

# Daring Cities Quarterly Network Journal

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## Introduction

Daring Cities is an URBACT Innovation Transfer Network, building on Ravenna's European Urban Initiative project DARE, a complex, participatory transformation process of Ravenna's Darsena district. The network works with local initiatives to co-develop new spaces and services, guided by updated narratives on each city's focus areas and grounded in evidence-based understandings of quality of life. This Journal, prepared by Lead Expert Levente Polyák, covers the period of September-November 2025 and introduces the key activities of the Daring Cities network in this period, with a particular focus on the Altea Transnational Meeting that shaped the consortium's work in this period.

## Transnational Meeting in Altea

How to reconnect fragmented areas of a city through urban interventions and storytelling? How to rethink public spaces through the involvement of community groups and citizen initiatives? How to use quality of life data to determine investments in urban transformation? These were the leading questions of the Daring Cities Transnational Meeting in Altea.

Transnational Meetings serve as key milestones in the Daring Cities trajectory. In October 2025, Daring Cities held its fourth Transnational Meeting in Altea. The aim was to give transfer partners an opportunity to share their progress, receive guidance through recommendations and good practices, and examine Altea's challenges in order to support the city in addressing them.

During the meeting, the network also looked into the importance of opening transformation processes to citizens and communities, allowing them to take an active role not only in deciding about the future of a neighbourhood but also in imagining and realising new spaces and services as well as contributing to their long-term maintenance and management.

On the eve of the Meeting, a Day 0 walk was organised by the Lead Expert to explore the most important sites of Altea, understand the structure of the city and position the city's challenges in their broader context. The walk allowed participants to better grasp the city's cultural significance and tourism industry, the most important sector of the local economy. Furthermore, it helped participants to understand the tensions between different uses of public space and earlier attempts by the municipality to address these tensions.



View of Altea from the Mirador de los Cronistas de España

## A venue for culture and education

Day 1 and 2 were organised in the Biblioteca Pública Municipal / Casa de Cultura Altea, the main cultural and library institution of the town, housed in a historic building located at Costera Pont del Montcau 14 in Altea. While the building functions as a public library with a collection of books, periodicals, access to digital resources, reading rooms and study areas, it is also a veritable cultural centre hosting a variety of events like exhibitions, concerts, conferences, storytelling, guided visits, and other cultural activities. As a central venue of Altea's social and cultural life, operating with the concept of "Biblioteca Social, biblioteca de todos", the award-winning library enabled Daring Cities partners to witness residents' dedication to their local history as well as natural and cultural assets. The Biblioteca Pública Municipal / Casa de Cultura Altea offered a perfect venue for plenary presentations, smaller groups workshops as well as coffee breaks and catering.





Workshop in the Casa de Cultura

## Advancing in the Daring Cities trajectory: opening processes to citizens and community groups

The Transnational Meeting began with a reminder of the Daring Cities process: locating Partner Cities in the broader trajectory enables them to understand the significance of upcoming actions and their role in the overall project design. A key element in the Roadmap is when cities open up their urban regeneration processes to citizens and community groups, inviting them to bring their proposals to the areas in transformation.

An important obstacle in the transfer of the DARE methodology to Partner Cities is the lack of experience and willingness in sharing power with or opening processes to citizens and community groups. In order to underline the central role of co-design, co-management and co-governance, the Lead Expert made a presentation about the advantages of real participation and collaborative processes.



Presentation in the Casa de Cultura

A central challenge in participatory initiatives concerns how they fit into longer-term processes. Traditional forms of participation and deliberation typically conclude once a decision has been reached, yet urban policymakers and community activists increasingly question what happens afterward and who is responsible for implementing decisions over time. Conventional participation models that end with decision-making often reflect a desire to influence what others (such as municipalities, regional authorities, or governments) should do, rather than a commitment to taking responsibility for what citizens themselves can undertake. Casting a vote on a participatory budgeting platform—or even joining a month-long citizens’ assembly—is fundamentally different from contributing to the long-term work of a neighbourhood committee or co-managing community spaces for years or decades.

