



URBACT



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URBAN ECHO: Transferability study

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Section 1: The Good Practice

1.1. Introduction

URBAN ECHO is an URBACT Transfer Network about integrated neighbourhood renewal. The network brings together six European cities to learn from Ghent's 20-year experience in place-based, people-centred urban renewal – and from each other.

Ghent (Belgium) is the lead partner. The five transfer partners are Düsseldorf (Germany), Pezinok (Slovakia), Cluj-Napoca (Romania), Perugia (Italy) and Las Gabias (Spain). The partnership spans a wide range of city sizes, governance systems, and levels of experience with neighbourhood-level work. That range is deliberate: the network is designed to test how an integrated approach to neighbourhood renewal can work in very different contexts.

This Transferability Study addresses three things. First, it describes Ghent's Good Practice, breaking it into transferable modules that partners can adopt and adapt independently. Second, it profiles each partner city – what they bring to the network, where they want to learn, and how ready they are to work with each module. Third, it lays out the methodology and roadmap for the network's work over the next two years.

City	Country	Population	Focus neighbourhood
Düsseldorf	Germany	650.000	Friedrichstadt Pilot for energy + renewal
Pezinok	Slovakia	25.000	Calja and Pezinok- Sever
Cluj-Napoca	Romania	300.000	Iris- former industrial district
Perugia	Italy	162.000	City wide: the Participation Houses
Las Gabias	Spain	24.000	The municipality as a whole: six nuclei
Ghent (lead)	Belgium	270.000	Ledeberg

1.2. EU-policy context

Integrated neighbourhood renewal sits within several European policy frameworks that all point the same way: real, lasting change in a place comes from working across sectors and together with the people who live there. The New Leipzig Charter (2020) describes the neighbourhood as the level where people feel the effects of urban policy most directly. The current EU Cohesion Policy supports this by asking for joined-up plans for an area. Cluj-Napoca's role in the EU Mission for Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities, like the New European Bauhaus, relies in practice on action at neighbourhood level. In December 2025 the European Commission added a new EU Agenda for Cities, which recognises cities as central partners in reaching Europe's wider goals.

The timing matters, because the way European money reaches cities is about to change. The EU is negotiating its next long-term budget, for the years from 2028, and the proposals on the table would reshape how funding is organised. The share that Cohesion Policy currently reserves for urban development would disappear, absorbed into a single plan that each country negotiates directly with the Commission. Networks of cities and regions across Europe have warned that this could push decisions further from the local level and leave urban work competing with every other priority for a place in the national plan. Two of our partners are close to this conversation: the Mayor of Ghent currently presides over Eurocities, and the Mayor of Cluj-Napoca helped draft the Committee of the Regions' position on the future of the policy. A few German and Austrian cities, Düsseldorf among them, have made a similar case, arguing that cities are where European goals become visible and useful to residents, and that this role needs protecting in the new budget.

This is where URBAN ECHO's work reaches beyond the six partner cities. The clearest finding from the study is that the hard part of this work lies inside the administration itself, where yearly budgets and separate departments make joined-up, long-term action difficult to sustain. URBAN ECHO helps city administrations work across those internal lines and stay ready to act when something unexpected arrives. That is the same capacity the EU points to when it talks about being more flexible and quicker to respond in a crisis.

The network also shows how the city scale and the neighbourhood scale can hold together: one shared direction for the whole city, with enough room for each neighbourhood to follow the path that suits it. This is close to what city and regional bodies are asking the EU to keep space for in the years ahead.

Europe is debating a further question that the network speaks to directly, which is how to keep a common purpose while letting each place work in its own way. The network's own phrase captures it: an echo is not a copy. Six very different cities are drawing on the same practice and shaping it to fit where they stand.

Whatever form the next budget finally takes, it will only deliver results if city administrations can carry integrated, long-term work through from beginning to end. Building that ability, in large cities and small towns alike, is what this network exists to do.

1.3. Ghent 's Good Practice

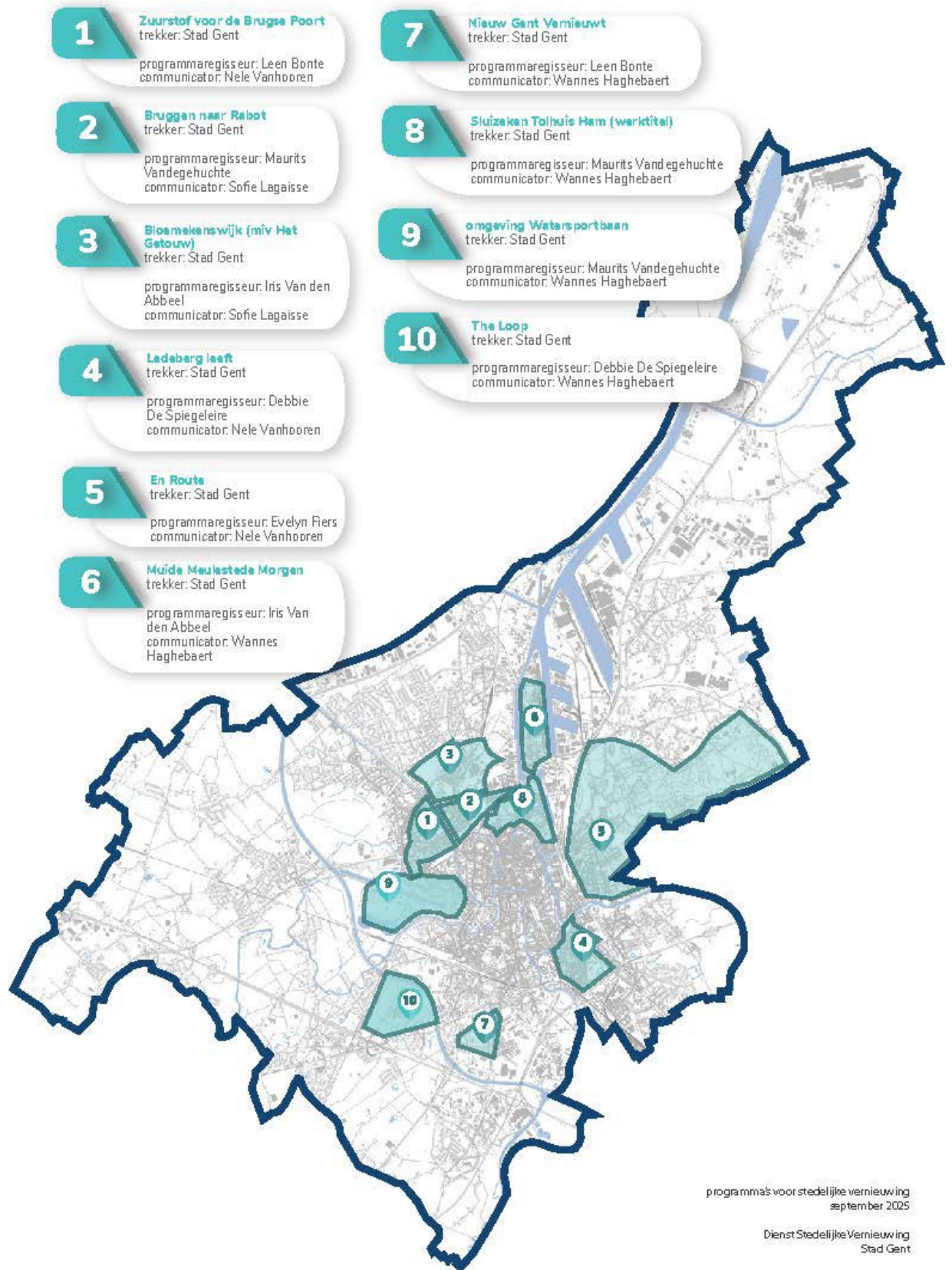


1.3.1. The story

Ghent is a city of around 270,000 inhabitants, divided into 25 neighbourhoods of roughly 10,000 people each. It has approximately 10,000 municipal employees (including police and fire department) and a city administration organised into 10 departments. What makes Ghent distinctive in the field of neighbourhood renewal is not any single project, but the fact that it has been doing this work systematically for over 20 years, across more than 10 neighbourhoods, learning and adjusting as it goes.

The starting point was the Spatial Structure Plan of 2003, which identified neighbourhoods where spatial, social, and economic challenges were concentrated. Rather than treating these as separate problems to be handled by separate departments, Ghent developed during the years an integrated approach built on three cornerstones: spatial interventions (public space, housing, infrastructure), social-economic actions (employment, services, access), and social-cultural work (community life, identity, belonging). Each neighbourhood programme combines all three.

The organisational model that supports this sits within the city's Operational Management department, under the General Manager. The Urban Renewal Service is led by a director (Liesbeth Bultinck, who also acts as URBAN ECHO Project Coordinator) and operates through programme managers supported by communicators – each urban renewal programme has an allocated couple of programme manager and communicator. Moreover, the cross-unit work is reinforced by the fact that the programme manager and communicator work closely with the dedicated neighbourhood manager. Currently, ten programmes are running at different levels of development.



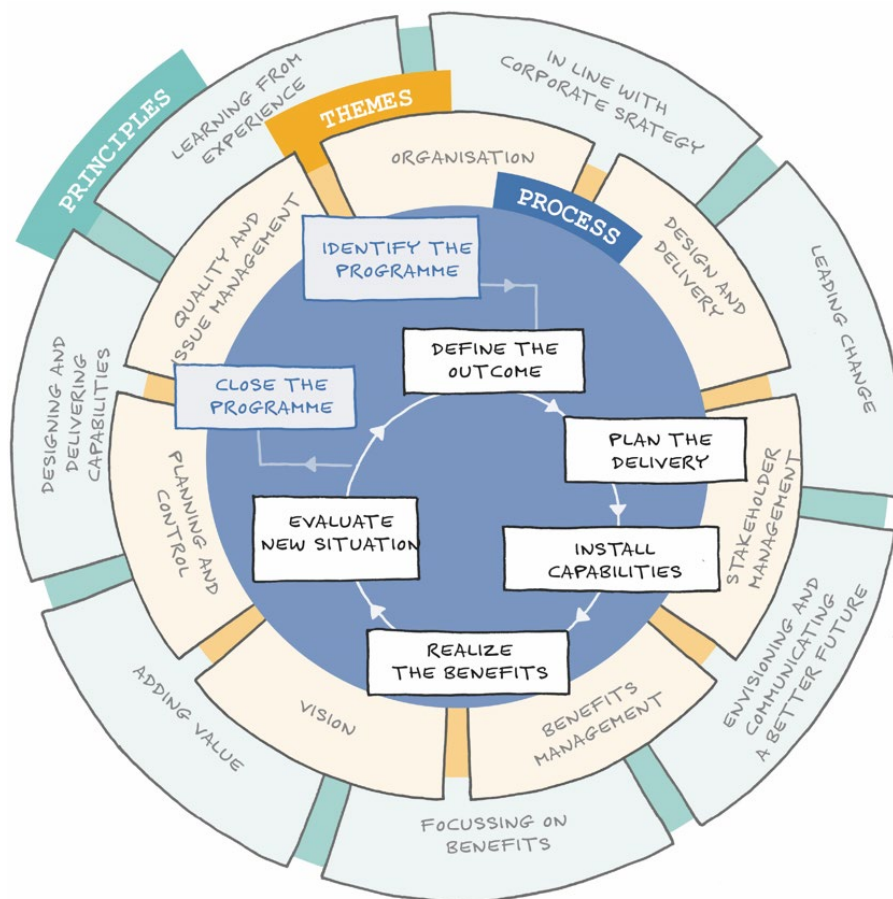
programma's voor stedelijke vernieuwing
september 2025

Dienst Stedelijke Vernieuwing
Stad Gent

Figure: 10 programs in Ghent

The programme management methodology is based on MSP (Managing Successful Programmes), adapted for the city context. It works through seven principles and a cyclical process: identify, define, manage and evaluate, close. Each programme moves through three design documents – programme mandate, programme proposal, programme plan – and is governed by a programme team, core team, steering group, and sponsor meeting. This structure is standardised across all programmes, while the content of each programme is shaped by the specific neighbourhood.

Figure: 7 principles +cyclical process



Ledeberg is the primary reference-neighbourhood for URBAN ECHO. This neighbourhood programme started in 2007 and is still running under the brand “Ledeberg Leeft” (Ledeberg Lives), with a combined budget of approximately €32 million from municipal, Flemish, and EU sources. Six objectives guided the work: more green spaces, better services, reduced traffic pressure, stronger access points to the neighbourhood, improved housing quality, and more places for people to meet. These translated into 31 concrete projects.

What the kick-off meeting in Ghent (January 2026) made clear to all partners is that Ghent's approach is the product of specific conditions – a high-trust environment between

administration and residents, strong political conviction about participation, an innovative transversal governance structure, and two decades of institutional learning. Some of these conditions exist in partner cities; others do not. The question for each partner is now “what from Ghent’s experience can we use, given where we are?”

1.3.2. The transferable modules

To make this question practical, the Good Practice has been broken into six modules. Each module represents a distinct area of practice that can be adopted and adapted independently. A city does not need to take all six, it chooses where to focus based on its own priorities and starting point.

The modules were defined primarily through the initial project application, the study visits, the kick-off meeting, and the analysis of Ghent's own documentation. They are presented here in the order that broadly matches the lifecycle of an urban renewal programme: the strategic frame comes first, the neighbourhood-level work follows, and learning closes the loop.

Module 1: Strategy, long-term programming and funding alignment. Ghent's renewal programmes work because three things are kept aligned over time. First, a city-wide strategic frame that identifies which neighbourhoods need integrated work and gives every programme a shared reference. Second, multi-year programmes that respect each neighbourhood's specificity while following a common methodology, so they remain coherent across political cycles. Third, funding combined from several sources: the municipal innovation budget, regular departmental budgets, Flemish subsidies and EU co-financing. The Ledeborg programme alone mobilised approximately €32 million between 2008 and 2020. The size of the budget matters less than the approach: participation is connected to actual investment decisions, and multi-year programming is protected from short-term pressures. This requires both technical skill (knowing how to combine funding streams) and political commitment (treating a programme as a long-term promise, not a single mandate's project).

