



Integrated Action Plan

Mértola Historic Center

A People-Centered Strategy for Sustainable Urban Regeneration in Mértola

URBACT



Co-funded by
the European Union
Interreg

U.R.IMPACT
Prioritising Social Impact in Urban Regeneration

U.R. Impact Mértola Municipality's Integrated Action Plan

Texts by André Sanchez and Rosinda Pimenta
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Detail of a bougainvillea in the historic center of Mértola.

Executive Summary

The Integrated Action Plan (IAP) for the Historic Center of Mértola emerges as a strategic response to the contemporary challenges faced by territories of high heritage, social, and environmental value. Promoting inclusive urban development, this plan aims not only to preserve and enhance historical and cultural heritage, but also to foster social cohesion, environmental and economic sustainability.

Mértola, with its unique historic center, located on the banks of the Guadiana River and marked by a strong multicultural identity, faces phenomena such as depopulation, an aging population, and deteriorating buildings. The plan embraces a crosscutting and participatory approach, combining urban regeneration with social action, cultural promotion, and the dynamics of small businesses. The inclusion of local communities in the decision-making process is crucial, ensuring that development is equitable, resilient, and adapted to the real needs of the population.

The Integrated Action Plan for Mértola aims to be an example of sustainable urban regeneration in historic contexts, reinforcing the role of historic centers as drivers of inclusion, innovation and quality of life.

The URBACT network fosters transnational collaboration to create and implement sustainable urban regeneration strategies. For Mértola, this translates into adopting a holistic and inclusive approach to address social, economic, and environmental challenges while preserving the territory's unique historical and cultural assets. By participating in this network, Mértola benefits from shared expertise, capacity-building opportunities, and access to innovative practices to tackle its specific challenges.

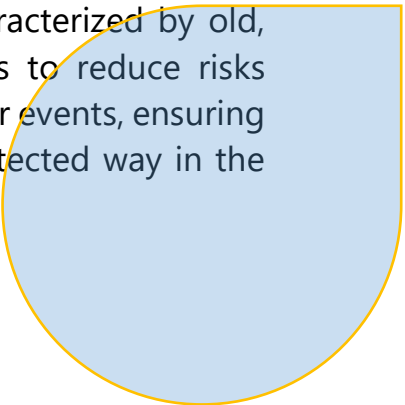
The Integrated Action Plan for the Historic Center of Mértola is the result of collaborative work by the Local Action Group and presents, in its structure, the vision for the territory, the proposal and value, the objectives, goals, actions, governance model, financing plan, timeline, communication plan, monitoring and sustainability.

The Integrated Action Plan for the Historic Center of Mértola is structured around four strategic areas that, in an articulated manner, contribute to the enhancement of the territory and the improvement of the quality of life of the local community. The first area focuses on **urban regeneration, housing, and heritage preservation**, promoting the updating of urban planning documents; the requalification of buildings and public spaces; the improvement of residential conditions; and the safeguarding of the historical ensemble, ensuring that the center maintains its identity and functionality.

The second area reinforces **community involvement and social inclusion**, encouraging the collaborative and active participation of residents, strengthening social cohesion, and ensuring that everyone has access to the opportunities and benefits generated by interventions in the historic center, highlighting the importance of continuously monitoring the social impacts of regeneration.

The third area focus on **economic, cultural, and tourism revitalization**, boosting local commerce, stimulating entrepreneurship, valuing cultural heritage, and reinforcing Mértola's tourist appeal through authentic experiences and initiatives that generate new attractions and attract new residents.

Finally, the fourth area focuses on **environmental sustainability and climate resilience**, promoting efficient resource management, biodiversity protection, and the implementation of adaptation measures to climate change, also integrating the dimension of security, particularly relevant in a historic center characterized by old, vulnerable structures of high heritage value. This approach seeks to reduce risks associated with degradation, structural instability, or extreme weather events, ensuring that the historic center evolves in a balanced, sustainable, and protected way in the face of future challenges.



Section 1

Local Context & Participatory Process



Historic Center of Mértola: the Guadiana River, the old city walls, and the iconic Clock Tower.

Local context

Current situation

Understanding the current situation of the historic center of Mértola is essential for framing the Integrated Action Plan (IAP). This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of relevant demographic, economic, social, and environmental data, highlighting the challenges and opportunities central to Mértola's urban regeneration and sustainability goals.

Population Statistics and Demography

Mértola's population stands at 6.209 residents, with approximately 150 people living within the historic center and 1.330 in the village of Mértola. The municipality is grappling with significant demographic decline since the 1960s due to the closure of a copper mine that employed the majority of the municipality's active population. With the closure of the mine, this active and fertile-age population emigrated to the cities and abroad, structurally compromising the replacement of generations, even to this day.

Currently, approximately 37% of the municipality's population is over 65 years old. Faced with a lack of job opportunities and the loss of some central state services (essentially Health services), the territory, like many other areas in the interior of the country, has continued to lose its active population, resulting in a progressive trend towards population aging, placing additional strain on local services and infrastructure.

In the Historic Center of Mértola, the population loss was essentially due to the migration of residents from this historic area to the newer area of the town of Mértola. The reasons for this migration are related to the urban specificities of the Historic Center and the physical and legal constraints it causes in terms of accessibility, mobility, construction options, among others. Most families, when the urban expansion of the town of Mértola occurred, moved to the newer neighborhoods, leaving in the "Old Town" those who did not have the economic means, the elderly, or those who chose to maintain their emotional ties to the place.

Currently, the Historic Center has a population that is essentially made up of adults between 50-65 years old, followed by the population over 65 years old. They are mostly people with low family income, with 46 people (22 families) residing in social housing. At the same time, a community of highly qualified upper-middle-class people with above-average income resides in the Historic Center. They mainly live in the Historic Center by choice, for the aesthetics and cultural value of the place.

Recently, an emerging influx of young migrants, drawn by municipal efforts and opportunities for community engagement related with science, regenerative farming and arts, offers a glimmer of hope for rejuvenating the local demographic structure.

Economy and Employment Situation

The economic scenery of Mértola is marked by limited diversification and limited job opportunities. The tertiary sector predominates, strongly influenced by cultural, heritage, and nature tourism, which has gained relevance thanks to the historical and scenic value of the municipality. In the services sector, the Social Economy area also stands out, especially services supporting the elderly population. The primary sector

still maintains a significant weight, notably through extensive agriculture, livestock farming, and activities linked to the rural world, although with a tendency to decrease due to the aging population and low generational renewal. Industry is not very significant, mainly limited to small manufacturing units related to local products. The economic fabric is mostly composed of micro and small businesses, local commerce, and services, reflecting the demographic size of the municipality and its socioeconomic dynamics based on seasonal activities and initiatives to value cultural and environmental heritage.

The municipality lacks a strong industrial base, with much of the local economy historically rooted in agriculture, tourism, and small-scale retail. These sectors, while important, fail to provide sufficient job opportunities to sustain the population, particularly for the youth.

Recognizing this challenge, Mértola has initiated several investment projects aimed at economic revitalization. These include transforming empty properties into retail spaces, fostering job creation through research centers focused on biodiversity and climate change, and developing elder care facilities to address demographic shifts. Despite these efforts, the local economy requires more robust diversification and innovation to provide sustainable employment opportunities and reduce dependency on external job markets.

Although the Historic Center is currently primarily a residential area, it also incorporates some economic and service activity. Notably, it houses several services of the Municipality of Mértola (the Municipal headquarters, the Administration and Finance Services; the Culture and Heritage, Sports and Youth Division; the Reserves and Technical Services of the Mértola Museum; the Local Economy and Tourism Support Center, the Tourist Office; and the Municipal Market). The Historic Center also contains the headquarters of the Guadiana Valley Natural Park and the Mértola Archaeological Site, the Mértola Parish Church, and a number of private businesses primarily associated with tourism (16 accommodation units representing a total of 67 beds), 1 restaurant, 2 cafes, 1 shop selling local products and handicrafts, and 2 craft shops (goldsmithing and traditional weaving).

The Historic Centre of Mértola presents a high potential for hosting new small businesses linked to local products, crafts, creative industries and other culturally based activities that can boost the local economy and reinforce the territory's identity. However, the growing interest in local accommodation, while contributing to tourism vitality, can intensify gentrification processes, reducing the availability of spaces for permanent economic activities and driving away residents. Following the increase in real estate demand associated with tourism, there has been a rise in property prices, which, coupled with some legal constraints arising from the area's heritage

classification, leads to difficulties in establishing and maintaining new businesses. The limited accessibility of some streets and the lack of parking are other frequently mentioned obstacles.

Social Challenges, Accessibility, Inequalities

Mértola faces significant social challenges, marked by pronounced inequalities and limited access to essential services. Housing speculation has driven up property prices, making affordable rental options scarce and exacerbating social inequalities. These issues are particularly acute for the youth, who struggle to find affordable and stable housing within the municipality.

Access to healthcare services is another critical concern, especially for Mértola's elderly population. Inadequate healthcare facilities and limited availability of specialized care create barriers to meeting the needs of vulnerable residents. This lack of services is compounded by social isolation, further emphasizing the need for strategies that enhance inclusivity and improve access to resources.

Mértola faces social challenges marked primarily by the sharp aging of its population, a result of low birth rates, the exodus of young people to larger urban centers, and reduced generational renewal. This dynamic generates greater pressure on social and health services, while simultaneously hindering the maintenance of an active and diverse community. The geographical dispersion of the villages (117 villages spread across 1,292 km², 49% with fewer than 50 inhabitants. Population density: 4.8 inhabitants/km²), coupled with limited public transport and a scarcity of local services, reinforces situations of isolation, especially among the elderly.

Furthermore, there are challenges related to the economic precariousness of some households, the difficulty of accessing adequate housing, and the lack of opportunities for skilled employment—factors that limit the capacity to attract and settle young people and families.

In terms of housing, real estate speculation (which occurs nationwide) has driven up property prices, making affordable rental options scarce and exacerbating social inequalities. These issues are particularly acute for young people, who struggle to find affordable and stable housing in the county.

In the Historic Center of Mértola, the Municipality has 27 social housing units, 22 of which are occupied by low-income families, representing a total of 46 direct beneficiaries. Many of these houses require general maintenance and measures to improve climate comfort (more efficient windows, for example, reinforced insulation

and roof maintenance). Some of these dwellings require intervention in terms of accessibility and adaptations for people with reduced mobility.

