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The Econnecting Network



Lead Partner

Unione della Romagna Faentina, Italy

Partners

Municipality of Berane, Montenegro

Municipality of West Mani, Greece

Comunidad Intermunicipal Viseu Dão Lafões, Portugal

Ennis Municipal District, Clare County Council, Ireland

Tori Vallavalitsus, Estonia

Razvojno Raziskovalni Center Ormož, Slovenia

Municipality of Nagykallo, Hungary

Municipality of Orihuela, Spain

Lead Expert

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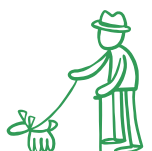
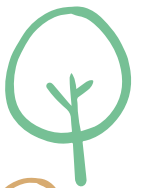
ECONNECTING means...

establishing **strategies and actions for rural-urban functional areas**, fostering the seamless integration of urban sustainable practices, well-being enhancement, and the cultivation of robust social connections through active citizen participation. This Action Planning Network brings together nine city partners from Italy, Montenegro, Greece, Portugal, Ireland, Estonia, Slovenia, Hungary and Spain to collaborate on shaping their „proximity territories,” characterized by intricate urban-rural linkages.

At the core of ECONNECTING lies a **comprehensive exploration of smart mobility solutions for public transport and mobility, coupled with the revitalization of villages, towns and their hub cities** to enhance the overall quality of life for citizens. The initiative embarks on a deep dive into the intricate fabric of these regions, seeking to address key aspects such as mobility, accessibility, and urban regeneration.

By employing a dialogue-oriented planning process and leveraging the proven URBACT methodology, ECONNECTING aims to **harmonize the dynamics between urban and rural areas**. The focus is specifically on optimizing mobility and accessibility, while simultaneously fostering vibrant public spaces that cater to the needs and desires of the local populace. All these efforts are grounded in a **commitment to environmental consciousness and community engagement**, ensuring a sustainable and people-centric approach to development.

Through collaborative efforts, ECONNECTING strives to create a model that not only enhances the connectivity between urban and rural spaces but also promotes a holistic and inclusive vision for the well-being of citizens. The initiative serves as a beacon for innovative strategies that prioritize the intersection of environmental sustainability, community vibrancy, and urban-rural harmony. In doing so, ECONNECTING emerges as a **catalyst for positive change, demonstrating the transformative power of collaborative urban planning on a European scale**.



MONUMENT TO FREEDOM IN BERANE BY
BOGDAN BOGDANOVIC





1

State of the Art

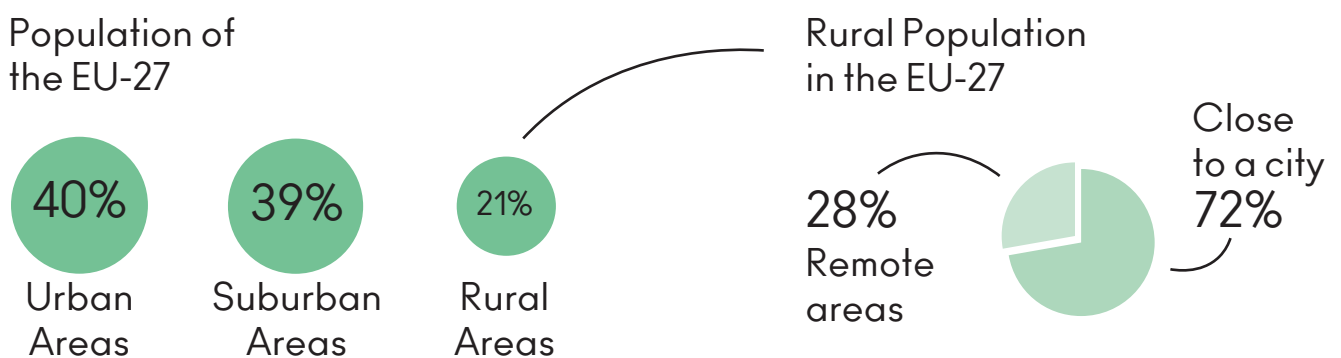
1.1 Introduction

About one third of Europe’s population is living the rural areas and half of the rural territory is close to regional hub cities. This is the context where the URBACT Action Planning Network ECONNECTING gets active: we seek to establish **strategies and actions for those rural-urban functional areas**, fostering the integration of urban sustainable development, well-being, and robust social connections with active citizen participation. The initiative will engage nine European cities from distinct countries in collaborative efforts to shape their „proximity territories.“ Through a cooperative planning process, ECONNECTING **aims to harmonize those urban and rural dynamics** while prioritizing on mobility and accessibility of those areas, create vibrant public spaces for the people, all based on environmental consciousness and community engagement.



Rural areas as a neglected issue of regional development

The development of rural areas in the European Union poses a complex challenge, as highlighted by the Rural Vision set by the European Commission. While these territories are characterized by their **natural beauty and strong communities**, they grapple with various obstacles. With over 341 million hectares, constituting **83% of the total EU area**, rural areas encompass agricultural land, forests, and natural spaces. Despite their significant contribution, they face demographic challenges, marked by an aging population, with the lowest shares below 50 years. Moreover, rural areas confront a **heightened risk of poverty and social exclusion**, surpassing urban counterparts. Although the employment rate has risen, the increase is attributed to a decrease in the rural active population, underscoring the need for sustainable job creation. Gender disparities persist, with a notable employment gap between men and women, and having the **women trapped with the caring activities with no access to jobs** because of lacking caring facilities. Additionally, there is a growing disparity in education, as the share of tertiary-educated individuals in rural areas lags behind cities, exacerbating the urban-rural educational divide. Furthermore, rural residents trail in basic digital skills, emphasizing the necessity for comprehensive development strategies to bridge these gaps and ensure the holistic progress of rural regions in the EU.



Source: LUISA Base Map (2018), European Commission JRC, EUROSTAT (2023)

Hub cities and their role in regional development

The concept of Hub cities and their important role in regional development holds **significant value for sustainable mobility and urban-rural linkages**. The network concentrates on mid- to small-sized cities serving as **vital hubs that connect rural and urban areas**, presenting a unique and complex landscape in terms of mobility and transport management. This specificity provides an excellent opportunity for collaboration among these cities to devise common, efficient, and innovative solutions tailored to this distinctive challenge. Notably, with 83% of Europe's territory being rural, these **urban centers play a crucial role that cannot be overlooked**.

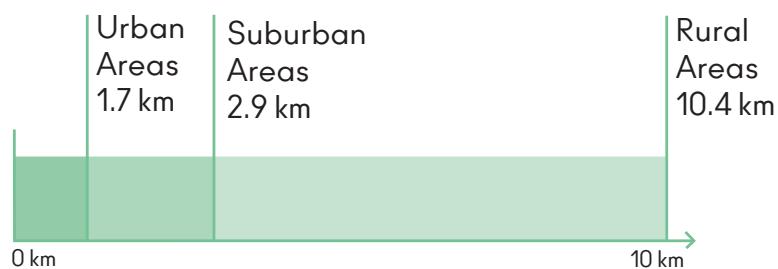
The overarching project's objective is to enhance the quality of life for European citizens by advocating for new sustainable mobility models and fostering improved connectivity between urban and rural regions. Through the **promotion of a more sustainable and balanced approach to mobility planning and management**, the project aspires to enhance the economic competitiveness of the participating regions while simultaneously addressing the environmental and social challenges associated with transportation. In summary, the emphasis on hub cities within the network showcases a strategic effort to create collaborative solutions that not only benefit local communities but also contribute to broader regional development objectives.

Our common vision: the accessibility shift

The creation of sustainable communities needs a fundamental change in the way we approach accessibility, by linking transportation and land-use planning. Rather than prioritizing speed, the focus should pivot towards facilitating people's ability to reach destinations effectively. The emerging paradigm emphasizes three key principles: **connectivity, proximity, and mobility**. In terms of connectivity, alternative forms that sidestep physical displacement must be taking into consideration. Proximity becomes a critical factor, advocating for the transformation of urban spaces to meet an increasing number of needs within a short distance, reducing reliance on automobiles. The mobility aspect addresses the residual transportation needs by promoting the integration of diverse modes of transport like car-sharing, car-pooling, bike-rentals etc., with a particular emphasis on enhancing public transport and fostering active forms of mobility. This strategic shift also entails curbing excessive car use to promote a more sustainable and balanced urban ecosystem.

