

WISH CITIES NETWORK JOURNAL 2 NOVEMBER 2025

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ABOUT THIS REPORT

This second network journal covers the WISH-CITIES network journey from July to November 2025. With our network focus on youth wellbeing, this semester has seen our focus shift to the local level, as Transfer Partners consider how they will design and implement their innovation transfer process. In this period, much of our attention has been on adaptation and experimentation.

This period has included two in-person Transnational Exchange Meetings (TNMs) which took place in Dublin and Cartagena. We have also held a number of online sessions as well as the second in our webinar series.

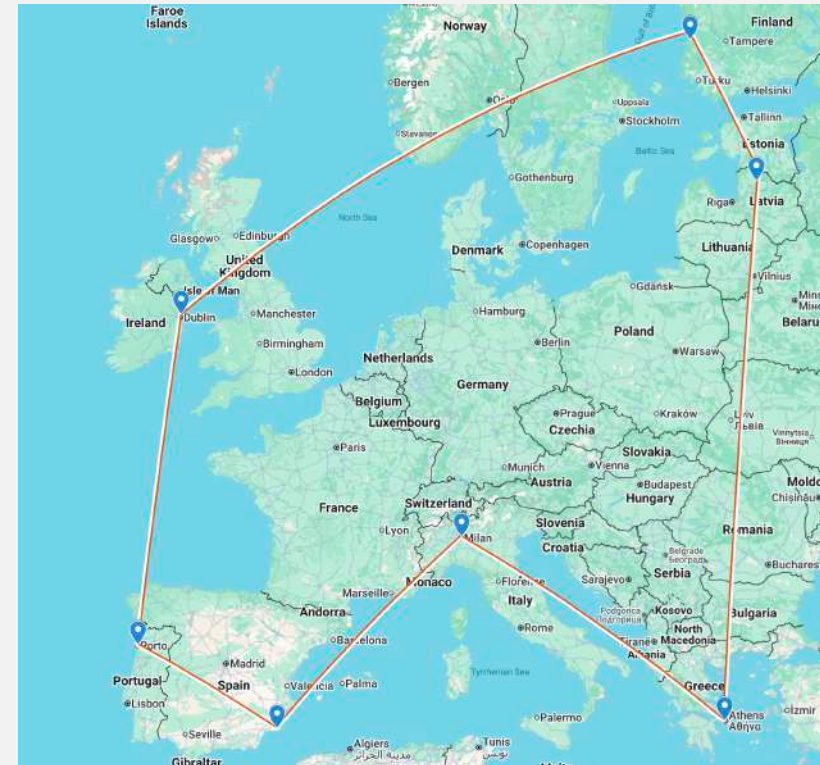
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WISH-CITIES REMINDER : THE BIG PICTURE I

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.



