



URBACT



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Interreg

Plan Einstein Academy

URBACT Innovation Transfer Network

Network Journal #1

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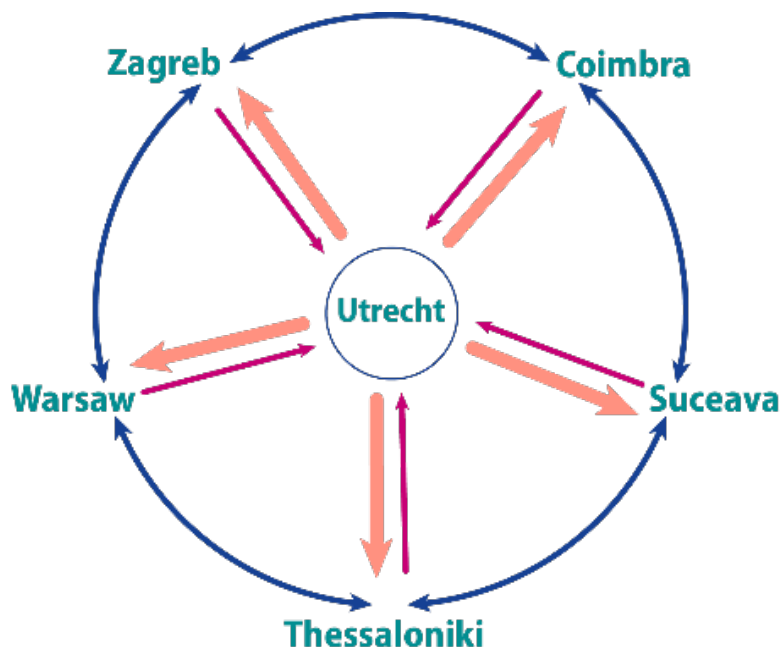
Plan Einstein Academy Network Journal #1, May 2025

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A. Introduction to the network

Plan Einstein Academy is a network of six European cities.



At the heart of Plan Einstein Academy is the original innovative practice city of Utrecht, which developed Plan Einstein as a new approach to local inclusion, bringing newcomers and neighbourhood members together as equals.



Plan Einstein network partners:

Lead Partner

- Utrecht (Netherlands).

Transfer partners:

- Coimbra (Portugal)
- Suceava (Romania)
- Thessaloniki (Greece)
- Warsaw (Poland)
- Zagreb (Croatia)

The network is characterised by the diversity of its city partners.



The diversity is apparent in geographical location....

.... but also other relevant aspects including: city size; migrant profiles; local experiences of migrant reception; and local policies towards migrant inclusion.

Plan Einstein: “Living together, learning together and working together.”

This is the core concept of Plan Einstein, the innovative practice from the City of Utrecht through which refugees and asylum seekers have been rebuilding their lives at the very heart of the local community since 2016.

