Future STEAM Cities

Quarterly Network Journal #2

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Introduction

Learning to transfer, transferring to learn

In the Future STEAM Cities network, we are not simply transferring an innovation — we are rethinking how cities can use STEAM approaches to unlock local talent, connect education and enterprise, and support inclusive development. Our work is not about replication. It's about learning to transfer — and in doing so, discovering that we are also transferring to learn.

The first quarter of the ADAPT phase, from March to May 2025, has shown just how dynamic this learning can be. Cities have moved from understanding Aveiro's STEAM City model to designing their own local testing actions — many grounded in the needs of young people, the gaps between education and employment, and the urgency of reimagining how learning happens across generations and systems.

With this shift, the Roadmap has become more than a framework — it is now our shared structure for experimentation. City partners are beginning to use tools like the Testing Loop, Letters from the Future,
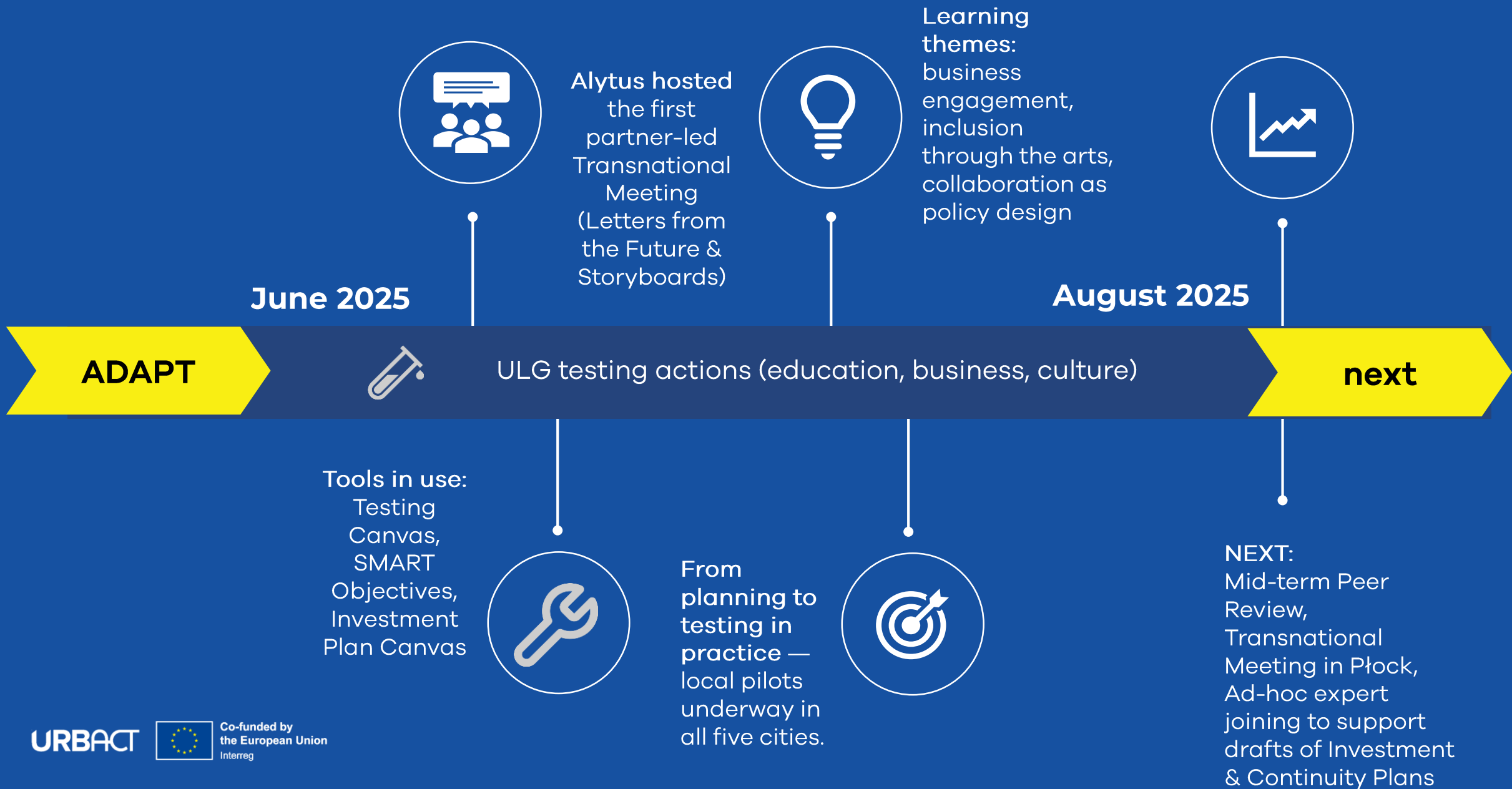
Introduction