Embracing this accessibility shift for sustainable communities signifies a departure from conventional approaches, recognizing the interconnectedness of urban planning and transportation choices. The emphasis on connectivity underscores the importance of comprehensive accessibility solutions that go beyond traditional notions of transport. Proximity **encourages the reimagining of cities as self-sufficient entities**, where residents can easily access the important places within proximity, minimizing the need for (individual) car travel. The mobility aspect advocates for a holistic approach that integrates various transportation modes, **prioritizing public transport and active means of mobility**. Restricting and de-incentivizing car usage becomes a key component, aligning with sustainability goals and fostering a transition towards eco-friendly and community-centric urban environments. This shift signifies a commitment to creating accessible, vibrant, and environmentally conscious communities that prioritize the well-being of residents while minimizing the ecological footprint associated with transportation.

Distance to the nearest generic local service facility* in the EU-28

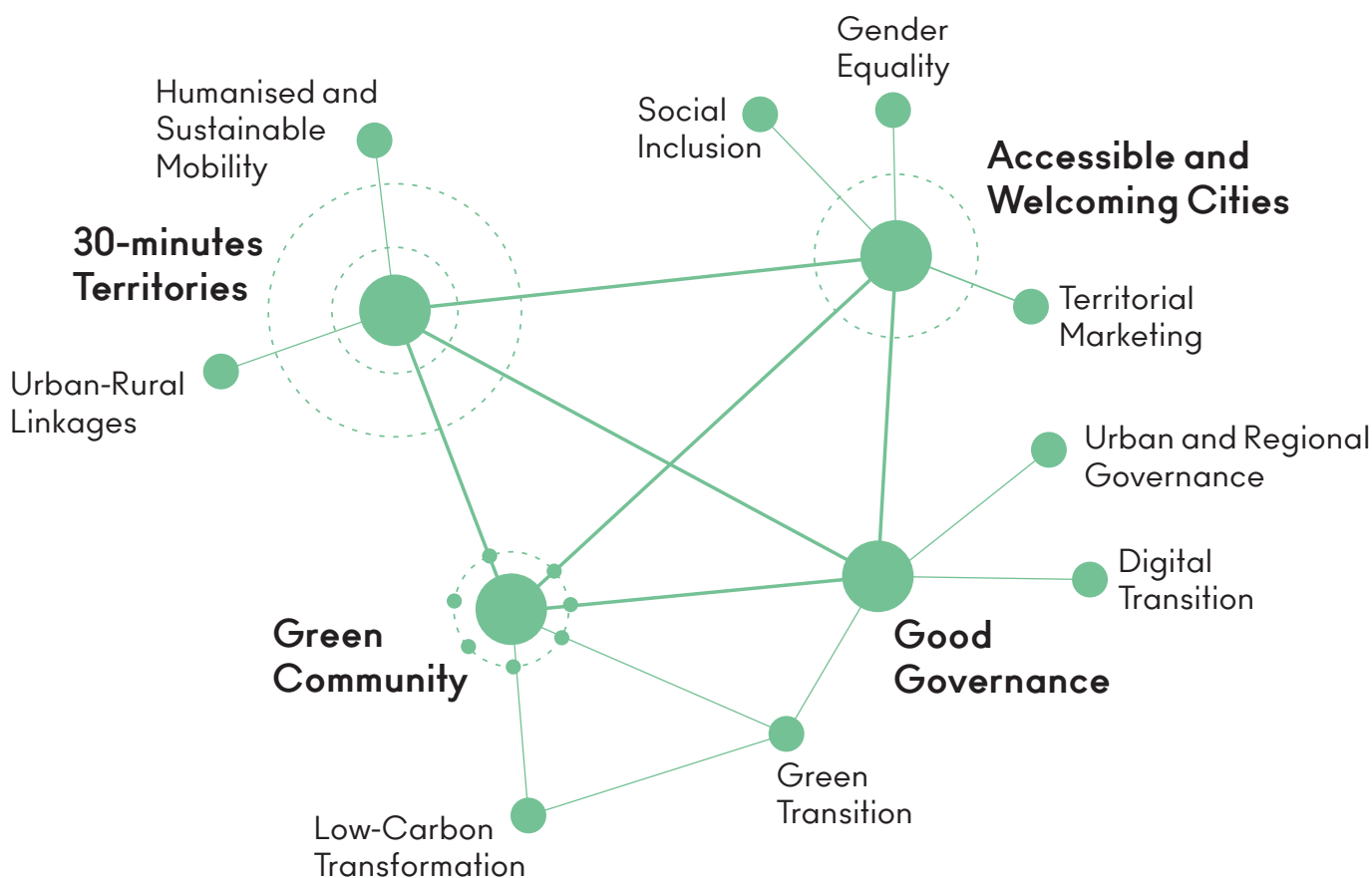


* e.g. education/healthcare, serving 5-10.000 people

Source: Kompil, M. Jacobs-Crisoni, C. Dijkstra, L. Lavalle, C., European Commission Joint Research Centre (2019)

1.2 Our four pillars for integrated urban development

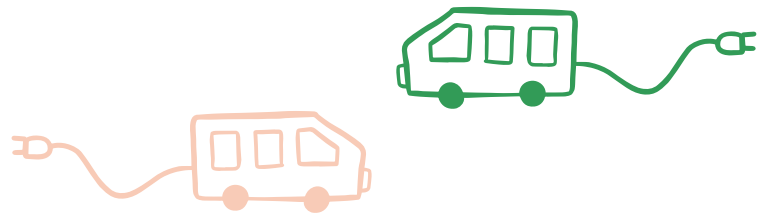
In the project activation phase, we collaboratively identified and discussed four emerging project topics with our partners, which now serve as the **guiding pillars for our initiatives**. These ongoing discussions play a central role in shaping the Integrated Action Plans of our partners, **steering them toward an integrated planning approach**, refining strategies, and fostering adaptability within our Action Planning Network. The completeness of these plans hinges on the consistent and thorough exploration of these key topics, establishing a robust framework vital for ensuring the sustained success and coherence of our project initiatives.



Our next step involves a comprehensive understanding of these identified topics, which will serve as the foundation for reshaping our actions accordingly. This proactive approach ensures that our actions are aligned with the insights gained from understanding these crucial aspects. This integrative methodology proves instrumental in navigating challenges and effectively seizing opportunities, as it fosters a strategic and flexible mindset within our collaborative network. By embedding this integrative approach into our actions, we not only enhance our adaptability but also **optimize our ability to capitalize on emerging opportunities**, thus contributing to the overall success and impact of the actions within the Integrated Action Plans.

30-Minutes Territories

ECONNECTING envisions the establishment of „30-minute territories“, where essential services, workplaces, and recreational spaces are conveniently reachable within a 30-minute radius, promoting accessibility and minimizing environmental impact. **Prioritizing a humanized and sustainable approach to mobility**, the network seeks to elevate the quality of life through the development of pedestrian-friendly zones, efficient public transportation, and eco-friendly commuting options. By fostering both proximity and sustainable mobility, ECONNECTING aims to **alleviate congestion, cut down carbon emissions, and enhance overall urban and rural connectivity**. The incorporation of Public-Private Partnership (PPP) models plays a pivotal role in involving private businesses in subsidized public transport, including mobility-on-demand services. Ensuring accessibility to rural areas also **serves as a social cohesion solution**, providing crucial services to both older residents and younger generations. Implementing carpooling and sharing models stands out as essential measures to significantly reduce the carbon footprint of our cities and villages, further contributing to ECONNECTING’s vision of creating environmentally conscious and interconnected communities.



Green Community

ECONNECTING’s mission centers on establishing green communities that prioritize **environmental sustainability through initiatives such as community gardens and tree-lined streets**. By activating public spaces, the organization aims to **enhance the sense of place and improve the environment simultaneously**. The creation of **hubs serving as community and mobility centers**, with electric bus fleets, ensures sustainable access to remote areas and contributes to vibrant public spaces.

