

CITIES@HEART

TOWARDS A BALANCED CITY CENTRE

8th QUARTERLY NETWORK REPORT

October 2025
December 2025



URBACT



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♥ 1. Cities@Heart

Cities@Heart mobilises ten European urban areas. Led by The Greater Paris Metropolis (a public entity with a sound track record in downtown revitalisation policy), network partners work together to understand the way **city centres** function and create a new framework to be used in city centre improvement initiatives.

- Pentágono Urbano** (Portugal)
- Granada** (Spain)
- Sligo** (Ireland)
- Greater Paris Métropolis** (France)
- Fleurus** (Belgium)
- Cesena** (Italy)
- Celje** (Slovenia)
- Osijek** (Croatia)
- Krakov Métropolis** (Poland)
- Amfiktyonies** (Greece)



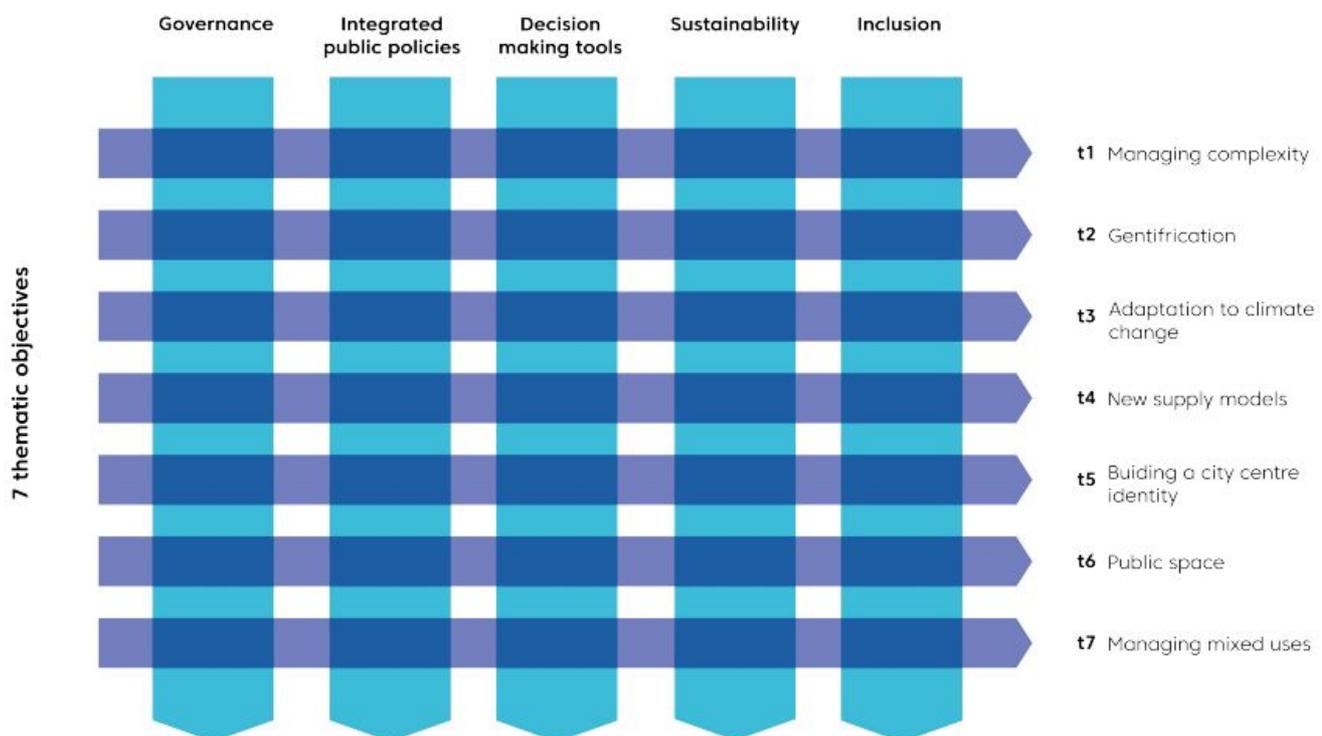
♥ 2. Where are we in our pathway to the City Centre toolbox?

Our roadmap proposes to exchange best practices and define indicators for public policies deployed in the city centre to generate a series of thematic objectives.

