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**Bielsko-Biała**

**URBACT**



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## **REinventing Culture in Urban Places ReCUP**

### **INVESTMENT PLAN**

**Bielsko-Biała**

## Introduction

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## SECTION 1 – THE POLICY CONTEXT

### 1.1 NEEDS ANALYSIS IN THE TERRITORIAL CONTEXT

Bielsko-Biała is a medium-sized city in southern Poland, with a population of approximately 170,000 inhabitants, located at the foothills of the Beskid Mountains, at the historical crossroads of Silesia and Lesser Poland. The city is characterised by a unique combination of dense urban development and immediate access to nature – forests cover around 30% of its area, and within the city's administrative boundaries there are 18 mountain peaks, including Szyndzielnia Mountain (1,028 m above sea level), accessible by cable car.

For centuries, the development of Bielsko-Biała was shaped by the textile industry, which influenced not only its urban structure but also its work culture, entrepreneurial traditions and capacity for adaptation. In the 20th century, the automotive sector became a key driver of development, while today the city combines industry with the creative sector, education and services. Bielsko-Biała's identity was formed in a context of cultural and national borderlands, which continues to translate into openness and an ability to respond to change.

Culture plays a key role in the city and constitutes one of its strategic assets. Bielsko-Biała hosts, among others, the Polish Theatre, the Jerzy Zitzman Banialuka Puppet Theatre, the Bielska BWA Gallery, the Studio of Animated Film – the oldest institution of its kind in Poland – and the modern Cavatina Hall. The city is home to major national and international festivals, while an extensive network of community cultural centres and libraries ensures the presence of culture at neighbourhood level. Bielsko-Biała functions as a cultural hub for the southern part of the Silesian Voivodeship.

At the same time, like many medium-sized European cities, Bielsko-Biała is experiencing demographic and social processes that increasingly affect the quality of social relations and everyday life. The key challenge addressed by the RECUP Investment Plan is the growing sense of loneliness and the weakening of social bonds. This phenomenon is understood not only as an individual issue, but as a territorial and structural one – linked to the way the city functions: how public space operates, what conditions it creates for meeting and cooperation, and whether it fosters a sense of shared ownership and co-responsibility for the city.

### **Thematic policy challenge – a public policy perspective**

In Bielsko-Biała, the RECUP challenge is situated at the intersection of several areas of urban policy:

- social cohesion and wellbeing (including mental health, relationships, support networks and trust);
- social regeneration (revitalising everyday social life, street activity and the comfort of staying in public space);
- youth inclusion (a sense of agency, real co-creative roles and low-threshold access to culture);
- cultural and civic education (shaping attitudes of co-responsibility for the city from an early age);
- accessibility and equality in the use of the city (designing actions and spaces for all, including people with specific needs);
- green and digital transitions, treated as tools to strengthen participation, relationships and quality of life, subordinated to social goals.

### **Scale and profile of the challenge – city level**

From a demographic and developmental perspective, Bielsko-Biała is facing processes that directly affect social relations: changing lifestyles, increasing polarisation of experiences, the shift of many activities to the digital sphere, and long-term demographic trends. In 2022, the city had 166,765 inhabitants, covering 124.5 km<sup>2</sup> and comprising 30 neighbourhoods, with a population density of around 1,340 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>. Updated data indicate a gradual decline in population.

These processes contribute to the “thinning out” of everyday contacts, the erosion of micro-communities and natural support networks, and consequently to an increase in loneliness. Importantly, loneliness affects different groups simultaneously: young people, adults of working age, seniors and people with specific needs, although its mechanisms vary depending on life situation and access to resources.

### **Mechanism of loneliness: shared space versus a “transit city”**

The diagnosis developed by the URBACT Local Group and reflections emerging from the city’s strategic processes point to a recurring conclusion: loneliness grows where the sense of shared space weakens. When the city is experienced primarily as infrastructure and a system of transit routes, rather than as a relational environment, willingness to

cooperate decreases, distance between residents and institutions grows, and culture is perceived as an “offer for the few” rather than as an everyday social practice.

In Bielsko-Biała, this mechanism is particularly linked to the condition of the historic centre and the inner city. Processes have been observed that weaken the social functions of the centre: a decline in everyday use, reduced diversity of ground-floor services, and the presence of vacant premises. This limits everyday reasons to stay in public space and, as a result, reduces opportunities for building neighbourly and intergenerational relations.

An additional local factor is the concentration of parts of social life in commercial spaces. In the immediate vicinity of 11 Listopada Street, a large shopping centre attracts a significant share of pedestrian traffic by offering easily accessible indoor conditions. For some young people, this space becomes a substitute for community. While outreach and support activities are carried out there, these interventions do not replace the need to reclaim public space as a relational environment.

### **Target groups and needs – loneliness across the life cycle**

In the RECUP diagnosis, young people emerge as a group particularly exposed to loneliness and exclusion from the “shared city”. Contributing factors include the shift of relationships to the digital sphere, a lack of safe and low-threshold “own places”, barriers to entering culture, and a crisis of agency. Effective responses require actions in which young people are not merely audiences, but co-creators – through volunteering, co-production, mentoring and real roles in shaping urban space.

Building community starts early, which makes cultural and civic education for children a crucial area of intervention. Adults of working age experience loneliness in less visible but systemic ways, related to time constraints and overload. At the same time, population ageing increases the importance of actions preventing social isolation among seniors, based on accessibility, proximity and intergenerational formats.

RECUP adopts accessibility as a core design principle, addressing architectural, communication, sensory, digital and economic barriers, so that the city and culture are genuinely accessible to all.



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gamification

trainings  
(e.g. commu-  
nication  
techniques)

dialogue  
ambassadors  
municipality  
NGOs

initiating  
neighborhood  
events

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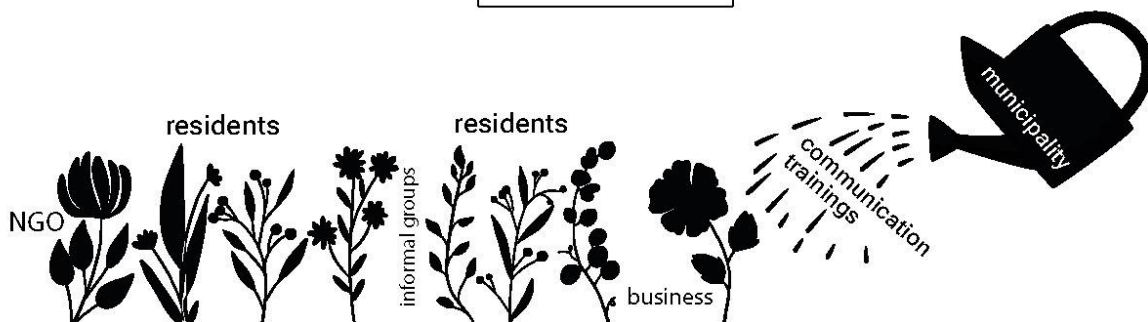
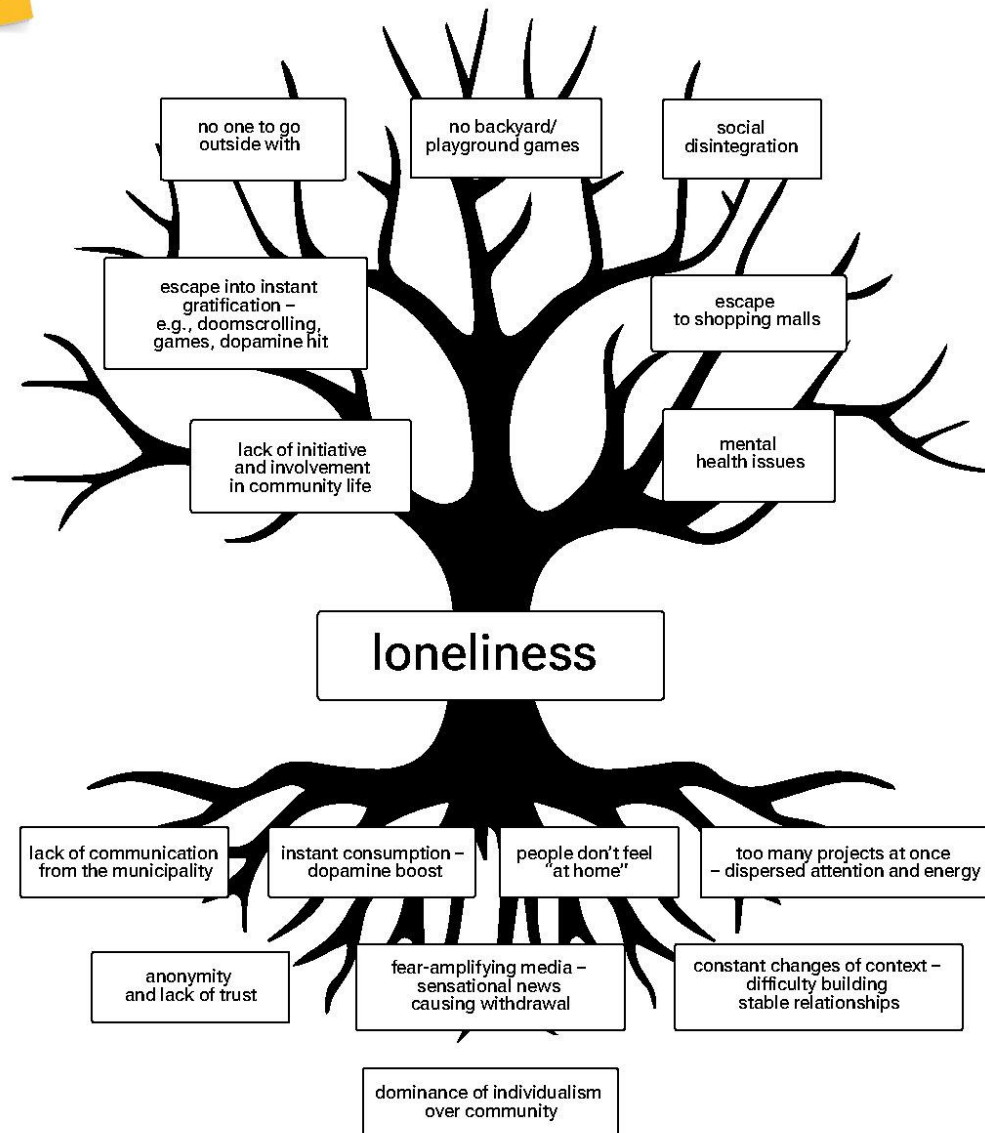
reporting  
system –  
a tool for  
building  
relationships  
and trust

ideas

consequences

problem

causes



## Assets and potential for a systemic response

Bielsko-Biała has assets that enable the development of a long-term policy to counteract loneliness: an extensive network of cultural institutions, including 14 Municipal Community Cultural Centres, a Municipal Public Library with 17 branches, a strong educational base, and an active NGO sector. The proximity of nature further supports wellbeing-oriented approaches. However, this potential requires coordination and actors capable of connecting institutions, organisations and residents so that cultural activities function as social processes rather than one-off events.

## “Creativity – Nature – Community” as the programme framework of the Polish Capital of Culture 2026

The RECUP Investment Plan is embedded in the programme framework of the Polish Capital of Culture 2026. Creativity is understood as a practice of agency and co-creation of the city; nature as a resource for wellbeing and balance; and community as the foundation for building relationships, trust and shared responsibility for space. The programme motto “*Weaving Wellbeing*” integrates these dimensions into a coherent logic, in which culture functions as a tool for long-term social change.

## Cultural Capacity / Cultural Assets – Bielsko-Biała

The city’s cultural infrastructure provides a strong material base for culture-led social engagement and participation, enabling activities at different scales – from neighbourhood-based initiatives to large-scale events.

| Indicator                                     | Value / note                                                                                                |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Theatres &amp; stages</b>                  | 2 theatres with 4 stages; 2 additional stages under adaptation                                              |
| <b>Cinemas</b>                                | 3 cinemas, 18 screens in total                                                                              |
| <b>Concert halls / multifunctional stages</b> | 5 main venues (including 1 private concert hall for 1,000 people) + 10 stages in community cultural centres |
| <b>Exhibition venues</b>                      | 6 exhibition spaces                                                                                         |
| <b>Public library</b>                         | Municipal Public Library: network of 17 branches                                                            |

|                                               |                                                                               |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Community cultural centres</b>             | Municipal Cultural Centre (MDK): network of 14 community centres              |
| <b>Amphitheatre</b>                           | 1                                                                             |
| <b>Event-ready public squares</b>             | 7 public squares prepared for cultural events                                 |
| <b>Sports venues used for cultural events</b> | 8 sports complexes adapted for cultural events                                |
| <b>Stadium capacity</b>                       | Open-air stadium with a capacity of 16,000 spectators                         |
| <b>Airfield area</b>                          | Recreational airfield within the city: 36 ha, suitable for large-scale events |

### City Facts & Figures – Bielsko-Biała

The following key data provide a concise overview of Bielsko-Biała's demographic, spatial and cultural profile, framing the territorial context for the RECUP Investment Plan.

| <b>Indicator</b>                           | <b>Value / note</b>                                                                                   |
|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Administrative status</b>               | City with county (powiat) rights                                                                      |
| <b>Location</b>                            | Southern Silesian Voivodeship; gateway to the Beskids                                                 |
| <b>Area</b>                                | 124.5 km <sup>2</sup>                                                                                 |
| <b>Population</b>                          | 165,766 residents                                                                                     |
| <b>Population density</b>                  | Approx. 1,340 inhabitants/km <sup>2</sup>                                                             |
| <b>Urban structure</b>                     | 30 housing estates and 18 districts.                                                                  |
| <b>City role</b>                           | Subregional centre with strong cultural and educational functions                                     |
| <b>Cultural ecosystem</b>                  | Polish Theatre; Banialuka Puppet Theatre; Bielska BWA Gallery; Studio of Animated Film; Cavatina Hall |
| <b>Cultural participation (perception)</b> | Over 65% of residents rate the cultural offer as good or very good                                    |
| <b>Public library network</b>              | 17 branches                                                                                           |

|                                   |                                                                 |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Community cultural centres</b> | 14 MDK centres                                                  |
| <b>NGOs</b>                       | 702 non-governmental organisations                              |
| <b>Labour market</b>              | Low unemployment rate                                           |
| <b>Upper-secondary schools</b>    | 25 schools, including 2 arts schools (music and fine arts)      |
| <b>Higher education</b>           | 3 higher education institutions, including 1 university         |
| <b>University</b>                 | University of Bielsko-Biała                                     |
| <b>Cultural specialisation</b>    | Animation heritage and strong performing and visual arts sector |
| <b>Cross-sector collaboration</b> | Active cooperation between culture, education and NGOs          |

## 1.2 THE POLICY RESPONSE

The RECUP Investment Plan for Bielsko-Biała provides a direct response to the diagnosed social needs, positioning culture as a public policy tool – supporting social cohesion, wellbeing, social regeneration and civic inclusion – rather than treating it solely as a sector focused on delivering events. The Plan covers the years 2027–2028, while treating 2026 – the year of the Polish Capital of Culture – as a transition moment: from a phase of intensive mobilisation to a phase of consolidation, systematisation and scaling of solutions, including shared quality standards (accessibility, responsibility, long-term perspective and process-based work).