ECONNECTING is in the search of integration of green economy principles into the fabric of villages and towns, fostering a holistic approach to community development.

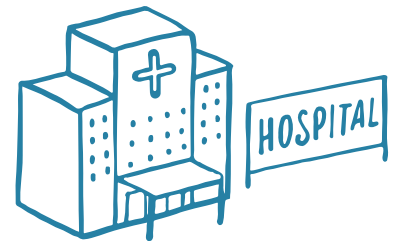
ECONNECTING advocates for integrating green spaces, biodiversity conservation, and eco-friendly practices in urban and rural landscapes. Emphasizing sustainable agriculture, green infrastructure, and community gardens, the initiative seeks to build resilient, harmonious communities that promote resident well-being while safeguarding the natural environment, starting with greening public sector buildings.



Accessible and Welcoming Cities

ECONNECTING prioritizes the development of inclusive and accessible cities, aiming to **create environments that welcome everyone and provide equal opportunities**. This involves **building infrastructure that caters to diverse abilities, promoting universal design principles, and enhancing accessibility in public spaces**. The initiative seeks to foster a sense of belonging by removing both physical and social barriers, thereby striving to establish cities where all individuals can actively engage in civic life. Beyond physical considerations, ECONNECTING also advocates for the development of flexible and adaptive urban uses.

We will explore how villages and towns can apply an approach that goes beyond urban and mobility planning, introducing a more **holistic perspective to improve the tangible spatial dimensions (hardware), add flexibility of uses and users (software), and complement with organizational actions (orgware)**. This approach involves organizing events, creating flexible public spaces based on weather conditions and people's needs, and preventing the decline of city and village centers. ECONNECTING promotes the creation of **spaces specifically designed for children and the elderly, urban design solutions for city centers, the establishment of bike infrastructure, and the implementation of a 20 km/h speed limit**. Additionally, ECONNECTING emphasizes the importance of fostering social spaces for everyone in city centers and leveraging culture as a key identity asset for villages and cities.



Good Governance

Recognizing the crucial role of governance in sustainable development, ECONNECTING advocates for the implementation of good governance practices across participating villages, towns, and city unions. This involves **promoting transparent decision-making processes, fostering citizen engagement in urban development, and integrating sustainable development goals into local policies**. The initiative seeks to enhance accountability, collaboration and responsiveness, ensuring that the development of proximity territories aligns with the needs and aspirations of communities. By addressing governance at all levels, ECONNECTING aims to **contribute to long-term social, economic, and environmental sustainability**.

Furthermore, the consideration of culture as a trigger and enabler for urban development is imperative. If explicitly addressed in urban governance models, a more holistic transformation is more likely. The regional decision-making process for the creation of multi-functional hubs involves all stakeholders, emphasizing the crucial cooperation with neighboring cities for the development of sustainable mobility nodes. Intra-municipal collaboration is key to the success of creating better connections between those towns. This also includes financial partnerships in the application for funding regional projects.



Our ECONNECTING- Manifesto for Urban-Rural Linkages





We will make the villages a good place to live!

Smart IT solutions support sustainable mobility solutions!

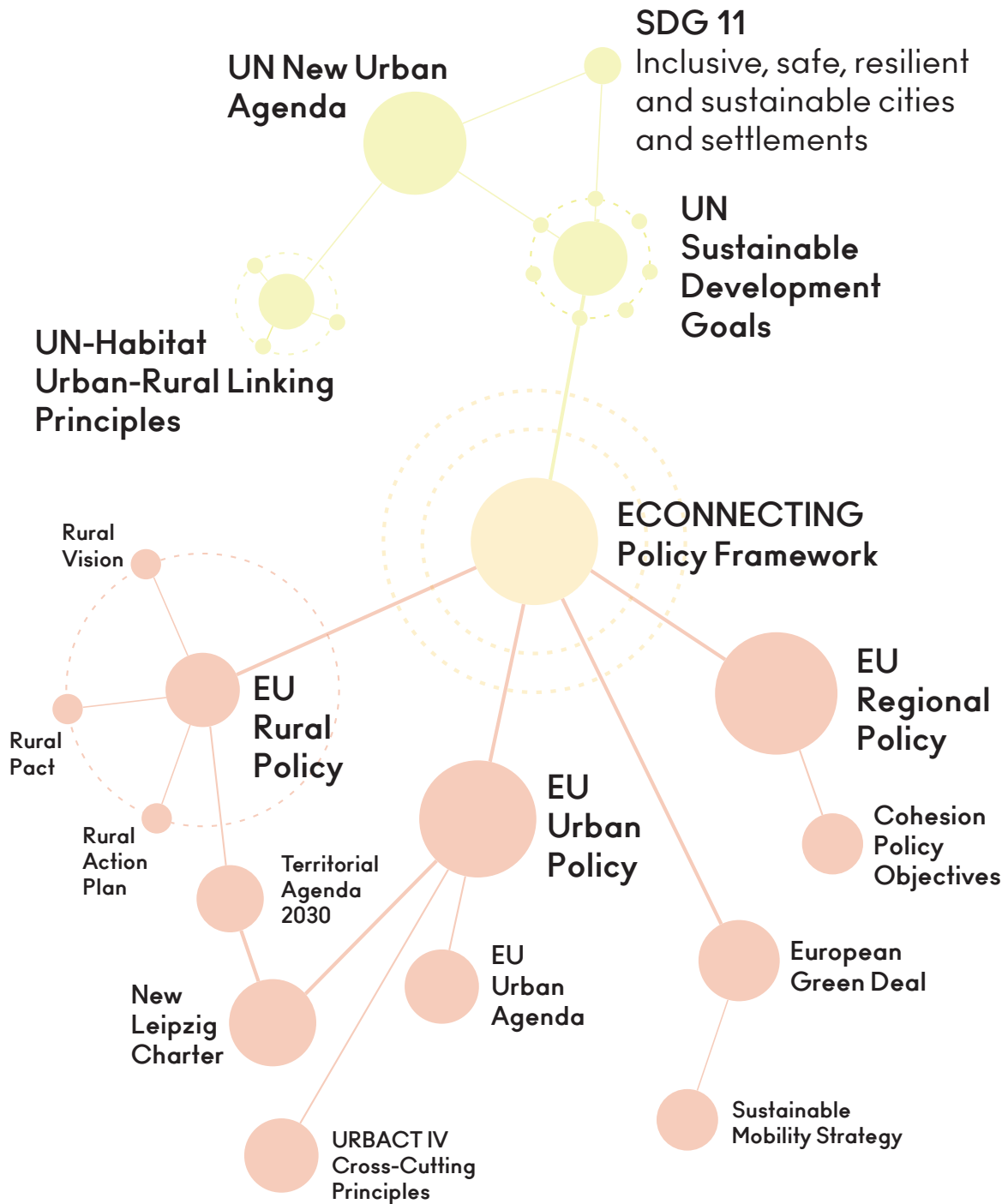
We want to create gender and inclusion balance through sustainable mobility!

We do not overlook villages in the climate crisis!

1.3 Policy Context

The ECONNECTING-Action Planning Network refers to a broad range of European and international policies, since a sustainable development for urban- and rural territories alike is a high priority of international policy. Transnational policy efforts recognize the need for an inclusive and sustainable, community-driven development that takes into account the need of sustainable urban-rural relations.

1.3.1 ECONNECTING Policy Framework



UN-Policy

SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11) lays the foundation for inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities and human settlements. This goal emphasizes the importance of safe, affordable, accessible, and sustainable transport systems, with special attention to the needs of vulnerable populations. Additionally, SDG 11.a underscores the necessity of supporting positive economic, social, and environmental links between urban, peri-urban, and rural areas through robust development planning at national and regional levels. ECONNECTINGs integrated thematic pillars take into account these specific goals summarized in SDG11.

UN New Urban Agenda

The UN New Urban Agenda comprehensively addresses social, economic, environmental, and spatial sustainability. It advocates for intervention mechanisms, technology, and innovation while placing central importance on gender equality, empowerment of marginalized groups, territorial equity, and climate change mitigation. Acknowledging the role of multi-level governance and sustainable transportation, the agenda outlines a holistic approach to urban development, that is also underlined in the ECONNECTING process.

