



# BREAKING ISOLATION

**REPORT N°1**

JANUARY-JUNE 2024

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**URBACT**



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# ABOUT THIS REPORT

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This report explains what happened in the Breaking Isolation URBACT network from January to June 2024. If you're interested to know what happened in the first stage (from September to December 2023) you can download the [Baseline Study](#)\* (State of the Art on the topic of social isolation + 10 city profiles).

In this report, you'll find more info about the network, the stages of action-planning, and a highlight, for each stage, of what the network has done, both at network level during Transnational meetings, as well as local level with URBACT Local Groups (ULG). You will also find all the tools that were created and/or used for each step.

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\* <https://urbact.eu/networks/breaking-isolation>

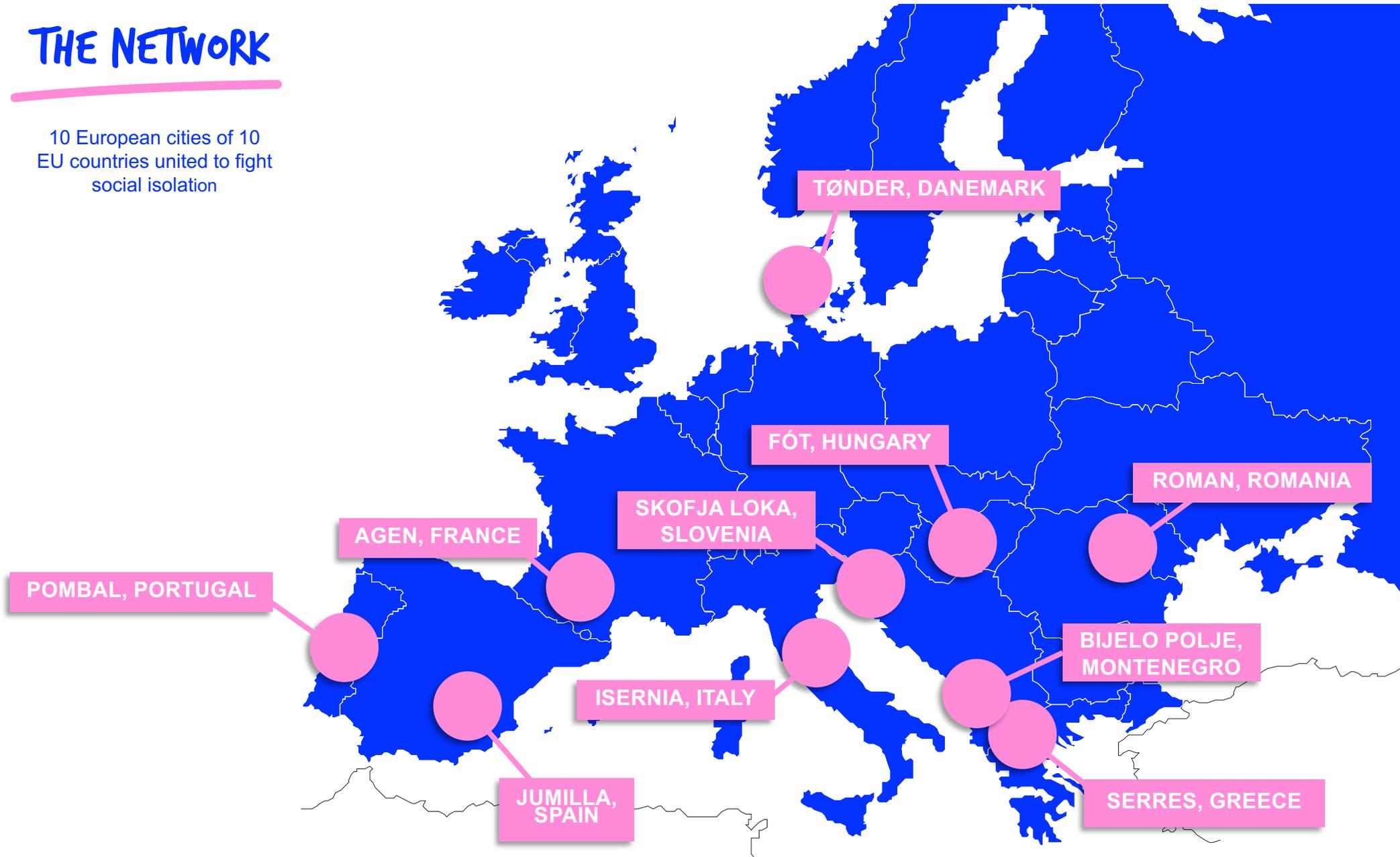
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# THE NETWORK

10 European cities of 10  
EU countries united to fight  
social isolation



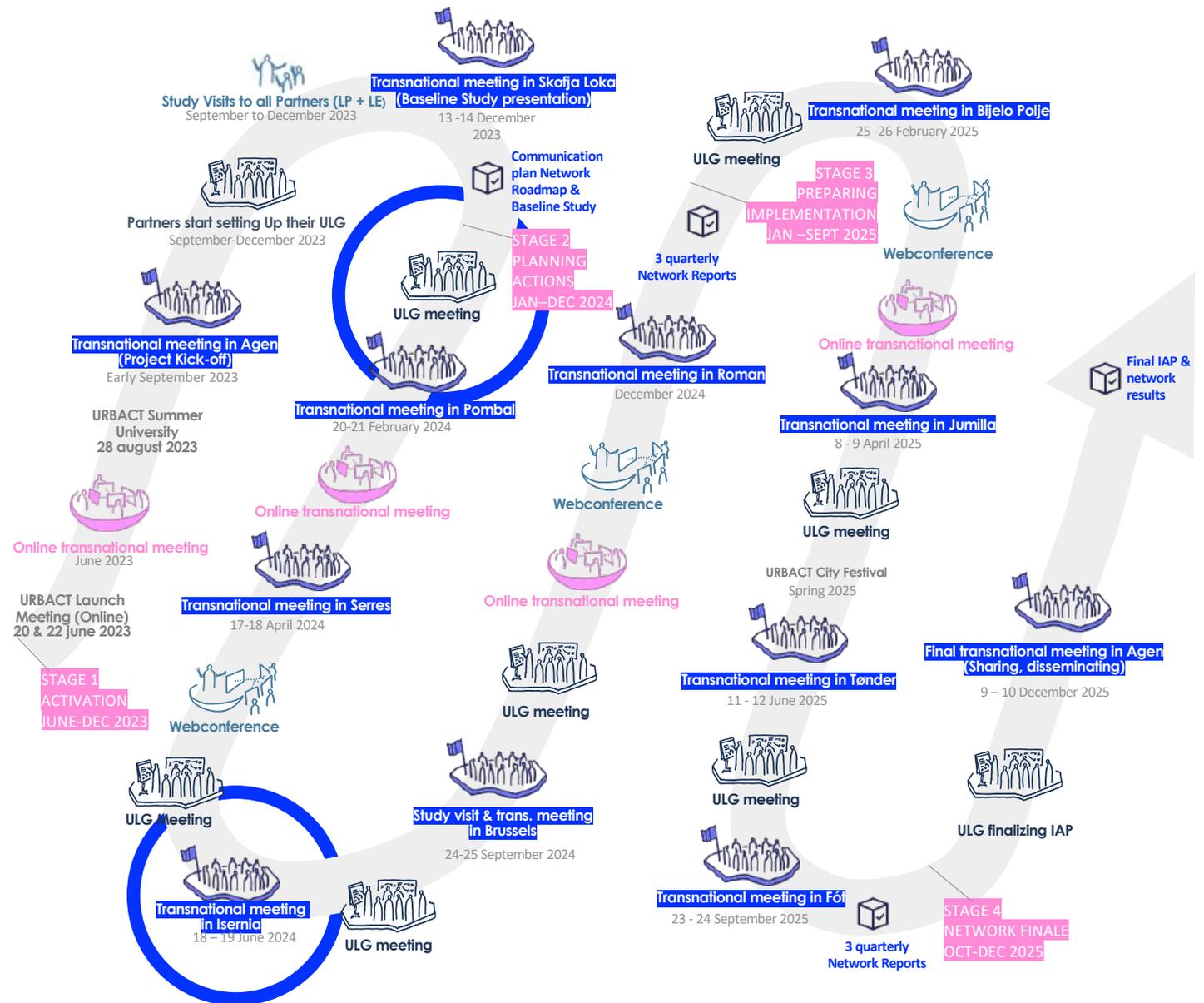
# A (COLLECTIVE) JOURNEY

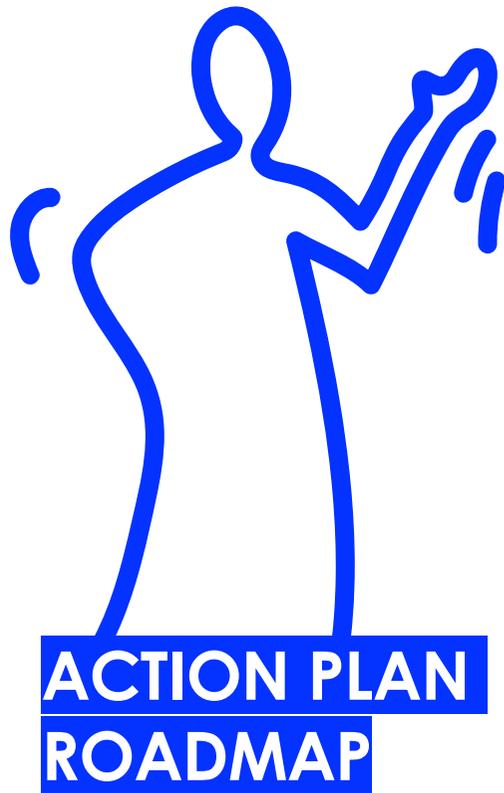
The Breaking Isolation journey is structured around a series of collective rendez-vous called Transnational Meetings (TNM). These TNM gather, systematically, the 10 cities of the Breaking Isolation network and is the most precious exchange & learn space for the network. Indeed, during those TNMs, each city presents the results of their work at local level with their URBACT local group, then the hosting city showcases inspiring practices (through on site visits), Lead Partner checks up administrative and communication matters while the Lead Expert explains the next steps of the journey as well as presents the ad-hoc tools that cities will have to use with their ULGs.