The Plan is consistent with the city’s strategic documents, in particular the development directions of the city and cultural development strategies up to 2030. It adopts an integrated approach, combining social, spatial, educational, environmental and institutional perspectives. The policy response is based on the assumption that regeneration and development cannot be understood solely in infrastructural terms – they require mechanisms for building relationships, agency and shared responsibility. In this sense, culture – especially when present in public space and designed through participatory processes – becomes a tool for rebuilding the “common city”.

The policy response articulated in the RECUP Investment Plan is grounded in and aligned with a coherent set of local, national and European strategic frameworks, ensuring that the proposed actions reinforce existing policies rather than creating parallel or isolated interventions.

### Alignment of the RECUP Investment Plan with local, national and European policy frameworks

| Policy framework                                                            | Key priorities                                                                                   | Relevance for the RECUP Investment Plan                                                                                                                               |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Development Strategy for Bielsko-Biała until 2030</b>                    | Quality of life, social cohesion, sustainable urban development, use of endogenous resources     | RECUP operationalises the strategy's social dimension by using culture as a tool to strengthen social bonds, residents' agency and everyday use of public space.      |
| <b>Strategy for the Development of Culture for Bielsko-Biała until 2030</b> | Culture as a public good, civic participation, accessibility, strengthening creative communities | The Plan translates strategic cultural objectives into concrete delivery mechanisms: co-creation, participatory public-space actions and long-term capacity-building. |
| <b>Community Revitalisation Programme until 2030 (GPR)</b>                  | Physical regeneration combined with social and economic activation                               | RECUP complements infrastructural investments by providing the social and cultural processes that activate regenerated spaces and restore their community functions.  |
| <b>Polish Capital of Culture 2026 – “Weaving Wellbeing”</b>                 | Wellbeing, community-building, culture as everyday practice                                      | The Plan ensures continuity after 2026 by consolidating tested formats into a permanent, scalable mechanism embedded in city instruments.                             |
| <b>European Capital of Culture 2029 bid (preselection phase)</b>            | Culture as a driver of wellbeing,                                                                | RECUP translates the bidbook's conceptual approach into an operational policy tool, maintaining                                                                       |

|                                                |                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                | participation, openness and dialogue                                         | momentum and partnerships beyond the bidding process.                                                                                                                                |
| <b>National and European policy priorities</b> | Social cohesion, inclusion, urban regeneration, green and digital transition | The Plan aligns with EU and national agendas by integrating Digital Transition (participation tools) and Green Transition (urban nature as wellbeing resource) into cultural action. |
| <b>URBACT IV / RECUP framework</b>             | Learning cities, transfer of good practices, participatory governance        | RECUP provides the methodological backbone for testing, learning and scaling solutions, embedding evaluation and partnership-based governance in everyday practice.                  |

### **Polish Capital of Culture 2026 and the European Capital of Culture 2029 bid as a catalyst for change**

Preparations for Bielsko-Biała's candidacy for the title of European Capital of Culture (ECoC) 2029, followed by the award of the title of Polish Capital of Culture 2026 (PCC), triggered processes that extended well beyond the cultural sector. In practice, these included:

- strengthening cross-sectoral cooperation (culture, education, social policy, development and public space);
- broadening the understanding of culture as a practice of everyday life and a development tool, rather than only a programme of events;
- placing greater emphasis on process quality: accessibility, inclusion of groups with diverse needs, environmental responsibility and safety in public space;
- intensifying work with residents through consultations, sectoral meetings, partnership-building and support for local initiatives;
- developing a narrative of the city based on local resources – creativity, nature and community – articulated in the Polish Capital of Culture 2026 under the motto “*Weaving Wellbeing*”.

In this context, participation in the URBACT IV Innovation Transfer Network RECUP represents a logical continuation. The city builds on the mobilisation and networking

experience developed during the ECoC/Polish Capital of Culture processes, translating it into an operational level – with a clear mechanism for testing, learning and implementing solutions that remain in place after the end of the Polish Capital of Culture year.

### **RECUP as an operational policy response: transfer and adaptation of the CUP4Creativity practice**

The policy response within RECUP is based on the adaptation of an innovative practice developed in Újbuda (Budapest) – CUP4Creativity – transferred through the URBACT IV Innovation Transfer Network. In the context of Bielsko-Biała, the practice has been adapted through:

- a focus on actions implemented in public space (artistic interventions, street art and urban formats);
- a strong participatory component, with residents acting as co-creators;
- the use of prototyping as a tool for testing and learning (what works, for whom and under what conditions);
- the building of durable partnerships between cultural institutions, municipal units, City Hall departments, NGOs, schools and local stakeholders.

URBACT Local Group (ULG) – key stakeholders and institutions

- Deputy Mayor of Bielsko-Biała – Adam Ruśniak
- Bielsko-Biała City Hall – Department of Culture and Promotion – Przemysław Smyczek, Kinga Czernek
- Bielsko-Biała City Hall – Department of Strategy and Economic Development – Piotr Oślak
- Bielsko-Biała City Hall – City Development Office – Magdalena Marek (Director)
- Municipal Roads Authority – Patryk Owcarz (Director)
- Point 11 / BCK (Bielsko-Biała Cultural Center) – Aleksandra Tarnawa
- NGO / PASMO Social Resilience Institute – Aleksandra Kozik
- NGO / Culture and Health project, NGO / PASMO Social Resilience Institute – Edyta Ruta
- The Street Art Academy coordinator – Justyna Łabędź
- Municipal Cultural Centre – North Community Centre (Świetlica Północ) – Adelina Gołębiowska
- Municipal Cultural Centre – Andrzej Lichosyt, Michał Czulak, Katarzyna Michna, Olga Chromik
- NGO – Vertical Slice Foundation – Anna Krocze
- Marcin Malik Malicki – an artist of Street Art – Marcin Buk
- Abel Company / V High School / V High School Association / Regional Teacher

Development Centre (RODN) – Bartłomiej Żywczak

- Regional Development Agency (ARRSA) – Patrycja Węgrzyn, Agnieszka Kowejsza
- Bielsko-Biała Entrepreneurship Centre – Romana Skalna
- City Activist, NGO – Zróbmy To Foundation – Marzena Kocurek
- City activist / IT sector representative – Jakub Nowak
- Bielsko-Biała City Hall – City Gardener (landscape architect), urban activist – Dariusz Gajny
- Musician, entrepreneur – Grzegorz Lulek
- NGO – Teraz Ulica Foundation – Irena Biskup

The composition of the URBACT Local Group reflects the systemic nature of the RECUP challenge in Bielsko-Biała. It intentionally brings together political decision-makers, municipal departments, cultural institutions, NGOs, artists, educators, development agencies and grassroots activists. This ensures that the project is embedded in everyday urban policies and operational realities rather than treated as a standalone cultural initiative, and significantly increases the likelihood that outcomes will be sustained beyond the project timeframe.

## SECTION 2: The investment proposal

### 2.1 BACKGROUND TO THE PROPOSAL

Bielsko-Biała joined the URBACT IV Innovation Transfer Network RECUP in order to translate an in-depth local diagnosis of loneliness and weakening social bonds into a durable, systemic mechanism of action for the city after 2026. The starting point is an understanding of culture not merely as a sector delivering events, but as a public policy tool capable of influencing wellbeing, social cohesion, the quality of public space and relationships between residents.

While infrastructure-focused investments are addressed through the Municipal Regeneration Programme and the Integrated Action Plan, the RECUP Investment Plan complements them by providing a process-based, relational and participatory mechanism that activates these spaces socially and culturally.

Participation in the RECUP ITN is a direct continuation of strategic processes launched in the city in recent years: the work on the European Capital of Culture 2029 bid and the implementation of the Polish Capital of Culture 2026 programme under the motto “*Weaving Wellbeing*”. These processes were cross-sectoral and participatory in nature,

involving social research, consultations, debates and the testing of new formats of working with residents. Their shared conclusion was that the city's key development challenge is not a lack of infrastructure or cultural offer, but the need to strengthen social relations, a sense of belonging and residents' agency.

In the ECoC bidbook, culture was explicitly defined as a factor of wellbeing – psychological, social and environmental – and as a space for dialogue between tradition and modernity, between different social groups and generations. This way of thinking is directly reflected in RECUP: the project does not focus on “new events”, but on building a mechanism that enables residents to co-create the city through culture, actions in public space and local partnerships.

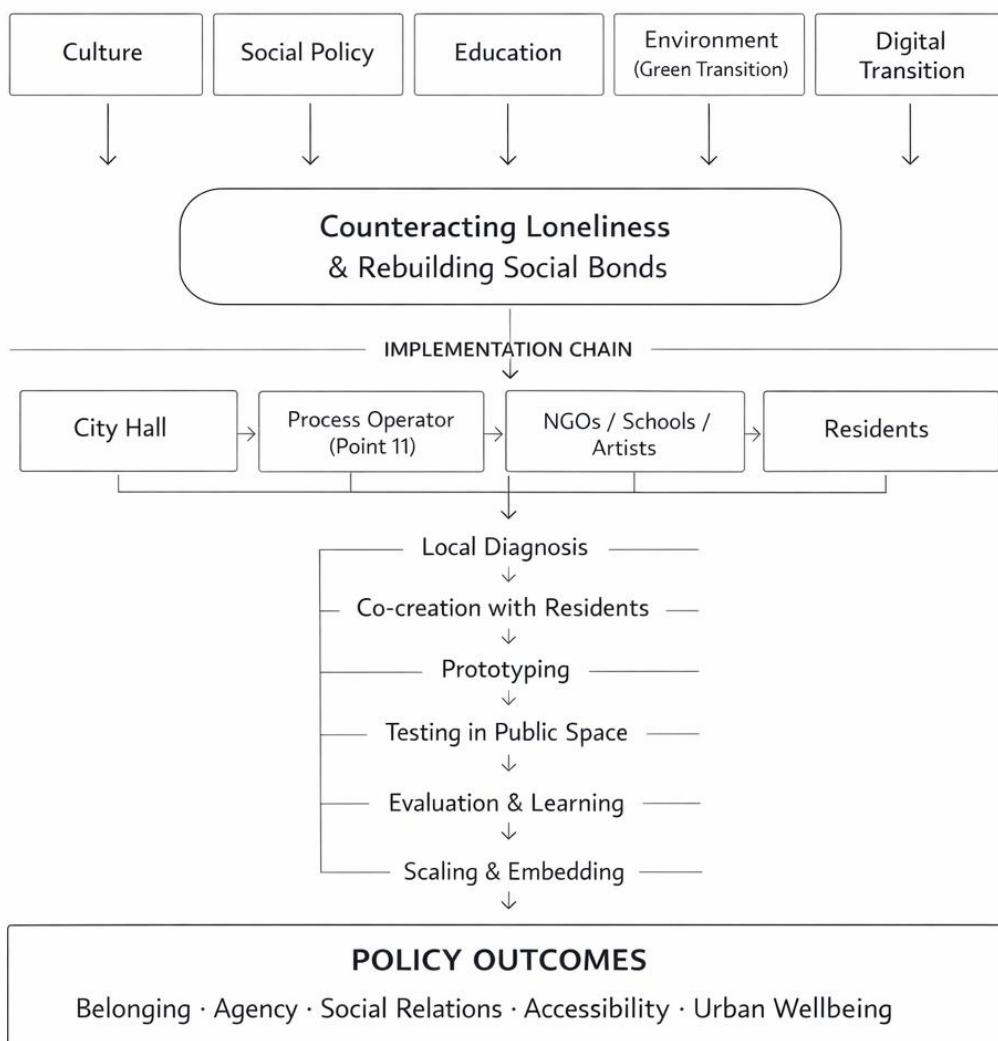
RECUP is based on the transfer of a practice developed in Újbuda (Budapest) – CUP4Creativity – whose core principle is restoring agency to residents and revitalising public space through culture, co-creation and process-based work. Operationally, this practice relies on activating small-scale, low-threshold actions in public space, initiated and co-produced with residents, while ensuring:

- continuous coordination and process facilitation,
- organisational and competence support,
- quality frameworks (including accessibility),
- learning based on reflection and evaluation.

