into how younger residents perceive Mantova's opportunities and challenges.

With these actions, the city has now completed most of its planned testing activities. The final remaining TA publishing thematic articles on the Mantova Soon platform based on the City Welcome Kit will be delivered in the next phase.

On 28 September, Mantova hosted a collective reflection event, Brunch del Policy Makers, conceived as an Open Day to the city. Participants reviewed the IAP draft, explored synergies created through the Residents of the Future project, and took part in a World Café session structured around three themes: Housing and Welfare, University and Work, and Innovation and City Branding. The discussions generated a wide range of ideas, including creative proposals such as a safe digital portal for student rentals.

The strong participation and enthusiasm expressed during the event demonstrated growing community interest, with many attendees asking about the next steps in the process a promising signal as Mantova moves towards the finalisation and communication of its IAP.

PLASENCIA

Plasencia Concludes Its Integrated Action Plan and Strengthens Its Resident-Attraction Strategy

Between July and September 2025, Plasencia reached a major milestone in the Residents of the Future project with the consolidation of its Integrated Action Plan (IAP), now fully structured around six strategic areas: public services, communication, urban planning, digital transformation, environment, and gender equality. The quarter focused on validating the plan's final components, refining strategic actions, and integrating the results of the testing phase into the overall approach.

During this reporting period, the municipality completed the systematisation of its testing actions, which centred on reshaping the city's image as a place to live. These included a new city brand, the "100% Plasencia" promotional video, and communication materials highlighting the city's quality of life elements tested publicly during the Open the Doors of the City event. Strong community engagement and social-media reach confirmed the relevance of this direction, reinforcing the need to invest in communication and resident-attraction tools.

The final version of the IAP now includes a full action catalogue ranging from a Welcome Kit for new residents to housing-focused interventions such as a mini-neighbourhood for young people and digital nomads. The plan also incorporates governance, monitoring systems and a detailed funding strategy, ensuring coherent implementation over the coming years.

With the IAP finalised and supported by an expanded URBACT Local Group, Plasencia is now well positioned to transition into the implementation phase, strengthening its ambition to project itself as an attractive, innovative, and resident-centred city.

SAINT-QUENTIN

Saint-Quentin Finalises Its IAP and Sets the Course for Urban Transformation

Between July and September 2025, Saint-Quentin advanced into the finalisation of its Integrated Action Plan (IAP), consolidating a long-term strategy to address demographic decline through innovation, sustainability and resident-centred development. Building on extensive stakeholder participation and evidence gathered over two years, the city has now shaped a coherent roadmap aligned with national and European frameworks.

During this period, Saint-Quentin refined its strategic pillars economic revitalisation, community well-being, education and retention, sustainability, and digital transformation summarised in Section 2 of the IAP. Flagship interventions were confirmed, including the Europe District Renewal, the mixed-use city-centre redevelopment, the creation of a Digital and Innovation Hub, micro-forest and renaturation initiatives, and a newcomer Welcome Platform supported by an Ambassador Network (pp. 17–20). These actions will guide the 2026–2030 implementation phase.

The quarter also marked the consolidation of the monitoring and governance architecture. A multi-level system Steering Committee, Technical Committee and ULG 2.0—was formalised to ensure transparency and cross-departmental coordination. A Quality-of-Life Observatory, with annual dashboards and citizen surveys, will underpin evaluation and adaptive management.

With the IAP now complete, Saint-Quentin enters the final months of the URBACT network with a strong strategic framework and a renewed ambition: to become a resilient, inclusive and innovative mid-sized European city where people choose to stay, return and thrive.

Saldus Finalises Its Integrated Action Plan and Consolidates Three Strategic Priorities

Between July and September 2025, Saldus completed the consolidation of its Integrated Action Plan (IAP), marking a key milestone in the Residents of the Future project. The final document brings together extensive local analysis, the outcomes of two testing actions, and the work of the URBACT Local Group, resulting in a coherent strategic framework built around three intervention areas: small entrepreneurship growth, suitable and affordable housing, and a more open and welcoming community.

During this quarter, the city integrated the insights from its two testing actions: the transformation of the former Sātiņi school into a small business community centre and a cycle of community-building events designed to foster a more inclusive atmosphere. Both actions generated practical learning ranging from how to activate unused public buildings to the importance of facilitators (“engines”) who support new ideas which directly informed the final selection of priority actions.