In between each TNM, cities organize their URBACT Local Group (ULG) meetings, in order to share their results to the next TNM.

Alongside ULG meetings and TNMs, the network also punctually organizes online meetings as well as webconferences on specific issues/topics.

This report summarizes what happened during the first semester of 2024 (between January 2024 and June 2024).

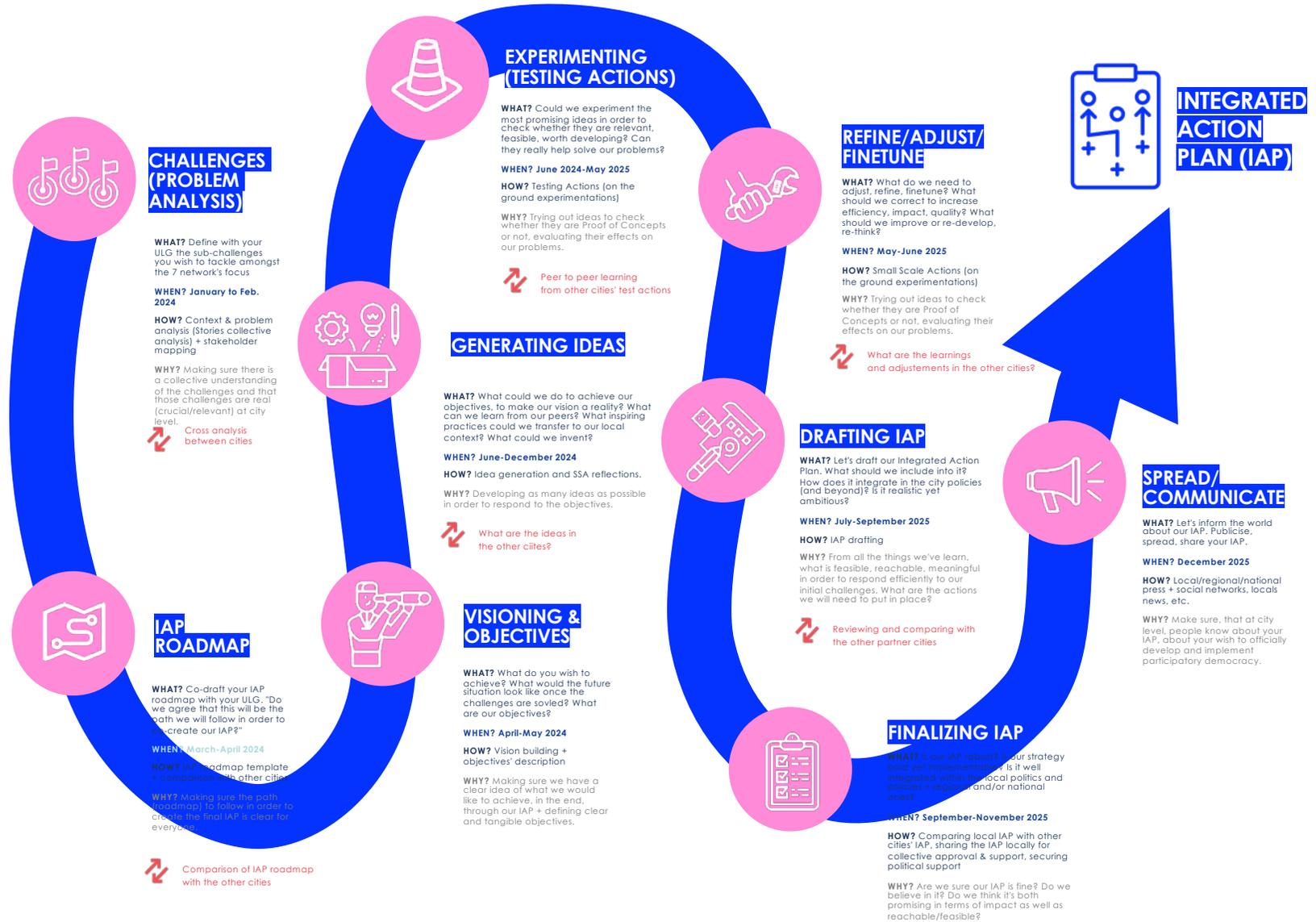




# A COLLECTIVE JOURNEY

Breaking Isolation network is an action-planning network of cities aiming at developing, each one of them, a local strategy to fight social isolation, called an Integrated Action Plan (IAP). In order to build this IAP, each city of the network is taken through a collective process (together with local stakeholders composing URBACT Local Groups) to first, diagnose the challenges and

issues of their city regarding the topic of isolation, then come up with the vision and objectives they want to achieve, or in other words, express their ambition, then, co-create ideas, copy and transfer promising practices from the other partner cities, then experiment, meaning try out ideas locally to collect proofs of concepts, then evaluate, refine, adjust then pack together the strategy.





# (CHALLENGES) PROBLEM ANALYSIS

## SENSING THE PROBLEM

As the baseline study highlighted it, social isolation is a rather vast and complex issue. It does not have a clear unique target in terms of people touched by the phenomenon (it may affect young people, middle-aged, elderly, etc.), nor does it have a unique way of approaching it (it can be tackled through healthcare policies, ycho-social services, social innovation, culture, sport, education, etc.). It was therefore important for the network that the 10 cities investigate how social isolation unfolds in their own towns.

Since the baseline study already identified the causes of social isolation, the Breaking Isolation cities were not asked to produce problem trees but rather use an adhoc tool, designed by the lead partner specifically for the network called the 'Isolation stories'. The principle? Since social isolation is a user-centered (human-centered) issue (not a technical, or infrastructural one), we need to get familiar with our topic from the user perspective. In other words, we need, to better understand our

topic, to dive in social isolation through real life stories, real experiences. Indeed, **to avoid having a purely theoretical approach to social isolation, we need all partners, but also their ULGs, to sense what social isolation is about, how it deeply affects people's lives, and how severe the issue can be. Social isolation is a weighty subject.**

During the Transnational meeting of Skofja Loka (Slovenia) in December 2023, cities were trained by the Lead Expert on problem analysis then had the opportunity to try out the tools that they will have to use afterwards with their own URBACT local groups in January 2024.

All cities found that writing the isolation stories was a very emotional experience for all ULGs. Indeed, **'we had some people who cried when participants were reading out loud (or hearing) real stories of people they knew'** reported the City of Agen but also other partners.

**'For every complex problem there is an answer that is clear, simple, and wrong'.**

H. L. Mencken, American journalist and essayist

# ISOLATION STORIES

## What is it?

User stories is a tool which enables you to put yourself in the shoes of the people who are affected/concerned/touched by a phenomenon, an issue. In this case, stories of people who suffer from isolation.

## Why to use it?

This tool enables people to apply a user-centered approach when it comes to policymaking. It forces everyone to put users, people at the center, in order to not forget that policies are always made, in the end, for people. In this case, this tool allowed everyone to feel/sense the seriousness and importance of our collective challenge (social isolation).

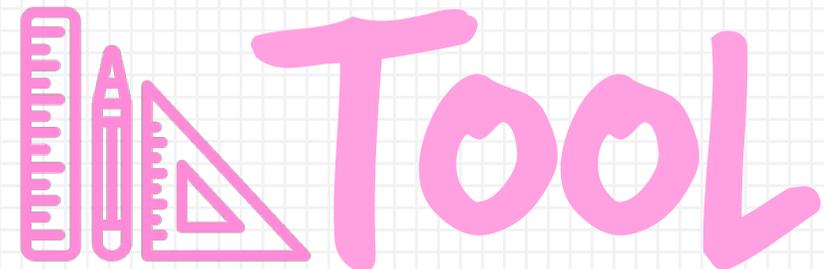
## How to use it?

1. Think and write down a story (either real, or at least inspired by real facts) of someone suffering from social isolation
2. Share it with the rest of the group
3. Do a collective analysis of the stories: what are the recurring factors/causes or patterns (or specificities) that we observe?



## Materials

On the left, template for writing a story. On the right, 100 stickers of portraits (AI made) so as to anonymize and give a face to each story.

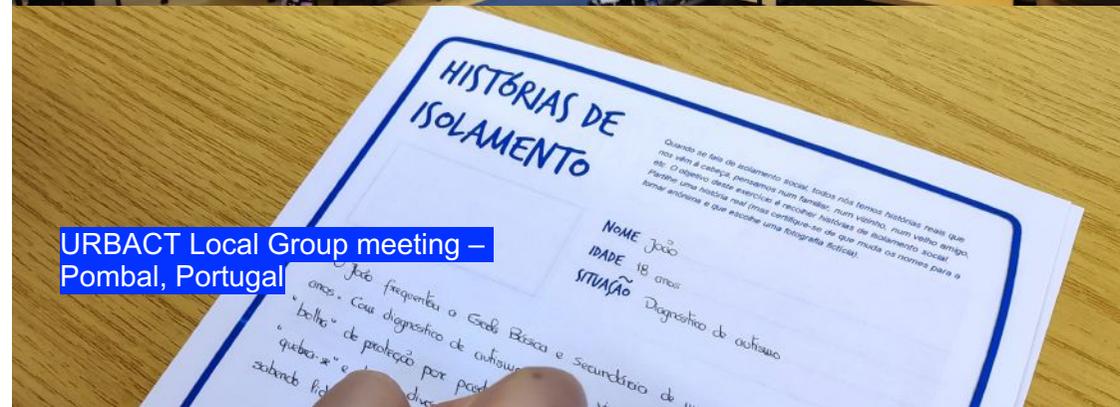




URBACT Local Group meeting – Jumilla, Spain



URBACT Local Group meeting – Serres, Greece



URBACT Local Group meeting – Pombal, Portugal



URBACT Local Group meeting – Tønder, Denmark



URBACT Local Group meeting – Isernia, Italy





URBACT Local Group meeting – Skofja Loka, Slovenia



URBACT Local Group meeting – Bijelo Polje, Montenegro



## A PUBLICATION

Now that all 10 cities produced stories (each of them were asked to deliver 10 stories) we, Lead Partner and Lead Expert together, decided that we would make use of this result and valorize it through a publication: 100 stories of social isolation.

