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Plan Einstein Academy

URBACT Innovation Transfer Network

Network Journal #3

Sep - Dec 2025

Plan Einstein Academy Network Journal #3, Jan 2026

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A. Network recap

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‘Plan Einstein’ and ‘Plan Einstein Academy’

Plan Einstein Academy is a two-year URBACT ‘Innovation Transfer Network’ working to transfer Utrecht’s ‘Plan Einstein’ concept to five other European cities.

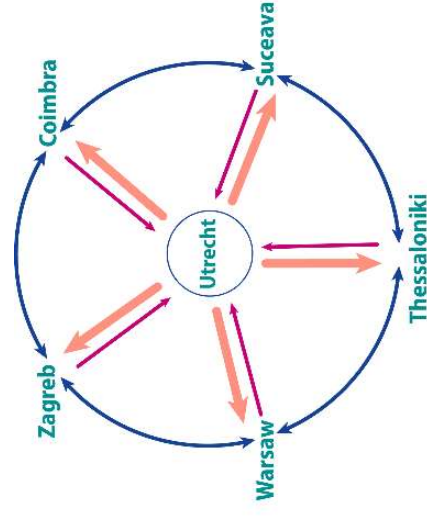
Plan Einstein is an innovative approach to local neighbourhood-level social cohesion bringing diverse local residents together as equals through open welcoming spaces and a diverse range of activities for socio-cultural engagement and personal development.

One of the strengths of Plan Einstein for its transfer is that local implementation can be very flexible. Spaces and activities can be very different from one location to another – so long as the principles of openness and inclusivity are respected.

Plan Einstein may – but does not have to – include a co-housing component bringing together newcomers and neighbourhood members. Implementation is best applied through an ecosystem approach – not isolated activities.

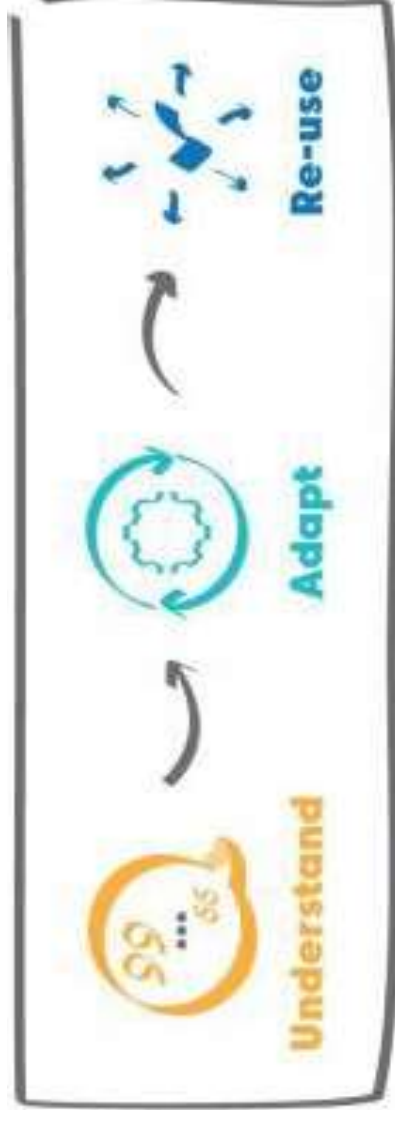


The network partnership



Network journey so far...

The first six months of the network (Sep 2024 - Feb 2025) were the '**Understand Phase**' – focused on building a solid understanding of Utrecht's original innovation - see [Network Journal #1](#).



Since March 2025, the Network has been in its '**Adapt Phase**' – where the focus is on exploring how the original innovation can be adapted for implementation in the five partner cities.

In Network Journal #2, we looked at the profile of our five transfer partners and their initial ideas for the potential of Plan Einstein into their own local context.

In this edition, we find out how their thinking has progressed and what local actions they are testing to put Plan Einstein approaches into action. We also look at what lessons we have learned as a network partnership about how best to plan the transfer of Plan Einstein to different local contexts.

