Cities@Heart

Lamia, Greece
52,289 inhabitants

Challenge

In recent years, Lamia has struggled with social exclusion, low income and weak tourism, alongside a car-centric, inaccessible center, limited greenery, low civic participation, buildings lacking in energy efficiency, and uneven social and urban development.

Local heroes

The action required collaboration between the Municipality of Lamia, urban planners, technology providers, and local stakeholders, ensuring effective implementation, maintenance, and acceptance while aligning smart mobility solutions with real citizen needs.



Lamia working group

Lessons learnt

- Start small with visible, people-centered interventions.

- Base decisions on real urban needs, involve local authorities early, and combine design with smart technology.

- Prioritize safety, accessibility, and adaptability to build trust and create scalable, impactful change.

Solution

Smart Pedestrian Crossings

The project aims to enhance urban resilience and inclusivity by addressing everyday mobility and safety needs. Focusing on Parkou Square, a central node with intense traffic and pedestrian activity, a Smart Pedestrian Crossing was implemented in cooperation with the Municipality of Lamia.

The intervention improves pedestrian safety and accessibility, raises environmental awareness, and contributes to the reactivation of the city center through smart, people-oriented solutions, supporting a safer and more connected urban environment.



A smart crossing in the city centre

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AMFIKTYONIES
Developmental Organization S.A.

Cities@Heart

Celje, Slovenia
48 847 inhabitants

Challenge

When Celje joined URBACT, the city centre was confronted with various challenges: vacant premises, declining footfall and loss of everyday functions, caused by changing consumer habits and competition from shopping centres.

Local heroes

Local entrepreneurs, property owners, cultural actors, residents, Zavod Celeia Celje and municipal departments are key local heroes, collaborating through the URBACT Local Group to revitalise Celje's city centre.



Celje's Urban Local Group

Lessons learnt

- Map vacant spaces and stakeholders early; engage property owners and businesses from the start;

- Test temporary uses before permanent ones; combine promotion with simple data on footfall;

- Use regular meetings to adapt actions together and keep the city centre active.

Solution

Community-Driven Public Space Activation

Celje introduced a coordinated approach to reactivate vacant ground-floor spaces through mapping empty premises, matching owners with new businesses and cultural initiatives, and supporting temporary and permanent uses.

The action combines mentoring, promotion and data-based monitoring of footfall. The expected impact is fewer vacant units, increased pedestrian activity, stronger local commerce and a more lively, inclusive city centre.



Activating the city centre with events

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MUNICIPALITY OF CELJE

Cities@Heart

Cesena, Italy
95 759 inhabitants

Challenge

For Cesena, accessibility was the main challenge: not only related to mobility and connections, but also from a social and economic perspective to make the historic centre accessible for all.

Local heroes

Local emerging artists, schools, and universities are the key heroes of the Open Art Gallery. They design and produce artworks, manage installations, and involve the community, ensuring the project's ongoing creativity and local ownership.



Event activation with local stakeholders

Lessons learnt

Key steps for implementing this action:

- Begin with temporary displays to test public interest.
- Engage schools and local artists from the outset to create ownership.
- Launch themed calls to refresh content regularly.
- Ensure a launch event to keep the area attractive and involve the neighbourhood.

Solution

Open-Air Art Gallery

To encourage people to linger from Portaccia to the city centre, the city transformed a blank wall in Via Caporali through public art. Nine metal display structures (200×140 cm) were installed in November 2025, hosting printed posters by young and older artists, selected through thematic calls every four months. Integrated with other actions, such as collective care of plants and flowers and cooler areas providing shade, this open art gallery is a fast, low-cost intervention that enhances an unattractive area, stimulates community care, increases pedestrian flow, improves safety and attractiveness, and fosters stronger local ownership, while supporting local creativity.



Exhibition in the public space

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Comune di Cesena

Cities@Heart

Fleurus, Belgium
22 923 inhabitants

Challenge

For several decades, the city centre of Fleurus has been losing its attractiveness: shop closures, deteriorating historic buildings, obstacles to mobility, and the impoverishment of the hyper-centre, where the median income is 21% lower than the municipal average.

Local heroes

The project is based on the joint commitment of the City of Fleurus, the City Centre Manager, local shopkeepers, cultural associations, citizens, and public and private partners brought together within the Cities@Heart ULG.