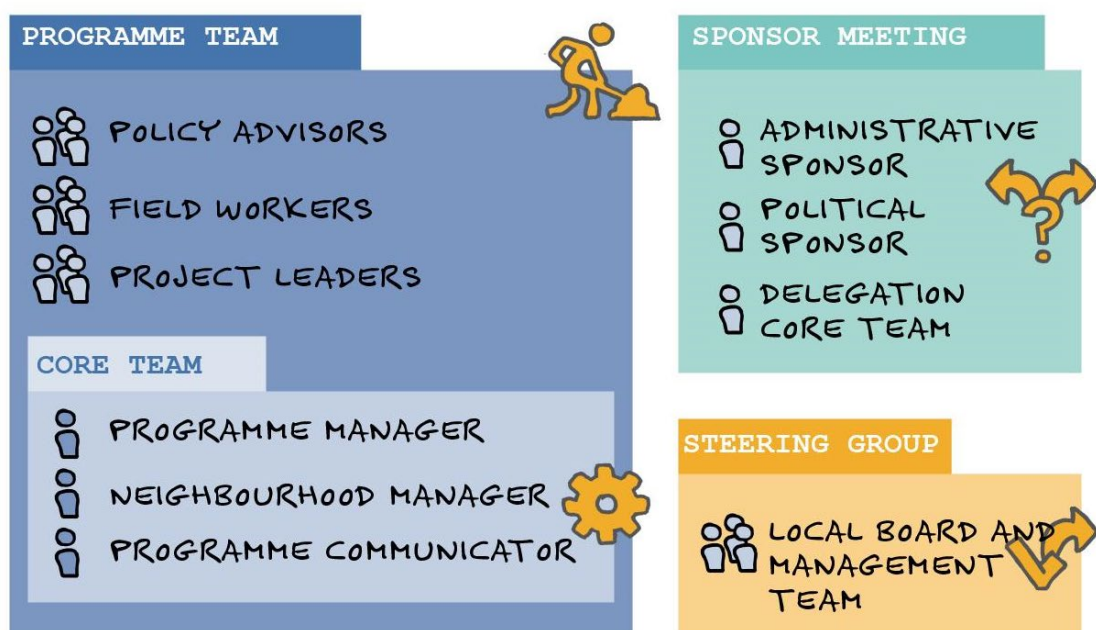
Module 2: Place-based diagnostics. How a neighbourhood is analysed before and during a programme. What data is collected, from whom, and how the findings shape the programme's design. In Ghent, the diagnostic phase combines quantitative data (demographics, housing conditions, green space ratios) with qualitative input from residents and local organisations. The diagnostic is updated as the programme progresses, so that decisions made later in the cycle can rest on the same shared reading of the neighbourhood as decisions made earlier. Ghent has also mentioned that some of its programmes started midway, in response to resident pressure or large development projects in a neighbourhood. A diagnostic produced in that situation has a different role than one that frames a new programme and is part of the same modular practice.

Module 3: Participation and people-centred planning. How participation is organised across the life of a programme: who is involved, at what stage, in what format, and how feedback loops work. Ghent uses brainstorming groups (around 50 members, selected through open call with attention to geographic spread, running over approximately 12 consultations). Methods include camera walks, scale models, poem writing, workshops, and speed dates between residents and city staff. Three lessons stand out from Ghent's practice: methods

should be customised to the audience; timing matters (too early and there is nothing concrete to react to, too late and decisions are already made); and active effort is needed to make sure different population groups are represented, not only the usual voices.

Module 4: Cross-departmental coordination. Neighbourhood renewal cuts across departmental boundaries by definition. Ghent manages this through a layered coordination structure: the programme team (operational), the core team (cross-departmental), the steering group (strategic), and the sponsor meeting (political and administrative sign-off). The programme manager acts as the central point of contact and coordination. This structure is the same in every programme, which means people who move between programmes or departments already know how the system works, coordination becomes a habit rather than a recurring effort.

Figure: coordination structure



Module 5: Communication at neighbourhood level. In Ghent, communication is treated as a distinct professional competence, not as a sub-task of participation or project management. Each neighbourhood programme has its own brand and visual identity (for example, "Ledeberg Leeft"). There is a single contact person per programme. Short films were shown in local shops, exhibitions were organised in the neighbourhood, and messaging is adapted to different audiences. Transparency is central: making clear what has been decided, what is still open, and what residents' input actually changed.

Module 6: Monitoring, evaluation and learning. How results are tracked, both tangible (buildings renovated, green space created) and intangible (trust built, community identity strengthened). Ghent works with Theory of Change and Outcome Harvesting as frameworks, though this is an area where the city itself wants to improve. Programme closure is treated as a conscious decision, guided by specific questions: has the programme achieved what it set out to do? What continues after the programme ends? What has been learned? This is an area where the network as a whole is starting from a relatively early point, and where shared learning will be particularly valuable.

1.4. Scope for improvement

Ghent does not present its practice as complete. Three areas stand out where the city wants to make progress, partly through its own work and partly through what it learns from partners.

First, the evaluation framework. Ghent has the conceptual tools (Theory of Change, Outcome Harvesting) but has not yet applied them consistently across programmes. The 20-year mark in Ledeborg creates a natural opportunity for a thorough retrospective, and this will feed into Ghent's Improvement Plan.

Second, reaching under-represented groups. Ghent invests significant effort in making participation inclusive but recognises that certain groups – people with low literacy, recent migrants, residents with no organisational affiliation — remain difficult to reach. Partners like Perugia (with its public draw system for Community Labs) and Cluj-Napoca (with its youth-focused Com'On City programme) bring approaches that may help.

Third, integrating further climate and digital transitions into neighbourhood renewal. Even though these aspects aren't disregarded by Ghent's programmes, these transitions became central policy priorities at EU-level and merit further reinforcement. Düsseldorf's fossil-free neighbourhood pilot in Friedrichstadt and Cluj-Napoca's work with the EU Mission on Climate-Neutral Cities offer relevant experience here.

1.5. Transfer potential – “An echo is not a copy”

At the Ghent kick-off, a phrase came up that has since become a reference point for the whole network: “an echo is not a copy.” Transfer does not mean replication. It means understanding a practice well enough to know which parts matter, then adapting those parts to a different context – different governance, different resources, different history, different people.

The modular structure of the Good Practice is designed to make this possible. Cities like Pezinok or Las Gabias (approx. 20,000 inhabitants, limited administrative capacity, new to URBACT) will not work with the same modules in the same way a partner like Düsseldorf (650,000 inhabitants, well-resourced neighbourhood programme already running) would. What is important is for each city to *own* their tailored transfer path.

What the study visits and kick-off also showed is that successful transfer requires more than good ideas. It requires the institutional conditions that allow people inside city administrations to change how they work. A motivated project coordinator who understands Ghent's approach but operates in an administration that follows a completely different logic will struggle. The network's role is partly to provide the backing that makes change possible: peer support from other cities facing similar problems, practical tools that have been tested elsewhere, and the institutional weight of a European commitment that can open doors locally.

The partner profiles in Section 2 assess each city's readiness for transfer across the six modules. The roadmap in Section 3 organises the network's activities around those readiness levels, so that support goes where it is most needed.

Section 2: Partner Profiles

2.1 Introduction and methodology

This section profiles each of the five transfer partner cities receiving Ghent's Good Practice. The profiles are based on four sources: the partner questionnaires completed for Ghent during the network selection phase, the bilateral online briefings between the lead expert and each partner (held in January 2026), and most importantly the study visit notes from each city (conducted between February and end of April 2026).

The lead expert's assessment draws on direct observation (walking the focus neighbourhoods, meeting stakeholders, sitting in on governance conversations) rather than on self-reported data. Each partner city has reviewed and complemented the draft of their profile before this version was finalised.

Every profile follows the same structure:

- The city and its context: a short portrait of the city, its size, governance, and what makes it distinctive.
- The policy challenge and local strategic framework: what the city is trying to address and what strategies or plans are already in place.
- The focus area or neighbourhood: where URBAN ECHO will concentrate its local work.
- What the city brings to the network: practices, experiences, or tools that other partners can learn from.
- Where the city wants to learn: the areas where the city sees the biggest gap between where it is and where it wants to be.
- Module readiness overview: a table showing the city's starting point for each of the six good practice modules, using three levels: "already practising," "developing," and "starting fresh."
- Anticipated transfer path: what the city can realistically aim to achieve by the end of URBAN ECHO.

The module readiness tables have been pre-filled by the lead expert based on the study visits. It was discussed and co-validated with partners at the second transnational meeting in Pezinok (June 2026). They are a starting point for conversation, not a final judgement.

2.2 Partners' profiles

Düsseldorf (Germany)



Landeshauptstadt Düsseldorf

The city and its context

Düsseldorf is a major German city of approximately 650,000 inhabitants and the capital of North Rhine-Westphalia. Among URBAN ECHO partners, it is the most resourced after Ghent and the closest to Ghent in terms of administrative capacity, planning frameworks and experience with structured neighbourhood-level work. The city has built a city-wide diagnostic and intervention system in recent years that allows it to identify priority neighbourhoods, design targeted programmes and run them with dedicated teams.

The cornerstone of this system is the Neighbourhood Atlas (Quartiersatlas), a structured data-driven tool that analyses all city neighbourhoods using indicators across seven thematic fields. From this analysis, the city has designated 12 Areas of Action (Handlungsräume) where focused work is needed, applying the relevant tools from a set of 10 interventions. The whole approach sits under the umbrella programme ZUKUNFT QUARTIER.DÜSSELDORF, which coordinates neighbourhood-level work across the city. The Urban Renewal unit, located within the Stadtplanungsamt (City Planning Office), is led by Andreas Schmitz and operates with dedicated programme coordinators.

A structural feature worth noting is the relationship between political and administrative spheres. Compared to Ghent, Düsseldorf has an intermediate layer in the form of the Dezernate (department directors), who manage the administration but are elected by the City Council. This creates a more layered governance that affects how decisions move between political will and technical implementation.

The policy challenge and local strategic framework

Düsseldorf has the strongest existing strategic and operational framework of any URBAN ECHO partner after Ghent. ZUKUNFT QUARTIER.DÜSSELDORF provides the umbrella; the Neighbourhood Atlas provides the diagnostic basis; the 12 Areas of Action provide the spatial focus; and federal programmes such as Sozialer Zusammenhalt (Social Cohesion) provide co-financing for major investments. Within this system, individual neighbourhood programmes are designed in phases, with explicit budgets and timelines.

Within URBAN ECHO, Düsseldorf has chosen two focal points that play complementary roles:

- **Friedrichstadt** is the city's URBAN ECHO Area of Action: the neighbourhood where Düsseldorf will adapt the Ghent Good Practice and test new approaches. It is at the start of its renewal programme, with the kick-off happening in early 2026.

- **Garath** is the city's good practice contribution to the network: a long-running, integrated renewal programme that has gone through one full phase and is now in its second.

This dual focus gives Düsseldorf a particular position in the network. It can both share what it has built in Garath and use Friedrichstadt as a live testing ground for what it learns.

The focus area

Friedrichstadt is the centre of gravity for Düsseldorf's URBAN ECHO work. It is a dense inner-city neighbourhood of roughly 8,000 residents, with one of the highest population densities in the city at approximately 16,500 inhabitants per km². The social profile is distinctive: 69.6% single-person households and 50.5% of residents with a migration background. Green space is extremely scarce at 3.5%. The building stock is predominantly 1950s-60s post-war construction in urgent need of energy retrofitting.



Photo: Typical street of Friedrichstadt

Within ZUKUNFT QUARTIER.DÜSSELDORF (ZQ.D), Friedrichstadt is designated as the first pilot neighbourhood to strategically implement climate protection and climate adaptation measures. This approach is aligned with the city's goal of achieving climate neutrality by 2035. The first step in preparing the implementation of these measures is the development of an integrated energy concept (Integriertes energetisches Quartierskonzept) for Friedrichstadt.

Under the title “Zukunftsviertel” (“neighbourhood of the future”) the concept is being developed in close cooperation with Stadtwerke Düsseldorf, the municipal energy utility, alongside other municipal departments. The energy ambition is therefore part of a wider integrated approach that includes, amongst other themes, public space, mobility and community life.

Three challenges shape the Friedrichstadt programme:

1. **Owner-renter split.** Most buildings are privately owned by individual landlords; the large majority of the occupants are renters, which makes coordinated retrofitting difficult. The city has limited property of its own to work with directly, in contrast to Ghent.
2. **Construction fatigue.** Friedrichstraße, the main commercial street, has been heavily affected by ongoing works, generating frustration among residents and local businesses.
3. **Avoiding gentrification.** The energy transition needs to happen in a way that protects long-standing residents from being pushed out. Maintaining social cohesion alongside ambitious environmental goals is a core design principle of the programme.

A specific local actor stands out: **Die Friedrichs**, a bottom-up citizens' association (slogan: "Lieblingsort statt Baustelle", "Favourite place instead of construction site") that emerged in response to construction frustration. Die Friedrichs is run by volunteers including the former district mayor, engaged citizens and business owners located on the Friedrichstraße. Through support since 2022 by several municipal departments as well as external actors like the chamber of commerce, the citizens' association has been strengthened. This has led to the opening of a neighbourhood office and the implementation of several projects like greening and neighbourhood events.

Die Friedrichs will be a key partner in the launch sequence, including the information market in March 2026 and the Friedrichstraßen-street festival in June 2026.

Garath plays a different role in the network. It is the neighbourhood Düsseldorf brings forward as its good practice contribution. Built between 1961 and 1970 in a clover-leaf structure of four quadrants, it covers 343 ha and houses approximately 18,500 residents, mostly renters, with an ageing demographic and a high share of children. After more than 50 years without significant investment, the city launched Garath 2.0 in 2015-2016 under the federal Sozialer Zusammenhalt programme. Phase 1 (2016-2023) delivered substantial physical and social investments, including the Kulturhaus Süd, a new cultural centre, seven animal-themed playgrounds, school restructuring and a courtyard and facade renewal programme with housing companies. Phase 2 (2023-2030), approved by the City Council in May 2023, covers six pillars from community life and culture to housing, mobility, climate adaptation and neighbourhood management. The programme is branded under the slogan "Unser Garath" (Our Garath), visible on bags, jackets, signage and online.