UN-Habitat Urban-Rural Linking Principles

The UN-Habitat Urban-Rural Linking Principles provide a localized framework for action, emphasizing integrated governance, participatory engagement, and environmentally sensitive planning. By grounding interventions locally, these principles aim to bridge the urban-rural gap and foster comprehensive, sustainable development across the continuum, just as it is the aim of the ECONNECTING network.

EU-Policy

New Leipzig Charter - The transformative power of cities for the common good

The New Leipzig Charter defines European cities across three dimensions: the just city, the green city, and the productive city. Guided by principles of good urban governance, including policy for the common good, an integrated approach, and participation, the charter envisions empowering cities to transform. It actively promotes transformative power at the neighborhood, municipal, and functional area levels. The integrated and participative approach of ECONNECTING reflects the principles of the New Leipzig Charter.

EU Territorial Agenda 2030

In connection with the New Leipzig Charter, the EU Territorial Agenda 2030 emphasizes strengthened cooperation between spatial levels, particularly urban-rural partnerships. Cooperation and networking within and between cities and towns are highlighted, recognizing the significance of promoting urban-rural linkages for the development of all places. Since urban-rural partnerships are at the core of the network, ECONNECTING specifically addresses the goals of the EU Territorial Agenda.

EU Urban Agenda

The Urban Agenda for the EU emphasizes realizing the full potential of urban areas, establishing an integrated approach, and involving urban authorities in policy design. It acts as a platform for thematic partnerships, such as Urban Mobility, Digital Transition, and Climate Adaptation, defining action plans for a more sustainable and resilient urban future.

European Green Deal

The European Green Deal outlines a transformative vision for the European economy towards net zero emissions by 2050. It prioritizes sustainable and smart mobility as one of three key funding areas, aiming to create more public transport. The Just Transition Mechanism supports regions most affected by the green transition, ensuring a fair and inclusive shift towards net-zero emissions. ECONNECTING's endeavours, especially in the field of sustainable mobility, perfectly align with the vision of the EGD towards a net zero emissions society.

Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy

The Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy aligns with the European Green Deal, aiming to reduce the transport sector's emissions by 90% by 2050. It focuses on making urban and interurban mobility more sustainable, healthy, and connected. The strategy leverages innovation, data, and Artificial Intelligence for smarter mobility, ensuring affordability and accessibility for all, especially in rural and remote regions. As for the European Green Deal, ECONNECTING is fully in line with its objectives, and emphasizes the often overlooked issue of sustainable mobility on urban-rural linkages.

EU Rural Vision, Rural Pact and Action Plan

The EU has set ten goals for a Rural Vision for the long-term development of its rural areas until 2040. Through this vision, it wants to foster attractive spaces, shaped by dynamic, inclusive and diverse communities that are engaged in multi-level and place-based governance. Rural areas should be providers of food security and sources of nature, but also lively, accessible, and equipped places of broad economic opportunities that fully benefit from digital innovation. The ten vision goals should be achieved through the EU Rural Pact and the Rural Action Plan. The Rural Pact aims to amplify rural voices and put rural territories high on the political agenda, to structure and enable networking and collaboration as well as mutual learning, and to encourage and monitor voluntary commitments to act for the vision. The Rural Action Plan is structured in four pillars: Stronger, Connected, Resilient and Prosperous. It contains 30 actions to be implemented by 14 departments of the European Commission. The aims of ECONNECTING fully support a development of urban-rural relations that follows the EU Rural Vision in improving sustainable connectivity, fostering innovation, inclusivity and economic opportunities and protecting environmental resources.

URBACT IV Cross-Cutting Principles

URBACT IV integrates digital, green, and gender considerations into Action Planning Networks. These principles guide baseline studies and activities, ensuring a comprehensive and inclusive approach to urban development. They are reflected in the core thematic pillars of the ECONNECTING-APN as well as in the complimentary topics of the network.

EU Cohesion Policy 2021-2027

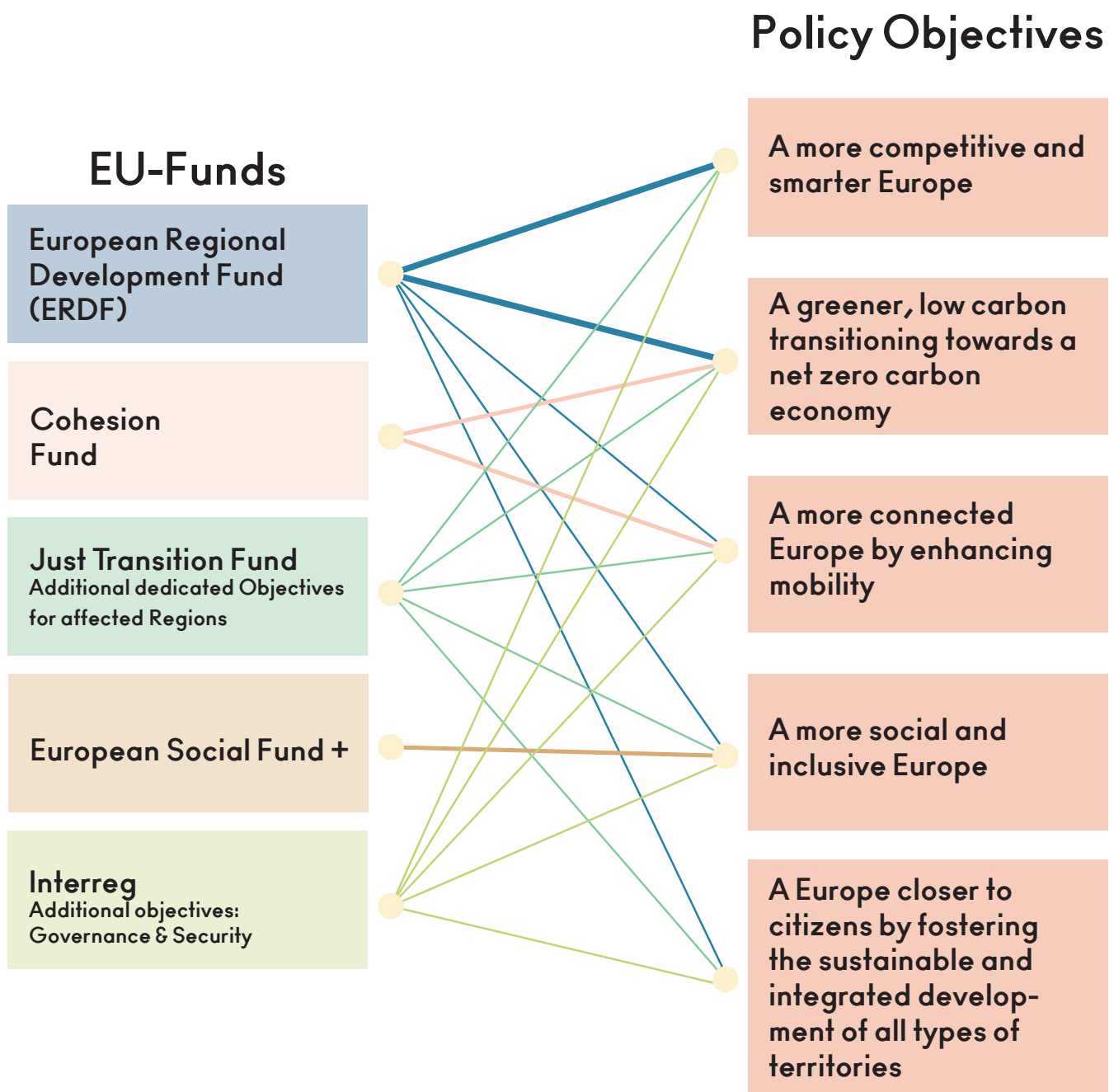
The EU Cohesion Policy context is essential for targeting the right policy objectives in order to seize crucial EU-funding opportunities. It is described in detail under 1.3.2.