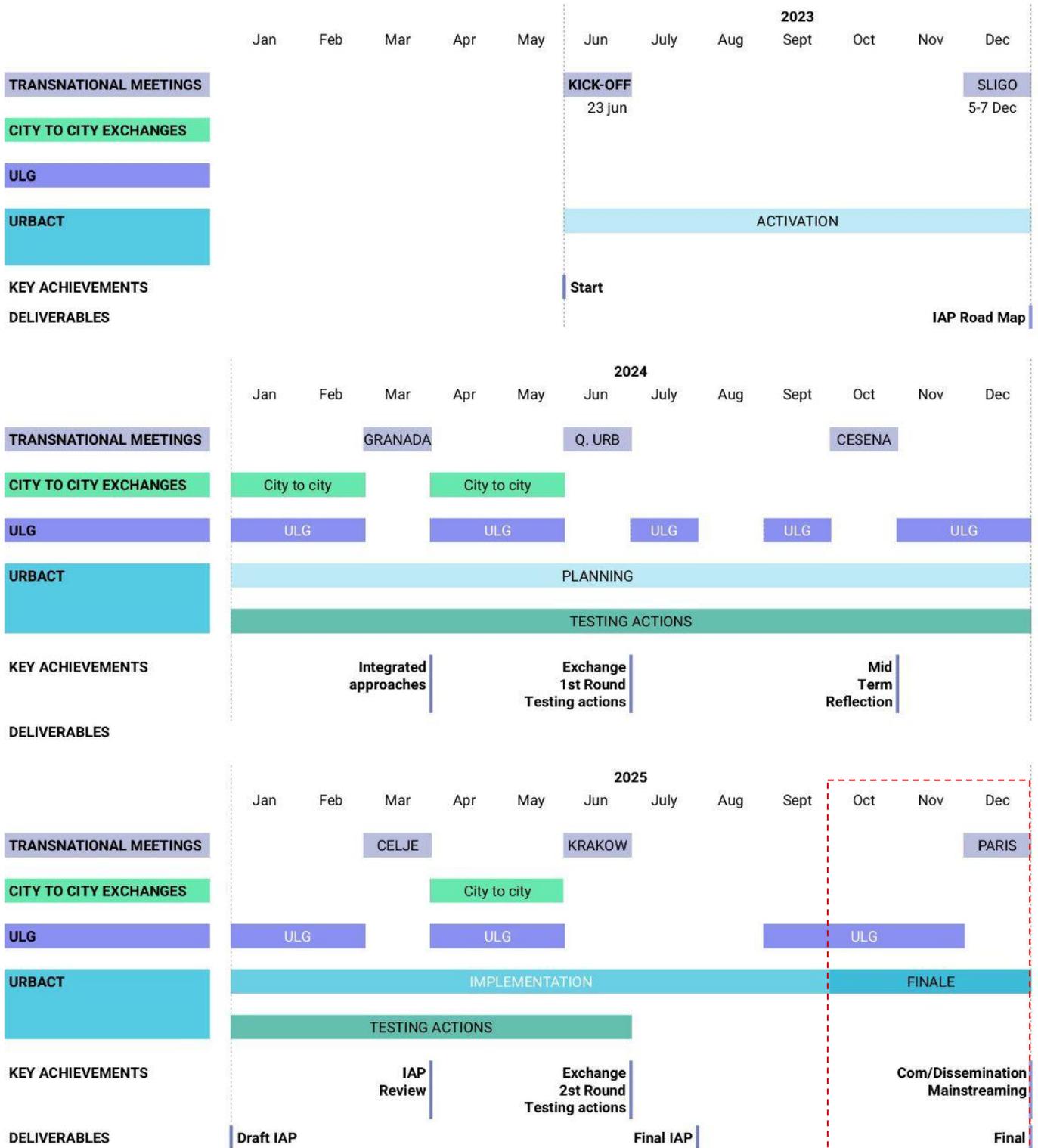
After more than a year and a half of network activity (meetings and dedicated workshops), we have explored all the topics proposed in the Baseline Study. The knowledge generated around these topics will help us structure the final guidelines through a series of levers and their associated actions and indicators.

Highlights!

- 7 strategic objectives
- 7 Transnational meetings
- 10 online meetings
- 4 online webinars



2. Our pathway to the city centres toolbox



♥ 3. What is going on in the network?

In the final quarter of the year, the URBACT Local Groups (ULGs) in each city focused on consolidating the work developed throughout the programme. Building on earlier collaborative meetings, ULGs refined the IAP visions and objectives, validated the Action Tables, and supported the shift from planning to implementation with local stakeholders.

This phase focused on translating shared priorities into concrete actions, while ensuring alignment with the network's objectives and addressing local challenges and opportunities.

Developing partnerships involving local authorities, beneficiaries/users, NGOs, public agencies, the private sector and the civil society has proven to be a key component in the design and implementation of efficient urban policies.



♥ 4. The 7th and final transnational meeting of the European network in the Greater Paris Metropolis

Day 1

The day began at the Greater Paris Metropolis headquarters with a welcome coffee. Introductions were given by Léonie Yang (Cities@Heart coordinator), Mar Santamaria (Lead Expert), Florence Louette (Cooperation and European Projects Director), and Alexandre Faure (Development Council Secretary).

The morning included presentations on the *Lively Downtowns Programme* (Léonie Yang) and the Greater Paris Metropolis ULG journey (Suzanne Pergal), followed by a welcome address from Daniel-Georges Courtois (Councilor) and a coffee break. Cities@Heart's 30-month journey and achievements of the nine partners were presented, along with a discussion with ULG members and City Centre Managers.

After transferring to the city of Vincennes, participants had lunch, a city presentation, and a guided tour of the city centre. The day ended with free time and dinner, including a presentation on Paris' night-time economy strategy by Alix Vandon.

Cities@Heart organised the 7th and final transnational meeting of the European network in Paris





The collective work resulted in three strategic publications — the Guide on Citizen Dialogue, the Cities@Heart Toolkit, and the Playbook – A Policy Guide to Transform Your City Centre — consolidating good practices and policy recommendations for revitalising city centres, strengthening local commerce, fostering housing, and creating more inclusive and sustainable public spaces.

HEART

A special
Cities@Heart



4. The 7th and final transnational meeting of the European network: Paris

Day 2

The day was dedicated to the City Center Forum at Maison de la Chimie in Paris, part of the 3rd European Forum on City Centers, organized by the Greater Paris Metropolis and Centre-Ville en Mouvement. Following Strasbourg in 2022, this edition brought together EU delegations to exchange best practices and envision sustainable, vibrant, and inclusive city centers.

The conference highlighted the first assessment from the European City Center Observatories, launched in 2022, covering urban logistics, planning and mobility, culture and public space programming, and city center management. Plenary sessions featured European mayors, and thematic field visits showcased initiatives within the Greater Paris Metropolis.

Cities@Heart organised the 7th and final transnational meeting of the European network in Paris.

The 3rd European Forum on City Centres in Paris: discuss how retail is central to the vitality of city centres, especially in the context of the twin transition towards digitalisation and environmental sustainability





The day concluded with a farewell dinner.