What Düsseldorf brings to the network

Düsseldorf has the largest set of practices to share among the URBAN ECHO partners. Five contributions stand out.

The **Neighbourhood Atlas methodology**: a city-wide, data-driven diagnostic that systematically identifies priority neighbourhoods. The seven thematic fields and the connection to the 12 Areas of Action give a working example of how data can structure decisions about where to act. This is directly relevant for any partner looking to strengthen the analytical basis of their renewal work/urban development.

The **Garath 2.0 model** as a complete example of long-term, integrated neighbourhood renewal at scale. Garath illustrates how an Addition: Practiced participatory methods vision-first approach (the Integrated Spatial Development Concept came before the funding), combined with lighthouse designation and federal co-financing, can deliver a multi-phase programme that transforms a neighbourhood over a decade and more.



Group photo in Garath

The **Verfügungsfonds (participatory district fund)**: a small-grants instrument running in Garath since 2018, with around 200 projects funded at up to €5,000 each. Funding decisions sit with an advisory board of residents and local actors, and implementation is fully in the hands of the project winners. This is a low-cost, high-trust mechanism for activating grassroots initiative, transferable to any neighbourhood programme.

The **externalised neighbourhood management model**: instead of employing neighbourhood managers as municipal staff, Düsseldorf contracts a locally rooted NGO through public tender. In Garath, this contract went to SOS Kinder Dorf, which already had deep roots in the neighbourhood. The Stadtteilbüro (neighbourhood office) on Fritz-Erler-Straße provides a constant physical presence, where residents come with all kinds of issues, many of them beyond the renewal programme itself.

The **digital neighbourhood platform** (unsergarath.de): built in cooperation with the Fraunhofer Institut, it combines news, events and the district fund in one place. Other Düsseldorf neighbourhoods are already interested in replicating it.

Beyond these specific tools, Düsseldorf brings a **fully operational four-layer ULG model** built around the categories of Akteursrunde (external stakeholder round), Zentrenmanagement

(internal city coordination), Einzelabsprachen (bilateral arrangements with specific actors) and Politische Gremien (political bodies). This model is one of the most structured in the network and offers a reference for partners building their own ULG architecture.

Düsseldorf also contributes practised participatory and communication methods, including the annual ZUKUNFT QUARTIER.DÜSSELDORF Conference, a flexible format designed to provide information on the overall process of integrated neighbourhood development. It serves to highlight interim goals, facilitate ongoing networking among stakeholders, and foster dialogue with experts on neighbourhood-related key topics.

Where Düsseldorf wants to learn

Despite the strength of its starting position, Düsseldorf has identified clear areas where the network can add value:

1. **Vision-first approach for Friedrichstadt.** During the study visit, Ghent advised Düsseldorf to define a clear, simple narrative for Friedrichstadt before launching interventions. The vision-first logic that worked in Garath is now being applied at the start of the new programme.
2. **Engaging private owners in retrofitting.** With limited city-owned property and an unfavourable owner-renter split, the central challenge in Friedrichstadt is convincing private owners to invest. Düsseldorf is exploring a motivational psychology approach and an ambassador model where early adopters encourage their neighbours. Peer exchange on this question, particularly with Cluj-Napoca and its experience of developing and implementing their Climate Contract, is of direct interest.
3. **Combining energy transition with social cohesion.** The risk of gentrification through energy retrofitting is a strategic concern. How to design an ambitious environmental transition that also protects social cohesion is a question Düsseldorf shares with Ghent and that the network can usefully address as a cross-cutting theme. Ghent run a living lab on this theme, insights of which could be of added value to the whole network.
4. **Adapting participation to a brand-new programme.** Düsseldorf has rich participation experience in Garath. Building participation from scratch in Friedrichstadt, with a different demographic profile and a more transient population, requires adapted formats. The network's exchange on participation methods is directly relevant. Similar to Ghent, Düsseldorf aims to improve reaching under-represented groups through new participation and communication methods.

As a first successful pilot inspired by the Ghent good practices on the matter, mid-March, Düsseldorf organised a public information event at the Regenbogen Schule. Experts from the city administration, municipal utilities, consumer advice centre and local initiatives were present at different **thematic stations**. Residents could move around, get advice, learn about the project, and leave their own ideas or comments.

5. **Integrating selected elements of Ghent's successful urban renewal approach into the general ZQ.D urban renewal process.** This includes approaches related to programme evaluation and closure, the potential use of design documents, as well as the continual assessment of participation methods. In this regard, sharing Ghent's

learnings from the application of conceptual tools like Theory of Change and Outcome Harvesting could provide valuable insights for the ongoing renewal process in Düsseldorf. Another aspect of possible improvement could be the appointment of a dedicated communication manager for the respective fields of action. Lastly, the exploration of brainstorming groups could potentially support citizens' engagement and identification with urban renewal programmes.

Module readiness overview

Module	Readiness	Brief evidence
1. Strategy, long-term programming and funding alignment	Already practising	ZUKUNFT QUARTIER.DÜSSELDORF provides a city-wide framework; Garath 2.0 illustrates a multi-phase programme with federal co-financing across 2016-2030. Friedrichstadt need to follow this example.
2. Place-based diagnostics	Already practising	Neighbourhood Atlas is the most developed data-driven diagnostic tool in the network, with seven thematic fields and citywide coverage.
3. Participation and people-centred planning	Developing	Garath has a strong participation track record (Children's Parliament, Verfügungsfonds advisory board, neighbourhood management); Friedrichstadt is at the start of building its own participation infrastructure.
4. Cross-departmental coordination	Already practising	Four-layer ULG model in operation; the existence of a programme renewal coordinator gives leverage for cross-departmental work in Friedrichstadt.
5. Communication at neighbourhood level	Developing	"Unser Garath" branding, the unsergarath.de digital platform, the Stadtteilbüro presence and a dedicated communicator in the URBAN ECHO team show a strong communication function that now needs to be deployed as well in the case of Friedrichstadt.
6. Monitoring, evaluation and learning	Developing	Phase 1 of Garath fed into Phase 2 design; a more systematic evaluation framework across phases and programmes is an area for development.

Anticipated transfer path

Düsseldorf occupies a particular position in the network: it is both a strong giver and a focused receiver. The realistic ambition by the end of URBAN ECHO is twofold.

On the receiving side, the clearest progress is expected on Module 3 (Participation) and Module 1 (Strategy) as applied to Friedrichstadt. The kick-off in 2026 will establish the

participation infrastructure for the new programme, drawing on Ghent's experience with adapted formats and on the network's wider exchange. The vision-first logic, applied at the start, is intended to give the programme the same long-term coherence that Garath has achieved.

On the giving side, Düsseldorf is expected to be one of the network's most active contributors across multiple modules. The city will host a transnational meeting in the first half of 2027, which will allow the network to engage in depth with the Garath model and also with the first developments in Friedrichstadt. Bilateral peer exchange, particularly with Ghent on neighbourhood management and with Ghent and Cluj-Napoca on energy transition, will be a recurring feature.

Düsseldorf's setup is fully operational, and the city is unlikely to require significant bilateral expert support from the Lead Expert. The most useful expert input is likely to focus on specific reflection moments around the design of the Friedrichstadt programme, in particular on the question of how to work towards an energy-efficient neighbourhood. This includes both technical input on energy communities and behavioural science perspectives on how to engage private owners and residents in the transition.

A cross-cutting topic put forward during the study visit in Düsseldorf, on which training would be valuable for all partners, is **how to bring more innovative project management approaches into city administrations through better use of data and the introduction of AI tools.**



Photo: team @ Stadtplanungsamt in Düsseldorf

Pezinok (Slovakia)



MESTO PEZINOK

The city and its context

Pezinok is a town of approximately 25,000 registered inhabitants, with the municipality estimating that the real population is closer to 30,000. It sits about 10 minutes by train from Bratislava on the line towards Trnava, at the foot of the Small Carpathians and within the Small Carpathian Wine Route. Together with Las Gabias, it is one of the smallest partners in the URBAN ECHO network and is new to the URBACT experience.

The town's identity blends a rural and an urban dimension. The municipality notes that Pezinok was first established in 1208. Its early development was linked to mining, and from the 16th century onwards its profile shifted towards viticulture. Wine cellars, wine shops and viticultural references are prominent in the historic centre, and the annual Vinobranie festival continues to be one of the country's major cultural events. In 1647, Ferdinand III granted Pezinok the status of a free royal town.

The municipality covers 72 km² and includes 18 residential areas. The most populated and developed are the two oldest areas, Cajla and Grinava, together with the city centre. The last 30 years have seen the growth of newer residential areas including Muskat, Juh, Sever, West and East, while around six of the areas are in the town's rural foothills and remain sparsely populated; the municipality also notes that these areas lack shared spaces such as public libraries and community centres.

Pezinok's position within the wider Bratislava urban area shapes daily life. Around 40% of the workforce commutes to the capital each day, and the town continues to attract households seeking more affordable housing while staying well connected to metropolitan jobs and services. The municipality describes Pezinok as having taken on the character of a "dormitory town" relative to the capital, and notes that its affordable housing and connectivity also draw foreigners and people moving from eastern Slovakia. At the same time, local services need to respond to gradual demographic ageing. This combination of residential growth, commuting and changing social needs creates pressure on schools, public services and infrastructure.

A structural issue raised during the visit concerns the difference between registered and actual population (this is a very similar situation to what was reported for Cluj-Napoca). As registration is not compulsory in Slovakia, official figures do not fully reflect the number of people living in the town. State transfers are linked to registered inhabitants, while municipal services need to respond to actual demand. This creates a recurring mismatch between resource allocation and real use of local infrastructure and is one of the town's most tangible

governance challenges. The current municipal budget amounts to around €45 million, with a significant share depending on population-based transfers; local taxes and EU funds also represent important revenue sources. The municipality reports that it carries no loans or debt, that strategic expenditure above €30,000 requires approval by the local council, and that an independent controller oversees financial processes.

From a governance perspective, Pezinok operates within a mayor-led municipal system. The mayor, Roman Mács, is directly elected for a four-year term and works with two vice-mayors. The municipal administration is structured into thematic departments, including finance and budget, urban development, social affairs, culture, education and sport, environment and public space, and strategies and project management. The city hall has around 150 staff, including both administrative personnel and social services staff. The municipality also notes that around 80% of staff workload is taken up by "transferred" competences carried out on behalf of the state, alongside its own "primary" competences.

Two features of the current context shape what URBAN ECHO can realistically support in Pezinok. The first is Pezinok's interest in building a multi-year, neighbourhood-level dimension into its planning, so that renewal can be sustained and resourced beyond a single year. The second is the value of continuity across political cycles, a theme common to many municipalities, where sustaining initiatives and building durable relationships between the administration, elected representatives and residents takes deliberate effort. Pezinok's interest in URBAN ECHO connects to this broader aim: establishing stable, credible and constructive ways of working with local communities over time.

The policy challenge and local strategic framework

Pezinok's strategic framework is anchored, as reported, in its Economic and Social Development Programme. The municipality has indicated that this plan is being updated as a five-year programme, organised around pillars that include environmental sustainability and smart, modern and digitalised services. The framework gives the city a clear medium-term reference point; the step Pezinok is interested in developing is a stronger neighbourhood-level logic within it, so that multi-year, place-based renewal becomes part of everyday practice, with URBAN ECHO as the testing ground.

The clearest illustration of why Pezinok joined the network is the recent experience around Radničné námestie (Town Hall Square). The municipality ran a two-round design competition and secured €1.5 million in external funding for climate adaptation measures, with a completion deadline of June 2029. A public consultation was held in February 2026 and the project featured on the front page of the municipal newspaper. The municipality has noted that the tight deadlines and financing conditions attached to EU-funded projects made early, in-depth consultation difficult, and that engagement came once the design had largely been settled. Residents would have welcomed earlier involvement, and the experience underlined how much the sequencing and transparency of participation matter. This is a major reason why Pezinok has high expectations for what it can learn from URBAN ECHO about organising participation earlier and more openly.

Pezinok already has two participation instruments to build on. A participatory budgeting programme has been running since 2021, allocating around €20,000 per year for 10 citizen-

proposed projects. A Green Adoption Programme involves residents in the voluntary care of public green spaces. Both schemes operate city-wide rather than at neighbourhood level, and both can serve as starting points for the future ULG process.

The focus area

The URBACT focus is on Cajla, with Pezinok-Sever included as part of the same neighbourhood programme. The two areas are linked by their social, cultural and educational fabric: activities at the Municipal Daily Centre in Cajla are organised in close cooperation with the younger generation in Pezinok-Sever, which sits immediately behind it.



Photo: Cajla Pezinok Sever neighbourhood

Cajla itself is the historical foundation of Pezinok. As the first cadastral area, it laid the basis for the town as it exists today. Within its historical boundaries, a residential area of blocks of flats, sports and educational facilities was established during the 20th century and has developed rapidly over the last 30 years. Today, Cajla is a mainly residential, lower-density area south of the town centre with a peri-urban character and an existing base of community activity.

Three features make Cajla a workable testing ground for URBAN ECHO:

- An existing community infrastructure, including Klub Cajlanov (a community association active for around 20 years, with approximately 80 members from across

Pezinok including seniors, children and musicians), the municipal Day Centre, and a local scouts group.

- Active social ties expressed through informal and outdoor meeting spaces rather than formal participation formats. This means there is local interest, with the practical challenge being how to move from general goodwill to a clearer neighbourhood agenda.
- Modest and practical resident priorities identified during the visit, including public seating, improvement of the local watercourse and ideas for intergenerational community activities. These give concrete entry points for early actions.

A first task for the local team is to clarify and communicate the road ahead/vision for Cajla (including it being a focus for URBAN ECHO), so that local actors and residents share a common understanding of the purpose of the work.

What Pezinok brings to the network

Three contributions stand out. A set of working participation instruments that can inform other partners. The participatory budgeting scheme (running since 2021) and the Green Adoption Programme show that Pezinok is not starting from zero on participation. Both operate at modest scale and within tight resource limits, which makes them particularly relevant for partners with similar constraints.