### What?

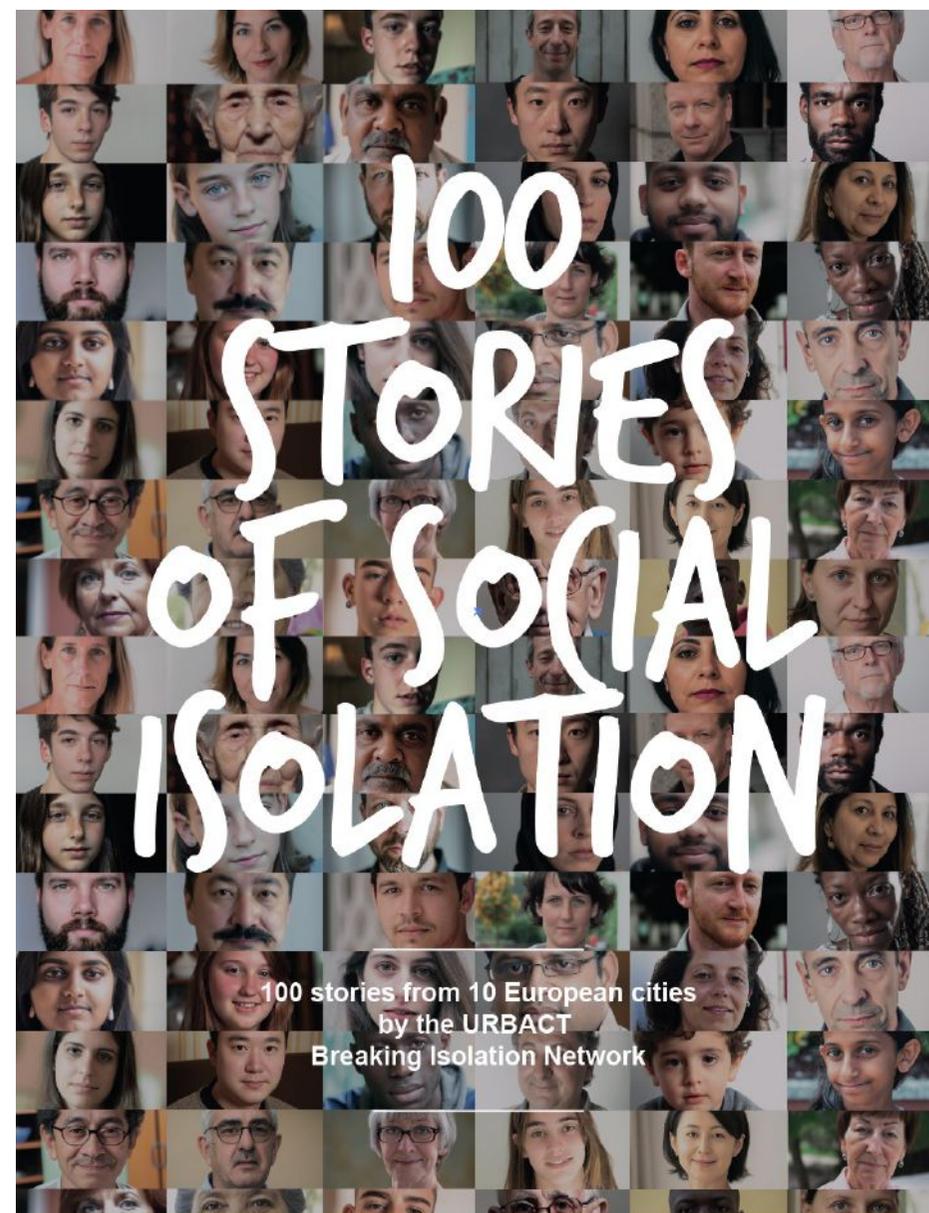
To create a European repository of 100 stories of isolation from 10 cities of 10 European countries.

### Why?

To showcase that isolation is universal, it has no border, nor age, nor color, nor religion, nor gender. And also because isolation policies need to be human-centered and the publication will keep reminding us who we are developing policies for. Finally, it is an interesting material for raising awareness.

### Status?

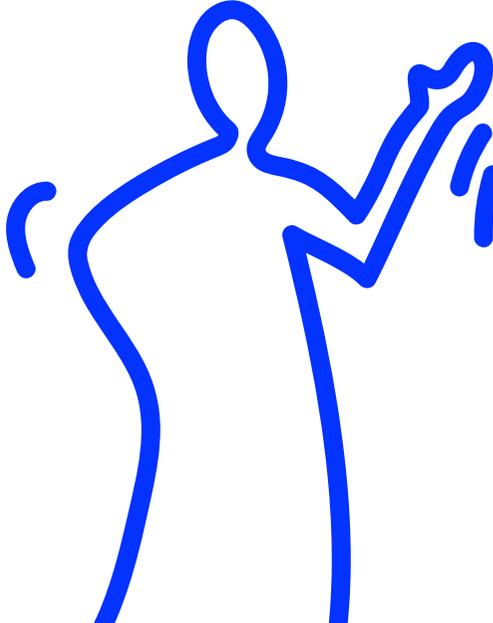
The publication is still in the process of being formalized, indeed it needs an adhoc layout plus the review of all the stories. Also, we want to ask the special committee fighting loneliness at the World Health Organization to eventually write a little article or edito which could be integrated in the publication.



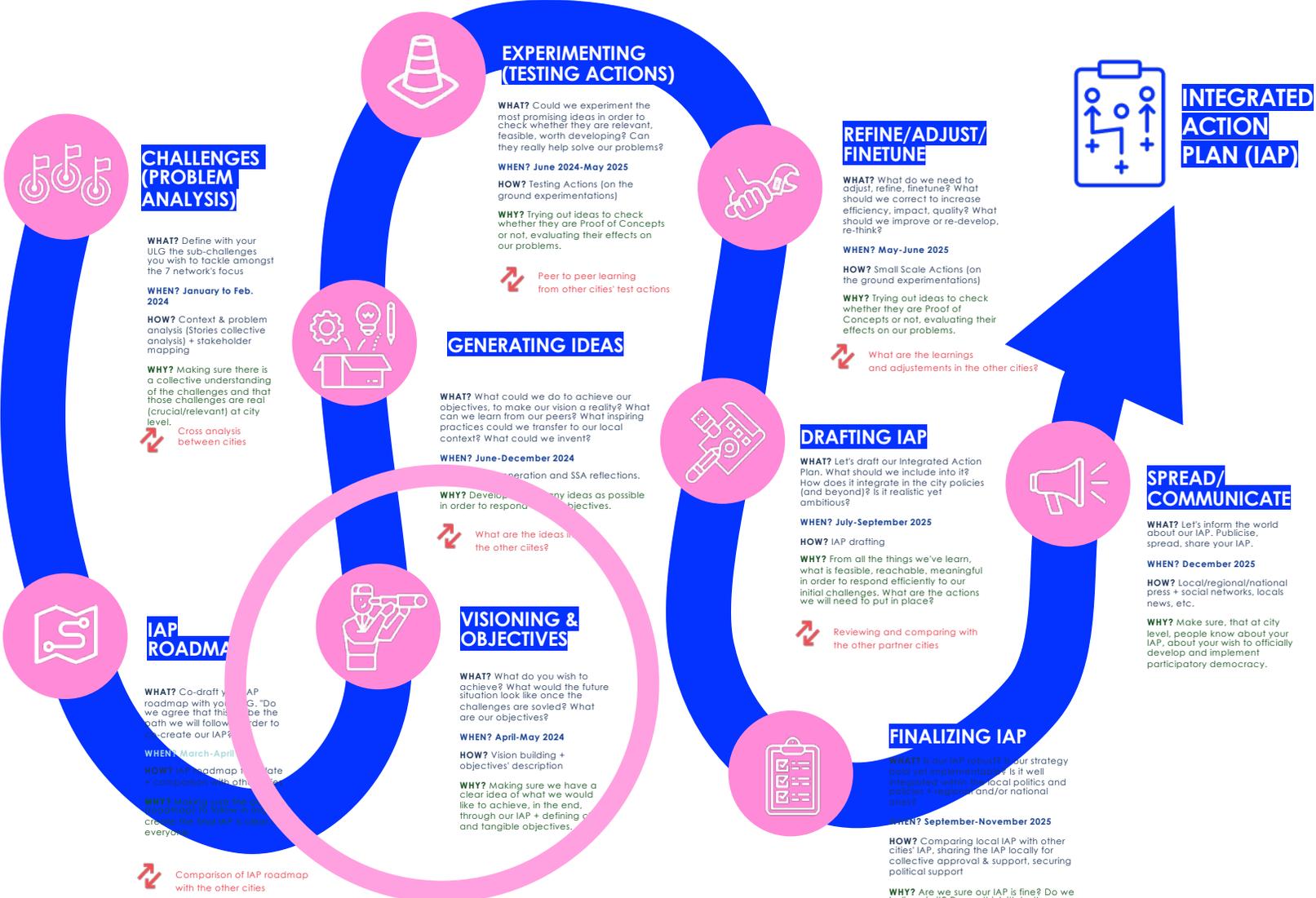
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# ACTION PLAN ROADMAP





# VISIONING & OBJECTIVES

## SETTING THE AMBITION

When developing an action plan, even though well integrated, it's fundamental to have a vision, or in other words, to have a clear ambition of what the city wants to achieve, in terms of long term objectives. In order to support the network with visioning, we decided to use two complementary (yet non exclusive) methods. The first one, called the 'Imaginary Time Travelling' and the second one, from the URBACT toolbox, is called 'The articles of the future'.

