



Hydro Heritage Cities in Play

URBACT



Co-funded by
the European Union
Interreg



Hydro~ Heritage Cities



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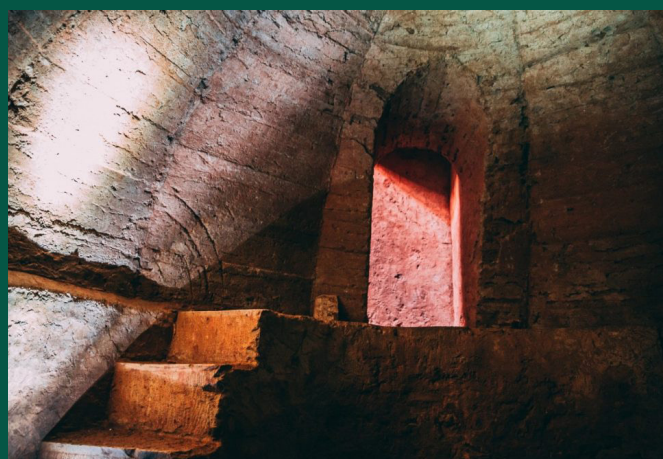
Foreword

Back in 2019, when applying for the U.I.A.'s programme last call, we could not imagine how far this endeavour would take us. The proposal we developed aimed to re-establish the historical and environmental value of Hadrian's Aqueduct in today's context. This 1900-year-old, subterranean and long-forgotten nature-based hydraulic infrastructure still crosses Chalandri, carrying water that goes to waste. Our ambition was to bring it back into memory, everyday life and the urban landscape, not as a sightseeing monument, but as living heritage for Chalandri's residents.

The premise of our project, Cultural H.ID.RA.N.T., initially outlined on a napkin, was simple: by bringing to light the aqueduct's presence and cultural value, we could promote its reuse as an alternative -non-potable- water resource.

Soon, we realised that the opposite was also true. In the context of climate and development challenges, water could act as an "ambassador" of a more eco- and water-sensitive urban culture, and as a driver towards greener and more sustainable urban development. This dual perspective is reflected in the project's title: Cultural Hidden IDentities ReAppear through Networks of WaTer. What began as an "innovative cultural heritage management" project evolved into a broader exercise in integrated and participatory urban planning.

It proved to be a powerful concept, bringing together a wide range of experts, spanning water management, urban planning, participatory design, archaeology and culture, alongside municipal departments and local communities. This broad collaboration was partly shaped by the aqueduct's multiple dimensions such as a heritage, natural and urban asset, and partly by our decision to approach it holistically and engage Chalandri's inhabitants and schools. The integrated and participatory methodology of Cultural H.ID.RA.N.T. became the source of its innovative strength. It created the conditions to connect technical solutions with social and institutional innovation, leading to the establishment of community-led bodies that continue to support the project's legacy.





The wide and international recognition of the project's innovative value encouraged us to share it further, and URBACT provided the ideal platform to do so. From the outset, "Hydro" referred to water and "Heritage" to the aqueduct's historical legacy. The concept of Hydro-Heritage was later coined to better communicate our approach to cities interested in forming a URBACT Innovation Transfer Network, and to define the common ground for collaboration.

The strong interest in forming the URBACT Hydro-Heritage Cities Network highlighted a growing awareness: past water infrastructures are key assets in addressing contemporary urban and climate challenges, such as droughts and floods. Neglected hydro-heritage sites are re-emerging at the intersection of resilience, sustainability and urban liveability. Aqueducts, watermills, irrigation systems and canals represent a terrain of multiple opportunities:

- 👉 They highlight the central role of water management in the historical, cultural and economic development of cities
- 👉 They connect traditional knowledge and community-based practices with the need for eco-sensitive urban transformation
- 👉 They foster a renewed relationship between citizens and water, both by raising awareness of its value and by offering alternative resources.

The journey of the Hydro-Heritage Cities network has been both creative and enriching. The diversity of ideas generated not only tested but expanded the transfer potential of Cultural H.ID.RA.N.T. Its methodology has been adapted to different contexts, scales and needs.

The Network's outcomes offer a wide range of examples showing how untapped water-related heritage can be reactivated to address pressing challenges while enhancing citizen wellbeing and participation in sustainable blue-green urban development.

We hope you will find the stories that follow both inspiring and refreshing.

We invite you to dive in and explore the Hydro-Heritage Cities pool of ideas.

City of Chalandri

A CONTINUOUS FLOWING BETWEEN PLACES

We step down, one by one, into the narrow underground passage.

The air is cooler here, the sound of the city fades replaced by the quiet echo of water moving somewhere in the dark. A hand touches the rough wall, another switches on a phone light. For a moment, no one speaks. We are not looking at a movie ... We are inside the almost 2000-year-old Hadrian aqueduct system.



It is in places like this, under the streets of Chalandri, that the journey makes most sense. Not as a concept, but as a shared experience between practitioners, technicians, cultural actors and municipal staff of the six cities of our network: Chalandri, Elche, Serpa, Sombor, Rome and Roeselare, all trying to understand what water means in each city.

Indeed, if there is a single image that captures the Hydro-Heritage Cities journey, it is movement.

Not only the movement of water, but a continuous circulation between local realities and transnational exchange, where ideas travel, are tested, and are reshaped—sometimes resisted—and then return transformed into plans and actions. From the very beginning, our network was designed around this movement. Each meeting of the network was not an isolated moment but part of a wider process, where learning happens elsewhere and meaning is built back home.

A METHODOLOGY BUILT ON CIRCULATION

We all had the Cultural H.I.D.R.A.N.T. approach developed in Chalandri as a shared reference. Its strength lies in interconnected pillars: community engagement, cultural activation, integrated governance and a transversal dimension - redefining hydro-heritage as a resource for community resilience, identity and wellbeing.



Water, in this perspective, is no longer only infrastructure, but it becomes a connector, linking people, policy fields and timeframes. It supports climate resilience but also shapes identity, sense of belonging and collective experience. Understanding this shift required more than explanation, it required a two-year long immersion.

Over these two years of mutual learning and exchange, each city’s journey has flowed, sometimes winding through unexpected curves, sometimes streaming straight ahead. Along the way, key events have shaped the course, becoming memorable landmarks unbeknownst before. We share some of these transformative moments in this booklet.



EVAPORATION



CONDENSATION

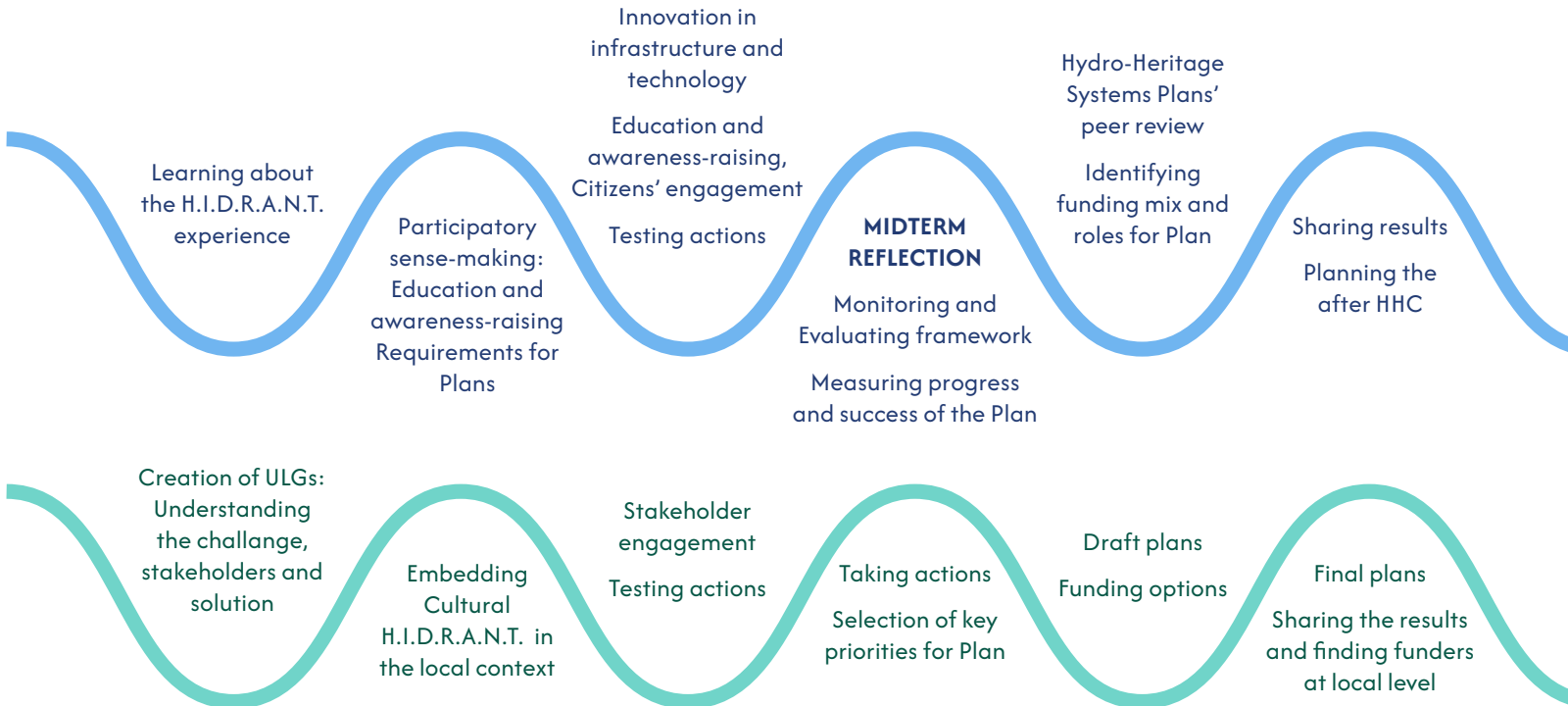


PRECIPITATION



RUNOFF

CHALANDRI KICK-OFF JANUARY 2025	ROESELARE MAY 2025	SERPA JULY 2025	SOMBOR OCTOBER 2025	ELCHE FEBRUARY 2026	ROME JUNE 2026
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THE FLOW OF CITIES, IDEAS AND AHA! MOMENTS

During our meeting in Roeselare, participation and engagement moved from theory into practice, combining strategic discussions with concrete examples, such as the citizen budget in the Krottegem district, where residents of all ages proposed and voted on small-scale projects under themes like green spaces, getting together, and nature-based solutions. We could see the tangible result during our walk with projects that extended beyond municipal plans, generating real ownership and pride in the neighbourhood. The workshop led by the theatre company UrbanDig Project introduced creative methods for participatory storytelling, and we learned that engagement happens when people can see themselves in the story through the power of arts.



Roeselare - May 2025

If Roeselare focused on participation, Serpa brought us into the realm of living heritage. Panels on education, technology and citizen engagement showcased how our cities are activating heritage, from digital tools to participatory theatre and a creative workshop with children, where we all could connect with “our inner child.” But it was outside the formal sessions that we could experience this activation more powerfully.