4. The 7th and final transnational meeting of the European network: Paris

Day 3

The day started at Saint-Ouen-sur-Seine with a welcome coffee at Salle des Fêtes Barbara, followed by a welcome address from a Saint-Ouen Councilor. Participants then visited Les Puces flea market, experiencing one of the city's most iconic commercial and cultural sites.

The morning continued with the *Cities@Heart Workshop – What's Next?*, focusing on future steps and reflections from the project. Lunch took place at La Communale de Saint-Ouen, accompanied by a presentation of La Communale and the city's strategy for supporting commerce and local businesses.

In the afternoon, a guided tour of Saint-Ouen city centre showcased urban initiatives and revitalisation projects before the programme concluded at 16:00.

Cities@Heart organised the 7th and final transnational meeting of the European network in Paris.





The Ville de Saint-Ouen-sur-Seine with many different contexts to explore, from its famous flea market to the Olympic village to a neighborhood in the process of comprehensive urban renewal.





5. Our Quarterly best practices

The best practices of this period are summarized by those presented during the transnational meeting in Paris, as well as those shared in the two thematic webinars held during this quarter.

5.1 Lively Downtowns Programme

5.2 Thematic Support with Key Partners

5.3 City of Vincennes

5.3.1 Vincennes Pre-emption Right Strategy

5.3.2 Vincennes Land Intervention Strategy

5.3.3 Vincennes Communication

5.3.4 Vincennes Tools

5.3.5 Vincennes Events

5.4 City of Saint-Ouen

5.4.1 Saint-Ouen City Strategy

5.4.2 Saint-Ouen Les Puces

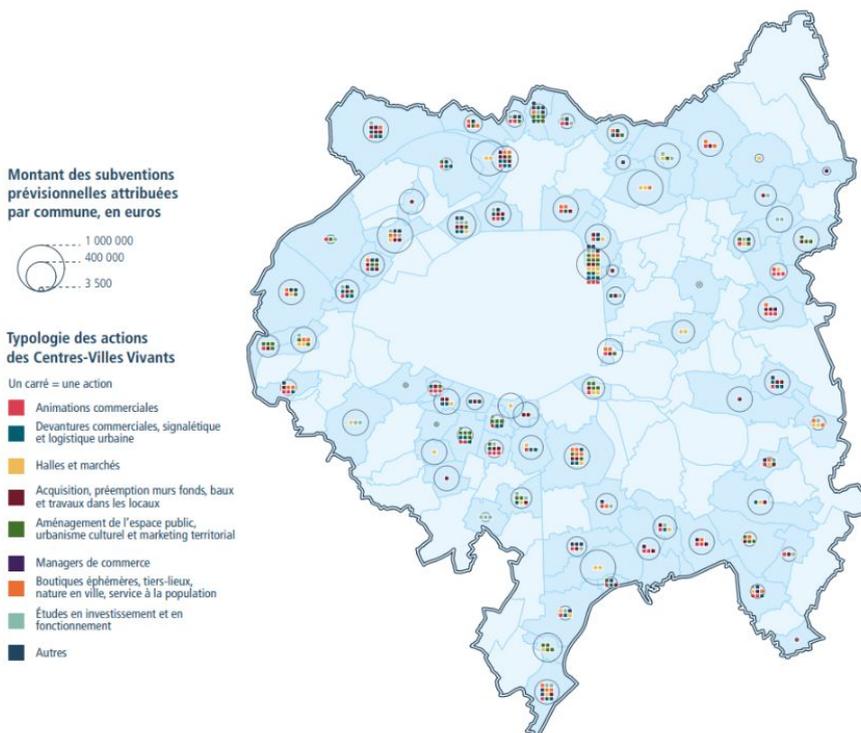
5.4.3 Saint-Ouen Small is big

5.4.4 Saint-Ouen La Communale

5.4.5 Saint-Ouen Olympic Village

♥ 5.1 Lively Downtowns Programme

The Greater Paris Metropolis provides technical and financial support to its municipalities, with 108 out of 130 municipalities currently involved. This includes €37 million in co-funding for initiatives such as market hall and storefront renovations, urban furniture, tree planting, and public art. In addition, municipalities can receive up to €500,000 over three years to implement targeted action plans. Support is delivered in collaboration with key partners specialized in commerce, craftsmanship, and urban planning, ensuring high-quality interventions that enhance both the local economy and the urban environment.



♥ 5.2 Matching empty premises with local entrepreneurs

The Greater Paris Metropolis supports entrepreneurs through the *Set Up Your Business* initiative with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry to connect small business entrepreneurs and municipal empty premises. In 2023, It also created a public real estate company.

Currently, 15 premises submitted by municipalities have been acquired. A drugstore, a fishmonger, and a bakery are in the process of opening, with a target of reaching 400 premises over the next 10 years. The programme focuses on key proximity economy shops, to strengthen local commerce and activate urban spaces.



♥ 5.3 Vincennes

Vincennes is a compact, high-density urban municipality directly east of Paris, forming part of the Métropole du Grand Paris. The city covers approximately 1.91 km² and had around 49 000 residents in the mid-2020s, with a very high population density of about 25 300–25 700 inhabitants/km² — among the highest in French municipalities outside central Paris.

The socio-demographic profile shows a relatively balanced age structure, with many families and working-age adults, and a substantial share of residents in skilled, professional, or managerial jobs, reflecting a relatively affluent and highly educated population.

Vincennes' commercial activity is primarily based on proximity retail and small-scale shops, including food stores, clothing, jewelry, florists, and household goods. The city hosts approximately 850 retail units, including 177 cafés, restaurants, and hotels, concentrated around key commercial areas: the city centre and the eastern, western, and southern commercial poles.



