

WISH CITIES NETWORK JOURNAL I AUGUST 2025

Written by
Eddy Adams
WISH-CITIES
Lead Expert



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ABOUT THIS REPORT

This first network journal covers the WISH-CITIES network journey from April to early June 2025. Our network focus is on youth wellbeing, building on and transferring from the Innovative Actions experience of the Lead partner, Milan. The network also involves other partner cities with great knowledge and experience of supporting young people, so although this is an Innovation Transfer Network (ITN), the learning and transfer is very much a two-way process.

This journal covers a busy period for the network. We met with other ITNs in Paris in April, hosted our first Transfer partner meeting in Gaia, Portugal, in May, and held our first webinar – focused on Rotterdam, in early June. We also started work on our testing actions, shifting the local work into a new gear.

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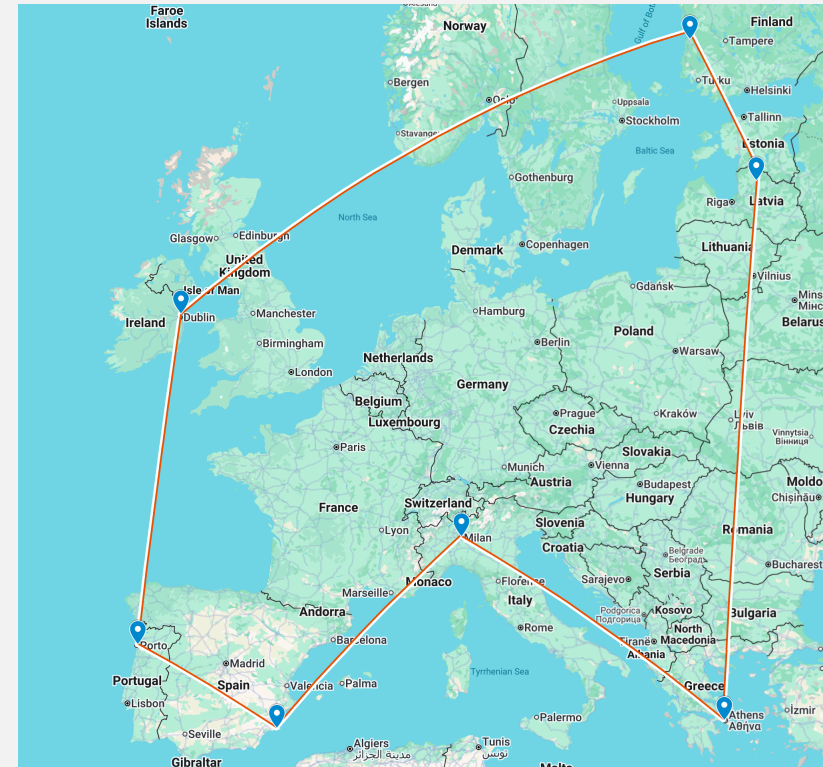


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WISH-CITIES: THE BIG PICTURE I

The WISH-CITIES network mobilises cities of all sizes from the four corners of Europe. Although they differ in many ways, the network partners have a commitment to improving youth wellbeing and empowerment. They do this at a time when almost one quarter of children in the EU are living in poverty (Eurostat 2022) and there are growing concerns about the rising levels of mental health issues amongst the young.

Cities are in the vanguard of addressing these issues, to ensure that children and young people have the best start in life, and the opportunity to achieve happiness and their full potential.