Learning to transfer, transferring to learn

and Storyboards to develop tests that are context-sensitive, collaborative, and open to iteration. In this spirit, the Alytus Transnational Meeting* provided a powerful space to explore what testing means: not as a technical task, but as a method of storytelling, alignment, and local coalition-building.

We've seen early signs of this in action:

STEAM open days in Alytus and Hackathon in Płock, challenge-based learning in Kolding, and growing dialogue between education and business sectors in Oulu and Aveiro. Each effort is different, but what binds them is a willingness to treat STEAM not as a fixed package, but as a flexible connector — between disciplines, between institutions, and between generations.

As we look ahead, our challenge is not only to test but to learn visibly and collectively — to ensure that each action adds not only local value but shared insight. We are not only transferring a model. We are reshaping how STEAM can support urban futures.

ADAPT

June 2025

August 2025

next

ULG testing actions (education, business, culture)

Alytus hosted the first partner-led Transnational Meeting (Letters from the Future & Storyboards)

Learning themes: business engagement, inclusion through the arts, collaboration as policy design

Tools in use: Testing Canvas, SMART Objectives, Investment Plan Canvas

From planning to testing in practice — local pilots underway in all five cities.

NEXT: Mid-term Peer Review, Transnational Meeting in Płock, Ad-hoc expert joining to support drafts of Investment & Continuity Plans

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The City focus

ALYTUS

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ALYTUS
LITHUANIA

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Alytus in a nutshell: "Education at the heart of adaption"

COUNTRY: Lithuania
POPULATION: ~50,000
KEY CHALLENGE: Youth out migration and the loss of local talent

FOCUS OF TRANSFER: Strengthening STEAM across schools, business and the community

Alytus is confronting a challenge shared by many European cities: young people leave, and the future leaves with them. Through Future STEAM Cities, the municipality is working to reverse that trend — not only by improving schools, but by building a learning ecosystem that links education, business and local identity.

Alytus in a nutshell:
"Education at the heart of adaption"

At the heart of this effort is the **new Learning Hub**, a major investment that brings business development and STEAM learning under the same roof. Its dedicated STEAM space will allow schools to **test new approaches**, collaborate with companies, and work with neighboring municipalities. It is a signal of Alytus' long-term commitment to skills and talent.