The meeting began with a dinner accompanied by the songs of the UNESCO-recognised Cante Alentejano and it culminated in a shared celebration at the Nora Festival (the festival of the well-wheel). Serpa showed us that hydro-heritage is not only about structures but also about rhythms, traditions and social connections that give meaning to places.



Serpa - July 2025



Sombor - October 2025

In late October 2025, we arrived in Sombor, where the meeting followed the rhythm of the Great Bačka Canal. From the beginning the experience unfolded on site. By walking and sharing a boat journey along the canal and visiting the Bezdan Lock, we were invited to step into the local context, seeing both the grand scale of the infrastructure and the untapped potential of this hidden-in-plain-sight heritage.

After the canal journey, we created space for reflection, revisiting our city journey, sharing progress, doubts and emerging directions. Most of all, it was a pause, a moment to recognise how far each city had come and what challenges remained. Then we shifted the perspective towards the future. Through expert inputs and discussions, we explored how to measure impact, ensure economic sustainability and also position hydro-heritage as a driver for tourism and local development.

As we all progressed with our URBACT Local Groups (ULG) work, the focus shifted towards planning and reusing the acquired knowledge. Finally our meeting in Elche illustrated this transition well. Here, the challenge became more concrete and substantial: how to bring together participation, cultural activation, governance and resilience into a coherent strategy... in other terms, our investment plans.

A key moment in this process was the peer review of our plans. Moving beyond internal reflection, we

opened our drafts to external perspectives to test assumptions, identify gaps and refine priorities through dialogue. This exchange helped us make the plans stronger, but also more grounded as we all confronted similar challenges around feasibility, funding and long-term governance.

The peer review also reinforced one of URBACT's underlying principles, which is, planning is not a solitary exercise but a collective process shaped by comparison, feedback and shared learning coming from different perspectives.

And now in Rome, in the immortal city, at the Aranciera of San Sisto, we look at our past journey together.



A EUROPEAN LEARNING SPACE

Alongside these city-based moments, the three URBACT events in Paris have created a wider frame for reflection. They connected us - Hydro-Heritage Cities - with other networks, opening space for relationships, peer learning and shared challenges. These exchanges reinforced a key insight that we learned soon enough, that is, transferring innovation is not about replication but about adaptation across our diverse contexts.

Webinars and online continuous exchanges with our pool of experts added another layer. It allowed us to deepen specific themes and experience from other cities and connect strategic thinking with practical implementation, with a look at the legacy and what our “after-URBACT” urban life might look like. Together, these dimensions formed a learning environment where knowledge did not accumulate, but rather it circulated within and beyond our network.



Paris - February 2026

FROM FLOW TO PLAY

Looking back, the journey is less a sequence of steps than a (hydraulic) system in motion. And gradually, hydro-heritage itself has changed meaning in our cities. Maybe the real impact of this journey does not sit in the meetings, the tools or not even in the Investment Plans. It sits in us, the cities, in how each place has interpreted the approach, faced its own constraints, activated its own communities and redefined what hydro-heritage can mean in practice.

The next pages take you there.

They bring together the stories of the six cities, each one a different path through the same journey. Alongside their stories are their “messages in the bottle,” distilled lessons, insights and recommendations addressed to you—the urban practitioners and policymakers navigating similar challenges.

Because this publication is not only meant to be read but also to be used.

Throughout the booklet, you will encounter light interactive elements and, at its core, a board game built around five Water Locks, each one representing a key policy or operational dimension of the journey. These are practical entry points to make the invisible water heritage visible, reflect, test ideas, and explore how the Hydro-Heritage approach could work in your own context. *Hydro-Heritage Cities in Play* is, in this sense, both a record and a tool. A way to step into the journey, unlock its challenges, and continue the flow—this time, in your city.

The background is a solid teal color with several white, flowing, wavy lines that create a sense of movement and organic growth. These lines are of varying thickness and curve across the entire page.

ROESELARE

FROM SILOES TO SEEDS

FROM SILOES TO SEEDS

The Hydro-Heritage Cities journey in Roeselare starts underground, a bit like in Chalandri.

Beneath the city, the Mandel and parts of the Sint-Amandsbeek still flow. These watercourses once shaped Roeselare, but over time they were covered, channelled and, in some parts, hidden because of pollution and strong odours. What had been central to the city gradually disappeared from view. Today, they remain largely invisible... and largely unknown.

Before joining the URBACT network, water in Roeselare was mainly approached as infrastructure, something to manage and maintain. At the same time, heritage, culture and public engagement followed separate paths. These fields coexisted but rarely did they cross paths. The underground rivers were part of technical plans, not of a shared narrative.

Our URBACT journey did not start with a clear path, but rather with a question: *"What if these worlds were brought together?"* Inside the city administra-

tion, some colleagues from water management -also from the provincial level - urban development, culture and heritage started exploring this idea. Gradually, others joined: heritage organisations working on local history, cultural actors and colleagues involved in neighbourhood engagement. At first, these connections were tentative. The concept of hydro-heritage was new, and its practical implications unclear.

The early phase was marked by uncertainty. Exchanges with other cities brought inspiration, but also raised questions: *"How could such approaches work in a city where water is mostly hidden?"*

The network's exchange and seeing how other cities used water heritage to create identity, public engagement and new uses of space helped us reframe the local perspective. Even an underground river could become meaningful if it were made visible and connected to people's experience.



Exchange visit within the Hydro-Heritage Cities network, sharing ideas and local practices.

This external inspiration helped us build internal legitimacy. It became easier to explain the value of hydro-heritage across departments and to management, linking it to ongoing priorities such as climate adaptation, urban development and cultural programming. The city's policy framework for 2025–2030 also reinforced this direction, recognising the potential of making hidden water heritage visible through cultural and artistic approaches.

Gradually, the conversation inside the administration has begun to change as climate-related works, such as the restoration of the Sint-Amandsbeek and other interventions along the Mandel, have started to be seen not only as technical projects but also as opportunities to create broader value. At the same time, heritage is no longer only about preservation, but about activating places and stories, identities and engagement.

From this shift, concrete ideas have started to emerge. A repository of the history of the Mandel and Sint-Amandsbeek is being developed, collecting both industrial and everyday narratives. This material will be made accessible through a new exhibition space near the canal, as well as through a heritage app and QR codes, placed in strategic locations across the city, including areas where the rivers run underground.



In parallel, the city is exploring ways to make the invisible visible through artistic expression. Events such as the Waterfestival or Heritage Day are seen as opportunities to engage citizens and connect them to these hidden infrastructures. Artistic and cultural interventions are expected to play a key role in translating technical realities into shared experiences.

A place in Roeselare where water, heritage and city life come together.

Hydro-heritage is also becoming linked to concrete investments. Major projects, including the restoration of the Sint-Amandsbeek, redevelopment works along the Mandel, and interventions around the canal, are being considered as opportunities to integrate cultural and social value alongside technical improvements.

These developments illustrate the first results of stronger connections between departments and stakeholders; however, this is not a linear process at all. Cross-department collaboration requires time, coordination and continued effort because different actors need to understand how they benefit from being involved, we need clear communication and visible results to keep them engaged.

What has certainly changed, however, is the perspective. Water is increasingly seen not only as

infrastructure, but as a carrier of history, identity, and meaningful for communities of the city. Heritage is being used to support future development and collaboration across departments and - while still evolving - is now recognised as necessary rather than optional.

The next phase will be about consolidating this approach by strengthening cooperation, embedding hydro-heritage into ongoing projects and ensuring that emerging ideas translate into lasting practices. For Roeselare, Hydro-Heritage Cities has not produced a single flagship intervention, but instead, it has initiated a shift from parallel approaches towards a more integrated way of working, as the URBACT method fosters.

The seeds are there. The challenge now is to ensure they continue to grow.



Message in a Bottle

What we learned

- 
- Break siloes **early**. Hydro-heritage gains momentum when different departments meet around the same table.
 - Make the benefit **visible** for each actor. People engage faster when they clearly see what is in it for them.
 - Use exchange with other cities as **leverage**. External examples help build **legitimacy** and energy at home.
 - Start with a **small** test, not only with a **big** vision. A first experiment makes the opportunity tangible.
 - Protect early results. New cross-sector initiatives need **follow-up** before they take root.

Roeselare's Seeds of Success

Match each "seed" from Roeselare's journey with the condition it needs to grow.

Seeds



1 Better collaboration inside the city administration



2 More awareness of water heritage



3 Stronger links between culture and water management



4 Local pilot actions



5 Long-term impact

Conditions

A Care, follow-up and continuity

B Making the benefit visible for each actor

C External exchange and inspiration

D Testing ideas in practice

E Breaking siloes

The background of the entire page is a solid dark red color. Overlaid on this are several thin, light red wavy lines that flow diagonally from the top left towards the bottom right. On the far left edge, there is a vertical blue bar that runs the full height of the page.

SOMBOR

THE CANAL THAT BROUGHT US TOGETHER

THE CANAL THAT BROUGHT US TOGETHER



"Winter on the canal", credits: Franja Menrat, 3rd place in the competition for the most beautiful postcard on the channel

Our hydro-heritage journey in Sombor begins in September 2024, with a simple presentation. At the first online meeting, we introduced our city to the other participating cities. It was during that moment that we ourselves began to realise the extraordinary water heritage Sombor holds, something that had always been there but had never been fully seen in this way.

One month later, in October 2024, Sandra Rainero, our Lead Expert, visited Sombor, and we held our first ULG meeting in that occasion. Nothing could have prepared us for what happened in that room.

The discussion quickly turned into an intense debate. On one side were politicians and developers, focused on economic use and infrastructure. On the other were environmentalists, athletes and artists, defending the ecological and cultural value of the canal. As urban planners (two out of three team members are actively working on development plans) we are used to coordinating between different actors. But rarely had we seen all these perspectives collide so directly, in the same space, at the same time.

And yet, something unexpected happened.

Alongside this debate, we met representatives of the Provincial Secretariat for Urban Planning and “Vode Vojvodine,” the public company responsible for managing the canal. We expected resistance but instead we gained a powerful ally who embraced our ideas enthusiastically. The provincial representatives expressed interest in adopting our strategy model across the entire region and canal network. This moment changed our expectations.

The visit to Chalandri was truly eye-opening and further expanded our perspective. Descending into a two-thousand-year-old aqueduct was an exceptional experience, as was touring the area with all its spatial interventions. It made the sense of hidden water tangible. Walking through the site and seeing how spatial interventions, culture and infrastructure could coexist helped us imagine new possibilities for Sombor.

The following visits to other partner cities reinforced this learning. Experiencing solutions firsthand proved far more powerful than reading about them. It was, as we often said, the difference between reading a screenplay and watching the film.

Each city left a trace in our thinking. In Roeselare, the underground channel suggested new ways to think about our own stormwater infrastructure. The integration of cultural heritage, centred around the Nora spring and aqueduct complete with an open-air theatre in Serpa showed how heritage and culture can be activated together. We were inspired to rethink tree irrigation in Sombor, a city known for its greenery but increasingly affected by climate change after seeing the traditional irrigation system in Elche.

Back in Sombor, these influences began to take shape. Through successive ULG meetings, earlier ideas started to crystallise, while new ones emerged. One of the key turning points was finding a way to address the conflict between economic interests and environmental and cultural concerns. Initial proposals focused on intensifying the canal’s transport function, a direction that would have significantly threatened both its ecological balance and its identity.