A long-standing community base in Cajla, embodied in Klub Cajlanov. Twenty years of continuous activity, with a coordinator who succeeded her own mother in the role, represents the kind of intergenerational continuity that many neighbourhood programmes aim for and rarely achieve. The municipality has recognised this with a "Senior Friendly 2025" award. The Klub operates on around €1,700 per year from the municipality, supplemented by sponsor contributions and volunteer work, and offers a concrete example of what a small community organisation can sustain over time.

A clear case of a small municipality working with constraints common to many European towns: limited staff, dependence on state transfers calculated on registered population that does not match real demand, and political turnover that can interrupt continuity. How Pezinok works through these constraints will be of direct interest to other small partners and to the wider URBACT community.

Where Pezinok wants to learn

Pezinok arrives in URBAN ECHO with a clear set of learning needs. Five areas were identified during the study visit and confirmed by the team:

- Structured participation in renewal contexts. The strongest message from the visit was the city's interest in **learning how to organise participation earlier, more clearly and in a more structured way** than the Radničné námestie experience allowed. Ghent's adapted methods for different audiences and the role of clear communication throughout a project cycle are directly relevant.

- **Communication** was identified as a specific capacity gap. The Ghent examples were relevant because they combine participation methods with concrete communication practices.
- **Clarifying and communicating the Cajla-Pezinok sever narrative.** Why this zone was selected, what the city wants to test there, and how local actors will be involved are questions that need a clear, shared answer before the work can build momentum.
- **Multi-year continuity for neighbourhood work.** Any transfer pathway will be realistic about how to sustain neighbourhood renewal over several years within the municipality's planning and budgeting cycle. Peer exchange with Cluj-Napoca, which works within a similar nationally-set budget cycle, may be useful here.
- **Cross-departmental working at neighbourhood level.** Building a working group that combines the relevant municipal departments with Cajla-based community actors is a core task for the ULG and a learning area shared with most other partners.

Module readiness overview

Module	Readiness	Brief evidence
1. Strategy, long-term programming and funding alignment	Starting fresh	Strategy is in place through the Economic and Social Development Programme; the multi-year, neighbourhood-level programming and funding alignment that this module describes is the element Pezinok plans to develop through URBAN ECHO.
2. Place-based diagnostics	Developing	The municipality cites its SMART MAP and sensor-based data infrastructure; the practice of translating data into integrated, neighbourhood-level diagnostics is still to be built.
3. Participation and people-centred planning	Developing	Participatory budgeting (since 2021) and Green Adoption Programme operate city-wide; structured participation in a renewal context is new, and the Radničné námestie experience showed the gap.
4. Cross-departmental coordination	Developing	Small administration (~150 staff) with thematic departments; cross-departmental working for neighbourhood renewal not yet formalised.
5. Communication at neighbourhood level	Starting fresh	Identified as a specific capacity gap during the visit; Pezinčan municipal newspaper exists, as well as other traditional PR, but strategic neighbourhood communication is still to be developed.
6. Monitoring, evaluation and learning	Starting fresh	No framework currently in place; the municipality intends to introduce regular departmental monitoring as part of the neighbourhood programme (stated as an aim).

Anticipated transfer path

By the end of URBAN ECHO, the realistic ambition for Pezinok is to make solid progress on three modules and lay the groundwork on others.

The clearest progress is expected on Module 3 (Participation). Participation is the central transfer need in Pezinok and the area where the city has the strongest motivation to change its way of working. The combined Cajla-Pezinok-Sever scope offers a concrete context in which to test structured participation methods, building on the existing community base and the working participatory budgeting scheme.

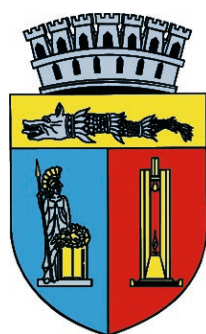
Significant progress is also expected on Module 5 (Communication), which the city itself has identified as a specific capacity gap. Working on participation and communication together, as Ghent does, gives Pezinok a way of addressing both at once rather than in sequence.

Progress on Module 4 (Cross-departmental coordination) is expected closely linked with the ULG formation process. Building a working group that brings municipal departments together with Cajla and Pezinok-Sever community actors is itself a structured exercise in cross-departmental working.

Modules 1, 2 and 6 (Strategy, Diagnostics, Evaluation) are areas where Pezinok will benefit from peer exchange and from the network's overall thematic work, with first steps rather than full transfer expected within the project's lifespan.

Pezinok has a particular role in the network's calendar: it will host the second Transnational Meeting in June 2026. The meeting includes a field component in Cajla-Pezinok-Sever and is designed to help the city work through its neighbourhood focus together with peers.

Cluj-Napoca (Romania)



PRIMĂRIA ȘI CONSILIUL LOCAL CLUJ-NAPOCA

The city and its context

Cluj-Napoca is the cultural and economic capital of Transylvania, with approximately 300,000 registered inhabitants and an actual population estimated to approach 500,000 once unregistered residents, students and expatriates are counted. It is comparable in size to Ghent, and among URBAN ECHO partners it is the largest after Düsseldorf. The city hosts around 80,000 students across nine universities and a foreign community of roughly 50,000, drawn by the IT sector (1,500 companies, 24,000 employees), quality of life and cultural

offer. One fifth of the population is composed of students and another fifth of young families aged 25-35.

The city sits in the heart of Transylvania, with a compact historical core constrained by geography: expansion happens mainly along an east-west axis. During the communist period, large residential neighbourhoods such as Mănăştur were built around former villages through forced industrialisation. Today Cluj continues to grow horizontally, with strong development pressure on surrounding municipalities. Floreşti, nearby, has grown from a small settlement to roughly 100,000 inhabitants, all dependent on Cluj's services (we note here the metropolitan sphere and the core city perspective; with Pezinok and Las Gabias we have the complementary angle).

The city has nine neighbourhoods, though these are not formally recognised in the administrative structure, served by seven local municipality offices.

The current mayor, Emil Boc, has been in office since 2004, providing over two decades of political continuity. The administration has roughly 1,000 approved positions, of which around 500 handle operational affairs, a very lean structure compared to Ghent. There is no transversal urban regeneration unit; cross-departmental coordination depends on the mayor's direct command. The city has so far worked with a well-defined strategy at city level rather than at neighbourhood level.

The municipal budget is approximately €400 million, with roughly 60% on investments and 40% on services. Local taxes are deliberately low, part of a business-friendly approach that has fuelled economic growth. Around 66% of the development budget comes from EU and national funds. Cluj has the highest EU fund absorption rate in Romania, with a portfolio exceeding €4 billion in projects implemented or in preparation. The method is strategic: a portfolio of ready projects is maintained and activated as soon as funding becomes available, always in line with the city strategy.

A recurring constraint raised during the visit is Romania's centralised governance. Annual budget cycles are imposed by national law; as of mid-March 2026, the city was still waiting for its 2026 allocation. Trust in local administration reaches 60-70%, compared to roughly 30% for national institutions, which gives the municipality a relatively strong base to work from despite the wider context.

Cluj-Napoca's development is closely tied to youth, culture and innovation. The city was European Youth Capital in 2015, which both built on prior investments and generated further development. Close institutional links exist between the municipality and youth organisations, NGOs and cultural federations. Festivals such as TIFF, UNTOLD and Electric Castle, initially partly funded by the municipality, now collaborate and reinforce each other and with city services. Since 2000, the city has oriented itself towards the knowledge economy, with an ecosystem of IT clusters, creative industries and innovation hubs supported by dedicated municipal funding and infrastructure.

On climate, Cluj-Napoca is a Mission City under the EU's "100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030" initiative, with commitments including 80% emissions reduction by 2030, 100,000 trees planted and 240 hectares of new green spaces. 60% of the public transport fleet is already electric, a hydrogen station is under construction, and all new buildings must connect to centralised heating.

The policy challenge and local strategic framework

Cluj-Napoca's strategic framework is one of the strongest among URBAN ECHO partners, with a particular profile: the city has a well-developed city-wide strategy and a sophisticated EU funding pipeline, but no equivalent strategic framework at neighbourhood level.

The **city-level strategy** is anchored in the Climate City Contract being developed under the EU Mission, the Net Zero Cities Action Plan, the Climate Investment Plan, and the Green Cluj Investment Programme. These documents combine ambitious climate goals with major infrastructure investments, including over 100,000 trees and 200 hectares of parks planned. The Walkable City Programme promotes sustainable mobility, and energy-efficient renovation of older apartment blocks is a strategic priority.

The **EU funding pipeline** is itself a strategic asset. The portfolio approach (maintaining ready projects activated when funding appears) has allowed Cluj to absorb significant EU resources year after year. Iris alone has roughly €200 million in public investments foreseen in the near future.

What is **missing is the neighbourhood-level layer**. Cross-departmental coordination depends on direct command from the mayor's office. There is no transversal urban regeneration unit, and the city has identified this as a gap during the URBAN ECHO discussions: the Ghent model could be relevant precisely here.

The city also has working participation tools that operate city-wide rather than at neighbourhood level. The **Centre for Civic Innovation and Engagement (CIIC)** has been active since 2017. **Com'On City**, a youth participatory budgeting programme co-owned by the PONT Group, the Federation of Youth of Cluj and the municipality, has been running since 2015 and is the basis of the COMONCITY URBACT network led by Cluj.

The focus area

The URBACT focus is on **Iris**, a former industrial neighbourhood in the northern part of Cluj-Napoca, located along the Someşul Mic River and the railway corridor.

Iris was shaped by major production sites, notably the Iris porcelain factory and the Carbochim adhesives platform (founded 1949). The area retains a strong working-class and industrial identity, still visible in its built environment: large production halls, rail lines, technical structures, logistics spaces and residual industrial materials continue to define the neighbourhood's physical structure.



Photo: Iris neighbourhood close to the river

Iris is undergoing a complex and uneven transformation. Former industrial uses have declined while new functions are gradually emerging, creating a mixed urban fabric where older industrial sites, vacant land, infrastructure corridors, natural areas and new developments coexist. Some parts appear underused or degraded; others remain intact or active. The neighbourhood has different speeds of change rather than a uniform process. The Someşul Mic River is a major asset and raises questions of connection and accessibility with the rest of the area.

Three challenges shape the work in Iris:

1. **Connectivity.** The neighbourhood includes barriers linked to its industrial past: large, enclosed sites, disused infrastructure, rail corridors, leftover spaces and difficult edges. These reduce permeability and make parts of the area harder to access. Mobility is still heavily car-oriented, and pedestrian infrastructure is limited.
2. **Gentrification risk.** Iris is becoming increasingly attractive to new residents and investors. Higher salaries in IT and services push property values up, particularly in transition zones like this one. The transformation requires an approach that protects the neighbourhood's identity and keeps existing residents connected to future change. This is a similar point to what Dusseldorf wishes to avoid in Friedrichstadt.
3. **Coordination between many actors.** Iris is the site of large public investments, major private developments such as RIVUS, and Horizon Europe research projects (URBREATH). Aligning these efforts at neighbourhood level is itself a coordination challenge.

Iris already offers concrete anchor points for URBAN ECHO. **Feroviarilor Park** is a recently rehabilitated 5.3-hectare park, nominated for the EU Mies van der Rohe Award, that functions as a testing ground for the city: new approaches are piloted there in collaboration with NGOs and residents before being scaled up. The park hosts the Pavilionul Tineretului (Youth Pavilion), which Cluj intends to develop into a community centre for Iris and the anchor point for the URBACT Local Group. The neighbourhood is also a pilot area within URBREATH, a Horizon Europe project that tests Nature-Based Solutions and an integrated regeneration methodology combining community involvement, ecologisation, digital tools, AI and social innovation. This means Iris is already a testing ground for a new regeneration model, providing a ready framework on which URBAN ECHO activities can build.

What Cluj-Napoca brings to the network

Cluj-Napoca brings four contributions that are of direct interest to other partners.

Com'On City as a structured youth participatory budgeting model. The programme has a clear process (open call, feasibility screening with direct feedback to proposers, public voting, implementation with dedicated facilitators), shared ownership between the municipality and an NGO, an online platform and school editions on climate and sustainability themes funded through the Net Zero Cities programme. The school editions (in Hațeganu and Goga schools, in Mănăștur) were considered highly successful and represent a concrete model for engaging younger age groups in participatory processes linked to neighbourhood-level sustainability goals.

How to work with private developers. The RIVUS project, where the IULIUS group acquired the former Carbochim industrial platform in 2020, illustrates Cluj's approach: the municipality requires major developers to contribute community infrastructure such as bridges, parks and public spaces as part of development agreements. This is standard practice in Cluj and directly relevant for any partner facing rapid private-sector growth.

A youth and culture infrastructure that goes beyond what the municipality could deliver alone. The combination includes municipal venues managed by the Direcția Centrul de Cultură Urbană (two medieval towers, two youth centres, two neighbourhood cinemas in Mărăști and Mănăștur, the Casino events venue in Central Park, and the Garnizoana cultural hub opening in April 2026), bank-sponsored spaces such as ZBOR Hub financed by BCR, and international foundation support (Botnar Foundation). The model of the municipality owning cultural and youth spaces and distributing their use to associations is itself a transferable practice – we note similarities on this topic between Cluj and Perugia.

EU funding as strategic practice. The portfolio approach (maintaining ready projects activated when funding appears) is itself transferable for partners with limited own resources. Combined with Cluj's high absorption rate and its experience as a Mission City, this offers a worked case of a city administration that manages to overcome constraints common to many European cities: centralised national governance, lean management structure and limited own resources.