This approach is particularly relevant to the context of Bielsko-Biała. The city has a well-developed network of cultural institutions, community cultural centres and libraries, an active NGO sector and experience in working in public space. At the same time, as shown by the ECoC and PCC processes, without a stable implementation engine there is a risk of fragmentation, one-off actions and the loss of effects after programme funding ends. RECUP addresses this gap by proposing a durable and scalable mechanism.

## RECUP – Integrated Urban Policy Mechanism

Culture as a Public Policy Tool for Social Cohesion and Wellbeing



Integrated Approach



Participatory Governance



Accessibility & Inclusion



Green & Digital Tools

During the work within the URBACT network, Bielsko-Biała implemented testing actions whose purpose was not to pilot events, but to verify the feasibility of the practice and adapt it to local organisational, social and spatial conditions.

### **Digital Transition dimension**

Artistic workshops and the city game *“Following the Whisperers – The Trail of Slavic Demons”*, based on the SplotBB platform, confirmed that digital tools can function as mechanisms for participation, education and building relationships with place, rather than merely for event promotion. The interactive narrative using geolocation, puzzles and gamification effectively engaged participants and strengthened their relationship with the city’s space and local intangible heritage. This action aligns with the direction set out in the ECoC bidbook, which emphasises the development of digital competences and the use of technology as a tool for accessible culture.

### **Green Transition dimension**

Artistic and ecological activities developed within the Treeline logic – including urban walks, creating “tree profiles” through sound, photography and illustration, and workshop components – confirmed the potential of linking culture with relationships to urban greenery and nature as a wellbeing resource. These experiences showed that “green” actions are most effective when embedded in a process (repeatability, group work, public presentation of outcomes) and when they strengthen community, rather than remaining purely educational. This direction is consistent with the New European Bauhaus approach and with the city’s strategic documents.

### **Evaluation of Testing Actions**

#### **City Game**

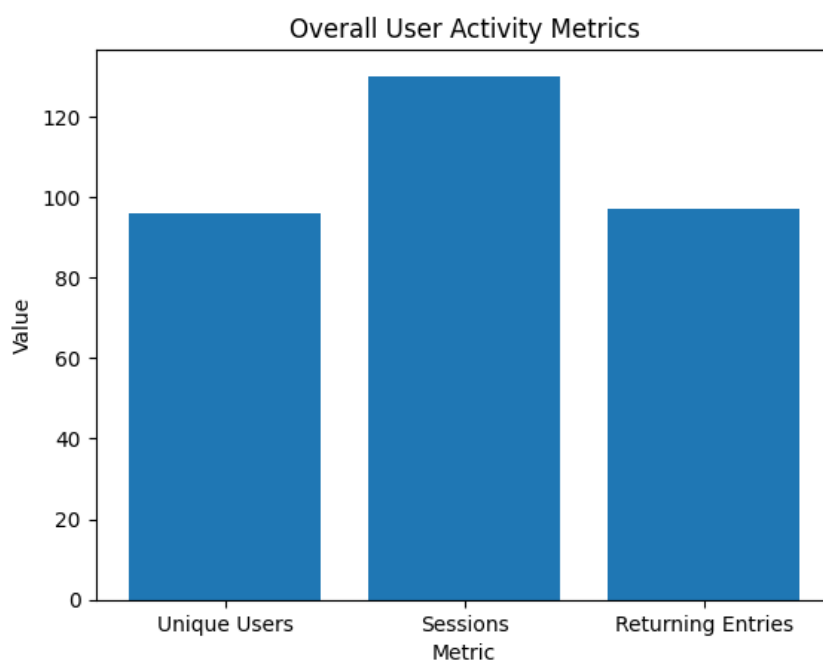
“Following the Whisperers – The Trail of Slavic Demons” (SplotBB platform)

It is a game that allows participants to explore Bielsko-Biała by solving tasks and touring the city, guiding them through familiar places seen in a new light - illuminated by Slavic stories preserved in local customs and language.

#### **Reach and Participants’ Attraction**

Quantitative data indicate that the urban game effectively attracted participants within a relatively short testing period (6 December 2025 – 31 December 2025). During this period, 96 unique users generated 130 sessions, demonstrating that many participants returned to the game multiple times. High levels of weekly and monthly active users (WAU/MAU = 82) combined with an average session duration of 30 minutes confirm that the game

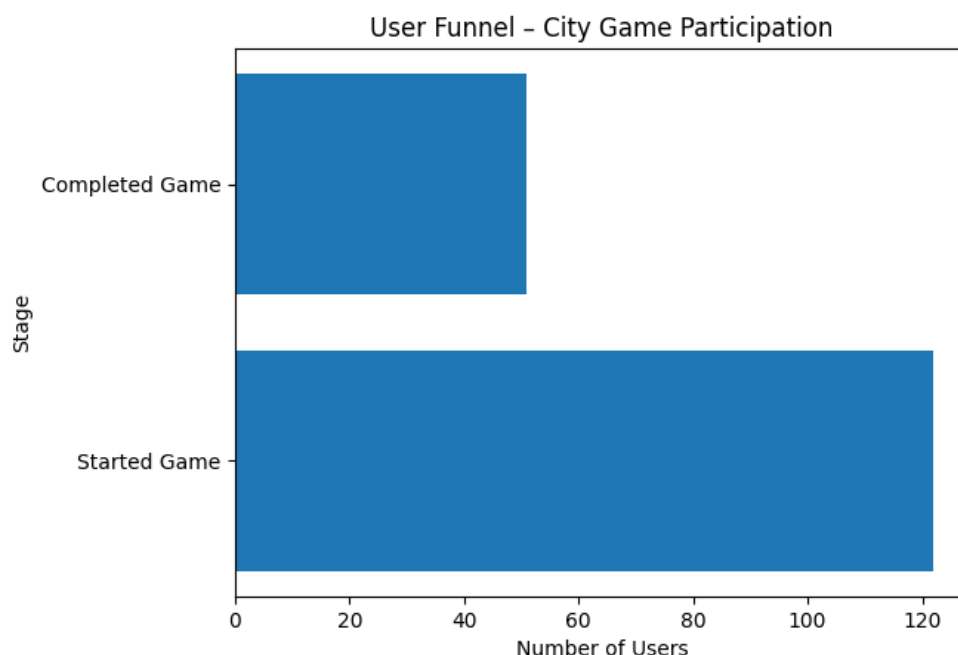
format was engaging and able to maintain participants' attention. These results align with the objectives of the *REinventing Culture in Urban Places (RECUP)* project, which aims to create low-threshold, appealing forms of cultural participation in urban spaces.



**User Activity Visualisation:** The user activity chart illustrates repeat engagement with the game, showing that 96 unique participants generated 130 sessions, with 97 returns, confirming the engagement, educational potential, and long-term scalability of the platform in fostering connections to local heritage and culture while activating public spaces and encouraging residents to actively explore the city.

### User Funnel, Retention, and Engagement Analysis

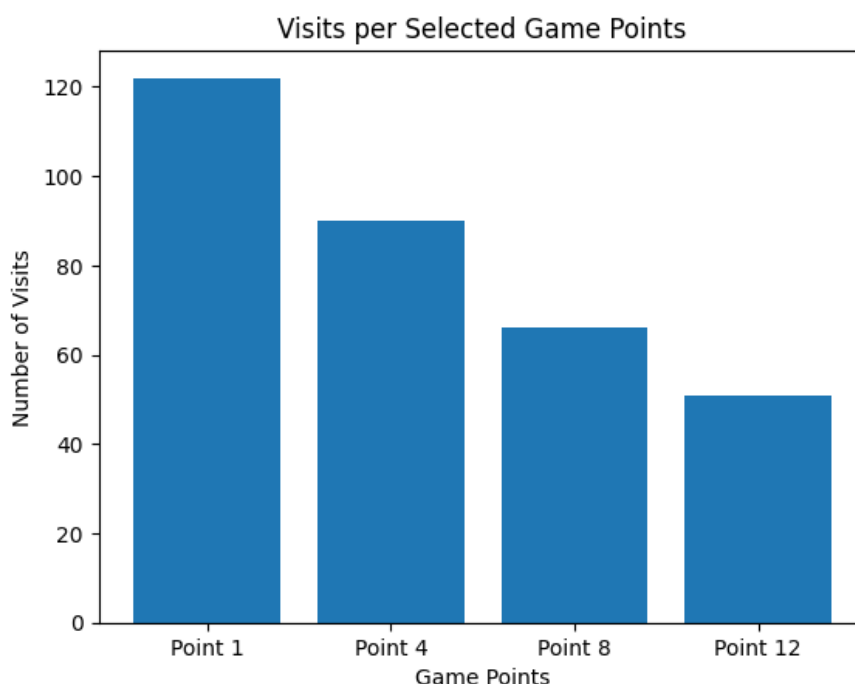
The user funnel shows a typical decline in participant numbers across stages of an urban game. Out of 122 users who started the game, 51 completed the full route, resulting in a 41% completion rate. In the context of open public spaces, this is a relatively high outcome, confirming the game's capacity to guide participants through the full narrative. At the same time, 71 drop-off points highlight areas for potential optimization: simplifying routes, enhancing intermediate motivation, or better balancing task length and difficulty.



**User Funnel Visualisation:** The funnel visualisation illustrates participant engagement, retention throughout the game, and the effectiveness of the game mechanics, showing that of 122 starters, 51 completed the full route, confirming the platform’s efficiency in engaging, educating, and building a cultural experience.

### Connection to Space and Place-Based Narrative

Geolocation data show a clear decline in visits along the route (from 122 visits at point 1 to 51 visits at point 12), reflecting both participant selection and progressive deepening of engagement. The most frequently visited locations – the Biła River bridge and 11 Listopada Street – are highly recognizable and symbolically significant sites in the city. This indicates that combining cultural narrative with well-rooted urban points strengthens participants’ connection to place, a key URBACT indicator.



**Game Points Visualisation:** The chart of route point visits illustrates participants' engagement within the Reinventing Culture in Urban Places project, showing which locations were most visited and how participants interacted with the urban space. This visualisation helps assess the strength of participants' attachment to place and the game's effectiveness in encouraging exploration of local heritage.

### Quality of Cultural Interaction and Educational Potential

Although strictly narrative metrics were relatively low (12 story content openings, 3 returns to points), these should be interpreted in the context of a pilot phase. The game mechanics successfully encouraged exploration of urban spaces, while future iterations could strengthen the educational and narrative component, for example, by linking progression to the exploration of content. Thus, the game demonstrates potential for scaling and further prototyping in a *test–learn–adjust* logic, in line with RECUP objectives.

### Ex-Post Findings Aligned with URBACT Core Indicators

#### Participation & Engagement

The game attracted 96 unique users who generated 130 sessions, including 82 weekly and monthly active users (WAU/MAU). The average session duration of 30 minutes, combined with 97 returns to the game, confirms participant interest and engagement in exploring urban spaces.

## **Social Inclusion & Connection to Place**

Geolocation analysis shows a concentration of users in sites key to local identity. Drop-off points and the 41% completion rate indicate areas for additional support in interacting with urban spaces.

## **Learning & Capacity Building**

Interactions with narrative content (12 content openings, 3 returns to points) demonstrate that the game supports cultural learning and the development of cultural competences. The mechanics allow participants to explore content independently, fostering curiosity and critical understanding of local narratives.

## **Replicability & Scalability**

The SplotBB platform and geolocated narrative mechanics can be easily transferred to other urban areas. The modular game design and integration with digital tools (URBACT Core Indicator: Digital Transition) enhance adaptability and enable iterative development in a *test–learn–adjust* approach.

The city game “Following the Whisperers – The Trail of Slavic Demons” is a clear example of effectively implementing low-threshold and inclusive mechanisms for cultural participation in urban settings. Through engaging narratives and interaction with public space, the game strengthens residents’ sense of influence over the city and awareness of local heritage. It simultaneously fosters social bonds and community cohesion, countering isolation and social fragmentation. The game mechanics encourage learning through culture, development of cultural competencies, and creativity, while its modular structure allows adaptation and deployment in other districts and URBACT partner cities. Thanks to its high replicability and scalability potential, the game aligns perfectly with the objectives of the project, offering a durable, flexible, and easily transferable model for urban cultural activation, ready for further development and strategic investment.

## **Qualitative Analysis (Expert observations)**

The qualitative component of the evaluation provides crucial insights into the implementation of the testing actions, the dynamics of social interactions, and the tangible impact of the initiatives on participants and the urban environment. Observations by facilitators and local experts covered all key aspects of the project, including the Digital Transition (city game “*Following the Whisperers – The Trail of Slavic Demons*”) and the Green Transition (Treeline initiative). These qualitative data allow for an

assessment of the effectiveness of methods, participant collaboration dynamics, and the potential for replicating the actions in other districts and cities.

### **Connection to Local Heritage and Place Identity**

The activities strongly referenced local narratives, history, and symbolism, thereby enhancing participants' sense of identity and belonging.

- Created artefacts, logos, and city game tasks incorporated elements of local cultural heritage, promoting reflection on the meaning of places and the city's history.
- Participants reported a stronger identification with urban spaces and increased interest in local history and legends.

### **Strengthening Social Bonds and Participation**

Workshops and city games fostered collaboration, experience sharing, and community integration, counteracting social isolation.

- Participants were able to work at their own pace and express their artistic sensibilities while contributing to collective outcomes, supporting trust and interpersonal relationships.
- High levels of emotional engagement were observed, alongside participants' declared willingness to join similar initiatives in the future.

### **Contact with Nature and Environmental Awareness**

The Treeline initiative enabled direct engagement with urban greenery, with participants creating "tree profiles" through photography, sound recordings, and artistic work.

- Educational and artistic walks in Cygański Forest and the Włókniarzy Park left lasting impressions and increased participants' ecological awareness.
- Observations indicated a growing sensitivity to the role of urban greenery and its importance for quality of life.