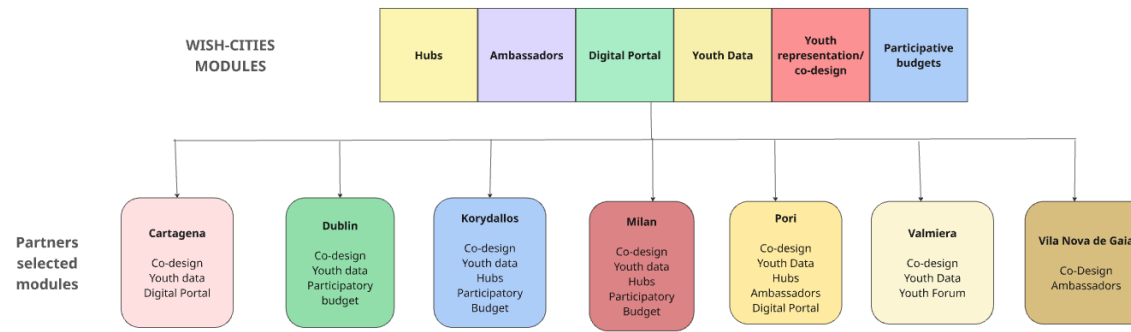
The WISH-CITIES network

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WISH-CITIES: THE BIG PICTURE 2



Mix of modules from Milan and TPs

Partners select transfer modules

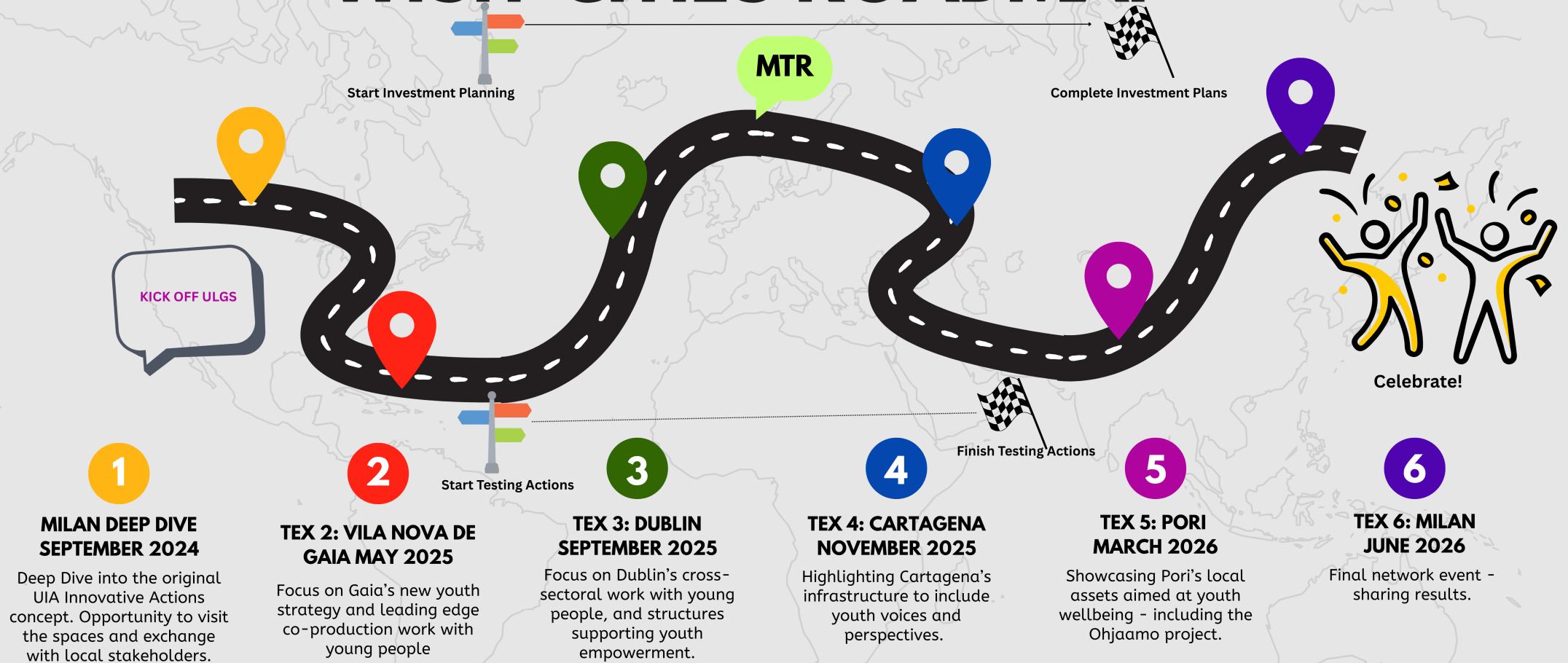
Youth co-design = compulsory shared module