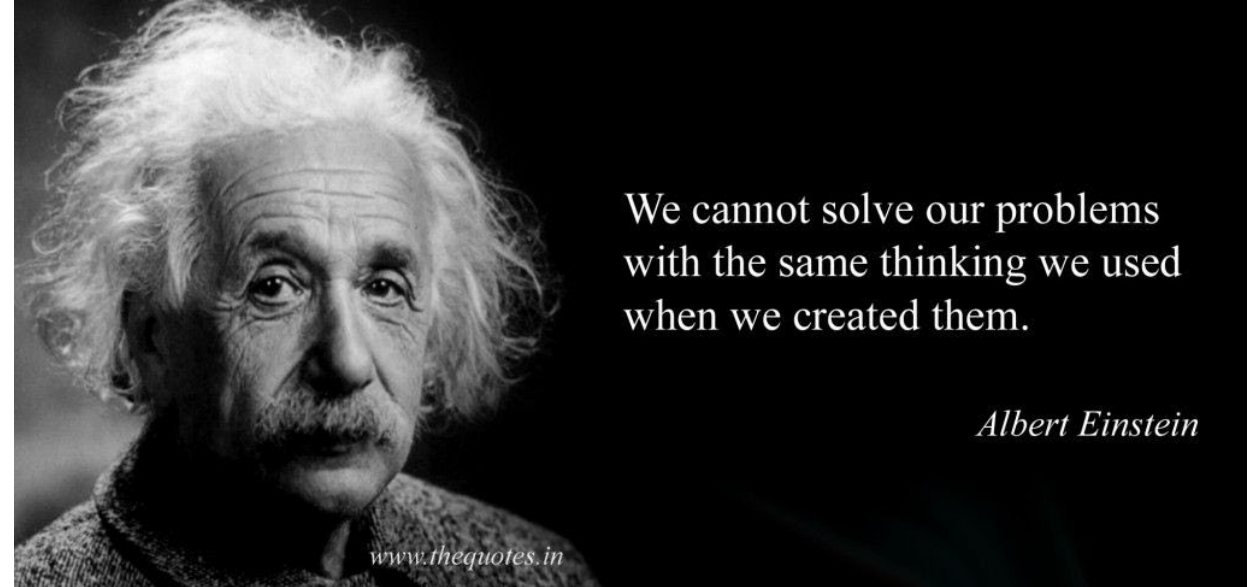
The approach is based on responding to the needs of locals and new arrivals alike in ways that foster mutual understanding, respect individual human rights and support the personal and professional development of all involved.



Why 'Einstein'?

Utrecht's approach could be called 'Plan Einstein' because it is a genius approach to local inclusion, addressing the shared needs of locals and newcomers from day 1.

But the name came from a happy coincidence. The pilot project – supported as one of the EU's '[Urban Innovative Actions](#)' (2016-2019) – was located at Einsteindreef in Utrecht.



Still, Einstein's messages about innovation apply directly to Utrecht's approach.

Europe has always been shaped by the movement of people. Yet, the issue has never seemed so politically sensitive and, in many cases, these tensions are playing out at local level. This is where traditional approaches to migrant reception have often failed: all-too-often deliberately separating new arrivals from local community members.

Utrecht's innovation is to show the positive results of bringing people together as equals and delivering support that seeks to benefit everyone.

B. Looking back at the 'Understand Phase'

Key milestones of the 'Understand Phase':

1. The network officially starts, 1 Sep 2024
2. Online Project Kick-off Meeting (TEX1) , 9 Sep 2024
3. URBACT kick-off meeting for all ITNs, Paris, 1-3 Oct 2024
4. Deep Dive into Plain Einstein (TEX2), Utrecht, 27-29 Nov 2024
5. 'Reviewing Plain Einstein' Online sessions (TEX3), Jan 2025
6. In-person visits to each Transfer Partner city by Lead Partner & Lead Expert, Jan-Feb 2025



Network partners met in person for the first time at the URBACT ITNs kick-off meeting in Paris 1-3 October 2024

Deep Dive into Plan Einstein, Utrecht, 27-29 Nov 2024

The Deep Dive was a great opportunity for all partners to:

- Hear about Plan Einstein's origins from its creators.
- Hear from current Plan Einstein practitioners.
- Experience the approach of Plain Einstein in action.
- Discuss Plan Einstein's key success factors.
- Start reflecting on any 'non-negotiables' for transfer.