Gradually, through dialogue, a more balanced vision began to emerge and our understanding of the canal



*Science Festival
“Fizi bizi”,
credits: Dusan
Kozoderovic*

itself deepened. Sites that we had initially identified as problems revealed themselves as assets of cultural heritage and genuine treasures. Among them were the bridge between Monoštor and Bezdan, and the abandoned railway bridge in Sombor, both of which began to be seen not as obsolete infrastructure, but as opportunities.

Historical research played a key role in this shift. We entrusted this work to our ULG member “Norma,” who exceeded all expectations, delivering far more material than requested on the history of the Great Bačka Canal. Through this research, we rediscovered the canal as a remarkable engineering achievement of over 200 years ago and as a driver of economic growth at a time when neither roads nor railways existed. As a result, the canal began to regain its narrative. The research also had an unexpected outcome: it inspired further work, with the material now being developed into a full book.

To extend this renewed narrative beyond the ULG, we launched a public photo-competition for the most beautiful postcard of the canal. The resulting exhibition was displayed outdoors, in front of the Museum of Danube Swabians, for more than six weeks. It attracted attention, curiosity and engagement.

Following the exhibition, we conducted a survey, receiving over 100 responses. Citizens shared their impressions and ideas for the canal’s future, allowing us to reach far beyond the initial project circle.

Slowly, people began to recognise the canal not just as infrastructure, but as a shared space with cultural and social value.

The project also found its way into unexpected places. We presented it at urban planning conferences and at the Science Festival “Fizi Bizi” in Sombor. Although the festival targeted elementary school children, it led to an unexpected connection: a student approached us, became involved in the ULG, and is now developing his graduation thesis on the Great Bačka Canal. Engagement can truly come from unexpected directions!

Our Hydro-Heritage Journey has also begun to influence formal planning. Two members of our team were already working on Sombor’s General Urban Plan, and elements of the project - particularly green corridors connecting the city to the canal - were directly integrated into it.

Looking back, the greatest value of the project lies in this gradual shift in perception: citizens, stakeholders and institutions are beginning to understand the canal as a space with social, cultural and environmental meaning. This journey has provided broader learning. Through exchanges with other cities, we have gained insights not only into water heritage, but into urban mobility, green infrastructure, blue solutions and integrated planning approaches.

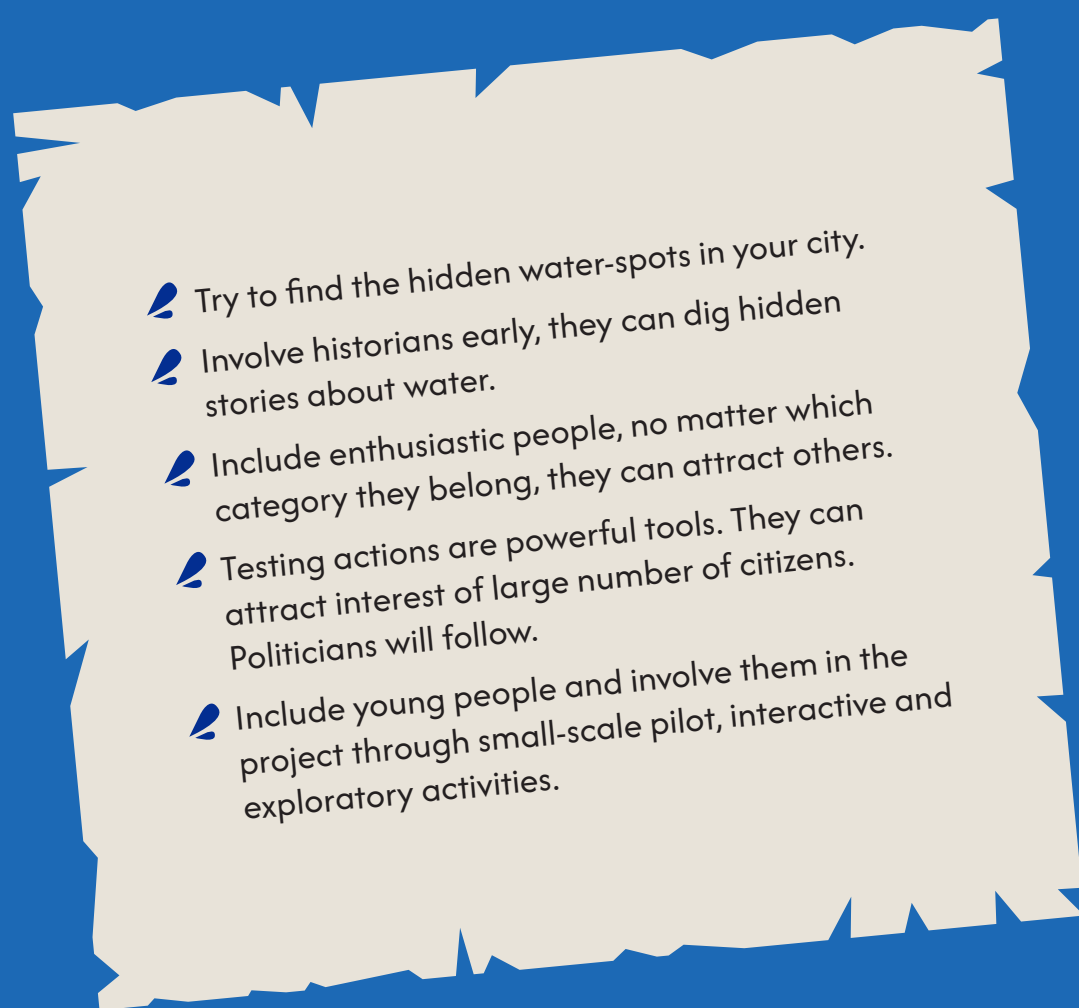
What started as a presentation has become a process of discovery. And that discovery is still ongoing.



3rd ULG meeting on the boat, credits: Dusan Kozoderovic and Dragana Siljanovic Kozderovic

Message in a Bottle

What we learned

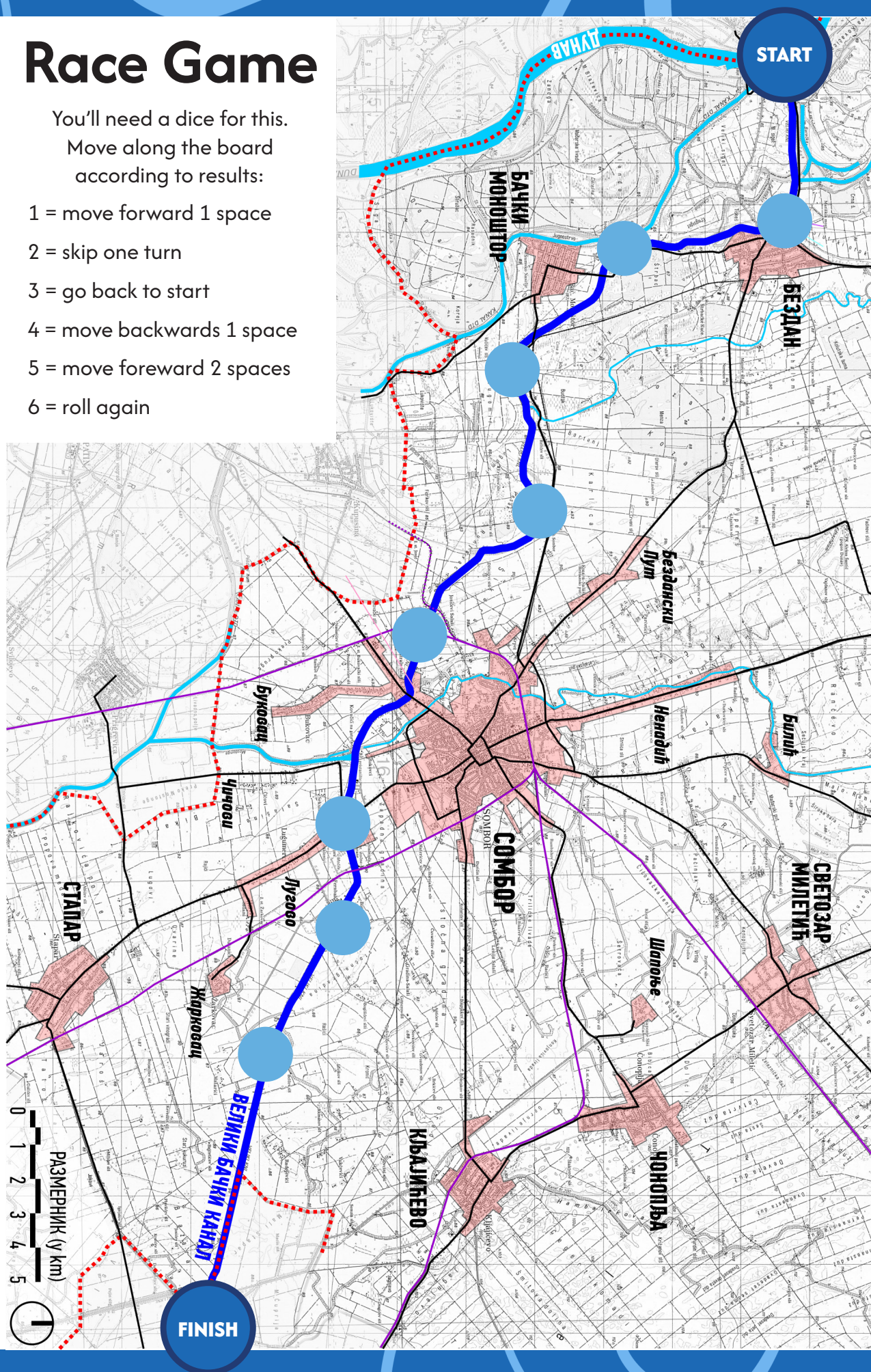
- 
- 
- Try to find the hidden water-spots in your city.
 - Involve historians early, they can dig hidden stories about water.
 - Include enthusiastic people, no matter which category they belong, they can attract others.
 - Testing actions are powerful tools. They can attract interest of large number of citizens. Politicians will follow.
 - Include young people and involve them in the project through small-scale pilot, interactive and exploratory activities.

Race Game

You'll need a dice for this.

Move along the board
according to results:

- 1 = move forward 1 space
- 2 = skip one turn
- 3 = go back to start
- 4 = move backwards 1 space
- 5 = move foreward 2 spaces
- 6 = roll again





ROME

**THE SAN SISTO ARANCIERA FROM HIDDEN
SPACE TO SHARED PLACE**

THE SAN SISTO ARANCIERA FROM HIDDEN SPACE TO SHARED PLACE

"Hidden" water paths: "Clivio di Villa Celimontana", Casm, Istituto Domizia Lucilla, Sapienza PDTA (photograph by M.T. Cutri)

Located in the heart of Rome, yet hidden from everyday life, the area of the San Sisto Aranciera and its seedbed has remained for years a quiet and elegant space; rich in history, but distant from the city's daily rhythms. Many passed nearby without ever noticing it. Fewer still knew the stories it held, the traces of water systems, cultivation practices and a layered relationship between nature and urban life that had slowly faded from view.