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WISH-CITIES ROADMAP



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OUR FIRST STOP: VILA NOVA DE GAIA PORTUGAL

WISH-CITIES
TRANSNATIONAL EXCHANGE VISIT
14TH AND 15TH MAY 2025

Gaia is Portugal's 2025 Youth capital. The city has a strong track record of involving young people in decision-making and service design. It has Portugal's largest participative youth budget (€240,000), an effective Youth Council and a new and innovative municipal youth plan.

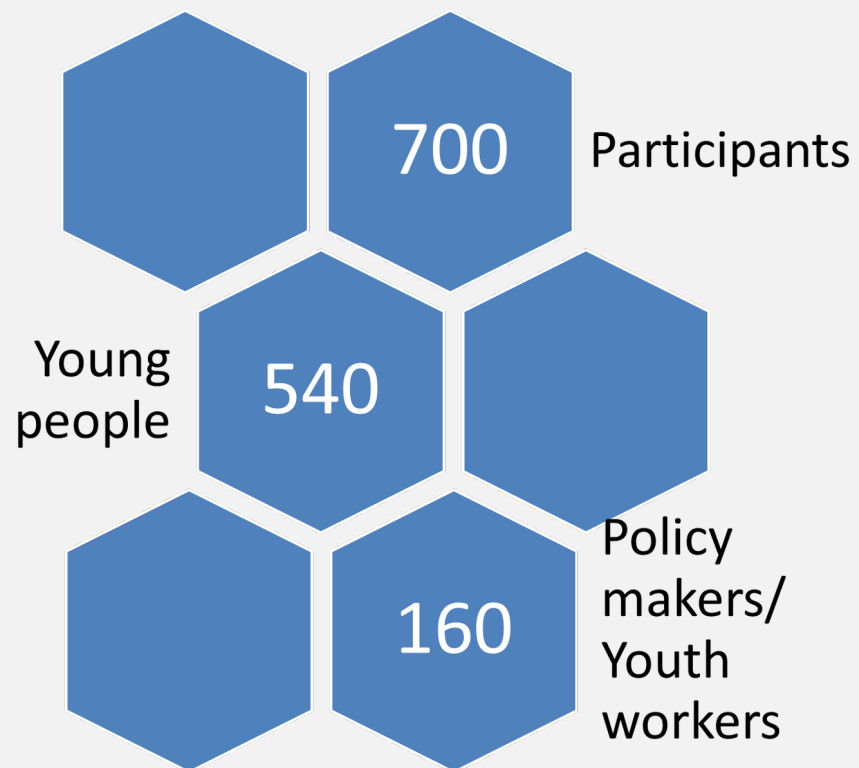


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GAIA'S MUNICIPAL YOUTH PLAN – THE PROCESS