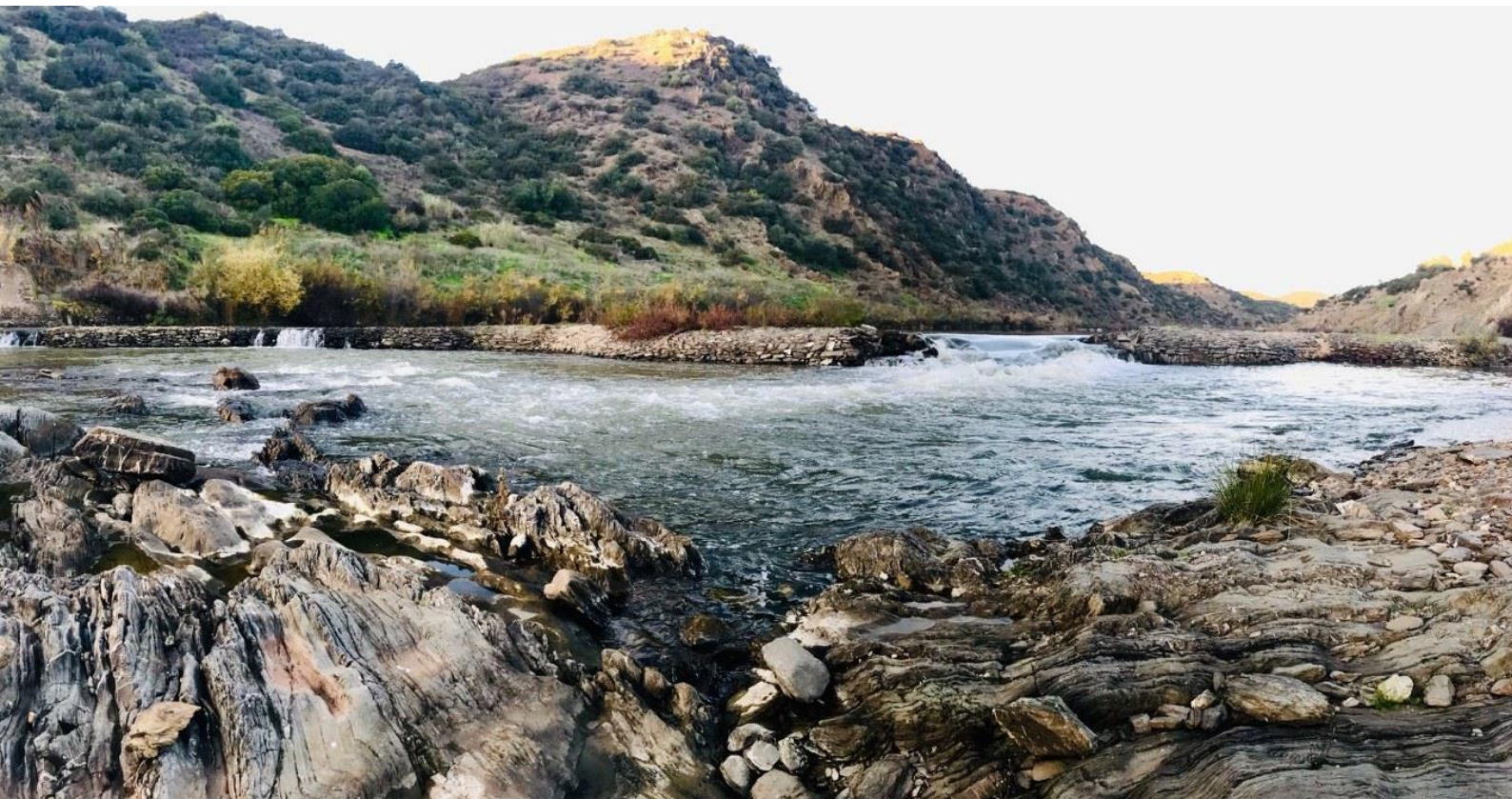
Access to healthcare services is another critical concern, especially for the elderly population of Mértola. Emergency medical services are minimal, healthcare professionals are few, and there is very limited availability of specialized care to meet the needs of the most vulnerable residents. This lack of services is exacerbated by social isolation, further emphasizing the need for strategies that promote inclusion and improve access to resources.

Local and Territorial Context

Mértola is a border municipality located in the southern interior of the country, in the Baixo Alentejo sub-region. To the east it borders the Andalusia region of Spain and to the south the Portuguese region of Algarve. The municipality has a total area of 1,292.9 km², is divided into 7 parishes and includes 117 localities. It has a population density of 4.8 inhabitants/km²: a population dispersion that poses significant challenges to municipal management.



Mértola stands out in the region for its exceptional cultural and natural heritage, the result of a long history of human occupation and a unique landscape shaped by the Guadiana Valley. Its historic center, castle, archaeological sites, and the influences of various Mediterranean civilizations reflect the municipality's cultural richness, while the surrounding natural environment reinforces the unique identity of this territory.



*Guadiana Valley. Location:
Guadiana Canals (area of old traditional fishing structures)*

To guarantee the safeguarding of the natural heritage, the territory of Mértola has four protection statutes:

- » Vale do Guadiana Natural Park
- » Special Conservation Zone (for habitat protection)
- » Special Protection Zone (for birdlife protection)
- » Ramsar Site (protection of the Vascão stream)

In terms of cultural heritage, there are two locations with protected status:

- » The town of Mértola, in particular the historical center
- » The village of Mina de S. Domingos and Pomarão (former mining village)

The rest of the territory is protected by the Archaeological Charter of Mértola, which identifies areas with archaeological remains throughout the municipality.



Archaeological excavation in the Historic Center of Mértola: Baptistery from the Late Antiquity period (3rd to 8th centuries AD)

Although the various statutes protecting cultural and natural heritage have played a crucial role in preserving heritage, biodiversity and local ecosystems, they have also created some friction with the population, mainly because the restrictions applied to land use, agriculture and economic activities in general are often perceived as limiting daily livelihoods and development opportunities.

Regarding the historic center of Mértola, there is has a legislative framework that protects its cultural value, particularly its urban characteristics (aesthetics, materials, and construction principles). The Safeguarding and Enhancement Plan for the Historic Center of Mértola (a normative document) dates from 1995 and urgently needs updating. A process is underway to update and convert this plan into a Detailed Urban Regeneration Plan, a legal instrument that links the safeguarding of cultural values to urban regeneration.

Another striking characteristic of the territory is the high risk of desertification, exacerbated by its high vulnerability to climate change. Mértola presents very particular solo and clime characteristics: it was recently classified as a semi-arid climate area, has an average of 285 days without rain, and in recent years it has recorded rainfall levels below 400 mm. The climatic trend points to a gradual increase in average temperature,

a decrease in precipitation, and an increase in extreme weather events (such as heat waves; torrential rainfall; cyclonic winds; extreme droughts and increase dusty days).

These climatic vulnerabilities underscore the urgent need for resilient and adaptive urban planning strategies that safeguard Mértola's populations and its natural and cultural assets.

SOWT analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Exceptional Heritage and Unique Identity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outstanding archaeological heritage • Strong historical and architectural authenticity. • Mértola is on the national list of candidates for UNESCO World Heritage status • Mértola Museum (14 centers) ✓ Privileged scenic location <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Situated in the Guadiana Valley, striking views, meeting point between river and the natural surroundings • High aesthetic and photographic value. ✓ Consolidated tourism offer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Museums and archaeological sites integrated into the town. • Cultural events and outdoor activities • Nationally and internationally recognized brand (Best Tourism Village 2025). ✓ Human scale and tranquil environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compact center, walkable. • Sense of security and community closeness. • "Human scale" and strong sense of place ✓ Institutional recognition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong role of the City Hall in heritage preservation and cultural programming. • Good projects funded by European funds over the last few decades. ✓ Strong Cultural Identity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multicultural History • Living Tradition • Plural and Cosmopolitan Cultural Vision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Limited Accessibility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrow streets, steep slopes, little nearby parking capacity. • Difficulty for road traffic, especially for residents and services. • Scarcity of nearby parking. ✓ Aging Population <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A large part of the residents are elderly; increasing depopulation. • Shortage of new residents, difficulty in retaining young people. • Reduced and aging resident population. • Risk of loss of social vitality in the historic center. • Lack of participation in collaborative processes ✓ Reduced Commercial Offer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little diversity of permanent commerce and services. • Strong dependence on seasonal tourism. ✓ Urban Constraints <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buildings and Social Housing in need of rehabilitation. • High costs to adapt to current energy and comfort standards. • Legal constraints arising from regulations associated with the status of a listed historic center. • Water, sanitation, and sidewalk networks in need of maintenance. • Little housing supply, particularly at affordable price • Real estate speculation with very high price • Presence of dissonant elements in traditional architecture ✓ Tourist Pressure vs. Local Life <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk of transforming the historic center into a purely tourist area. • Some periods of high traffic make daily use uncomfortable. ✓ Risk of structural insecurity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degradation and lack of maintenance of historical infrastructure (walls, buildings, castle) • Vulnerability to climate risks associated with heat waves, torrential rains and cyclonic winds • Urban structure that hinders intervention in emergency situations

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing demand for authentic tourism, slow tourism, and historical routes. • Detailed urban rehabilitation plan underway with the possibility of rethinking urban regeneration in a collaborative, inclusive and sustainable way. • Access to European funds for urban regeneration. Incentives for youth housing and support for the recovery of properties promoted by the Municipality. • Mértola, Best Tourism Village 2025). • Biosphere Sustainable Tourism Destination Certification. • Existence of structuring projects such as the Mértola Biological Station, the Biodiversity Gallery, the Heritage Center or the Hammam and Tea House. • Proximity to Spain. • Culture of participation and ongoing participatory initiatives. • Municipal programs providing financial support for rehabilitation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Population desertification <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued exodus of young people. • Risk of loss of residential function in the city center. • Little participation in community processes ✓ Excessive dependence on tourism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High seasonality. • Sensitivity to economic, climatic, or geopolitical fluctuations. ✓ Climate change <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased extreme temperatures affect habitability. • Greater risk of material degradation and need for repairs. ✓ Real estate pressure and local accommodation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possible gentrification and loss of permanent residents. • Difficulty for families to settle in the city center. ✓ High rehabilitation costs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May lead to the abandonment of buildings and loss of assets.

Local relevant existing strategies and policies

Mértola, Future Lab

Community-based territorial innovation process for a more resilient and regenerative future lead by the Municipality of Mértola.

The “Mértola – Laboratory for the Future” strategy is based on the idea of transforming the municipality into a territory for experimentation and social, environmental, and economic innovation, capable of testing sustainable solutions adapted to the rural world. This approach integrates initiatives linked to ecological transition, regenerative development, the promotion of culture as a strategy for social cohesion; the revitalization of science and the centrality of collaborative community processes, promoting replicable pilot projects in other regions. It integrates projects in the following areas: Culture, Education, Social Cohesion, New Rural Economy, Agroecological Transition, Governance, networks, and social innovation. By involving the population, local institutions, researchers, and external partners, the strategy seeks to create new opportunities for knowledge, employment, and retention of people, simultaneously reinforcing the cultural identity of Mértola and positioning the municipality as a living example of territorial innovation in the interior of the country.

Mértola Future Lab, is inspired by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which incorporates a holistic approach to environmental, social, and economic planning. This strategy prioritizes combating desertification, promoting biodiversity conservation, and supporting community-based approaches to regeneration (urban, social, economic, cultural, or landscape).

www.mertolafuturelab.com

Safeguarding and Enhancement Plan for the Historic Center of Mértola

Regulation containing urban planning standards that govern all interventions in the physical space of the historic center, extending 50 meters beyond the city walls. These regulations date from 1995 and are governed by regional and national entities within the framework of cultural heritage. These regulations are complemented by national legislation for the protection of cultural heritage

Detailed Urban Rehabilitation Plan for the Historic Center of Mértola

The Safeguarding and Enhancement Plan for the Historic Center of Mértola dates from 1995 and urgently needs updating. A process is underway to update and convert this plan into a Detailed Urban Regeneration Plan.

The Plan aims to ensure an integrated, strategic, and operational approach to the revitalization of the historic center, promoting the conservation and enhancement of the built cultural heritage and public spaces, their functional and environmental requalification, the rehabilitation of buildings and basic infrastructure, the improvement of housing opportunities, and the enhancement of the living conditions of the resident population. It also intends to create conditions for strengthening the tourist, cultural, and economic attractiveness of the historic center, guaranteeing compatibility between urban uses and the safeguarding of existing heritage values.

Municipal Climate Change Adaptation Plan

The Mértola Municipal Climate Change Adaptation Plan is a strategic document that guides the municipality in preparing for and responding to the impacts of climate change. The plan identifies the main risks to the territory—such as heat waves, floods, strong winds, and pressures on natural and cultural heritage—and defines measures to increase local resilience. It focuses especially on the safety of people and property, the preservation of biodiversity, landscape regeneration, and adaptation of the tourism sector, proposing the integration of climate adaptation into municipal planning. Furthermore, it promotes the involvement of the community and local entities, reinforcing knowledge about the risks and preparing the municipality to respond more effectively to present and future climate challenges.