Both tools are meant to allow participants to think and picture the future in order to set the ambition of the city regarding the challenge it chose to work on.

In Breaking Isolation, as usual, during TNMs tools are introduced by the Lead Expert, then tried out for real (in order to prepare all cities to replicate the use of the tool

locally with their ULGs), and finally discussed to see who would feel comfortable using it, whether or not it would require adaptations and corrections, etc. In the case of the two tools for visioning, all partners found the imaginary travelling interesting but were not sure that they would dare to replicate it and use it in their own cities with their URBACT local group (especially the ULG which include elected officials or civil servants of higher hierarchy, and/or 'serious' and rather conservative professional stakeholders). In any case, the URBACT tool was sufficient for this step if some cities didn't feel at ease using the other extra tool. Finally, at the TNM of Serres in April 2024, we found that nearly all cities decided to use the imaginary time travelling as a introductory tool for visioning and confirmed its added value.

# IMAGINARY TIME TRAVELLING

## What is it?

The Imaginary Time Travelling is a creative tool which enable participants, through a guided script, to imagine how the future could be like.

## Why to use it?

This tool is good to stimulate imagination, to offer an atypical (and slow pace) experience during a workshop, and to confront representations.

## How to use it?

1. Put some ambient background music.
2. Explain the tool and the rules.
3. Everyone closes eyes. Then you start reading the script.
4. Have a collective (or subgroup) debrief session: *What did you see? What was the differences between the two cities you went to? What was the atmosphere, ambiance, colors? What were people doing? How did you feel in those two cities?*

## Mental time travel

Documented and experimented by Prof. Dr. Kerstin E. Cuhls (Foresight Center, ISI, Fraunhofer Institute), the technique of mental time travel can be used as a creative process for individual and collective foresight process.



## Highlights

- Mental proces
- Menta very d
- Everyl partic

## Mental time travel

1. Stay quiet and try to remain calm
2. Listen carefully and let yourself be guided
3. Keep eyes closed all along
4. Let your mind wander, open up & imagine
5. Try not to fall asleep

## IMAGINARY TIME TRAVELLING

Dear time travel adventurers: You are about to enter the future.

Sit in a comfortable position! Now, close your eyes.

Breathe deeply a couple of times, then breathe slow

You are about to be transported to the future. You a 2080. You'll be in a society where social isolation is new norm. A society in which people have lost their relations.

10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5... You are about to land in this social location: A, 3, 2, 1...

You've just landed inside a city. In this city, everyone only about himself. Individuality has won... People have very little contact with one another. Whether they are or not, people are mostly alone.

Look around you. Walk around the city.

Do you see people? What are they doing? How do they appear? How do they look like? Keep walking. Look through the windows of the buildings you pass by. What do you see?

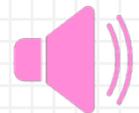
Keep exploring this city... Social isolation is extreme. Relations are rare. Try to guess how people feel. Try to explore the spirit of this place in which people have lost the meaning of togetherness.

Wait, the ground trembles. Things are spinning around you. You are about to be transported again to another place. Things accelerate. You are lifted from the ground. 10, 9, 8,

You monitor around. You observe what people do. How is the city like? What has changed? Look at public space, look at buildings, look at houses. What's different from the past?

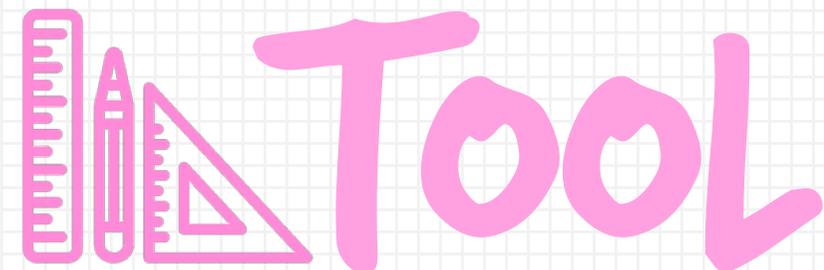
[wait 10 seconds]

Things start spinning again. You're about to be brought back to the present. 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5... You're almost back to the present. 4, 3, 2, 1. You're back. You're here. Take a deep breath. You're here, in Portugal, in Portugal. We are in 2024. And you open your eyes.



## Materials

A scientific paper about the original tool that this version was inspired by in order to show that it a 'serious' tool despite the fact it's unusual. A list of 5 rules. A script for the narrator. A background soundtrack for the ambience.



# SCRIPT OF THE NARRATOR

Dear time travel adventurers. You are about to embark on the future.

Sit in a comfortable position! Now, close your eyes.

Breathe deeply a couple of times, then breathe slowly.

You are about to be transported to the future. You will be in 2040. You'll be in a society where social isolation is the new norm. A society in which people have lost most social relations.

10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5... You are about to land in this society of isolation. 4, 3, 2, 1...

You've just landed inside a city. In this city, everyone thinks only about himself. Individuality has won... People have very little contact with one another. Whether they are young or old, people are mostly alone.

Look around you. Walk around the city.

Do you see people? What are they doing? How do they appear? How do they look like? Keep walking. Look through the windows of the buildings you pass by. What do you see?

Keep exploring this city... Social isolation is extreme. Relations are rare. Try to grasp how people feel. Try to capture the spirit of this place in which people have lost the meaning of togetherness.

Wait, the ground trembles. Things are spinning around you. You are about to be transported again to another place. Things accelerate. You are lifted from the ground. 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5... Here we go again.

You're being transported to your own city. 4, 3, 2, 1.

You've just landed in your own city. Things seem completely different here. There is no isolation. In this city, isolation does not exist. People care for each other, they support each other. No one is left behind. No one is left alone.

You walk in your city and look around. You see people. What are they doing? What do you see?

You pass by some groups of people. You walk toward them. What are they doing? Why are they gathered? How do they look like? You go a bit further and continue to wander around. What do you see? What do you hear?

You keep wandering. You pass in front of buildings and houses. You look through the windows. What's going on inside? How do people seem like? How do they feel to you?

You wander around. You observe what people do. How is the city like? What has changed? Look at public space, look at buildings, look at houses. What's different from the past?

[wait 10 seconds]

Things start spinning again. You're about to be brought back to the present. 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5... You're almost back to the present. 4, 3, 2, 1. You're back. You're here. Take a deep breath. You're here, in Pombal, in Portugal. We are in 2024. And you open your eyes.



Training and trying the tool during Transnational Meeting in Pombal, Portugal

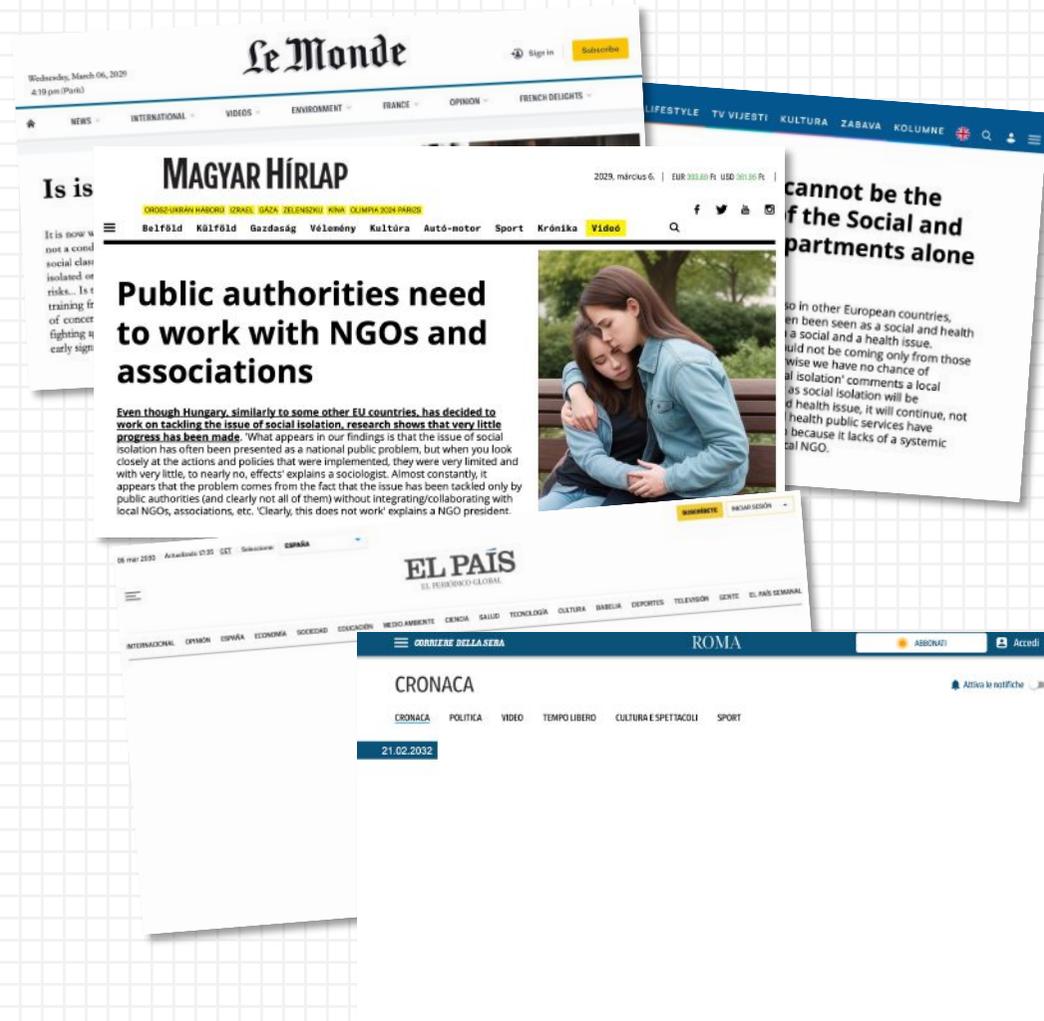


Using the tool with ULG – Fot, Hungary

# ARTICLE OF THE FUTURE

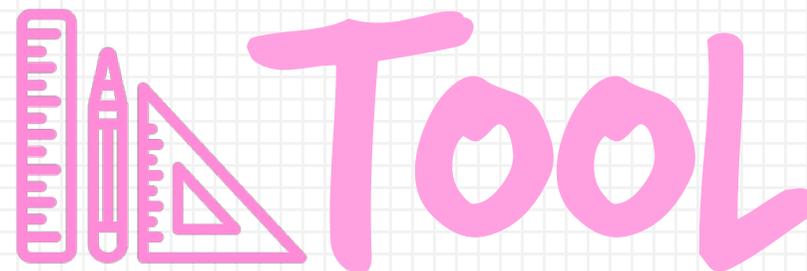
More info about the **NEWSPAPER OF TOMORROW** in the **URBACT** toolbox:

<https://urbact.eu/toolbox-home/analysing-problems/newspaper-tomorrow>



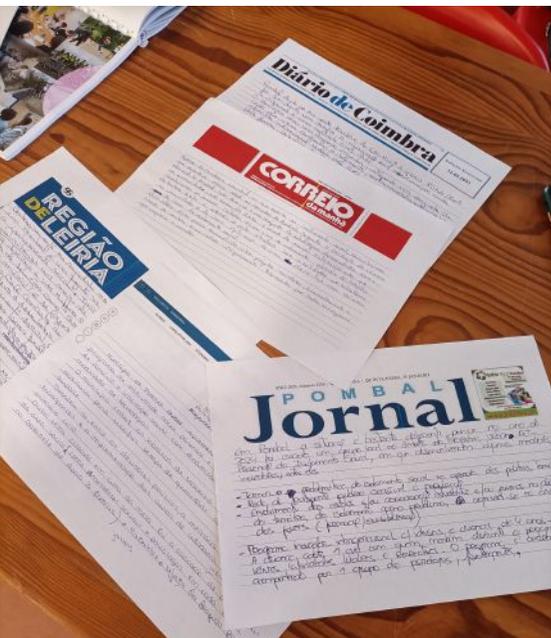
**Materials**

Examples of articles of the future + empty templates





Articles of the future - ULG Meeting, Roman, Romania



Articles of the future – Pombal, Portugal



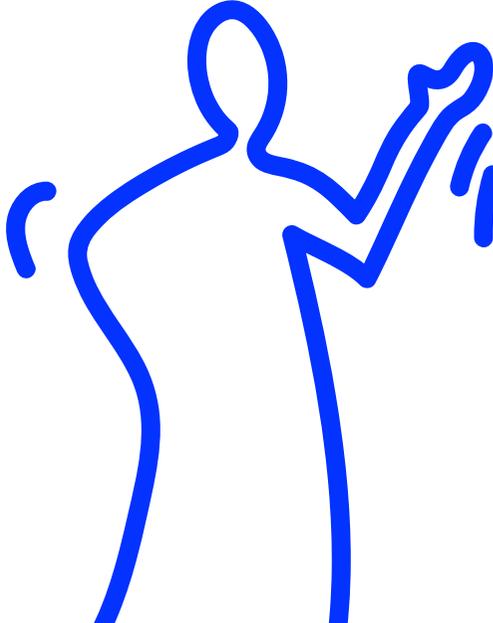


Using the tool with ULG – Jumilla, Spain

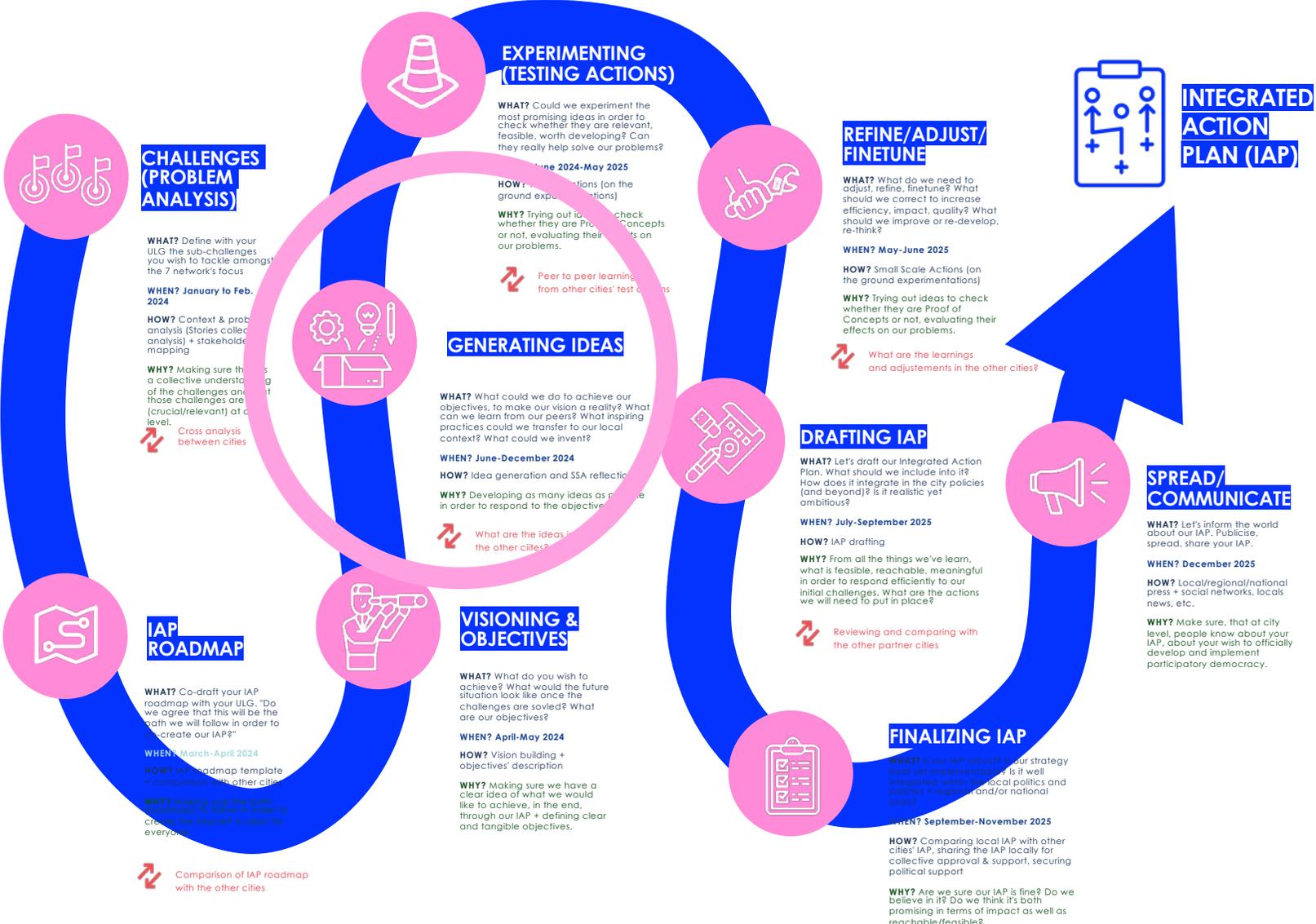


Using the tool with ULG – Agen, France





# ACTION PLAN ROADMAP





# GENERATING IDEAS

## FINDING IDEAS

Generating ideas is (one of) the most critical step in the journey of an action-planning network. Indeed, action-planning in URBACT lies upon the peer-to-peer learning, the transfer of good practices from one city to another but also the integration of new, atypical, original ideas which emerged along this cooperative adventure. 'Vision without action is daydream. Action without vision is nightmare.' says a Japanese proverb.

During the Transnational meeting in Serres, Greece, in April 2024, partner cities received a training by the lead expert on idea generation as well as introduced to a series of tools that they should be using with their URBACT local groups. During this TNM, 3 tools were introduced and

tested by all network members so as to verify their usability and added-value (but also possible improvements which could be made prior to using them locally with ULGs). Together with the tools, partners were introduced to co-creation rules and idea/concept assessment tools.

Idea generation is key for the network as cities will present and exchange ideas during Transnational meetings. Several cities, as of July 2024, already started idea generation activities with their ULG with very positive feedback already (on both the tools and the ideas themselves).

**What is difficult is not to  
find ideas, but to find  
good ones.**

# Where do ideas come from?

## 1. From local things that work

(things that already exist in your place/city and that could be supported, developed, enlarged, multiplied)

**Example:** In Føt (Hun) (but also in Bijelo Polje (Mon), a socialization center for elderly people is working very well and is very promising. Its model could be potentially replicated within the city.

## 2. From elsewhere

(things that already exist elsewhere and that could be copied, adapted, transferred, modified)

**Example:** The elderly socialization space of Jumilla is an interesting practice which could be potentially transferred to another city... or the Sports of All initiative of Pombal, etc. The baseline study is full of cases which could be potentially transferred/copied.

## 3. From new thinking

(things that don't exist anywhere, that have not been done yet but could be considered/explored/ thought of)

**Example:** It's about combining concepts, ideas, trying to adopt new ways of looking at the problems, etc. The nature-school of Tonder (Den) is an example of a new approach to generate socialization in a indirect way...

# CO-CREATION RULES

In a participatory co-creation process, collective rules are essential to ensure that all participants have an equal opportunity to contribute and that the collaboration runs smoothly. These rules help establish a sense of fairness, respect, and accountability among all individuals involved. By adhering to these collective rules, participants can communicate openly, but also

self-moderate themselves (for example in subgroup work). Having these rules in place also helps prevent conflicts, misunderstandings, and power imbalances, fostering a more inclusive and productive environment for creativity and innovation to thrive. Of course, making them a bit fun (as the ones from below), helps.



