

WISH CITIES NETWORK JOURNAL 3

March 2026

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URBACT



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ABOUT THIS REPORT

This third network journal covers the WISH-CITIES network journey from December 2025 to March 2026. This semester the network has concluded its Mid Term Review (MTR) process, and shifted its main focus to the production of the final outputs – the Investment and Continuity Plans.

This period has included one in-person Transnational Exchange (TEX) meeting which took place in Pori, Finland, early March. WISH-CITIES also came together with the other Innovation Transfer Networks in Paris in February. Before this, we also hosted our third webinar, showcasing Vienna's democracy work with children and young people.

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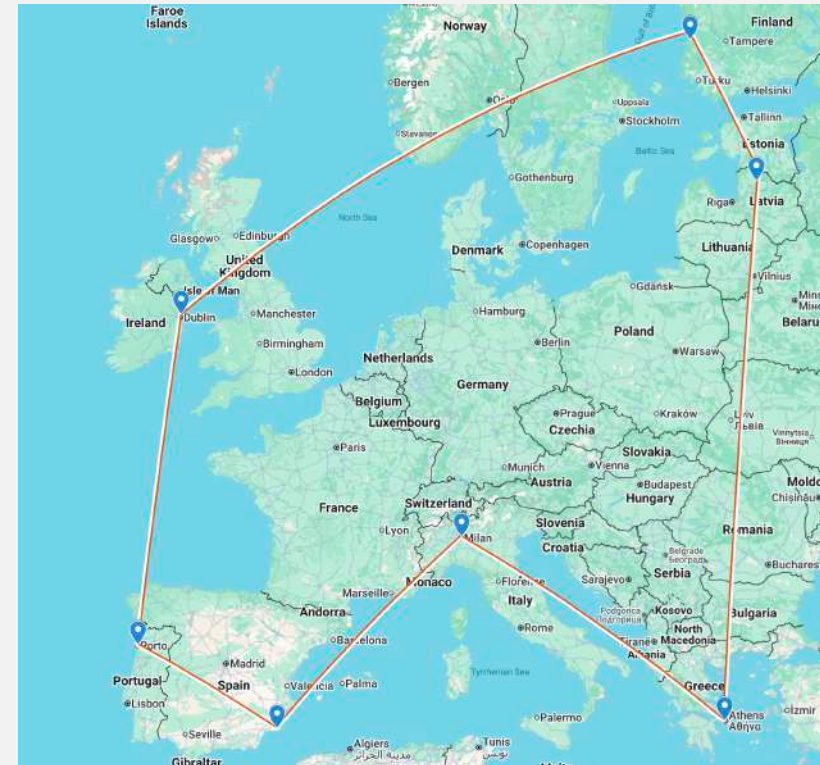


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WISH-CITIES REMINDER : THE BIG PICTURE I

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.