Local communities are frequently mobilised to defend their most valued public spaces, sometimes through legal, political, or financial means. In certain cases, victories achieved by these groups lead to ongoing collective efforts to maintain and manage these spaces, relying on volunteer work and shared resources and responsibilities. Through co-maintaining, co-managing, and co-governing such

places, groups develop new coordination and deliberation skills, as well as innovative approaches to decision-making related to how these spaces are used.

## Reconnecting the urban fabric: a critical walk in Altea

Altea faces a significant challenge due to the physical barrier created by the N-332 road and the railway line, which separates the historic centre from the coastal area and restricts transversal mobility. To address this fragmentation, the municipality has launched a Seafront Regeneration Strategy aimed at removing obstacles, improving connections and creating a more integrated, sustainable urban model. Although a final solution has not yet been chosen, an ideas competition and early planning efforts have helped establish key priorities, particularly the need to reconnect the economic hub along the second beach line with the historic centre. Drawing on international examples while adapting them to local needs, Altea aims to restore public space, strengthen local identity and enhance the cultural and tourism appeal of its seafront.

In order to support Altea in this endeavour, an Ad-hoc Expert was invited to help Altea's work and share his experiences with Partner Cities, with a focus on reconnecting fragmented areas that are divided by infrastructure (Altea's tram line) and gender-sensitive public space planning and design. An architect, urban planner and landscape architect, Jon Aguirre Such explained several projects he worked on in various Spanish cities, including public space design in San Sebastián, research in Madrid about how covering the rails around Chamartín could affect the neighbourhood as well as in Vitoria, working on a participatory process around covering rail tracks.

In order to make Altea's challenge more tangible, a critical walk was organised for participants of the Transnational Meeting. The walk repeated an earlier walk with various stakeholders, including residents, shop owners, regional representatives and public servants of the municipality and brought to light many problems connected to the city's division to its upper and lower parts. Participants were invited to share their observations in questionnaires, adding their impressions to an already established dataset about people's perception of public space.





Critical walk to explore the urban fragmentation caused by the railway in Altea

## Local processes: Planning Testing Actions and Open Calls

The Altea meeting allowed cities to conceive their next steps according to the Daring Cities Roadmap, opening up their processes to citizens and community groups. In order to open perspectives towards the following months, the meeting closed with a workshop focusing on each city's planned Testing Actions and Open Calls.

Den Helder is focused on addressing the inequality of chances for children by transforming a neighborhood to be child-friendly, ultimately aiming to reverse the historical preference for cars. The primary testing action planned is a **critical walk with children**, which will involve temporarily closing parts or all of the neighborhood to cars. During this walk, children will use cameras to document where they play, meet friends, and which streets they like, effectively revealing the "story of the neighborhood". This walk is recommended to happen multiple times, potentially at least three times, focusing on both the network and specific places. Data is also being gathered through school children creating drawings and texts about their likes and dislikes concerning the neighborhood.

Den Helder's open call will be directly linked to the critical walk and is intended to collect contributions from anyone—kids, parents, or others—to make the neighborhood more child-friendly. This call seeks to involve people in projects such as finding individuals keen to dedicate time, expertise, money, or work toward taking care of or transforming a public space.

The ambition of Olomouc centers on mobility, working with a combination of hard data (municipality, state, regional data) and soft data, such as "feeling maps" derived from surveys where people mark where they feel safe or endangered. Testing actions include **workshops**, described as being similar to the critical walk approach, designed to bring people to specific locations to observe their reactions. These workshops are planned in two sessions: before and after the project implementation. Other testing actions involve **creative events**, such as collaborations with a theatrical company skilled in making workshops fun, or organizing markets, like one with a company producing seeds/plants in the railway zone. The use of a **Story Map from GIS**, which combines text and interactive maps, is also defined as a perfect testing action.