## RULES OF IDEATION

1. We're here to find ideas (possible solutions), not reasons why it'll never work
2. Listen before reacting (even if the person is slow)
3. Don't break other people's ideas if you have nothing better to suggest
4. We're all legitimate to express ourselves (hierarchy is kept outside the room)
5. Try to build on each other's ideas, even if they sound a bit weird or crazy
6. We don't bite others (even if they deserve it)
7. Don't make fun of other people's ideas (or do so with kindness and humor)
8. Don't monopolize the floor
9. We're all responsible for the atmosphere, so let's make sure it's a good one.

# CONCEPT MERGE

## What is it?

The Concept merge is a creativity tool which invites players to think out of the box by trying to merge concepts that don't necessarily usually match together.

## Why to use it?

This tool is good to stimulate creativity and go beyond classic solutions. It forces stakeholders, in particular the ones who have a long experience working in the field of social isolation, to explore new approaches, new ways to answer to the challenge.

## How to use it?

1. Select your mission(s)
2. Roll the dice to pick the first and second concepts to merge
3. Brainstorm using the concepts that got picked and write down ideas
4. Need inspiration? Have a look at the cheat list
5. Play multiple rounds (from step 2) then share all the ideas and discuss them. You may use the assessment tool (see further)

**MISSION**

We need to better diagnose those at risk of isolation (early signs)

**MISSION**

We need to reinforce a culture of mutual community care

**MISSION**

We need to better identify socially isolated people

**CONCEPT**

**How does it work?**

1. Roll your two dice one after the other. The first one indicates the column, the second one the number of the concept.
2. Then, roll your two dice again to select a second concept.
3. Place markers (it can be a coin or any other small item) on the 2 concepts you picked.
4. Start brainstorming (be careful, time is limited) in pairs (or trios), try to find an idea by merging concepts together... ideas shall respond to your mission.
5. Write your idea (even if it's just a sentence) on a post-it, indicate on the post-it the number of the concepts.
6. When time is over (3-4 min), everyone starts again with new concepts.
7. After a couple of rounds (it's up to you to define, it shall be minimum 3 rounds), the groups share their most interesting ideas!

<b>1.</b>	<b>2.</b>	<b>3.</b>	<b>4.</b>	<b>5.</b>	<b>6.</b>
1.1 Constant Reliable	2.1 Bottom-up Contributory	3.1 Low-cost Affordable	4.1 Occasional Event	5.1 Hand-made Own brand	6.1 Unique Centralized
1.2 Certified Official	2.2 Formal Institutional	3.2 Luxurious Dedicated	4.2 Cosy Private		
1.3 Reusable Multi-use	2.3 Sexy Bling-bling	3.3 Modular Convertible	4.3 Friendly Festive		
1.4 Disposable Instantaneous	2.4 Discreet Classic	3.4 Alternative Informal	4.4 Selective Targeted		
1.5 Traditional Historic	2.5 Manual Simple	3.5 Professional Scientific	4.5 Gene Disc		
1.6 Avant-garde Futuristic	2.6 Automatic Intelligent	3.6 Daily Continuous	4.6 Perm Stror		

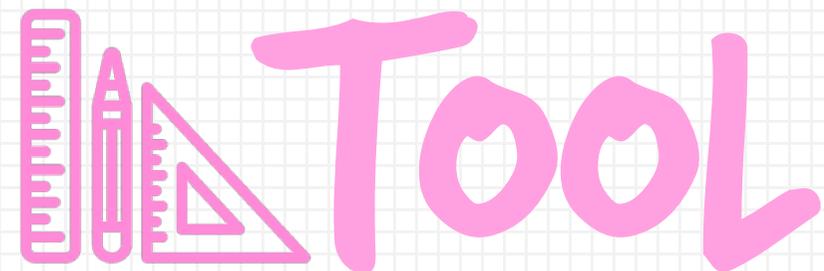
**CHEAT LIST**

As you brainstorm to find ideas, don't hesitate to regularly have a look at this list as it may help you find possible solutions.

A website	A space/place
A campaign	A game
A network	A gathering
A publication	A device
A service	An infrastructure
A policy	A law
An app	An activity
An event	A technology
A toolkit	A product
A workshop	A community/group

## Materials

At the top, missions cards, in the center a sheet for concepts picking (using the dice), on the bottom right, a cheat list for inspiration.



# WHAT IF

## What is it?

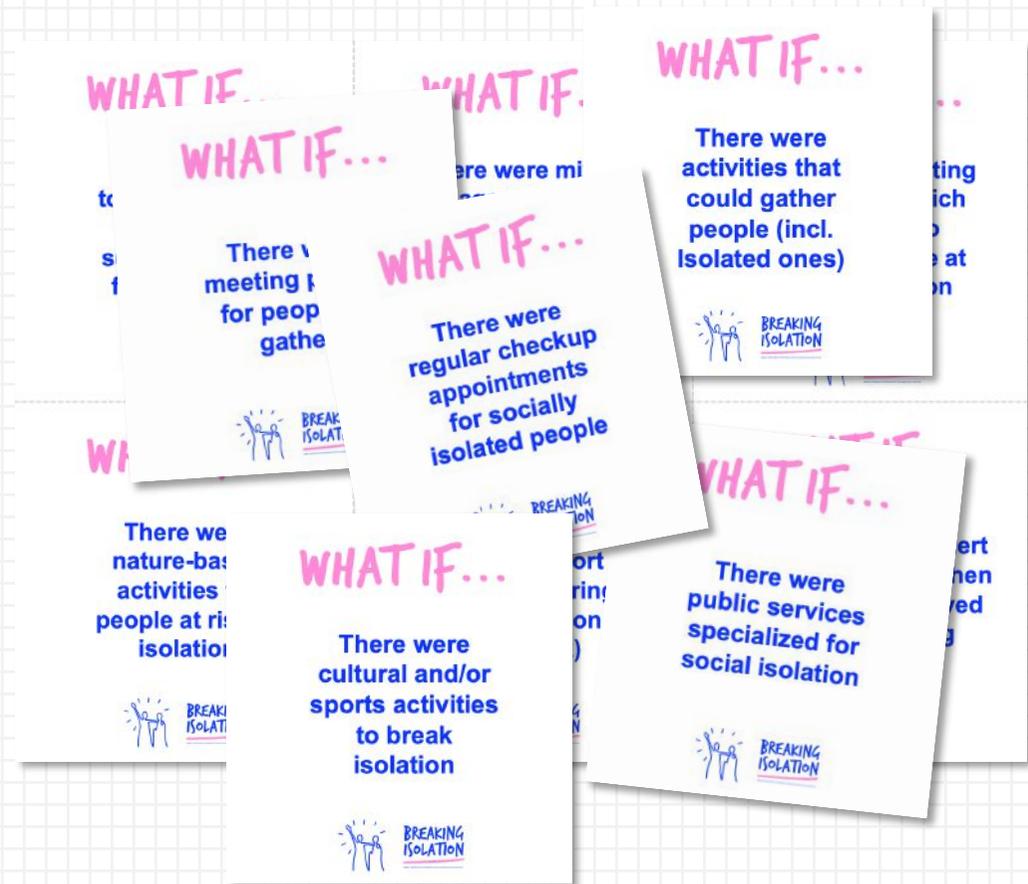
The "What if..." tool is a card set of 27 suggestions meant to provoke conversation and reaction. Each card is a piece of suggestion, it is food for thought and supports brainstorming.

## Why to use it?

The "What if..." tool is meant to suggest, stimulate conversation and reaction and finally help find ideas. It serves as a basis to kickstart creative discussion on directions that are unusual or atypical to explore. It's especially relevant with stakeholders who have difficulties exploring vast array of directions.

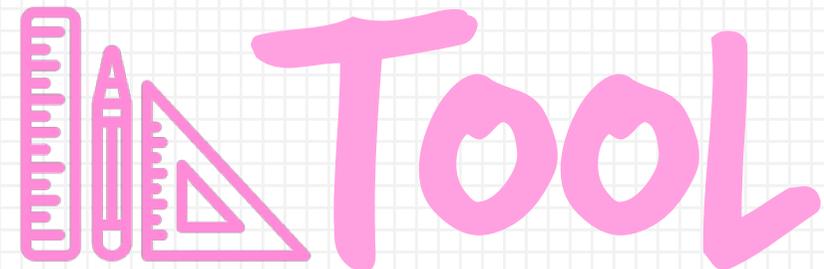
## How to use it?

1. Shuffle the cards then place them face down on the table. The first player picks one, reads it out loud, and put it face up on the table.
2. The team discusses the suggestion, and tries to build a solution. Write it down on a post-it.
3. You may repeat the steps until all the cards are gone\*. Then choose the best ideas and share them in plenary (you can use the assessment tool).



## Materials

Card set + post-its.



# ISOLATION STORY

## ALTERNATIVE ENDING

### What is it?

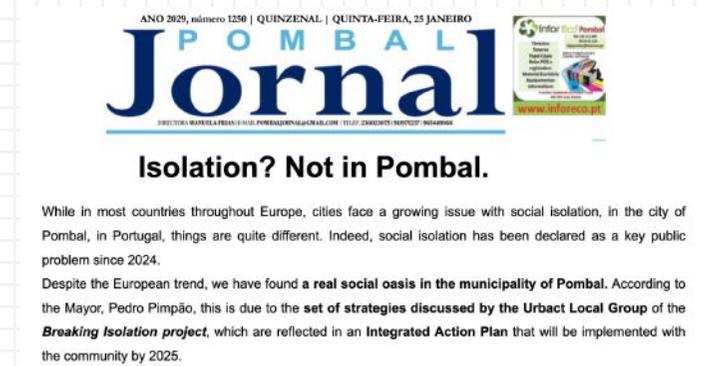
Alternative ending is a tool to stimulate ideation through creative writing. Re-starting from the articles of the future that each city has already written, participants are invited to imagine how each story could have ended or could end in a positive way. Each new alternative story, social isolation has been avoided, prevented and/or broken. In this revised version of the story, participants describe the result (benefits) and imagine the how (what allowed the change).