Education is moving too. Lithuania's flexible curriculum gives the city space to integrate STEAM creatively, even before it becomes national policy. Teachers across Alytus are already experimenting with modules inspired by Aveiro, with ambitions to **advocate for STEAM nationally**.
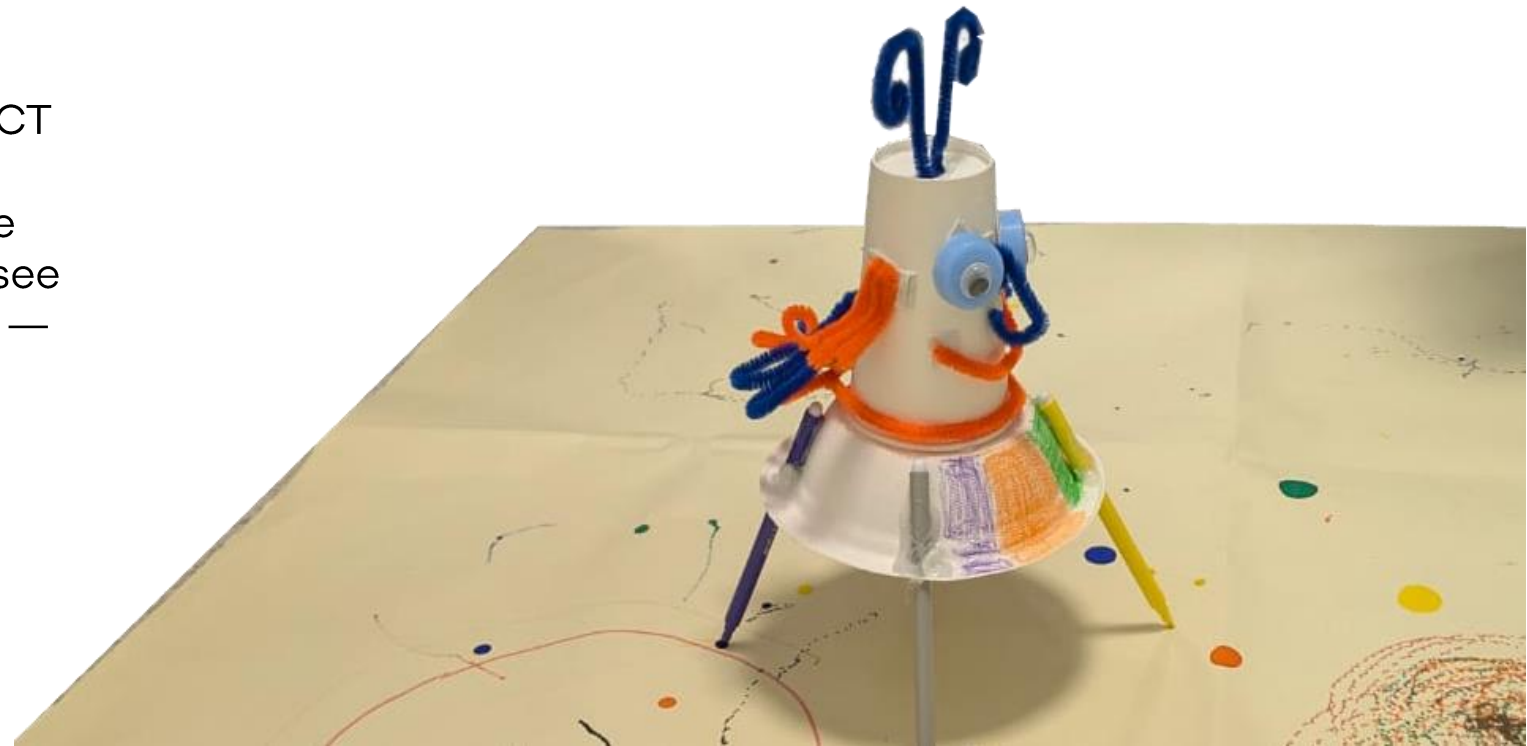
Alytus in a nutshell:
"Education at the heart of adaption"

Local testing began this summer. The first **Company Open Days** will open the doors of digital firms to students and jobseekers, helping young people see what a career in Alytus might look like. In autumn, an **entrepreneurship contest** will build creative problem-solving pathways for secondary students.

Alytus' strength lies in alignment: the URBACT Local Group brings educators, companies, politicians and cultural actors into the same conversation. Partners across the network see Alytus as a city that **makes STEAM tangible** — something students can build, test or show.

Alytus is not simply transferring Aveiro' s model; it is **reshaping it for its own future**. And in doing so, it offers a lesson to other cities: with the right coalition, even mid-sized places can create a STEAM-driven ecosystem strong enough to help people imagine staying.

June 2025, Transnational Meeting "Alytus, where understanding at the heart of adaption"

Alytus, a host city of inspiration

Early June, partners travelled to Alytus, a small Lithuanian city with a big ambition: **to turn learning into staying**. Alytus, once known for its steady outflow of young talent, is reinventing itself through a citywide commitment to STEAM education. For two days, the city became a living classroom where imagination and planning met.

The Transnational Meeting consolidated the Adapt phase — when ideas born in Aveiro's pioneering UIA project started to take on new life in five distinct contexts.

The gathering brought together municipal leaders, educators, researchers, and business representatives from Alytus. Participants exchanged perspectives on how STEAM can address local needs: STEAM education, youth opportunities, and cross-sector collaboration. It was a moment of shared purpose and local pride, reflecting both Alytus's political commitment and its openness to learn from others.