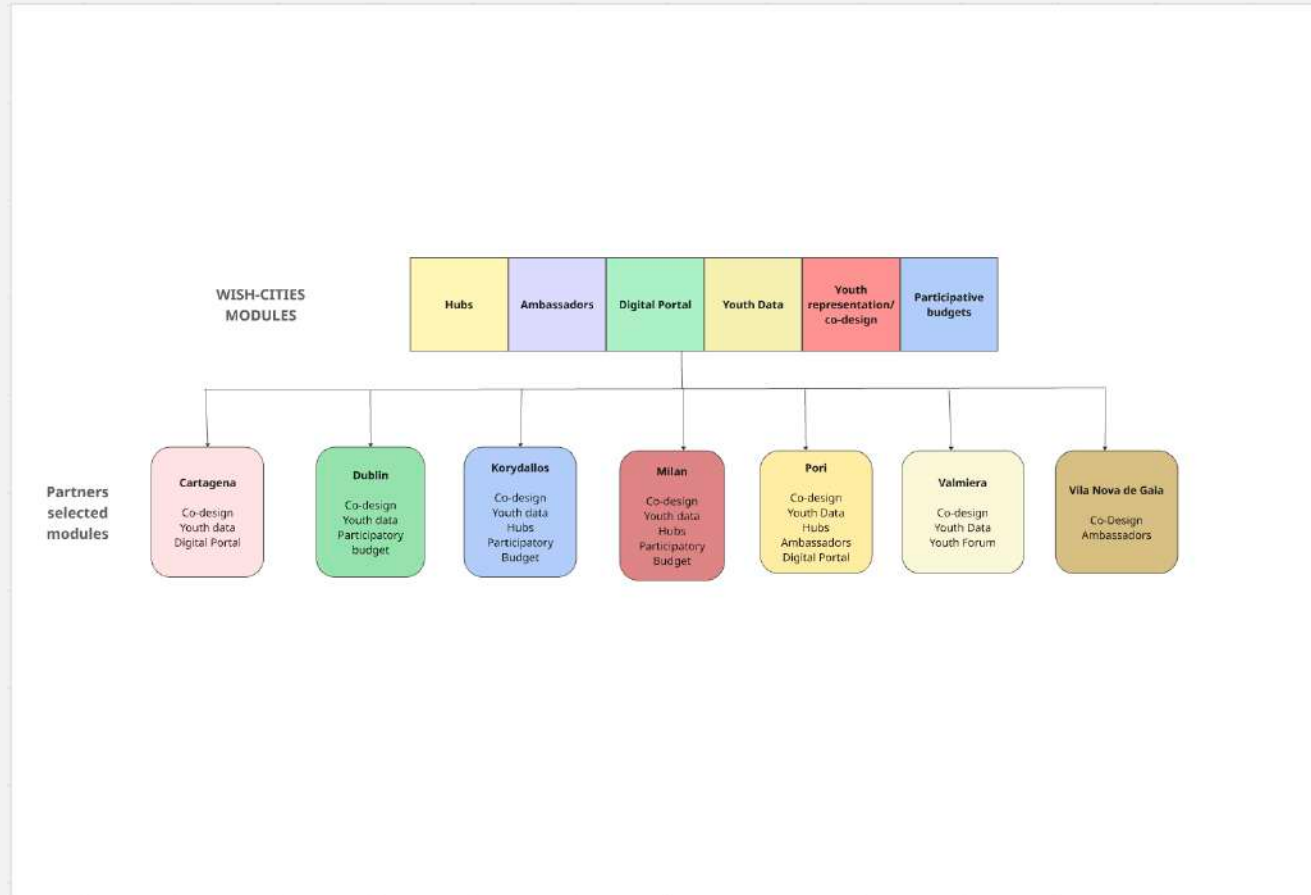


The WISH-CITIES network



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WISH-CITIES REMINDER: THE BIG PICTURE 2