The IAP’s strategic direction was finalised through eight ULG meetings and a participatory process that combined local expertise with transnational learning on city branding, investment attraction, housing, and economic diversification. The plan now includes 22 actions, with nine priorities identified for initial implementation, supported by a governance structure, monitoring indicators, and funding pathways.

With the IAP now complete, Saldus enters the next phase equipped with a clear roadmap to address depopulation: strengthening entrepreneurial ecosystems, improving housing availability, and building a more connected and welcoming community.

Šibenik Advances Student Engagement and Finalises Its IAP for Implementation

A central focus this quarter was the repetition of Šibenik's testing action at the local polytechnic. Building on the successful pilot from 2024, the project team conducted the same student survey during the welcome day for first-year students. This provided an opportunity to compare data across academic years and further engage young people in sharing their perceptions of the city. The collected results will serve as the basis for a forthcoming scientific article, to be prepared by a university professor with the aim of publication in a peer-reviewed journal.

The city also advanced its Integrated Action Plan. Following the review received in Iisalmi, Šibenik completed the previously missing section on monitoring and confirmed that all planned measures would be retained, given their relevance and alignment with local priorities. Several actions are already being prepared for implementation through both external funding sources and the municipal budget. The project slogan, "Šibenik – Work-Life Balance in Mediterranean Style," remains central to the IAP's vision and narrative.

An additional milestone for Šibenik this quarter was securing national funding to modernise primary schools through the transition to single-shift, full-day teaching. The first contract was signed, marking the beginning of a significant investment in more inclusive and high-quality educational environments.

With these developments, Šibenik enters the final months of the project with a strengthened IAP, renewed engagement with young residents, and momentum toward implementing its long-term urban transformation goals.

TREBINJE

Trebinje Finalises Its IAP and Showcases Digital Culture Through Major Local Events

Between July and September 2025, Trebinje made significant progress in the Residents of the Future project, focusing on the completion of its Integrated Action Plan (IAP) and strengthening its positioning as a digitally oriented, creative, and participatory city. Alongside core project management activities, the team engaged in several URBACT capacity-building sessions, including masterclasses and modules on migration and gender-equal cities.

A key development this quarter was the visit of the national URBACT contact point, Ms. Lejla Selmanović, who reviewed Trebinje's IAP together with the local team. The city presented its strategic orientation toward digital transformation, highlighting how the IAP integrates lessons from the network, the digital readiness assessment, and the completed test action on enhancing administrative digital capacities. Ongoing measures such as the Digital Transformation Strategy, new e-services, and open-data initiatives were also showcased as early steps already underway.

At the local level, the sixth URBACT Local Group meeting on 1 August served as a major milestone. Members collaboratively reviewed the final draft of the IAP, refining data sources, implementation timelines, and the city's long-term vision. The session confirmed the shared ownership of the plan and outlined the final steps before its presentation at the network's closing conference.

Trebinje also linked its IAP themes to two major cultural-digital events. The EchoStone Festival (14–16 August) animated the Old Town with electronic music, reinforcing the city's commitment to youth engagement and digital culture. Later in September, Trebinje hosted the Mediterranean Gaming Festival, the first event of its kind in Bosnia and Herzegovina, gathering developers, creatives, e-sport athletes, and industry leaders. Both initiatives demonstrated how digital culture can support urban attractiveness, innovation, and community participation core pillars of Trebinje's IAP.

