



Highlights from Tori Vald

From Strategy to Action

From February 19th to 21st, Tori Vald (Estonia) hosted the seventh meeting of the ECONNECTING network.

In February, the ECONNECTING network gathered for a pivotal transnational meeting in Tori. The event marked a critical moment in the transition from planning to implementation for ECONNECTING partners. Participants arriving from across Europe were greeted by Tori's municipal Mayor, **Lauri Luur**, who gave a friendly welcome before the group dove into a meaningful exchange.



The first session focused on empowering actors and resourcing strategies for implementation. Highlights included a presentation by Lea Vutt on "[Space4People](#)", the URBACT Action

Planning Network that helped the Estonian city of Valga to develop more attractive public spaces through sustainable mobility solutions. Through this presentation, participants were able to learn some valuable lessons on how to move from strategic planning to concrete implementation. The lead expert, Roland Krebs, helped to focus the process by providing clear guidance on how to measure success, assess risks and prioritise actions within Integrated Action Plans (IAPs).

This was followed by the **iPESTLE** session, a useful tool to test partners' ability to understand the local delivery context of their IAPs. Once an action plan has been drafted, the iPESTLE tool is used to identify the challenges you may face in local implementation. In fact, iPESTLE is an acronym that stands for seven 'headings' to consider when assessing your local context. These are Informational, Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal and Environmental.

Want to know more? Read the full explanation of the tool on the [URBACT website](#).

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The ECONNECTING Manifesto

One of the most anticipated moments of the whole meeting has been the co-creation of the ECONNECTING Manifesto. Grounded in the principles of the **New Leipzig Charter** (*just city, green city, productive city*), partners shared key mobility and urban regeneration projects and collectively tackled core questions around carbon neutrality, inclusive governance, green transition, and reversing population decline.

Group work generated a first draft of the Manifesto – a shared vision for thriving, resilient, and connected territories – to be refined ahead of the project’s final conference. The day concluded with a forward-looking discussion on communication and next steps, followed by the farewell dinner.



Off-activities

Various side activities enlivened the transnational meeting in Tori. The group ventured outdoors for a **snowshoeing trek** through the pristine Riisa Bog in Soomaa National Park, touching with their hands the Estonian wildlife, many cultural heritage gems and natural beauty. Riisa Bog is a nature reserve where biodiversity is preserved and enhanced.

To stimulate creativity and empathy, a **role-playing game** took center stage. Participants embodied various community members – from a single mother to the head of the LGBTQ+ association – to explore the benefits and barriers of Tori’s local action plan and to generate inclusive proposals rooted in diverse lived experiences.

An enjoyable **study visit** took place at the local cider farm in the village of Jõesuu, followed by a walking tour and a co-creative session exploring Tori’s tourism potential. This hands-on experience highlighted how rural villages can act as hubs for innovation and sustainability in regional development.



The Power of Mapping

CO-CREATION FOR INTEGRATED URBAN DEVELOPMENT

In ECONNECTING we use mapping as a core tool to identify challenges, potentials, and concrete actions across complex urban-rural territories. At such a large planning scale, local interventions are often hard to pinpoint. That's where mapping comes in—**helping us to navigate complexity**, simulate future scenarios, and visualize shared strategies. It supports a continuous, inclusive dialogue and reveals pathways toward a Zero Carbon City Region. Mapping facilitates a shared understanding between stakeholders, including policymakers, local groups, planners, and citizens. It allows for spatial analysis of emotional responses, infrastructure needs, and investment priorities. Whether you're identifying gaps in walkability, planning green infrastructure, or pinpointing areas for renewal, maps communicate clearly **where change is needed and why**.

Let's bring it on the map 
For a zero-carbon city region!

The beauty of mapping? It's for everyone. We've worked with children, seniors, and public servants—training them to simply “draw the first line.” Emotional mapping, for example, invites participants to mark places they love, dislike, or want to change. This exercise sparks deep reflection and powerful collective insights. Combined with scenario techniques, mapping helps reduce fear of failure: every idea has value, even if it's just part of the discussion. Mapping serves two main functions: it **visualizes qualitative input** from workshops and co-creation processes, and it translates data from quantitative analysis into **accessible visual stories**. In both cases, it strengthens planning by connecting data with human experience. By bringing people together around a common vision, mapping enables collective decision-making in URBACT Local Groups and beyond. It's more than a tool—**it's a process**. And when you put it on the map, you make transformation visible and actionable.

News from West Mani

Integrated Action Plan & Small-Scale Actions

The Municipality of West Mani (Greece) presented the Integrated Action Plan to the local community in January, the result of a broad and fruitful debate developed within the URBACT Local Group and the citizens. The mayor, George Chioureas, praised the work done within the ECONNECTING network to foster attractive environments, both in terms of technical infrastructure, digital applications and incentives to attract new permanent residents to the villages. Nevertheless, Western Mani wants to position itself not only as a tourist destination, but also as a place to live, thanks to the quality of life it can offer.

Following the presentation, four new projects were added to the IAP. The Integrated Action Plan (IAP) was updated and enriched with suggestions from citizens during the public presentation. The final draft will therefore include the following two small-scale actions:

Open art exhibitions

Students from Kampos and Stoupa primary schools will transform West Mani into an open-air gallery, displaying artworks that reflect their views on public spaces and sustainability. These events, organised in collaboration with school teachers and directors, go beyond simple exhibitions, inviting residents and visitors to give feedback on public space improvements and to participate in upcoming volunteer activities. These activities will take place throughout May 2025.