Mix of
modules from
Milan and TPs

Partners
select transfer
modules

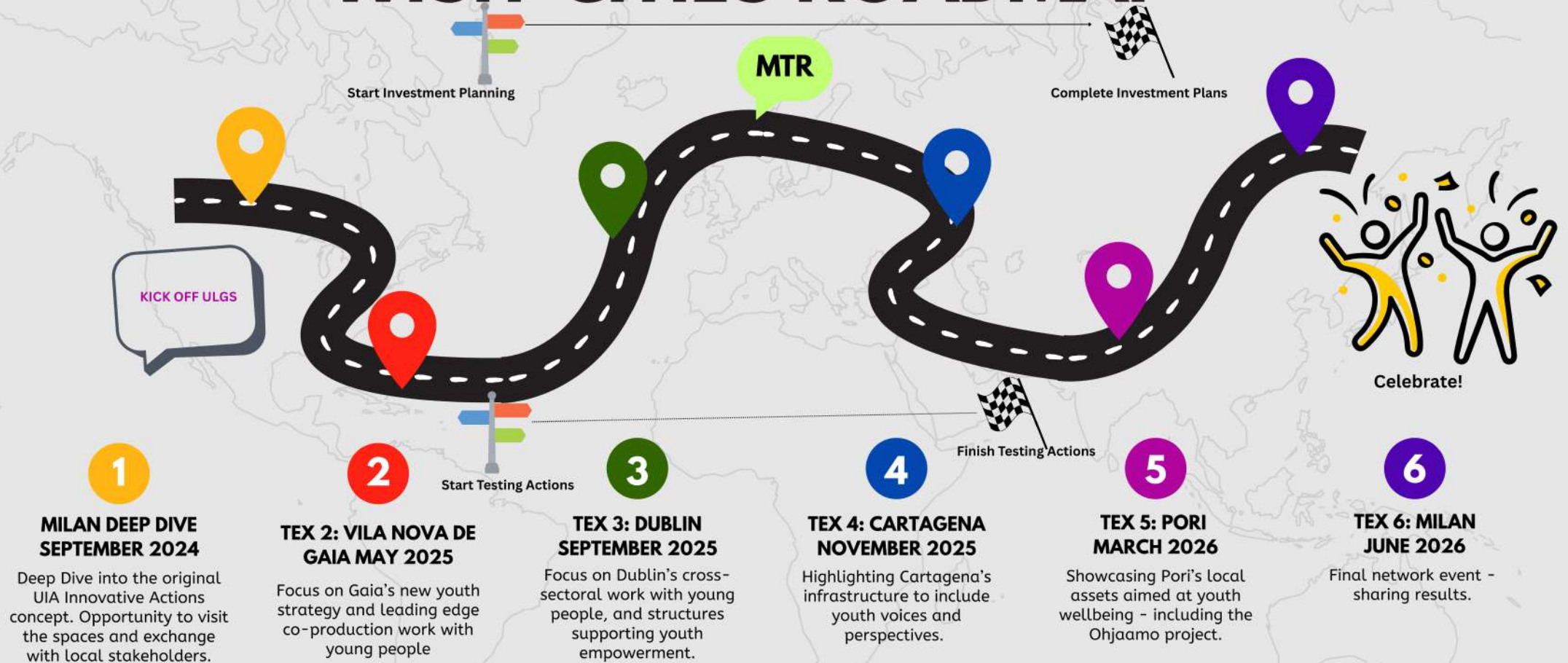
Youth co-design
= compulsory
shared module

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WISH-CITIES ROADMAP



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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 3 : VIENNA'S CHILDREN AND YOUTH STRATEGY

Across Europe, the principles of democracy are under threat. Voting rates continue to decline in many areas and there are growing levels of mistrust between citizens and policy makers.

Supporting young people to understand our political structures and encouraging them to be active citizens will be vital if our democratic structures are to survive. As a programme, URBACT's commitment to participatory methods supports this ambition. Specifically, WISH CITIES' focus on youth empowerment also supports this agenda.

Our third webinar showcased Vienna's inspiring work to stimulate the active civic involvement of young people.



Image: Courtesy of City of Vienna

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VIENNA'S STARTING POINT

Vienna has been a UN City of Human Rights since 2014. It recognises that human rights, includes children's rights. Children should be heard and their views taken into account.

Vienna is home to almost 400,000 young people under the age of 19. They are experts in their own experience.

Vienna adopted its children and youth strategy in June 2020. It aimed to make Vienna 'the most child and youth-friendly city in the world.'

The 193 measures in the strategy included a commitment to establish a children and youth parliament and to create a participatory budget for young people.



Image: Courtesy of City of Vienna

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VIENNA'S HEADLINE ACTIVITIES

Vienna designed the methodology and tools to conduct 1,309 workshops with 12,559 children and young people across the city.

The city established separate Children (aged 5 to 14) and Youth Parliament (age 14 to 20) with clear structures and agreed policy themes.

Vienna's participatory budget is a mechanism to generate, prioritise and fund ideas from the city's young people. In 2023/24 it generated 227 submissions, with the best ideas financed after an open vote. Successful projects have included recreational, environmental and social initiatives.



Image: Courtesy of City of Vienna

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OUR FOURTH NETWORK STOP: PORI FINLAND

WISH-CITIES
TRANSNATIONAL EXCHANGE VISIT

10th and 11th March 2026

Located on the west coast of Finland, Pori has a population of 83,106 people, of whom 13,219 are aged between 15 and 28. Traditionally a hub of heavy industry, nowadays Pori supplies 40% of Finland's energy. The city is on music-lovers' map for its annual jazz festival, held every July.



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PORI YOUTH CONTEXT

Children in Pori benefit from strong educational facilities and a network of effective local services, which helps them make a successful transition to adulthood.

Higher unemployment rates amongst adults mean that some children (in some localities as high as 22% of households) are affected by poverty. Those in single-parent families and from migrant backgrounds are more at risk.