Where Cluj-Napoca wants to learn

Cluj-Napoca's learning needs are concentrated in areas where the city's strong city-level practice has a counterpart at neighbourhood level. Four areas were identified during the study visit:

1. **Sustained citizen engagement at neighbourhood level.** Cluj has working participation tools (CIIC, Com'On City, the unsuccessful 2022 general participatory budgeting attempt), and the gap is in organising sustained participation focused on a specific neighbourhood. Ghent's random sampling method for citizen panels generated strong interest during the visit and is envisaged for transfer.
2. **Cross-departmental coordination.** Compared to Ghent, Cluj has no transversal urban regeneration unit; cross-departmental work depends on direct mayoral coordination. The city has identified this as a gap that the Ghent model could help address.
3. **Strategic frameworks at neighbourhood level.** Cluj has a strong city-level strategy and is now looking at how to give Iris the equivalent integrated framework, combining the existing investments, the URBREATH research, the RIVUS development and the community infrastructure into a coherent neighbourhood project.
4. **Equity in the green transition.** Without a clear focus on affordability and access, green investments risk excluding lower-income residents. Cluj wants to embed fairness and inclusion into all aspects of neighbourhood renewal, and this is an area where peer exchange (with Düsseldorf in particular, given the parallel concern in Friedrichstadt) will be valuable.

Module readiness overview

Module	Readiness	Brief evidence
1. Strategy, long-term programming and funding alignment	Already practising	Strong city-level strategy, sophisticated EU funding pipeline, portfolio approach to ready projects, Mission City framework. Neighbourhood-level strategic framework still to be built.
2. Place-based diagnostics	Developing	Strong analytical capacity at city level (Climate Neutrality Digital Twin, URBREATH framework); neighbourhood-level diagnostic practice to be built through the ULG, in a form adapted to Iris's mid-transformation stage.
3. Participation and people-centred planning	Developing	CIIC active since 2017, Com'On City running since 2015 and lead practice for the COMONCITY network; sustained neighbourhood-level participation is the gap.
4. Cross-departmental coordination	Developing	Cross-departmental working depends on direct mayoral coordination; no transversal urban regeneration unit; the EU funds coordination unit functions well and offers an internal reference point.

5. Communication at neighbourhood level	Developing	Strong city-level communication function; neighbourhood-level communication and branding are areas to develop as the Iris work takes shape.
6. Monitoring, evaluation and learning	Developing	Mission City and URBREATH frameworks provide structured M&E references; integrated evaluation across the Iris programme still to be built.

Anticipated transfer path

By the end of URBAN ECHO, the realistic ambition for Cluj-Napoca is to use the network to translate strong city-level practice into a coherent neighbourhood-level approach in Iris.

The clearest progress is expected on **Module 4 (Cross-departmental coordination)** as applied to Iris. The URBACT Local Group will be built around the existing Net Zero Coalition and anchored at Pavilionul Tineretului in Feroviarilor Park. This gives the city a structured way of bringing together municipal departments, universities, NGOs, the Energy Cluster and the actors of the URBREATH project around a shared neighbourhood focus.

Progress on **Module 2 (Place-based diagnostics)** is expected in a specific form, adapted to the fact that Iris is mid-transformation rather than at a blank-page stage. The ULG, with its Net Zero Coalition base, university partners and NGO presence, will be the place where a shared diagnostic reading of Iris is built, drawing together what URBREATH, the Climate Neutrality Digital Twin, the public investments and the RIVUS consultation have already produced. Ghent's own experience is directly relevant here: the city has explicitly mentioned that some of its urban renewal programmes started midway, in response to resident pressure or large development projects, and that a diagnostic produced in that situation has a different role than one that frames a new programme. This is therefore a transferable practice rather than an exceptional case.

Significant progress is also expected on **Module 3 (Participation)** at neighbourhood level. The Cluj Days festival will be used as a first testing moment for community engagement in Iris. The Ghent random sampling method for citizen panels is the practice that the city specifically wants to transfer. The COMONCITY network, also led by Cluj, provides a parallel learning channel on participatory budgeting that can usefully inform the URBAN ECHO work without duplicating it.

Progress on **Module 1 (Strategy)** is expected through the development of an integrated neighbourhood-level strategic frame for Iris, connecting the existing public investments, the RIVUS development, the URBREATH research and the community infrastructure into a coherent project.

Modules 2, 5 and 6 (Diagnostics, Communication, Monitoring and Evaluation) are areas where Cluj will benefit from peer exchange and from the network's overall thematic work. Cluj will host the third Transnational Meeting in October 2026, with a thematic focus on data, diagnostics and the relationship between evidence and participation. This will be a moment for the city to share its Climate Neutrality Digital Twin, its Net Zero Cities work and its CIIC and participatory budgeting experience.

Cluj has a capable coordinator in place (Alexandra Poliec, EU project coordinator) and strong political backing through the Mayor's Cabinet. The city is unlikely to need intensive bilateral

support from the Lead Expert. The most useful expert input will be light touch, focused on linking URBAN ECHO with the city's existing frameworks (Mission City, URBREATH, COMONCITY) so that the Iris work benefits from these connections rather than competing with them.

Photo: Iris Neighbourhood park



Perugia (Italy)



The city and its context

Perugia is the regional capital of Umbria, in central Italy, with 162,362 inhabitants and a municipal territory of 449.5 km². The territory is roughly four times the area of Paris, with only about 11% of it built land; the rest is agricultural land, forestry and green space. The city hosts two universities with approximately 30,000 students and is known internationally for events such as Umbria Jazz, the International Journalism Festival and Eurochocolate. Its economy is weighted towards the tertiary sector (46.9% of GDP), followed by industry (28.2%), commerce (20%) and agriculture (4.9%).



Photo: Perugia aqueduct.

The defining feature of Perugia, from a governance and planning perspective, is its **polycentric territorial structure**. The Territorial Strategic Document identifies **63 microcities** across the municipal territory: the historic centre, 55 predominantly residential settlements, and 7 specialised ones (tertiary, leisure, healthcare). Many of these microcities (some of them small villages) have strong local identities rooted in culture, food and tradition. Residents tend to identify first with their microcity and then (maybe) with Perugia as a whole.

This territorial complexity is a legacy of an **administrative reform carried out 13 years ago**, which abolished the former *Circoscrizioni* (13 decentralised administrative units) into the municipality of Perugia. The intention was administrative optimisation, and the effect was a loss of local governance presence. Many residents, particularly in the outer areas, still feel that they were abandoned by the administration. The memory of the *Circoscrizioni* remains strong: people continue to refer to them and to the services they once provided locally.

The municipal administration has become leaner over the same period. Currently around 1,000 staff serve the entire territory, which is felt as far from sufficient for a municipality of this size. This structural understaffing shapes the way Perugia works and explains, in part, its reliance on external actors. Italy in general, and Perugia in particular, has a dense ecosystem of associations and third-sector organisations: the municipality counts more than 300 registered associations. When the *Circoscrizioni* were dissolved, some local associations (known as *pro-loco*) took over tasks and responsibilities previously handled by the decentralised administration.

The current mayor, **Vittoria Ferdinandi**, was elected on a platform that placed participation at the centre of municipal policy. Her mandate programme (2024-2029) is structured around 12 thematic lines, several of which connect directly to URBAN ECHO. The most relevant is **Line 1, "Vince la Partecipazione"** ("Participation Wins"), which calls for direct community involvement and the activation of territorial participation bodies. Line 12, "Perugia Wins with its Territories," supports the vision of a polycentric city that values the specific identities of its districts and hamlets. URBAN ECHO is positioned as an operational tool to support this political agenda.

Perugia is also currently absorbing a significant volume of investment through the **National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR)**, with nearly €200 million across 55 interventions. These funds were attracted during the previous mayor's term, and the current administration is focused on implementation. The largest single project is a Bus Rapid Transit system linking several parts of the city including the San Sisto neighbourhood, where easy access is an issue. The municipal budget depends heavily on external funding. Most investment resources come from EU funds (directly or through the Umbria Region, via ERDF and ESF) and from national programmes such as PNRR. Own revenues are limited. The city is skilled at attracting and programming EU funds, and implementation capacity is stretched, with a structural problem flagged repeatedly during the visit: most funds finance new infrastructure but provide very little for the staff needed to make everything work.

The policy challenge and local strategic framework

Perugia's strategic framework is built around several interlocking instruments that have been developed over the past two to three years and are now in active implementation.

The cornerstone is the **Documento Strategico Territoriale (DST)**, presented during the study visit by Franco Marini, Head of urban planning and lead of the recently created inter-departmental coordination unit on strategic planning and urban regeneration. The DST is a voluntary planning tool (not required by any regional or national law) whose purpose is to bridge economic programming with territorial planning. It draws on EU Regulation 2021/1060 (Article 28 on integrated territorial development) as its conceptual basis. The DST is structured around an Interpretative Framework of nine thematic maps that analyse the territory's structuring characteristics (constraints, flows, risks, green and blue infrastructure, microcities and proximity, and others). From this analysis, the document defines 4 Strategic Objectives, 23 Strategic Guidelines and 103 Project Actions. Three pilot projects ("Progetti-Guida") anchor the strategy spatially: the urban railway corridor as a driver of peri-urban regeneration, the network of cultural places in the historic centre, and the Tiber corridor as the structural backbone of landscape and environmental improvement.

From the DST framework, several **masterplans** have been developed. The most advanced is the masterplan for **San Sisto**, a neighbourhood in the southern part of the city that hosts the main hospital complex and the Medicine University faculty. Three additional masterplans are in preparation under the current political mandate: for the northern part of the historical centre, for the area north of the city centre, and for Ponte Felcino along the Tiber.

The current **Urban Agenda 21-27** is defined at regional level and operates through Structural Funds. Perugia's Sustainable Urban Development Programme (PSUS), titled "Proximity and Microcities," focuses on two neighbourhoods: San Sisto (7,750 residents) and Sant'Erminio (9,844 residents). The total budget is approximately €15 million across 15 integrated interventions covering green infrastructure, cycling networks, public square redesign, renovation of cultural facilities, ICT solutions and social actions, with implementation planned for 2025-2028.

A second pillar of the strategic framework is the **Participation Office**, opened in February 2025, which sits within the Department of Institutional Bodies, Communication and Participation and reports directly to the Mayor. The office's mandate covers several instruments: the development of **Participation Houses** (Case della Partecipazione) as new community advisory bodies in neighbourhoods and villages; the reinforcement of 18 existing thematic advisory committees (Consulte tematiche, covering topics such as public space, public health and youth); the revision and strengthening of collaboration pacts on public goods; the development of participatory budgeting; and the creation of digital participation tools.

A central decision was to involve academic expertise from the outset. A **three-year agreement with the University of Perugia** (Department of Political Sciences) covers specialised training for municipal staff to build a cross-departmental working culture around participation, the development of an updated regulation for collaboration pacts on public goods, and methodological support for the Partecipa Perugia process.

Two existing legal formats structure the municipality's relationship with associations. The first is a **convention**, a fixed-term agreement that tends to be rigid and can create a sense of ownership in the association. The second is the **collaboration pact** (Patto di Collaborazione), which can last up to nine years, focuses on a public good and can involve municipalities, associations, individuals and companies. Collaboration pacts are grounded in the Italian

constitutional principle of horizontal subsidiarity (Article 118, paragraph 4), which recognises citizens' contribution to the general interest as a fundamental democratic principle. The municipality is currently working to revise and strengthen this instrument, making it more flexible and better monitored.

The focus area

Perugia is one of the two URBAN ECHO partners, alongside Las Gabias, that is not focusing on a single neighbourhood. The transfer focus is **the Partecipa Perugia process and the creation of the Participation Houses**, with a neighbourhood-level dimension that will emerge once the Houses are located in specific territories.

This decision reflects the city's situation. The central challenge for Perugia is how to organise and sustain meaningful participation across a vast and morphologically diverse territory of 63 microcities. The Partecipa Perugia process is the structured response to that challenge, and URBAN ECHO is positioned to support it. Once the Participation Houses are located in specific neighbourhoods, a closer link with a neighbourhood-level focus, as understood in Ghent, will emerge.

The **Partecipa Perugia process** follows a six-step roadmap. Five Community Labs of approximately 20 participants each were established across the city territory, for a total of 100 participants selected through public call and public draw (a form of mini-public). The process moves through an orientation phase, a Bar Camp open event (held in late January 2026 with around 200 participants), deliberation within the Labs, Community Assemblies across Perugia's territories with dot voting, and finally a municipal decision and accountability step. A final document regrouping all ideas (what, where and how of the Participation Houses) is expected by May 2026. Deliverables expected by end 2026 include a new regulation for the Participation Houses, an updated regulation for collaboration pacts, the opening of 3-5 Participation Houses in different neighbourhoods, and an increase in the number of collaboration pacts proposed by associations and citizens.

A concrete example of civic engagement already operating on the ground was visited during the study visit: **Piazza del Melo**, where the Roghers A.P.S. (a youth-oriented association) and the POST Foundation (a science and fab lab) work side by side. The "SWITCH ON" project, funded through a welfare call by the Perugia Foundation bank foundation, transformed the square into a multifunctional centre with dedicated spaces for music, event training, digital literacy and collaborative artistic workshops. The municipality plans to formalise a collaboration pact for Piazza del Melo involving both the Roghers and POST, giving institutional backing to a collaboration that is already working well in practice. This case illustrates the broader pattern in Perugia: a rich civic ecosystem where associations and foundations are active and capable, and where the municipality's role is increasingly to provide a framework, resources and formal recognition. This case overall recalls what was seen in Cluj-Napoca as well (ZBOR hub) – close links supporting youth initiatives between public, private and associative sectors.

What Perugia brings to the network

Perugia brings four contributions of direct interest to other partners.

The Partecipa Perugia model. The six-step process, from Community Labs selected through public draw to deliberation, Community Assemblies with dot voting and municipal accountability, is a structured and replicable approach to designing participation infrastructure from scratch with citizens. The involvement of university researchers as both facilitators and learners adds an institutional dimension that gives the process academic rigour and a built-in learning loop.

Collaboration pacts as a framework for shared governance. The Italian legal basis for collaboration pacts (rooted in the constitutional principle of horizontal subsidiarity, Article 118 paragraph 4) and Perugia's practical experience with them, including the current effort to revise and make them more flexible, offer a **concrete model for formalising partnerships between the municipality, citizens, associations and companies**. This is relevant for any partner city looking to move beyond informal collaboration. Examples of existing pacts include urban greenery management with citizens – Perugia's good practice that structured the URBACT network PARKS

The Documento Strategico Territoriale as a planning instrument. A voluntary strategic document that bridges economic programming and territorial planning, with a strong spatial and analytical basis (63 microcities, 9 thematic maps, integration of EU funding sources). This approach could be relevant for partners looking to connect their URBAN ECHO work to broader city strategy.