Mértola Local Housing Strategy

The Mértola Local Housing Strategy is a planning instrument created to address the housing needs of the municipality and to guarantee access to decent, adequate, and affordable housing for the population.

The document prioritizes improving the conditions of the existing social housing stock, creating new affordable housing solutions, and rehabilitating vacant properties to increase the available supply. The strategy also promotes cooperation with private owners, encouraging the availability of houses for rent at controlled costs and stimulating urban rehabilitation. With a strong social and territorial focus, the Local Housing Strategy aims to retain the population, revitalize the municipality, and contribute to a more balanced and inclusive development, coordinating with national housing support programs. Within this strategy, the rehabilitation of 7 houses in the Historic Center for affordable housing is planned.

Special Emergency Civil Protection Plan (PEEPC) for the Historic Center of Mértola

The Special Emergency Civil Protection Plan (PEEPC) for the Historic Center of Mértola, which complements the Municipal Emergency Civil Protection Plan (PMEPC) of the municipality, is a guiding document on the safety of people and property, specific to the historic center area, with the aim of integrating risk management with heritage protection.

Mértola, Biosphere Sustainable Destination Certification

The “Biosphere Destination” certification is an international sustainable tourism certification, granted by the Institute of Responsible Tourism (IRT), an organization recognized by UNESCO and the World Tourism Organization.

It is a certification based on the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This certification evaluates and recognizes destinations that develop policies and practices aligned with the 2030 Agenda, ensuring that tourism contributes to the environmental, social, economic, and cultural sustainability of the territory.

Mértola has been a Biosphere destination since 2025. As part of its certification, it has an action plan where it has made measurable and monitored commitments in areas such as nature preservation, resource management efficiency, emissions reduction, heritage protection, social inclusion, well-being of the local community,

and promotion of responsible tourism, contributing to the achievement of all 17 SDGs. The Biosphere label functions as an international seal that proves that the destination is committed to the SDGs and is dedicated to developing sustainable, ethical, and long-term tourism.

Participatory process

Collaborative Processes in the Historical Center of Mértola

The development of the Integrated Action Plan for the Historic Center of Mértola is based on collaborative and co-creation processes. More than simply gathering contributions in a fragmentary way, the aim is to build a shared vision in which the various actors—local community, municipal technicians, researchers, associations, and economic agents—act as co-creators of the solutions that will shape the future of the historic center.

This collaborative approach has deep roots in the very tradition of participatory management of the Historic Center of Mértola. Over the past few years, the municipality and its partners have developed multiple formats for dialogue and community involvement, reinforcing a local culture of collaborative practices and co-responsibility. Examples of this include the use of:

» the **World Café Methodology**, which allowed for the discussion of challenges and opportunities in open thematic roundtables;





World Café Methodology regarding the management of the Mértola Forest Perimeter

» the **Heritage Forum**, a meeting space between experts and the community to discuss related with heritage and urban management in the historic center;



Heritage Forum on the proposal for the requalification of the Mértola riverfront.

» the "**Night at the Market**" initiative, which brought residents, technicians, and the "Night at the Market" initiative, which brought residents, technicians, and visitors

together in an informal conversational environment that helps create community and a sense of belonging.



*Night at the Market:
food, community and a sense of belonging (Urbact Good Practice)*

Furthermore, Mértola participated in the Circular Cities Network process (a national network inspired by the URBACT methodology), focusing on sustainable urbanism, where the historical center was a key topic of discussion.

Thus, the development of the Integrated Action Plan continued—and deepened—an already established trajectory of advanced participatory practices.

Urban Local Group (ULG)

The ULG of Mértola was formed by residents of the Historic Center of Mértola and the following entities:

Name of the Organization	Area	Observations
Residents' Association of the Historic Center	They act as active mediators in community life, promoting the defense of residents' interests, quality of life, civic participation, and the appreciation of the territory.	It was created in 2020.
Mértola Parish Council	Administrative functions and territory management	-
Mértola Archaeological Research Center	Arqueology Research Cultural and Heritage Literacy Based in the historic center	Based in the historic center those responsible for archaeological excavations in the Historic Center
Cláudio Torres Museum of Mértola	Museum Education Services	Municipality management
Association for the Defense of the Heritage of Mértola	ONG focused on Heritage and Sustainability	Based in the historic center Works in Mértola, Alentejo, Algarve and Africa.
Montícola Association	Non-profit association working in the areas of environmental education, biodiversity, and sustainability.	Based in the historic center
Vila Velha Space	Restaurant and sustainable grocery shop	Based in the historic center
Casas da Vila Velha	Accommodations	Based in the historic center
Casa Visconde de Bousões	Accommodation	Based in the historic center
ALSUD Professional School of Mértola	Formal and Non Formal education and Training Senior University Project	Currently working in the Based in the historic center

Three sessions/meetings were held with residents and other members of the ULG during the UR Impact process. This group also included professionals from the Municipality in the areas of Culture and Heritage, Social Services, and Urban Planning.



ULG meeting



Pensar, Agir Think & Act Community workshops

The session had two themes: the infrastructure and management of the Historic Center, and daily life and revitalization of the historic center. The session included the participation of UGL members and some invited experts.

In April 2024, a community dialogue and civic participation session was held, led by the Residents' Association of the Historic Center.

The aim of this session was to create an open space for listening, sharing, and joint reflection, allowing residents to present concerns, suggestions, and proposals related to the experience, preservation, and sustainable development of the historic center.

During the session, topics such as the conservation of architectural heritage, mobility and accessibility, housing, tourism, local commerce, cleaning and maintenance of public spaces, as well as cultural initiatives and community revitalization will be addressed.



Pensar e Agir

Oficinas do Centro Histórico de Mértola

11 de abril 14:00 – 17:30

Igreja da Misericórdia (Museu de Arte Sacra)

14:00 Café de boas-vindas

14:15 Mesa Redonda Colaborativa: Do Planeamento à Ação
Instrumentos de planeamento, infraestruturação e prioridades de intervenção

Virgílio Lopes, Campo Arqueológico de Mértola
Rosinda Pimenta, Município de Mértola
Ana Paula Amendoeira, CCDR Alentejo, Unidade de Cultura
Agata Navarro, SIM Beja
José Alegria, Darquiteria
Moderação: Bárbara Pais

15:45 Mesa Redonda Colaborativa: A Vida Quotidiana e a Dinamização
Sociocultural do Centro Histórico

Jorge Pulido Valente, Assoc. de Moradores do Centro Histórico de Mértola
Manuel Marques, Município de Mértola
Ana Marcos Morais, Assoc. Monticola
Mendes Paula, Assoc. Nacional de Municípios com Centro Histórico
Moderação: Bárbara Pais

17:30 Lanche convívio com residentes locais

Participação aberta a todos os interessados.
Inscrições: residentes.chmertola@gmail.com





Uma iniciativa promovida pela Associação de Moradores do Centro Histórico de Mértola (AMCHM) com o apoio da Câmara Municipal de Mértola no âmbito do projeto URBACT U.P. Impact.

Testing Action Youth Participation

In the summer of 2024, as part of a youth holiday camp, the municipality developed a week of activities for young people of Mértola in the Historic Center with three main objectives:

- » to introduce the place to young people (some never visited)
- » to capture their perception (how do they see it)
- » to co-create future scenarios

The activity included walks and visits to the historic center; photography exercises (they were asked to photograph what they liked most and what they disliked); group analysis on the collected photographic material; group dynamics (including creative writing and sketching workshops) to imagine future scenarios and the path to achieve them.



From the work carried out, it was possible to perceive, in relation to perceptions, that most young people had little knowledge of and interaction with the historical center. They highlighted the architecture and museums positively, and the ruined houses and accessibility in a most negative way. Regarding future scenarios, most imagined a historical center without ruined or abandoned houses, clean, with green areas and new cultural spaces, more suited to their tastes and hobbies.



This was an important initial exploratory work with younger people, who are usually far removed from the historical center of Mértola and have little awareness of its heritage value.

Overarching challenges

Mértola's historic center faces a complex and interconnected set of challenges that require a multidimensional and strategic approach.

One of the most pressing problems is **demographic decline and the aging** of its resident population. This trend is the result of the transition of a large number of people to the new part of the town of Mértola, resulting from the urban expansion that took place from the 1980s onwards and the widespread loss of the working-age population in the municipality, due to migration to urban areas and abroad. The loss of population in the historic center translates into a **progressive loss of sociability, economic, and cultural dynamics**. It is therefore crucial to consider policies to attract new residents in the historic center, particularly the younger population, as well as to generate attractiveness for new cultural and economic dynamics. **Aging continues to pose challenges to the quality of urban space, especially in areas such as mobility and accessibility.**

Another important challenge it's related to the **need to preserve its historical legacy, authenticity and materiality of its urban complex, while also integrating contemporary elements associated with the regeneration and quality of urban space**. These include solutions for thermal comfort or energy efficiency in buildings; accessibility; mobility; digitalization of services; or even the use of more economical and sustainable construction materials. This relationship between tradition values and contemporary solutions generates some friction between residents and regulatory agencies and some situations of non-compliance with the regulations of the safeguard plan in place.

One of the biggest challenges is related to **the lack of affordable housing** (for purchase or rent). As a Historic Center in a town with significant tourism activity, in recent decades we have seen an **increase in real estate speculation, reflected in rising house and rental prices**. At the same time, there is a high presence of tourist accommodations in Mértola's historic center—which contributes to rising prices per square meter and increases the **risk of social de-characterization and gentrification**. Currently, are registered in the historic center of Mértola 17 touristic housing units with a capacity for 62 people (41% of the resident population).

Mértola is a **highly vulnerable area to climate change**, with increasing records of extreme weather events such as heat waves, torrential rains, dust storms, and cyclonic winds. The general trend is for rising average temperatures, decreasing, and concentrating precipitation.

In this climate context, **the urban area of Mértola its characterized by several specific features**, that must be taken into account in urban planning and management, particularly the presence of:

- » a walled, terraced historic center with old structures and buildings, with significant slopes, highly exposed to the sun, heat, and rainwater;
- » the Guadiana River and the Oeiras Stream, which experience torrential rainfall with episodes of flooding or, in the case of the Oeiras Stream, virtually no flow in the summer, with stagnant waters more conducive to the occurrence of vectors and eutrophication processes;
- » a forest perimeter dominated by a stone pine monoculture, acacia and/or eucalyptus with a high risk of fire;
- » and an urban area with little shade, reduced vegetation, and a predominance of impervious surfaces (asphalt, pavement) that accumulate heat and intensify "heat island" phenomena.

These features pose significant threats to the urban environment, such as:

- » the risk of increased occurrence of the heat island effect;
- » collapse of old structures due to torrential rains;
- » impacts on public health, particularly on more vulnerable social groups such as the elderly, children, and people with chronic diseases;
- » economic impacts resulting, for example, from increased energy costs; losses in tourism;
- » and the potential devaluation of real estate values.

Given this context of vulnerabilities, risks, and impacts, it is essential to rethink the regeneration of urban spaces through systemic and territorially adapted approaches that are effective in both mitigating and adapting to climate change.

Finally, another critical challenge is the need to **promote greater active community involvement and inclusive participation** in city management and urban planning. Currently, the Historic Center has a Residents' Association with a small number of participating residents and limited participation in the activities it promotes. Therefore, it is necessary to consider innovative forms of community involvement and participation in order to develop urban solutions that truly reflect local needs and aspirations.

Section 2

Vision, focus areas & strategic objectives



Castle Street, Historic Center of Mértola

Vision

The vision for Mértola's Historic Center is to establish a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable urban environment that preserves its rich cultural heritage while fostering social and economic development. Rooted in the principles of sustainability, equity, and innovation, this vision seeks to balance tradition with progress, ensuring a thriving future for the community.