### **Digital Transition – Use of Digital Tools**

The SplotBB platform enabled the integration of offline and online activities and active participation in the city game.

- Digital tools supported participation, cultural education, and public space activation, engaging diverse age and social groups.

- Digital artefacts (logos, interactive maps, tasks) facilitated documentation and provided potential for replication in other locations.

## Conclusions

The testing actions effectively addressed identified social challenges: lack of belonging, social isolation, limited participation, and low environmental awareness.

- Integration of Digital and Green Transition components allowed the combination of education, culture, and environmental awareness into a coherent urban revitalization program.
- Observations confirm the real potential for scaling and replicating actions in other districts and European cities.
- The collected qualitative data underline the relevance of continued investment in these projects, in line with key URBACT indicators: Participation & Engagement, Social Inclusion, Connection to Place, Environmental Awareness, Learning, Replicability, Scalability.

## Summary Table of Key Observation Areas

| Observation Area                           | Expert Observations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Link to URBACT Indicators                                                         |
|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Local Heritage &amp; Place Identity</b> | Participants in artistic workshops and the city game “ <i>Following the Whisperers – The Trail of Slavic Demons</i> ” actively created artefacts inspired by local legends, Slavic beliefs, and city history. The creative process encouraged reflection on the significance of places and cultural symbols, leading to increased identification with urban space and a sense of belonging. Interest in city history also increased. | <b>Connection to Place &amp; Local Identity, Learning &amp; Capacity Building</b> |
| <b>Social Bonds &amp; Participation</b>    | Workshops and the city game promoted group collaboration and experience sharing. Participants engaged in discussions, collective problem-solving, and creative activities, reducing social barriers. High emotional engagement, mutual motivation, and willingness to participate in future initiatives were observed.                                                                                                               | <b>Participation &amp; Engagement, Social Inclusion &amp; Community Building</b>  |



|                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                               |
|------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Environmental Awareness / Contact with Nature</b> | The Treeline initiative – educational and artistic walks in Cygański Forest and Włókniarzy Park – provided direct interaction with urban greenery. Creating artistic tree profiles (photographs, sound recordings, illustrations) deepened reflection on the role of nature and the importance of greenery for urban quality of life. Participants showed growing ecological sensitivity and responsibility for shared spaces. | <b>Environmental Awareness &amp; Green Transition, Learning &amp; Capacity Building</b>       |
| <b>Digital Transition / Digital Tools</b>            | The SplotBB platform integrated offline and online activities. Participants created digital artefacts (logos, interactive maps) and engaged in game tasks through the app, supporting active cultural education, group integration, and participation of diverse communities. Digital tools facilitated documentation and knowledge transfer for future projects.                                                              | <b>Participation &amp; Engagement, Learning &amp; Capacity Building, Replicability</b>        |
| <b>Evaluation Conclusions</b>                        | Facilitator observations confirmed that the testing actions addressed the city's key social challenges: social isolation, low participation, limited ecological awareness, and weak sense of community belonging. The actions showed high potential for replication and scaling, supporting recommendations for implementation in other districts and European cities.                                                         | <b>Scalability, Replicability, Social Inclusion, Connection to Place &amp; Local Identity</b> |

## Evaluation Summary

Bielsko-Biała implemented a series of testing actions within the URBACT IV RECUP network to verify the practical feasibility of culture-led solutions and adapt them to local social, spatial and organisational conditions. Qualitative observations, supported by pre/post survey results and implementation feedback, demonstrated that the activities positively affected multiple dimensions of urban loneliness, enabled the rebuilding of social relationships, strengthened participants' sense of agency, and increased engagement with public spaces.

The combination of the artistic workshops on Slavic demonology led by Marcin Malik Malicki (known artistically as Malik), the city game *Following the Whisperers – The Trail of Slavic Demons* (developed through the SplotBB platform), and the Treeline artistic-

ecological initiative (implemented in cooperation with internationally recognised composer Graham Fitkin and local musician Ghostman) enabled the simultaneous advancement of Digital and Green Transition objectives, contributing to increased ecological awareness, digital participation and cultural competences.

The flexible and modular design of the testing actions demonstrated high potential for replication and scaling, making them suitable for further municipal investment and long-term integration into the city's cultural, social policies. The pilots also confirmed that education, culture and environmental stewardship can be combined into a coherent model of innovative, adaptable and sustainable urban revitalisation.

The conclusions from the pilot phase and the work of the URBACT Local Group clearly indicate that Bielsko-Biała is ready to move from successful but fragmented interventions to a stable implementation mechanism: a clear model for supporting micro-actions, permanent cross-sector coordination, shared quality standards (including accessibility), and a learning system based on monitoring, evaluation and iterative improvement. This mechanism constitutes the core of the investment proposal developed in the following sections of the Plan.

## **Strategic Lessons from Testing Actions**

The pilot phase generated evidence that goes beyond the success of individual activities. Collectively, the testing actions confirmed that culture-based experimentation can function as an effective public policy tool for addressing loneliness, weak social bonds and underused public space. The results provide a credible foundation for the proposed 2027–2028 investment phase.

### **1. Small-scale actions can generate high public value when designed as processes**

Relatively modest and flexible interventions may produce significant outcomes when structured as participatory processes rather than one-off events. The strongest value emerged through co-creation, dialogue, repeated encounters and shared authorship. This validates the Plan's assumption that future investment should prioritise continuity, facilitation and recurring engagement formats.

### **2. Culture can reactivate public space through relational place-making**

The testing actions showed that familiar urban locations can quickly regain social meaning when activated through storytelling, creativity or nature-based experiences. Participants were encouraged not only to pass through the city, but to stay, interact,

reflect and return. This confirms that culture should be treated as a practical regeneration instrument, complementing physical investments with social activation.

### **3. Digital and Green tools are most effective when serving social goals**

Digital and Green Transition components generated the strongest public value when linked to belonging, inclusion and wellbeing. The SplotBB platform increased access and engagement through geolocated cultural and narrative exploration. Treeline connected urban greenery with reflection, creativity and collective community experience. Future investment should continue using these dimensions as enablers of social cohesion.

### **4. Young people engage when given real agency**

Younger residents responded strongest when invited to shape content, co-create activities and take meaningful roles. Passive audience models generated weaker engagement than authorship and responsibility. This strongly supports the proposed youth pathway based on mentoring, volunteering, co-production and real influence over public-space initiatives.

### **5. Bielsko-Biała is ready to scale**

The most important lesson is institutional. The city already possesses the core assets required for scaling: active partners, tested formats, growing cross-sector trust, operational experience and demonstrated resident demand. The next step is therefore not further fragmented pilots, but a stable city mechanism combining coordination, micro-funding, quality standards and continuous learning through prototyping and monitoring results.

### **Added Value of the Transfer Process**

The pilot phase demonstrated that successful transfer does not mean copying solutions from another city, but translating core principles into local realities. Bielsko-Biała drew inspiration from the CUP4Creativity practice: the power of culture in public space, low-threshold participation open to people without barriers, residents as co-creators rather than passive audiences, and prototyping as a method of learning through action.

These principles were then adapted to the city's own territorial context: local heritage and identity, urban greenery as a wellbeing resource, youth participation needs, and the momentum generated by the Polish Capital of Culture 2026 process. This confirms a mature transfer capacity based on adaptation, ownership and continuous learning.

At the same time, the pilots strengthened cooperation between City Hall departments, cultural institutions, NGOs, educators and community actors. This institutional

governance learning is a particularly valuable strategic asset, as long-term impact depends not only on successful activities, but on the city's ability to work consistently across sectors.

### **Why Immediate Investment Is Justified and Priority Actions for 2027–2028**

The testing phase created momentum, partnerships, practical know-how and public legitimacy for the RECUP approach. Without a timely investment phase in 2027–2028, there is a clear risk that these assets would remain temporary and dispersed.

Targeted investment now would allow the city to consolidate proven formats, scale successful actions, embed shared standards and secure durable public value. The proposed Investment Plan therefore represents the logical continuation of already validated practice.

Priority actions offering the highest expected social return on investment:

- Created artefacts, logos, and city game tasks incorporated elements of local cultural heritage, promoting reflection on the meaning of places and the city's history.
- A permanent coordination and delivery operator to ensure continuity, quality management and cross-sector cooperation.
- A flexible micro-fund for neighbourhood co-created actions enabling low-threshold resident participation and local ownership.
- Youth agency pathways based on mentoring, volunteering and co-production roles.
- Scaling digital participation tools, including the SplotBB platform and related participatory formats.
- Cyclical Green Transition wellbeing programmes based on the Treeline model, linking culture, nature and community wellbeing.

### **Strategic Conclusion**

Bielsko-Biała has moved beyond experimentation. The next strategic step is institutionalisation at scale: transforming tested cultural innovation into a permanent city capacity for wellbeing, belonging and social cohesion.

## 2.2 OUR STARTING POINT

Bielsko-Biała's starting point for adapting the CUP4Creativity practice is a clearly defined urban policy challenge: loneliness and the weakening of social bonds, understood in a structural and territorial way. As developed by the URBACT Local Group, this challenge results from overlapping factors:

- a lack of sense of belonging to place and community,
- difficulties in establishing and maintaining relationships,
- a weakened balance between individualism and communality,
- excessive digital stimulation and resulting isolation (particularly among young people),
- reduced sense of safety and comfort in public space,
- limited influence of residents on shaping urban space and activities.

The city enters the adaptation process with significant assets:

- a well-developed institutional infrastructure for culture and local animation (network of municipal cultural centres, a public library with dispersed branches, institutions of regional importance),
- experience in participatory actions and work in public space,
- developing digital tools for animation and participation (SplotBB),
- strengthened cross-sector cooperation capacity developed through ECoC and PCC processes,
- a unique environmental asset: proximity of mountains and forests as a real component of wellbeing.

At the same time, the starting point reveals barriers that, without investment intervention, would limit the durability and scale of actions.

### **Organisational and systemic barriers**

- fragmented responsibilities and lack of a single, stable coordination mechanism at the intersection of culture, social policy, education, public space, greenery and digitalisation;
- risk of one-off actions and lack of continuity after funding ends;
- financial and procedural instruments ill-suited to small, flexible public space interventions;
- lack of a systemic approach to monitoring and evaluating relational and social change.

### **Social and accessibility barriers**

- informational, economic and symbolic barriers to access to culture;
- limited effectiveness in reaching groups most exposed to isolation;
- deficit of durable “relational places” in public space.

### **Territorial barriers**

- uneven distribution of cultural and social activity across the city;
- weakening of social functions in parts of the city centre, vacant premises and declining “street life”, reinforcing the experience of the city as a transit space.

In this context, the RECUP Investment Plan responds to a key gap: the city has resources and experience, but needs a durable architecture of action – combining process, tools, partnerships, quality standards and evaluation – to maintain and scale the approach after 2026. This starting point defines the project for adapting the CUP4Creativity practice, developed in the following subsections.

## **2.3 THE ADAPTED VERSION OF THE INNOVATIVE PRACTICE**

### **Adapted practice in a nutshell (Bielsko-Biała version)**

The adapted version of the CUP4Creativity practice in Bielsko-Biała establishes a **permanent municipal mechanism for counteracting loneliness through culture**, understood as a relational, process-based public policy tool rather than a sectoral programme of events. The mechanism is designed to operate beyond individual projects and funding cycles, embedding learning, co-creation and partnership-based delivery into the everyday functioning of the city.

In operational terms, the adapted practice is based on the **cyclical activation of low-threshold actions in public space**, co-created with residents and local partners, supported by a dedicated process operator, and embedded in a logic of **testing, learning and gradual scaling**. The experience of testing actions implemented during the URBACT phase serves as proof of feasibility and as a foundation for institutionalisation in the investment phase (2027–2028).

The adaptation retains the core logic of the original CUP4Creativity practice while responding to the specific social, spatial and organisational conditions of Bielsko-Biała. In particular, it addresses the city’s key challenge of weakened social bonds and loneliness by restoring **agency, presence and shared responsibility** in everyday urban spaces.

## Core elements of the adapted practice

### 1. Co-creation mechanism for micro-initiatives in public space

The first pillar of the adaptation is a **permanent co-creation mechanism** enabling residents—especially young people—to move from passive participation to active co-authorship of cultural and social actions.

In practice, this means regular activation of **small-scale, low-threshold initiatives**, such as:

- artistic and street-art interventions,
- neighbourhood-based cultural micro-events,
- participatory cultural education formats,
- dialogue- and relationship-building actions,
- micro-projects linking culture with nature or digital tools.

The mechanism prioritises accessibility, simplicity and responsiveness, allowing initiatives to emerge close to everyday life rather than through complex project structures. This directly reflects the CUP4Creativity emphasis on empowering residents and lowering barriers to participation.

### 2. Prototyping and testing as a municipal working standard

The second pillar translates the CUP4Creativity logic of experimentation into a **standard municipal practice**. RECUP deliberately shifts the focus from “delivering events” to **delivering a process**:

**planning → prototyping → reflection → adjustment → scaling**

Testing actions implemented during the URBACT phase demonstrated that this approach:

- reduces implementation risk,
- increases relevance for participants,
- allows rapid learning and correction,
- supports more effective responses to loneliness.

In the investment phase, prototyping becomes a **permanent innovation tool**, enabling the city to test formats before embedding them in regular programmes or funding instruments. This strengthens both effectiveness and accountability from a public-finance perspective.

### 3. Process operator and implementation anchor

A critical element of the adapted practice is the presence of a **stable process operator**, acting as a bridge between:

- City Hall departments,
- municipal cultural institutions,
- NGOs and grassroots groups,
- schools and youth environments,
- artists and creative practitioners,
- residents.