A rich civic ecosystem and the question of how to give it institutional form. Perugia's dense network of associations, bank-funded civic spaces such as the PERUGIA FOUNDATION welfare call, university partnerships and volunteer-driven cultural programming illustrates what a rich and largely informal participation infrastructure looks like. The challenge of giving it institutional form without stifling it is itself a transferable question.

A philosophical reference point worth noting is the Italian thinker **Aldo Capitini** and his concept of "omnicracy," a society governed by all, not by a few. This intellectual tradition is closely linked to Perugia and informs the broader framing of why participation matters here.

Where Perugia wants to learn

Perugia arrives in URBAN ECHO with clear learning needs that connect directly to the gaps between its strong strategic ambition and its actual implementation capacity. Four areas were identified during the study visit:

1. **Neighbourhood-level testing of participation.** Once the Participation Houses are located in specific areas, Perugia will need practical methods for place-based engagement. Ghent's experience with structured participation formats over the life of a programme is directly relevant.
2. **Cross-departmental coordination.** The coordination unit on strategic planning and urban regeneration was formally created recently and is in practice a one-person operation. The ambition is that transversal working becomes the norm across the administration. Ghent's layered coordination model and the experience of other partners could provide practical guidance.
3. **Communication that makes participation visible.** Making participation visible, understandable and credible to a broad public across a very large territory is a

specific challenge. The idea of a city-wide communication plan to inform residents about everything being done in terms of participation was raised during the visit and needs further development.

4. **Embedding the change of relationship with citizens internally.** A deliberate decision was made at the start of Partecipa Perugia not to involve the public administration in the initial consultation with residents, on the reasoning that administrative presence could inhibit open expression. This raises a critical question for the city: how to manage this shift in the relationship between institution and citizens internally, and how to back it so that it lasts beyond the current political cycle.

A network-level question that Perugia raises specifically concerns **mobility in a polycentric territory**: the debate around the Bus Rapid Transit and the wider challenge of connecting a sprawling territory of 63 microcities is a point of interest for peer exchange. The Lead Expert noted that the experience of Coimbra (inter-municipality, through the URBACT SIT FLEXI good practice) could be relevant here.

Module readiness overview

Module	Readiness	Brief evidence
1. Strategy, long-term programming and funding alignment	Already practising	Documento Strategico Territoriale provides a strong strategic frame; PSUS Proximity and Microcities programme runs to 2028; €200 million PNRR portfolio in implementation.
2. Place-based diagnostics	Already practising	Nine thematic maps in the DST, 63 microcities identified; San Sisto masterplan as worked example; data-driven diagnostic capacity in place.
3. Participation and people-centred planning	Already practising	Partecipa Perugia six-step process running; Participation Office active since February 2025; collaboration pacts framework; three-year agreement with the University of Perugia.
4. Cross-departmental coordination	Developing	Coordination unit exists on paper and is in practice a one-person operation; transversal working is the ambition, not yet the norm.
5. Communication at neighbourhood level	Developing	Participation Office reports to the Mayor and includes communication; city-wide communication plan on participation is an idea raised during the visit, not yet developed.
6. Monitoring, evaluation and learning	Developing	University partnership provides methodological support; structured evaluation across the participation process and the broader strategic framework is still to be built.

Anticipated transfer path

Perugia occupies a particular position in the network: it has one of the strongest participation frameworks among the partners, but also a solid strategic framework, however with significant implementation capacity gaps. The realistic ambition by the end of URBAN ECHO

is therefore less about acquiring new frameworks and more about giving institutional substance and place-based grounding to what is already in motion.

The clearest progress is expected on **Module 4 (Cross-departmental coordination)**. The URBACT Local Group will, at the first stage, consist of municipal staff and university partners. The ULG can sit "on top of" the implementation group that will form around the Participation Houses, serving as a monitoring and learning layer. This gives the coordination unit a concrete operational context in which transversal working becomes practice rather than ambition.

Significant progress is also expected on **Module 3 (Participation)** at neighbourhood level, once the Participation Houses are located. The evaluation of Partecipa Perugia could be included as a pilot project within the URBAN ECHO deliverables, with a compatible timeline (the process started end 2025 and aims to open the first Participation Houses in 2026). Ghent's neighbourhood-level participation experience will be directly relevant once the Houses anchor the work in specific territories.

Progress on **Module 5 (Communication)** is expected through the development of a city-wide communication plan on participation, which Perugia identified as a practical priority during the study visit.

Modules 1, 2 and 6 (Strategy, Diagnostics, Monitoring and Evaluation) are areas where Perugia is one of the network's strongest contributors. Perugia will host the sixth Transnational Meeting in 2027, with a thematic focus on participation design and institutional embedding. The Participation Houses will be in operation by then, allowing the network to engage in depth with the Community Lab experience and with the broader question of sustaining participation beyond political cycles.

The bilateral support from the Lead Expert will focus, in the early stages, on **connecting the ULG to the Partecipa Perugia process**, so that the two structures reinforce rather than duplicate each other. A specific follow-up identified during the visit is to explore the agreement framework Ghent uses with associations managing public places, as a reference point for the Perugia work on collaboration pacts.



Group photo at Piazza Mio

Las Gabias (Spain)



The city and its context

Las Gabias is a town of approximately **24,000 registered inhabitants**, located 8 km south of Granada in the southern arc of the metropolitan area. It is one of the smallest partners in the URBAN ECHO network, alongside Pezinok, and new to the URBACT experience. Two features define its current situation. First, Las Gabias has stopped being a peripheral municipality and become a piece in the Granada metropolitan system: a large share of daily life – work, education, services – takes place outside the municipal boundary. Second, the town is **polynuclear**: it is made up of six nuclei (Gabia Grande, Gabia Chica, Pedro Verde, Urbanización San Javier, Híjar and Los Chopos) of very different sizes, profiles and levels of provision. Each nucleus connects radially to Granada rather than to its neighbours. As Manuel Pérez put it during the study visit: the nuclei look towards Granada, not towards each other.



Photo: Las Gabias – view from above

Population growth over the past two decades has been continuous and strong. The population is younger than Granada's average, and many residents have arrived from elsewhere. This is a real strength, but it also intensifies pressure on housing, public spaces, schools and everyday services. According to the PAI CREA Las Gabias, around 79% of the municipal surface is in residential use; the share allocated to economic activity is close to zero in planning terms. The defining tension is not that Las Gabias has grown too much, but **how it has grown**: fast, residentially, and with weak articulation between its parts.

The administration reflects this transition. In 2016, when the town crossed 20,000 inhabitants, it took on responsibilities previously handled by the Diputación. A new organisational structure for 2025-2027 has been adopted, with nine thematic areas and a Specific Plan for Human Resources Planning aimed at improving how the administration coordinates and sustains transversal projects. The transition is real but unfinished: cross-departmental work happens at councillor level in principle, but in daily practice departments are not yet in the habit of working together.

The policy challenge and local strategic framework

Las Gabias does not have a formal urban regeneration plan. What it has is a set of strategic instruments that are gradually building the framework for one. The cornerstone is the **Las Gabias 2030 Urban Agenda**, aligned with the Spanish Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. The agenda sets out priorities including neighbourhood improvement, territorial equity, public space regeneration, energy rehabilitation, green transition and citizen participation.

Three other instruments shape the strategic context:

- **EDUSI funding** (through the Metropolitan Area of Granada) has already enabled tangible improvements in public space, accessibility and energy efficiency, including relevant actions for Las Gabias, notably the rehabilitation of Casa de los Blasco and the Youth Entrepreneurship Centre.
- While the municipality prepared and submitted its own Local Integrated Development Strategy (EDIL), it was not finally approved. However, several of the actions identified through that strategy remain relevant and some of them are expected to be implemented using the municipality's own resources.
- A new **General Urban Development Plan** is in the final stage of procurement. This is the strategic document that will shape the next 10-15 years of urban development. Las Gabias has decided to make it a **participatory process**, embedding citizen engagement from the outset through new regulations and the creation of permanent civic structures.

The diagnostic that Manuel Pérez presented on Day 1 of the study visit synthesises the situation in **eight structural problems with one common root**: growth that has been fast and quantitative, but weak in articulation. The arrival of the **tram**, with two stops planned in Las Gabias (one in Gabia Grande, one near Los Chopos), is treated as a pivotal moment, it can either reinforce existing imbalances or help rebalance the municipality.

The focus area

Las Gabias is one of two URBAN ECHO partners – together with Perugia – that is not focusing on a single neighbourhood. The transfer focus is the **municipality, with** particular attention to the relationship between its nuclei. This decision reflects the diagnostic: the polynuclear structure is itself the central planning challenge, and working in only one nucleus would miss the point.

The URBACT focus is therefore framed around a **transversal theme: how to give coherence to a town that exists as a set of separate nuclei facing Granada rather than each other**. This is not primarily a mobility question – it is a question about identity, services, public space and shared belonging. Mobility is one piece of it (the connections between nuclei matter), but the deeper challenge is how Las Gabias can function as a single town while respecting the distinct character of each of its parts. Within this transversal frame, the **arrival of the tram** is treated as a strategic lever: with two stops planned in Las Gabias it can either reinforce existing imbalances or help rebalance the municipality, depending on how the broader urban project is shaped around it.



Photo: map of Las Gabias

The Day 2 workshop at the Torreón Árabe surfaced specific places where focused attention is most needed and where the transversal theme can be tested concretely. **Conquistadores** (in Gabia Grande, on the perimeter of the main town access and directly affected by the tram), **Híjar** (the second-largest nucleus) and **Gabia Chica** (the smallest, with a strong sense of being "left behind") emerged as priority candidates. These can be used as pilot areas through which the wider question of inter-nuclei coherence is worked out in practice. The final scope, including how the municipality-wide focus is combined with one or more pilot zones, will be confirmed by the Las Gabias team in the months following the study visit.

What Las Gabias brings to the network

A **clear case of a polynuclear suburban municipality** in a metropolitan area with no consolidated metropolitan governance. Las Gabias' situation – growth without internal cohesion, services unevenly distributed – is recognisable to other partners, particularly Perugia (with its 63 microcities) and Cluj-Napoca (with its Iris neighbourhood and the broader pressure of horizontal expansion).

An **administration in mid-reorganisation**. The new 2025-2027 structure was designed precisely to give the administration the capacity to sustain transversal projects. The URBACT Local Group is a chance to test, on a concrete scope, what cross-departmental working can mean inside an administration that is still building this culture. Other partners can learn from Las Gabias's experience of trying to do this in real time.

A **diagnostic methodology**. The Day 2 mapping workshop, with two parallel groups working through five questions and consolidating on a shared map, is also a replicable format.

Where Las Gabias wants to learn

Las Gabias arrives in URBAN ECHO with a clear sense of where it needs to grow. Five learning areas were identified during the study visit and confirmed by the team:

1. **Vision-setting for the municipality, while** respecting the specificities of each nucleus. The Urban Agenda gives a starting point; Ghent's approach to programme vision (clear, simple, communicable) is directly relevant.
2. **Cross-departmental working in practice**. Las Gabias has a new organisational structure but limited experience of running it. Ghent's layered coordination model and Perugia's parallel attempt to build a transversal coordination unit are both relevant references.
3. **Sustained citizen engagement**. The new Citizen Participation Regulations are being co-created. Las Gabias is interested in concrete formats – how participation is organised across the life of a project, not only at consultation moments. Perugia's Partecipa process and Düsseldorf's structured ULG are both peer references here.
4. **Communication that lands**. Several workshop participants noted that the municipality already runs information efforts, but residents do not know what is available. This is a recurring finding across the network and one of Ghent's strongest practices.
5. **Data for decision-making**. Las Gabias is interested in how to gather, set up and use data to support decision-making at municipal level. This need, raised by the team, connects to the network's online session on data and AI tools.

A network-level question that Las Gabias raises specifically: **how to translate the arrival of a major piece of mobility infrastructure (the tram) into a wider rebalancing of the municipality**, rather than letting it reinforce existing imbalances.

Module readiness overview

Module	Readiness	Brief evidence
1. Strategy, long-term programming and funding alignment	Developing	Urban Agenda, EDUSI, EDIL and the new General Urban Development Plan provide the frameworks. Long-term programming is not yet an embedded practice.
2. Place-based diagnostics	Developing	Day 2 mapping workshop showed the team can run diagnostics with internal staff; need to develop data-driven methods
3. Participation and people-centred planning	Starting fresh	New Citizen Participation Regulations being co-created; the team is motivated but has limited prior practice in structured participation.
4. Cross-departmental coordination	Developing	New 2025-2027 organisational structure aims at this; daily practice is just starting (the study visit itself was the first cross-departmental working moment for several participants).
5. Communication at neighbourhood level	Starting fresh	A communications function exists; the gap is between dissemination and information landing with residents.
6. Monitoring, evaluation and learning	Starting fresh	Not yet a topic for the city; no current framework in place.

Anticipated transfer path

By the end of URBAN ECHO, the realistic ambition for Las Gabias is to make solid progress on three modules and lay the groundwork on others.

The clearest progress is expected on **Module 4 (Cross-departmental coordination)**: the URBACT Local Group is designed around the three-sphere model (political, technical, citizen), and is explicitly intended to give institutional form to the cross-departmental dynamic that started during the study visit. The ULG is the lever for embedding the way of working that the new municipal structure aims for.

Significant progress is also expected on **Module 3 (Participation)**: connecting the URBACT work to the participatory drafting of the new General Urban Development Plan gives Las Gabias a concrete, high-stakes context in which to test structured participation methods.

Progress on **Module 1 (Strategy)** is expected through the alignment between the Urban Agenda, the General Urban Development Plan and the URBACT focus - building a shared, communicable vision for the municipality as a whole, with the tram as an anchor point for rebalancing.

Modules 5 and 6 (Communication, M&E) are areas where Las Gabias will benefit from peer exchange and from the network's overall thematic work, with first steps rather than full transfer expected within the project's lifespan.

The bilateral support from the Lead Expert will focus, in the early stages, on **the format of cross-departmental working** (building on the Day 2 workshop format) and on **ULG formation**.



