

May / July 2025

QUARTERLY NETWORK REPORT #5

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SUMMARY

Our latest report offers key insights from the recent meeting in Berane, alongside a rich thematic input by our lead expert Roland Krebs on the place-led development approach — a method that empowers communities to shape local decisions. The report also includes updates from our partners in Viseu Dão Lafões and West Mani, showcasing many interesting small-scale actions and vibrant local activities that promote inclusive participation.

Additionally, we explore two simple yet powerful tools for civic engagement: Cine Urbano and Postcards to the Mayor. Enjoy the read!



Highlights from Berane

The 8th transnational meeting of the ECONNECTING network was held in Berane (Montenegro) from 23rd to 25th June.

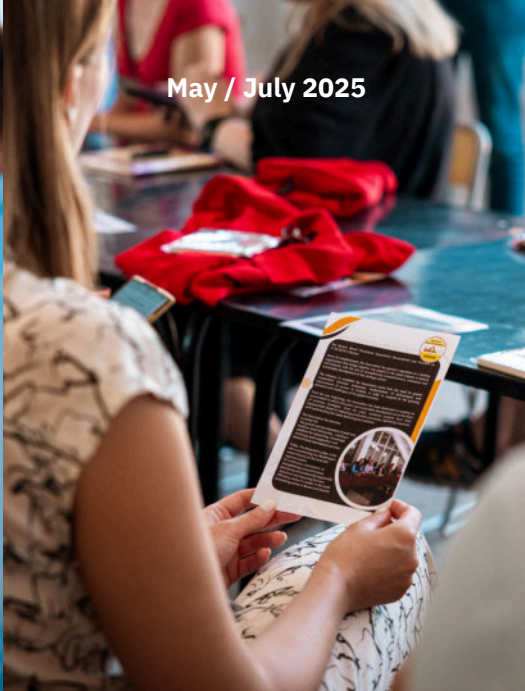
Aptly named “The Last Mile”, the 8th transnational meeting marked the penultimate gathering of project partners as they move toward the final phase of implementation.



The meeting opened with greetings from Mrs. **Mira Paunović**, Vice President of the Municipality of Berane. Institutional greetings came also from Mrs. **Borka Lješковиć** of the Ministry of European Affairs, who joined virtually to highlight Montenegro’s active role in the URBACT IV programme. Mrs. **Nadia Carboni**, Lead Partner Coordinator of the ECONNECTING network, also shared a project status update and extended best wishes for the final steps ahead.



A highlight of the opening session was the presence of Mrs. **Kana Tomašević**, Head of the Directorate for First Level Control at the Ministry of Finance. She spoke on the importance of continuity between past and future financial frameworks (IPA 2007–2013, 2014–2020, and beyond), stressing that cooperation on projects like ECONNECTING strengthens Montenegro’s EU alignment and administrative capacity. She praised Berane’s commitment and expressed hope for future collaboration.



Highlights from Berane

Showcasing Local Innovation

Participants were introduced to inspiring examples of local and regional development. Mr. Goran Prebiračević of neighboring Bijelo Polje presented the “**Breaking Isolation**” Action Planning Network, tackling social exclusion through innovative community services.

Berane also showcased its ambitious **SDIP project**, part of the World Bank's Sava-Drina Corridor programme. Mrs. Maja Đurišić, Secretary for Economic Development and Investments, outlined plans to transform parts of the city through multi-functional river fortifications and regional cooperation with Gusinje, Plav, and Bijelo Polje.



Field Visits and Cultural Insight

Key project sites, including **Jasikovac's Freedom Monument**, were toured by the participants to this meeting. They gained insights on EU-funded cultural initiatives led by the **Polimlje Museum**, presented by archaeologist Mr. Vlado Lutovac.

On the second day, the spotlight turned to sustainable mobility. A field visit to **Lubnice village** offered a firsthand look at the challenges and opportunities in **connecting urban and rural zones**. Discussions focused on implementing pilot actions and exchanging practical solutions.

Mr. Miljan Ralević, from Berane's Secretariat for Economic Development, guided participants through ongoing infrastructure works, emphasizing the transformative potential of planned projects such as the bypass extension and the new city market.

The testing action during the Tori Vald Integrated Action Planning process.



The Place-Led Development Approach

Enabling the "Bottom-Up" in the "Top-Down"

The New Leipzig Charter – The Transformative Power of Cities for the Common Good, presented by the European Union in 2020, proposes a **place-led approach** for the development of places through an integrated framework. In this new approach, urban planning and the creation of public spaces are no longer seen as top-down processes based solely on predefined goals set in city halls.

In recent years, participatory and dialogue-led approaches have become essential for the co-creation of places and areas together with communities.