Key milestones in the period Sep-Dec 2025 (Adapt Phase Q3+)

1. Launch of the Network Mid-Term Review,
Sep 2025.
2. In-person network meeting in Zagreb (TEX6),
1-3 Oct 2025
3. Bilateral health checks and Investment Plan
review sessions with each partner, Oct-Dec 2025
4. Online network meeting on ULG developments, 4
Nov 2025

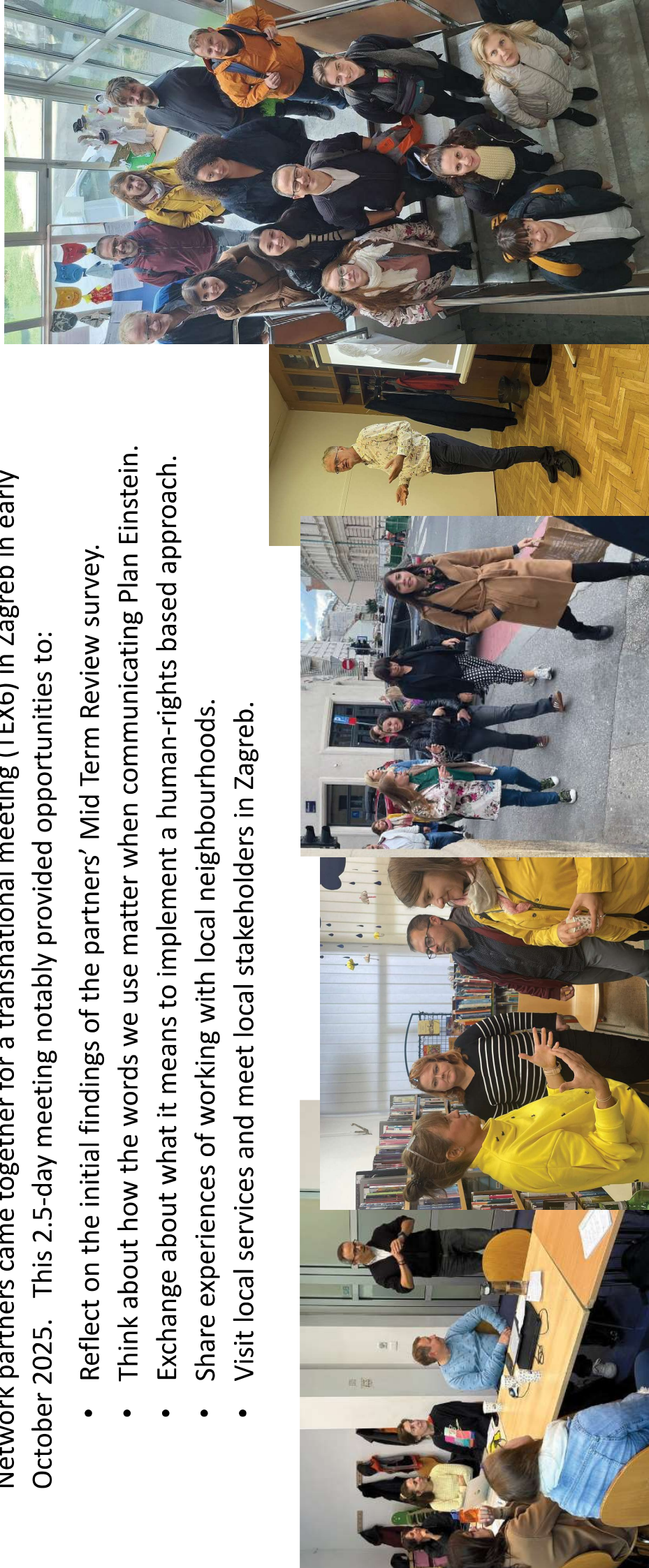


Network partners met in person in Zagreb for the 6th network transnational exchange meeting, 1-3 October, seen here in the city's Welcome Centre for Refugees and Migrants.

In-person network meeting in Zagreb, 1-3 October 2025

Network partners came together for a transnational meeting (TEX6) in Zagreb in early October 2025. This 2.5-day meeting notably provided opportunities to:

- Reflect on the initial findings of the partners' Mid Term Review survey.
- Think about how the words we use matter when communicating Plan Einstein.
- Exchange about what it means to implement a human-rights based approach.
- Share experiences of working with local neighbourhoods.
- Visit local services and meet local stakeholders in Zagreb.