With the Hydro-Heritage Cities project, this place became the starting point for a different story. A story that begins with water, heritage, and people, and gradually brings them back into connection.

At first, the Aranciera was simply there. A space with potential, but without a clear role in contemporary urban life. The question was not only how to restore it physically, but how to make it meaningful again. How could it become a place that people recognise, use, and feel part of?

Rather than defining a function from the outset, the Roma Capitale URBACT Local Group chose to approach the Aranciera as a space to be explored together. The process unfolded step by step, through discussions, exchanges, and testing. Slowly, the idea of



using Aranciera also as an *Urban Social Greenhouse* emerged, albeit for precisely identified periods of time within its different uses and annual calendar of events. Thus reusing Aranciera started to be viewed not just as a physical transformation, but as a way to connect environmental awareness, education, and cultural heritage in a lived space.

This direction was shaped by a strong collaboration between Roma Capitale and Sapienza University. Within the Hydro-Heritage Cities network, this partnership created a bridge between academic knowledge, institutional action and local engagement. It also allowed the experience of Chalandri to be reinterpreted in a new context, less as a model to replicate, and more as a method to adapt.



**LOCK 1
STAKEHOLDERS**

(Who is involved?
Who is missing?)

**LOCK 1
STAKEHOLDERS**

(Who is involved?
Who is missing?)

**LOCK 1
STAKEHOLDERS**

(Who is involved?
Who is missing?)

**LOCK 2
DESIGN**

(What are we
creating? What is
the vision?)

**LOCK 2
DESIGN**

(What are we
creating? What is
the vision?)

**LOCK 2
DESIGN**

(What are we
creating? What is
the vision?)

**LOCK 3
GOVERNANCE**

(Who decides?
How do we work
together?)

**LOCK 3
GOVERNANCE**

(Who decides?
How do we work
together?)

**LOCK 3
GOVERNANCE**

(Who decides?
How do we work
together?)

"The Same Faces"

Your project meetings are well attended—but always by the same people. Key groups (youth, marginalised communities, local businesses) are missing.

- Who is not in the room—and why?
- What would make participation more accessible or relevant for them?
- Should you adapt the format, the language, or the location of engagement?

"The Unexpected Ally"

A technical authority (e.g. water management agency) shows strong interest in your project—but their priorities differ from yours.

- What do you have in common, and where do your interests diverge?
- How can you build a shared narrative or objective?
- What risks do you need to manage in this partnership?

"Participation Fatigue"

Stakeholders have already participated in many consultations and are starting to disengage.

- What has participation meant so far—information, consultation, or co-creation?
- How can you make participation more meaningful or visible?
- What quick win could rebuild trust?

"The Invisible Asset"

Your water heritage is hidden, underground, or unknown. People don't see its value.

- How can you make the invisible visible (physically, digitally, artistically)?
- What story could help people connect to it?
- Who could help translate technical knowledge into public experience?

"Too Many Ideas"

Your group generates many creative proposals, but lacks focus.

- What criteria can help you prioritise?
- Which ideas create the most impact or learning?
- Can you test instead of deciding?

"A Site with Potential"

You have a restored (or soon-to-be restored) heritage site, but it is not yet used or recognised by citizens.

- What activities could bring people in?
- Who should co-design the use of the space?
- How can the site connect to everyday life?

"The First Meeting Shock"

Your first stakeholder meeting leads to confusion or conflicting expectations.

- What went wrong —content, format, expectations?
- How can you clarify roles and objectives?
- What method could help structure the next meeting?

"Silos Inside the City"

Different departments are interested, but they don't naturally collaborate.

- What shared goal could connect them?
- What does each department gain from collaboration?
- Do you need a formal or informal coordination mechanism?

"From Idea to Ownership"

The project is driven by a small group, while others remain passive.

- Who needs to feel ownership—and how?
- How can responsibilities be shared?
- What small action could activate others?

The Five Water Locks: A collaborative game to unlock Hydro-Heritage Cities

Objective of the Game

Work together to “unlock” the five water locks by responding to real-life urban challenges inspired by the Hydro-Heritage Cities journey. Each lock represents a key dimension of integrated urban development. To unlock them, players must **discuss, decide, and agree on a course of action**.

There are no single correct answers — the goal is to think, exchange, and learn together.

What’s in the Game

- The **Board** (with 5 Water Locks)
- A deck of **Scenario Cards** with **Discussion Prompts**
- **Tokens** (to mark progress)



Who can play

- 2 to 6 players (or small groups)
- Ideal for workshops, training sessions, or team reflection



UNLOCK T



**SILO
LOCK**

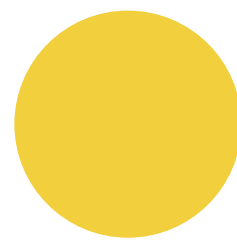


**FUND
LOCK**



**INVISIBLE
WATER
LOCK**

THE *FLOW*



**CONTINUITY
LOCK**



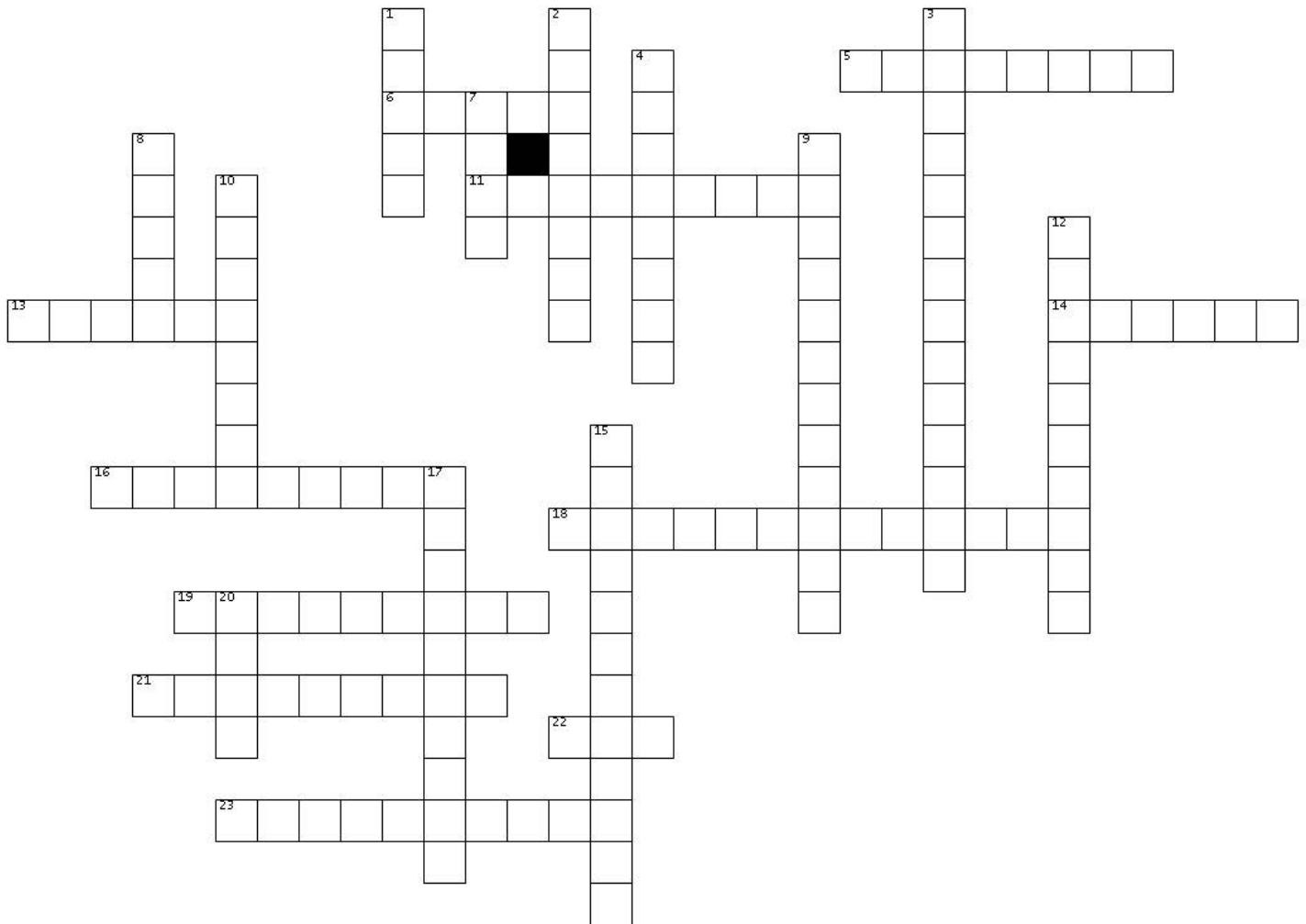
**DING
OCK**



**PARTICIPATION
LOCK**

HYDRO HERITAGE PUZZLE

Use the clues to fill in the words above. Words can go across or down. Letters are shared when the words intersect.



ACROSS

5. Ancient underground water channel that inspired the project
6. Waterway connecting landscapes, people, and heritage
11. Belgian city exploring hidden water heritage and canals
13. European programme supporting sustainable urban development
14. Serbian city reconnecting citizens with canal heritage
16. Greek city where the Cultural H.ID.R.A.N.T. story began
18. Active involvement of citizens and stakeholders
19. Historic tree nursery and garden space in Rome
21. People working together around shared local heritage
22. Local stakeholder group guiding the project in each city (initials).
23. Way institutions and citizens collaborate in decision-making

DOWN

1. Spanish city famous for its palm groves and irrigation heritage
2. UNESCO-listed palm grove landscape of Elche
3. Long-term balance between environment, culture and society
4. Route through which water flows across a territory
7. Traditional Moorish waterwheel used to lift water
8. Portuguese town known for its aqueduct and Nora heritage
9. Process of giving new life to places and communities
10. Public celebration mixing culture, water, and participation
12. Ability of cities and communities to adapt and recover
15. Groups and people involved in shaping the project
17. Resources and funding needed to bring plans to life
20. Italian capital adapting hydro-heritage through the Aranciera

LOCK 4 FUNDING

(What resources
do we use?)

LOCK 4 FUNDING

(What resources
do we use?)

LOCK 4 FUNDING

(What resources
do we use?)

LOCK 5 IMPLEMENTATION / IMPACT

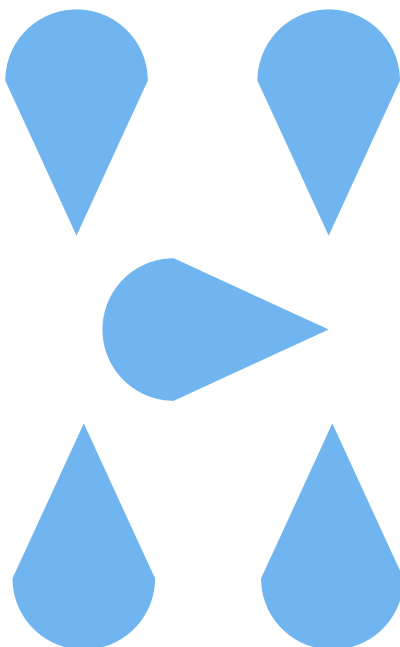
(What happens in
reality? What lasts
over time?)