Mértola aims to be a model of sustainable urban regeneration, where historic preservation coexists with modernization, enabling the creation of an accessible and dynamic living environment. Through a participatory and collaborative approach, the IAP will empower local stakeholders—residents, businesses, and institutions—to shape the future of the Historic Center.

Objectives of the Integrated Action Plan

The Integrated Action Plan (IAP) for Mértola's historic center was designed to address its unique challenges by implementing a comprehensive and sustainable urban regeneration strategy. The central objective of this plan is to define urban regeneration measures that respond to the challenges listed above, prioritizing residents' quality of life and their participation in planning and decision-making processes.

Main Objectives:

Promote residential retention and attractiveness in the historic center, ensuring quality of life for all residents, by

- » Creating conditions that encourage resident retention and attract new residents, especially young people and families.
- » Rehabilitating the housing structure with affordable, comfortable, and energy-efficient solutions, respecting the historical identity of the area.
- » Improving the provision of public services, transportation, accessibility, public spaces, infrastructure, and local amenities that facilitate daily life in the center.
- » Promoting a safe, inclusive, and diverse urban environment with opportunities for community sociability and cultural engagement, reinforcing a sense of belonging and social cohesion.
- » Creating public policy for urban regeneration and financial, technical and fiscal support programs.

Preserve the cultural, identity, and heritage value of the historic center, ensuring its adaptation to the essential principles of urban space quality, by:

- » Safeguarding the historic center's historical, architectural, and symbolic identity, promoting interventions that respect its authenticity and collective memory.
- » Adapting public spaces and buildings to contemporary criteria of functionality, universal accessibility, safety, comfort, and environmental sustainability.
- » Promoting the connection between heritage conservation and urban innovation,

ensuring that the historic center is a living, inclusive space of memory adapted to the current and future needs of the community.

Ensure community participation in decision-making processes and continuous monitoring of the social impact of regeneration measures, by

- » Establishing permanent mechanisms for active listening and involvement of the local population in all phases of the regeneration process (planning, implementation, evaluation).
- » Promoting forums, community assemblies, public consultations, and collaborative processes with residents, associations, and local stakeholders.
- » Developing participatory monitoring systems that assess the social impacts of interventions.
- » Promoting transparency, public accountability, and the ability to adjust policies based on the community's real needs.
- » Strengthening the role of the Residents' Association within the community.

Boost economic and cultural activity in the historic center, promoting a vibrant, attractive, and sustainable area, by

- » Supporting the development of local businesses, crafts, restaurants, cultural tourism, co-working areas and other economic activities consistent with the historic center's character.
- » Encouraging the establishment of entrepreneurs, creators, and cultural agents, with incentives, shared spaces, and programs to support social and creative innovation.
- » Valuing tangible and intangible heritage as a driver of identity, tourist attraction, and economic dynamism.
- » Promoting regular, participatory, and decentralized cultural programming, reinforcing the historic center's role as a space for encounters, creation, and cultural expression.

- » Coordinating economic revitalization with goals of social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and community participation.

Strengthen the safety and resilience of the historic center to the risks associated with climate change by:

- » Identifying and mitigating specific vulnerabilities of the historic center to extreme weather events, such as flooding, structural collapse, heat waves, or droughts.
- » Developing climate risk and emergency management plans, coordinated with the community and civil protection services.
- » Raising awareness among residents and local stakeholders about sustainable practices and self-protection.
- » Integrating nature-based solutions (e.g., plant shade, permeable pavements, renaturalization of spaces) into the rehabilitation of public spaces.
- » Promoting energy efficiency and thermal adaptation of buildings, respecting their heritage value.

Focus Areas

URBAN REGENERATION, HOUSING AND HERITAGE

The priority given to housing and the quality of life provided in the urban space is highlighted, with targeted improvements focused on housing renovation, incentives for resident retention, support for affordable rentals, improvements to basic infrastructure, urban sanitation, strengthening local services, and the creation of well-maintained public spaces. Special attention should be given to the elderly population in areas such as accessibility, mobility, and combating social isolation.

Prioritizing affordable housing for all and caring for urban spaces to ensure the comfort and quality of life of residents must be balanced with the need to preserve cultural values and heritage. To ensure this balance, we give special emphasis on updating the current Safeguarding and Enhancement Plan, which dates back to 1995.

This plan should be updated, considering not only the principles of conservation and enhancement of the cultural heritage and identity of the place, but also, in accordance with current urban planning regulations, the integration of sustainability principles and the improvement of basic urban infrastructure.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

The construction of the plan for the urban regeneration of the historic center of Mértola strongly depends on collaborative processes, capable of bringing together residents, local entities, and experts in a continuous dialogue that guarantees solutions tailored to the real needs of the place. This broad participation strengthens the legitimacy of decisions, improves the quality of interventions, and promotes a sense of belonging that is essential for the sustainability of the transformations. In this sense, the integrated action plan presupposes the continuity in carrying out initiatives that promote active listening and the involvement of the local population in all phases of the regeneration process (planning, implementation, and evaluation), the holding of thematic forums and community assemblies, and the promotion of initiatives involving the local residents' association.

In addition, it is essential to monitor the social impacts of urban regeneration, assessing how the changes affect community dynamics, access to services, quality of life, and social cohesion, ensuring that urban development is balanced, inclusive, and beneficial for the entire population. In this sense, it is important, within the scope of the IAP (Institute for Environmental Protection), to create a set of social indicators and to constantly update a monitoring system of the social impacts of the ongoing regeneration process.

ECONOMIC, CULTURAL AND TOURISM REVITALIZATION

The focus is on revitalizing the historic center as a vibrant space with economic and cultural activity, encouraging the dynamics of small local businesses, crafts, cultural tourism, and the creative economy. This focus area also includes considering the redevelopment of public spaces for cultural uses and the incubation of community projects (placemaking).

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE

The safety and climate resilience of Mértola's historic center are fundamental to protecting its unique heritage and ensuring the safety of the local community. The presence of historical structures such as the city walls, the castle, and other defensive elements, while of enormous cultural value, requires additional care, as they may present vulnerabilities in the face of extreme phenomena, such as heavy rainfall or temperature variations. In addition, the urban configuration itself—with narrow streets, steep slopes, and some dead ends—influences the capacity to respond to emergencies, conditions circulation, and hinders rapid interventions in risky situations. High temperatures and the risk of intensification of heat islands require urgent measures, prioritizing nature-based solutions that help cool the urban space, improve thermal comfort, and strengthen climate resilience.

Thus, strengthening climate resilience implies articulating heritage protection with mitigation and adaptation strategies, ensuring that these unique characteristics of the historic center do not become factors of fragility, but rather integrated elements in a comprehensive urban security approach.

Examples of actions in this focus area include the regeneration of the riverside area of Mértola or the redevelopment of squares and streets with green shade provided by plants and the update of the Emergency and Civil Protection Plan for the historic center of Mértola.



Section 3

Integrated Action Plan

The Integrated Action Plan for the Historic Center of Mértola is composed of 4 complementary Work Packages, which derive from the previously identified areas of focus.



W.P1: URBAN REGENERATION, HOUSING AND HERITAGE

The Historic Center of Mértola is a valuable cultural and historical asset, but it faces deteriorating infrastructure, limited accessibility, and a need for modern adaptation while preserving authenticity. Urban regeneration is crucial for revitalizing public spaces, restoring historic buildings, and ensuring the area's long-term sustainability.

This Work Package (WP) forms the foundation of the Integrated Action Plan for the Historic Center of Mértola, guiding a balanced transformation between daily life and cultural preservation. This work package focuses on improving affordable housing conditions, enhancing public spaces, and valuing the built heritage, promoting a historic center that is inhabited, functional, and culturally distinct. Through urban rehabilitation, strengthening basic infrastructure, and updating heritage safeguarding instruments, WP1 seeks to ensure quality of life for residents, encourage population retention, and protect Mértola's unique identity in the face of contemporary challenges.

Sector-based: Housing, Historic Buildings and Public Infrastructure

Mértola's Historic Center requires targeted interventions in housing and heritage conservation to ensure its long-term sustainability. Many historic buildings suffer from neglect, poor maintenance, and inefficient energy use, leading to rising costs and decreased livability. Additionally, a lack of affordable housing contributes to population decline, making it difficult to attract and retain residents. The intervention focuses on renovating and modernizing historic buildings while preserving their architectural

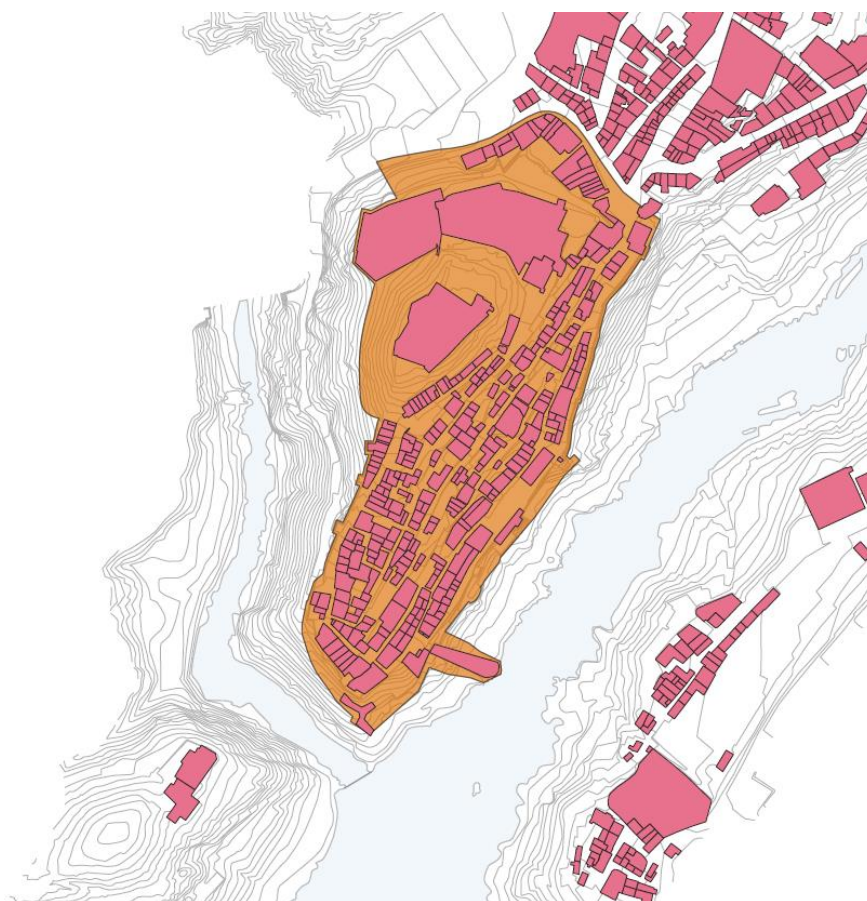
integrity, ensuring that housing solutions align with contemporary needs without compromising heritage values.

In addition, efforts should be made to update the urban infrastructure network, particularly the condition of pavements, in order to improve mobility for the elderly; public lighting; and the water and sanitation network.

This set of measures should be framed by a Detailed Urban Rehabilitation Plan, a public policy document that will update the current Plan, which dates from 1995 and is in urgent need of updating. Furthermore, financial support should also be provided to private property owners for urban rehabilitation.

Location-based: All Historic Center

The entire Historic Center of Mértola is the focal point of this intervention, as it represents the cultural and historical identity of the town. Specific areas requiring urgent restoration and adaptive reuse will be prioritized to maximize impact.