The place-led approach advocates a more iterative and co-created method that allows for many influences, while keeping an eye on the long-term goal. Immediate actions make the long-term vision tangible and help **build trust** within co-creation networks—enabling testing, learning, and, based on this, the co-creation of bolder actions.

This stands in contrast to working only with rigid, long-term planning schemes. **Urban experiments become drivers** of these shared transitions, bringing placemaking into focus.



The testing action during the Tori Vald Integrated Action Planning process.

The Place-Led Development Approach

Enabling the "Bottom-Up" in the "Top-Down"

Placemaking is both a strategy and a process of co-creation that focuses on enhancing social and economic well-being, as well as the overall quality of life. It recognizes that human needs for **prosperity, sociability, and security** are essential to counter feelings of alienation.

As a multifaceted approach to urban development, placemaking emphasizes the creation of **meaningful places** through active community involvement. It draws on local knowledge, culture, and the unique characteristics of a place to design environments that reflect the needs and desires of the people who live, work, and interact there. The core idea behind placemaking is to **empower local communities** to be active participants in shaping the public spaces they inhabit, fostering a sense of ownership and belonging.

During the ECONNECTING planning cycle, the partners extensively made use of placemaking and the place-led approach. They carried out test actions at low cost and implemented **spatial experiments** while shaping the Integrated Action Plans. It is a fun and engaging way to reach out to the community and motivate everyone to co-create smart and meaningful actions!



Do you want to know more about the place-led approach?
Follow placemaking-europe.eu

News from Viseu Dao Lafoes

ULG Meetings and Youth Engagement Drive Mobility Change

CIM Viseu Dão Lafões has embraced a **participatory and flexible process** to develop its IAP under the ECONNECTING project. Combining online and on-site ULG meetings allowed consistent engagement across the region's **14 municipalities**. Four meetings have been held so far. The first, held online in February 2024, introduced the URBACT method and project phases. The second (Mar 2024, on-site) gathered 15 stakeholders to define challenges and priorities. In the third meeting (Sept 2024), municipalities worked on Mobility Hub proposals adapted to their specific contexts. These were later refined through one-to-one coordination sessions.

The fourth meeting, held in February 2025, focused on presenting these proposals and evaluating IAP actions.



Between 10 and 14 February 2025, CIM Viseu Dão Lafões also promoted the activity **“Postcard to the Mayor”** across 12 schools. Over 250 students explored the environmental and social benefits of cycling and shared their ideas to improve soft mobility. The activity included an interactive presentation of the BORA! bike-sharing system and road safety rules, as well as a group exercise designed to encourage young people to play a part in shaping the future of local mobility.





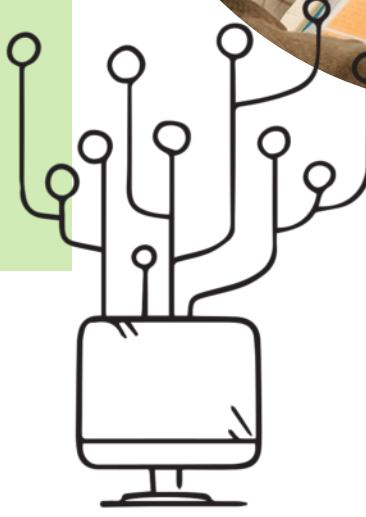
News from Viseu Dao Lafoes

Upcoming activities

Looking ahead, the '**Can I walk or cycle?**' activity is planned. This initiative involves marking distances to nearby destinations in chalk at strategic locations such as bike-sharing stations and safe pedestrian routes. This will promote walking and cycling by enhancing route visibility and user experience.

As part of the ECONNECTING activities, the project will support the study and development of **data-driven dashboards** using mobile positioning data. These dashboards aim to provide insights into **key mobility patterns**, including the origins and destinations of people at parish level, broken down by hour and visitor type (e.g. resident, regular visitor, tourist, occasional visitor). The analyses will also assess **visitor type-specific length of stay** and identify movement patterns, such as the most common flows between parishes, hourly entries and exits, and the parishes with the most inbound and outbound movements.

A final ULG meeting is planned for September 2025.





News from West Mani

How to achieve children’s civic engagement

In a powerful demonstration of how civic engagement can begin at early age and lead to meaningful change, the Municipality of West Mani (Greece) has shown that even the **youngest citizens can influence the future** of their community.