LOCK 5 IMPLEMENTATION / IMPACT

(What happens in
reality? What lasts
over time?)

LOCK 5 IMPLEMENTATION / IMPACT

(What happens in
reality? What lasts
over time?)



How to Play

- 1. Set up the board:** Place the board at the centre of the table. Shuffle the Scenario Cards and place them face down.
- 2. Start from any lock:** As a group, choose one of the five locks: Stakeholders, Design, Governance, Funding and Implementation
- 3. Draw a Scenario Card:** One player draws a card and reads it aloud. Each scenario presents a challenge inspired by real city experiences.
- 4. Discuss and decide:** As a group discuss how you would respond to the situation, share experiences or ideas and try to agree on a common approach
- 5. Unlock the lock:** Once the group reaches a shared decision, place a token on the lock and move to the next one
- 6. Continue until all locks are open:** The game ends when all five locks are unlocked.

"Public Funds Only"

Your plan depends almost entirely on public or EU funding.

- What other resources exist locally (private, community, partnerships)?
- What could attract non-public investment?
- How can you make your project more appealing to different funders?

"Small Ideas, Big Vision"

You have many small actions, but no clear long-term funding strategy.

- Which actions could be scaled up?
- How do they connect to a larger vision?
- What funding pathway could support growth?

"Unclear Value"

Decision-makers are not convinced your project deserves funding.

- What benefits are not clearly communicated?
- Who are the key decision-makers you need to convince?
- Can you demonstrate impact through a pilot?

"The First Pilot"

You are launching your first testing action.

- What does success look like for this pilot?
- How will you learn from it?
- How can you communicate results to others?

"Great Moment, Then What?"

A successful event or activity has just taken place—but nothing is planned next.

- How can you build continuity from this moment?
- Who could carry the initiative forward?
- What is the next small step?

"Fragile Change"

New ideas and collaborations exist but depend on a few individuals.

- How can you embed these changes in structures or policies?
- What alliances could strengthen them?
- How do you move from individual to collective ownership?

What made Rome's case both rich and complex was its context. The Aranciera is located in the Celio district, surrounded by some of the most well-known and monumental heritage sites in the city. This gave the project a strong symbolic dimension, but also raised an important question: *"Could such an experience be extended beyond a central and privileged area?"*

To address this, the ULG adopted a deliberate strategy. Alongside institutional and expert partners, such as the Italian Geographical Society, it focused on involving schools. If the Aranciera was the starting point, the ambition was clearly to move beyond it, reaching people who might not otherwise engage with heritage or environmental topics.

Collaborating with teachers and students of the Domizia Lucilla Higher Institute (Agriculture section) and the Regina Margherita Comprehensive Institute the project gradually shifted scale. The focus expanded from the site itself to the relationship

between people and their city. The aim was not simply to transmit knowledge, but to create a process of discovery.

The approach was progressive. It began in the classroom, where students were introduced to the themes of water, heritage and urban transformation. From there, the project moved into the city. Students were guided through places they thought they already knew but were invited to observe them differently, to notice details, connections and hidden elements. Finally, the journey led them to the Aranciera and the surrounding green space of Villa Celimontana.

This gradual movement - from the classroom to neighbourhood and to site - allowed a different kind of engagement to take shape.

Cultural heritage became something to experience rather than simply observe. Through storytelling pathways carefully designed and led by Sapienza, students were able to connect their everyday environment with broader narratives of water systems,

Palazzetto Mattei, Italian Geographical Society, library room, day on the occasion of Geonight 2026, (photograph by Italian Geographical Society)



historical layers and ongoing urban change. The video produced by the students of the Domizia Lucilla Institute reflects this change: not only in what they learned, but in how they began to see their surroundings.

At the same time, the involvement of the Italian Geographical Society added an important complementary dimension. As a well-established cultural institution, it provided both a physical space for activities and a broader framework of knowledge. Its presence helped reinforce the credibility of the project and connect it to a wider network of expertise, including the Centre for Modern Studies (CSSM), which contributed by sharing the spirit and commitment of the HHC project, and by offering students its knowledge on the Aranciera–Villa Celimontana context.

As the process unfolded, the Aranciera itself began to take on a new role. Not only as a building object of restoration, but as a place activated by relationships, learning and shared experiences. What had long been hidden and disconnected will start to function as a small but meaningful hub where environmental awareness, heritage and community could meet.

The idea of the *Urban Social Greenhouse* is the result of this gradual transformation. It is not a fixed or final model, but an evolving framework. It brings

together space, people and knowledge. It creates the conditions for ongoing activities and interactions. It also reflects a way of working that values experimentation, participation, and adaptation.

At the same time, the process has revealed some of the challenges of working in a city like Rome. The scale and complexity of the urban context make it difficult to expand initiatives quickly. Institutional structures, stakeholder expectations and the layered nature of the city itself require time, coordination and continuous negotiation.

Yet, these challenges also underline the importance of starting from concrete experiences.

The Aranciera shows that even in a complex and stratified urban environment, it is possible to reactivate hidden spaces and build new connections around them. It demonstrates that heritage can become a living resource, and that water - often overlooked - can act as a thread linking past, present and future.

Looking ahead, the challenge is to build on this experience and extend it further. The Investment Plan aims to support this process, identifying new opportunities, resources and partnerships. The ambition is not only to consolidate what has been achieved, but to explore how similar approaches could be applied in other parts of the city.



Seedbed and
Orangery of San
Sisto, meeting of
Sapienza-PDTA and
Stakeholders with
Councilor Sabrina
Alfonsi- Roma Capi-
tale (photograph by
D. Riglietti)

Message in a Bottle

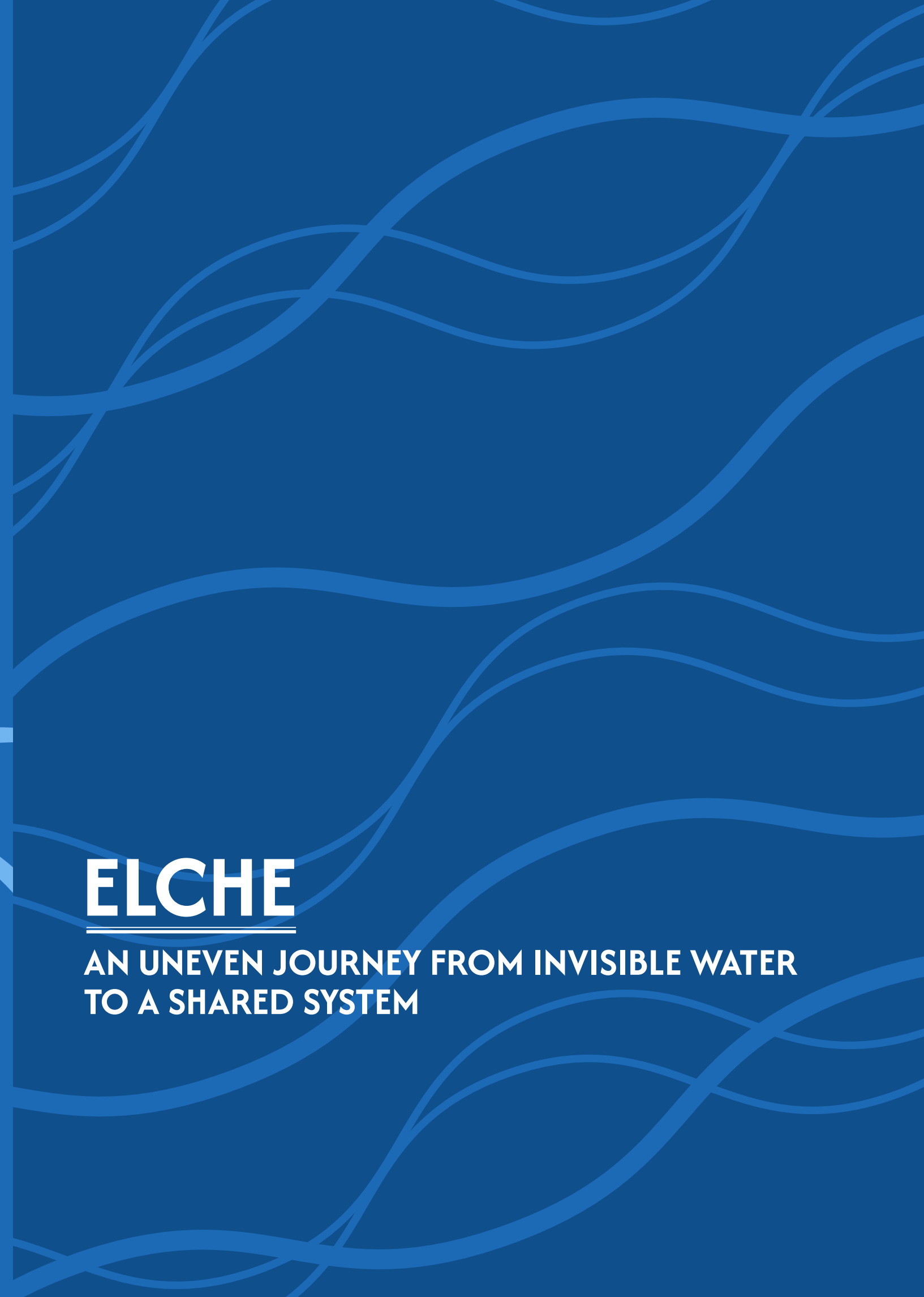
What we learned

- 
- 👉 **Make the invisible visible:** Hidden heritage can become a powerful driver for urban regeneration when it is reconnected to people and everyday life.
 - 👉 **From one place to a city-wide model:** Pilot sites can trigger broader change when designed as scalable and replicable systems.
 - 👉 **Water connects people, place and future:** Reframing water as a cultural and social asset strengthens awareness and climate resilience.
 - 👉 **Participation builds lasting impact:** Strong communities and shared governance matter more than individual projects.
 - 👉 **Small actions, systemic change:** Local, low-cost initiatives can generate wider transformations when guided by a clear vision.

Color In

Color the Aranciera with your favourite colors, and make it visible again!





ELCHE

**AN UNEVEN JOURNEY FROM INVISIBLE WATER
TO A SHARED SYSTEM**

AN UNEVEN JOURNEY FROM INVISIBLE WATER TO A SHARED SYSTEM



More than anything else, Elche started its Hydro-Heritage journey with a paradox.

On one hand, the city holds one of the most extraordinary hydraulic heritage systems in Europe, the UNESCO Heritage Palmeral, its irrigation networks, the Acequia Mayor del Pantano and centuries of accumulated knowledge. On the other hand, this system was increasingly invisible, technically functioning in parts, culturally fragmented and weakly connected to contemporary urban life.

The first meetings of the local group revealed this contradiction very clearly. When mapping policies, initiatives and stakeholders, the landscape appeared rich but disconnected. Regulations on heritage, water reuse projects, educational initiatives and tourism routes all coexist in our wide heritage of palm groves, but are rarely aligned.