□ Map of the area covered by the integrated action plan

Type-based: Physical Interventions, Capacitation and Legislation

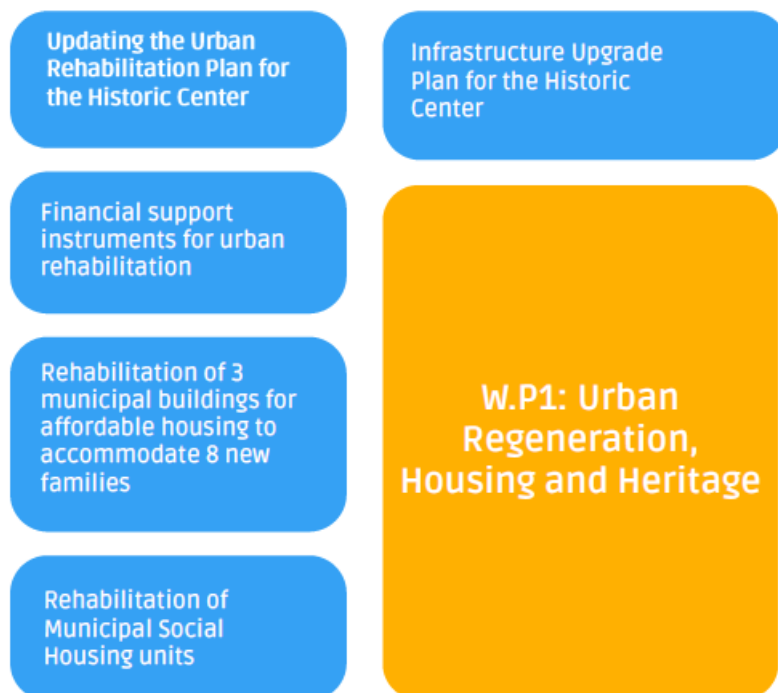
This area of intervention includes both tangible and intangible actions to ensure a holistic approach to urban regeneration:

- » Physical Interventions: Restoration of façades, roofs, and interiors of historic buildings, improvement of public spaces, enhancement of energy efficiency in buildings, pavements, water infrastructures.
- » Capacitation: Training programs for local builders and architects in heritage conservation techniques, awareness campaigns for residents on sustainable building practices, and support for property owners in accessing grants and funding opportunities for restoration.
- » Legislation: Municipality Policy and Grant Programs.

Associated objectives:

- » Promote residential retention and attractiveness in the historic center, ensuring quality of life for all residents
- » Promote residential retention and attractiveness in the historic center, ensuring quality of life for all residents

Proposed Actions



WP. 1.1 UPDATING THE URBAN REHABILITATION PLAN FOR THE HISTORIC CENTER

Action	Intended Result	Resource/Asset	Lead Agency	Key Partners	Time Scale
1.1 Urban Rehabilitation Plan for the Historic Center (updating the actual Safeguarding Plan from 1995)	The main result of the Detailed Urban Rehabilitation Plan for the Historic Center of Mértola is the definition of a clear and binding framework that guides all interventions in the historic center, ensuring that rehabilitation is carried out in an integrated, coherent, and sustainable manner.	Existing regulatory documents, historical archives, technical expertise in restoration.	Mértola Municipality	Campo Arqueológico de Mértola Architects DOTAU Urban Planning Experts, Academia, Local Builders, Heritage Conservation Public Entities Residents Association Community Parish council	Short-term (17 months) On going process
Potential risks		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excessive bureaucracy • Lack of community participation • Conflict of interest between tradition and contemporary issues • Conservatism in cultural heritage protection policies 			
Funding		Budget 75.000,00€ Funding 100% Municipality Funding			

**#Urban
Rehabilitation
Plan for the
Historic Center**

WP. 1.2 FINANCIAL SUP-PORT INSTRUMENTS FOR URBAN REHABILITATION

Action	Intended Result	Resource/Asset	Lead Agency	Key Partners	Time Scale
1.2 Financial support instruments for urban rehabilitation: 1.2.1 Urban rehabilitation grant program (funding up to €30,000.00 per project) 1.2.2 White Houses Program (support for facade restoration and painting with funding up to €5,000.00 per project)	Restoration of 5 to 10 buildings per year Improvement in the quality and aesthetic uniformity of facades Reduction of risks associated with structural fragility Incentive for residents to remain in the area Reinforcement of the attractiveness and vitality of the historic center	Mértola Municipality	Mértola Municipality Private owners	Architects Regional entities responsible for overseeing urban licensing	On going process
Potential risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demand exceeding financial capacity • Unequal distribution of support (more capable owners benefit more) • Difficulties in carrying out the works • Interventions that do not fully respect heritage regulations, compromising the authenticity of the historic center. • Risk of gentrification if the appreciation of buildings leads to increased rents and the departure of residents. • Excessive dependence on public support • Insufficient oversight 				
Funding	Budget Urban rehabilitation grant program 100.000,00€/per year White Houses Program: 50.000,00€ Funding 100% Municipality Funding				

**# Grants for
urban
rehabilitation**

WP. 1.3 REHABILITATION OF MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS FOR AFFORDABLE RENTAL HOUSING

Action	Intended Result	Resource/Asset	Lead Agency	Key Partners	Time Scale
1.3 Rehabilitation of 3 municipal buildings for affordable rental housing to accommodate 8 new families	<p>Increase housing availability within the Historic Center by converting a municipal-owned building into affordable rental units, helping to retain residents and attract new inhabitants</p> <p>Building nº 1: 6 two-bedroom flats Building nº 2: 1 two-bedroom house Building nº 3: 1 one-bedroom house</p>	<p>Municipal property, restoration funds, construction workforce, architectural and engineering expertise.</p> <p>IRU (national/european funding for Housing)</p> <p>Municipal Housing Strategy</p>	Mértola Municipality	<p>Regional Housing Authorities, Social Services, Construction Companies, EU Structural Funds</p> <p>Regional entities responsible for overseeing urban licensing</p>	<p>Medium to Long-term</p> <p>2025-2029</p> <p>Building nº 1 already in public tender for the construction work</p>
Potential risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of funding • Delays in construction due to technical, archaeological, or administrative restrictions typical of historical areas. • Cost overruns resulting from unforeseen structural issues or the need for specific materials to comply with heritage regulations. • Limitations imposed by heritage classification, or the possibility of finding archaeological finds that may restrict architectural solutions or increase the time and cost of interventions. • Discovery of serious pathologies in buildings, requiring a review of the project or increasing the necessary investment. • Social conflict regarding the future allocation of housing. 				
Funding	<p>Budget</p> <p>Building nº 1: 1.001.450,00€ Building nº 2: estimated 400.000,00€ Building nº 3: estimated 125.000,00€</p> <p>Funding</p> <p>85% IRHU (national/european funding for Housing) 15% Municipality Funding</p>				

Municipal buildings for affordable housing

WP. 1.4 REHABILITATION OF MUNICIPAL SOCIAL HOUSING UNITS

Action	Intended Result	Resource/Asset	Lead Agency	Key Partners	Time Scale
1.4 Rehabilitation of Municipal Social Housing units: Improved thermal comfort and energy efficiency (27 houses)	Diagnosis of the current state of social housing: inspection of buildings and survey of beneficiaries. Maintenance of social housing Improving the quality of life of people Combating energy poverty	Municipal property, restoration funds, construction workforce, architectural and engineering expertise. IRU (national/european funding for Housing) Municipal Housing Strategy	Mértola Municipality Mértola Social Network - a network of partners in the social sector.	Regional Housing Authorities, Social Services, Construction Companies, EU Structural Funds	Medium to Long-term 2025-2029
Potential risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient budget, which limits the ability to carry out all necessary interventions. • Delays in the execution of works due to bureaucracy, lack of human resources, or technical difficulties. • Inadequate prioritization, which may fail to serve the most needy buildings or families. • Lack of manpower. • Insufficient communication with residents, which may generate dissatisfaction, conflicts, or resistance to works. 				
Funding	<p>Budget Estimated 600.000,00€</p> <p>Funding 85% IRU (national/european funding for Housing) 15% Municipality Funding</p>				

**# Rehabilitation of
Municipal Social
Housing**

WP. 1.5 INFRASTRUCTURE

UPGRADE PLAN FOR THE HISTORIC CENTER

Action	Intended Result	Resource/Asset	Lead Agency	Key Partners	Time Scale
1.5 Infrastructure Upgrade Plan for the Historic Center: Flooring (accessibility improvement) Water and Sanitation Network (renovation) Public Lighting (change to LED - 2000K amber) Fiber Optics infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renovation of 2 streets in the historic center, including pavement work, water and sanitation network improvements, and installation of fiber optic infrastructure. • Upgrading public lighting to LED. • Improved quality of life and mobility, especially for the most vulnerable. • Greater attractiveness for new residents. • Improved public services provided. 	Municipal funds, Construction workforce, architectural and engineering expertise PARU (national/european funding for urban regeneration special for small scale towns)	Mértola Municipality	Regional Housing Authorities, Social Services, Construction Companies, EU Structural Funds Regional entities responsible for overseeing urban licensing	Medium to Long-term 2026-2029
Potential risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical and Operational Risks (Interference with archaeological structures, technical difficulties due to the morphology of the historical center, accidental damage) • Heritage and Regulatory Risks (restrictions related to heritage protection, delays in obtaining opinions and) • Financial Risks (lack of funding, budget overruns) • Social and Community Impact Risks (Significant disruptions to people's daily lives, negative impacts on local commerce and tourism) • Environmental Risks (noise, dust, disturbance of biodiversity occurring in the urban space) • Coordination and Management Risks (lack of municipal technical capacity for monitoring, project non-compliance) 				
Funding	Budget Not estimated yet Funding 85% PARU (national/european funding for urban regeneration special for small scale towns) 15% Municipality Funding				

Better urban infrastructure



W.P2: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL IMPACT MONITORING

A successful urban regeneration strategy must involve and empower the local community. The Historic Center's demographic decline, aging population, and youth disengagement present challenges to its long-term sustainability.

Sector-based: Social Inclusion and Governance

The Historic Center of Mértola faces demographic decline, an aging population, and social fragmentation. Strengthening community engagement and ensuring social inclusion are essential to fostering a sense of belonging, encouraging local participation, and making Mértola a vibrant and dynamic place to live and visit. This intervention seeks to strengthen local identity, promote intercultural dialogue, and improve social cohesion by engaging diverse social groups, including long-term residents, youth, and visitors.

Location-based: Village of Mértola

All activities will be carried out in the public spaces and buildings, markets, courtyards, and cultural venues of the Historic Center, ensuring that urban regeneration is not only physical but also social and cultural. By activating key areas within the historic core, these interventions will help revitalize underutilized spaces, making them central to community life.

Type-based: Organisation of Events and Public Awareness Activities

To create an inclusive, participatory urban environment, this intervention will focus on community-based events and awareness activities, such as:

- » Public cultural events and festivals that promote Mértola's multicultural heritage.
- » Community discussions and informal gatherings to stimulate local engagement.
- » Thematic activities in heritage spaces that strengthen local identity while ensuring diversity and inclusion.