1.3.2 EU-Funding Policy Context

The EU Cohesion Policy 2021-2027 aligns with broader European goals, striving for a more competitive, smarter, greener, and socially inclusive Europe. It emphasizes enhanced mobility, a transition towards a net-zero carbon economy, and the sustainable and integrated development of all types of territories.

More in detail, the Cohesion Policy follows five policy objectives, namely „A more competitive and smarter Europe“, „A greener, low carbon, transitioning towards a net zero economy“, „A more connected Europe by enhancing mobility“, „A more social and inclusive Europe“ and „A Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of all types of territories“. Since ECONNECTING adheres to these targets, the APN network can be the starting point to obtain funding allocated to the issues defined in the EU Cohesion Policy to realize their objectives. Several European funds are dedicated to these targets: The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Cohesion Fund, the European Social Fund +, the Just Transition Fund (that supports areas affected by the ongoing low-carbon transition) as well as the Interreg fund for certain projects.



1.4 Good Practice

The case studies of Bregenzerwald in Vorarlberg, Austria; Pontevedra, Spain; and Cluj-Napoca Metropolitan Area in Romania, although geographically distinct, share a common topics of **transformative urban planning geared towards sustainability, connectivity, and community well-being**. Each region demonstrates a commitment to creating accessible and livable spaces, transcending conventional urban development models.

The villages of the region of Bregenzerwald in Vorarlberg, Austria

Bregenzerwald in Vorarlberg, Austria, stands out as an **exemplary 30-minute territory**, showcasing an innovative and comprehensive approach to elevate accessibility and connectivity. The region has **implemented mobility hubs at local bus stations, strategically fostering the development of services, housing, and public spaces around these hubs**. The commitment to enhancing rural connectivity is evident through robust bus services, emphasizing the creation of a well-connected and accessible community.

One notable aspect of Bregenzerwald's approach is its embrace of Small Acupuncture Interventions, exemplified by a municipal building in the town of Hittisau, housing a museum of women, rehearsal rooms for brass bands, and facilities for firefighters under one roof. The region's **urban planning plans prioritize density without sprawling town extensions, promoting walkable distances**. The establishment of small hubs further contributes to a network of interconnected community spaces. Encouraging multi-family housing while restricting single-family homes is a pivotal strategy, fostering a diverse mix of residential options.

Bregenzerwald's unique emphasis on **sustainable building materials, particularly wood, reflects its commitment to craftsmanship and regional traditions**. The transportation hubs in the center of Bregenzerwald play a crucial role in enhancing regional connectivity. The region's success lies in a harmonious blend of thoughtful urban planning, strategic mobility interventions, and community-focused initiatives.



Source: Roland Krebs (2023)

Urban-Rural linkages to improve accessibility: Cluj-Napoca Metropolitan Area, Romania

Cluj-Napoca Metropolitan Area in Romania has emerged as a compelling case study in fostering urban-rural linkages through a multifaceted approach to development. The region has prioritized improving public spaces in rural municipalities, **recognizing the intrinsic connection between urban and rural environments**. By enhancing **public spaces in these areas**, Cluj-Napoca Metropolitan Area aims to **create a more integrated and inclusive community fabric** that transcends traditional urban boundaries.

A key initiative driving sustainable accessibility is the **Somes Metropolitan Blue-Green Corridor**, a visionary project that utilizes the Somes River as a focal point for sustainable mobility corridors. This corridor not only facilitates **efficient and eco-friendly transportation** within the metropolitan area but also underscores the **commitment to environmental sustainability**. Furthermore, Cluj-Napoca has actively engaged in a green and digital transition, aligning itself with contemporary urban development trends. The Cluj Integrated Metropolitan Development Plan encapsulates these efforts, integrating soft measures, flagship projects, and complementary measures to holistically address the diverse aspects of urban development. This comprehensive approach positions Cluj-Napoca Metropolitan Area as a forward-thinking example, showcasing how **urban centers can evolve through integrated planning** that embraces sustainability, connectivity, and digital innovation.



Source: Arquitectura Viva (2023)

A car-free town as a role model: Pontevedra, Spain

For more than two decades, Pontevedra, a town in Spain with a population of 83,000, has pioneered the development of a fully pedestrianized city center. By systematically restricting vehicular access, the city has created vibrant, pedestrian-friendly zones, fostering safety, community engagement, and a significant reduction in car traffic and greenhouse gas emissions. The initiative has not only transformed public spaces but has also led to increased safety and a thriving community life.

One notable aspect of Pontevedra's innovative urban planning is the introduction of the „Metrominuto“ pedestrian network. This visual guide illustrates the time it takes to walk from one point to another within the city, encouraging a healthier lifestyle and emphasizing the accessibility of essential services on foot. This strategic emphasis on walkability aligns with global efforts to promote sustainable urban development and healthier living.

Pontevedra's success serves as a compelling case study for urban planners worldwide, highlighting the positive impact of prioritizing pedestrians over vehicular traffic. As cities grapple with the challenges of urbanization and climate change, Pontevedra's car-free city center stands as a shining example of how commitment to sustainable urban development can enhance community life and contribute to a more environmentally responsible future. The town's transformative approach serves as an inspiration for cities seeking innovative solutions for creating people-centric and sustainable urban environments.



Pictures: Citychangers.org (2021)

Other inspiring Networks & Projects

Networks & Projects

URBACT RiConnect

Urbact Action Planning Network (Urbact III) that rethinks mobility infrastructure on a metropolitan level. The focus lied on mobility, urban planning, public space, ecosystem functions and the social impact, fostering an integrated approach to mobility. The network developed place based approaches with co-creation processes, leading to an integrated development.

URBACT Thriving Streets

This URBACT III - network aimed to improve mobility from an economic and social perspective, recognizing mobility as a motor for urban health, inclusivity, the local economy and social cohesion. The network implemented Integrated Local Action Plans as well as small scale actions.

URBACT Walk`n`Roll Cities

This initiative brings together the knowledge of three URBACT APNs (RiConnect, Space4People and Thriving Streets) and has developed a guidebook for tackling challenges regarding sustainable mobility and public space, it presents visions and state of the art interventions at different city scales.

Functional Areas in the EU

This project unites twelve functional areas within the European Union that work together to cross administrative borders for a green transition. It has provided guidebooks for urban-rural linkages and developing sustainable infrastructure and platforms for knowledge exchange, as well as toolkits for cooperation in functional areas.

Inspiring Case Studies that you can further explore...

Grenoble Metropolitan Area (FR)

The Metropolitan Area of Grenoble won the European Sustainable Urban Mobility Planning Award in 2021 with its efforts in the Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan, developed for 123 municipalities in the functional area. It follows an integrated approach on sustainable mobility accessible to all, including socially vulnerable groups. It prioritizes modes of active mobility as well as interconnectedness of different modes of mobility.

Jiu Valley (RO)

Jiu Valley is a former mining area, characterized by the coal industry and thus deeply affected by the ongoing transition towards renewable and green energies. The area counts about 135.000 inhabitants living in six different municipalities. Following an integrated just transition approach, supported by funds of the EU Just Transition fund, the area developed a sustainable electric bus transport network that connects the municipalities as well as a new governance structure that aims to develop new sustainable tourism strategies.

Cesis (LVA)

The small town of about 15.000 inhabitants is of strong regional importance: It redeveloped its old town through calmed traffic, shared spaces, street furniture and priority for pedestrians and cyclists. The town developed quick temporary solutions, a street design concept and a city-wide cycling network and pursues a strict policy to keep cars out of the city centre.

Bad Berleburg (GER)

This small town counts about 20.000 inhabitants that live in 20 different villages and towns on a large surface of 275 km², nicknamed a „town of villages“. It follows a long-term sustainability strategy, oriented on the UN-SDGs, that aims to support an ageing society, provide good working and living conditions as well as to support the energy transition. Through a participative process, it is developing a long-term sustainable mobility plan making mobility accessible to all citizens.

Karditsa (GR)

This small city of 56.000 inhabitants, winner of the European Sustainable Mobility Award in 2019, stands out because of its important promotion of cycling and walking, as well as because of its improvements in active mobility infrastructure and public space. Today, around 40% of trips are made by bike, it is named „the Greek city of cycling“.