The operator is responsible for coordinating calls and processes, supporting initiators, ensuring accessibility and safety standards, facilitating partnerships, and organising monitoring and learning cycles.

In Bielsko-Biała, this role is fulfilled by **Point 11**, operating in close cooperation with municipal institutions and City Hall. This provides an **institutional anchor** that prevents fragmentation, supports continuity and allows the mechanism to function across sectors and neighbourhoods.

### 4. Digital and Green dimensions as enhancers (not standalone goals)

In line with CUP4Creativity, Digital and Green dimensions are treated as **enablers** rather than autonomous objectives.

- **Digital** is developed as a tool for participation, education and animation, building on formats tested through the SplotBB platform (geolocation, narrative-based city games, tasks, badges, documentation and outreach). Digital tools support access, engagement and learning, particularly for younger participants, without replacing face-to-face interaction.
- **Green** is developed as a wellbeing-oriented and community-building practice, linking culture with urban nature. Actions follow the Treeline logic: creative walks, artistic interpretations of greenery, projects “reading the city through nature”, and initiatives centred around parks, trees and everyday green spaces. These formats strengthen ecological awareness while simultaneously building social bonds.

## Mapping the adaptation to the original CUP4Creativity practice

The table below illustrates the direct correspondence between the original CUP4Creativity pillars and their adapted form in Bielsko-Biała.

| <b>CUP4Creativity – original pillars</b>   | <b>Adaptation in Bielsko-Biała (RECUP)</b>                                          |
|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Resident empowerment and agency</b>     | Permanent co-creation mechanism for micro-initiatives in public space               |
| <b>Low-threshold, small-scale actions</b>  | Cyclical activation of neighbourhood-based micro-actions                            |
| <b>Experimentation and learning</b>        | Prototyping as a municipal standard (testing → learning → scaling)                  |
| <b>Dedicated process coordination</b>      | Point 11 as a stable process operator and implementation anchor                     |
| <b>Partnerships across sectors</b>         | Structured cooperation between City Hall, institutions, NGOs, schools and residents |
| <b>Culture as a public-space activator</b> | Artistic, participatory and relational actions in everyday urban spaces             |
| <b>Flexibility and adaptability</b>        | Modular formats adjustable to neighbourhood scale and participant needs             |
| <b>Sustainability beyond projects</b>      | Embedding the mechanism in municipal instruments and budgets (post-2026)            |

## Rationale: why these elements are priorities in Bielsko-Biała

In Bielsko-Biała, loneliness intensifies where residents lack everyday reasons to meet in public space and feel limited influence over their surroundings. The adapted practice therefore prioritises **regular situations of encounter** and the restoration of agency, particularly among young people, through safe, accessible and locally rooted formats.

Equally important is the **territorial dimension**. The city requires a mechanism that functions both in central areas facing revitalisation challenges and in neighbourhoods with strong local identities. The adapted practice therefore combines actions in the city centre with neighbourhood-based initiatives anchored in local institutions and partners.

### Key aspects requiring local adaptation

The adaptation explicitly addresses the following local conditions:

- **City scale and structure:** ensuring coherence and quality while operating across central areas and multiple neighbourhoods.
- **Youth needs:** strong emphasis on co-creation, mentoring, real roles, low-threshold entry points and digital tools.
- **Accessibility:** applying accessibility standards to both actions and communication, reflecting the diversity of participants' needs.
- **Administrative realities:** simplification of procedures, clear decision paths, spatial agreements and safety protocols for public space.
- **Financial sustainability:** designing the mechanism to be funder-ready and embeddable in municipal, partnership and external funding instruments in 2027–2028, without dependence on a single source.

## 2.4 THE INTEGRATED APPROACH AND THE PARTICIPATIVE PROCESS

The RECUP investment proposal is designed from the outset as an integrated approach, because the mechanism of loneliness – according to the city's diagnosis and the URBACT Local Group – is not a single-sector problem. In practice, this means that cultural intervention simultaneously has social, spatial, educational and health dimensions, while Digital and Green are treated as tools enhancing accessibility and wellbeing.

### How policies and sectors are integrated

The project assumes permanent cooperation and coordination at the intersection of:

- culture and animation (cultural institutions, process operator, network of public space actions);
- social policy (work with groups exposed to isolation, relational support, safety and comfort of space use);
- education (cultural and civic education from childhood, in partnership with schools);
- public space and mobility (conditions for actions in space, accessibility, logistics, safety);
- environment and greenery (nature as a wellbeing resource; green actions as relational practice);
- digitalisation (tools for participation, education and animation; digital accessibility and outreach);

– regeneration (revitalising social functions of space and creating everyday reasons for presence).

Operationally, integration is achieved not through declarations but through **co-design**, agreed standards for public space implementation and shared measurement of effects (relational indicators, participation, sense of belonging and agency).

### **Role of the URBACT Local Group – from diagnosis to co-implementation**

The ULG in Bielsko-Biała functions as a strategic-operational backbone: combining competences of City Hall, cultural institutions and social partners, and acting as a forum for aligning priorities and assessing feasibility. During preparation, the Investment Plan is built on ULG work (diagnosis of loneliness mechanisms, identification of resources and barriers, recommendations for adaptation). During implementation, the ULG will be crucial for:

- maintaining cross-departmental integration,
- co-deciding on priorities of calls and interventions,
- addressing formal and spatial barriers on an ongoing basis,
- reviewing monitoring and evaluation results and introducing adjustments.

### **Ensuring real co-creation with residents**

The project moves away from a model where residents are merely consulted and then offered ready-made activities. Co-creation will be implemented through:

- open idea submission mechanisms and calls for micro-actions (clear criteria, support in preparation, simplified entry for people without project experience);
- mentoring and competence support (especially for young people and informal groups), making agency real rather than symbolic;
- co-production with institutions and NGOs (shared roles: idea – support – implementation – evaluation);
- volunteering and youth roles (organisation, facilitation, documentation, animation) as a way of building belonging and civic competences;
- dialogue formats about public space and the city (actions in space as a pretext for discussion, negotiation and reclaiming shared ownership).

### **Inclusion of key groups and lowering barriers**

The project assumes that the city is “for everyone”, but experiences of culture and community must be designed for concrete needs:

- **young people**: co-creation, digital tools, safe relational frameworks, mentoring and real roles;
- **children**: cultural and civic education as a foundation;

- **adults:** high-quality, engaging actions beyond consumption;
- **seniors:** counteracting isolation through proximity, accessibility and intergenerational formats;
- **people with specific needs:** accessibility as a design principle.

In RECUP, accessibility is understood broadly – as a real possibility to participate in culture and use public space regardless of age, ability, life situation, digital competences or economic resources. This approach is consistent with the city’s logic of building quality of life through equal access to public services and socio-cultural activities.

### **Sustainability (“after 2026”)**

Section 2 assumes that the Investment Plan is not a “one-year project”, but a mechanism embedded in city strategies and capable of being financed and developed in 2027–2028.

Sustainability will be built through:

- a permanent process operator and partnership network,
- repeatable action cycles rather than one-off events,
- embedded tools (calls, support packages, standards, digital tools),
- monitoring and evaluation used for learning and adjustment,
- a logic of combining funding sources (public and partnership-based) and preparing the project to meet funder requirements.

## **SECTION 3: THE ADAPTED INNOVATION PROJECT**

### **3.1 THE VALUE PROPOSITION**

The proposed project is an investment in the city’s long-term capacity to counter loneliness and the weakening of social bonds – through culture understood as a public policy instrument, not merely an “events sector”. In practice, this means moving from one-off activities to a permanent, repeatable and scalable model of work in public space: with residents, for residents, and in shared responsibility for places.

The value of the investment for the city and for the funding institution lies in the fact that it:

- creates conditions for rebuilding community (neighbourhood ties, intergenerational bonds, peer relationships, support networks), strengthening wellbeing and social cohesion as a real, measurable outcome of urban policies;
- reverses the “transit-space” logic by reinforcing the relational and social functions of the inner city and other parts of the city (including districts), thus supporting

revitalisation understood in social terms;

- strengthens residents’ agency – especially young people’s – through co-creation mechanisms, mentoring, volunteering and co-delivery roles (not only participation as an audience);
- builds the city’s capacity for cross-cutting work (culture – social policy – education – public space – transport – environment – digitalisation), so that cultural interventions become a real tool for integrating policies rather than “a project alongside”;
- embeds the Green and Digital Transitions as enablers of accessibility, participation and quality of life (including digital tools that engage residents and artistic–ecological activities that build relationships with urban greenery and nature as a wellbeing resource);
- consolidates the legacy of BB2026 (“Weaving wellbeing”) as a long-term model – so that the programme year is not a one-off peak, but a transition point towards standards and mechanisms implemented in 2027–2028 and beyond.

In the short term (2027–2028), the project delivers a visible qualitative change: more safe, low-threshold opportunities to “be together”, greater resident presence in shared spaces, and increased cultural participation in a co-creation format. In the medium and long term (after 2028), it creates systemic value: a permanent cross-sector collaboration model, accessibility and quality standards, and a mechanism for replicating actions in new locations, with the potential to draw on multiple funding sources.

### 3.2 THE WORKPLAN

The action plan below translates the diagnosis and the concept of the adapted practice into a feasible implementation project. The project is based on transferring the key mechanism of the good practice from Újbuda (CUP4Creativity): culture as a process of building social bonds in public space through co-creation, prototyping, learning and scaling, supported by a process operator (Point 11) and delivered with a network of municipal and social partners.

The action plan is designed as cycles (iterations), not single events. In each cycle, the following are essential: diagnosing the micro-needs of a place, co-design, implementation of prototypes, testing, evaluation and improvement.

#### **Action 1. Launching a municipal “co-creation mechanism” in public space (frameworks, standards, tools)**

##### **Description**

In the first implementation phase, the city establishes a coherent organisational

mechanism that enables regular cultural actions in public space as a social process.

The mechanism includes:

- design and quality standards (including accessibility, safety, communication standards);
- clear rules for inter-departmental cooperation and collaboration with external partners;
- a simplified “implementation package” for initiatives (permits, contacts, schedule, responsibilities, H&S, rules for working in public space);
- a recruitment and selection procedure (open, transparent, with criteria: relational impact, low threshold, co-creation, accessibility);
- an evaluation model (a minimum set of indicators and research tools);
- a catalogue of pilot locations and rules for cooperation with site managers.

**For whom:** cultural institutions, the Municipal Cultural Centre network, libraries, NGOs, informal groups, schools, animators and local leaders; indirectly – residents (with a focus on young people).

**Where:** first, areas with visible deficits in relational functions (historic and inner-city sections, key pedestrian routes, places with high turnover and vacant premises) and selected districts – in line with a needs-and-potential map.

### Baseline

- no permanent, repeatable mechanism for implementing relational activities in public space (actions are ad hoc and dispersed);
- formal and communication barriers limiting bottom-up initiatives;
- limited “process legibility” for residents and partners.

### Output indicators

- an adopted and implemented set of standards and procedures;
- an established coordination team and a regular cooperation mode;
- a tools package for initiatives and partners;
- a list of locations and cooperation rules.

### Result indicators

- a shorter and simpler pathway for delivering actions in public space;
- more partners able to deliver activities (including NGOs and informal groups);
- increased trust and predictability of the process (fewer conflicts, fewer ad hoc decisions).

### Risks and mitigation

- risk of excessive bureaucracy: mitigated by “minimum procedures, maximum clarity”;

- risk of team overload: cycle planning, task delegation, support from the Municipal Cultural Centre network and partners;
- risk of conflicts in public space: safety standards, communication with the surroundings, cooperation with the Municipal Roads Authority and relevant services.

**Timeframe**

- 2027: development and implementation of standards + launch of the first cycle of activities;
- 2028: refinement based on evaluation and scaling of the mechanism.

**Action 2. Cycles of prototyping relational activities in public space (artistic interventions, street art, neighbourhood actions)****Description**

Implementation of cyclical actions that activate public space and turn it into a place of relationships, co-presence and shared responsibility.

Actions include:

- artistic interventions in public space (street art understood as a dialogue and co-creation process, not only a mural as an outcome);
- neighbourhood and intergenerational actions (micro-formats of meetings, workshops in public space, “conversation triggers”);
- identity-based actions (drawing on the city’s layered history – the textile industry as a foundation of development, production and industrial traditions, animation heritage, and contemporary creative formats);
- actions that create “reasons to return” – fixed points in the calendar and in space (repeatability rather than one-off events).

**Link to the testing logic**

Actions are delivered in iterations: in each location a prototype is created, observed, consulted, improved and – if successful – consolidated as a format.

**Baseline**

- a low number of informal meeting opportunities in public space;
- a limited number of actions that build relationships over time (process-based work);
- an outflow of activity to commercial spaces.

**Output indicators**

- number of completed activity cycles in locations;
- number of co-delivering partners (institutions/NGOs/groups);
- number of actions co-created with residents (including young people).

**Result indicators**

- increased sense of belonging and shared responsibility for place;
- stronger “social presence” in spaces covered by the actions;
- growth in relationships and bottom-up initiatives (as a proxy indicator for rebuilding community).

**Risks and mitigation**

- social conflict around changes in space: communication work, a visible co-creation process, clear rationale;
- risk of vandalism or tensions: cooperation with local leaders, educational components, presence of facilitators;
- risk of “eventification”: mandatory process component (preparation – co-creation – return – evaluation).

**Timeframe**

- 2027: pilots in key locations + development of replicable formats;
- 2028: expansion to further places and districts.