Pilot Municipal Transport

Meanwhile, West Mani will also be exploring a second small-scale action: a pilot urban transport service planned for June. This service will run for a short period of time in order to gain valuable inputs that can be incorporated into the IAP.





New episode on air!



#6 Viseu Dao Lafoes

Demand Response Transportation System "Ir i Vir"

A new episode of the ECONNECTING podcast is now available on Spotify. Our lead expert Roland Krebs interviews **Ricardo Riquito**, Head of innovation and digital transformation at Viseu Dao Lafões in Portugal, about the groundbreaking **"Ir i Vir"** demand-response transport system. The Viseu Dao Lafões region is located in central Portugal and is surrounded by mountains and hills: this geographical conformation is perfect for wine production, outdoor activities and nature tourism; however, many rural villages remain isolated.

For some of these villages, "Ir y Vir" is the only public transport system and, since its inception, has transformed mobility in the entire region. This innovative system guarantees access to essential services and to educational/employment opportunities, as well as fostering social cohesion; there is no doubt that this transport system will shape future regional development and transport planning. Open Spotify now for a fascinating conversation about the future of mobility and innovation in the Viseu region!

The ECONNECTING series of interviews and inspiring stories is now available on the world's most popular podcast hosting platform, Spotify! **Scan** the QRcode to get directly to the channel. Then click the **+ button** to follow and remember to turn on notifications so you don't miss any episode!



Tools of the month

PLACEGAME

The PlaceGame is a playful, easy-to-understand approach that aims to turn the local community into protagonists in the analysis and creation of spaces in their area.

The goal is to bring people and their views together in the planning area, let them assimilate its characteristics and propose their own elements and aspects. In addition, the locals are mixed with initiators, representatives of local government, and developers.

The planning area should be subdivided into smaller areas, where one main space is also designated. The group is divided into subgroups, which are sent out to the area's subdivisions to evaluate them individually. Participants are then asked to **rate their area** according to the criteria in the questionnaire. Next, participants are asked to **identify opportunities** for the area on the basis of their ratings, answering the following questions and writing the answers down on sticky notes:

What do you like or not like about this place?


What quick improvements and long-term changes would you make?

What local partnerships or local talents can you identify?

Download the
Place Game template



The individual results are discussed within the small groups and, afterward, each small group can present their notes to the whole group.

Try it at home! 

The placegame was designed by Project of Public Space and it waits for project :)

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Tools of the month

OPEN CALL

The Open Calls tool is used to identify and stimulate potential future users of specific places within the planning area.

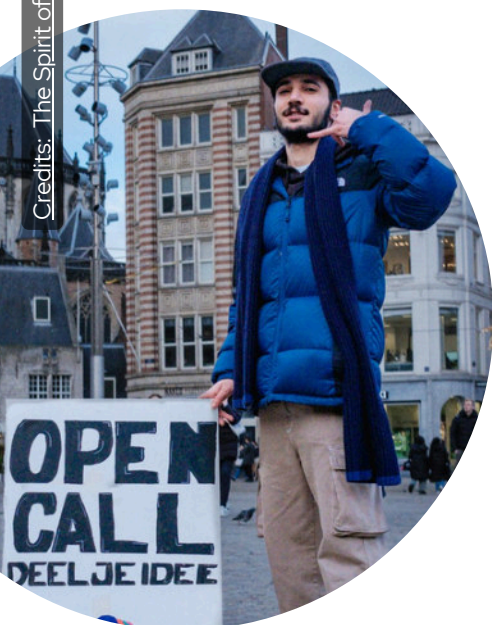
Unlike conventional calls, Open Calls also **appeal to nonprofessionals**. They can be used to find temporary or permanent users of a vacant plinth or building in the planning area; they also can help identify local stakeholders and encourage them to follow and be in charge of a program within the planning area.

Open Calls need **intensive preparation**, including sound knowledge of the claimed space and a prior understanding of the local networks, both online and offline. The tool may be based on the results of other tools applied during the assessment phase, using the provided network. The organizers should also search for platforms to promote the call, define criteria for the submissions, and prepare a budget to support submissions and prizes.

If the goal is to find temporary or permanent users, the you could define **specific criteria** for the calls, such as non-commercial uses that add value to the neighborhood. In some cases, financial support (e.g., in the form of reduced rent) may be necessary.

The call is then promoted on several online platforms during a **limited time frame**; it should always provide clear information regarding submission criteria.

Afterward, all the submissions should be collected and analyzed. The organizers decide which one(s) will be put into practice, **publish the result** of the call, and discuss further details concerning the execution with those who made the winning submission(s).



Credits: The Spirit of Amsterdam (2025).



Credits: UKH | Ungdomskulturhuset Aarhus (2024)



Looking ahead

NEXT STEPS

The last transnational meeting was more than just a checkpoint. The network draws its lifeblood from these meetings to look towards distant horizons without ever taking its feet off the ground. This international community is now gearing up to turn thoughts into reality, giving concrete form to the inspiring values of co-creation, proximity-based planning and climate-smart transformation. As we all prepare for the next transnational meeting in Berane, Montenegro, Tori has certainly left a warm impression of commitment, care and connection across urban and rural divides.