B. Evolving thinking and testing actions

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1. Zagreb

The team in Zagreb have made perhaps the biggest shift in their thinking from the initial months of the project. Having started off thinking about a city-wide approach to transfer, they have become **increasingly convinced of the strategic value in taking a more neighbourhood-focused approach**.

They have **chosen to work in the neighbourhood of Travno** – it being the location also of the Porin Reception Centre. This is a remarkable change compared to their initial feelings that it would be too difficult to take action in this neighbourhood due to the potential political sensitivities in working in or around the Reception Centre.

A key aspect of their journey has been appreciating that **Plan Einstein is about addressing the needs of the whole local community** and not just the residents of the Reception Centre or other migrant newcomers. This has meant that they have opened themselves up to working with new and more diverse community actors to discuss how to create spaces and activities that are open and welcoming to all-comers – which still includes, but is not limited to the residents of the Reception Centre.

On this basis, they have started **working with new partners** – including the Cultural Centre in Travno and the local Dugave Library (pictured right).



Zagreb continued

The intention is to **use Travno as a pilot neighbourhood** in which to demonstrate the success of implementing Plan Einstein – before inspiring and supporting other neighbourhoods of the city to develop similar approaches.

The approach has **already achieved positive results in bringing together diverse community actors** who share a belief in open, inclusive approaches, but did not previously cooperate or explicitly work together to have more positive impact in their neighbourhood. In this way, the project is already starting to deliver a local ecosystem approach – one of the pillars of Plan Einstein implementation – including both broad community actors, together with more explicitly migrant-focused organisations.

At the same time, the city has evolved its thinking about its Welcome Centre for Migrants located in the city centre, which has limited space to become a truly open and welcoming space as Plan Einstein promotes. The idea is now to **decentralise its Welcome Centre** – taking information and support services into neighbourhoods and local communities using the new open, welcoming spaces that will be created within communities.

On this basis, the project will now co-create an Implementation Plan together with local stakeholders and deliver **small-scale testing actions in the Travno neighbourhood** to explore ways to create meaningful encounters between people whatever their background. Ideas include a multi-cultural choir and personal development courses.

2. Thessaloniki

Thessaloniki has taken a very **hands-on, practical approach to developing its ideas and thinking**, focusing on using testing actions to generate momentum towards the planning of Plan Einstein transfer.



The community garden testing action brought together people from different backgrounds and diverse ages.

While discussions about developing an ambitious co-housing project continue, the ULG coordinator worked to develop a small-scale action in a disadvantaged neighbourhood of the city. **Working together with a local school, they tested creation of a community garden** as a means of bringing people together whatever their age and background for a shared activity and meaningful encounters.

The successful activity showcased the benefits of community-focused activities in a specific neighbourhood and has **encouraged positive engagement and momentum towards the idea of organising more such activities** in the neighbourhood.

Further community activities they want to test in the neighbourhood now include woodworking workshops and backgammon tournaments.

3. Warsaw

A critical challenge for the ULG Coordinator has been **the high levels of expectation and needs** expressed by the diverse range of NGOs active in the field of migrant reception and integration. Several have wanted to work explicitly on the topic of NGO funding. However, Zagreb provided a constructive and inspiring example of the advantages of focusing down on a pilot neighbourhood and working with a broader range of community actors.

The team are now focused on **identifying activities that already fit** the philosophy and **using small-scale testing actions** to see what they can learn in terms of developing a more coherent Plan Einstein approach.

They decided to seek proposals from potential service providers to deliver small-scale community-based activities.

For example, a joint mosaic-making workshop was delivered by an artist from Belarus during World Refugee Day (*see photo*).



Warsaw continued

The team have **continued to engage** **MALs** (Neighbourhood Activity Places) in the city to explore implementation of Plan Einstein-type activities.

Workshops and community meetings were launched in MAL Kotłownia and MAL Wolska Mozaika as **testing actions**.