**Action 3. Digital Transition as a relationship enabler: urban games and participatory digital tools (SplotBB.pl – a web-based platform for co-created urban games)****Description**

Development and use of digital tools to animate urban space and engage residents in culture and the city narrative. Reference points are pilot actions: art workshops on Slavic demonology and the urban game “Following the Whisperers – The Slavic Demon Trail”, based on the SplotBB platform (geolocation, puzzles, cultural narratives). In 2027–2028 the tool will be used in a systemic way:

- as a participatory format (co-creating routes, content and narratives);
- as an educational format (for schools, families, young people);
- as a tool to increase access to information and entry into culture (low threshold);
- as a collaboration platform for institutions and partners (enabling sharing with other city entities under clear rules).

**Digital accessibility standard**

Digital tools developed in the project meet digital accessibility requirements in line with WCAG 2.2, level AA (readability, contrast, keyboard navigation, alt text, mobile accessibility). Communication follows plain-language principles and content is designed with diverse user needs in mind.

**Baseline**

- a limited number of digital tools strengthening relationships with the city and local identity;

- digital overload among young people without a community and local-rootedness component.

**Output indicators**

- number of new routes/formats within SplotBB;
- number of partners using the tool;
- number of actions connecting physical and digital space.

**Result indicators**

- increased resident engagement in exploring the city and participating in culture;
- strengthened sense of belonging through local narratives;
- building intergenerational participation (families, schools, seniors).

**Risks and mitigation**

- risk of digital exclusion: offline components, facilitator support, cooperation with libraries and the Municipal Cultural Centre network;
- risk of “a game instead of relationships”: mandatory meetings/workshops and co-creation component;
- risk related to tool maintenance: a maintenance plan, update rules and clear responsibilities.

**Timeframe**

- 2027: development and ordering of the tool-sharing model + new formats;
- 2028: scaling across the city and onboarding additional partners.

**Action 4. Green Transition as a wellbeing enabler: artistic–ecological activities (Treeline)****Description**

Expansion and scaling of artistic–ecological activities based on pilots combining “Reviving culture in urban spaces” with the Treeline format (UNESCO patronage): city walks, creating artistic “tree profiles” (sound, photography, illustration), online workshops with a UK composer, and presentation of outcomes in 2026 (exhibition and concert). In 2027–2028 the project translates this experience into a permanent method of:

- building residents’ relationship with urban greenery;
- creating “soothing” community practices in space (walking as a relational tool, not only recreation);
- ecological education through art and co-creation;
- strengthening wellbeing based on the resource of nature available in the city’s immediate surroundings (mountains and forests) as well as within the urban fabric.

**Baseline**

- limited use of urban greenery as a space for cultural and relational actions;
- insufficient number of formats combining culture, education and wellbeing.

**Output indicators**

- number of Treeline / artistic–ecological cycles;
- number of participants in outdoor and workshop activities;
- number of partners (institutions, schools, NGOs).

**Result indicators**

- increased ecological awareness and relationship with place;
- increased participation in low-threshold community activities;
- improved perceived quality of space and “comfort of being together”.

**Risks and mitigation**

- seasonality: year-round planning (different formats for different seasons, indoor/outdoor components);
- risk of reducing the action to an “event”: cyclicity, workshop work, local groups caring for outcomes.

**Timeframe**

- 2027: delivery of cycles in selected locations;
- 2028: expansion to further areas and onboarding additional institutions.

**Action 5. Agency programme: young people, volunteering, mentoring and co-production****Description**

This action responds to the key need: young people want to be co-creators, not only recipients. The programme builds real roles for young people: co-designing actions in public space, co-leading activities, creating content (e.g., for digital tools), skills-based volunteering, peer mentoring and relational support. The programme is delivered in close cooperation with cultural institutions, the Municipal Cultural Centre network, schools and social organisations, and – where needed – with social policy and community support services.

**Programme elements**

- recruitment for roles (young facilitators, co-curators, co-creators of routes and narratives, volunteers);
- mentoring (institution/NGO staff as process mentors);

- safe frameworks (rules, support, cross-sector cooperation);
- competence development pathways (from participation to co-leading).

**Baseline**

- a shortage of “places and roles” for young people;
- loneliness reinforced by digital isolation and a lack of influence over one’s surroundings.

**Output indicators**

- number of young people in co-creator roles;
- number of actions co-produced with young people;
- number of mentoring/support hours delivered.

**Result indicators**

- increased agency and sense of belonging;
- strengthened social and civic competences;
- development of lasting peer and intergenerational relationships.

**Risks and mitigation**

- risk of “token participation”: real influence of young people on decisions, not only consultation;
- risk of burnout: role rotation, mentor support, reasonable workloads;
- risk of exclusion: low-threshold entry, different engagement levels, cooperation with Municipal Cultural Centre sites, libraries and schools.

**Timeframe**

- 2027: programme launch and first roles;
- 2028: consolidation and linking to long-term municipal and partner instruments.

**Action 6. Strengthening competences and partnerships: culture sector, NGOs and inter-departmental cooperation****Description**

This is the “soft infrastructure” component without which public-space actions cannot scale or become embedded. It includes:

- trainings and workshops for institutions, NGOs and local groups (designing relational actions, working with young people, accessibility, safety in public space, communication, evaluation);
- support in securing funding and preparing applications (building on partners’ development competences, including BCP and ARR);

– developing a cooperation standard and a “shared language” between departments and institutions.

**Baseline**

- high motivation to cooperate, but no permanent competence architecture;
- dispersed responsibility and limited repeatability of practices.

**Output indicators**

- number of training and workshop processes;
- number of partners supported;
- number of joint initiatives delivered in a co-production model.

**Result indicators**

- increased delivery capacity of the city and partners;
- higher effectiveness and durability of actions (less one-off delivery);
- improved quality of cross-sector cooperation.

**Risks and mitigation**

- risk of low attendance: topics aligned with real needs, practical delivery;
- risk of “training without implementation”: linking trainings to cycles of actions and mentoring.

**Timeframe**

- 2027–2028: ongoing actions linked to prototyping cycles.

### **3.3 GOVERNANCE AND DELIVERY MODEL**

The governance model has been designed to be feasible, anchored in existing city structures, and to balance two dimensions: (1) formal requirements for implementation in public space and (2) the need for flexibility and fast learning typical of prototyping.

**Lead and implementation anchor**

Point 11 (within the structure of Bielsko-Biała Cultural Centre) acts as the process operator and coordinator:

- leads prototyping cycles (from idea to test and evaluation);
- moderates cross-sector collaboration;
- ensures coherence of standards (accessibility, quality, communication, safety);
- runs activities with young people, volunteering and partners;
- is responsible for logistics, documenting results and learning.

**Governance structure (levels)**

**1. Steering Committee / Strategic Team (quarterly mode)**

Purpose: strategic decisions, removing systemic barriers, ensuring coherence with city policies.

Composition: representatives of key City Hall departments (culture and promotion, social policy, strategy and development), the City Development Office, the Municipal Roads Authority, representatives of cultural institutions (Bielsko-Biała Cultural Centre / Point 11, the Municipal Cultural Centre network, Bielsko-Biała BWA Gallery), and – as needed – development partners (ARR/BCP).

Responsibilities: approving annual cycle plans, priority locations, cooperation rules and standards.

**2. Operational Team / Delivery Team (working mode – every 2 weeks)**

Purpose: day-to-day delivery, location arrangements, schedule coordination, problem solving during implementation.

Lead: Point 11.

Members: coordinators from City Hall, the City Development Office, the Municipal Roads Authority, cultural institutions, NGO partners depending on the cycle.

**3. URBACT Local Group (ULG) – co-creating and monitoring body**

Purpose: ensuring multiple perspectives, quality participation and continuous learning.

Role: recommendations, consulting standards, identifying barriers and resources, supporting evaluation, and acting as a channel to communities and institutions represented in the ULG.

**Partner roles – practical responsibilities**

- City Hall Department of Culture and Promotion – political coordination in culture, coherence with city programmes, communication and partnership support.
- City Hall Social Policy Department – support for relational and inclusion components; cooperation on activities with young people and vulnerable groups; linking cultural actions with local support networks.
- City Hall Strategy and Development Department / City Development Office – integration with city strategic directions, planning and revitalisation support, location selection and coherence with spatial processes.
- Municipal Roads Authority – arrangements regarding road lanes, safety and organisation in public space, cooperation in designing “relational places”.
- Bielsko-Biała Cultural Centre / Point 11 – process operator, cycle delivery, mentoring, implementation and evaluation.
- Municipal Cultural Centre network and libraries – local contact points and distribution

in districts; support for recruitment, promotion, educational and low-threshold actions.

- Bielsko-Biała BWA Gallery – curatorial and artistic competence, ensuring quality of interventions in space, working with artists and communities.
- NGOs and informal groups (including organisations working in public space) – delivery and co-creation of actions, building trust in local environments, reaching groups less present in institutions.
- Development partners (Regional Development Agency in Bielsko-Biała (ARRSA), Bielsko-Biała Entrepreneurship Centre (BCP)) – support in funding and instruments for bottom-up initiatives, advisory on grants and organisational development, linking the project to support programmes (including ecological and social ones).

### **Built-in accessibility, safety and quality standard (embedded in governance)**

The project adopts “accessibility as a design principle”, covering:

- physical accessibility (selecting places and solutions that do not exclude people with reduced mobility);
- communication and information accessibility (clear materials, plain language, multi-channel communication, contact and support options);
- digital accessibility (WCAG 2.1 AA for online tools);
- sensory accessibility (solutions tailored to activity formats: audio description, captions, alternative materials – depending on the format);
- safety standard for actions in public space (location risk assessment, rules for facilitator presence, cooperation with the Municipal Roads Authority and services, communication with residents and local businesses).

Standards are applied not as an “additional annex” but as a condition for admitting actions into a cycle (a quality criterion).

## **3.4 OVERALL PROJECT SCHEDULE**

The schedule follows an iterative implementation logic: preparation – pilot – scaling – consolidation. The project is conceived as a continuation of the energy and standards of BB2026 and as a durable model for 2027–2028.

### **Phase 0 – Closing pilots and preparing for implementation (second half of 2026)**

- summarising pilot actions (Digital: SplotBB; Green: Treeline) and implementation conclusions;
- preparing an initial map of locations, resources and barriers;
- agreeing the governance structure and the mode of inter-departmental cooperation;
- organising the model for maintaining digital tools and the accessibility standard.

**Phase 1 – Implementation pilot and model refinement (Year 1, 2027)****Q1 2027**

- launch of the Strategic Team and the Operational Team;
- adoption of quality/accessibility/safety standards and the implementation package;
- selection of first locations and preparation of the cycle schedule.

**Q2–Q3 2027**

- delivery of the first prototyping cycles in public space (artistic interventions, neighbourhood actions, street art as a process);
- development and use of digital tools (SplotBB) in a co-creation and education format;
- implementation of artistic–ecological cycles (Treeline) as wellbeing actions;
- launch of the youth agency programme (roles, mentoring, volunteering).

**Q4 2027**

- evaluation of Year 1 (qualitative and quantitative results, risk and barrier analysis);
- refinement of standards and tools;
- preparation of the scaling plan for 2028 (additional locations, partners, schedule).

**Phase 2 – Scaling and consolidation (Year 2, 2028)****Q1–Q2 2028**

- expansion to further locations and districts while maintaining standards;
- onboarding more delivery partners (institutions, NGOs, schools, informal groups) via the co-production model;
- consolidating the youth programme as a permanent agency pathway in culture (new recruitments, mentoring, role development).

**Q3–Q4 2028**

- stabilising funding and resources by linking the project to existing municipal instruments and external sources available to the city and partners (grants, calls, regional and national programmes) so that parts of the actions can continue beyond the investment;
- strengthening the competence component: training and advisory cycles for institutions/NGOs (including support for applying for funds, partnership development, planning process-based actions);
- final evaluation and preparation of a “replication package” (standards, tools, formats, governance model, recommendations for subsequent years) as a basis for continued funding and scaling after 2028.

**Continuity logic beyond 2028**

The project’s outcome is intended to be a lasting city capacity for relational work in public space: not a one-off programme, but a permanent model that can be continued

and funded from multiple sources. The project prepares the ground for subsequent investment stages (larger scale, additional locations, deeper work with young people, development of digital tools and green wellbeing formats), and its results will be developed in the next parts of the Plan: Section 4 (budget and financing) and Section 5 (monitoring and evaluation).

## SECTION 4: BUDGET

### 4.1 PROJECT COSTS

The RECUP Investment Plan for Bielsko-Biała (2027–2028) assumes that actions will be delivered primarily through the city’s and partners’ existing organisational, technical and institutional capacities. These include the City Hall, municipal cultural institutions (in particular the Bielsko-Biała Cultural Centre), municipal units, NGOs and partner organisations. The Plan is designed as an **operational mechanism** that strengthens and coordinates what already exists and works in the city, rather than creating a parallel project structure.

The scale and structure of the budget are aligned with the City of Bielsko-Biała’s existing expenditure patterns in culture, social policy, education and regeneration, and are comparable to previously approved investment plans, ensuring financial realism and institutional feasibility. A significant share of technical services, basic infrastructure and administrative support is provided within statutory tasks and regular employment of municipal institutions; these inputs constitute an **in-kind contribution** and are therefore not fully charged to the project budget. As a result, the financial plan focuses on programme, production and process-related costs that are directly linked to the delivery of actions.

The cost model is deliberately oriented towards **operational expenditure** – artistic work, social processes in public space, participation, education and facilitation – rather than infrastructure investments treated as an end in themselves. Where capital or “hard” expenditure occurs, it has a strictly enabling function, improving the conditions for implementation (e.g., temporary infrastructure, minor spatial adjustments, safety measures, or equipment necessary for outdoor and educational activities).