♥ 5.3.1 Vincennes Pre-emption Right Strategy

Commercial Pre-emption Right Strategy

Vincennes has implemented a strategy of intervention using the commercial pre-emption right. In 2008, the city defined the scope of the pre-emption right to cover artisan businesses, commercial businesses, and commercial leases.

This was followed by the formal adoption of the commercial pre-emption right in 2013 and an expansion of its scope in 2020. Since 2013, the city has carried out nine commercial pre-emptions, with a total cost of €304,555.

9 commercial preemptions carried out since 2013 – cost for the City: €304,555



♥ 5.3.2 Vincennes Land Intervention Strategy

Land Intervention Strategy

Vincennes has adopted a land intervention strategy focused on the acquisition of commercial premises in neighborhood hubs. Recent initiatives include the opening of a grocery store in September 2024 and the upcoming opening of a beauty institute in Autumn 2025.

In partnership with the Greater Paris Metropolis Real Estate Company, the city also supported the opening of a bakery in August 2025 and is marketing new premises with prospects for 2026.

Regulatory tools complement these actions, including the protection of commercial frontages in the PLUi (Local Intercommunal Urban Plan) and urban planning regulations applied to shopfronts and commercial signage, ensuring a coherent and attractive urban environment.



♥ 5.3.3. Vincennes Communication

Communication plays an important role through diverse promotion tools for local commerce:

- Dedicated communication campaigns
- Dedicated social media channels
- Communication materials (Vincennes Info, event sponsorship, etc.)

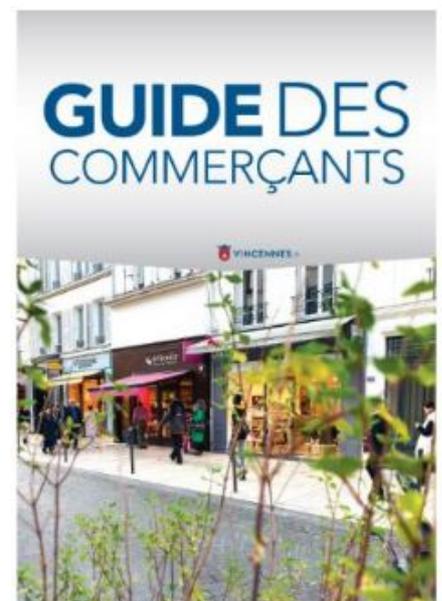
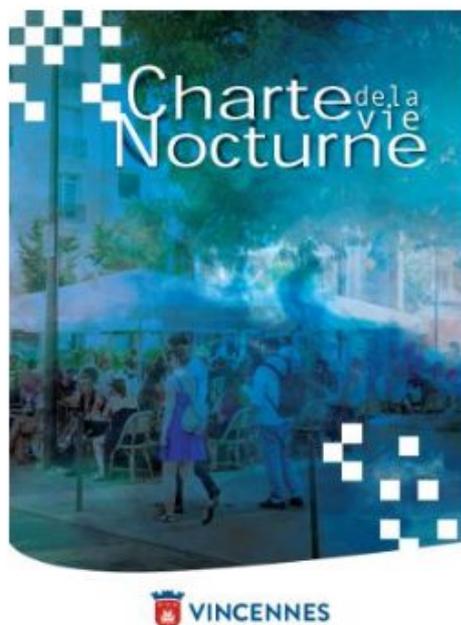


♥ 5.3.4. Vincennes Tools

Tools to Support Shopkeepers and Promote Local Craftsmanship

Vincennes provides several tools to support shopkeepers, including a *Shopkeepers' Guide* and a *Nightlife Charter*.

To promote local craftsmanship, the city offers *Le Comptoir Vincennois*, a pop-up shop dedicated to artisan-creators, and the "Créé à Vincennes" label, which showcases local creation, production, and the city's unique identity.



♥ 5.3.5. Vincennes Events

Events and commercial activities

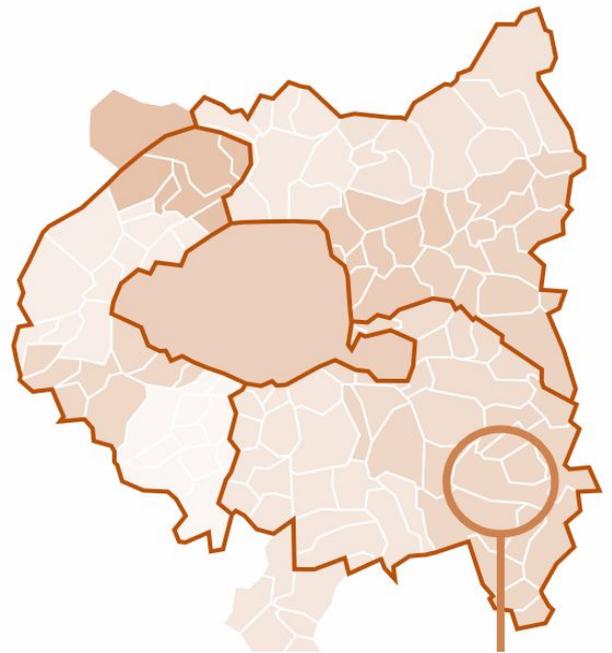


♥ 5.4 Saint-Ouen

Saint-Ouen, located near Paris, benefits from a dynamic metropolitan environment that has been significantly strengthened in recent years. Improved public transport connections have enhanced accessibility, contributing to a more active urban life and reinforcing the city's role within the Greater Paris area.