Understanding each partner's unique local context

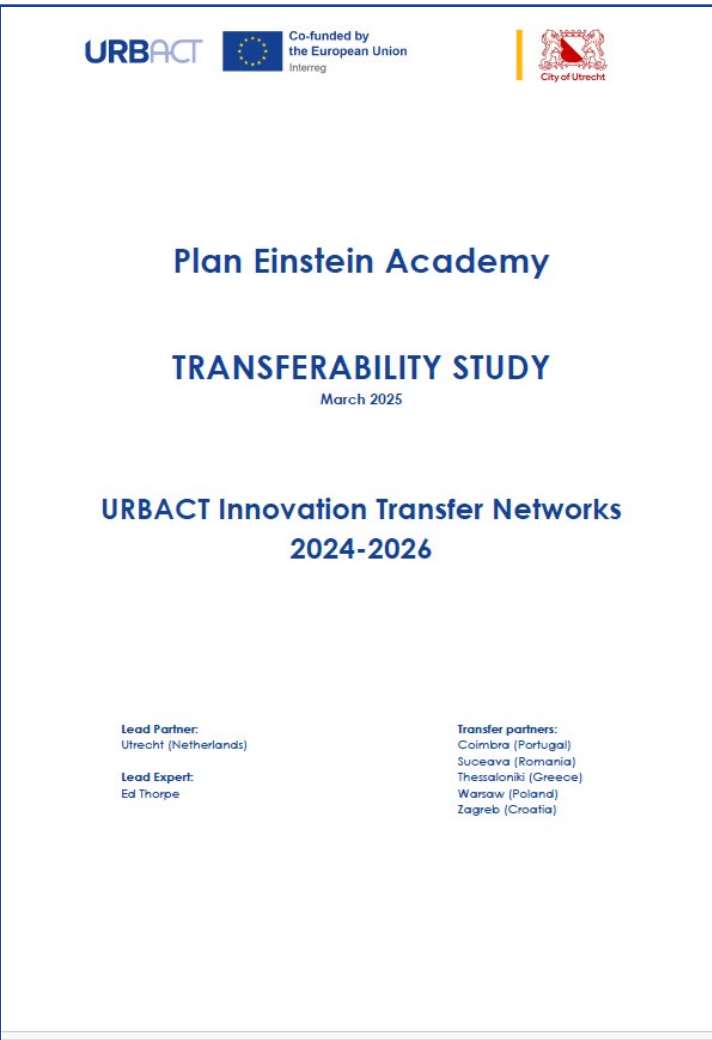
Visits by the Lead Partner and Lead Expert to all five 'Transfer Cities' was a crucial step of the Understand Phase, featuring meetings and discussions with project coordinators, partner NGOs and service providers, politicians and other local stakeholders.

Discussions had two primary components:

1. Further presenting and explaining Utrecht's Plan Einstein approach to local stakeholders.
2. Understanding local context and realities, and the potential to transfer Plan Einstein.



Key ‘Understand Phase’ output : Transferability Study Sections 1 & 2



The work of the Understand Phase was captured and presented in the first two sections of the Plan Einstein Academy ‘Transferability Study’.

The first section presented Utrecht’s original Plan Einstein innovative practice in some detail, including Utrecht’s journey with the approach and an initial consideration of its overall transfer potential.

The second section provided partner profiles for each of the transfer cities, looking at local context, policies, services and stakeholders, and initial ideas for transfer of Plan Einstein in each specific case.

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C. Refining the Network Methodology

Key milestones of the 'Adapt Phase Q1' (Mar-May 2025):

1. In-person network meeting in Warsaw (TEX4), 26-28 Mar 2025
2. URBACT ITNs' 'Adapt Phase' kick-off meeting, Paris, 28-30 Apr 2025
3. Finalisation of the Plan Einstein Academy 'Transferability Study'
4. Publication of the first network article



Network partners met in person in Warsaw for the 4th network transnational exchange meeting, 26-28 March, hosted by the Family Support Centre.

Kicking off the 'Adapt Phase': In-person network meeting in Warsaw, 26-29 March

Network partners came together for a transnational meeting (TEX4) in Warsaw in late March 2025. This 3-day meeting notably provided opportunities to:

- Share the latest hopes and ideas for transfer of all partners.
- Exchange on progress with the URBACT Local Groups in each city.
- Reflect on how to create welcoming activities and spaces for meaningful encounters.
- Refine the network methodology and roadmap.
- Visit and meet with local stakeholders and service providers in Warsaw.



Preparing to adapt ‘Plan Einstein’: Refining the Plan Einstein concept

One of the first steps forward in the Adapt Phase – to help make the Plan Einstein concept easier to understand and to work with – was to identify its component parts. This was helpful in defining aspects that can be looked at separately – even if they ultimately need to be implemented within an overall integrated approach.

This work identified some aspects that are considered ‘core components’ – essential for transferring Plan Einstein in a meaningful way. Others are optional ‘components’, which may or may not be relevant or a priority depending on local context, realities or preferences.