## Key assumptions underpinning the budget design

- **Fixed costs** are kept to a minimum while ensuring continuity and quality of the mechanism, including coordination, facilitation of cooperation, risk and schedule management, and adherence to accessibility, safety and sustainability standards.
- **Variable costs** are directly linked to action packages, including public-space interventions (street art and small-scale place-based actions), participatory activities, Digital Transition and Green Transition components, education and inclusion.
- **Layered financing (cross-financing)** is applied: selected actions can be financed in parallel from several policy streams (culture, social policy, regeneration, education, environment and digitalisation) provided they serve the same public objective of counteracting loneliness and rebuilding social bonds.
- **Scaling is phased:** 2027 focuses on operational implementation and stabilisation of the mechanism; 2028 expands reach and embeds solutions in the city's permanent instruments.

## Cost structure – main categories (linked to Section 3 action packages)

### 1) Programme and production costs for public-space actions

These costs cover preparation and delivery of **cycles of activities**, not isolated one-off events. This includes:

- artistic interventions, street art actions, small and medium murals, temporary installations and performative formats embedded in processes of working with residents;
- production (artists' fees, materials, fabrication, documentation, preparatory and clean-up works);
- organisational costs specific to working in public space: arrangements and permissions, safety measures, supervision, basic logistics, and insurance where required;
- presentation of outcomes in formats adequate to a process (walks, open meetings, micro-exhibitions, digital documentation), rather than a single "final event" as the only result.

Large landmark projects are explicitly excluded in favour of site-specific, participatory and distributed interventions.

## **2) Digital Transition – urban games and digital tools (SplotBB.pl web app as an urban participation tool)**

This category covers both the tool and the social process around it:

- development and maintenance of content, scenarios, routes and mechanics of urban games (including updates);
- technical support (maintenance, fixes, security and reliability);
- production of narrative and educational assets (texts, graphics, audio or micro-materials for group work where relevant);
- facilitation and embedding: workshops, walks and facilitated use with schools, youth, adults and seniors, and support for partners to integrate the tool into everyday practice.

Technical integration is a limited cost; artistic, narrative and facilitation work constitutes the core expenditure.

## **3) Green Transition – artistic and ecological actions**

Costs include workshops, walks and outdoor actions combining culture, education and relationships with urban nature, including:

- field-based and documentation activities (sound, photography, illustration and other media);
- preparation and public presentation of outcomes in accessible, low-threshold formats (in public space and/or institutions);
- cooperation with municipal units responsible for greenery and environmental education, applying a cross-financing logic where tasks serve shared wellbeing and community objectives.

## **4) Coordination, facilitation and management (implementation core)**

These costs determine feasibility and quality of the Plan:

- substantive and operational coordination, including portfolio management of actions delivered by multiple entities;
- facilitation of cross-sector cooperation, agreements and support for implementers (including formal and administrative guidance);
- schedule, risk and quality management, including accessibility, safety and sustainability standards;
- organisation of Urban Local Group work during implementation: working meetings, progress reviews, learning loops and course corrections based on

data.

This cost line remains lean, as a significant share of administrative support is provided institutionally and treated as in-kind contribution.

## 5) Education, participation and capacity-building

This category strengthens long-term sustainability:

- youth programmes based on co-creation, mentoring and volunteering with real responsibilities;
- work with children and schools through cultural and civic education in practice;
- engaging formats for adults and seniors, including intergenerational actions counteracting isolation;
- competence development for institutions and NGOs: training, participatory design support, standards development, and preparation for future funding.

## 6) Monitoring and evaluation (embedded in delivery)

Costs include research and analytical tools, formative evaluation after cycles and phases, a summative evaluation, and translation of conclusions into practical recommendations to be embedded in city standards and everyday practice. The objective is to measure not only attendance, but also relational change, belonging, agency and perceived safety in public space.

## 7) Communication and accessibility (standard conditions of delivery)

Communication and accessibility are treated as necessary conditions for effective counteraction of loneliness, not as add-ons. Costs include multi-channel communication reaching non-regular users of institutions, materials in accessible formats (including plain language and alternative versions), and participation support for people with diverse needs and resources.

## Operational budgeting and control notes

- The budget differentiates **operational (revenue)** and **capital** expenditure; in this Plan, operational costs dominate.
- Amounts will be refined through annual operational budgeting for 2027–2028 and action-specific costings (depending on locations, accessibility and safety requirements).
- Where justified, a **risk reserve** should be included (e.g., price volatility of materials, additional safety requirements, scheduling shifts).

- Implementation requires coherent procurement and contracting rules (fees, production, technical services) to enable multiple entities to deliver within one coordinated mechanism.

### Indicative budget table (2027–2028, EUR) – planning ranges

The ranges below are indicative and serve planning, negotiation with potential funders and preparation for task-based budgeting. Final amounts will be confirmed during operational budgeting and detailed costings.

| Cost category                                                                        | Annual range (EUR) | 2027–2028 range (EUR) | Notes                                                                                            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Public-space interventions and street art</b>                                     | 58,000–93,000      | 116,000–186,000       | Fees, materials, small/medium murals, production, documentation, safety/arrangements             |
| <b>Digital Transition – urban games and tools (SplotBB.pl)</b>                       | 28,000–47,000      | 56,000–93,000         | Scenarios, content, graphics, facilitation, workshops; limited technical integration/maintenance |
| <b>Green Transition – artistic–ecological actions</b>                                | 23,000–37,000      | 47,000–74,000         | Walks, workshops, content/output production, accessible presentations                            |
| <b>Education, participation and volunteering</b>                                     | 19,000–33,000      | 37,000–65,000         | Youth, schools, intergenerational formats, mentoring                                             |
| <b>Bottom-up initiatives support (micro-grants / mini-commissions / mixed model)</b> | 33,000–47,000      | 66,000–93,000         | Two cycles/year; low-threshold micro-actions (typical grant EUR 700–1,100)                       |
| <b>Coordination and management (operator – Point 11)</b>                             | 28,000–42,000      | 56,000–84,000         | Lean coordination core; significant institutional support treated as in-kind                     |
| <b>Monitoring and evaluation</b>                                                     | 9,000–14,000       | 19,000–28,000         | Tools, formative and summative evaluation, implementation-ready recommendations                  |
| <b>Communication and accessibility</b>                                               | 7,000–12,000       | 14,000–23,000         | Outreach beyond regular audiences; accessible formats and participation support                  |

|                         |   |                                                 |                                               |
|-------------------------|---|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| <b>Total indicative</b> | – | <b>approx.<br/>EUR<br/>411,000–<br/>646,000</b> | Subject to operational budgeting and costings |
|-------------------------|---|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|

From an investment perspective, the RECUP Investment Plan is structured to allow potential funders to clearly identify **what they are investing in, at what scale, and how their contribution fits into the overall financial architecture**. Each action package presented in Section 3 is linked to a defined cost range (Section 4.1) and a realistic mix of funding sources (Section 4.2), combining municipal, national, European and private inputs where appropriate.

The Plan intentionally avoids a one-source-per-action logic. Instead, it applies a **layered and modular funding approach**, in which a single action (e.g. a public-space intervention, a digital participation format or a youth co-creation programme) can be co-financed by different policy streams, provided they serve the same public objective of counteracting loneliness and rebuilding social bonds.

This structure allows funders to engage at different levels: by supporting a specific action type, a thematic component (Digital or Green Transition), a target group (youth, seniors, neighbourhoods), or a system function (coordination, evaluation, scaling). As a result, the Plan is readable not only for implementing partners, but also for public and private investors who need a clear line of sight between **their contribution, the scale of intervention, and the expected social return**.

## 4.2 INVESTMENT SOURCES

Financing of the Investment Plan is based on a hybrid model combining municipal funding, external grants and partners' organisational and in-kind contributions. The key assumption is to reduce reliance on a single source and to build a financial architecture that can sustain the mechanism beyond 2028 by embedding it in permanent city instruments. The Plan is designed for layered financing: the same public objective (counteracting loneliness and rebuilding social bonds) can be pursued through coordinated funding streams across departments and institutions. In line with the RECUP "Grants and Beyond" capacity-building, the Plan is not designed to rely on short-term subsidies as the main sustainability mechanism. Instead, it develops a resilient local financing ecosystem that combines: (1) stable municipal and institutional funding for continuity; (2) competitive grants for piloting and scaling; (3) private-sector contributions (cash and in-kind) aligned with neighbourhood needs; and (4) community-

based contributions (micro-donations, co-ownership of outcomes, stewardship). This mix is feasible only if the Plan can demonstrate social returns (reduced loneliness, stronger local networks, increased trust and agency) alongside outputs.

### **1) City of Bielsko-Biała budget and institutional budgets (stability core)**

Municipal and institutional budgets form the stability core of the Plan, financing actions delivered within statutory responsibilities (culture, social policy, regeneration, education, environment and public space management). Implementation will also leverage institutional resources – facilities, staff time, equipment and technical services – largely treated as in-kind contribution. Crucially, the Plan strengthens and develops existing municipal instruments that already function effectively, rather than creating parallel structures. These include grant calls, public task commissioning, participatory budgeting mechanisms, youth and neighbourhood formats, aligned with the RECUP co-creation mechanism. Where feasible, municipal premises and space-related instruments may support stabilisation of social and cultural activity, especially in areas requiring activation and a stronger everyday presence.

### **2) Cross-financing and shared departmental responsibility (culture as a public policy tool)**

The Plan intentionally combines funding streams for actions serving the shared objective of counteracting loneliness and rebuilding social bonds. Typical cross-financing pathways include:

- culture + social policy (relationships, outreach work, prevention of isolation),
- culture + education (cultural and civic education in practice; work with children and youth),
- culture + regeneration / public space management / mobility (revitalising streets and everyday places),
- culture + environment (Green Transition as wellbeing and relationship with urban nature),
- culture + digitalisation (Digital as a participation and inclusion enabler, not a substitute for relationships). This approach strengthens durability because it integrates RECUP into existing policies and budgeting routines, instead of adding a separate project layer.

### 3) National grants (development and piloting component)

National sources may support innovation in formats, tool and competence development, piloting and scaling of solutions validated through testing actions. Potential sources include programmes supporting culture, education, youth, social inclusion, civic participation and community-based regeneration. Indicative routes (to be confirmed annually against calls and eligibility rules) may include:

- programmes of the **Ministry of Culture and National Heritage (MKiDN)** (primarily enabling and programme costs rather than large investments),
- programmes of the **National Centre for Culture (NCK)** supporting cultural education and local participation,
- the **National Freedom Institute (NIW)** where relevant to NGO-led components (community participation, volunteering, civic capacity),
- national or sectoral youth and volunteering instruments supporting structured engagement and competence development.

For each call, implementation should attach a simple mapping: action package → eligible cost types → lead partner → timeline → co-financing source.

### 4) European funds and external instruments (scaling and embedding component)

The Plan is structured to be translated into applications aligned with cohesion, inclusion, regeneration and green/digital transitions. At this stage, it does not pre-judge competition outcomes; instead, it builds implementation readiness: partnerships, action packages, a quality framework and a monitoring and evaluation model. Depending on the call calendar for 2027–2028, relevant pathways may include:

- **ESF+ / EFS-type instruments** for social inclusion, youth engagement, community work and prevention of isolation (soft measures, competence building, service innovation),
- **ERDF-type instruments** where eligible for small-scale enabling public-space improvements supporting participation, accessibility and safety (not infrastructure for its own sake),
- **regional and national operational programmes** (depending on priorities and calls),
- **Interreg** (cross-border cooperation) where relevant to partnerships and shared formats with neighbouring regions,

- **Creative Europe / Erasmus+** where eligible for international cooperation and learning that strengthens capacity and standards.  
For Digital and Green components, the Plan assumes two lanes: **(1) operational delivery through municipal cross-financing; (2) scaling/replication and tool development through EU calls when available.**

### **5) Private sector – sponsorship and patronage (supporting component)**

Following PCC 2026, city visibility and cross-sector relations may strengthen private support through:

- financial and in-kind sponsorship for selected public-space actions (with transparency and public-interest safeguards),
- partnerships with local businesses to co-finance micro-initiatives,
- service support (printing, logistics, materials, equipment use) treated as in-kind contribution.

Beyond sponsorship, the Plan will systematically map non-financial corporate assets (equipment, technical expertise, staff volunteering, communication reach, pro-bono services) against neighbourhood needs and action packages. The City/Operator will act as a broker and matchmaker, enabling companies to contribute without turning the Plan into branding-driven sponsorship. All partnerships will follow transparency rules and a public-interest safeguard checklist (scope, visibility rules, ethics, and conflict-of-interest prevention).

### **6) Partners' non-financial contributions (cost leverage and feasibility condition)**

Partners' in-kind contributions strengthen feasibility and reduce cash-cost pressure. They include provision of spaces and organisational resources, staff time within statutory duties, volunteering under clear standards and supervision, know-how and networks of institutions/NGOs/municipal units, and shared tools (including digital tools). Depending on funder requirements, in-kind inputs may be valued financially or presented descriptively as leverage.

### **Indicative financing structure (to be validated)**

The following structure provides a realistic planning reference for the blended financing logic of the Plan:

- City budget and institutional budgets (including in-kind): approx. 45–55%

- National grants (cash): approx. 20–25%
- Participatory instruments / micro-grant mechanisms (cash, municipal and/or external): approx. 10–15%
- Private sector / sponsors (cash and in-kind): approx. 5–10%
- Non-financial contributions (in-kind leverage): presented as a leverage component, with or without valuation, depending on funder requirements.

### **Financial sustainability logic beyond 2028**

The objective is not a project to be closed, but a mechanism that can be maintained through permanent city instruments. This requires gradual:

- embedding of actions (or their key parts) in annual budgets and programmes of institutions,
- institutionalisation of quality standards (accessibility, safety, sustainability) as everyday delivery practice,
- strengthening partners' capacity to secure funding and deliver processes,
- maintaining coordination as a function within local governance, rather than a one-off temporary project position.