Urban transformation has supported a more vibrant and liveable townscape, with updated planning rules encouraging human-scale development and improved residential quality. These changes have helped activate streets and public spaces, supporting a more diverse mix of housing, economic activities and services.

Economic vitality is also reflected in the renewed attractiveness of key commercial areas, where requalification processes have improved the quality and diversity of retail activities. At the same time, Saint-Ouen's strong cultural and commercial identity continues to play a central role in the city's appeal (*Puces* flea market attracts around 4 million visitors per year), attracting visitors while maintaining close links with local creative and artisan communities.



♥ 5.4.1 Saint-Ouen City strategy

Building on this dynamic context, Saint-Ouen-sur-Seine has developed a comprehensive regeneration strategy that places people, neighbourhood balance and metropolitan integration at its core. Rather than concentrating development in a single centre, the city has chosen to distribute growth across its six neighbourhoods, ensuring that each district benefits from new opportunities while preserving its own identity.

A key strength of the approach lies in the transformation of former industrial land, which once represented almost half of the city's surface. Since the 1990s, these areas have gradually been converted into offices, services and mixed-use developments, turning past constraints into strategic assets. Large-scale projects are carefully connected to everyday life, reinforcing local centralities around "village squares", neighbourhood markets and proximity commerce.

Economic development acts as a major driver of inclusion and vitality. Strategic facilities of metropolitan and national importance, such as the future Grand Paris Nord University Hospital and new high-level administrative headquarters, are expected to generate thousands of jobs and attract students, professionals and visitors.



♥ 5.4.1 Saint-Ouen City strategy

Social and environmental dimensions are equally embedded in the strategy. Deep renovation programmes target post-war social housing, improving living conditions while upgrading public spaces and pedestrian connections. At the same time, the reconquest of the Seine riverbanks—supported by metropolitan funding—has transformed infrastructure-dominated spaces into accessible, shared public areas, reinforcing Saint-Ouen's relationship with the river and creating new leisure and ecological corridors.

Finally, culture and sport play a unifying role in the city's transformation. Facilities such as the Bauer Stadium and the reconversion of emblematic buildings strengthen local pride and collective identity, while complementing Saint-Ouen's well-established cultural and creative ecosystem.

Together, these actions illustrate how Saint-Ouen combines metropolitan ambition with neighbourhood-scale interventions, offering a balanced and transferable model of inclusive urban regeneration.



♥ 5.4.2 Saint-Ouen Les Puces

Since 1885, Saint-Ouen has developed a dense commercial fabric, with around 1,200 shops. Dedicated counselors, including one who is a shopkeeper, support merchants in managing challenges such as tourism pressures, the impact of the *Périphérique* ring road, and freight deliveries. Current strategies focus on increasing the attractiveness of *Les Puces*, ensuring it remains a vibrant and well-managed market while balancing the needs of local businesses and visitors.



♥ 5.4.3 Saint-Ouen Small is big

Saint-Ouen has created a new space for artisans in a renovated industrial printing building. The initiative started as a test space with a small contribution for 3–6 months, selected through an open call. Artisans receive digital support, and the current physical space is managed by a private foundation (open Friday to Sunday), with the building provided by the city council. Each seller manages their own profits independently, and the space also hosts workshops. This project occupies part of the market parking area and contributes to strengthening local craftsmanship and activating underused urban spaces.

**Small
is Big**
LA BOUTIQUE DU
MICRO-COMMERCE



♥ 5.4.4 Saint-Ouen La Communale

Located in the recently developed Seine Docks neighbourhood, a 10-year-old urban area, La Communale represents a new hub for commerce and social life. It is a place of discovery and connection, experience sharing, and welcoming every member of the community.

It combines a diverse mix of food, retail, and cultural activities, creating a vibrant destination that reinforces the neighbourhood's identity while attracting visitors from across the city.



♥ 5.4.5 Saint-Ouen Olympic Village

The Olympic Village will welcome over 6,000 new residents, with 40% of the housing allocated as social housing, reflecting Saint-Ouen's commitment to inclusivity. The arrival of these new inhabitants generates additional local revenues through taxes, which can support the development of public facilities and services to meet growing demand. Beyond housing, the village integrates public spaces, local services, and pedestrian-friendly streets, strengthening social cohesion and connectivity with surrounding neighbourhoods.