The Meeting
"Alytus, where understanding turning into doing"

Alytus testing

For Alytus, the meeting was also an opportunity to show leadership. Local coordinators Asta Kimantė and Neringa Rinkevičiūtė demonstrated how municipal support can turn limited budgets into meaningful action. Their first testing initiative — the Company Open Days — has been designed to connect students and jobseekers with digital companies. By using SMART objectives, the team defined clear goals, timelines and outcomes, ensuring that early successes could feed directly into the forthcoming Investment Plan.

Quotes from Alytus

> " *Our city is full of young people, talents... come build new houses.*
>
> (From the Alytus Letter from the Future, imagining 2030)

> " *Our strength lies in doing things people can see — something students can touch, build, or show. It makes STEAM real.*

> " *Testing leads to the creation of local STEAM experts who help embed STEAM across all schools and companies.*

> " *The city becomes known for its youth talent, reversing brain drain.*
>
> (From the Alytus Storyboard of Our ULG Journey)

> " *Budget constraints affect current activities, but municipal support ensures continuity.*

> " *We're connecting education to opportunity – this is how people start imagining staying.*

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What partners said about Alytus

> "
> *Alytus has a strong political support, with the mayor actively engaged*

> "
> *Alytus' multi-stakeholder alignment is a strength compared to some cities where long-term resources or business engagement remain difficult to secure.*

> "
> *It is noticeable the involvement of local businesses and the kolegija in Alytus*

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The testing season

Five cities,
one shared method

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Five cities
One shared method

TEST

The testign season

By July, the energy sparked in Alytus had spread across the network. All five cities deepened in the 'testing season' — a period of rapid experimentation guided by a process, **the Testing Loop**, and a set of tools.

These small-scale actions are not prototypes for implementation but exercises in collective learning: short, low-risk trials to test assumptions, engage stakeholders, and build confidence.

ALytus

Asta Kimanté

> We're connecting education to opportunity – this is how people start imagining staying.

In **Alytus**, the Company Open Days moved from concept to coordination. The business department and vice mayor reached out to local companies to open their doors to students and graduates, making the city's digital economy visible. Budget constraints were real, but the municipality stepped in to cover gaps, ensuring that momentum continued.
An autumn entrepreneurship contest was also announced, inviting young people to design projects that could strengthen the local economy.

Aveiro

Carla Semedo

described the approach as
'a smart territory strategy —
connecting people, data
and opportunity.'

Meanwhile in Portugal, Aveiro' s Local Group
re-energized its collaboration between the University,
the Institute of Telecommunications, and ALTICE
Labs.
With the city newly designated as the country's third
Free Technological Area, Aveiro aims to expand its
Living Lab to include Tech Labs for community
learning, bringing STEAM education to families,
seniors, and jobseekers.
The Regional Community Authority joined discussions
to explore regional scalability.

Kolding

Leendert Bjerg

" Every company visit turns a
learning moment into a
career possibility

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re-energized its collaboration between the University,
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its Living Lab to include Tech Labs for community
learning, bringing STEAM education to families,
seniors, and jobseekers. The Regional Community
Authority joined discussions to explore regional
scalability.

Paula Vorne

" The "A" in STEAM gives a
voice to every learner.

Oulu

Farther north, **Oulu** advanced its STEAM 2.0 model, using leadership workshops to enhance collaboration among schools and kindergartens. A comprehensive school will be selected as a testing environment for new equipment and ICT integration, supported by university researchers.
The city also deepened its commitment to the arts: the 'A' in STEAM became central to inclusion, giving voice to less academic learners through music, crafts and digital creativity.

Płock

In **Poland, Płock's** six working groups advanced their
pilot ideas through summer 'homework.'
Meetings at the municipal technology park
connected businesses with schools, addressing soft
skills gaps identified through local surveys.
Three primary schools were selected to pilot STEAM
activities from September.

Agata Kochanowska

described the process as 'a
laboratory of ideas, where
each group tests and learns
together.