### **Key decisions at the operational budgeting stage**

- defining the proportion between the coordination core and the programme budget to maintain quality without reducing field delivery,
- selecting the bottom-up support instrument (micro-grants / mini-commissions / mixed model) and simplifications for accounting and contracting,
- agreeing a cross-financing model across departments and units (scope, procedure, accountability),
- deciding whether and how to value in-kind contributions (depending on funder requirements).

## SECTION 5: Monitoring and Evaluation

### 5.1 THE MONITORING AND EVALUATION APPROACH

Monitoring and evaluation of the RECUP Investment Plan for Bielsko-Biała (2027–2028) have been designed as an integral part of implementation, not as a “reporting layer” added at the end. This follows directly from the nature of the intervention: the Plan aims to reduce loneliness and weakened social bonds through culture in public space, strengthening belonging, agency and shared responsibility for the city. This type of social change cannot be captured solely through simple attendance figures – it requires observation of the process, the quality of experience, and whether participation translates into lasting relationships, return visits, co-creation and willingness to act.

An approach combining three complementary perspectives has been adopted:

- **operational monitoring** (whether actions are delivered in line with the plan, standards and schedule),
- **outcome monitoring** (whether change is emerging in key areas: belonging, social bonds, agency, cultural participation beyond institutions, and the Digital/Green dimensions),
- **developmental evaluation** (learning: what works under what conditions, for whom and why – and how to improve it in subsequent iterations).

The system is continuous and formative (during delivery, with the possibility of adjustments), as well as cumulative and summative (periodic summaries and a final assessment after 2028). This means working in a cycle: planning – prototyping – delivery – reflection – adjustment – scaling. In this approach, the risk of failure at the level of individual formats is accepted (e.g. mismatch of location, time, or methods of working with a group), but treated as a source of knowledge and improvement, rather than a “project error”. This is consistent with the logic of prototyping and with the URBACT methodology, which emphasises implementation monitoring and learning during delivery.

#### Responsibilities and organisation of M&E

- **Point 11** acts as the monitoring and evaluation coordinator (data collection, structuring registers, organising quarterly reviews, implementing adjustments in actions, and integrating findings across partners).
- Delivery partners (cultural institutions, cultural centres, NGOs, schools, City Hall departments, and entities responsible for public space and greenery) are responsible for component-level data within their activities (activity registers, documentation, short participant surveys, observations).

- The **URBACT Local Group (ULG)** serves as a validation and learning platform: it participates in quarterly and annual reviews, supports interpretation of results, recommends changes, and safeguards alignment with local priorities, accessibility standards and implementation realities.
- At selected moments (e.g. mid-term and final evaluation), external support is possible in the form of short in-depth studies or independent interpretation of data, in particular regarding wellbeing, loneliness and the quality of cross-sector cooperation.

### Quality, ethics and minimum standards

1. **Tool adequacy:** short, repeatable “before/after” measurements within action cycles, combined with qualitative observation and interviews.
2. **Burden minimisation:** measurement tools must be light and must not hinder participation, especially for young people and for those with low trust in institutions.
3. **Accessibility and inclusiveness:** measurement tools (surveys, forms, communications) will be prepared in plain language, with paper and digital options, and basic adaptations for people with disabilities (e.g. readability, contrast, the possibility of assistant support when completing forms).
4. **Data safety:** participant data will be collected and processed in a minimal way, in line with purpose limitation; sensitive data (e.g. wellbeing-related) will only be gathered voluntarily, with clear information, and without identifying individuals in reports.
5. **Usefulness for the funder and the city:** results will be reported using a consistent structure: outputs (what was delivered) – outcomes (what changed) – implementation lessons (what we improve) – financial implications (what is worth scaling and funding further).

Monitoring and evaluation results will serve three practical purposes:

- steering implementation (adjustments during delivery),
- justifying the investment (evidence of feasibility and effectiveness for funders),
- institutionalisation (embedding proven formats and standards in city and institutional routines after 2028).

### Strategic impact focus and shared learning logic

To maintain strategic focus and ensure that the Monitoring and Evaluation system remains feasible and meaningful, the RECUP Investment Plan defines **one overarching impact objective**, supported by **a limited set of core impact indicators**. This layer

complements the detailed output and outcome framework described below and helps avoid the risk of dispersing attention across too many metrics.

### Overarching impact objective

The overarching impact objective of the RECUP Investment Plan is:

**To sustainably reduce urban loneliness in Bielsko-Biała by strengthening residents' sense of belonging, social connectedness and agency through culture-based action in public space.**

This impact is understood as a long-term change in how residents relate to the city, to each other and to public space, rather than as a short-term effect of individual events or formats.

### Core impact indicators (strategic level)

To track this impact over time, the Plan focuses on **no more than three core impact indicators**, monitored longitudinally and interpreted collectively rather than mechanically:

1. **Sense of belonging to the city and public space**
  - whether residents increasingly feel that public spaces are “also for them”, safe, meaningful and worth returning to.
2. **Perceived social connectedness and reduction of loneliness**
  - whether participants report stronger social ties, support and reduced feelings of isolation as a result of repeated engagement.
3. **Agency and willingness to co-create**
  - whether residents move from passive participation to active involvement, co-creation or stewardship of actions and places.

These indicators do not replace the more detailed outcome measures described in Section 5.2; instead, they function as a **strategic compass**, ensuring that monitoring efforts remain oriented towards the core change the city wants to achieve.

### Shared reflection and foresight with the ULG

To support a common understanding of impact and to avoid a purely technocratic approach to evaluation, the Plan introduces **collective reflection and foresight tools** as part of the M&E process. In particular, techniques such as the *Journal of Tomorrow* will be tested with the URBACT Local Group to:

- articulate a shared vision of the desired long-term change,
- reflect on early signals of impact beyond quantitative data,

– connect monitoring results with strategic decision-making and future investment choices.

This approach strengthens ownership of the evaluation process, supports learning across sectors and helps align operational decisions with the long-term impact ambition of the city.

## 5.2 THE MONITORING AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The monitoring and evaluation framework is based on a logical chain: baseline → outputs → outcomes → impact, with indicators separated across three levels: the action level (what was implemented), the social change level (what improved), and the city capacity level (whether the city can do this in a stable and repeatable way). The system has been tailored to the Plan's specificity: actions in public space, participatory processes, digital tools (Digital Transition) and the nature-relationship component (Green Transition).

### A. Baseline – how we will establish the “starting point”

The baseline will be established in Q1 2027 in a pragmatic and comparable way across actions, using three sources:

1. a baseline survey for participants in the first action cycles (short, repeatable, 3–6 key questions),
2. a semantic profile survey among ULG members (“pre” measurement – diagnosing perceptions of the project, cooperation and the role of culture in public space; an analogous “post” measurement in 2028),
3. comparative data from 2026 (if available within institutional and city resources) – as a reference point for organisational practices, reach of activities and standards.

The baseline will include:

- basic segmentation of participants (young people / seniors / adults / children with carers – where relevant),
- information about “first contact” with culture in public space (whether the person participated previously),
- short subjective indicators: belonging, agency, perceived social connectedness.

For loneliness, short and validated questions/mini-scales will be used in order to avoid creating new tools from scratch and to increase the reliability of comparisons over time (e.g. brief forms of established loneliness scales used in population research).

## **B. Output indicators – what has been delivered**

Output indicators correspond directly to actions in Section 3 (workplan). Each action will have an “action card” with a minimum dataset: description, place, target group, partners, accessibility standard, risk description, documentation and short lessons learned.

### **1. Interventions and actions in public space (street art / artistic interventions / performative actions)**

- number of interventions and locations delivered;
- number of work cycles with residents before/after the intervention (not only “delivery” but process);
- number of local partners co-delivering (e.g. institution + NGO + municipal unit).

Sources: activity register, production documentation, arrangement protocols, photo documentation.

Frequency: after each cycle + quarterly report.

### **2. Participatory processes and co-creation**

- number of workshops, neighbourhood meetings, outdoor activities and facilitation hours;
- number of people moving from participant to co-creator/volunteer roles;
- number of co-produced initiatives (with residents, young people, informal groups).

Sources: facilitators’ logs, submission forms, field notes.

Frequency: after each cycle + semi-annual summary.

### **3. Digital tools and urban games (Digital Transition)**

- number of routes/scenarios launched/updated;
- number of users and completed routes;
- basic engagement indicators (e.g. completions, returns, drop-off points – if analytically available).

Sources: tool analytics, content registers, post-game survey.

Frequency: ongoing monitoring + quarterly report.

### **4. Artistic–ecological actions (Green Transition)**

- number of walks, workshops, documentation activities;
- number of works/outputs produced (e.g. tree profiles: sound, photo, illustration)

- depending on format);
- number of green locations covered by the action.

Sources: action documentation, archive of works, facilitators' notes.

Frequency: after each cycle + annual report.

#### 5. **Capacity-building and competence strengthening**

- number of training/competence meetings for partners and implementers;
- number of entities supported (institutions, NGOs, informal groups);
- number of improvements implemented in standards (accessibility, safety, sustainability, communication).

Sources: attendance lists, training materials, improvement protocols.

Frequency: semi-annually.

#### 6. **Cross-sector cooperation**

- number of partners and types of sectors involved in actions;
- number of repeat co-deliveries (the same entities cooperate across subsequent cycles);
- number of joint operational arrangements/agreements.

Sources: partner map, coordination meeting minutes, co-delivery register.

Frequency: quarterly.

### **C. Outcome indicators – what change is occurring**

Outcomes measure change in areas critical to the Plan's objective: loneliness, social bonds, belonging, agency, use of public space, and the durability of cooperation.

#### 1. **Sense of belonging to the city and public space**

- change in responses to short statements (e.g. "this place is also for me", "I like spending time here", "I feel I have influence / I know how I can get involved").

Method: pre/post cycle survey + short qualitative comments.

Frequency: after each cycle + annually.

#### 2. **Sense of social connectedness / loneliness**

- change in responses related to support and relationships (short, validated questions; no clinical diagnosis).

Method: participant survey + in-depth interviews with selected groups (especially young people).

Frequency: after key cycles + one in-depth study per year.

#### 3. **Agency and the shift from participation to co-creation**

- share of participants declaring willingness to return and co-create;

- number of people engaged in volunteering/co-production;
  - number of bottom-up initiative submissions or co-created actions.
- Method: post-action survey + volunteering and co-production registers.
- Frequency: quarterly + annually.

4. **Cultural participation beyond institutions and lowering entry barriers**

- share of people who previously did not use institutional offers or used them rarely;
  - declared increase in willingness to take part in actions in public space.
- Method: “participation profile” survey + short intercept studies (where feasible).
- Frequency: after each cycle + annually.

5. **Quality and durability of cross-sector cooperation**

- partner assessment of cooperation (short partner survey twice a year);
  - number of implementation improvements resulting from reviews;
  - degree to which actions are embedded in institutional and departmental routines (e.g. repeatability of cycles, standards, shared resources).
- Method: partner survey + process analysis + ULG reviews.
- Frequency: semi-annually.

6. **Digital and Green Transition dimensions**

- Digital: whether digital tools genuinely lower entry barriers (facilitate participation, increase engagement, encourage return);
  - Green: whether attentiveness to greenery increases, along with the relationship with nature as a wellbeing resource and willingness to care for the surroundings.
- Method: short post-action surveys + digital analytics + observations and interviews.
- Frequency: after each cycle + annually.

**D. Evaluation tools – what we use and how**

1. **Action card (implementation standard)** – description of objective, groups, accessibility, risks, partners, baseline data and lessons learned.
2. **Short pre/post surveys** – max. 2–3 minutes; paper/digital; plain language.
3. **Semantic profile survey** – minimum for ULG (pre/post), optionally piloted for selected groups.
4. **Digital tool analytics** – interpreted together with qualitative data (to avoid the “clicks trap”).

5. **Observations and field logs** – especially for relationship-building actions (atmosphere, entry barriers, safety).
6. **Short interviews / focus groups** – with young people, seniors, those less present in culture, and partners.
7. **Learning meetings** – quarterly debriefs + ULG reviews using a structured set of questions: what works, what does not, why, what we change, and what the cost and organisational implications are.

### **E. Monitoring and evaluation schedule (2027–2028)**

- Q1 2027: baseline, launch of action cards, reporting standard, first pre/post measurements.
- Quarterly (2027–2028): review of outputs, risks, implementation quality, accessibility, safety; decisions on adjustments and resource shifts.
- Semi-annually: review of partner cooperation and delivery capacity (partner survey + process analysis).
- Annually (end of 2027 and end of 2028): annual outcomes report, short in-depth studies in selected groups, recommendations for budgeting and financing.
- Q4 2028: final evaluation (post-mortem), conclusions for city policies and preparation of funding applications for subsequent stages.

### **F. Targets**

The Plan does not assume setting arbitrary numerical targets without a credible baseline. Target values will be defined after the baseline is established in Q1 2027 and will take the form of:

- directional targets (increase/decrease) for “soft” areas (belonging, agency, loneliness),
- range targets (bands) for outputs (number of cycles, locations, actions, partnerships) – so as not to reward “quantity at all costs” but to maintain quality and safety.

### **G. Use of results – how data will translate into decisions**

Results will be used for:

- iterative improvement during implementation (formative use),
- decisions on scaling formats that genuinely build relationships and belonging,
- strengthening accessibility, communication and safety standards in public space,
- justifying the budget and funding mix (what delivers the greatest social value relative to cost),

– building the city’s long-term capacity for process-based work: culture as a public policy tool rather than a one-off events programme.

Designed in this way, the M&E system makes the RECUP Investment Plan both an implementation tool and a learning tool for the city – enabling measurement of social change related to loneliness and social bonds, and translating it into organisational and financial decisions beyond 2028.