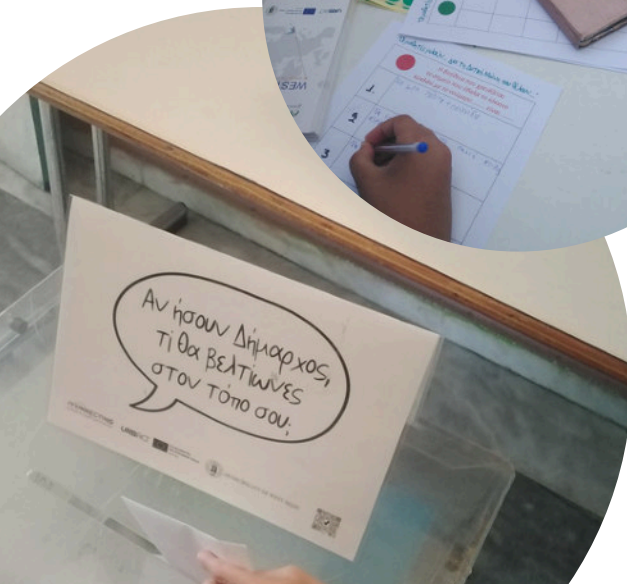
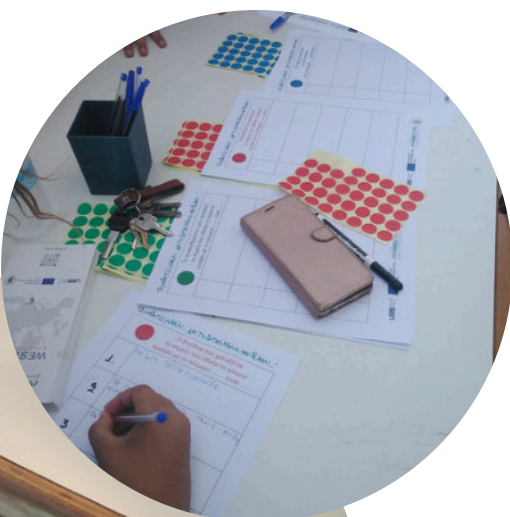
In fact, the municipality recently completed its second **Small Scale Action**, an initiative designed to raise awareness, spark dialogue, and generate proposals for improving everyday life in West Mani from a child’s perspective.

The action involved **students aged 6 to 12** from the elementary schools of Kampos and Stoupa. Using the URBACT tool “Newspaper of Tomorrow,” students were invited to envision a better future for their municipality. Through drawings and written expressions, they explored challenges and opportunities related to mobility, public space, and community well-being, offering a fresh, hopeful, and even remarkably insightful points of view. Children’s work was showcased at a public event, held on 5th and 6th June 2025.

What lessons can we learn

This hands-on civic action had significant outcomes, as the Mayor of West Mani participated, engaged with students, and committed to implementing their proposed improvements in schools. This exemplifies how inclusive local actions can enhance responsive governance.

If you are planning a similar initiative, **read the full article** on URBACT’s website: <https://urbact.eu/articles/how-achieve-lasting-impact-through-childrens-civic-engagement>



Tools of the month

source: Roland Krebs, superwien

CINE URBANO

The Cine Urbano is a good method to present **collective knowledge** and input on a **specific topic** to a group of people. It also invites people to partake in a community activity, which already creates a level of comfort and makes it easier for participants to join the discussion afterward. This method enables a variety of new people to join the process or project and raises awareness of the chosen topic or urbanism in general.

QUESTIONS

- What can we learn from **different perspectives**?
- Are there any **other approaches** the project might learn from?
- When comparing perspectives, are there any **similarities**?
- What has the project **fulfilled** or even surpassed?
- Are there any possible **deficiencies**?

The setup can vary depending on access to resources and space. In order to reach a large number of people, it is best to be located in an **accessible public space**. The Cine Urbano can also use an indoor designated space accessible to the public. When it is organized indoors, the event might attract fewer people.

The tool is about **organizing a public movie night** with an **open discussion** on the viewed topic afterward. Ideally, the movie night should be prepared in collaboration with a film collective or media school to find a suitable movie on the desired topic. This may also help with resources for screening and renting/purchasing the relevant film(s).

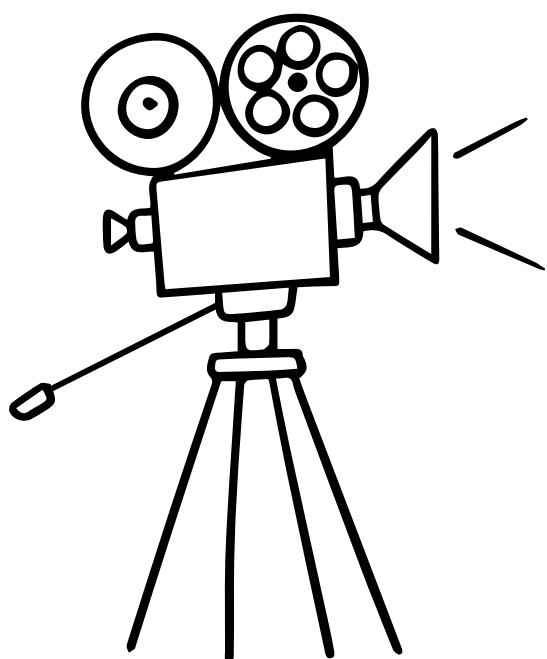


source: Roland Krebs, superwien

The movie should preferably be related to the local surroundings, deal with a **relevant topic** connected to either the physical or thematic situation on-site, or have been shot in the area. It is also possible to show the project movie, if there is one.