Exercise

❄️ Haven't thought about it	🌱 Discussing ideas	📅 With a clear plan	🔥 Fully testing

Haven't thought about it

❄️

Discussing Ideas

🌱

With a clear plan

📅

Fully testing already

🔥

New idea

Alytus	Aveiro	Kolding	Oulu	Plock
• Company Open Days → first test, scheduled for autumn 2025, led by business department & vice mayor. 🟢	• Tech Labs expansion → integrate into schools and community (parents, unemployed, seniors) 🟡	• Strengthen the Hard Skills Station initiative 🟢	• STEAM 2.0 workshops: leadership and collaboration among teachers/school leaders. 🟠	• Hackathon planned with 16–18-year-olds (October, just before TM) 🟠
• UBU Code → test in schools next year (pending guidelines/ software). 🟢	• Training → boot camps, micro-credentials, soft skills for companies. 🟠	• Showcase the STEAM effort at elementary school level 🟢	• Test environment school → selected for a 2-year pilot to test STEAM equipment & ICT integration. 🟡	• Study visits for teachers 🟢
• Entrepreneurship Contest → planned for next year (challenges from local companies). 🟢	• Tech services/a pps → Living Lab expansion, digital twin, sensors. 🟠	• Improve the political support for STEAM initiatives 🔵	• Arts integration pilots: VR + 3D printing + music. 🟠	• Student workshops 🟡
• Additional adaptations: Tech Labs, Art & Tech initiatives. 🟢	• Urban challenges → startups and R&D using Living Lab. 🟠	• Kolding Tech City will serve as a platform for the development of further STEAM initiatives. 🟢	• STEAM on Wheels and artistic residency with Aveiro planned (spring 2024, extended autumn) 🟠	• Boot camps 🟢
	• Joint ULG meeting in September to reset priorities and confirm tests. 🟡	• Challenge-based collaboration between sound designer students from Sonic College (UC Syd) and businesses. 🟡	• Research focus → testing equal access to STEAM for 20,000 students. 🟠	• Open days in local companies 🔵
	🟠 not testing in FSC	will happen on 15th SEP	• Entrepreneurship collaboration between students from Kolding Design School, University of Southern Denmark and UC Syd. Joint workshops in areas as setting up business, pricing sales (September - october 2025) 🟡	Literacy robot to pre-school or primary school 🔴	• Entrepreneurship contests 🟢 🔴🟢

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3. INVESTMENT PLAN CANVAS: is the strategic container for your long...
vision, objectives, actions, governance, and resources. It evolves a...
what works, adapting based on real-world evidence and collabo...

IP Section 1
Needs Analysis &
Policy Response

IP Section 2
Investment Proposal

IP Section 3 & 4
The funding case, costing & budget

The Problem
Problem Definition & Needs
Analysis

Specific Objectives
What do you want to achieve?

Workplan
Activities & Timeline

Governance
How to organise?

Policy Response
Strategic priorities & how the
project will address them.

Adapted Practice
What one the element
practice to be...

2. TESTING CANVAS Use this tool together with your **ULG MEMBERS**. It provides a sha...
space to define the test in detail, clarify assumptions, roles, and success criteria, and foster co...
of the learning process.

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Our overall goal is to...
Your general objective

This test will help us to...
Specific objective and project you are
working on this time

We want '
What ex
interest?
Be specific

We will measure...
What are the elements you will b...
measure? Number of people? Satis
(survey)? Reactions?...

Our testing IDEA is...
...be what you will do to test, the precise format. Be specific

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Future STEAM Cities

1. TEST & INVOLVE WORKSHEET is used first. It helps the **CITY TEAM** prep...
Identifying what to test, why it matters, and **who to involve** — setting the stage for action or...
stakeholder, ULG, engagement.

1
What are you planning to test or explore?

2
Why it is important now?

3
Who should be involved?

4
What each member of our ULG will get
and learn that motivates them to be
involved? What's the hook for them?

5
How will we engage them in the test so
they can make the most of the journey?

6
What support do we need?

7
When and how will we test it?

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The learning network

Building capacity, reflection,
and shared evidence

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Five cities
One shared method

TEST

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The learnign network

In July, Ian Graham, URBACT ad-hoc expert, joined Future STEAM Cities to support partners in drafting their Investment and Continuity Plans — helping translate the lessons from testing into long-term strategies.

Partners have been revising their SMART objectives and using shared tools to link testing actions to potential funding pathways. At the same time, the Lead Partner and Lead Expert took part in the URBACT Funding and Resourcing training (as trainers) and the European Urban Initiative Policy Lab in Rotterdam, contributing insights from Future STEAM Cities to the wider European discussion on urban funding innovation.