Group photo in Hajar

2.3 Synthesis: the network at a glance

The matrix below shows all six partner cities against all six Good Practice modules. Ghent appears in a separate row to reflect its position as the Good Practice city.

The matrix is the lead expert's reading at this point in the network. It was discussed and co-validated with partners at the second Transnational Meeting in Pezinok (June 2026).

City	M1. Strategy, programming and funding	M2. Place-based diagnostics	M3. Participation and people-centred planning	M4. Cross-departmental coordination	M5. Neighbourhood communication	M6. Monitoring and evaluation
Ghent (Good Practice)	Reference practice (20+ years of multi-year programmes, layered funding)	Reference practice (quantitative + qualitative, updated through the programme)	Reference practice, with active improvement ambition (reaching under-represented groups)	Reference practice (layered structure: programme team, core team, steering group, sponsor meeting)	Reference practice (distinct professional competence, programme branding, single contact person)	Practising, with active improvement ambition (20-year retrospective on Ledeburg as opportunity)
Düsseldorf	Already practising	Already practising	Already practising	Already practising	Developing (the particular one for Friedrichstadt)	Developing
Cluj-Napoca	Already practising (city-level)	Developing at neighbourhood level	Already practising	Developing	Developing	Developing
Perugia	Already practising with active improvement ambition at staff capacity-level	Already practising	Already practising	Developing	Developing	Developing
Pezinok	Starting fresh at neighbourhood level	Developing	Developing	Developing	Starting fresh	Starting fresh
Las Gabias	Developing	Developing	Starting fresh	Developing	Starting fresh	Starting fresh

Where the network is strongest

Outside Ghent, the strongest areas are **strategy, place-based diagnostics and participation**. The picture behind the matrix is more uneven than the labels suggest.

Strategy (Module 1) is labelled "Already practising" for Düsseldorf, Cluj-Napoca and Perugia, but the three sit behind that label in different ways. Düsseldorf has the most complete picture: ZUKUNFT QUARTIER.DÜSSELDORF provides a city-wide framework, Garath 2.0 illustrates a multi-phase programme running from 2016 to 2030 with federal co-financing, and the city operates with a reasonably stable mix of funding sources. Multi-year programming and funding alignment work as a system.

Cluj-Napoca has a clear city-level strategy and is the highest EU fund absorber in Romania, with a portfolio exceeding €4 billion in projects implemented or in preparation. The city maintains a ready portfolio of projects that activate as funding becomes available, always linked to the strategy. The constraint is the budget cycle: Romanian law imposes annual budget approval, which limits continuity from one year to the next, and there is no neighbourhood-level equivalent of the city strategy yet.

Perugia has an articulated city-level strategic document, the *Documento Strategico Territoriale*, with its nine thematic maps, 63 microcities, four strategic objectives and several masterplans developed from it. Implementation depends almost entirely on external funding, with EU funds via the Umbria Region and national programmes such as PNRR (€200 million currently in flight) as the main sources. The city is skilled at attracting these, but has limited control over their timing and is constantly adjusting the work to where the money is.

Diagnostics (Module 2) brings three complementary strengths together. The Neighbourhood Atlas in Düsseldorf is the most developed data-driven diagnostic among the partners. Perugia's analytical base sits in the DST and its 63 microcities, with the San Sisto masterplan as a worked example. Ghent combines quantitative and qualitative methods that run through the whole life of a programme. Pezinok and Las Gabias can draw on this collective base, particularly for moving from city-level analysis to neighbourhood-level diagnostic work. Cluj-Napoca, where Iris is already mid-transformation, will use its ULG to build a shared reading of the neighbourhood from inputs that already exist (URBREATH, the Climate Neutrality Digital Twin, public investments, the RIVUS consultation).

Participation (Module 3) is the topic where each city is working from a different starting point. Perugia has the Partecipa Perugia process, the Participation Office and the collaboration pacts framework. Cluj-Napoca has Com'On City, the lead practice for the COMONCITY URBACT network, with possible cross-fertilisation between the two networks. Düsseldorf has the Garath track record (Children's Parliament, Verfügungsfonds advisory board, established neighbourhood management). What these partners share is less a gap in basic capacity and more a common question: how to keep their participation practices current with changing social expectations, and how to apply them to specific renewal contexts (Iris for Cluj, Friedrichstadt for Düsseldorf, the future Participation Houses for Perugia). Pezinok and Las Gabias are at an earlier stage and will benefit most directly from peer support. This makes participation a topic with strong peer-to-peer potential across the whole network.

Who can help whom

Module 1 is better treated as shared network work than as bilateral peer support. None of the partners has yet built the cascade Ghent demonstrates, where regional, national and European funding is structured around a city-level strategy translated at neighbourhood level. Pezinok and Las Gabias are at an earlier stage still. Building this kind of strategic frame is also one of the most effective ways for the network to reduce its dependence on shifts in political leadership.

Diagnostics (Module 2) has two clear worked examples in the network: Düsseldorf's Neighbourhood Atlas and Perugia's nine thematic maps.

Participation (Module 3) brings several peer-to-peer relationships at once. Pezinok and Las Gabias share the challenge of building their first structured participation experience in a renewal context, with Perugia, Cluj-Napoca, Düsseldorf and Ghent all offering useful references depending on the specific need. The COMONCITY URBACT network led by Cluj-Napoca is a particular asset for partners interested in participatory budgeting and youth engagement. A second peer-to-peer relationship sits between Cluj-Napoca and Perugia themselves. Both cities have large student populations and a development strategy that explicitly works with and through young people. In both cases, participation happens through a working triangle between the municipality, youth associations and private entities. ZBOR Hub in Cluj (financed by BCR and run with the Federation of Youth of Romania) and Roghers A.P.S. in Perugia (financed through Perugia Foundation welfare call, working alongside the municipality and the POST Foundation) are two concrete examples of the same model in action. Direct exchange between these two cities will reinforce their own practices and produce learning for the wider network.

Cross-departmental coordination (Module 4) draws on Düsseldorf's four-layer ULG model and Ghent's layered coordination structure as the main references. Four partners (Perugia, Cluj-Napoca, Pezinok, Las Gabias) sit at "Developing" on this module. The detail of how the work is organised is set out further below.

Communication at neighbourhood level (Module 5) has Ghent and Düsseldorf as the main references. The fact that five out of six partners sit at "Developing" or "Starting fresh" reflects one of the cross-cutting findings of the study visits: communication as a professional skill is under-recognised in most partner cities.

Energy communities and carbon-neutral neighbourhoods: a peer-to-peer route worth flagging

This route does not jump out of the matrix on its own. It comes from the study visits and connects to the URBACT cross-cutting priority on the green transition.

Düsseldorf is developing Friedrichstadt as the first pilot neighbourhood to strategically implement climate protection and climate adaptation measures, working with the municipal energy utility Stadtwerke and looking for ways to bring private owners into retrofitting. Ghent runs a living lab on energy transition at neighbourhood level (Muide Meulestede Fossielvrij), with hands-on experience of the technical and behavioural sides of the

transition. Cluj-Napoca contributes its Climate City Contract and its position as one of the EU Mission Cities working towards 2030 climate neutrality. A thematic exchange between these three cities on energy communities, retrofitting and carbon-neutral neighbourhoods reinforces each city's own work and produces useful material for the wider network. The Ghent living lab raised during the Düsseldorf study visit is a natural starting point for the exchange.

Las Gabias and Perugia: a shared territorial challenge

Las Gabias and Perugia have two things in common that the matrix does not show.

The first is their territorial structure. **Las Gabias is polynuclear**: six nuclei that face Granada rather than each other. **Perugia is polycentric**: 63 microcities identified in its strategic document. Both cities deal with the question of **how to give coherence to a dispersed territory**, and neither has a worked answer to point to. A direct exchange between them mostly compares problems, which is useful in itself; the exchange becomes more productive when a third party with a relevant approach joins the conversation. This aspect will be followed up outside of URBAN ECHO, as the topic goes beyond the transfer network focus.

The second is **working with associations**, where the two cities are at very different starting points. Perugia has a developed practice, with participation conventions and collaboration pacts based on the Italian constitutional principle of horizontal subsidiarity. Las Gabias is just starting to formalise this. The relationship here is one-way: Las Gabias has something to learn from Perugia, and the exchange will work as straightforward peer learning rather than joint problem-solving.

Where the most effort needs to go

Communication (Module 5) and monitoring and evaluation (Module 6) are the network's weakest areas. On Module 6, no partner outside Ghent is at "Already practising", and Ghent itself wants to improve. This is the module where the network as a whole is starting from the earliest point, and where shared learning will matter most. The 20-year retrospective on Ledeborg that Ghent will produce as part of its Improvement Plan can serve as a shared learning anchor.

Cross-departmental working: three starting points, one question

Module 4 reads as "Developing" for four out of five transfer partners. This flattens a more interesting picture. **Cross-departmental working is a different challenge depending on where each city stands** and treating it as a single shared topic at network level can help each partner make progress in its own context. The study visits surfaced three different starting points.

The first is keeping an existing way of working alive over time. In Ghent and in Düsseldorf, cross-departmental work already happens: Ghent has its programme team and the embedding in formal processes (steering group, sponsor meeting); Düsseldorf has the Urban Renewal unit and the four-layer ULG model. The shared challenge for both cities is durability. A team that works across silos is fragile by nature: it depends on political backing that can shift when leadership changes, and any reorganisation of the administration can weaken it.

The question is how to make something that exists precisely because it cuts across normal lines last over time.

The second is stretching what one team does to the rest of the administration. In Cluj-Napoca and Perugia, cross-departmental work is concentrated in the EU funding team. That team works across departments because EU funds require it to, and it is often the most experienced unit in cross-cutting work. The rest of the administration continues to work in silos. The shared challenge is how to spread the way of working that exists in the EU funding team to other parts of the administration, so that working across departments becomes a general practice rather than the job of one team.

The third is building the habit from scratch. In Las Gabias and Pezinok, the administrations are too small to maintain a dedicated cross-cutting team, and the existing departments are not in the habit of working together. The political structure reinforces this: each department answers to a specific political leader, so cross-departmental work requires negotiation across political as well as administrative lines. The shared challenge is building the habit of cross-departmental working from the ground up, in a setting where the existing structures actively discourage it.

These three starting points lead back to the same underlying question: what does it take for a city administration to work in a way that matches the integrated, place-based logic of neighbourhood renewal? Ghent's Good Practice rests on the answer the city has built over twenty years. The other partners are working towards that answer from where they are. Specific thematic sessions on cross-departmental working, organised around these three starting points rather than as a one-size-fits-all topic, can support each partner in moving forward in its own context while keeping the shared commitment visible across the network.

Cross-cutting URBACT priorities

URBAN ECHO works on all three URBACT cross-cutting priorities, each in a different way.

The **green transition** is taken up through the peer-to-peer route on energy communities and carbon-neutral neighbourhoods set out above (Ghent, Düsseldorf, Cluj-Napoca), and through the green and blue infrastructure thread that connects URBAN ECHO to the PARKS URBACT network led by Perugia.

The **digital transition** runs through the network's work on data and digital tools for neighbourhood planning, with the Digital Twins existing in the network and Pezinok's SMART MAP as the main reference points. A dedicated online session under Ghent's lead is foreseen between TM2 and TM3.

Gender equality is treated as a practical question of who is in the room. The composition of each ULG, the outreach behind it, and the question of who is typically missing from neighbourhood participation are matters the ULG coordinators face from day one. An ad hoc expert on **inclusive participation** will join one of the regular six-weekly ULG coordinator support group meetings in autumn 2026 and will come back face-to-face for a working slot with the coordinators at TM4 Las Gabias in spring 2027. The full operational arrangement is set out in Section 3.

Section 3: Methodology and Roadmap

3.1 Network methodology: three levels of support

URBAN ECHO uses a hybrid methodology that combines shared thematic work with differentiated support. This is because the partnership is diverse by design. Cities of 20,000 inhabitants sit alongside cities of 650,000. Administrations new to URBACT work next to administrations with two decades of European cooperation behind them. The methodology has to give every partner enough common ground to learn together, while leaving room for very different starting points. This approach is inspired by the core of Ghent's good practice that provides a common city-level framework for all, while keeping possible neighbourhood-targeted actions, sensible to each zone's specificities.

The network's task is to help each partner identify what from Ghent's experience can be adapted to its own context, rather than deliver the full Good Practice as a package. That requires working at module level.

At last, the main difficulty is institutional, not intellectual. The study visits made clear that committed people work in administrations whose default logic (annual budgets, departmental silos, political cycles) often runs against integrated, multi-year neighbourhood work. The methodology has to support local change-makers inside their administrations, not only deliver content.

Against this analysis, the network defines and operates at three levels:

Level 1: Common. All partners take part in the **six transnational meetings** and in the shared thematic work organised around them. Each meeting combines a thematic deep-dive (with one or two cities bringing forward specific knowledge and others contributing) with working sessions on practical transfer questions. **Online thematic sessions** between meetings keep the work moving and bring in external expertise if/when needed. The Common layer is also where URBAN ECHO connects to other URBACT networks (see below).

Level 2: Clustered. Cities with similar profiles or shared challenges work together on specific themes. Three clusters have emerged from the study visits: energy-efficient neighbourhoods (Ghent, Düsseldorf, Cluj-Napoca); polycentric territories (Perugia, Las Gabias); and youth and the public-private-associative trio (Cluj-Napoca, Perugia). A potential fourth cluster can be formed, size-based: small municipalities (Pezinok, Las Gabias) – no specific targeted activities are foreseen for this cluster, but regular exchanges between the two could be beneficial and will be decided upon by each of them as the network progresses. Clusters are not exclusive. Las Gabias appears in two of them because the two work on different things. Section 3.3 sets out what each cluster works on concretely.

Level 3: Bilateral. Targeted support distributed by need, delivered by the Lead Expert or by ad hoc expertise. Bilateral work includes **coaching the local team, exchanges between two cities, and ad hoc expert support on specific topics**. Bilateral support is not distributed

equally: it goes where the gap between ambition and capacity is largest, and where a concentrated input can unblock something, the city cannot solve on its own.