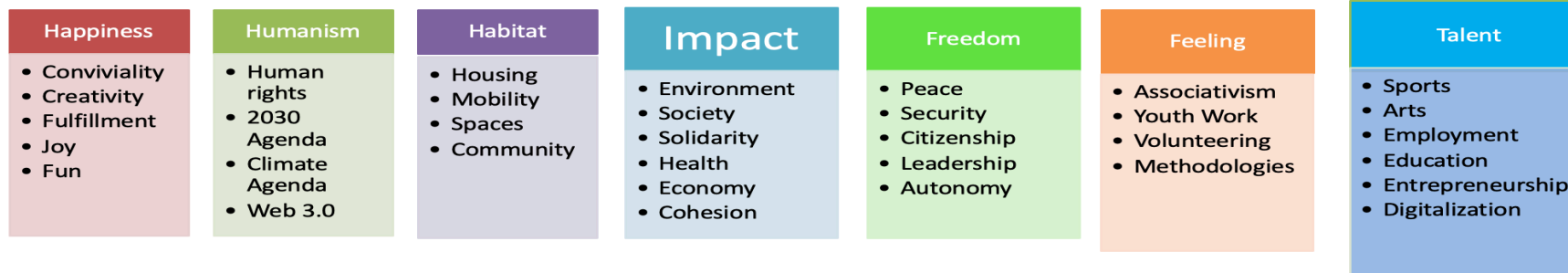


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GAIA MUNICIPAL PLAN THEMES



The youth-centred aspect of the Gaia planning process is reflected in the final output. This is clearly different to a typical 'city plan', as it includes themes that participating young people prioritised. These include 'Happiness' 'Humanism' 'Habitat' and 'Talent' which we would not typically see in such a document.

VILA NOVA DE GAIA – KEY TAKE AWAYS

- Mobilise strong political leadership
- Adopt a fully inclusive approach
- Find creative ways to enable participation
- Trust young people in your processes
- Continually review and improve services



WISH-CITIES WEBINARS

The WISH-CITIES webinar series provides an opportunity to widen the network scope and involve cities conducting leading edge work with children and young people. The series will focus on *Lighthouse Cities* that are pioneering new, innovative and effective ways of promoting youth wellbeing.

The webinar series will run through June 2025 until spring 2026 as open invitation, interactive online events that provide space to examine and discuss successful city approaches to working with young people.



Photo by [Joshua Hibbert](#) on [Unsplash](#)

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WEBINAR I: SHINING A LIGHT ON ROTTERDAM

Rotterdam, Europe's largest port, is a diverse, dynamic city with a strong reputation for innovation. This extends to its work with young people, which includes a sophisticated and well-structured mentoring system, that is open to all school-age children.

Raisri Roekalea from the city's mentoring service and mentor Lyvana Ignacio, joined us to share their experiences and help us understand the model.



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WEBINAR 1: THE ROTTERDAM MENTORING MODEL

As part of a national regeneration programme focused on Rotterdam South, all local school pupils are provided with a mentor. Mentors are young higher-education students, often from similar backgrounds to their mentees. Mentors are trained and supported in the role, and given credits in recognition of their work.

The match between mentor and mentee is based on the former's university focus and the needs of the school pupil. Mentors are offered a minimum of one hour's mentoring per week for 20 weeks, delivered during school time. The precise format and structure of the support are negotiated between the pairs.



Image courtesy of Hogeshool Rotterdam

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WEBINAR 1: BENEFITS OF THE ROTTERDAM MENTORING MODEL

In terms of benefits, mentees report that the process helps them think about potential careers, as well as building their social skills and emotional development.

Mentors say that the experience builds their confidence, develops their coaching skills and helps them identify the skills they have – and how they might be applied in the labour market.

Both mentors and mentees note that the experience raises their awareness of what it means to grow up in a deprived area and how they can transcend their background to have successful professional careers.



Image courtesy of Hogeshool Rotterdam

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LOCAL FOCUS



LOCAL FOCUS

After the completion of the initial 'Understand' stage, the ITN focus switches to 'Adapt' which coincides with greater emphasis on local level activity. During the network set-up stage, partners established their ULGs, which have been configured in different ways, reflecting their local context and structures.

The ADAPT stage is where ULG members will design and develop their testing actions, where they seek to implement and experiment on the ground.