More importantly, participation has been uneven, key actors missing and information dispersed. When

we met for the first times there was no shared agreement on what the Investment Plan should really focus on. Even the idea of a “central project” remained unclear in early discussions.

However, something important emerged very early and that was a shared intuition that the future of Elche’s hydraulic heritage would depend not on isolated actions, but on building a coherent system.

The turning point came through the transfer process from Chalandri. The local group did not simply replicate the CULTURAL H.ID.R.A.N.T. model but rather it reinterpreted it. Instead of focusing only on infrastructure, the group prioritised education, participation and the idea of the hydraulic system as a “living resource” rather than a static heritage asset.

This shift was reinforced through discussions and exchanges in transnational meetings. Experiences such as Roeselare’s highlighted the importance of co-creation, citizen science and micro-scale

interventions. Hydraulic heritage only survives if it is used, understood and collectively managed, that was the message we got clear and back in Elche, this led to a gradual reframing of the Investment Plan. The focus gradually moved from “restoring elements” to “activating a system”.

The vision that emerged reflects this transformation, that is, Elche as a reference in sustainable and integrated water management, where heritage, agriculture, education and innovation are connected through a shared governance model.

This vision is not abstract. It is grounded in very concrete challenges identified by the group such as the deterioration of hydraulic infrastructures, the lack of coordination between actors, insufficient water quality for irrigation, and – mostly - low public awareness and fragmented information systems.

At the same time, the process also revealed a strong asset that can give this governance model a solid ground: social legitimacy.

Through the testing activities during the Dia del Agua, stakeholders showed an almost unanimous recognition of the importance of the Palmeral and its hydraulic system for the future of the city. At the same time, they clearly perceived that without intervention, this heritage would progressively deteriorate.

This combination — high value and high perceived risk — fundamentally changed the positioning of the Investment Plan. It is no longer a cultural project. It is a neces-



sary intervention.

Another critical evolution has been the integration of ongoing initiatives. Projects such as the use of regenerated water from Algorós, the recovery of the Molí Real, and the “Memoria del Agua” initiative are no longer treated as isolated actions, but as building blocks of a broader system. This required a difficult but necessary step of accepting that Elche does not need to invent new projects, but to connect existing ones.

Despite this progress, the journey has not been smooth.

Participation has remained a challenge. Some stakeholders have been highly engaged, while others have been absent or reactive. The process has depended heavily on a small core group. This has limited the speed of progress and delayed key decisions, particularly regarding the definition of concrete investment actions.

However, this constraint has also forced prioritisation.

By the mid-term reflection, the group received a clear

message from external feedback. The Investment Plan needed to go beyond infrastructure and address social cohesion, education and identity. This reinforced the direction already emerging locally.

Today, Elche’s journey can be summarised as a transition from fragmentation to integration — still incomplete, but clearly underway. What emerges is a thinly designed path from a collection of disconnected initiatives to a structured system linking water, heritage and community. From an invisible infrastructure to a narrative of a living system and from a technical asset to a shared cultural and social resource.

The main lesson we have learned so far is not that Elche has “solved” its challenges. It has not.

The lesson is that even in a context of limited participation and slow progress, a strong conceptual framework — combined with the right European exchange — can reframe the way a city understands its own assets. Today in Elche water is no longer just something that flows through hidden channels. It is becoming something that connects people, places and time.



Message in a Bottle

What we learned

- 
- **Start from what already exists.** The challenge is rarely lack of projects, but lack of connection between them.
 - **Hydraulic heritage is not a monument — it is a system.** Treating it as static leads to decline.
 - **Social legitimacy is a strategic asset.** High public recognition and perceived risk lead to a strong case for investment.
 - **Participation is not guaranteed.** Build your process assuming uneven engagement.
 - **Make the invisible visible.** Without narrative and experience, infrastructure remains irrelevant.

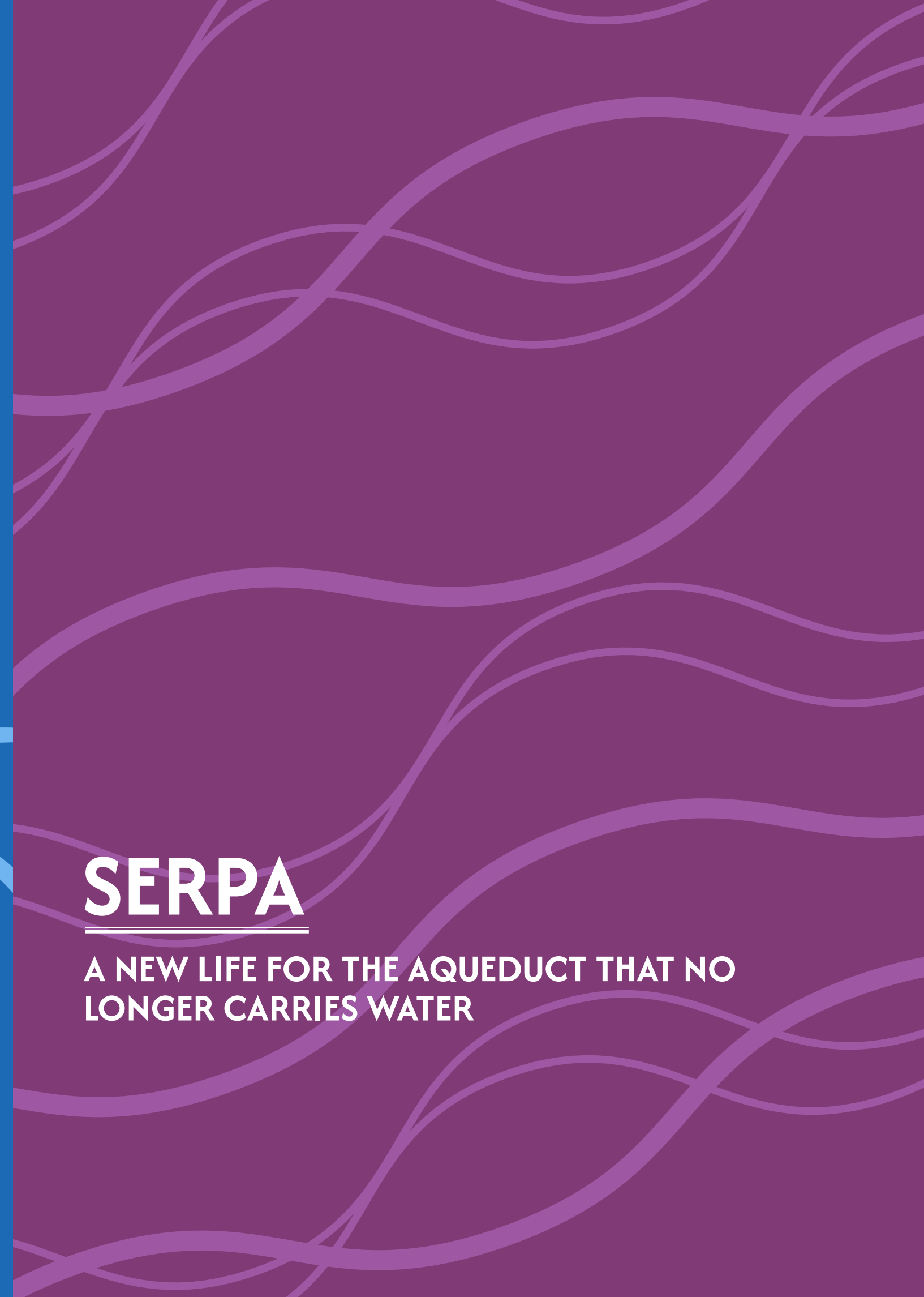
Hidden water: Find the system

Find 8 hidden words related to Elche's water heritage system.

Once you find them, ask yourself:

How are these elements connected in your city?

D	L	A	P	A	D	I	W	I	A	E	G	B	D	E
S	P	W	A	T	E	R	Q	K	D	S	H	E	Q	D
A	O	T	L	R	S	R	E	U	S	E	K	D	A	I
C	O	M	M	U	N	I	T	Y	G	D	L	U	S	O
I	U	F	E	L	A	G	G	U	B	F	N	C	K	A
F	F	E	R	T	U	A	C	E	Q	U	I	A	J	S
J	S	D	A	W	I	T	U	M	A	H	U	T	N	D
K	D	A	L	D	O	I	J	D	O	K	B	I	U	H
U	E	O	T	S	L	O	M	Y	E	N	U	O	I	E
R	A	R	A	A	S	N	I	U	R	P	W	N	F	R
E	R	I	R	F	A	F	S	W	D	L	Q	U	E	I
I	U	O	D	N	E	D	A	B	F	W	A	I	D	T
S	N	L	L	M	N	S	D	L	I	E	D	O	E	A
D	B	A	P	O	U	A	T	D	T	D	A	P	S	G
A	R	S	O	Y	E	K	H	A	A	I	S	H	P	E



SERPA

**A NEW LIFE FOR THE AQUEDUCT THAT NO
LONGER CARRIES WATER**

A NEW LIFE FOR THE AQUEDUCT THAT NO LONGER CARRIES WATER



Storytelling and reenactment about water fountains culture (@Vitor Brasão)

The waterwheel of Serpa — the *Nora* — indelibly marks the historical profile of our ancient town in southern Portugal, near the border with Spain. Towering above the imposing medieval walls, it remains one of the city's most recognisable landmarks, connected to the aqueduct that stretches along the fortifications.

Nestled into a corner of the city wall, the waterwheel appears almost like a watchful tower. The aqueduct, with its nineteen arches superimposed on the wall, disappears at the other end among the trees of a palatial garden.

Despite all its magnificence, this monumental complex bears many a scar of abandonment and neglect. For many years now, the waterwheel has no longer turned or discharged water into the aqueduct. Its timbers have rotted, and pigeons now occupy the space where people and animals once busied themselves drawing water from the subsoil and bringing it to the inhabitants of the palace that commissioned its construction in the seventeenth century.

For the people of Serpa, the waterwheel and aqueduct have long been associated with the local elite: symbols of the power and architecture of the palace owners, who even altered the defensive function of

the city walls to secure their water supply. The town itself, then still a small village, never benefited from this water. People looked at the waterwheel as a monument, not as a tool connected to everyday life.

And yet, beneath Serpa, water has always flowed. For centuries, cisterns, wells, and fountains were built both inside and outside the walls, supplying water for drinking and irrigation in this dry territory where water has always been precious.

Hydro-Heritage Cities has given the chance for the whole community to reconnect with its past, its heritage and water, Serpa's most essential resource.

As a municipal technician working in the heritage sector, my vision for recovering this monument had always been quite traditional: rehabilitation, conservation, restoration and public access. The integration of Serpa into the Hydro-Heritage Cities network—and especially the discovery of the Cultural H.I.D.R.A.N.T. project—became a turning point in how we looked at this site.

Suddenly, we saw the possibility of creating something broader: a project capable of linking the historical

legacy of Serpa, embodied in one of its most iconic monuments, with the life of the community itself. Once a private infrastructure serving a noble family and only donated to the State in the 1950s, the waterwheel and aqueduct could now truly become part of public and everyday life. Through culture, water awareness and participation, the project gained a new meaning: not only restoring heritage, but giving it back to the whole community.