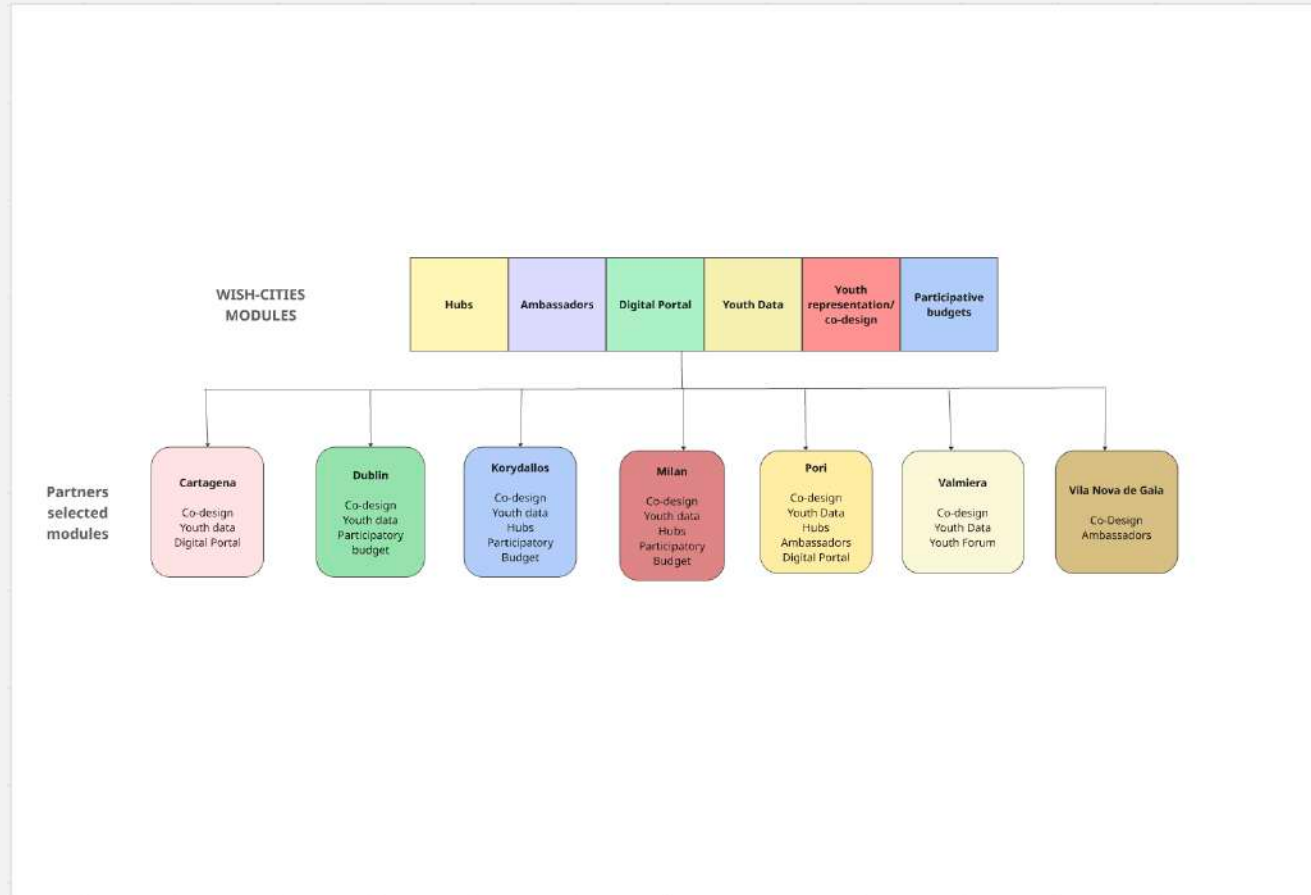
The WISH-CITIES network

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WISH-CITIES REMINDER: THE BIG PICTURE 2



Mix of
modules from
Milan and TPs

Partners
select transfer
modules

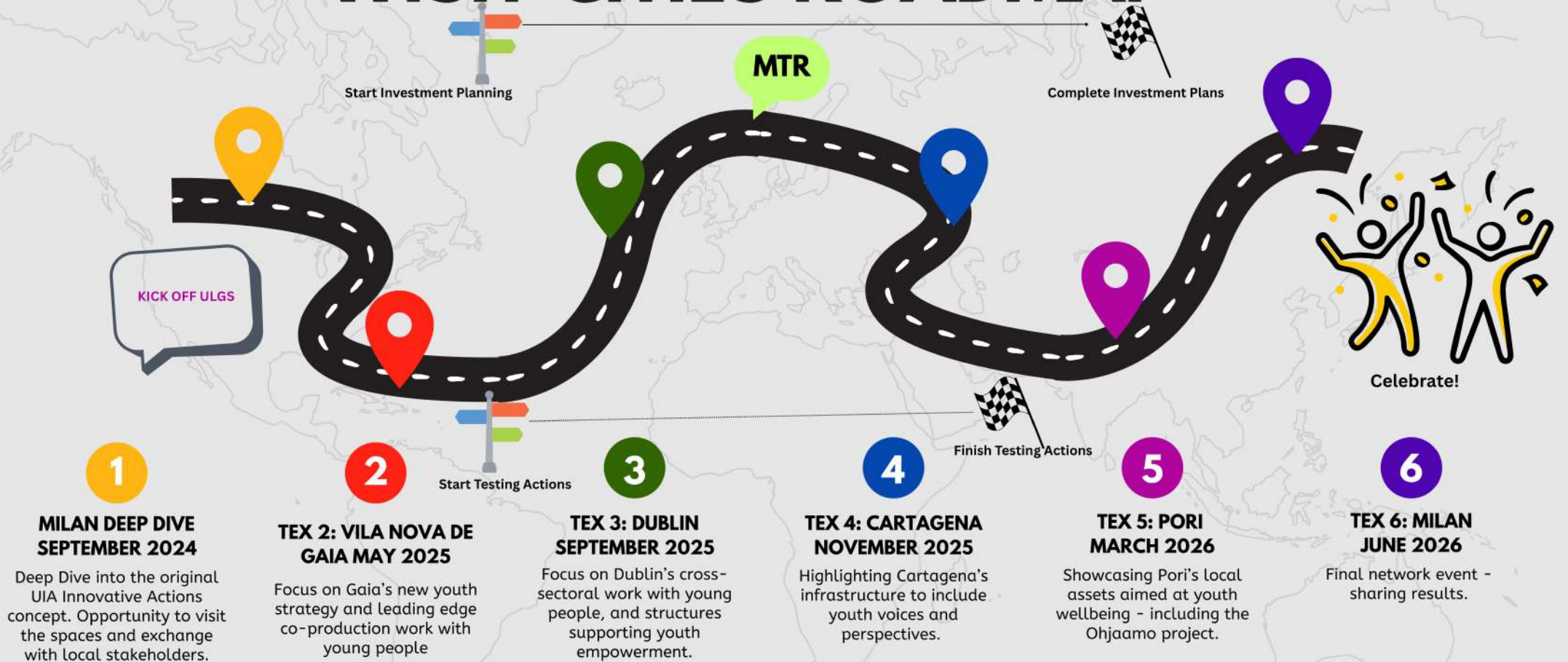
Youth co-design
= compulsory
shared module