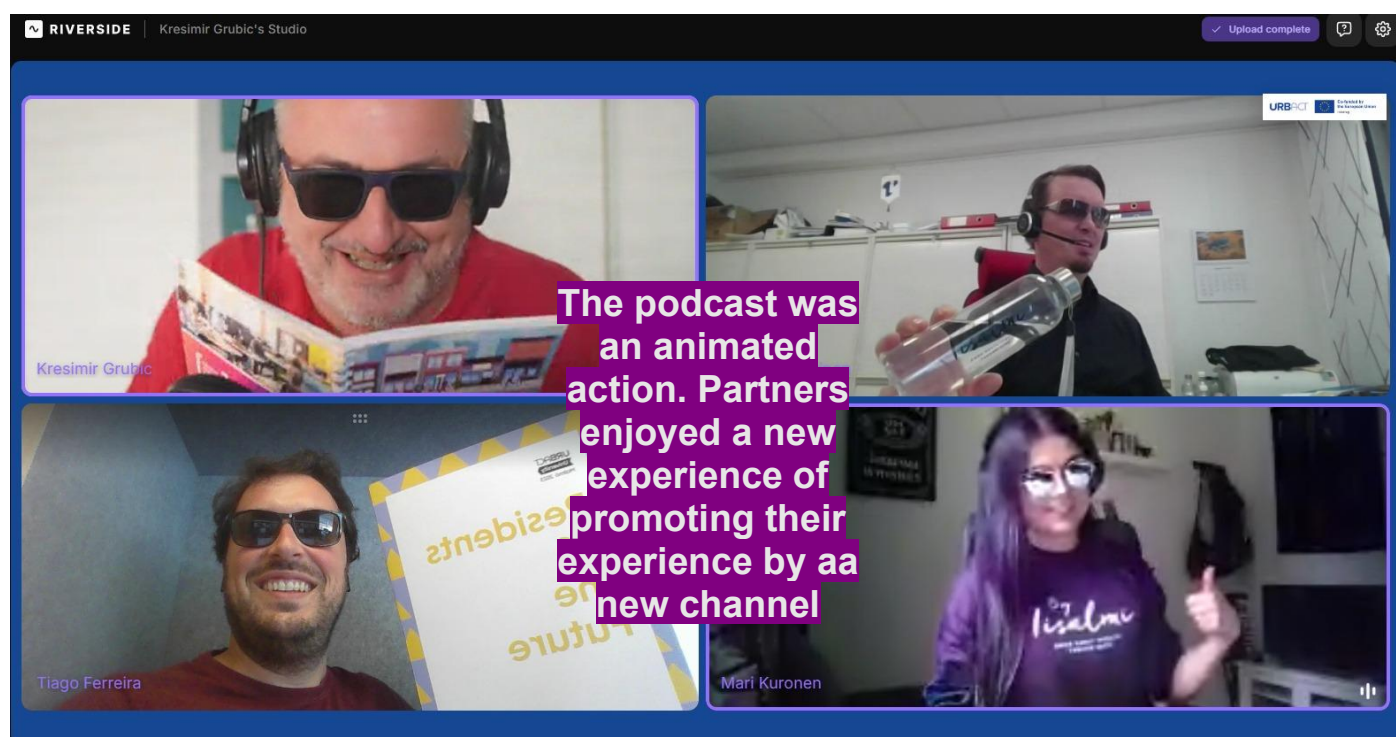
With the IAP now reaching its final stage, Trebinje enters the last phase of the project with strong momentum, a solid strategic framework, and an emerging reputation as a Mediterranean hub for creativity and digital transformation.

2.2 Residents of the Future Podcast Series: Giving Voice to 9 Cities Shaping Urban Renewal

The Residents of the Future podcast is a new communication product developed by the project to give voice to the people and places driving local responses to population decline. Produced as part of the network's storytelling and dissemination strategy, the series offers an intimate and authentic look at how nine European cities are working to become more liveable, inclusive, and future-ready.

Each of the nine episodes focuses on a different partner city, featuring conversations with two local residents or stakeholders. Together with the host, they explore the realities of living in their city, the challenges of demographic decline, and the creative ways communities are responding — from reimagining housing and revitalising empty spaces to embracing digital tools and attracting new residents.

Each episode also includes a short interlude where the host reflects on one of the project's key themes, such as quality of life, investment attraction, digitalisation, or citizen participation.



The Residents of the Future podcast will be available on Spotify and YouTube, and aims to reach urban practitioners, policymakers, and citizens across Europe. It serves as both an advocacy tool and a source of practical inspiration for cities facing similar demographic challenges.

By centring real voices and grounded experiences, the podcast reinforces the project's core mission: to shape resilient cities through the people who choose to live in them.