Visiting the city centre

Lessons learnt

Involving local stakeholders from the outset, establishing clear governance, and anchoring each action in an overall vision helps avoid isolated projects and ensures a coherent, lasting transformation.

- Apply a flexible method: stable objectives, adaptable means.
- Regular evaluation: amplify what works, adjust what blocks.

Solution

#TRANSFORM
Reimagining Fleurus City Centre

#TRANSFORM is an integrated programme for revitalising the city centre of Fleurus, combining urban rehabilitation, support for local commerce, culture, soft mobility, and citizen participation. Supported by Cities@Heart, it coordinates existing and new initiatives to act simultaneously on the built environment, public space, culture, and the local economy.

Street art, cultural events, upgraded public spaces, and strengthened local businesses are generating visible momentum, reinforcing the identity of the city centre and encouraging residents and visitors to make it their own.



A mural to enliven the city centre

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FLEURUS

Cities@Heart

Granada, Spain
235 294 inhabitants

Challenge

Granada's city centre faces a series of interconnected challenges of touristification, congestion and a lacking infrastructure that stem from its unique urban dynamics, demographic changes, and evolving economic structure.

Local heroes

The ULG for Granada brings together a diverse range of stakeholders, ensuring a comprehensive approach to urban revitalization. The public sector, private sector, associations, and academic sector are involved each contributing their perspectives to the project.



Organising a Cities@Heart visit

Lessons learnt

Specific good practices enabled Granada to move from a shared diagnosis to a coherent package of implementable actions for the city centre.

- Evidence and baseline analysis,
- Co-creation with the URBACT Local Group (ULG),
- Transnational exchange with partner cities,
- Local testing through Small Scale Actions.

Solution

Open Air Event for European Mobility Week

For the first time, the Calle San Juan de Dios – one of the most crowded central streets in the city centre– got closed to traffic during the whole afternoon in order to celebrate a range of activities oriented to children and families living in the city centre.

The decision to focus on children was a groundbreaking approach for an event typically geared toward an adult audience, which often overlooks the needs and interests of younger participants.



Creating public spaces for residents, not just for tourists

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Ayuntamiento de Granada

Cities@Heart

Greater Paris Metropolis, France
7.2 million inhabitants

Challenge

The Lively Downtowns Programme now supports city centre revitalisation in 105 cities across the Greater Paris Metropolis.

Despite the programme's success, we lacked tools to integrate citizen dialogue.

Local heroes

City centre or local commerce managers are the backbone of the Lively Downtowns Programme. They are the link between the public and private sector, providing practical feedback on city centre solutions.



Workshop with city centre managers

Lessons learnt

Dialogue with citizens is deeply linked to social and political context.

- Adapt your strategy accordingly. Meet participants where they are.
- Understand the problem and your goals from the outset.
- Determine a governance model and anchor political support.
- Measure indicators and evaluate regularly.

Solution

A study on how to involve citizens in shaping public spaces

Lively and inclusive public spaces are essential to a thriving city centre. In 2024 we experimented with the activation of public spaces during the Paris 2024 Games, supporting over 500 actions in 86 cities across the Metropolis.

In 2025, we launched a "placemaking" study to identify best practices, challenges and a methodology to enliven the public realm in city centres with participatory projects. It's part of our strategy to put people at the heart of city centres.



Organising participatory events in the city centre around soft mobility

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Métropole du Grand Paris

Cities@Heart

Krakow Metropolitan Area, Poland
1,145,723 inhabitants

Challenge

The Metropolitan Area is rapidly growing, from 4% in Krakow to 33% in nearby municipalities.

This is causing congestion, safety issues and lower quality of public spaces.

Local heroes

This would not have happened without the involvement of the school community the commitment and openness of the employees of the Niepołomice Municipal Office.



Participating in a tactical urbanism Small Scale Action

Lessons learnt

Any changes to urban space near schools should be :

- Based on needs analysis
- Managed independently by interdisciplinary experts
- Consider all users
- Ensure stakeholder cooperation
- Include education and promotion
- Involve continuous monitoring and evaluation

Solution

Changing traffic organization and improving public space

In 2024, we conducted a broad participatory process in the vicinity of a primary school located in the city centre of one of the metropolitan cities—Niepołomice.