The test-and-report cycle

Between transnational meetings, each city commits to testing one concrete thing: a diagnostic exercise, a participation format, a coordination meeting between departments, a communication initiative etc. The commitment is small and specific. The point is to produce evidence of what works in practice, not impressions from a study visit. At the next meeting, each city reports back PechaKucha style: what was tried, what happened, what was learned.

This cycle keeps the transfer grounded in actual administrative practice. It also builds a shared library of attempts across the network. And it gives each partner repeated small chances to push against the institutional default in its own administration, with the backing of a network commitment behind it.

To support the cycle, the Lead Expert can provide a **light pilot template** covering what the pilot is, what is expected to happen, what will be observed, and when it will be reported. The same effort feeds two deliverables: the test-and-report rhythm within the network, and the Local Testing Reports that the application form commits to producing. Each pilot is linked to an element of the city's emerging Transfer Plan, so that the pilots accumulate towards the final deliverable rather than sitting alongside it.

Connections to other URBACT networks

Two URBACT networks have direct connections to URBAN ECHO partners, and in both cases the lead partner of the other network is also a transfer partner in URBAN ECHO. This creates a natural basis for joint work rather than just for mutual visibility.

PARKS, where Perugia acts as lead partner, focuses on public green spaces and their role in urban life. A joint online session is planned on how green and blue infrastructure earns its place inside an integrated neighbourhood programme: what gets built, who designs it, who programmes it once it exists. Material from Ledeberg (where "more green spaces" was one of six programme objectives), Cluj-Napoca's Green Cluj programme, Düsseldorf's heat and green-space deficit in Friedrichstadt, Las Gabias's underused public spaces and Pezinok's vineyard-edge identity all feed the discussion. The session connects to the URBACT cross-cutting priority on the green transition.

COMONCITY, where Cluj-Napoca acts as lead partner, works on civic commons and shared governance. A joint online session is planned on how participatory budgeting and collaboration agreements function inside a multi-year programme: as a one-off engagement tool, as a recurring trust-builder, or as a way of bringing non-municipal resources into the renewal. Cluj-Napoca's Com'On City and PONT model, Pezinok's running participatory budget, Perugia's patti di collaborazione, Ghent's neighbourhood-level brainstorming groups and participatory budgets, and Las Gabias's new participation regulation all feed the session.

The [URBAN ECHO work plan Excel](#) places all actions included in the project on a specific timeline.

3.2 The transnational rhythm

The network runs six transnational meetings, each hosted by a different partner city. Ghent has confirmed it can host a seventh wrap-up meeting in early 2028, subject to budget reprogramming. Each meeting combines a thematic anchor, study visit components and working sessions on the test-and-report cycle.

Stage 1: Understand (November 2025 – August 2026)

TM1 Ghent, January 2026. Kick-off. Discovery of the Good Practice, partner introductions, agreement on working methods. Field visits to Ledeborg and Dampoort.

Photo: TM1 Kick-off in Ghent @Ledeborg neighbourhood



TM2 Pezinok, June 2026. Three functions. First, partners review and validate the Transferability Study, working through the module readiness matrix together and confirming priority modules. Second, thematic content on participation - communication and stakeholder engagement angle, drawing on Perugia's Partecipa process. Third, a field component in Cajla-Pezinok Sever, where the group helps Pezinok think through its neighbourhood focus.

Photo: TM2 group photo at wooden playground, Central Pezinok



Stage 1 also covers all five study visits (Düsseldorf, Pezinok, Cluj-Napoca, Perugia, Las Gabias, conducted February to April 2026), the kick-off of the ULG coordinator support group, and the first bilateral support calls as needed, prioritising Pezinok and Las Gabias (ULG formation) and Perugia (connecting the ULG to the existing Partecipa process). The URBACT Summer University in Cork in August 2026 brings the ULG coordinators together with peers from across URBACT and acts as a capacity-building moment in the run-up to the first local test actions; the URBACT online masterclasses run alongside throughout the period. By the end of August 2026, all ULGs should be operational and the final Transferability Study, the Communication Plan and the first network journal should be published.

Stage 2: Adapt (September 2026 – June 2027)

Between TM2 (Pezinok) and TM3(Cluj-Napoca) – **September 2026** - an **online learning session on data collection, management and visualisation** is led by Ghent for the benefit of all partners interested in the topic. The session connects URBAN ECHO's work to the URBACT cross-cutting priority on the digital transition.

TM3 Cluj-Napoca, October 2026. Thematic anchors: **participatory budgeting**, with Cluj's Com'On City as the primary worked example; the **Climate Neutrality at city and neighbourhood levels**. The meeting also runs a structured working session on **cross-departmental working in city administrations**. The lead expert provides the methodological frame, working with the three starting points identified in Section 2.3 (keeping an existing function alive over time, stretching what one team does to the rest of the administration,

building the habit from scratch). Partners work in parallel groups and each city leaves with a concrete first step to test before TM4.

Between TM3 and TM4, bilateral support intensifies and each city runs its first test actions: Düsseldorf on the Friedrichstadt concept design contract and further ULG meetings (Akteursrunde Friedrichstadt); Cluj-Napoca on the ULG around the Iris neighbourhood; Perugia on the first Participation Houses; Pezinok on clarifying the Cajla narrative and a first structured engagement with residents; Las Gabias on the first participatory mapping exercise linked to the wider city strategy; Ghent on the 20-year evaluation of Ledeborg.

To support all communication efforts, in **November-December 2026, Ghent organises online communication training** for all internal municipal teams and ULG coordinators interested in the topic.

TM4 Las Gabias, spring 2027. Thematic anchor: the **URBACT Local Group** as the lever for cross-departmental work in small municipalities. Las Gabias brings the experience of using its ULG to give institutional form to the cross-departmental dynamic that started during the study visit. The meeting also includes a test-and-report slot on the cross-departmental working steps each city tried since TM3, and a **face-to-face working session with the ULG coordinators on inclusive representation**. The ad hoc expert who potentially joined a coordinator support group meeting in autumn 2026 rejoins the network here, picking up the work each ULG has done in the meantime on outreach and composition. The **mid-term reflection** closes the meeting, looking at what is working in the transfer, what needs to be adjusted, and whether the roadmap needs updating, with inclusive representation as one of the threads running through.

TM5 Düsseldorf, June 2027. Date fixed by the Friedrichstadt programme timeline. Thematic anchor: energy-efficient neighbourhoods and the broader question of strategy and integrated financing. Study visits to Garath and Friedrichstadt. The meeting is where the work on strategy and integrated financing comes together explicitly, bringing Ghent's Good Practice into conversation with the EU funds know-how of Perugia and Cluj-Napoca. Also: peer review of draft Transfer Plans.

Stage 3: Prepare for Re-use (July 2027 – April 2028)

TM6 Perugia, early Oct 2027. Thematic anchor: **participation**, with the lessons learnt from Partecipa Perugia and the practice of establishing collaboration pacts between public administration, private actors, citizens and associations. The Participation Houses will be operational by then, allowing the network to engage in depth with the Community Lab experience and with the question of sustaining participation beyond political cycles. The Partecipa Perugia evaluation reads its results through the lens of inclusive representation, closing the loop on the work the ULG coordinators have been doing on outreach and composition since autumn 2026. Partners present **near-final Transfer Plans**; Ghent presents the Improvement Plan. A working session on implementation closes the meeting.

TM7 Ghent, early 2028. Ghent has confirmed it can host a wrap-up back-to-source meeting, subject to budget reprogramming at mid-term. The idea is to close the network where it started, with each partner presenting its final Transfer Plan and Ghent its Improvement Plan,

including how the network's feedback has shaped it. Confirmation depends on budget reprogramming at mid-term.

From October 2027 to April 2028: final bilateral support, the Final Network Report, the third network article, and local dissemination events in each partner city.

Running throughout

The **ULG coordinator support group** meets online roughly every six weeks, with Lead Expert participation. One coordinator presents a practical challenge (how to get a specific department involved, how to organise a first neighbourhood meeting, how to deal with low turnout etc.); the others react. The chair rotates.

Monthly online coordination meetings between the Lead Partner and the partner project coordinators keep the operational work aligned, complemented by regular bilateral encounters between the Lead Partner and the Lead Expert. Gender and inclusivity issues are addressed within the partner coordination meetings, with ad hoc expertise brought in on specific moments.

3.3 Clustered and bilateral work

This section sets out the two layers of differentiated work in the network: the three clusters and the bilateral support.

Cluster 1: Energy-efficient neighbourhoods

Partners: Ghent, Düsseldorf, Cluj-Napoca | URBACT theme: green transition.

Activities and expert support:

- A Düsseldorf visit to Ghent's living lab in 2026 (Q4).
- A Düsseldorf extended stay in Cluj-Napoca after TM3, to engage directly with the climate work there.
- Ad hoc expertise on the climate dimension supporting the cluster's work.

Cluster 2: Polycentric territories

Partners: Perugia, Las Gabias. | URBACT theme: non-topical, connects to the wider URBACT focus on territorial cohesion. Both cities are interested in working with a third city from outside the network; following clarification from the Secretariat, this exchange is treated as optional and outside URBAN ECHO, best pursued as a City-to-City Exchange with possible European Urban Initiative support.

Cluster 3: Youth and the public-private-associative trio

Partners: Cluj-Napoca, Perugia.

Activities and expert support:

- A peer exchange between Cluj-Napoca and Perugia on how the public-private-associative trio is set up and held together, with a focus on how to make the model a stable arrangement rather than a project-by-project effort. Held potentially in connection with TM3 Cluj-Napoca (October 2026) or TM6 Perugia (October 2027).
- A joint online session with the COMONCITY URBACT network (Cluj-Napoca lead partner), giving the work a wider audience and bringing in other cities interested in participatory budgeting and youth engagement.

Bilateral support

Bilateral support is distributed by need, with the following pattern emerging from the study visits.

Ghent: an optional peer exchange with Perugia on Partecipa Perugia. This is contingent on Perugia confirming whether a formal evaluation of Partecipa is foreseen; if it is, and if it is of interest to Ghent, the visit would let Ghent learn from Perugia's participation practice and bring its critical eye to the evaluation.

Düsseldorf: energy-efficient neighbourhoods ad-hoc expertise, with the visits described under Cluster 1 to Ghent and Cluj-Napoca. Modern city administrations and AI (for all).

Pezinok: support on communication and participation (online training lead by Ghent), shared with Las Gabias where the needs overlap.

Cluj-Napoca: support from lead expert on cross-departmental working and internal communication, including support for an immersive exposition, or similar, and workshop for municipal colleagues on the city's European projects and EU visibility.

Perugia: support from lead expert on cross-departmental working and internal communication, as needed.

Las Gabias: communication coaching (Ghent led) for the diagnosis and approach to trust-building with the population, shared with Pezinok. Data gathering and management.

3.4 Building transfer capacity inside administrations

One of the clearest findings from the study visits is that the main difficulty in transfer is not a lack of good ideas. It is the gap between individual motivation and institutional capacity. In almost every partner city, committed and capable people work on URBAN ECHO. They work inside administrations that often operate on a different logic: annual rather than multi-year planning, departmental silos, political cycles that interrupt continuity, limited staff for implementation even when funding is available.

This is not something the network can fix from the outside. But it can help in several ways.

The study visits themselves created momentum locally. In Las Gabias, the visit became the moment when the whole administration engaged with what URBAN ECHO means for how they work, not just the project coordinator.

The bilateral support is designed to reinforce local change-makers. When the Lead Expert visits a city, the purpose is to help the local teamwork through specific problems: how to structure a first ULG meeting, how to convince a reluctant department head, how to frame a proposal so that it gets political backing. The transnational meetings serve a similar function at a different scale: partners can refer to a European commitment when they need institutional cover to try something new.

The ULG is the local lever that ties all this together. The pilots that feed the test-and-report cycle sit within the ULG. The local communication and participation tests run through it. The cross-departmental working in small municipalities is built around it. When the network commits to something at European level, it is the ULG that carries the commitment back into the local administration. That makes the ULG more than a stakeholder group: it is the structural counterpart of the network inside each city.

3.5 Outputs and communications

The network produces a defined set of outputs, in line with the URBACT Transfer Network framework: five Transfer Plans (one per transfer partner) and one Improvement Plan (Ghent); the Transferability Study (this document); the Communication Plan; three network articles, six quarterly network reports, the Final Network Report; the Local Testing Reports that capture the pilots run between transnational meetings; six ULG contact lists.

A separate Communication Plan is being developed by the network's communication managers. It covers the URBACT website and mini-site, the three network articles, the local dissemination events in each partner city, and the social media presence. An outline is available as annex.

Two principles connect the communications work to the methodology set out in this section. First, communication is treated as a competence in its own right, mirroring how Ghent treats it inside its Good Practice. Targeted communication coaching led by Ghent for Pezinok, Las Gabias and any other partner interested is part of this. Second, the local dissemination events at the end of the network are the moment when each city presents its Transfer Plan back to its own community, closing the loop between the European commitment and the local administration where the work has to land.

3.6 Final assessment

This network has a strong foundation. The partnership includes cities that genuinely want to change how they work, beyond collecting a European label. The Good Practice is well documented and has been seen first-hand by all partners. The modular structure gives each city a clear entry point. The study visits have already created working relationships between people who will be in conversation for the next two years.

The realistic expectation is that most cities will make solid progress on two or three modules and begin work on others. Full transfer of all six modules within the project's lifespan is not expected for any partner. Ghent itself took twenty years to build what it has. What URBAN ECHO can do is give each city a tested framework, practical tools, peer support and enough momentum to keep going after the project ends.

The biggest risk is the gap between ambition and institutional capacity that was visible in several cities. The network's methodology (three levels of support, the test-and-report cycle, bilateral backing for local change-makers, the ULG as local lever) is designed specifically to address this. Whether it succeeds will depend on how consistently it is applied, and on whether the political and administrative conditions in each city remain supportive over the next two years.

The phrase from the Ghent kick-off carries the assessment:



URBAN ECHO will succeed not when partners look like Ghent, but when each partner has built something that resonates with Ghent's practice while fitting its own context. The methodology and roadmap set out in this section are designed to make that possible.

URBAN ECHO

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URBACT



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