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WISH-CITIES ROADMAP



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OUR SECOND STOP: DUBLIN IRELAND

WISH-CITIES
TRANSNATIONAL EXCHANGE VISIT

9th and 10th September 2025

Dublin, Ireland's capital city, has a population of almost 600,000. More than one quarter of residents are children and young people. The city has an extensive network of support services, provided through the public sector and its strong NGO base.



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DUBLIN DATA CONTEXT

- Like many capital cities, Dublin is characterized by high levels of wealth and poverty, with growing socioeconomic polarization
- Census data indicates highest concentrations of children & youth in peripheral disadvantaged areas such as Ballyfermot and Ballymun
- Drivers such as the pandemic and increased digital use have contributed to rising rates of mental health issues amongst young people



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DUBLIN – KEY TAKE AWAYS

- Well-established and strong collaboration between the public and NGO sectors
- Important emphasis on the role of community-based intermediary organisations, and trusted adults within them
- Youth-work an important and visible service – including detached model which was a new approach for some network members
- Dublin makes good use of cultural events as a way to build connections with young people



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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 2 : YOUTH PEER COLLECTIVES AGAINST VIOLENCE

Our September webinar tackled the important theme of violence affecting young people. Specifically, it focused on the innovative work in two English cities - Bradford and Hull - that brings young people together to design and implement anti-violence measures.

This model, which has been widely adopted by cities in the UK, is based on a peer-to-peer format developed by the Young Foundation, a London-based social innovation charity. At its heart, the *Peer Action Collective* supports young people to take action that can prevent and mitigate the violence which affects the lives of many youngsters. This includes bullying and intimidation in on-line, as well as face to face, contexts.



Image: Courtesy of the Young Foundation

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OUR THIRD STOP: CARTAGENA SPAIN

WISH-CITIES
TRANSNATIONAL EXCHANGE VISIT
19th and 20th November 2025

Cartagena, located in south east Spain, is a historical city with a strong naval tradition. It is a young city with a youth population of 36,454 which accounts for 17.7% of the total population. Since 2018 Cartagena has been designated as a UNICEF 'Child-Friendly City'



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CARTAGENA INTERVENTIONS

- The council operates with 36 people specializing in youth issues and a budget of less than 2 million euros (excluding infrastructure).
- Cartagena supports a range of interventions to empower young people including its Youth Forum, its youth hubs a participative budget and its annual child/youth manifestation



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CARTAGENA INTERVENTIONS

On Thursday 20th November over 1,000 young people marched on City Hall to articulate their rights as children, in line with the UNICEF principles. A manifesto setting out these details (including the right to play, the right to study, the right to green space) was read from the stage, and later the Cartagena Youth Council met formally with the Mayor, senior Ayuntamiento staff and UNICEF representatives, to review progress on children's issues and to set out the Council's priority demands for the years ahead.



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CARTAGENA – KEY TAKE AWAYS

- The city has a strong and long-standing infrastructure designed to support and empower young people
- There is high-level political commitment to promoting youth wellbeing and democratic participation
- Children and young people are well prepared to actively participate in these structures
- Careful steps have been taken to support marginalized children to play an active part



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LOCAL FOCUS



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OUR TESTING ACTIONS

Testing actions give space to experiment with new products or services. They can also be used to address gaps in knowledge and experience. At the same time, they can create an attractive platform for local stakeholder collaboration, as well as raising the visibility of WISH-CITIES' work at local level with key stakeholders, such as politicians and decision-makers.

In this semester, Ad-Hoc Expert Liat Rogel has been on hand to support network partners as they develop, implement and evaluate these model actions designed to improve youth wellbeing in a variety of different ways. Liat's support has taken the form of an online Worksop with all partners, complemented by a series of bilateral meetings to explore each partner's concept more deeply. The Ad-Hoc support will conclude with a final webinar in early December, where partners will review their experiences together.