Over more than a year, conversations with members of the local community helped us rethink priorities and explore possibilities that had not initially been considered. The process unfolded through a series of small shifts in perspective.

The rehabilitation of the monumental complex and its reopening to residents and visitors remains the central objective. But gradually we began to understand that this was not only about restoring a physical structure. It was also about creating a setting for cultural activities, a meeting place for the community, and a space for younger generations to learn about water, heritage and the history of their city.

*The Nora
Festival (@
Fabrice Ziegler)*



As the project developed, expectations within the community also grew. People started asking: "Could the waterwheel finally be recovered and returned to the city?" Then came an unexpected moment that accelerated everything.

Sometime during the Hydro-Heritage journey, part of the waterwheel's structure collapsed due to years of deterioration and lack of maintenance. Suddenly, an emergency intervention became necessary to prevent further losses and begin urgent consolidation works. Paradoxically, this difficult moment also marked a change in public perception.

As works began, the community started to look again at the waterwheel with concern but also with hope. What had long seemed static and untouchable in an instant appeared fragile and alive. People realised that heritage cannot simply remain there forever, immune to time but rather it needs care, attention, and continuous use in order to survive. This shift changed our perspective as city officers as well. We stopped

seeing the waterwheel and aqueduct only as historical elements to preserve and began to imagine them as active parts of community life again.

Now is the time to move from plans to action. Rehabilitating the monument will be the most demanding, expensive and lengthy task, but we can already imagine the moment when the waterwheel and aqueduct are fully returned to the city and its inhabitants.

And they will not stand alone. The municipality's commitment to hydraulic heritage now extends beyond this single monument. Other fountains and historic water structures in Serpa have also been restored, not only as objects to admire but as stories to tell and spaces to experience, our testing action focused on this water-related history.

Beneath Serpa, water has always flowed. Now the time has come to bring it back to the surface and back into the life of the city.

Serpa's aqueduct and waterwheel (@Nicola di Nunzio/CMSerpa)



Message in a Bottle

What we learned

- 
- Transform historical heritage into a living story that connects with local communities and becomes a useful and usable asset in everyday life
 - Despite the many difficulties that may arise, citizen participation is essential and cannot be taken for granted. It needs to be continuously nurtured, renewed and connected to real experiences and spaces
 - Integrating hydro-heritage projects into broader local policies helps secure political support and strengthens long-term impact
 - Moments of urgency or crisis can become opportunities to mobilise attention, accelerate action and create new public awareness around heritage

Connect the dots

And color in the missing part of the Nora



The background of the entire page is a dark green color. Overlaid on this are several thick, light green wavy lines that flow diagonally from the top left towards the bottom right. These lines are of varying thickness and create a sense of movement and organic form.

CHALANDRI

THE HARD JOB OF MAKING A VISION OUR OWN

THE HARD JOB OF MAKING A VISION OUR OWN

"Inhabitants feel the public space as their own; they have ideas, modify it, and care for it."

"Citizens have built a trusting relationship with the city administration and actively engage."

"Residents have a clear picture of the city's condition and of the measurable targets we need to achieve."

(from Chalandri's ULG Newspaper of Tomorrow exercise)

Leaving aside the Hydro-Heritage Cities physical meetings, always rich in inspiration and exchange, the truly memorable moments in our journey have been relatively few. Amid the implacable pace of project work and agony to deliver, these moments stand out to us as key turning points. They are the moments when change happens, solidifies and is felt. Moments that eclipse doubts, frustration and impatience proving all the effort invested begins to make sense.

Almost a year into our Hydro-Heritage Cities journey, we had only just managed to get our ULG up and

running. At the first meeting, months earlier, we were proud to have brought together, for the first time, four city departments, a deputy mayor, two city councillors and Chalandri's development agencies, working alongside the project team and selected partners from the UIA Cultural H.ID.RA.N.T. project.

Their experience was something we hoped to build upon. Yet the meeting quickly turned into a fast exchange of ideas, with mixed and - for some - unclear and disappointing results. It became evident that we needed to slow down and recalibrate.



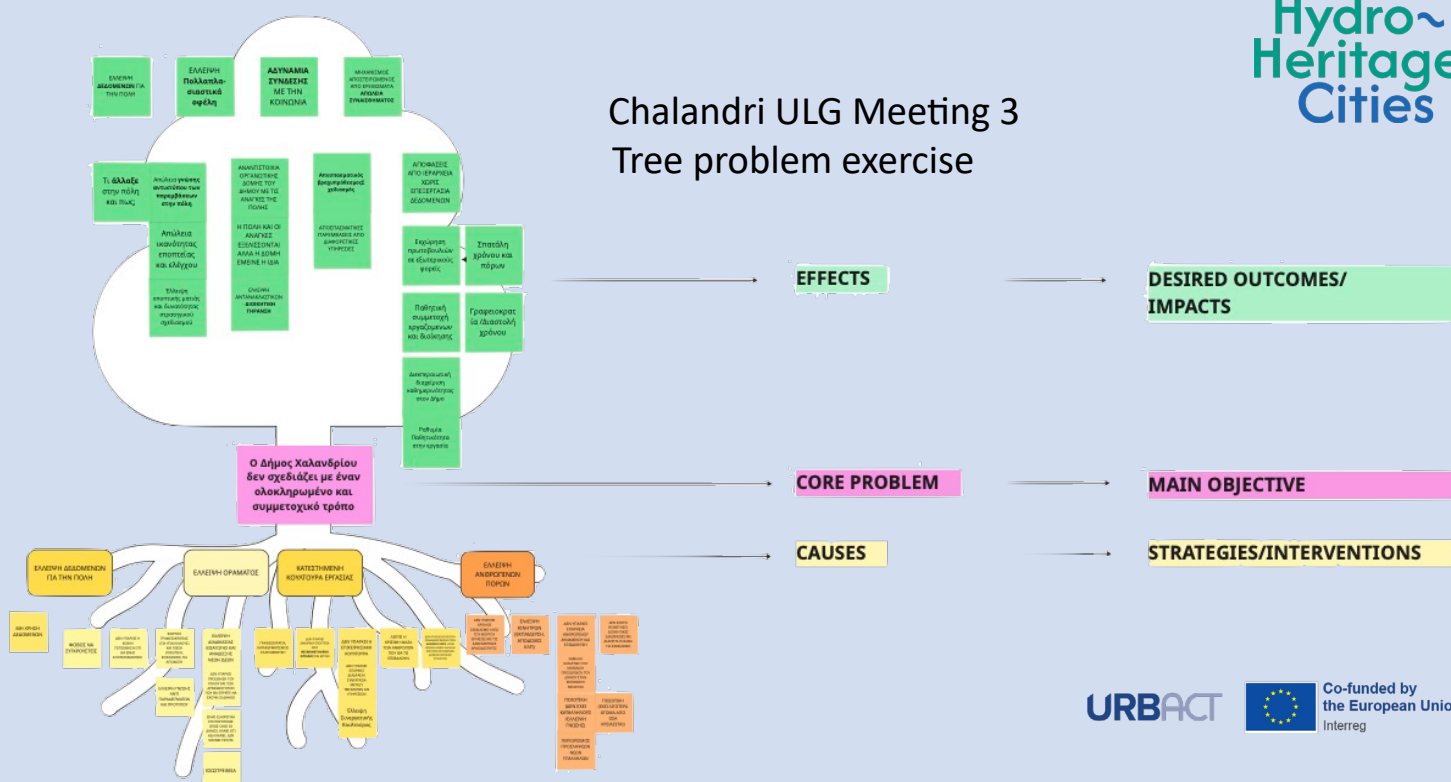
Looking back, this early moment proved valuable. It helped us recognize where we needed to adjust and gave us the opportunity to rethink our approach from the beginning. Most importantly, it revealed the gap between the project team, already familiar with Cultural H.ID.RA.N.T., and the newcomers: municipal staff and elected officials in the ULG. We realized that the strength of Cultural H.ID.R.A.N.T.'s methodology alone was not enough. It needed to be translated, step by step, into something that could be shared and owned by others.

This required us to take a step back. We began to build a more gradual process, focused on co-recognizing both the need for and the benefits of our proposal

for the city, and on co-imagining shared objectives and a pathway to reach them. As lead partner of the Network, we were also experiencing first-hand what it means to transfer a practice... even within our own municipality.

At the same time, we worked to clarify our continuity plan and make it more tangible through co-designed pilot actions. That's when we turned to the URBACT toolkit for structure. Exercises such as the 5 Whys, the Problem Tree, and the Newspaper of Tomorrow helped bring more solidity and focus to our meetings. The discussions were not always linear, at times they circled back or opened new questions, but this became part of the process.

Using the problem tree with the ULG to bring focus to our meetings





The ULG and newcomers: municipal staff, elected officials and experts

Gradually, these exchanges helped us better understand the challenge, explore its root causes, and shape a shared direction. This process of unpacking and refining our initial ideas helped bring ULG members onto common ground.

By the fourth meeting, when we asked participants to reflect on the everyday work and achievements of a future Urban Lab, which was our vision for integrating the Cultural H.ID.RA.N.T. approach into municipal practice, the responses echoed the quotes at the top of this story. Participants also shared how much they had enjoyed the session.

The shift was tangible, the atmosphere had changed and so had the level of clarity. While the final outcome was still taking shape, the direction had become more visible and the path easier to follow. With this renewed confidence, we invited new members to join the ULG. It became easier to explain what we wanted to achieve, and to integrate new perspectives into the process.

By then we had a concrete framework for co-designing and testing the Urban Lab's working method with municipal staff, experts and residents. What

had initially seemed abstract or not immediately necessary began to take the form of a practical and actionable process.

Through the preparation of the testing action, a number of participatory walks and a GIS-based dashboard to assess walkability in one of Chalandri's neighbourhoods, we also uncovered resources and capacities within the municipality that had previously remained in the background. This made the proposal more tangible and relevant for city employees and elected officials alike.

Perhaps all this was simply part of a learning curve. Yet it reinforced something we thought we already knew from Cultural H.ID.RA.N.T., that is, meaningful participation requires preparation and continuous effort.

The initial momentum of the Hydro Heritage Network maybe led us to move too quickly, but we learned to adjust, and this initial failure helped us become more aware, more methodical and more adaptable in navigating the challenges of transferring and scaling innovative practices across different contexts and actors. Even within our own city.

Message in a Bottle

What we learned

Think big – start small

Strategic ambition requires a broad, long-term vision, but implementation benefits from a focused starting point. Establishing a small core group to define shared objectives proved more effective than engaging all stakeholders from the outset.

Invest in relationships beyond project delivery

Building trust and collaboration beyond formal project requirements is essential for shared understanding, smoother knowledge transfer, and stronger co-creation processes.

Be ambitious, but adapt to operational realities

When visions extend beyond institutional capacity (e.g. systemic change), translating them into incremental and practical interventions is key. A gradual, “learning by doing” approach supports sustainable change.

Work through targeted engagement within the administration

Bilateral exchanges and identifying key contact persons within departments can be more effective than relying only on large group meetings, accelerating alignment and ownership.

Use transnational exchange as a catalyst

URBACT meetings and city visits create space for reflection, inspiration and stronger engagement, away from daily administrative pressures.