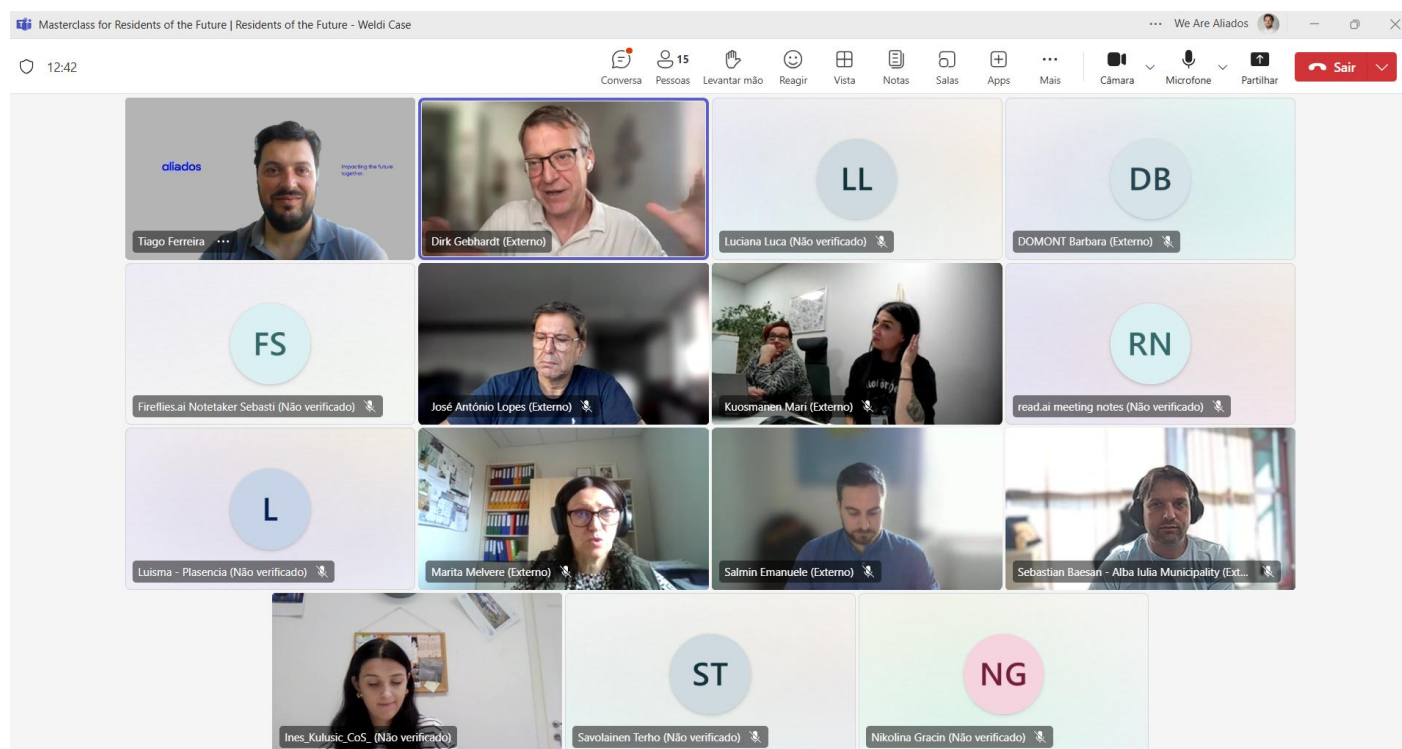
2.3 Residents of the Future x WELDI Masterclass on Migration

On 16 September 2025, the Residents of the Future network partnered with fellow URBACT network WELDI (Welcoming International Talent) to deliver a dedicated masterclass on migration and newcomer integration. This ad hoc learning mission, led by the WELDI expert Dirk Gebhardt, provided in-depth insights into how migration can support local development in shrinking cities.

The session was designed to help partner cities better understand the potential of migration and migrant integration in countering demographic decline, while also exploring what works best in supporting newcomers to become active local citizens.

Structured into three core parts, context, practical tools, and policy implications. The masterclass shared a rich toolbox of solutions already applied in cities across Europe, including:

- Welcome kits and digital guides (e.g. Plasencia, Šibenik)
- One-stop shops and help desks
- Pathways to decent work and housing
- Co-creation with migrants and anti-discrimination strategies



Participating cities explored how these approaches can be adapted to their own contexts. The session also covered trends in migration across Europe, including economic migration, student mobility, and digital nomads, as well as temporary protection for Ukrainian refugees.

This collaboration strengthened the knowledge base of the Residents of the Future network and contributed to its wider goal of making cities more open, resilient and welcoming. The mission also reflected URBACT's ethos of inter-network learning and peer exchange.