Associated objectives:

Ensure community participation in decision-making processes and continuous monitoring of the social impact of regeneration measures

Proposed Actions:





Arqueology for all

WP. 2.1 WORLD CAFÉ COMMUNITY SESSIONS & SKETCHING

Action	Intended Result	Resource/Asset	Lead Agency	Key Partners	Time Scale
<p>2.1 World Café Community Sessions</p> <p>Collaborative co-creation sessions open to the community, following the World Café methodology and using sketching to visualize</p> <p>Main questions: Do we want Mértola to be a UNESCO World Heritage Site? What is our vision for the Historic Center and how can we get there?</p>	<p>4 world café sessions 2025/2026</p> <p>Guarantee the participation of residents in the processes and planning.</p> <p>Generate direct contributions from the community: solutions adapted to the real needs Strengthening the sense of identity and belonging Social cohesion of the historic center.</p>	<p>Experts in the World Cafe methodology</p>	<p>An external Consulting Organization</p>	<p>Municipality Campo Arqueológico de Mértola Community Residents Associations Local Entrepreneurs Parish council</p>	<p>Short-term (6 months)</p>

Potential risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risks of Participation (Low community engagement, unequal participation, with dominant voices from some groups and underrepresentation of the elderly, youth, or minorities, lack of interest or skepticism) • Risks Related to Session Dynamics (Conflicts or tensions among participants, potentially creating a hostile environment, discussions straying from the topic, compromising the collection of useful information) • Risks of Communication and Dissemination (Low dissemination, resulting in little awareness of the sessions, unmanaged expectations) • Risks of Integration with the Regeneration Plan (Ideas that cannot be implemented due to technical, legal, or financial constraints, community frustration if contributions are not visible in the final plan)
Funding	<p>Budget 5.000,00€</p> <p>Funding Urbact Municipality Funding</p>

World Café
Community
Sessions

WP. 2.2 NIGHT AT THE MARKET

Action	Intended Result	Resource/Asset	Lead Agency	Key Partners	Time Scale
<p>2.1 Night at the Market</p> <p>Collaborative and cultural activity happening at night in the municipal market to engage people in community actions and build a sense of belonging.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 Night at the Market Sessions (winter/spring/summer/fall) • Strengthening social cohesion and community involvement • Greater sense of belonging and active community participation, promoting dialogue between different generations and profiles of residents and visitors. • Dynamics of the Mertola market 	Municipality Market	<p>Municipality of mértola</p> <p>AEVG Entrepreneurs Association</p> <p>Parish council</p>	<p>Senior University</p> <p>Local Associations</p> <p>Local producers</p> <p>Community</p>	On going activity (every year)
Potential risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unmanaged expectations can lead to frustration if community contributions are not reflected in actions to their benefit 				
Funding	<p>Budget 4.000,00€</p> <p>Funding Municipality Funding</p>				



WP. 2.3 ARQUEOLOGY4ALL

Action	Intended Result	Resource/Asset	Lead Agency	Key Partners	Time Scale
2.3 Arqueology4All Literacy activities for culture and heritage (social media posts about ongoing excavations, museum pieces, historical facts, exhibition of archaeological pieces in public places - cafes, services)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased cultural awareness and knowledge • Greater community involvement and participation in heritage protection • Promotion of local identity and appreciation of the • Historic Center Democratic dissemination and access to heritage 	Museum of Mertola Educational Team	Museum of Mértola	Campo Arqueológico de Mértola	On going 2026-2029
Potential risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low engagement or interest in online publications, reducing the reach of the campaign. • Legal restrictions on the disclosure of ongoing archaeological discoveries. • Target audience not reached, namely young people or residents less familiar with social media. 				
Funding	Budget 3.000,00€ Funding Municipality Funding				

WP. 2.4 URBAN REGENERATION SOCIAL IMPACT REPORT

Action	Intended Result	Resource/Asset	Lead Agency	Key Partners	Time Scale
2.4 Urban Regeneration Social Impact Report This report is based on a battery of social impact indicators that assess improvements in quality of life, social and community cohesion, and the active participation of residents in the transformations of the historic center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of areas for future improvement. • Assessment of gaps and needs, serving as a basis for planning new interventions. • Transparency and accountability. 	Municipality Social Professionals	External consulting organization	Mértola Social Network Residents Association	2026-2029
Potential risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data Collection Risks (Low response rate in surveys or questionnaires, limiting representativeness, Incomplete or incorrect information provided by participants, • Underrepresentation of specific groups affecting social analysis) • Operational Risks (Lack of human or technical resources, including analysts and data processing tools) • Communication and Disclosure Risks 				
Funding	Budget 10.000,00€ Funding Social Radar Programme (National Program with European Social Fund)				

Social Impact Report

WP. 2.5 YOUTHLAB

Action	Intended Result	Resource/Asset	Lead Agency	Key Partners	Time Scale
2.5 YOUTHLab A participatory and experimental space aimed at young people, where they can develop ideas, discuss community problems, and propose solutions for public policies and local projects for the Historic Center. It functions as a co-creation laboratory, combining debates, workshops, and practical activities, promoting innovation, creativity, and the active involvement of young people in decision-making and strategic planning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater youth participation in local decisions concerning the Historic Center • Development of skills and active citizenship • Generation of innovative ideas • Strengthening the bond between young people, the community, and the urban space of the historic center 	Municipality youth offices	Local Secondary School	Students Association Mértola Social Network	2025-2026
Potential risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low youth participation, • Disinterest or lack of motivation, • Underrepresentation of specific groups, such as young people from different neighborhoods, socioeconomic backgrounds, or minorities. • Unmanaged expectations 				
Funding	Budget 10.000,00€ Funding Municipality Funding Erasmus+ European Youth Foundation				

Youth Lab



W.P3: ECONOMIC, CULTURAL AND TOURISM REVITALIZATION

The WP3 project focuses on the economic, cultural, and tourism revitalization of the Historic Center of Mértola, promoting the development of activities that increase the attractiveness of the area for residents, visitors, and entrepreneurs. This area of intervention aims to create a dynamic urban environment where historical and cultural heritage is valued, while simultaneously supporting local economic growth.

The focus includes supporting small businesses, crafts and local commerce, promoting cultural and creative tourism, requalifying public spaces for cultural and community uses, and developing projects that foster the creative and innovative economy. At the same time, WP3 seeks to integrate actions that strengthen the identity of the historic center, enhance the visitor experience, and promote citizen and community participation initiatives, ensuring that economic growth is sustainable and inclusive.

Sector-based: Entrepreneurs, Association, Municipality and Local Community

Economic revitalization in Mértola's Historic Center depends on stimulating local commerce, attracting new businesses, and supporting local entrepreneurs. This intervention will focus on enhancing the retail sector and strengthening associations, creating new attractions, ensuring that cultural heritage is also an economic asset that generates sustainable job opportunities and business growth. Active community participation is very important for the dynamics of sociability in renovated public spaces.

Location-based: All Historic Center

The interventions will be implemented throughout the Historic Center, targeting underutilized commercial spaces, public markets, and cultural sites to ensure a dynamic and economically viable urban environment. Special focus will be placed on key areas that can attract visitors and stimulate local spending.

Type-based: Product Valorization, Retail Attraction, Placemaking

This intervention will enhance Mértola's economy through:

- » Valorization of local products, such as artisanal crafts, natural cosmetics, and regional foods.
- » Retail attraction strategies, including upgrading historic commercial spaces, supporting new businesses, and making local commerce more visible and attractive

to both residents and visitors.

- » Creation of new cultural projects to generate new attractions
- » New public spaces to foster community and cultural interaction

Associated objective:

Boost economic and cultural activity in the historic center, promoting a vibrant, attractive, and sustainable area.

Proposed Actions:



Artistic performance in the Historic Centre of Mértola

WP. 3.1 HAMMAM & TEA HOUSE

Action	Intended Result	Resource/Asset	Lead Agency	Key Partners	Time Scale
3.1 Hammam & Tea House Definition of the management model Communication and marketing Seeking investors for the private concession Wellness tourism offerings inspired by the region's Islamic heritage, featuring a Mediterranean-inspired tea house.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a unique cultural and wellness tourism attraction, generating economic activity and supporting local • Increased Tourist Attractiveness • Local Economic Development • Revitalization of the Historic Center • Opening of the municipal project for private concession 	Hammam & Tea House building	Municipality	AEVG Local Entrepreneurs Association	2026 On going process
Potential risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial risks (Lower than expected revenues; pressure on financial sustainability) • Operational risks (Difficulty in securing a specialized team to operate an hammam, high maintenance costs) • Positioning and market risks (Lack of demand, competition from other wellness facilities in the region.) 				
Funding	Budget 56.000,00€ Funding 85% "Growing with Tourism" Program – Tourism of Portugal 15% Municipality of Mértola				

Hammam & Tea House of Mértola

WP. 3.2 NEW ROMAN MUSEUM AND RENOVATION OF THE TOWN SQUARE

Action	Intended Result	Resource/Asset	Lead Agency	Key Partners	Time Scale
3.2 New Roman Museum and renovation of the town square A museum will be built to house four large Roman statues recently discovered during an archaeological excavation in Mértola. The museum will be located in a public building in the lower part of the historic center. The project includes a snack bar within the museum with a terrace overlooking the town square.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased tourist appeal and revitalization of the historic center: a new hub for visits and leisure, encouraging the flow of people and extending the time spent in the historic center. • Boost to the local economy and local commerce. • Creation of a multifunctional cultural space for residents and visitors. • Requalification and revitalization of the Town Hall Square as a central public space 	Municipality Building	Municipality of Mértola Museum of Mértola	Campo arqueológico de Mértola	2025-2027 On going process
Potential risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unexpected Archaeological Discoveries (Excavation or intervention at the site may reveal new archaeological findings, forcing the work to be halted, the project to be revised, and increasing deadlines and costs) • Technical Difficulties in Integrating with Existing Heritage • Delays in the Construction Schedule • Financial Overcosts 				
Funding	Budget Estimated 2.200.000,00€ Funding 85% PARU (national/european funding for urban regeneration special for small scale towns) 15% Municipality Funding				

**# New Roman
Museum & New
Town Square**

WP. 3.3 COWORKING MÉRTOLA

Action	Intended Result	Resource/Asset	Lead Agency	Key Partners	Time Scale
3.3 CoWorking Mértola Coworking space that can accommodate up to 9 workstations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attracting new professionals and boosting the local economy • Creating a creative and collaborative community • Strengthening the vitality of the historic center 	Private Building	Montícola Local NGO	Municipality of Mértola AEVG	2025-2026 On going process
Potential risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low adoption and underutilization of space • Lack of technical and operational resources for ongoing management • Insufficient financial sustainability • Difficulty in integrating coworking into local dynamics • Financial Overcosts 				
Funding	Budget 12.000,00€ Funding 70% Private Funding 30% Municipality Funding				

WP. 3.4 FLOW4SCIENCE & ART PROGRAM

Action	Intended Result	Resource/Asset	Lead Agency	Key Partners	Time Scale
3.4 Flow4Science & Art Program Sabbatical leave and artist residency program 5 houses in the historic center for accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attracting artists, researchers, and qualified professionals to Mertola. • Boosting social and economic development and promoting the region. • Revitalizing the historic center with new residents 	5 municipality houses	Biological Station of Mértola	Municipality of Mértola FLAD Luso-American Foundation for Development	2026-2029
Potential risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low uptake of qualified candidates • Insufficient integration with the local community • High operating costs and dependence on external funding 				
Funding	Budget 35.000,00/per year Funding Creative Europe FLAD Luso-American Foundation for Development Municipality of Mértola				

WP. 3.5 MÉRTOLA BIOSPHERE TOURISM

DESTINATION CERTIFICATION

Action	Intended Result	Resource/Asset	Lead Agency	Key Partners	Time Scale
<p>3.5 Mértola Biosphere Tourism Destination Certification</p> <p>Granted by the Responsible Tourism Institute (RTI), an international organization based in Spain that works to promote sustainable tourism.</p> <p>The RTI is responsible for evaluating destinations, companies, and tourism ventures according to environmental, social, and governance criteria, aligned with the UN SDGs.</p>	<p>Biosphere certification valid for 3 years</p> <p>Increased conscious tourism appeal</p> <p>Greater involvement and benefit for the local community</p> <p>Enhancement of cultural and landscape heritage</p> <p>Added value for local businesses associated with tourism</p> <p>Improved awareness and attraction of investment</p>	<p>Expertise from Regional Tourism Professionals</p> <p>Municipality Tourism Team</p>	<p>Alentejo Regional Tourism Authority</p>	<p>Municipality of Mértola</p> <p>Local tourism agents and enterprises</p>	<p>2026-2029</p> <p>On going process</p>
Potential risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failure to obtain the certification • Low participation or resistance from local businesses • Difficulty in continuously meeting the requirements 				
Funding	<p>Budget 25.000,00€</p> <p>Funding Alentejo Regional Tourism Authority</p>				



BIOSPHERE
TOURISM



WP.:4 ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE

This Work Plan focuses on initiatives aimed at the safety of people and property and strengthening the climate resilience of the Historic Centre of Mértola in the face of climate change. It includes conservation interventions in historical infrastructure, emergency plans and risk management, and the implementation of nature-based solutions to mitigate the effects of extreme weather events such as torrential rains, heat waves, and erosion.