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LOCAL FOCUS: ULG MODELS

In most partner cities the ULG is now quite well established. The format, composition and frequency of meetings differs, depending on the local context. In some cases, partners have established a completely new body. In others, they have built upon an existing structure, which already involves some of the key stakeholders. Factors which influence this include:

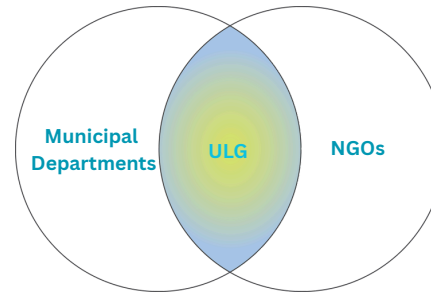
- The spatial scale of the city
- The existing network and collaboration structures
- Having an existing ULG in place



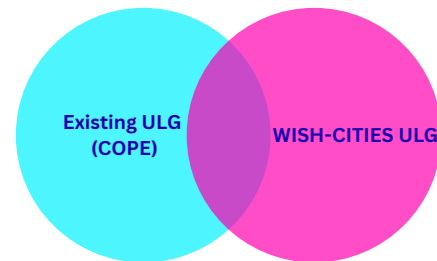
LOCAL FOCUS: ULG MODELS



Milan ULG model



Pori and Valmiera model



Korydallos model

We can see the diversity of ULG models from these different partner examples. The Milan version comprises a smaller core group, who meet regularly, complemented by a larger 'Community of Interest' that meets twice a year. In both Pori and Valmiera, the ULG brings together different municipal departments and key NGOs. In Korydallos, the WISH-CITIES ULG is aligned with an existing ULG, established for the URBACT COPE network.

HERE COME THE TESTING ACTIONS

At the Paris ITN meeting in April, Liat Rogel introduced the concept of testing actions and invited networks to ‘think like a lion, act like a cat.’

Liat and Eddy have subsequently been working with our network partners to ideate this notion, and to explore the potential for testing actions within the network.



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HERE COME THE TESTING ACTIONS

To help partners structure and develop their potential ideas, we used the URBACT testing actions canvas. This starts with the notion of the challenge and playfully asks partners to consider, what if? It also grounds the experiment in reality by inviting partners to reflect on what they want to test – the *how* of this activity – and, critically, how they will know if they have succeeded.

The Challenge	What if...	We want to test if...
Our IDEA		Measurement

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HERE COME THE TESTING ACTIONS

At the Gaia TEX, we started exploring potential testing ideas, using the canvas.

CARTAGENA

The Challenge	What if...	We want to test if...
The recently created youth body be recognised and binding by the local Government	What would municipal policies be like if young people were the protagonists and participated in their decisions?	this body is really effective and the right model for participation and important decisions - not only the city.
Our IDEA	Measurement - N° of participants - Proposals collected - Implementation of proposals - Working sessions - Transfer proposals	
The creation of a municipal youth council and that this council is provided by statute, regulated by community, etc. as a way of giving it its own entity.		

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CITY OF FORLÌ

improved youth data

The Challenge	What if...	We want to test if...
Young people's wellbeing	comprehensive information would be continually/ all the time in use for evaluation and decision making	what kind of information do we need to get comprehensive enough
Our IDEA	Measurement - complex model for "data collection" - does the actions come to life? - do the proposals lead something? - DOES THE WELLBEING GET BETTER? FOR YOUNG	
make a pilot: to choose some starting point, regular checkins, presented to various stakeholders, thinking proposals to be made → these taken to city government		

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Dublin

The Challenge	What if...	We want to test if...
Youth services not aligned with real community needs especially in deprived areas	What if youth participation budget is shared amongst "at risk" - deprived communities	if youth outcomes the test matches the funder's criteria
Our IDEA	Measurement - Different issues do you issues match funding criteria.	
- Group of youths in each area prepared funding application to apply for funding to address youth issues		