The learnign network

From these months of network activity, cities have learned that:

- Testing is not a smaller version of implementation but a form of collective inquiry.
- Small experiments can shift mindsets, while business engagement grows through visibility and trust rather than formal agreements.
- The arts, once seen as complementary, are now central to inclusion and creativity.
- Each URBACT Local Group is evolving from a coordination committee into a platform for policy co-design.

By late August, partners were preparing for the next Transnational Meeting in Płock, where the Polish team will host two days of activities to explore the local context and ongoing testing actions. The meeting will include practical sessions with Płock's URBACT Local Group, a peer review of the first Investment Plan drafts (the first in-person session with the ad-hoc expert), and the launch of a new network learning module on Funding and Resourcing.

The journey that began in Alytus is now moving into its next phase: from testing to planning, and from planning to investment.

Preparations for the Mid-Term Reflection, a key step in the network's learning cycle, have begun. Over the summer, the Lead Partner and Lead Expert designed a short survey, to capture cities' progress and experience at the project's halfway point. Finalised in August, this light-touch tool sets the basis for a broader autumn reflection, leading to shared adjustments and a consolidated report in early 2026.

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Some numbers

In just three months, the network's collaborative energy produced tangible evidence of progress.

Every city designed or launched at least one testing action, with three of them — Alytus, Kolding and Płock — actively involving the business community. Two others, Aveiro and Oulu, strengthened partnerships between education and research institutions.

3 months

32 participants
Alytus meeting brought together 32 participants from five cities

150 stakeholders
Schools, universities, businesses, NGOs, and city departments.

5 cities

+5 testing actions

+20 meetings
URBACT Local Group meetings

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What´s next

From testing to planning

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The coming months will mark a turning point for **Future STEAM Cities**. Testing actions launched over the summer will move from first results to reflection, feeding directly into the drafting of each city's **Investment Plan** and Aveiro' s **Continuity Plan**. The network will meet again in Płock in October for two days of shared learning and peer review — a crucial milestone in consolidating the ADAPT phase.

This meeting will combine local exploration with collective work: partners will review Płock's testing actions, discuss emerging patterns from across the network, and conduct the **first face-to-face session with the ad-hoc expert** to refine investment pathways. A dedicated workshop on **Funding and Resourcing**, designed by the Lead Expert following training at the European Urban Initiative Policy Lab, will introduce practical strategies to sustain STEAM actions beyond the project's lifetime.

The next edition of this journal will document how cities are moving from testing to structured planning — comparing early versions of Investment and Continuity Plans, identifying funding routes, and assessing how local partnerships are evolving. As the network edges closer to the **Re-use phase**, the story will shift once again: from experimentation to long-term impact, where lessons from Aveiro and its partners begin to shape new models of STEAM-driven urban development across Europe.

Adapt phase
Testing, learning and planning

March to August 2025

What we've done

(mar-aug 2025)

- Adapt phase launched with shared Testing Loop and tools

- ULGs reactivated and engaged in testing co-design

- First local testing ideas shaped using the worksheets and canvases

- Preparation for the TM in Alytus – including tool refinement and team mobilisation

- Webinar #1 explored STEAM as culture, mindset, and civic infrastructure

Adapt phase
Testing, learning and planning

March to August 2025

What we've done

(mar-aug 2025)