Trofaiach (AT)

The small Austrian city of around 11.000 inhabitants achieved an integrated revitalisation of the city centre through cultural initiatives and sustainable uses, such as repair & second hand shop, farmers market, etc. through a broad, participative transformation process. The main road was redesigned as a shared space, a mobility point was created, new bus services as well as an on-demand bus line and bicycle plan.

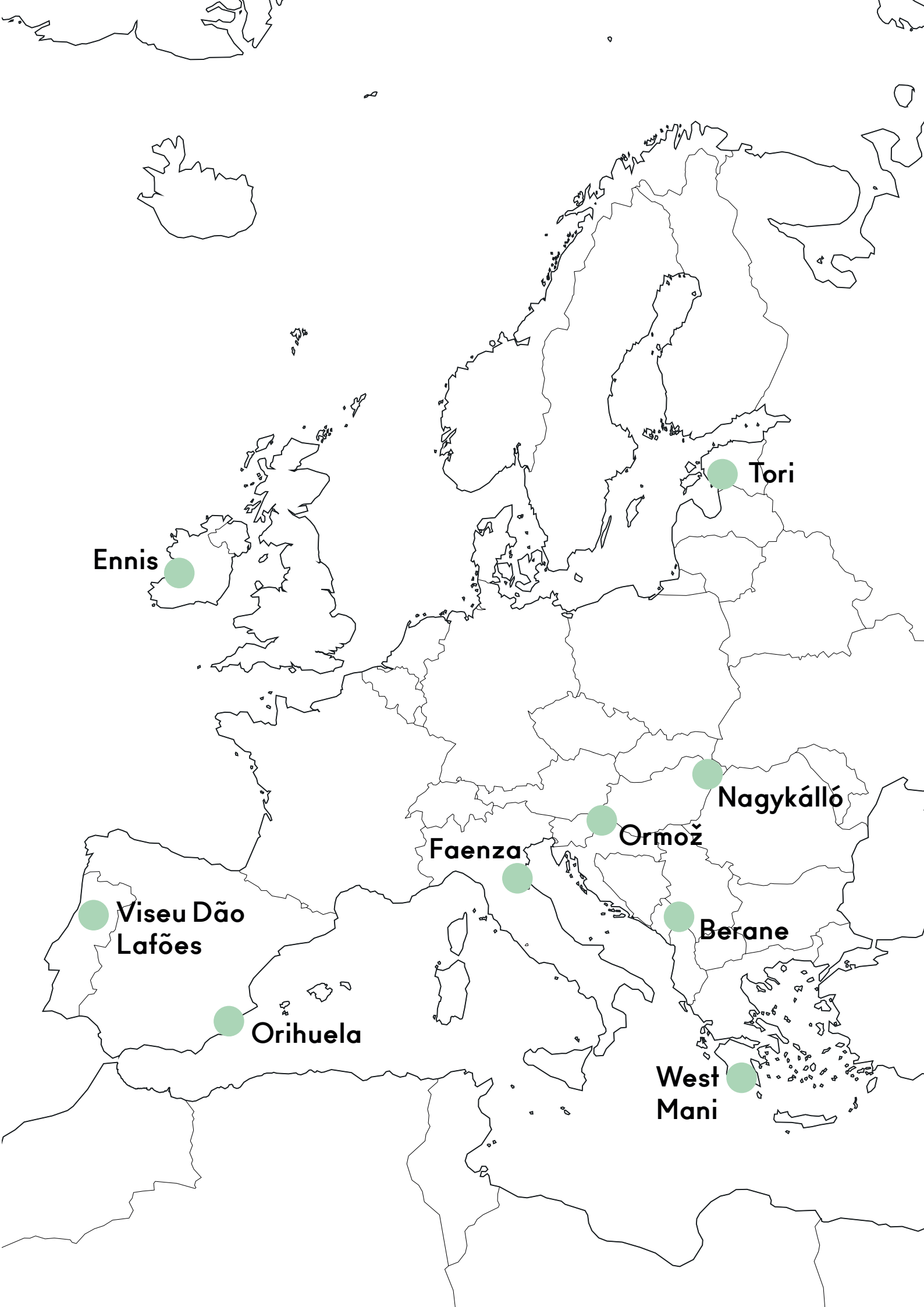
FAENZA





Partner Profiles

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Ennis

Tori

Nagyková

Ormož

Faenza

Berane

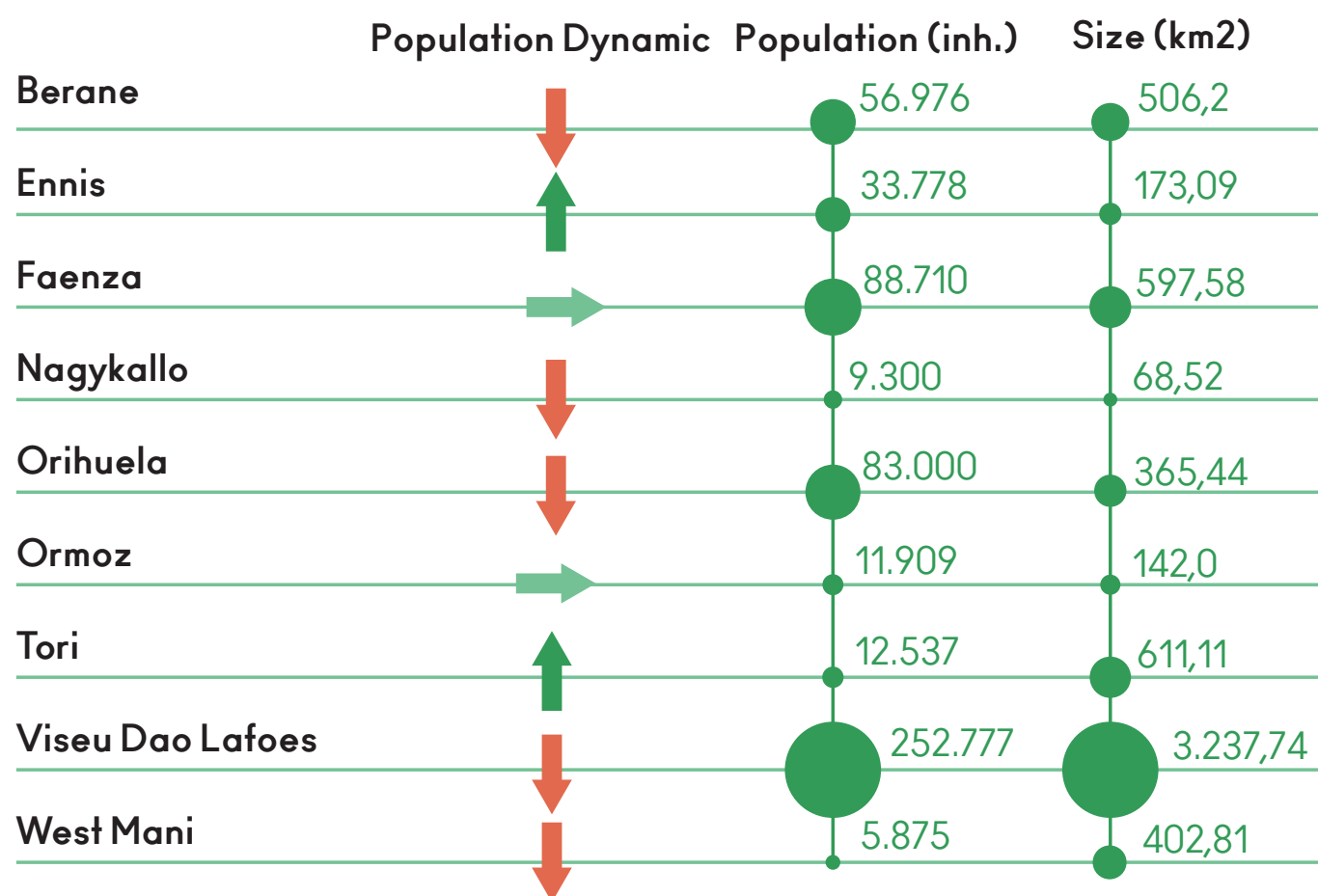
**Viseu Dão
Lafões**

Orihuela

**West
Mani**

2.1 Overview

ECONNECTING counts nine partners from nine European countries, located in different regions, with their own qualities, challenges, opportunities and resources. Some are located in a more **rural environment** (such as Ormoz), some are close to medium-sized cities but still characterised by a number of rural settlements (Tori, Nagykálló, West Mani), some are close to or between important metropolitan areas (Orihuela and Unione della Romagna Faentina) or represent a micro-region in themselves with centres of attraction (Viseu Dão Lafões, Unione della Romagna Faentina, Ennis Municipal District). They **vary greatly in size**, and some have a population scattered over a large area, which is a major obstacle to sustainable accessibility. But they are united in their ambitions towards a sustainable and inclusive future through community building and integrated planning of future-proof mobility systems.