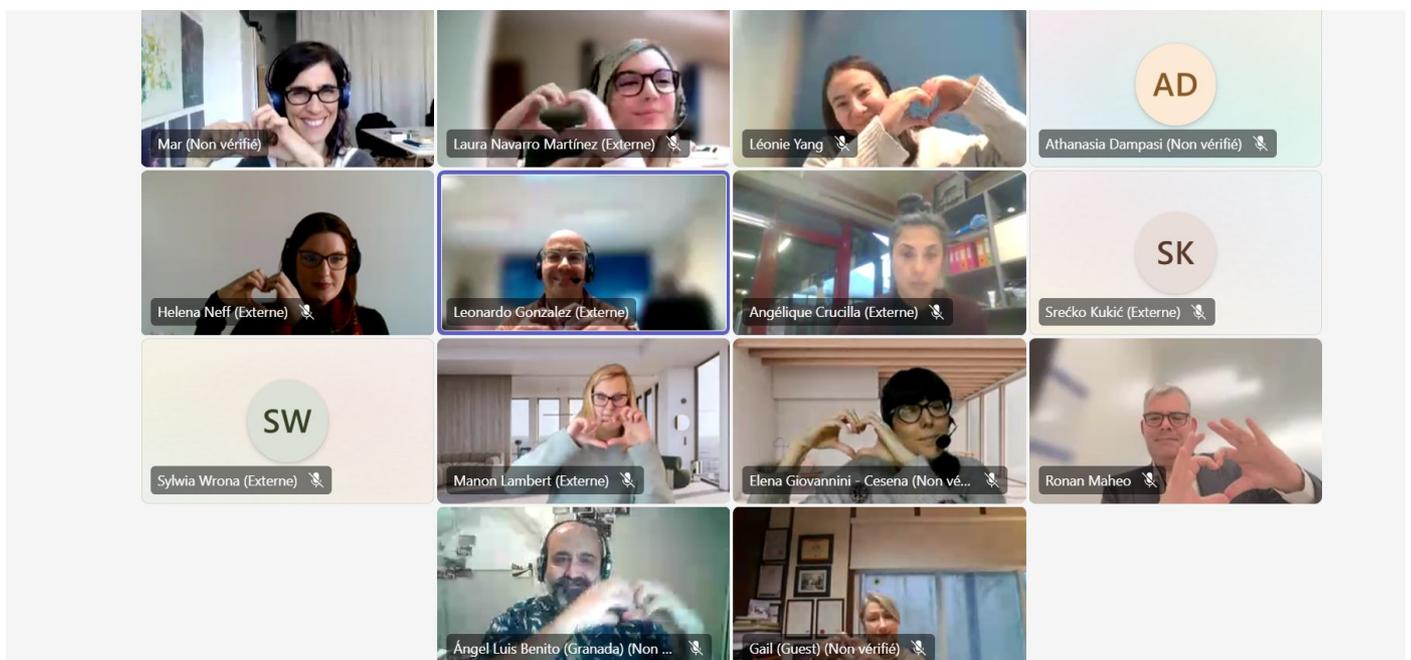
♥ 6. Integrated Action Plan Review

During this quarter, the cities in the network refined their IAP visions and objectives. These drafts were reviewed in two key sessions.

In the online session, facilitated by Ed Thorpe (Ad-Hoc Expert) and the Lead Expert (LE), the focus shifted toward further developing the Action Tables in alignment with each city's vision and objectives.

The Peer Review Process was initiated in Celje, beginning with an exercise designed to promote active listening and facilitate assessments of IAPs among partners. These were grouped according to shared thematic areas.

The IAP framework is a future-oriented, context-driven tool designed to address specific urban policy challenges through a coherent and multi-layered approach.



♥ 6.1. Integrated Action Plans

All partner cities have now completed their Integrated Action Plans, each outlining a locally tailored strategy to address shared urban challenges and strengthen the vitality, accessibility, and liveability of their city centres.

01. Pentágono Urbano

The IAP focuses on creating a data-driven, participatory governance system through a Competence Centre for Urban Innovation to improve decision-making and urban quality.

02. Cesena

The IAP focuses on improving accessibility, liveability, and economic diversity in the historic city centre.

03. Fleurus

The IAP focuses on revitalising the city centre through integrated urban renewal, cultural activation, and support for local commerce.

04. Granada

The IAP focuses on rebalancing the historic centre by improving public spaces, mobility, housing, and community cohesion.

05. Celje

The IAP focuses on reactivating vacant commercial spaces to strengthen economic vitality and city-centre attractiveness.

06. Krakow

The IAP focuses on improving public spaces, mobility, and participation to manage growth and enhance quality of life in the town centre.

07. Lamia

The IAP focuses on regenerating Parkou Square through green, smart, and inclusive public-space interventions.

08. Osijek

The IAP aims to make Osijek's city centre vibrant, people-centered, and climate-resilient through improved public spaces, mobility, and cultural engagement.

09. Sligo

The Sligo IAP focuses on revitalizing the city centre by increasing housing, activating vacant spaces, and enhancing the economic and social impact of public events.

1

CITIES@HEART PU IAP

Towards a balanced City Centre



INTEGRATED ACTION PLAN
By Pentágono Urbino

URBACT Co-funded by the European Union

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2



ARRIVE
STAY
ENJOY!
Cesena
Integrated
Action Plan

URBACT Co-funded by the European Union

CITIES@HEART

Comune di Cesena

3

FLEURUS | EVOLUTION IN MOTION



INTEGRATED ACTION PLAN

EUROPEAN URBACT PROGRAM CITIES@HEART

CITIES@HEART URBACT Co-funded by the European Union

VILLE DE FLEURUS VISIT

4

Integrated Action Plan for a balanced city centre in Granada



centro back to barrio

URBACT Co-funded by the European Union

CITIES@HEART

5

INTEGRATED ACTION PLAN

Cities@Heart



CITIES@HEART URBACT Co-funded by the European Union

Celje

6

VISION PLAN 2025

The new face
of Niepolomice city centre

Designing an inclusive centre with
the participation of all its users.



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7

Cities@Heart INTEGRATED ACTION PLAN | LAMIA



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CITIES@HEART

COMUNE DI LAMIA

8

City of Osijek, Croatia

Integrated Action Plan – Osijek, Croatia

URBACT IV – Cities@Heart Action Planning Network/URBACT IV –

CITIES@HEART URBACT Co-funded by the European Union

Osijek

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SLIGO CITIES@HEART Integrated Action Plan



URBACT Co-funded by the European Union

CITIES@HEART

Sligo SLIGO BID

SLIGO BID

♥ 7. Small Scale Actions

During this quarterly period, the remaining small-scale actions have been successfully completed. In Lamia, two primary schools hosted workshops where 80 students shared their ideas for the central square, revealing a strong desire for greenery and playful spaces.