### Why to use it?

This tool is interesting as it builds upon previous work (articles of the future) and it brings positivity and hope.

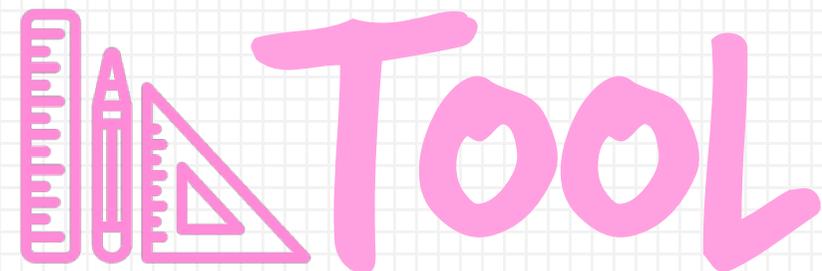
### How to use it?

Pick a story, pick 3 characters and try to imagine how they could have changed (for the better) the story if at least one of them (if not) had intervened somehow. Then, repeat.



### Materials

Articles of the future (written by the cities), plus card set of characters.



# IDEA/CONCEPT ASSESSMENT

## What is it?

2 mini tools have been made in order to help partner cities (and in particular ULGs) to order, filter and assess the best ideas and concepts. The first tool uses a simple pile-making technique. The second tool is an evaluation sheet.

## Why to use it?

In ideation processes, participants tend to be easily excited or over-enthusiastic about the ideas they've found (despite rationality/feasibility, etc.), this is why it is very important to use, after a session of creativity, filtering/ ordering/ assessment tools to enable them to better identify most promising or best ideas worth to be taken further.

## How to use it?

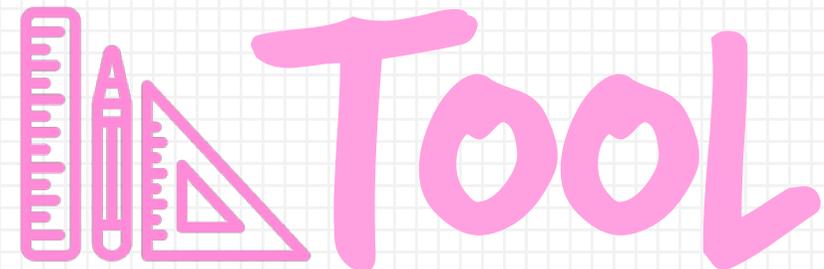
Tool 1: Take all your ideas and discuss each one of them and decide in which pile it should go.

Tool 2: Take all your ideas and/or concepts and assess them (by subgroup or individually).



## Materials

At the top, 3 piles card to order ideas, at the bottom, a concept assessment sheet.