Unione della Romagna Faentina

598 km²



Ennis

Municipal District

173 km²



Tori Vallavalitsus

611 km²



Ormoz

142 km²



Berane

506 km²



Orihuela

365 km²



Nagykálló

69 km²



Comunidad Intermunicipal

Viseu Dão Lafões

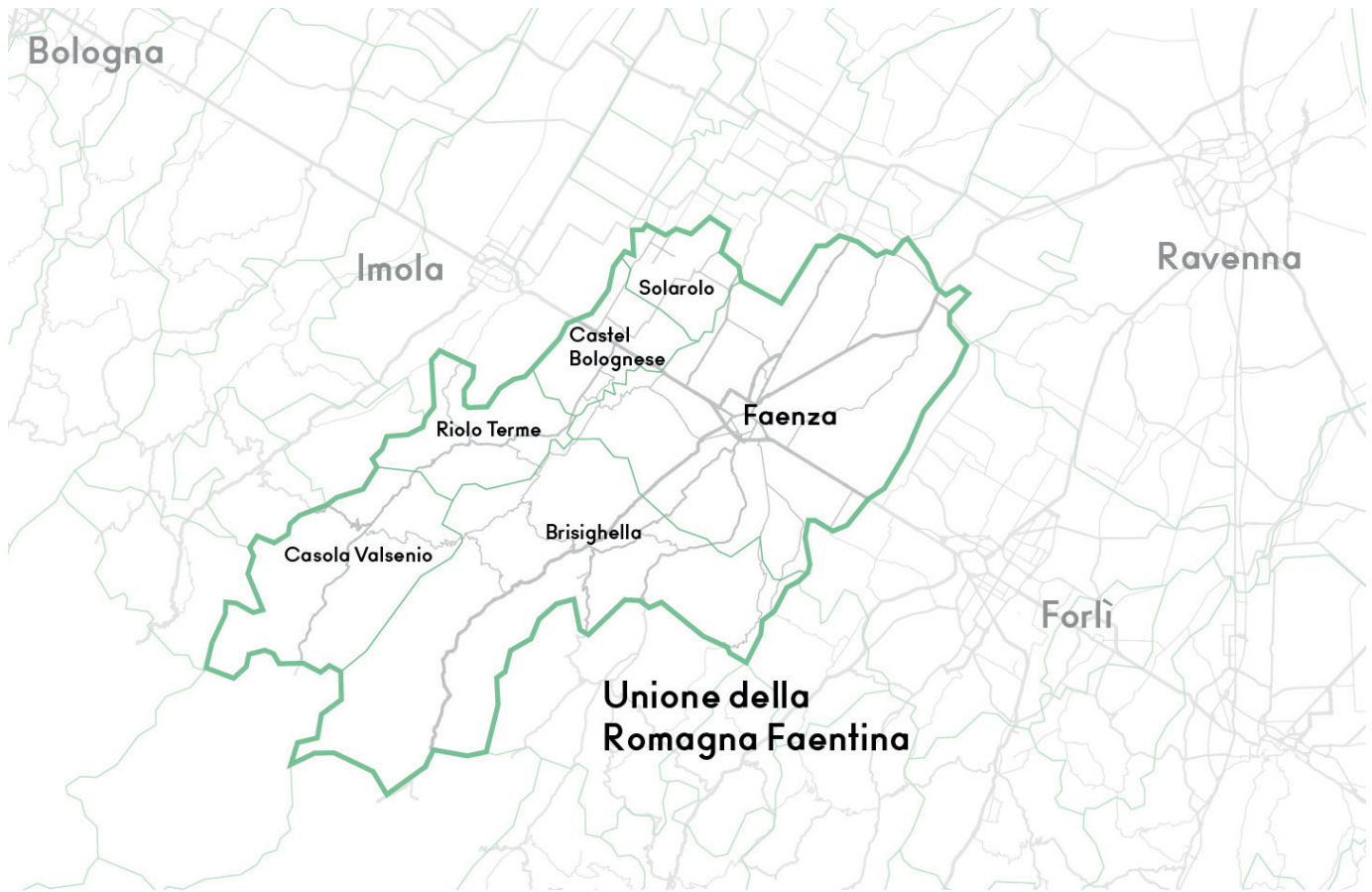
3238 km²



West Mani

403 km²





Unione della Romagna Faentina

Country and Region	Italy, Region of Emilia Romagna
Population	88.710
Area	597,58 km ²
Population Density	148,4 inh./km ²
Governance Structure	Union of 6 municipalities

Local Context

The Unione della Romagna Faentina is an independent local public entity, founded in 2012, made up of 6 municipalities located in the Emilia Romagna region (Italy), close to the metropolis of Bologna and the cities of Ravenna and Forlì. It is located in an economically vibrant region on the Via Emilia, which historically connected important cities such as Parma, Modena, Bologna and Rimini.

Unione della Romagna Faentina unites the municipalities of Brisighella, Casola Valsenio, Castel Bolognese, Faenza, Riolo Terme and Solarolo, with a total population of 88,710. The city of Faenza is the main urban settlement with about 58,000 inhabitants. It is the industrial and agricultural centre of the area and can be reached by train, the Emilia railway and the A14 motorway, and is well connected to the other main cities in the country. From Faenza railway station you can reach Bologna in 40 minutes.

The city has an important history, especially for its architectural development during the Renaissance. The main industries are mechanical engineering and food production, the unemployment rate is low (5.3%). Faenza is surrounded by a hilly agricultural area. The main educational, economic and health services are concentrated in the centre, but each municipality has its own primary and secondary schools. The city of Faenza has a functioning bicycle network and several urban and intercommunal bus lines. However, the inter-municipal cycle and pedestrian network needs improvement and the more rural areas of the Unione della Romagna Faentina are not well connected to the urban centres. Most trips are still made by private car (64%), while cycling is also popular (19%) - only a small proportion is made by public transport (7%). Around two thirds of trips within the URF last less than 15 minutes.

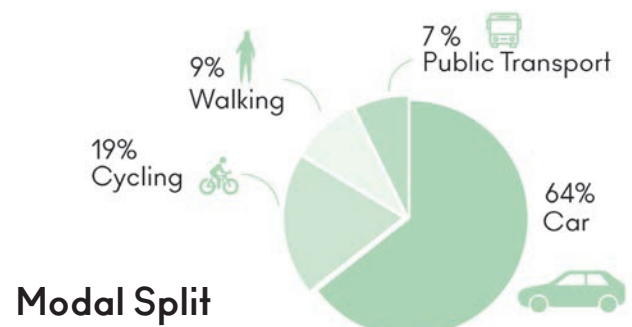
In 2023, Faenza and its surrounding towns and villages experienced the devastating impact of a severe flood, leaving certain areas in a state of complete destruction. The aftermath prompted immediate efforts to initiate reconstruction, and at present, substantial strides are being made in the ongoing recovery process.