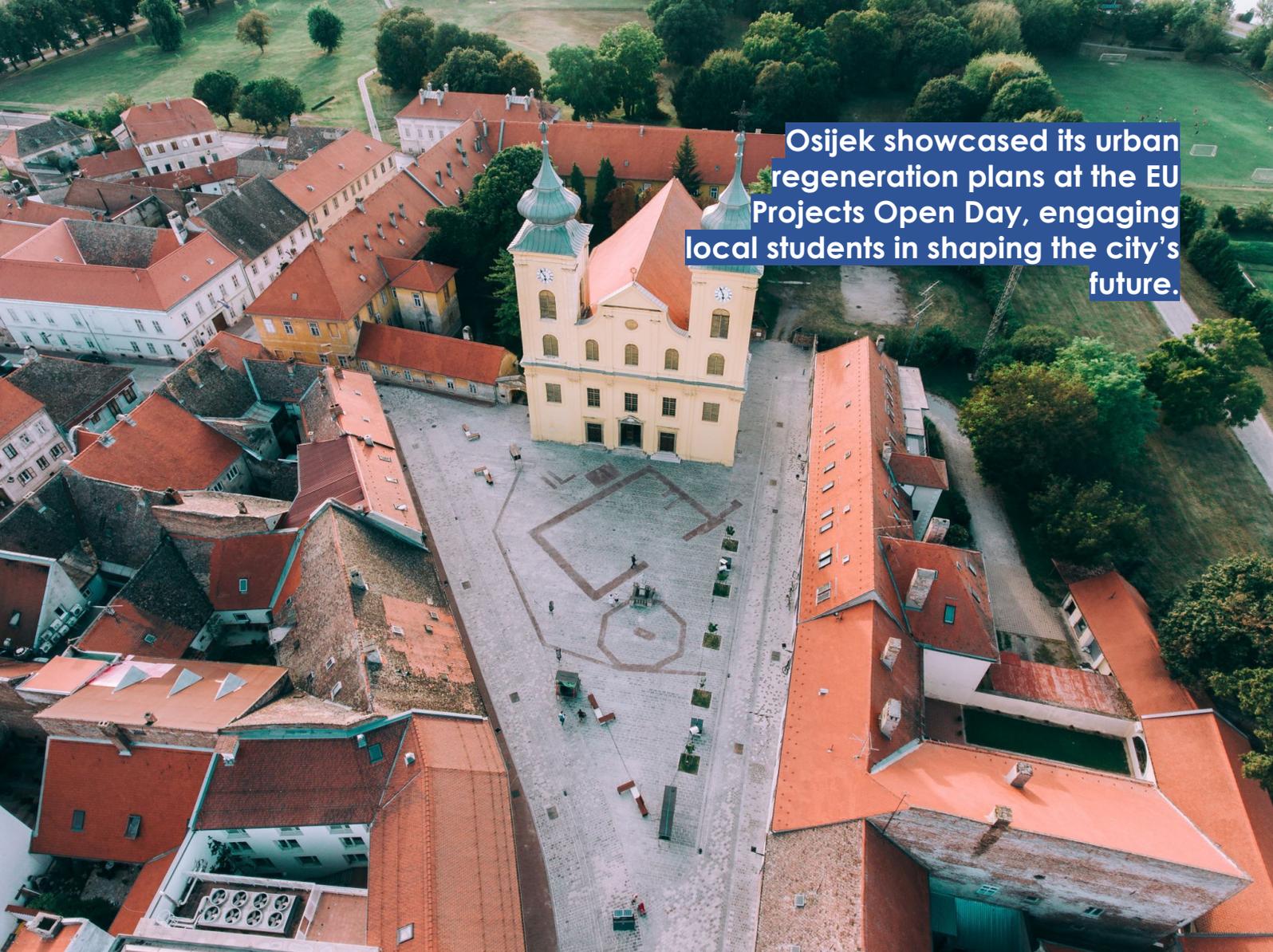
Osijek brought together around 200 participants in the city center for a public event showcasing EU projects and Cities@Heart, incorporating surveys and student interviews that highlighted the importance of New European Bauhaus principles and citizen engagement.

In Cesena, a November event presented the IAP and a Small Scale Action at the city's historic southern entrance, featuring seating and an Open-Air Art Gallery. Developed with ULG members, the project promotes walkability, social interaction, and community-driven cultural regeneration.



Cesena's SSA - which includes seating and an Open-Air Art Gallery along a key walkway - aims to encourage walkability and social interaction.





Osijek showcased its urban regeneration plans at the EU Projects Open Day, engaging local students in shaping the city's future.

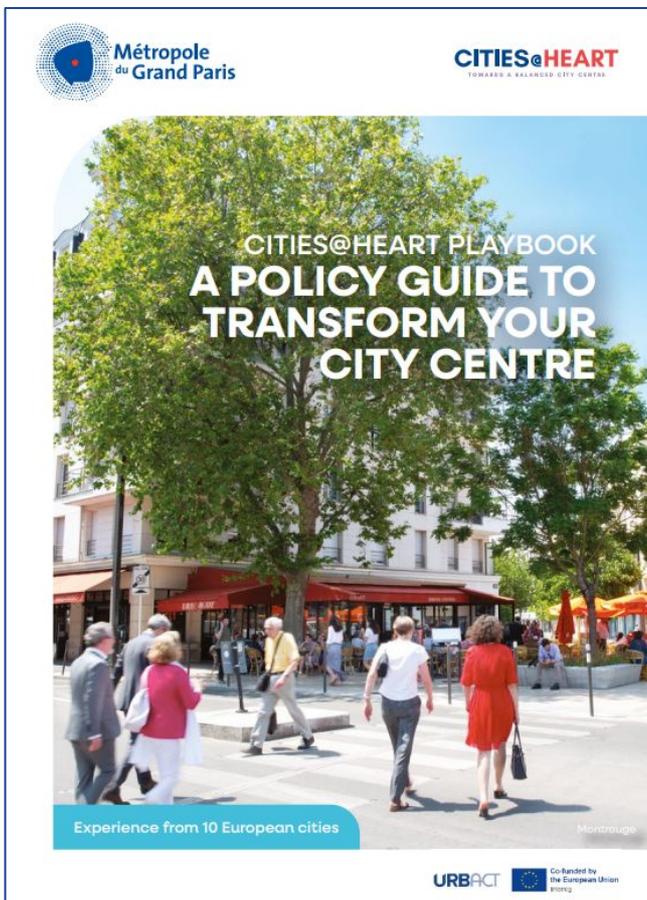


Development Organization Amfiktyonies and Lamia's Youth Council engaged 5th and 6th graders to share ideas for a more child-friendly and vibrant city center.