- Network meetings structured coordination and resource exchange
- Transnational Meeting in Alytus (June) – tools tested live with city teams and ULG members
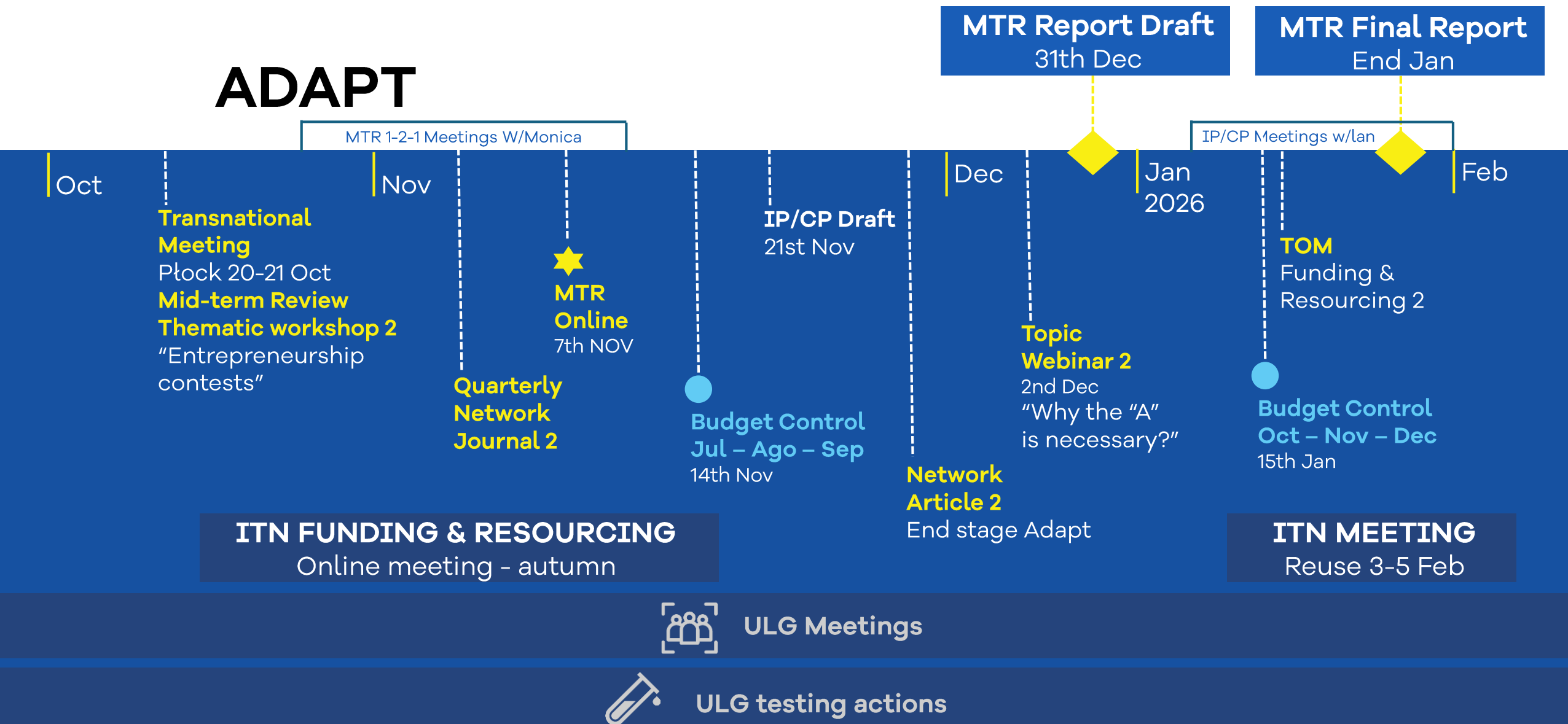- First local test actions launched and reviewed
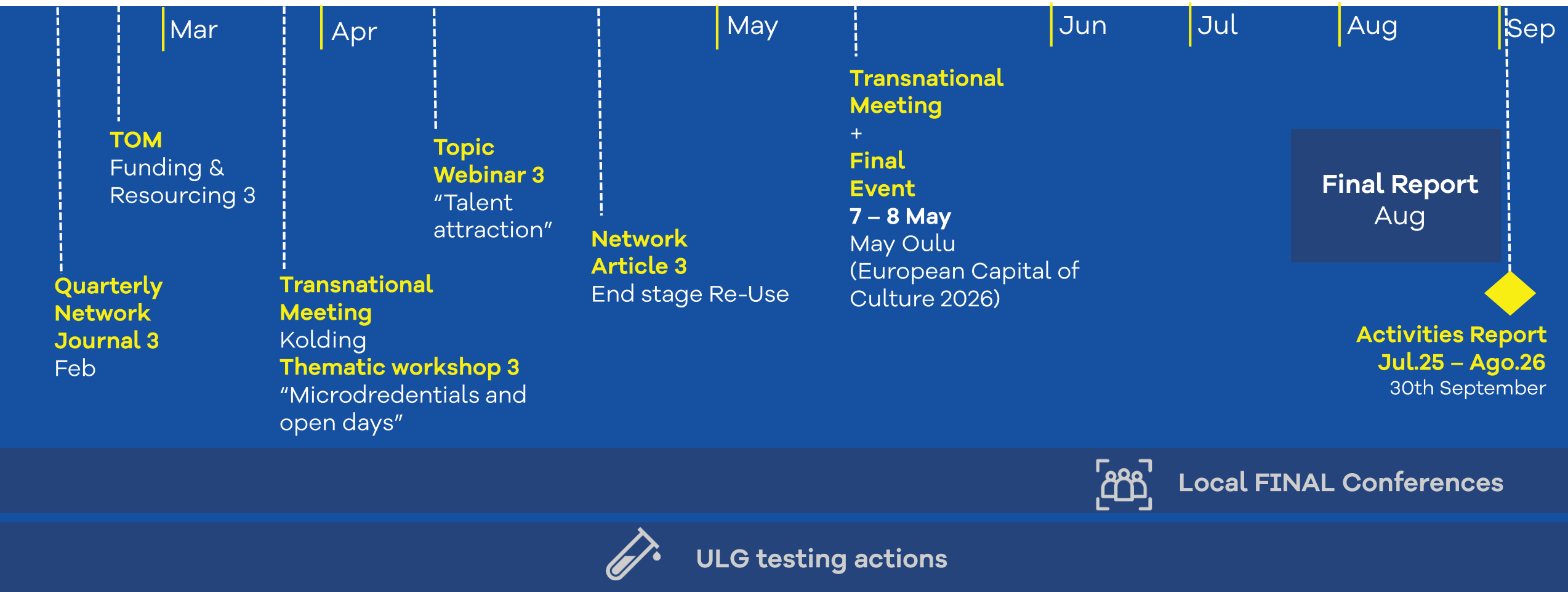
What's next?