At the TEX4 meeting in Warsaw, the table (right) was agreed as a first mapping of the transfer potential of each element to each city.

The mapping not only identifies which components may or may not be relevant for each partner, but also identifies one priority aspect for each city. This is the aspect whose transfer is expected to be the most impactful in its local context.

Key: Priority Important Potential Not feasible

	Core Components			Optional Components			
	Spaces for Meaningful Encounters	Activities for Meaningful Encounters	Ecosystem Approach	Policy/strategy	Co-housing	Shelter-focused	Voluntary Migrants
Coimbra							
Suceava							
Thessaloniki							
Warsaw							
Zagreb							

Preparing to adapt ‘Plan Einstein’: Refining planned network activities

Following the meeting in Warsaw, it was confirmed that network-level activities to support the work of the partners would focus on three inter-related dimensions of transferring Plan Einstein effectively:

1. Looking thematically at each of the defined **‘elements of Plan Einstein’**.
2. Addressing identified **implementation challenges**.
3. Supporting partners through each stage of the **network journey**.

Aspect of content	Prioritisation	Aspect of content	Prioritisation	Aspect of content	Prioritisation
i) Spaces for Meaningful Encounters	Key for all partners	i) Plan Einstein’s foundational principles	Key for all partners	i) ULG creation and operation	Key for all partners
ii) Activities for Meaningful Encounters	Key for all partners	ii) Working with neighbourhood members	Key for all partners	ii) Testing actions	Important for all partners
iii) Ecosystem Approach	Key for all partners	iii) Access to finance	Key for all partners	iii) Investment/ Continuity Plans	Important for all partners
iv) Policy/ strategy	A key opportunity for some partners	iv) Working with the media	Important for all partners	iv) Cross-cutting themes	Important for all partners
v) Co-Housing	A key opportunity for at least one partner	v) Working with local politicians	Important for all partners	v) Mid-Term reflections	Important for all partners
vi) Shelter-focused	Relevant for some partners	vi) Working with bureaucracies (national and local).	Relevant for all partners	vi) Final report, event and lessons learned	Important for all partners
vii) Voluntary Migrants	Relevant for some partners				