The objective is to reconcile the preservation of historical heritage with environmental sustainability, promoting safer streets, squares, and buildings, adapted to future conditions and prepared to protect the resident community, visitors, and cultural assets.

Sector-based: Historic Infrastructure, Public Areas Comfort and Greening

The Historic Center and riverside areas of Mértola experience high temperatures, lack of shade, and limited green spaces, affecting public comfort and urban livability. Addressing these challenges through public space greening and climate adaptation strategies is essential to enhance environmental sustainability and resilience. This intervention aims to increase urban comfort, mitigate the effects of climate change, and create a more livable historic center.

Historical structures such as the city wall, the river tower, or the castle present conservation problems that threaten the safety of people and property. Urgent conservation measures and the implementation of a continuous monitoring system are therefore necessary.

Location-based: All Historic Center and Riverside Area

The intervention will focus on public spaces within the Historic Center and the riverside area, where improvements in shade, water management, and ecological restoration can create a more pleasant and sustainable urban environment. The riverside area, in particular, holds potential for urban greening and ecological restoration, while key plazas and streets in the Historic Center require thermal comfort adaptations to counteract extreme heat.

Type-based: Physical Interventions, strategic planning

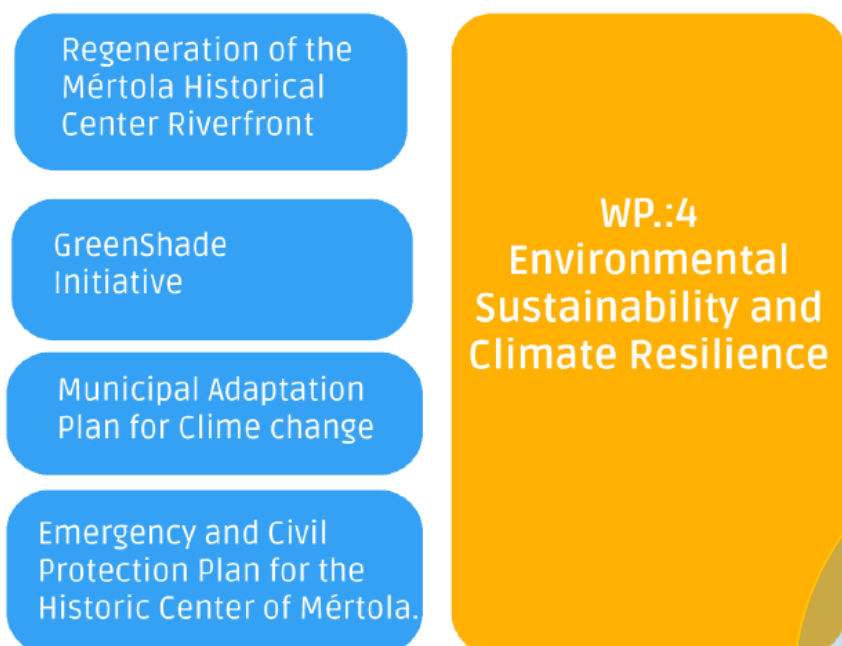
This intervention will include:

- » Architectural and landscape redesign of the riverside area.
- » Urban greening initiatives to increase shaded areas and vegetation cover.
- » Implementation of climate-adapted public spaces through pilot projects that serve as models for future urban design strategies.
- » Strategic planning: Municipal Plan for Adaptation to Climate Change and Emergency and civil protection plan for the historic center of Mértola.

Associated objective:

Strengthen the safety and resilience of the historic center to the risks associated with climate change.

Proposed Actions:



WP. 4.1 REGENERATION OF THE MÉRTOLA HISTORICAL CENTER RIVERFRONT

Action	Intended Result	Resource/Asset	Lead Agency	Key Partners	Time Scale
4.1 Regeneration of the Mértola Historical Center Riverfront Riverbank stabilization against erosion Ecological restoration (promotion of urban biodiversity) Edible gardens (fruit trees are among the planted trees) Accessibility Landscape interpretation	Creation of a new green area next to the Historic Center Climate mitigation Environmental protection and resilience of riverbanks Increase in urban biodiversity (pollinators and birds) Improvement of the quality of public space and urban landscaping Promotion of socialization and community cohesion Enhancement of tourism in the historic center	Riverside area, landscape architecture expertise, funding for green infrastructure.	Municipality of Mértola	Biological Station of Mértola	2025-2026 On going process
Potential risks	Insufficient maintenance and degradation (Lack of resources for regular maintenance of trees, gardens and equipment can lead to the degradation of the space, compromising the safety, aesthetics and social benefits of the project) Floods on the Guadiana River				
Funding	Budget 396.000,00€ Funding 85% ITI Urban Networks - Program funded by ERDF – European Regional Development Fund 15% Municipality of Mértola				



WP. 4.2 GREENSHADE INITIATIVE

Action	Intended Result	Resource/Asset	Lead Agency	Key Partners	Time Scale
4.4 GreenShade Initiative Creating green shade in the historic center using climbing plants from the Mediterranean flora (bougainvillea, jasmine, vines)	Improved thermal comfort and urban microclimate Aesthetic and landscape enhancement of public spaces Promotion of local biodiversity Encouragement of socialization and use of public spaces	Landscape architects Gardeners and maintenance technicians Plants Gardening equipment Pots	Municipality of Mértola Parish of Mértola	Residents Association	2025-2026 On going Process
Potential risks	Damage to buildings and infrastructure Insufficient maintenance Limited community acceptance				
Funding	Budget 6.000,00€ Funding Municipality of Mértola				

WP. 4.3 MUNICIPAL PLAN FOR CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION

Action	Intended Result	Resource/Asset	Lead Agency	Key Partners	Time Scale
4.5 Municipal Plan for Climate Change Adaptation	Greater knowledge about climate risks Reduced vulnerability to extreme weather events Improved urban and environmental resilience Protection of historical and cultural heritage Increased community awareness and involvement Strategic planning and continuous monitoring	Municipal Human Resources External Consulting Technical and Geographic Information Resources Earth Observation Systems (EOS)	Municipality of Mértola	Portuguese Environment Agency (APA) (CCDR Alentejo) Directorate-General for Territory (DGT) ICNF – Institute for Nature Conservation and Forests Alentejo Hydrographic Region Civil Protection Local Associations Schools	2025-2026 On going Process
Potential risks	Insufficient community involvement Limited financial and technical resources				

	Changes in political or institutional context Technical complexity of measures Underestimation of future climate impacts Lack of continuous monitoring Lack of qualified personnel
Funding	Budget 21.000,00€ Funding Municipality of Mértola

WP. 4.4 EMERGENCY AND CIVIL PROTECTION PLAN FOR THE HISTORIC CENTER OF MÉRTOLA (UPDATING)

Action	Intended Result	Resource/Asset	Lead Agency	Key Partners	Time Scale
4. Emergency and Civil Protection Plan for the Historic Center of Mértola (updating)	Increased safety for residents and visitors, with faster and more effective responses to emergency situations. Reduction of damage to historical and archaeological heritage through specific protection protocols. Improved coordination between all civil protection agencies, ensuring integrated and efficient action. Reduced impact of extreme weather events (heat waves, floods, strong winds), thanks to the identification of vulnerabilities and implementation of preventive measures.	Municipal Human Resources External Consulting Resources Earth Observation Systems (EOS)	Municipality of Mértola	Municipal Civil Defense. National Emergency and Civil Protection Authority (ANEPC) GNR / Mértola Territorial Post Mértola Volunteer Firefighters Mértola Health Center / ARS Algarve ICNF / Vale do Guadiana Natural Park Parish of Mértola	2026/2027 12 months
Potential risks	Lack of community involvement Insufficient or outdated technical information Conflicts of competence between entities Limited financial and human resources Delays in protection or maintenance works Lack of specialized personnel				
Funding	Budget 15.000,00€ Funding Municipality of Mértola				



Islamic Festival of Mértola

Section 4

Governance & Funding

Governance Structure

The effective implementation of the Integrated Action Plan (IAP) for Mértola's Historic Center requires a governance structure that ensures coordinated efforts, accountability, and active participation from all stakeholders. This section outlines the main entities responsible for overseeing the IAP, their roles, and the mechanisms for coordination and communication among different departments and stakeholders.

IAP Implementation and Monitoring

- » Mértola Municipality (Urbanism, Environment, Culture and Social Departments): Lead agency overseeing implementation, funding allocation, and policy integration.
- » Urban Local Group (ULG): A collaborative working group, consisting of municipal representatives, local associations, business, neighborhood association and citizens/residents.
- » Project Coordination Taskforce: A small team of Municipality personal and ULG representatives, with the aim of being responsible for monitoring the plan, for cross-sector coordination and collaboration between public and private stakeholders.
- » External Experts: technical expertise on urban planning, heritage, urban regeneration, social impact, sustainability, and community engagement.

Stakeholder Engagement Actions

The stakeholder engagement activities are those foreseen in WP2; namely the World Café sessions, the Night at the Market and the initiatives with the younger population through the Youth Lab sessions. Social innovation laboratories to be developed with the schools of Mértola, where students can develop ideas, discuss community problems, and propose solutions for public policies and local projects for the Historic Center.

Proposed Communication Mechanisms:

- » Biannual Public Forums: Organized to present progress, gather community feedback, and foster transparency.
- » Quarterly Reports submitted to the Municipal Council and funding agencies detailing progress, challenges, and financial expenditures.

IAP Monitoring

Monitoring the Integrated Action Plan for the Historic Center is a fundamental element to guarantee its effective, coherent execution, aligned with the defined strategic objectives. This point presents the plan's monitoring and evaluation model, based on a logic of continuous and participatory monitoring, which allows tracking the progress of actions, evaluating their impacts, and introducing adjustments whenever necessary. By promoting transparency, shared responsibility, and the active involvement of different local actors, monitoring constitutes not only a control instrument but also a space for collective learning and strengthening the quality and sustainability of interventions in the Historic Center.

SMART Goals

S.M.A.R.T Goal 1: By 2027, Urban Rehabilitation Plan for the Historic Center updated and approved

S.M.A.R.T Goal 2: By 2027, restore at least 2 historic buildings for affordable housing while ensuring energy efficiency improvements and adherence to architectural conservation regulations.

S.M.A.R.T Goal 3: By 2026, increase community participation in urban development by organizing at least 4 community-based events per year, fostering inclusivity, and involving 20% more local residents and youth in decision-making processes

S.M.A.R.T Goal 4: By 2028, implement at least 2 major climate adaptation projects in public spaces to enhance thermal comfort and green infrastructure, reducing urban heat impact by 10% in key locations (Riverside area and public space).

S.M.A.R.T Goal 5: By 2027, increase local business activity in the Historic Center by 20%, including the opening of at least 2 new businesses focused on sustainable tourism, retail, and cultural entrepreneurship.