(mar-aug 2025)

Jun - Nov	• Local test actions reviewed
Sep	• Network & ULG Coordinators Group meeting – learning and check-in
Oct. 20-21	• Transnational meeting in Płock – peer feedback on tests and first plan drafts
Dec. 02	• Webinar #2 – partnerships and scaling
ongoing	• Midterm review of plans and learning
TBA	• 5 Funding Training sessions – exploring post-project routes
Feb. 2-5	• URBACT Re-use Kick-off – cross-network alignment
Mar	• Transnational meeting in Kolding – closing Adapt phase, refining plans
TBA	• Submission of first version of Investment Plans and Continuity Plan

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Re-use phase*

From insight to commitment

(Mar – Aug 2026)

This final phase will focus on consolidation and legacy: refining plans, preparing for implementation, and making visible what cities have learned and built.

(*) Re-use phase: The final phase of the URBACT transfer process, where cities finalise their plans and prepare for implementation and sustainability.
(*) Continuity Plan: A long-term plan developed by the Lead Partner (Aveiro) to sustain and scale its original innovation after the project ends.

Key activities

- Finalisation of Investment and Continuity Plans*

- Webinar #3 (Spring) – continuity, ownership, and next steps

- Final TM and public conference in Oulu (May) – within the European Capital of Culture year

- Publication of final Journal and Network Report

- Project close and handover (August)

Glossary

Understand phase

The first phase of the URBACT Innovation Transfer process, focused on building a shared understanding of the original innovation and its potential for adaptation in different city contexts.

Adapt phase

The second phase of the URBACT Innovation Transfer method, focused on testing and shaping local solutions inspired by the original innovation.

Re-use phase

The final phase of the URBACT transfer process, where cities finalise their plans and prepare for implementation and sustainability.

Investment Plan

A strategic document developed by each city, outlining how they will embed and fund the adapted innovation beyond the project.

Continuity Plan

A long-term plan developed by the Lead Partner (Aveiro) to sustain and scale its original innovation after the project ends.

Glossary

ULG

URBACT Local Group: A local multi-stakeholder group supporting the design and adaptation of the innovation in each partner city.

Testing loop

A practical framework used across the network to design, carry out, and reflect on small-scale tests of the innovation.

Topic Webinar

An online session bringing together all partners (and sometimes external speakers) to explore key themes relevant to the transfer process.

Test & Involve Worksheet / Testing Canvas / Investment Plan Canvas

Three interconnected tools developed within the network to help cities plan their testing actions, involve the right stakeholders, and connect their learning to long-term strategies.

Transnational meeting (TM)

An in-person meeting involving all project partners, used for peer learning, joint work on tools, and strategic exchange.