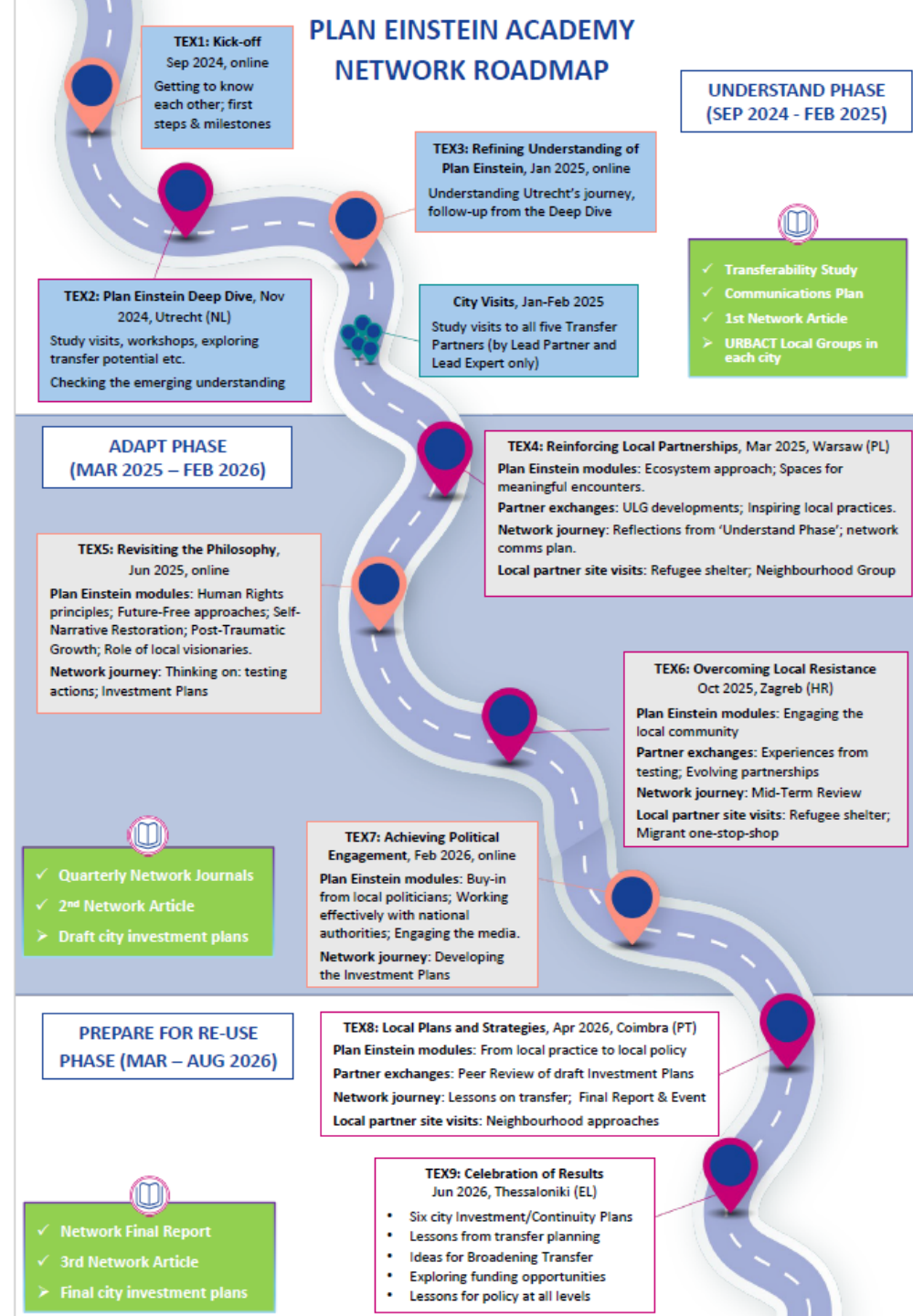
Each of these aspects of the network’s focus were mapped according to whether they were key, important or merely relevant, and whether for all partners or just some partners.

Preparing to adapt 'Plan Einstein': Refining the Network Roadmap

The final piece of the methodological revision, and the final section of the completed Transferability Study was the updated 'Network Roadmap'.

This roadmap presented in a simple visual format the planned network journey from beginning to end, including the timing and planned focus of the in-person and online transnational exchange (TEX) meetings and the foreseen outputs for each phase of the journey.

The journey is broken down into three phases: a six-month 'Understand' Phase until Feb 2025; a one-year 'Adapt' Phase until Feb 2026; and a six-month 'Prepare for Re-use' Phase until Aug 2026.