♥ 8. Our final products: The Playbook

The Playbook is a practical guide for revitalising city centres through community-driven, evidence-based policies. It highlights five key levers, concrete actions, and evaluation indicators, drawing on local initiatives and best practices. Designed for decision-makers and urban professionals, it helps cities create vibrant, inclusive, and resilient urban cores while supporting collaboration across sectors and with communities.



RL Lever 2: Retain Residential Life

♥ Best practises
How to get inspired?

Housing Grant for families in Celje
RL1 RL2 MEDIUM-TERM | €€ | PUBLIC PROMOTION

Across Europe, and particularly in Slovenia, rising housing prices and high private rental costs have made it increasingly difficult for young people and families to secure their first home. Limited affordability delays independence and pushes many into precarious living conditions, reinforcing inequalities and hindering social mobility.

To address this challenge, the Municipal Housing Company of Celje promoted a Public Tender tailored for young adults and young families in 2019, offering access to public rental apartments at affordable rates. Applicants are selected through clear and transparent criteria, ensuring support reaches those most in need.

Beyond ensuring long-term accessibility to housing, the grant also represented an opportunity for the municipality to activate specific locations in the city centre by welcoming new inhabitants with specific needs that may trigger the transformation of commerce and services around and create long-lasting bonds within the community. 94 young households applied to the tender, and 14 housing units were allocated (9 for families and 5 for singles or couples).

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♥ 8. Our final products: The Toolkit

The Cities@Heart Toolkit provides 10 practical tools to transform city centres across Europe. Developed by municipalities and inspired by Small Scale Actions, each tool includes step-by-step guidance, context, feasibility, results, and relevant indicators. Designed for policy makers and local technicians, the toolkit enables low-budget, in-house implementation of measurable, community-driven initiatives, adaptable to local needs.

Cities@Heart Toolkit

10 tools to manage your city centre
Based on the experience of 10 European cities

- 1. Define your city centre's SWOT **SG** 4
- 2. Your city centre transformation checklist **SG** 7
- 3. Analyse residential and commercial uses **LC + RL** 15
- 4. Attract entrepreneurs **LC** 19
- 5. Activate your vacant premises **LC** 21
- 6. Organize events **ID** 24
- 7. Measure footfall **LC + ID** 27
- 8. Experiment traffic pacification **IE** 29
- 9. Create a sense of place **IE + ID** 32
- 10. Understand city centre users' expectations **SG** 36

Cities@Heart playbook - 5 levers
LC : Sustain your local commerce
RL : Reinforce residential life
IE : Promote inclusive urban environments
ID : Build a city centre identity
SG : Create a shared governance






2

Cities@Heart Toolkit - November 2025

6. Organize events **ID**

Inspiration from Cesena, Italy

Cesena, a city of 100 000 inhabitants, hosts a wide variety of events throughout the year. However, the number of available event spaces is limited, which can lead to scheduling conflicts. To optimize event planning and resource allocation, a shared calendar across sectors was created to provide a clear view of all events throughout the year, leading to better coordination and fewer overlaps. By coordinating all these cultural, gastronomic, sports, and volunteer events, the goal is to develop a unified strategy for the animation of the historic centre.

Step by Step Methodology

1. **Design your table on Excel**, please find below the example from Cesena.
2. **Share it with your colleagues and organize a launch meeting** to make sure all municipal services organizing events, in-house or with external partners, know where the table is and can update it regularly, including elected officials. This table can be a simple shared Google Sheets file or be integrated into any internal CRM tool.
3. **Update regularly the table**. In the case of Cesena, one person of the tourism team is in charge of contacting the various services to make sure the table is up to date.

Template - Events Table

Hour	Place	Initiative	Organizer	Notes
JANUARY				
Monday, Jan 1				
15:00-10:30	Piazza della Libertà	Christmas Train, departure and arrival in Piazza della Libertà	L'Accento	
16:00-17:30	Piazza Almerici	Circus Tent - Children's Christmas (show for	L'Accento	

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♥ 9. Upcoming milestones

URBACT CITY FESTIVAL Nicosia - September 2026

The **upcoming URBACT city festival** will bring together urban practitioners from across Europe to exchange knowledge, explore innovative approaches, and foster new collaborations. The Cities@Heart network will be present to share its experiences, insights, and lessons learned from revitalising city centres, offering inspiration and practical examples to other URBACT members.

Cities@Heart continues its **journey**, connecting cities, sharing practices, and driving lasting change in urban centres.

The future of Cities@Heart

The Cities@Heart network is committed to keeping its collaboration alive and evolving. The next steps focus on ongoing exchange of knowledge, monitoring the impact of Integrated Action Plans (IAPs), and sharing new practices in city-centre regeneration. Cities will continue joint meetings, pilot projects, and community-driven initiatives, supported by digital tools like the Playbook and Toolkit, while elected officials champion the long-term integration of lessons learned into local policies.

Thank you,
And stay posted for more!



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