Recent research also indicates growing levels of anxiety and poor mental health amongst children and young people in the city region.



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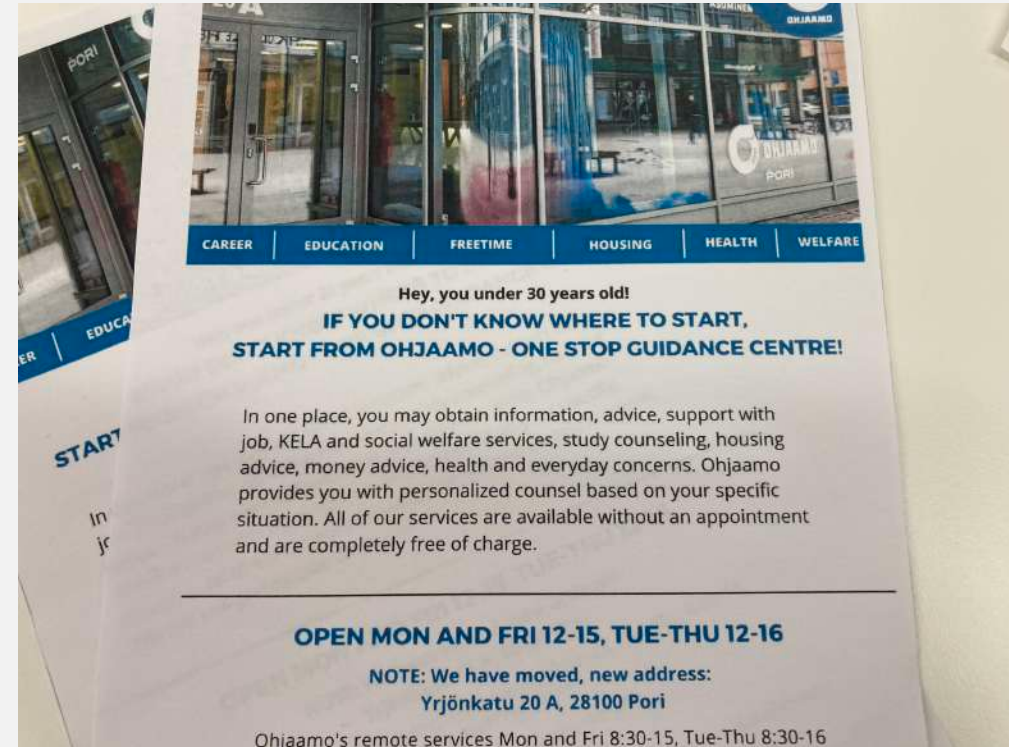
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PORI INTERVENTIONS

Pori has invested heavily in gathering effective data about young people and social and economic deprivation. This supports an evidence driven approach to the design and delivery of interventions.

The city has a number of distinctive approaches to supporting young people which include: Ohjaamo (youth support hub), a framework to support hobbies and a sophisticated youth pass model.

There is also an excellent interface between schools and the city's youth work services.



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PORI – KEY TAKE AWAYS

In the final exchange network partners drew the following conclusions from their Pori visit:

- There are high levels of trust and collaboration
- There is an impressive level of investment in children and youth services
- Their excellent data allows them to plan and target services with confidence
- There is an emphasis on early intervention rather than waiting for crises to happen



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FROM TESTING ACTIONS TO INVESTMENT PLANS

The testing actions have been used as a means to experiment and explore at the local level. In some cases, cities have used this to pilot completely new approaches. For example, Valmiera has tested the concept of youth democracy as part of its first children and youth strategy.

Other cities, often with a more established landscape, have used the testing actions to refine, tweak and add to their existing framework. One of these is Cartagena, which is exploring ways to extend the age cohort of its youth council. Another is Vila Nova de Gaia, which is trying to devolve decision-making to young people in some municipal spaces.

In each case, transfer partners – as well as the Lead Partner – have fully utilised the testing actions opportunity to help shape their final outputs.



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FROM TESTING ACTIONS TO INVESTMENT PLANS



WISH CITIES MIRO board summary of the testing actions

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SPRINGTIME IN PARIS

In February, WISH CITIES partners convened in Paris with the 9 other Innovation Transfer Networks. Over two days they explored synergies and considered ways to conclude in an impactful way, through the power of storytelling.