Participatory Monitoring

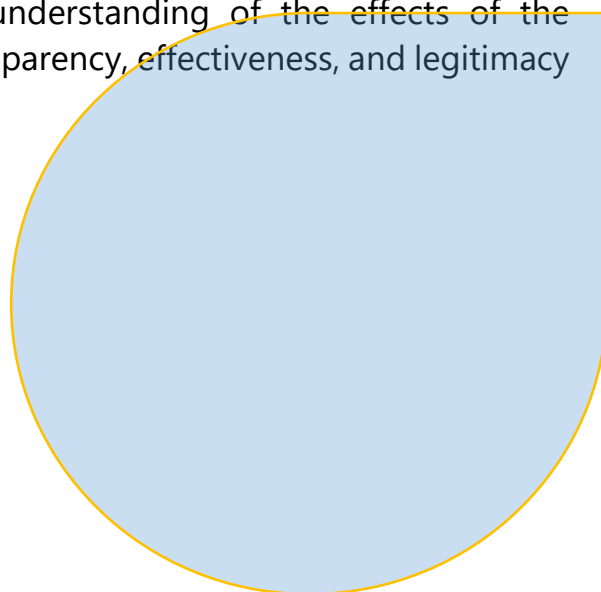
Dimension	Monitoring Element	Description	Responsible Entities	Frequency	Tools / Outputs
Governance	ULG	Body responsible for the overall monitoring of the Plan, analysis of results and proposal of adjustments	Municipality ULG	Quarterly	Meeting minutes, opinions, adjustment proposals
Thematic Management	Thematic Monitoring Groups	Monitoring of actions by strategic axis (heritage, housing, public space, economy, tourism, social action)	Municipality departments Task Force	Biannual	Thematic reports, meeting records
Implementation	Action implementation progress	Monitoring of physical and financial execution of the actions foreseen in the Plan	Municipality departments Task Force ULG	Quarterly / Biannual	Updated action sheets, timelines
Results	Quantitative indicators	Assessment of outputs (number of interventions, participants, events, supports, etc.)	Municipality departments ULG	Biannual	Indicator tables
Impact (see next chapter)	Qualitative indicators	Assessment of social, economic, cultural and territorial impacts	ULG	Annual	Participatory evaluation report
Participation	Community involvement	Level of involvement of residents and local stakeholders in the Plan	ULG	Annual	Attendance lists, participation records
Public Consultation	Forums and participatory sessions	Open moments for review, debate and collection of contributions	ULG	Annual	Summary reports, minutes
Communication	Transparency and dissemination	Dissemination of the Plan's progress and achieved results	Municipality	Ongoing	Digital platform, newsletters, information panels
Evaluation	Plan adjustment	Review of actions, targets and methodologies based on monitoring results	ULG	Annual	Adjustment proposals, revised version of the Plan
Reporting	Monitoring reports	Systematic compilation of monitoring information	Municipality departments Task Force	Biannual and Annual	Progress and evaluation reports

Social Impact Monitoring (outputs & outcomes)

Monitoring the Integrated Action Plan for the Historic Center of Mértola is of central importance to ensure that the implemented actions produce real and lasting changes in the life of the community. Beyond monitoring the physical and financial execution—traditionally focused on outputs such as the number of works carried out, events promoted, or participants involved—it becomes fundamental to evaluate the social effects generated by the plan, that is, the outcomes and impacts associated with the public intervention.

In this context, monitoring the social impact allows us to understand whether the actions effectively contribute to broader objectives, such as improving quality of life, strengthening social cohesion, reducing isolation and vulnerability, increasing the sense of belonging to the Historic Center, and strengthening citizens' trust in local institutions. These effects, although less immediate and more difficult to measure, are crucial for the sustainability of urban regeneration policies, especially in small-scale territories with fragile demographic dynamics. The adoption of social indicators, both qualitative and quantitative, based on residents' perceptions and the observation of social change over time, allows us to overcome a merely accounting-based logic in public action. This aligns with the approach of the URBACT program and the U.R. Impact project, which prioritizes results-oriented evaluation, continuous learning, and the adjustment of policies to the real needs of the territory.

In this way, the present logical framework integrates a monitoring system that combines performance indicators (outputs) with outcome and impact indicators, ensuring a more complete and integrated understanding of the effects of the Integrated Action Plan and reinforcing the transparency, effectiveness, and legitimacy of municipal intervention.



Output and Outcomes Monitoring System: Logical Framework

IMPACT LEVEL (medium/long term)

Expected Impact

Sustainable improvement in the quality of life in the Historic Center of Mértola, with a more cohesive, confident, economically active and resilient community, and with greater recognition of the value of local public intervention.

Impact Indicators (structural change)

- » Evolution in the number of permanent residents
- » Overall level of well-being and quality of life (survey)
- » Level of citizen trust in the City Council
- » Level of identification with the Historic Center as a place to live
- » Perception of equity in access to local opportunities

Verification sources:

Periodic population surveys; demographics; evaluation reports

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LEVEL OF RESULTS / OUTCOMES (short/medium term)

↳ Outcome 1 – Urban and housing regeneration with social impact

Outputs (what is done)

- » Number of buildings rehabilitated
- » Number of dwellings recovered for permanent housing
- » Number of interventions in public space
- » Number of heritage buildings with new uses

Outcomes (what changes)

- » Increased perception of comfort and housing quality
- » Reduced feeling of abandonment and urban degradation
- » Greater use of public space by residents
- » Reinforcement of the social value of heritage

Outcome indicators

Degree of resident satisfaction with housing and public space
Percentage of residents who regularly use public space
Degree of perception of appreciation of local heritage

↳ Outcome 2 – Enhanced participation and social cohesion

Outputs (what is done)

- » Number of participatory sessions held
- » Number of participants involved
- » Number of community initiatives supported
- » Existence of permanent participation structures

Outcomes (what changes)

- » Reduction of social isolation, especially among the elderly
- » Increased sense of belonging to the community
- » Strengthening of trust among neighbors
- » Greater citizen confidence in local institutions

Outcome indicators

% of residents who feel like an active part of the community
Level of interpersonal trust (survey)
Level of trust in municipal action
Number of autonomous community initiatives that emerged

↳ Outcome 3 – Economic, Cultural, and Tourism Revitalization with Local Benefits

Outputs (what is done)

- » Number of businesses supported/created
- » Number of cultural events held
- » Number of local agents involved in cultural programming
- » Number of sustainable tourism promotion actions

Outcomes (what changes)

- » Greater economic diversity in the Historic Center
- » Increased local employment
- » Greater access for the resident population to cultural offerings
- » More positive perception of tourism by residents

Outcome indicators

% of businesses managed by local residents
Number of jobs created or maintained
Level of resident satisfaction with cultural offerings
Level of social acceptance of tourism

➔ Outcome 4 – Sustainability, security, and climate resilience

Outputs (what is done)

- » Number of buildings with energy efficiency improvements
- » Number of climate adaptation actions implemented
- » Number of environmental and safety awareness actions
- » Existence of plans, strategic policy documents and protocols

Outcomes (what changes)

- » Increased perception of safety in public spaces
- » Greater thermal comfort during extreme periods
- » Greater public awareness of climate risks
- » Adoption of more sustainable behaviors

Outcome indicators

Degree of perceived safety
Percentage of residents informed about climate risks
Degree of satisfaction with environmental comfort
Reported changes in sustainable behaviors

MONITORING AND CONTINUOUS LEARNING

Tools

Regular population surveys
Reflection sessions with the ULG
Monitoring reports
Comparable indicators over time (baseline, intermediate, final)

Added value of the monitoring system

Demonstrates the social change generated, not just the execution
Supports evidence-based policy decisions
Reinforces transparency and institutional trust
Allows adjustments to the Action Plan over time

Overall Costings and Funding

Activity	Budget	Funding
W.P.: 1 URBAN REGENERATION, HOUSING AND HERITAGE: 2.351.450,00€		
1.1 Urban Rehabilitation Plan for the Historic Center	75.000,00€	Municipality Funding
1.2 Financial support instruments for urban rehabilitation:	150.000,00€	Municipality Funding
1.3 Rehabilitation of 3 municipal buildings for affordable rental housing to accommodate 8 new families	1.526.450,00€	85% IRHU (national/european funding for Housing) 15% Municipality Funding
1.4 Rehabilitation of Municipal Social Housing units: Improved thermal comfort and energy efficiency (27 houses)	600.000,00€	85% IRHU (national/european funding for Housing) 15% Municipality Funding
1.5 Infrastructure Upgrade Plan for the Historic Center:	Not estimated yet	85% PARU (national/european funding for urban regeneration for small scale towns) 15% Municipality Funding
W.P.:2 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & SOCIAL IMPACT MONITORING: 22.000,00€		
2.1 World Café Community Sessions	5.000,00€	Urbact Municipality Funding
2.1 Night at the Market	4.000,00€	Municipality Funding
2.3 Arqueology4All	3.000,00€	Municipality Funding
2.5 YOUTHLab	10.000,00€	Municipality Funding Erasmus+ European Youth Foundation
W.P3: ECONOMIC, CULTURAL AND TOURISM REVITALIZATIO: 2.328.000,00€		
3.1 Hammam & Tea House	56.000,00€	85 % "Growing with Tourism" Program – Tourism of Portugal 15% Municipality of Mértola
3.2 New Roman Museum and renovation of the town square	2.200.000,00€	85% PARU (national/european funding for urban regeneration for small scale towns) 15% Municipality Funding
3.3 CoWork Mértola	12.000,00€	70% Private Funding 30% Municipality Funding
3.4 Flow4Science & Art Program	35.000,00€	Creative Europe FLAD Luso-American Foundation for Development Municipality of Mértola
3.5 Mértola Biosphere Tourism Destination Certification	25.000,00€	Alentejo Regional Tourism Authority
WP:4 ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE: 438.000,00€		
4.1 Regeneration of the Mértola Historical Center River-front	396.000,00€	85% ITI Urban Networks - Program funded by ERDF – European Regional Development Fund 15% Municipality of Mértola
4.4 GreenShade Initiative	6.000,00€	Municipality Funding
4.5 Municipal Plan for Climate Change Adaptation	21.000,00€	Municipality Funding
4. Emergency and Civil Protection Plan for the Historic Center of Mértola (updating)	15.000,00€	Municipality Funding
Total budget		5.139.450,00€



conclusion

The development of the Integrated Action Plan for the Historic Center of Mértola, created within the framework of the UR Impact project of the URBACT Program, represents a fundamental milestone in the construction of a sustainable and shared strategy for this unique place. The process involved the mobilization of local entities, specialists, cultural agents, economic operators, and, above all, the resident community, allowing for the identification of priority challenges and the enhancement of opportunities that contribute to urban regeneration, socio-economic revitalization, and the valorization of Mértola's heritage.

This Plan is a results-oriented instrument, articulating the preservation of the historic center with innovative solutions that promote quality of life, inclusion, and resilience. Its implementation is based on an integrated approach that values both cultural heritage and contemporary dynamics, reinforcing the attractiveness of the historic center and its capacity to generate new economic and socio-cultural activities.

One of the structuring aspects of this Plan is the strengthening of the monitoring of the social impact of urban regeneration, ensuring that interventions are not limited to improving the physical space, but also produce tangible benefits for residents. The definition of social indicators, mechanisms for continuous evaluation, and reporting procedures will allow for measuring effects in areas such as community cohesion, accessibility, inclusion, economic development, and resident satisfaction. This commitment to ongoing evaluation ensures that the implemented actions remain aligned with the real needs of the community and with the objectives of UR Impact.

At the same time, the Plan consolidates a vision of participatory governance, recognizing that the active participation of the community in decision-making processes is essential to guarantee the relevance, legitimacy, and sustainability of public policies. Citizen involvement, through forums, consultations, co-creation labs, and other collaborative methodologies, will be fundamental to adjusting strategies, anticipating challenges, and adapting actions over time.

Thus, the Integrated Action Plan for the Historic Center of Mértola is not limited to defining a set of interventions: rather, it constitutes a lasting commitment to a socially responsible urban transformation, built by the community and continuously monitored. This approach will allow Mértola to establish itself as a benchmark in heritage management, social innovation, and the adoption of urban regeneration models aligned with European principles of sustainability, inclusion, and active participation.



Mértola, 2025

URBACT



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Prioritising Social Impact in Urban Regeneration