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TESTING ACTIONS: MILAN

Milan has an established support framework for children and young people. However, it is always looking to improve these and the city is using the testing actions opportunity to explore ways to improve the functioning of their local youth hubs. It is also testing ways to get better youth data, though innovative approaches to data-gathering.

Milan has commissioned the Politecnico di Milano to lead this work, which kicked off in November and will conclude the early 2026. It builds on the city's commitment to improve its understanding of the issues young people face, and to co-design improved ways to support them.



TESTING ACTIONS: CARTAGENA

Through their testing actions, Cartagena aims to address an issue which many other cities face. This is the challenge of retaining the involvement of active young people beyond the age of eighteen.

Currently, the involvement of young participants in structures like the Youth Council ends at this age, and there is no formal mechanism to retain their association. Cartagena is keen to change this, and the testing actions will provide space to explore the practical options.

The potential prize is quite clear: the continued involvement of committed and experienced young people who can make a difference at city level.



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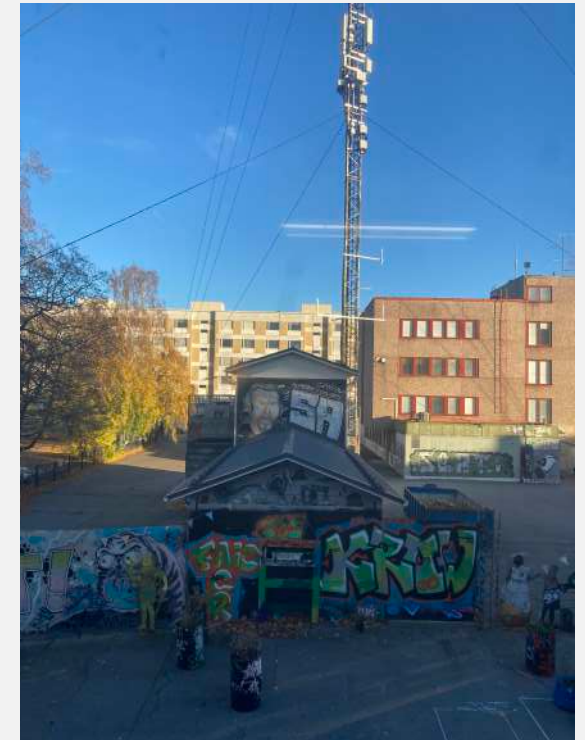


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TESTING ACTIONS: PORI

Like many Finnish cities, Pori has a strong reputation for service co-design and an established track record of listening to and implementing with young people. There is already a highly effective one-stop shop in the city, and Pori plans to extend its range of physical hubs providing services to young people.

As part of its testing actions, Pori is constructing an exchange with young people to gain a better understanding of potential service needs in these new spaces. Rather than assume what they want, the municipality is conducting a series of listening activities to help shape its evolving service offer.



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TESTING ACTIONS: KORYDALLOS

Korydallos is looking to improve levels of trust between the administration and young people.

As part of its testing actions approach, Korydallos is trying to design new ways to bring young people together, in order to listen to them and to place their concerns and suggestions at the heart of its local youth policies.

This has not been an easy task, and the city council has learned about what doesn't work - as well as what does - in trying to engage young people this way. The hope is that through this valuable experience, Korydallos finds new, effective ways to conduct a trusted dialogue with its young people.



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TESTING ACTIONS: DUBLIN

Dublin's testing action explores how Community Youth Workers could be embedded within local government structures by introducing a Human Learning Systems (HLS) approach to youth and community development.

The testing action will assess whether this integration can improve outcomes for young people while influencing national policy and education systems. The concept has gained traction at the national level, having been presented to the Taoiseach's Office and leading to the formation of a cross-government working group on Human Learning Systems. The pilot is expected to begin in 2026 in the Ballymun area, subject to funding and ministerial approval.



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TESTING ACTIONS: VILA NOVA DE GAIA

Vila Nova de Gaia has a strong reputation for youth empowerment, and is currently Portugal's National Youth Capital. With the largest youth participatory budget in the country and a well-established Youth Council, it has sophisticated tools to hear youth voices.

Gaia is using the testing actions opportunity to examine some of its own assumptions. Their local experiment seeks to hand over power to young people to decide how they want to use identified civic spaces. In this way, Gaia Municipality will 'let go', allowing youngsters to determine how some key local assets are used. The city hopes that a successful experiment will help inform future approaches to service provision.