Following these testing actions, Olomouc's open call will be used to invite associations, companies, or specific target groups to submit **ideas for feasible events or actions** that help achieve the project goals. Since the city has experience managing calls, they plan to utilize their existing web application for submitting project proposals. The call can solicit ideas for **short-term creative events** or for **broader projects** to be included in the investment plan.

Kragujevac's project focuses on the redevelopment of the former military technical institute, specifically the mechanical workshop and the square in front of it. Their testing actions are divided into four main areas: 1) A **digital tour of the Star Limit Museum**, developed with university gaming students, to engage people with industrial heritage. 2) An **art contest** named "My factory of the future," aimed at elementary and high school students to envision the building's future use, with selected artworks displayed publicly. 3) **Digital Horizons**, a creative presentation of the city's tourist and cultural potential using digital technologies like AR, VR, and mobile applications. 4) An **industrial legacy online campaign**, utilizing a digital platform for industrial heritage.

As the city is close to making a political decision to fund reconstruction using green bonds and is preparing a pre-feasibility study offering three technical solutions for the building, Kragujevac's open call is anticipated to target **organizations, associations, or activities wishing to settle in the reconstructed building**. Because 60% of the space must be used for public purposes (cultural or otherwise), this call will focus on organizations interested in utilizing this space, and is planned toward the end of the reconstruction process when interested parties can see the building's exterior.



Dunaújváros is working on two parallel objectives: establishing its first tree repository for urban management and addressing the emotional impact of the steel factory closure. Testing actions include **mapping the area** for the tree repository using a student program to photograph trees and count urban furniture like waste bins and benches. Another action involves creating a **QR code system** at the steel statue park to provide information about the art pieces.

The city plans two types of calls: 1) A call for **stories and photos** from citizens regarding their relationship with local trees and urban areas, intended to support the project's storytelling and be published in the local newspaper. 2) An open call for **projects/proposals to transform an unused school green area** into a community space. This latter call will be addressed to the school community and citizens via the official website, with the long-term idea of inviting groups of citizens to potentially become **caregivers** for specified green areas.

Piraeus is focused on the redevelopment of the old railway station area to house a museum of traditional song and a climate laboratory. The primary testing action already conducted was a **collective walk** with the local community, university, and the development organization to survey the area and collect initial ideas on green areas and pedestrian uses.

Piraeus intends to plan an open call for **initiatives** to contribute activities and proposals inside the future building or green area, separate from the public construction tender, to foster local ownership and involvement.

Altea's main objective is the 'trailization' (transformation of the railway path), which requires securing political support from the regional government, who own the land. An initial testing action was a **critical walk** held with decision-makers, regional government officials, and experts to secure support for the project. A forthcoming testing action is **gamification/role gaming** planned for November with secondary school students, where they assume roles related to key indicators like accessibility and safety (e.g., using a wheelchair or being blind) to gather concrete feedback on the path to their school.

Due to time constraints and the need for political alignment, the open call in the current phase will be **highly focused on key stakeholders** (political institutions and land owners) to secure the necessary mandate for the transformation. If political alignment is challenging or delayed, a more localized open call could be an **Ideas Market** focused on collecting specific proposals for a known problematic square.

Ravenna's presentation focused on reactivating spaces and strengthening the identity related to its previous DARE project. Testing actions and events include: 1) A **community event** for the reopening of the Bike Park, involving cultural and sports associations. 2) A **non-workshop** (collective thinking) aimed at strengthening the identity of the Darsa by collecting inputs for creating formal rules for using its visual

assets. 3) **Community labs and events (Stoaza)** focusing on engaging young people to collect their vision and rethink the use of specific neighborhood spaces. 4) A **park walk with children** (planned for May/June) to understand how they live the park and how it can be shaped through their perspective. The city is focusing on supporting associations and encouraging participation through specific community events and collective workshops, rather than detailing a new general open call structure for project proposals in this segment.



Workshop in the Casa de Cultura