After the screening, the moderator should ask the group **some questions** to start a discussion and propose a contextualization of the project itself.

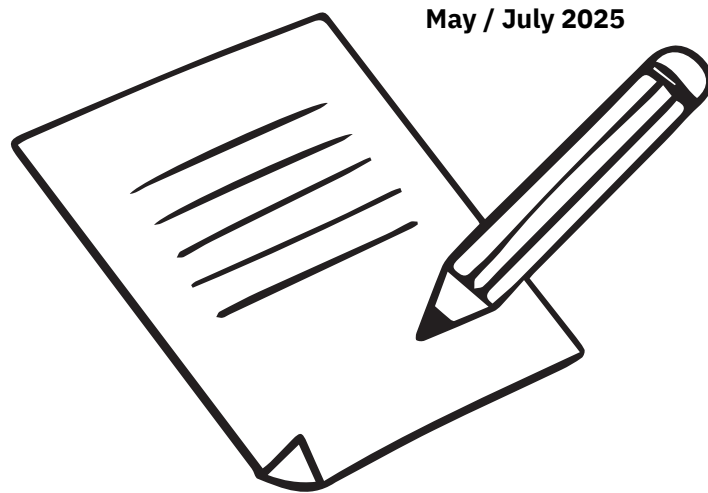
Hosting a movie night can be a fun activity for the community, but also a way to **connect people** in the neighborhood **with experts and artists**. If a movie shot in the area exists, it can also reveal one's own area from an artistic or thematic point of view, which might foster renewed consideration for one's surroundings. Other movies might show different approaches and **boost the motivation** of local people to become active.



Tools of the month

POSTCARDS TO THE MAYOR

This tool is useful for **identifying** and collecting **wishes, suggestions, and ideas** (probably criticism, too) coming from the local community during the visions and goals phase. It can also be used to obtain **feedback** and **validation** by the community in more advanced phases of the project.



Postcards are a quick and easy way to gather ideas from and interact with the public; they also provide an opportunity to expand the peer group. Finally, they work well as an **icebreaker**.

For the vision and goals phase:

What are the wishes, suggestions, and ideas of the locals concerning the intervention area?
What do they expect?

For the validation and feedback phase:

How do the locals perceive the project results?
What opinions do they hold about the various aspects of the project?



Postcard to the Mayor at the Anatol Rodgers High School in Nassau, The Bahamas in a project to improve active mobility for pupils. Credits: Roland Krebs, superwien

The organizers should prepare the postcards, which should be addressed to the municipality and feature a guiding question. The front of the postcard may contain a **project image**. A table covered with the postcards and pens should be set up next to a visible clothesline with pegs, where the filled-out cards can be hung up. Another setup would be to collect the postcards in a “**postbox**,” which enhances privacy but reduces inspiration and visibility. The workshop can either take place as an activity in a public space where **passers-by can participate** or be integrated into a preset format, where only a predefined group is involved. In both cases, people should be invited to participate in advance. At the beginning of the workshop, the moderators should give a **brief introduction** explaining the goals and the activity to the participants.

Looking ahead

URBACT



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SAVE the DATE!

*You are warmly invited to participate in the final conference of the ECONNECTING network on **17th September 2025**, in **Faenza**, Italy. Join us for an immersive, full-day experience focusing on urban-rural mobility, set within the beautiful **International Museum of Ceramics**. Engage with both local and international experts, and learn about the outcomes of the ECONNECTING journey so far!*

Contact us at:
progettieuropi@romagnafaentina.it.

NEXT STEPS

With the penultimate meeting concluded, partners now focus on finalizing and sharing their Integrated Action Plans—the cornerstone outcomes of any Action Planning Network.

As the project approaches its final steps, Berane extends heartfelt thanks to all participants and hopes the spirit of collaboration—and the memories of their time in Montenegro—will inspire the road ahead beyond “The Last Mile”.

From 15th to 18th September, all the partners will be hosted by the Union of Romagna Faentina, the Italian lead partner of the network, as they reach the end of this incredible European journey together!