These tests (see photo) showed that although the spaces are attractive and suitable for inclusive activities, there was a **need for stronger neighbourhood-level promotion**, multilingual communication, involvement of community ambassadors, and closer coordination with NGOs and resident leaders with the aim to achieve greater participation.

Other tests and small-scale actions already developed in Warsaw include social skills training for teenagers, an open Conversation Club, integration activities for children, and courses on entrepreneurship and professional development.

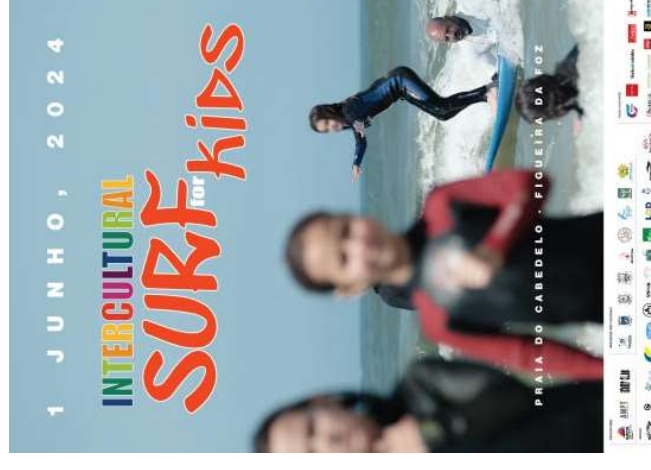
4. Coimbra

Coimbra has been progressing along two main strands of activity. On the one hand, they have been working to **incorporate Plan Einstein principles into the new Migrant Integration Plans** being developed at municipal and intermunicipal level across Coimbra. Supported by an AMIF project, these plans aim to provide a key lever to align existing actions, strengthen coordination across municipalities and embed community-based approaches into formal policy frameworks.

On the other hand, they have been working with their ecosystem of partners to **identify existing activities taking place in the region** that already apply Plan Einstein principles.

Through the ULG members they have already identified more than 20 practices implemented in at least 12 municipalities, covering areas such as reception, social inclusion, education, employment, health and community engagement.

Inspiring initiatives include **collective walks** involving locals and newcomers, **multicultural forest fire response teams**, intercultural lunches between foreign and Portuguese neighbours. An **inclusive surf festival** in a coastal municipality of the region brings together migrant and local children in a major annual activity which creates meaningful encounters around a specific aspect of local culture (see poster, right).



5. Suceava

For the team in Suceava, the **priority remains the development of an open, welcoming space** for meaningful encounters in the city centre. They have been working to identify potential locations – already owned by the Municipality – which could be turned over to this use and negotiating with colleagues in the local authority accordingly. They are hopeful of being able to confirm an appropriate location to include in the Investment Plan.

They are also exploring the idea to develop a **sewing workshop** to bring together ladies from Ukraine and Romania to exchange sewing techniques and ideas, focused on the traditional Romanian blouse (see image) which is recognised on UNESCO's 'Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity'. One of the NGOs represented in the ULG has an appropriate space to offer for such an inclusive activity built on local cultural identity.

The team is also exploring ideas around **how to incorporate Plan Einstein into mainstream cultural activities**, such as encouraging more inclusive approaches within local sports clubs and the incorporation of more inclusive programming in local museums and the theatre.



C. Next steps

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Key activities and topics for the ongoing work of the network

The up-coming key next steps for the Plan Einstein Academy network, Jan - Mar 2026, include:

- ✓ Next online network meeting on ULG developments in early Jan 2026.
- ✓ Conclusion of the Network Mid-Term Review in Jan 2026 and any associated updates to the network methodology and roadmap.
- ✓ Submission of first drafts of each partner city's Investment Plans, mid-Jan 2026
- ✓ URBACT ITNs' 'Prepare for Re-Use Phase' kick-off meeting, Paris, 3-5 Feb 2026
- ✓ Online TEX7 meetings focused on key thematic topics: Future Free Approach & Entrepreneurship; and Funding and Finance, Feb 2026
- ✓ In-person TEX8 Meeting in Coimbra, 25-27 March 2026, focused on Peer Reviewing the city Investment Plans for transferring Plan Einstein.
- ✓ Ongoing regular bilateral support and network communications