D. Communicating Plan Einstein

Key communication tools & outputs

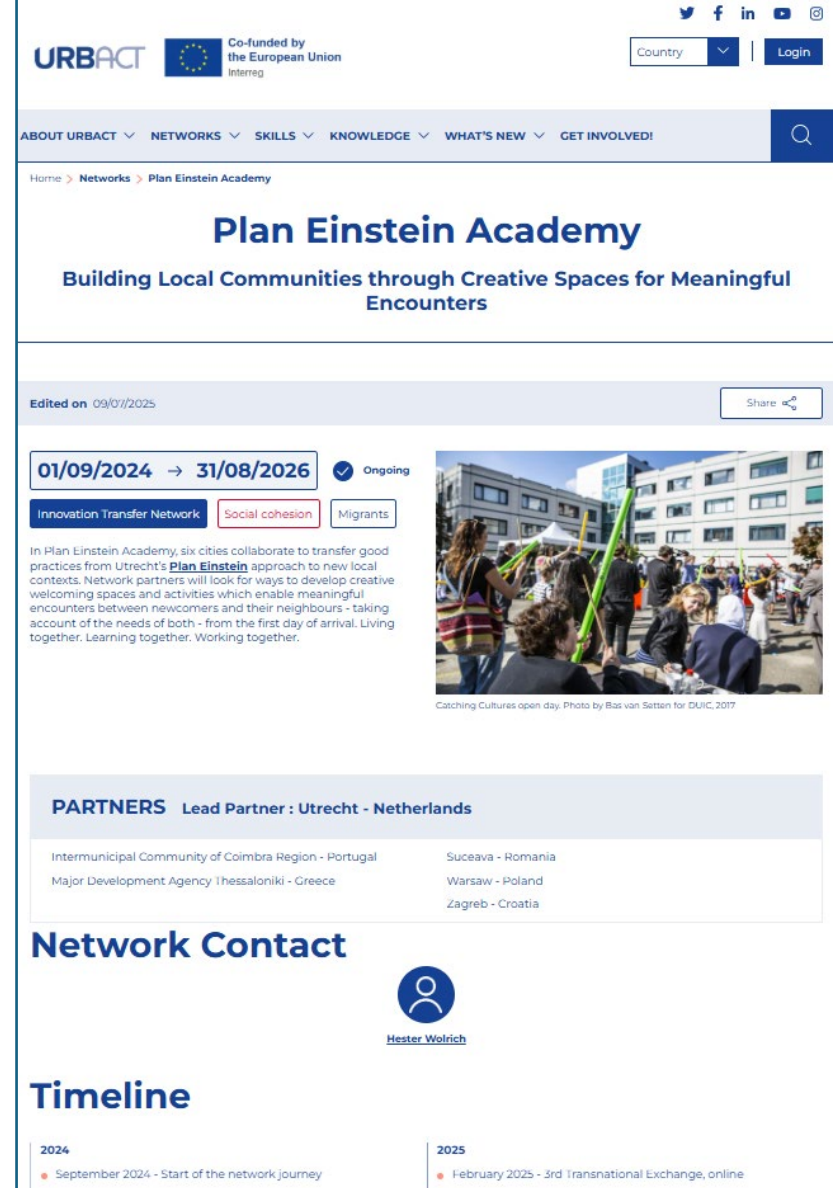
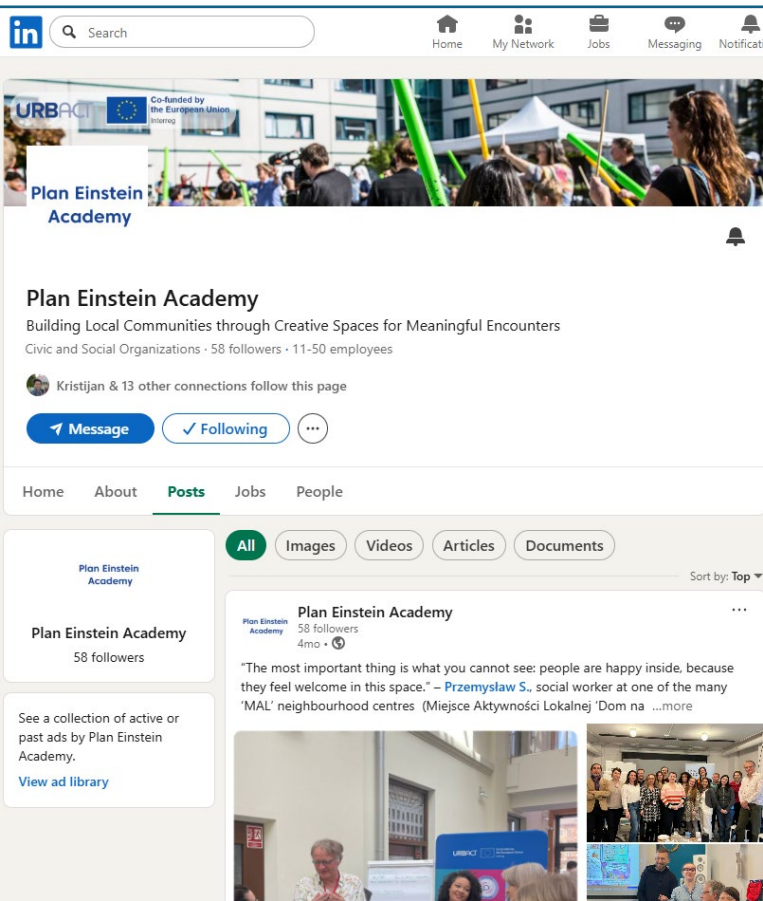
Plan Einstein Academy has established its main communications channels and produced its first communications outputs.