Treat the process itself as capacity building

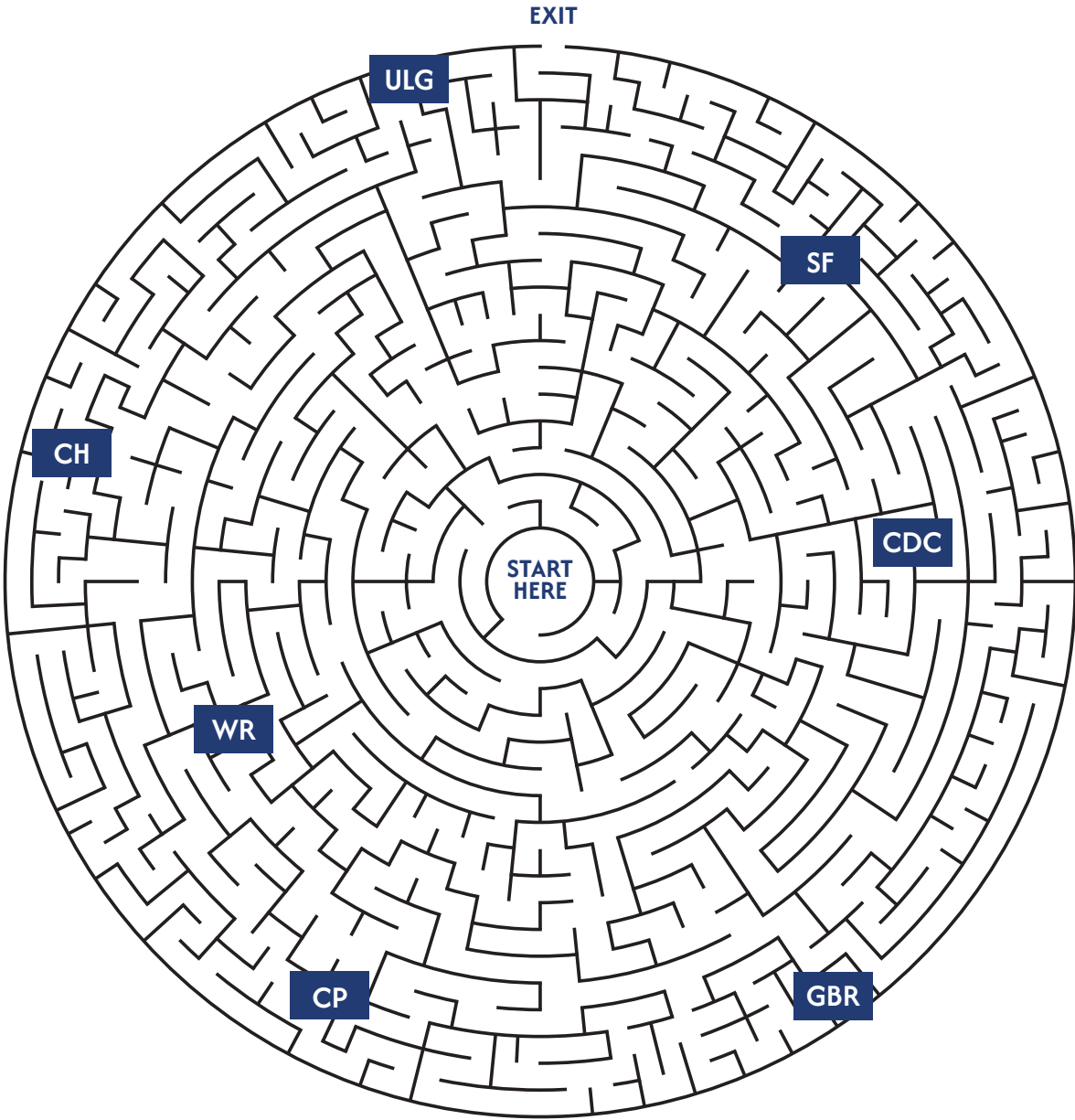
The URBACT experience functions as a learning process that strengthens skills, tools, collaboration and internal culture within the municipality.

Maze

Find your way towards integrated hydro-heritage management

- ULG:** ULG FORMATION
- CH:** CULTURAL HERITAGE
- WR:** WATER REUSE
- CP:** CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

- GBR:** GREEN-BLUE REGENERATION
- CDC:** CROSS-DEPARTMENT COLLABORATION
- SF:** SMART FINANCING



Keeping the flow

I live in Venice, where water is the very essence and the literal foundation of the city. It shapes how you move, how you orient yourself and how you experience the city. It is beauty and fragility at the same time, something to navigate and to manage but also something that defines identity and sense of belonging.

Perhaps this is why working on Hydro-Heritage Cities felt immediately familiar. And perhaps this is also why one lesson became very clear to me early on. Transferring innovation is never a simple act of moving ideas from one place to another.

There is a good practice, there are cities willing to adopt it, and a process will connect the two. But in reality, what happens in between is far more complex. Each city encounters innovation with its own history and culture, its own structures and its own limitations. And what follows is not replication but something much more interesting... and much more demanding... it is reinterpretation.

This is where the URBACT approach has proven its value. Because innovation transfer, as experienced in Hydro-Heritage cities, has never been about transferring technical solutions. It has been about creating the conditions for cities to make sense of them in their own way and create a new vision of their future. URBACT (and myself as a URBACT “tool”) has offered a safe space that allows this reinterpretation to happen.

And yet, it was anything but automatic. The integrated approach, for example, required cities to step out of their comfort zones. Hydro-heritage does not belong to one department, it cuts across culture, water management, environment, education and tourism to mention the most invested fields.





In some cities, these connections started to emerge, sometimes unexpectedly. In others, they remained difficult to establish. This is not a weakness of the method, but rather it is the reality of institutions, policy integration is hard practice.

Participation tells a similar story. URBACT Local Groups can be powerful spaces, they bring together different voices, perspectives and energies but they also reflect the power dynamics of the local context. Engagement cannot be assumed, it must be built, step by step, through clarity, trust and relevance. Even Chalandri, the owner of the Cultural H.I.D.R.A.N.T, that has received global attention for the revitalization of its ancient aqueduct, has experienced this hardship first-hand with its ULG drama.

I have seen both sides of this process, and - if you have read this booklet - you have too. Moments of hesitation, but also instants where something shifts, when stakeholders take ownership, ideas start to circulate beyond the project and the initiative becomes part of the city's narrative.

I am convinced that this is when innovation transfer truly happens. Not just in the plans or in the meetings, but in those moments where a community begins to make the idea its own.

So, what remains after this journey? There are, of course, concrete outputs: investment plans, pilot actions, partnerships and maybe new opportunities for funding. These are important, and they will shape what comes next.

But for me, the real legacy is probably less tangible and more human in nature. It is in the way I (yet again) and the cities involved have started to look at water differently, the shift from preserving or maintaining heritage to activating it with the community and the still growing confidence to engage with complexity and resilience also in light of social, environmental and economic uncertainties.

What this journey has foremost taught me as an urban expert (and Chalandri, Serpa, Elche, Sombor, Roeselare and Rome) is - arguably - a way of working. If I go back to Venice and to water, it's even clearer. Innovation - like water - does not follow a straight path, it adapts and finds its way, it floods above protection levels to reshape what it encounters.

The flow continues.

Sandra Rainero

Hydro-Heritage Cities Lead Expert

SOLUTIONS

Roeselare's Seeds of Success

1 → E 2 → C 3 → B 4 → D 5 → A

Insert crossword

ACROSS

5. AQUEDUCT
6. CANAL
11. ROESELARE
13. URBACT
14. SOMBOR
16. CHALANDRI
18. PARTICIPATION
19. ARANCIERA
21. COMMUNITY
22. ULG
23. GOVERNANCE

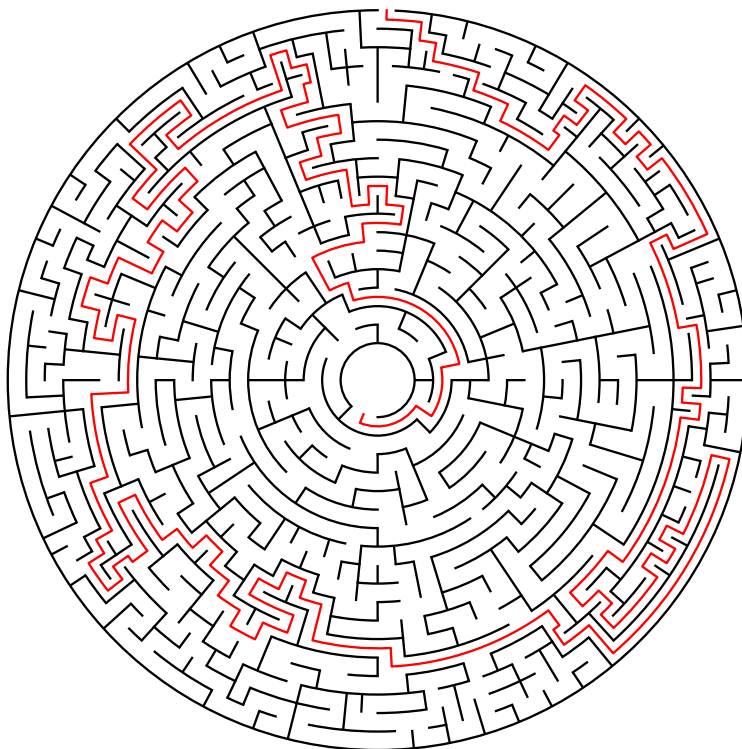
DOWN

1. ELCHE
2. PALMERAL
3. SUSTAINABILITY
4. WATERWAY
7. NORA
8. SERPA
9. REGENERATION
10. FESTIVAL
12. RESILIENCE
15. STAKEHOLDERS
17. INVESTMENT
20. ROME

Elche's Hidden water: Find the system

D	L	A	P	A	D	I	W	I	A	E	G	B	D	E
S	P	W	A	T	E	R	Q	K	D	S	H	E	Q	D
A	O	T	L	R	S	R	E	U	S	E	K	D	A	I
C	O	M	M	U	N	I	T	Y	G	D	L	U	S	O
I	U	F	E	L	A	G	G	U	B	F	N	C	K	A
F	F	E	R	T	U	A	C	E	Q	U	I	A	J	S
J	S	D	A	W	I	T	U	M	A	H	U	T	N	D
K	D	A	L	D	O	I	J	D	O	K	B	I	U	H
U	E	O	T	S	L	O	M	Y	E	N	U	O	I	E
R	A	R	A	A	S	N	I	U	R	P	W	N	F	R
E	R	I	R	F	A	F	S	W	D	L	Q	U	E	I
I	U	O	D	N	E	D	A	B	F	W	A	I	D	T
S	N	L	L	M	N	S	D	L	I	E	D	O	E	A
D	B	A	P	O	U	A	T	D	T	D	A	P	S	G
A	R	S	O	Y	E	K	H	A	A	I	S	H	P	E

Chalandri Maze





ROMA



serpa | terra forte
município



Excelentísimo
AYUNTAMIENTO
— de ELCHE —