We invited residents, entrepreneurs, and the school community, including teachers and students, to participate in the initiative. They designed their space and solutions that would make them feel safer. We then implemented the changes we had developed together. Surveys conducted after implementation show that we have achieved our goal—this space in the city center has begun to better serve residents.



The transformed public space before and after.

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Kraków Metropolitan Area

Cities@Heart

Osijek, Croatia
96 313 inhabitants

Challenge

Since 2011, Osijek has depopulated (-11% by 2021: 108,048 to 96,313) and aged fast (22% 65+), weakening the local economy and resulting in a higher number of vacant premises and low city-centre footfall.

Local heroes

Explain ULG, city planning/services, SSA citizens, youth NGOs, University, Chamber of Commerce, property owners and entrepreneurs - co-design pilots, host pop-ups and run events. On-site surveys and an online map collect feedback; the best ideas are scaled citywide.



Particants in the city's Small Scale Action

Lessons learnt

Make sure data monitoring and communication are an integral part of your strategy.
- Small Scale Action workshop: 1-page Public Space Brief.
- Pilot 2–3 micro-sites: Co-design on site and vote with a QR code or paper leaflets.
- Run short (4–8-week) pilots; measure footfall & dwell time.
- Publish progress and results
- Agree on maintenance roles early

Solution

Osijek Public Space Pilots: Beautiful+Green+Fair

After our Small Scale Action brought 150+ residents into the city centre, Osijek turned ideas into action.

We co-designed three "Beautiful+Green+Fair" micro-sites, then tested them with 4–8 week pilots—shade, seating, greenery, safer crossings and clear wayfinding.

At the same time, owners opened vacant units for low-risk pop-ups. By measuring footfall and feedback, we scaled what works into permanent upgrades and a livelier, safer centre.



Public Space Activation

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GRAD OSIJEK

Cities@Heart

Pentágono Urbano, Portugal
700,000 inhabitants

Challenge

City centres in Pentágono Urbano faced ageing population, housing pressure, lower-than-average income levels and fragmented governance, limiting coordinated action to ensure inclusive, vibrant and sustainable urban centres.

Local heroes

This action relies on the commitment of the five PU municipalities, the URBACT Local Group, universities, civic organisations, businesses and citizens, working together to co-design and sustain long-term urban innovation.



URBACT local group meeting

Lessons learnt

- Build permanent cooperation structures, not isolated projects.

- Anchor innovation in data, participation and capacity building.

- Involve political leaders and local stakeholders early, and create spaces to test ideas before scaling them across cities.

Solution

Pentágono Urbano Competence Centre for Urban Innovation

The Pentágono Urbano Competence Centre for Urban Innovation transforms Cities@Heart into a permanent governance structure. It brings together five municipalities to produce urban data, develop research agendas, train local actors and test solutions through living labs.

The Centre strengthens evidence-based decision-making, supports inclusive policies and positions Pentágono Urbano as a regional hub for sustainable and people-centred city centre transformation.



Inaugural conference organised by the Competence Centre

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Pentágono Urbano
O futuro onde nos ligamos

Cities@Heart

Sligo, Ireland
20,000 inhabitants

Challenge

Sligo sought to verify commercial vacancy data (20.5%) and establish economic impact for festivals and events in a new public realm space, Queen Maeve Square.

Local heroes



This project succeeded due to the effective public-private partnership model in Sligo City, including Sligo County Council, Sligo Business Improvement District.

Solution

Assessment of building data and supports and Creation of an effective data collection strategy

1. Validation of vacancy rate and assessment of current government supports towards repurposing of vacant stock to help address housing and commercial stock challenge in Sligo.

2. Devise and deliver a series of effective data collecting approaches to measure the impact of festivals and events held in Queen Maeve Square. In Year 1, 42 events were held and saw over 49,000 attendees. On average most stayed 2-4 hours and spent on average €50-100.



Queen Maeve Square

Lessons learnt

A public-private partnership model is key to success.

- Validate any data being used to inform city planning. Double check data discrepancies.

- Data collection can be cost effective but know your audience! Surveys should be simple, short and incentivised for maximum return!

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SLIGO BID

Sligo.