Main communications channels are:

- Network [webpage](#) on the URBACT website (right)
- Network [LinkedIn page](#) (left)

Key outputs so far are:

- Draft network communication plan (internal)
- Network Transferability Study (see above)
- [First Network Article](#) (see next page)
- This first 'Network Journal'



The importance of inclusive communication

Agreeing communications materials for Plan Einstein Academy has been more challenging than it might be for certain other thematic topics.

One of the key messages of the team behind Utrecht's innovation is that the words we use matter. Even well-meaning attempts to define the proposed solution and its related challenges and transfer risks can fall into the trap of reinforcing the divisions and 'otherness' that Plan Einstein seeks to overcome.

Categorising people into one or another group can serve to emphasise differences, even when talking about attempts to bring people together.

The Transferability Study and [first network article](#) (right) seek to reflect the approach of inclusive communication, highlighting that Plan Einstein fosters mutual understanding, respects individual human rights and supports the personal and professional development of all involved.

However, the challenge of ensuring inclusive communication is one that will be discussed further with network partners in the coming months.

Seeding a new approach to local social cohesion across Europe's cities

Edited on 22/08/2025

Share



Kid's activity at the open day of the first Plan Einstein location. Photo: Bas van Setten

"You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete." So said the American philosopher and futurist Buckminster Fuller. He could have been talking about the city of Utrecht and their innovative social transformation project that has turned traditional models of migrant reception on their head. Utrecht (NL) has shown an approach that can meet the needs of new arrivals from their first day in the local area at the same time as the needs of the local community already in place. In doing so, they have created positive relationships, overcome distrust and fear and provided an example of local social cohesion that can, and should, inspire other cities across Europe. This is the starting point of Plan Einstein Academy, a two-year Innovation Transfer Network supported by URBACT that is exploring how to transfer Utrecht's innovative 'Plan Einstein' model to five partner cities in different European countries: Coimbra (PT); Suceava (RO); Thessaloniki (EL); Warsaw (PL); and Zagreb (HR).

Social cohesion

Understanding migration as an urban topic

Migration has been a constant and defining force in Europe's history, from ancient tribal movements and Roman trade routes to medieval displacements, colonial-era flows, and modern labour and refugee migrations. Europe has always been shaped by the movement of people.

At the same time, the issue has never seemed so politically sensitive and in many cases these tensions are playing out at local level. This is because the question and reality of migrant reception ends up being a local one, whether talking about voluntary migrants in search of improved opportunities, or involuntary migrants fleeing war or persecution.

This is where traditional approaches to migrant reception have often failed: for example creating refugee reception centres that deliberately separate new arrivals from local community members. New arrivals are told to wait for a decision on their asylum claim without access to work, training or other opportunities. Meanwhile, local neighbours are told not to fear the new arrivals, despite them often being housed behind fences and having no opportunity to get to know each other.

E. Next steps

Key activities and topics for the ongoing work of the network

The up-coming key next steps for the Plan Einstein Academy network from June 2025 include:

- ✓ Trilateral health checks with each transfer city in turn (with the Lead Partner and Lead Expert) to review latest thoughts, progress and challenges.
- ✓ Online networking sessions (TEX5) to present and discuss tips and guidance on the local Investment Plans and Testing Actions to be delivered.
- ✓ Online exchange sessions (TEX5) to discuss latest developments, progress and challenges with the URBACT Local Groups.
- ✓ Internal communications activities, to update where necessary the network communication plan and reflect as a network on the challenges of inclusive communication.
- ✓ Ongoing external communication, including the next network journal and social media.
- ✓ Preparing the next in-person transnational exchange meeting in Zagreb in October 2025.