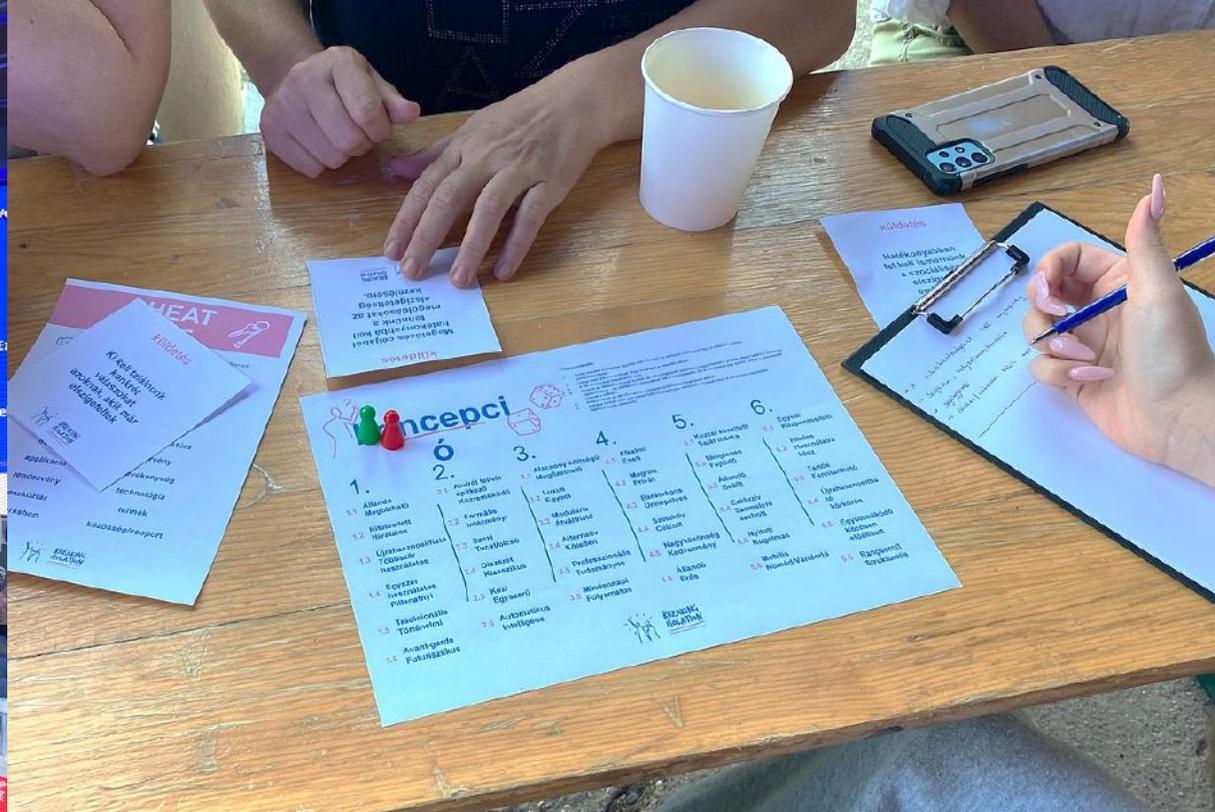


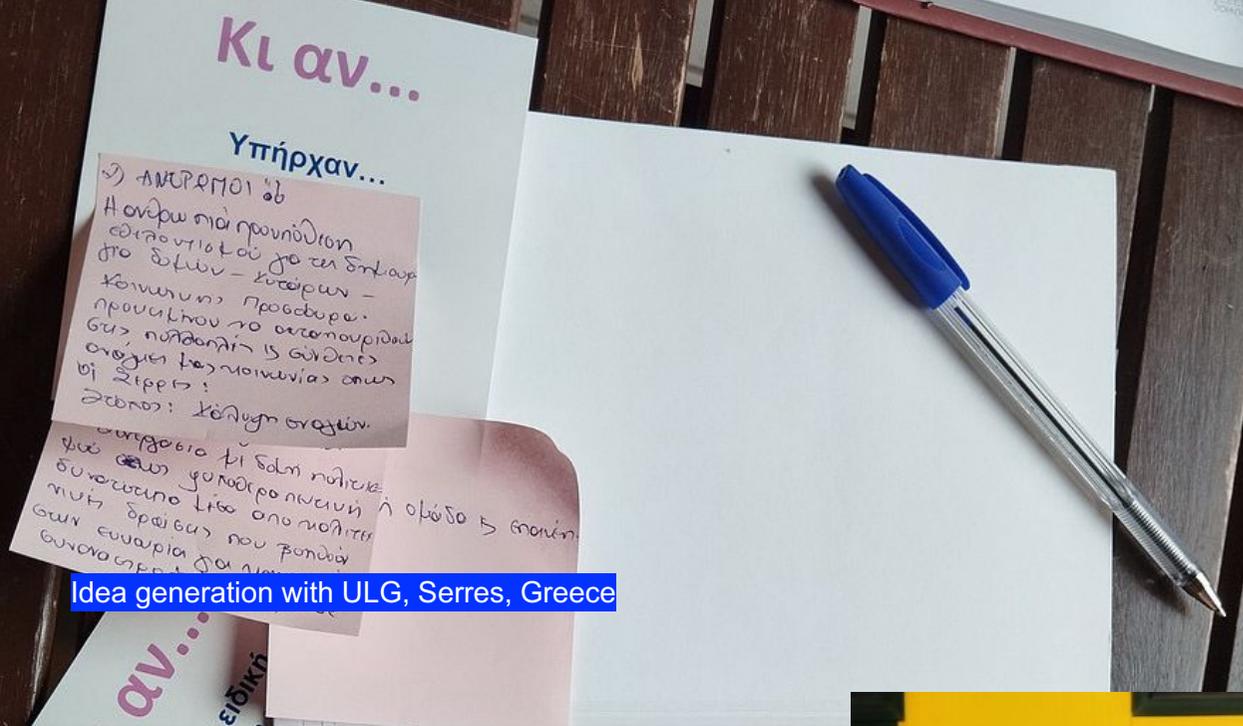


Idea generation with ULG, Pombal, Portugal



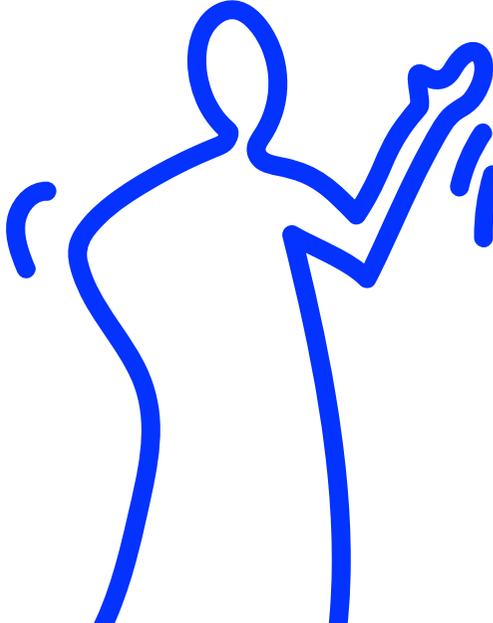
Idea generation with ULG, Fót, Hungary



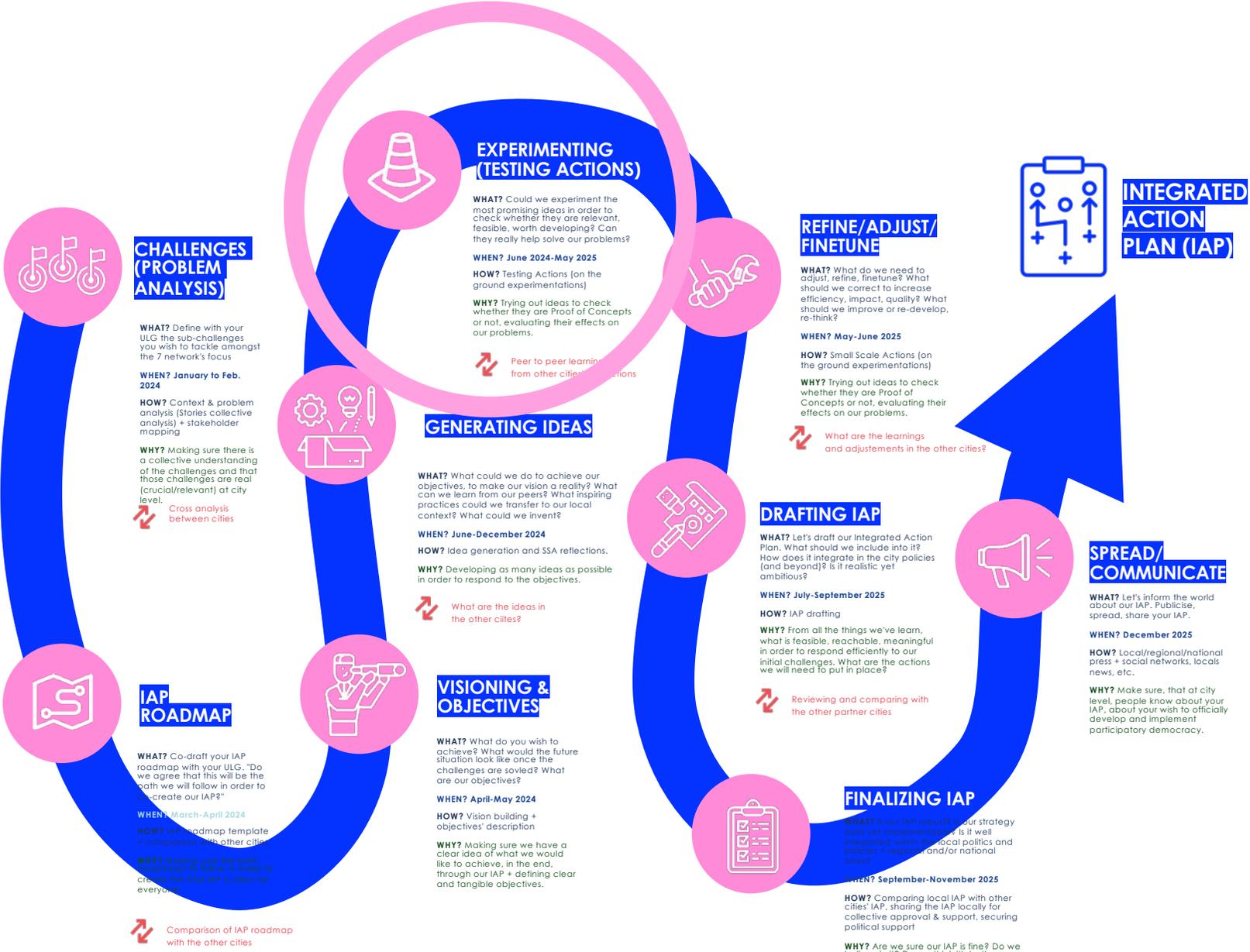


Idea generation with ULG, Serres, Greece





# ACTION PLAN ROADMAP





# EXPERIMENT- ING (TESTING ACTIONS)

## PROOF OF CONCEPTS?

Testing Actions is a crucial learning stage for partners cities. Indeed, it allows to verify if some of their ideas are worth considering for their future IAP. Partners received a dedicated training on Testing Actions in June 2024 during the Transnational Meeting of Isernia in Italy. During this TNM, partners were introduced to the concept of Testing Actions, as well as examples coming from URBACT III and the Small Scale Actions report (made by Liat Rogel, Elisa Saturno & Selam Mebhratu Kidane-

mariam and Christophe Gouache for the URBACT secretariat). The City of Agen, lead partner, also shared its experience with conducting Small Scale Actions from its previous URBACT network of Active Citizens.

Adhoc materials to support testing actions was also produced and introduced to partners. It includes: testing action template, testing action proposal template and a testing action self-assessment tool.

# TESTING ACTIONS

## PREP. PACK

### What is it?

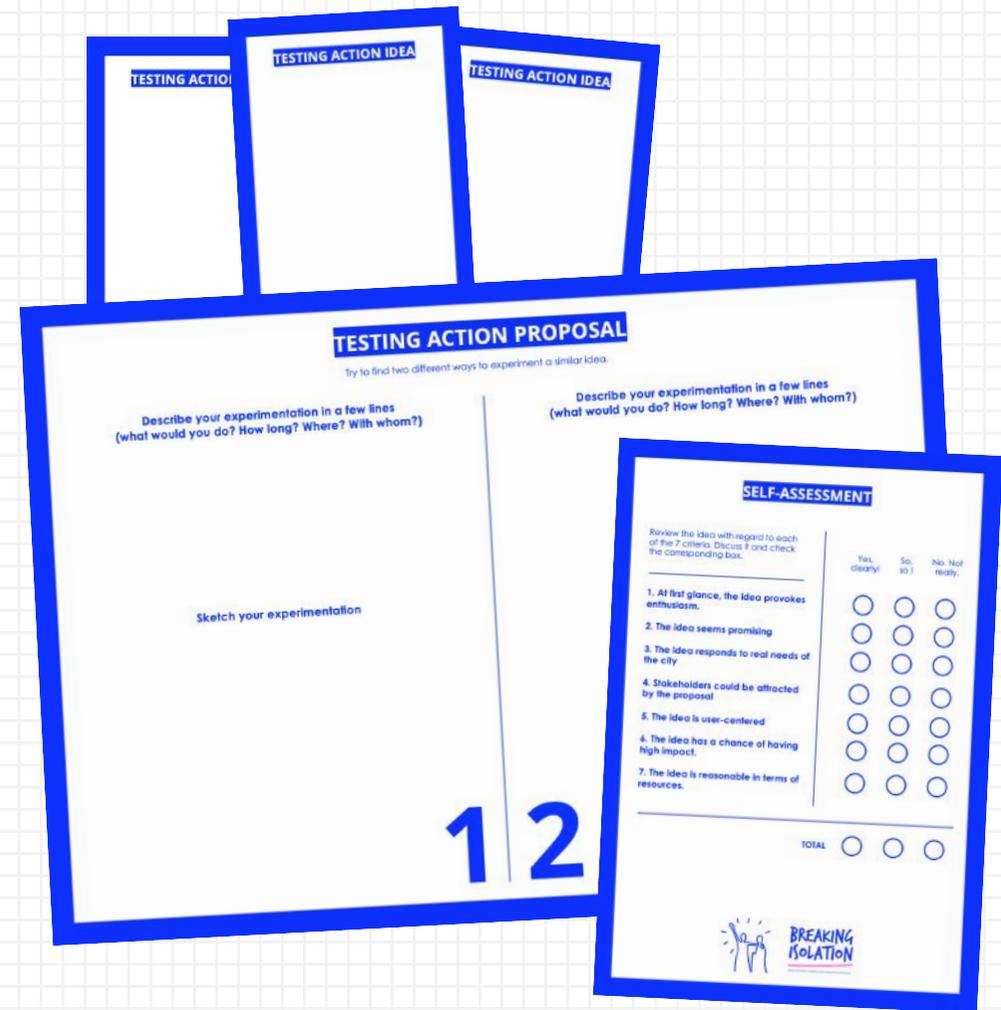
The Testing Actions Preparation Pack is composed of 3 tools, testing action idea sheets, testing action proposal sheets (which shall include a description of the experimentation, what, why, how, etc.) + a sketch of the testing action, and finally a self-assessment tool to review the proposals in order to identify the most promising ones.

### Why to use it?

This pack is meant to help structure the Testing Action work with ULGs. It helps them move from an idea, to an experimentation concept to a more structured review of possible experimentations.

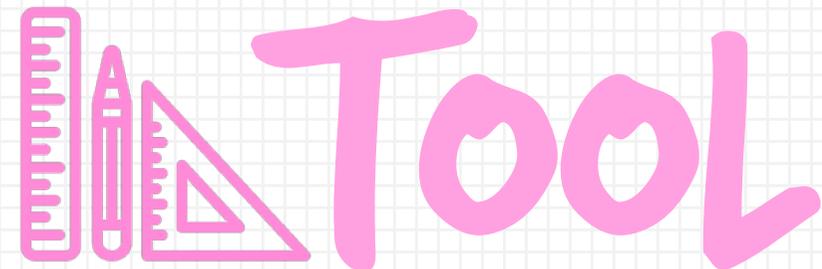
### How to use it?

1. Find as many ideas as possible on the testing action idea sheets, then select the best ones and develop them in the testing action proposal, finally use the self-assessment tool to review all the proposals.



### Materials

At the top, missions cards, in the center a sheet for concepts picking (using the dice), on the bottom right, a cheat list for inspiration.







Credit: Nicolas Castet, Lead Partner coordinator, in Pombal, Portugal. Picture by Christophe Gouache

This report highlights and summarizes the different stages, progress and tools used during the first and second quarter of the Breaking Isolation URBACT network for the year 2024.

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Written by Christophe Gouache, Lead Expert