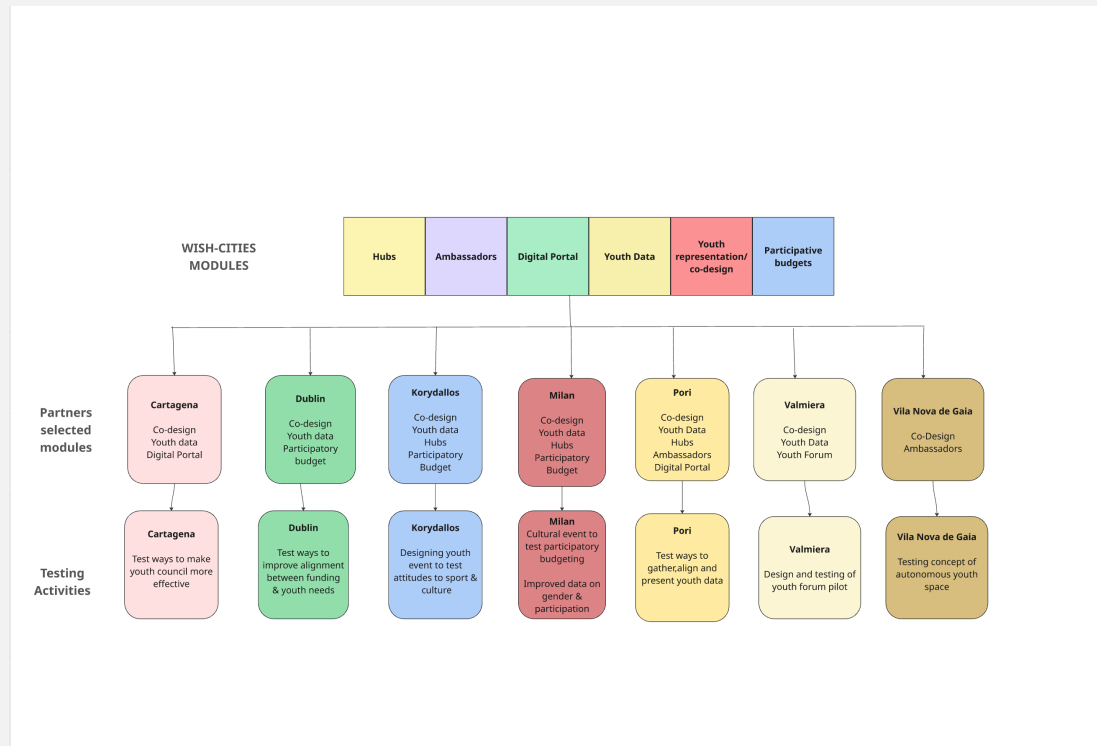
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HERE COME THE TESTING ACTIONS



In early summer 2025, here's where we are with the ideas around testing actions. Each partner has identified at least one testing action to undertake in the coming months, where they will refine, implement and test an activity that has been developed with the support of the Ad Hoc (Liat Rogel) and Lead Expert.

LEAD EXPERT REFLECTIONS



“Our network partners are bound by the common challenges they face and their shared commitment to improving youth wellbeing. This semester has seen the network shift from baseline activity and theoretical exchanges to a stronger focus on practical local actions. This is implicit in the transition from the ‘Understand’ to the ‘Adapt’ stage. With it, comes the opportunity to mobilise local stakeholders, through the ULGs and the testing actions. These interventions are informed by our transnational framework, and the TEX in Gaia set the bar very high, inspiring partners with the scope and quality of the city’s work with young people. For me, personally, it was very satisfying to see Gaia’s commitment to inclusion, with young people from all backgrounds active and visible during our work there. Let’s keep up the good work, as we get deeper into our innovation transfer journey”

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WHAT'S UP NEXT?



At the local level, partners will implement and complete their testing actions and our focus will shift towards the Investment Planning process. The second WISH-CITIES webinar – focused on youth peer action – takes place early September then we have TEX 2 in Dublin followed by TEX 3 in Cartagena in November. Between these TEX meetings, we will conduct the Mid Term Reflection (MTR) process, the results of which can help share and inform the remainder of our network activity.

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STAYING IN TOUCH

If you're interested in our work and want to follow our journey, you can do this in several ways. First, there's our website which you can find at <https://urbact.eu/networks/wish-cities>. We also have a Linked In page which you can access [here](#).

Looking forward to seeing you somewhere on the road!

Eddy Adams
WISH-CITIES Lead Expert
July 2025



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