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TESTING ACTIONS: VALMIERA

As a new municipality, Valmiera lacks a dedicated youth department, a coordinated youth work structure, and a formal youth strategy. The city's Democracy Starts in Family election serves as a strategic testing action designed to test internal coordination capacity and build an evidence base for a future youth strategy.

The election functions not just as a youth vote, but as a mechanism for organizational learning. Its most valuable finding is that the municipality can organise the activity internally, while external support proves less effective. This insight provides evidence to justify future investment in internal capacity as a key pillar of the emerging youth strategy.



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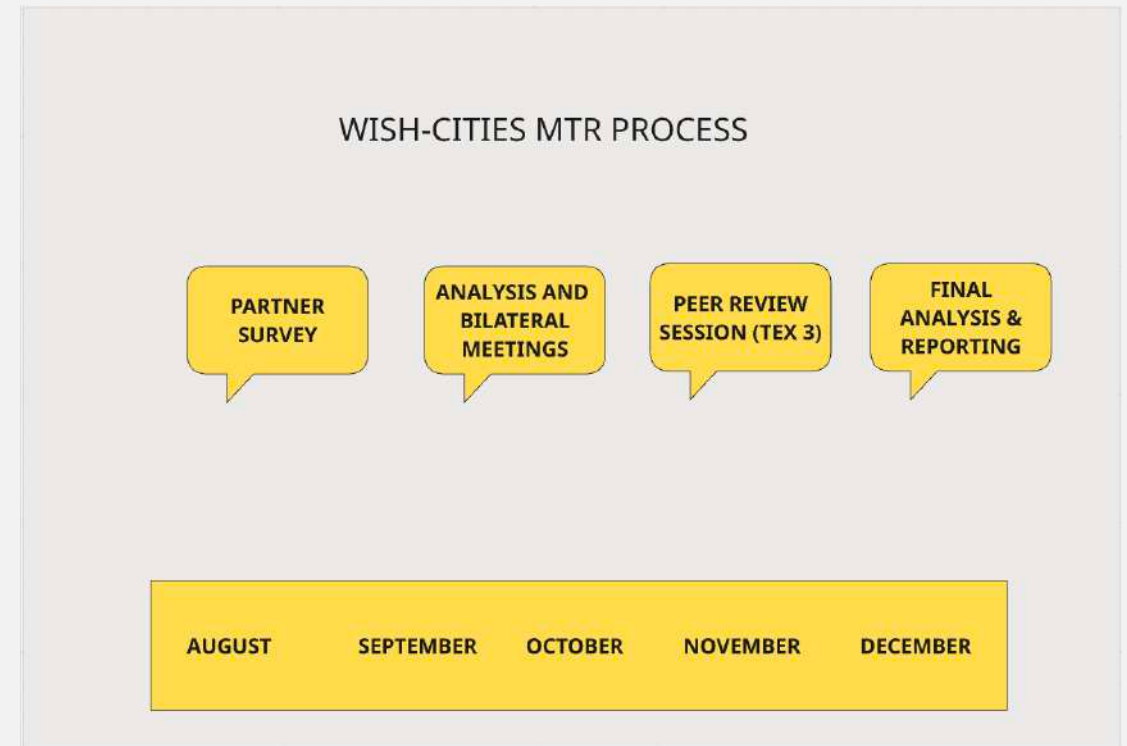
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THE MID TERM REFLECTION

The Mid-Term Reflection (MTR) has been conducted during this semester. At this mid-point, partners have been invited to feedback on the experience so far and to propose ways to improve its performance in the final months ahead.

The process has included an on-line survey, a workshop during the Cartagena TEX and a final analysis and review of the key findings.

The final MTR report will be produced in January 2026.



LEAD EXPERT REFLECTIONS



“During this semester, network partners have taken charge of their activities at local level, through both the Testing Actions and their initial activity around the Investment/Continuity Plans. There is now a stronger sense of bottom-up ownership to WISH-CITIES, which is very positive.

Network partners have taken inspiration, and practical tips, from their study visits to Dublin and Cartagena. Both of these cities offered fresh ideas and methods, which created food for thoughts amongst our partners.

All of this inspiration can now feed into the final outputs that they have already started to develop. There is still room for some new ideas – as we visit Pori in the spring – whilst the MTR feedback offers space to make some adjustments to how we work together ”

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WHAT'S UP NEXT?



Time flies and we already approach the final year of our network collaboration. Ahead of that, there is still work to do, and fun to be had, as we prepare for our final TEX meeting in Pori, Finland, during the next semester. Alongside this, we look forward to hearing about Vienna's impactful work with young people, at our next webinar in January.

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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
November 2025



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