2.4 Exploring the Night-Time Economy: Joint Masterclass with Cities After Dark

As part of its ongoing peer-learning efforts, the Residents of the Future network partnered with the URBACT network Cities After Dark to deliver an inspiring ad hoc masterclass on the role of the night-time economy in small and medium-sized cities. This collaborative session offered fresh perspectives on how the hours between 6 PM and 6 AM can become a powerful tool to increase urban attractiveness and support population retention.

The masterclass, led by Simone d'Antonio, built on insights from Cities After Dark and examined how cultural vibrancy, extended services, and public space design after dark can strengthen the quality of life for current and future residents.

Participants reflected on how smaller cities, often perceived as “quiet” or inactive at night can strategically use the nocturnal dimension to:

- Retain young people and attract new residents
- Support local businesses and creative industries
- Improve safety and accessibility in public spaces
- Create inclusive evening experiences across all neighbourhoods
- Promote decentralised and year-round cultural programming

The challenges of night-time economy

Night-time economy is a field in which integrated policies are needed for tackling the complexity of its challenges:

- Vibrancy of cultural and music venues
- Licensing hours, shops and services
- Security and noise pollution
- Use of public spaces
- Gender equality
- Sustainable mobility
- Access to work
- Green spaces and sustainability
- Governance of NTE



The night economy development could make small cities more attractive to young people

URBACT



Co-funded by
the European Union
Interreg

The session encouraged participating cities to rethink their urban identity beyond daylight hours, and to explore new ways to activate unused spaces, support nightlife ecosystems, and offer nighttime services tailored to diverse populations, including shift workers, students, and digital nomads.

This joint learning action strengthened inter-network collaboration and highlighted the importance of considering night-time policies as a strategic component of local development particularly for cities working to reinvent themselves in the face of demographic change.

3. What's Next on Residents of the Future?

As the Residents of the Future project approaches its final phase, the last months of the network's journey will be marked by two key moments of exchange and reflection:

Final Transnational Event – Mantova, October 2025

All partner cities will gather in Mantova, Italy for the project's final transnational meeting, which will serve as a closing event and a space to share the main results and legacies of the Integrated Action Plans (IAPs). The event will highlight how each city has progressed in developing local strategies to address population decline, and will celebrate the stories, pilots, and community actions that shaped the journey. Representatives from other URBACT networks, institutions, and potential future collaborators will be invited to take part.

Thematic Masterclass – Remote Work & Digital Nomads

The network will also host a final online masterclass in collaboration with the URBACT network Remote-IT, focusing on the role of remote work and digital infrastructure in attracting new residents to small and medium-sized cities. The session will explore emerging trends around digital nomads, the impact of coworking and co-living spaces, and how cities can strategically position themselves to benefit from the remote work revolution.

Together, these final activities will consolidate the knowledge gathered throughout the project and ensure that the lessons from Residents of the Future continue to inspire cities beyond the network.

4. Final remarks

Dear reader,

As we conclude this Seventh Quarterly Report of the Residents of the Future project, we find ourselves at the threshold of a new chapter, one not of beginnings, but of bringing everything together.

Over the past months, cities have completed their Integrated Action Plans, transforming years of shared learning, local experimentation, and peer exchange into grounded strategies for population resilience. The result is not simply nine plans, but nine visions for cities that choose to care, adapt, and grow with their people.

This period has been marked by generous collaboration, not only within our network, but across others. Through joint masterclasses with WELDI and Cities After Dark, we've expanded our perspective and strengthened our collective toolkit. These sessions reminded us that in Europe's smaller cities, innovation often begins with conversation across themes, sectors, and borders.

Now, we look ahead to the final event in Mantova, where our network will come together one last time to share stories, celebrate achievements, and reflect on the legacy we leave behind. Alongside this, our upcoming session with the Remote-IT network will invite us to think further about digital futures and what it means to stay connected, even from a distance.

To every city team, local partner, and member of our extended URBACT community: thank you. Your work is helping to reimagine the role of smaller cities not as places left behind, but as places to belong, to return to, and to build anew.

See you in Mantova.

Warm regards,

Tiago Ferreira

September 2025

WANT TO KNOW MORE? PLEASE FOLLOW US ☺

We would love to have you following our social media accounts:

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/residents-of-the-future-urbact-apn/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61558026719726>