The ITN event also provided an opportunity to gather feedback on the draft Investment/Continuity Plans through a peer review with partners from other networks. Feedback from this was very positive, with comments such as:

“The peer review challenged our level of ambition – are we trying to do too much?”

“The exercise raised some helpful points, such as the opportunity to embed social entrepreneurship in our final document.”



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THE MID TERM REFLECTION

The Mid Term Reflection (MTR) report was published in January 2026. The process identified high levels of satisfaction and progress amongst the partners. Specifically, it identified the in-person events as the most impactful part of the experience.

The process also identified the potential to focus more clearly on the URBACT Toolbox and tools which can be applied at the local level, in the final stages.



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LEAD EXPERT REFLECTIONS



“Time behaves strangely in transnational networks. At the start we seem to have forever, but beyond the half-way point, things seem to move much faster. This brings pressure, and network partners had to work hard to produce their draft plans ahead of the Paris meeting.

On reflection, this pressure was helpful, as we are now well placed. The success of the testing actions, providing a platform for local activity and exploration, was extremely helpful here.

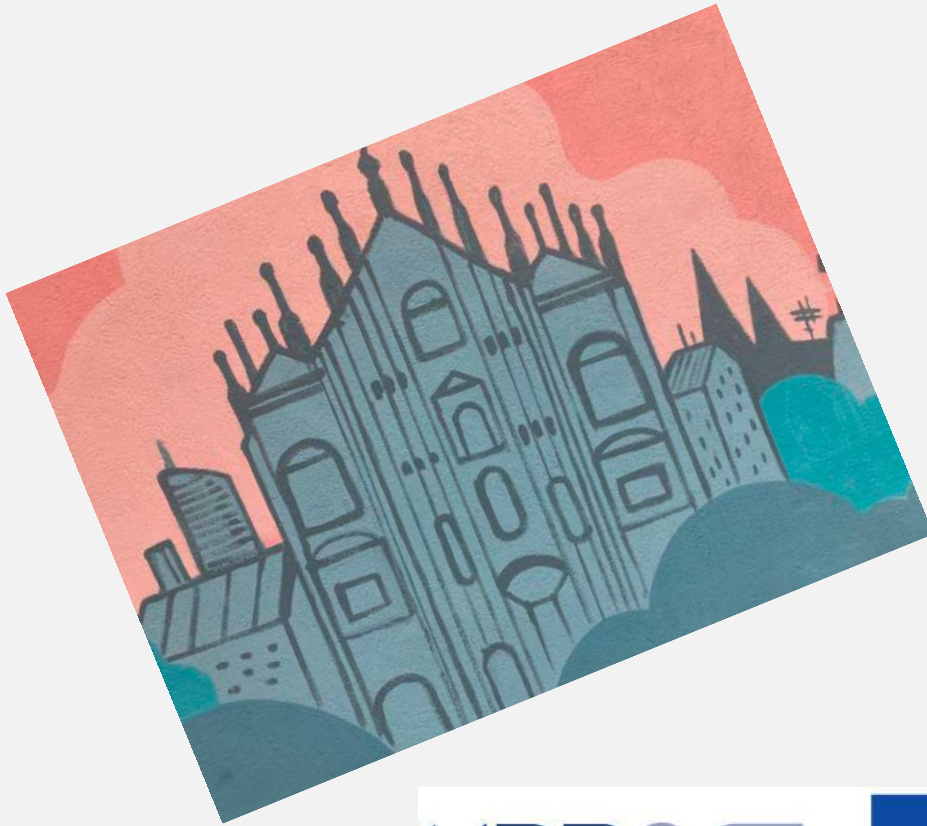
The visit to Pori was inspiring and made us wonder whether it's too late in the day to add new ideas. No, is the answer, but the coming semester – as we head to the final event – is a period to consolidate, converge and capitalize our network results.

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WHAT'S UP NEXT?



Our network journey is not quite over. Although Pori was the final TEX visit, we have a fourth webinar taking place in May, with a focus on Barcelona's employability model.

And, of course, our roadmap wraps up in Milan, mid June, when all of the final outputs will be shared and our joint efforts celebrated.

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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
March 2026



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