Governance, Policies, Strategies & Actions

A new public transport system is currently being developed with the Associazione Mobilità Romagna (AMR) and local stakeholders such as schools and private companies. In the city centre, the use of cargo bikes for logistical purposes is being implemented. The new PUMS - Piano Urbano della Mobilità Sostenibile (Sustainable Mobility Plan) includes plans for a new intermodal hub connecting the regional railway station, a new bus interchange station and new car parks and also makes improving cycling links between urban and rural areas a key priority. The PUMS has been developed jointly by all six URF municipalities. The municipalities of the Unione della Romagna Faentina are all actively involved in numerous projects, such as the new planning of the public transport system to increase the coverage of public transport not only in the urban area, but also to improve services to rural communities through new suburban lines. There are already several urban and intercommunal bus lines, as well as the Green Go Bus, an electric shuttle that connects the outskirts of Faenza with the city centre.

There is a charge for parking in the centre with a discount for residents. Outside the centre, parking is free. In addition, the centre of Faenza is a „ZTL“, a restricted traffic zone that reduces the circulation of private cars for non-residents in the historical centre.

The URF organises „Consulta della Bici“ meetings in collaboration with civil society NGOs, which also represent cyclists, to work together on the development of cycle paths. A project is underway to renew the now outdated bike-sharing system. The Bike to Work project aims to encourage employees to use their bicycles to commute to work. URF also works with schools to promote sustainable mobility. The „Piedibus“ project has been developed in collaboration with schools: It promotes walking to school with the help of volunteers who accompany the children.



Strengths

- Strong governance model that eases cooperation between municipalities
- Actions towards a sustainable mobility model (PUMS, Bike to work)
- Established cycling culture
- Location in a thriving region

Weaknesses

- Lack of connections and infrastructure between urban- and rural areas
- Strong use of private cars
- Missing infrastructure for cycling

Opportunities

- Improve connectivity for urban-rural relations
- Improve rural and suburban infrastructure
- Create infrastructure for areas affected by the floodings
- Co-create sustainable solutions with stakeholders

Threats

- Depopulation in rural areas
- Car dependency
- Limited accessibility for vulnerable groups
- Floods or other natural disaster wi huge impact on the area

Challenges & Objectives

Unione della Romagna Faentina is partly disconnected from its adjacent rural areas, there is a lack of sustainable suburban mobility infrastructure such as bike lanes and sidewalks between rural areas and the centre of Faenza. The main roads are burdened by motorized traffic, in general, an extensive use of private cars can be observed, leading to air pollution and high carbon emissions. Today, 64% of all trips are made by car. Frequent bus services are limited to peak hours, there is difficulty in promoting successfully the public transportation offers. Public services are not easily accessible for elderly people living in rural areas, the transportation network needs to be improved to better serve vulnerable groups, improving the autonomy of women, low-income groups, children and elder citizens. Certain rural areas are still isolated around Brisighella and Solarolo since they have been severely affected by floodings in spring of 2023.

URF primarily aims to reduce the dominant use of private cars through better suburban infrastructure for cyclists and pedestrians. Therefore, it is crucial to fill gaps in the existing network. In addition, the promotion of sustainable mobility is also a priority. To improve accessibility, especially for women, elderly people, children, and people with reduced mobility, it is key to improve the public transportation network, especially in rural areas of URF. This is a major step in fostering their autonomy and creating a high quality of life for all. Furthermore, URF aims to focus especially on areas that were affected by the severe floodings during springtime in 2023.



The city center of Faenza and the challenged infrastructure after the floods in the region in May 2023

Learning Needs

- Concepts for sustainable and accessible urban-rural linkages

Learning Contributions

- Model of strong inter-municipal collaboration
- Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan
- Sustainable Mobility projects in collaboration with NGOs (Piedibus, BiketoWork,...)

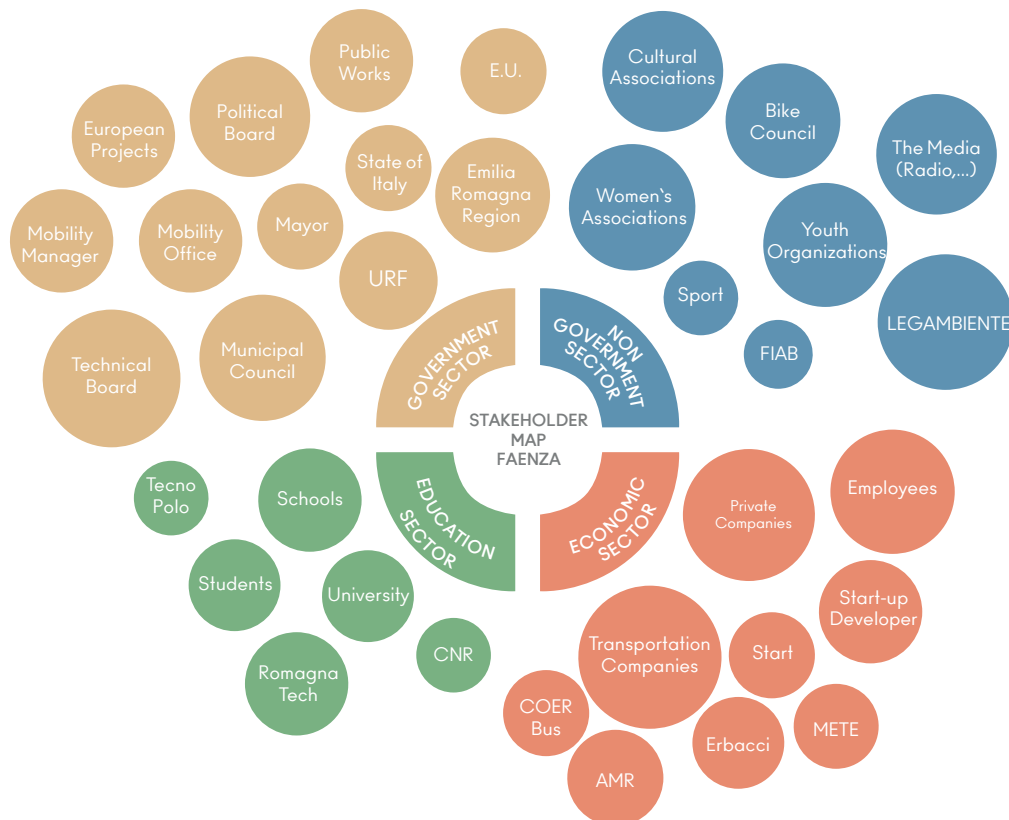
Integrated Action Plan

Since the territory of Unione della Romagna Faentina has been heavily affected by the floodings during May 2023, the mobility system needs to be redefined. A crucial challenge is the improvement of connections between urban- and rural areas. The goal is to create urban-rural linkages following an integrated, sustainable approach. Another main challenge is the lack of suburban infrastructures such as bikelanes and sidewalks. The IAP should also promote sustainable mobility among specific groups, such as schoolchildren or employees of local companies for instance, in order to tackle the dominant use of private cars.

Urbact Local Group

Unione della Romagna Faentina has a solid experience in the management of EU projects and a specific European Project Office that has already dealt with different EU- and national funding programmes (Erasmus+, Creative Europe, CERV, ERDF). URF was already a partner in the URBACT UrbSecurity Action Planning Network.

The Urbact Local Group will be coordinated by Lorenzo Mallus, he is a technical officer at URF. He is a trained architect and real estate manager. The group will include different stakeholders, such as schools, companies, citizens and cyclist representatives, as well as consortiums of local producers. Meetings with the mobility managers of private companies are planned to further implement the Bike to Work project.





Ormož

Country and Region	Slovenia, Podravska Region
Population	11.909
Area	142 km ²
Population Density	83,86 inh./km ²
Governance Structure	Public Development and Research Center

Local Context

Ormož is located in the Podravje region, near the Croatian and Hungarian borders, on the River Drava. Its surroundings are characterised by rural villages, the town counts 61 settlements on its territory, only 16% of its inhabitants live in urban areas. Almost a quarter of the population is over 65 (23%). The landscape is characterised by agriculture and viticulture, the latter being one of the most important industries in the area, which is known as a region of high quality wines. The centre of Ormož provides important services (administration, education, health, shopping) in its compact core for the more rural hinterland, and connectivity between urban and rural areas is crucial. There is a high level of car dependency, with only 10% of trips made by public transport and 80% by car. In addition, the number of private cars is still increasing. The vast majority of trips (70%) are longer than 5 kilometres.

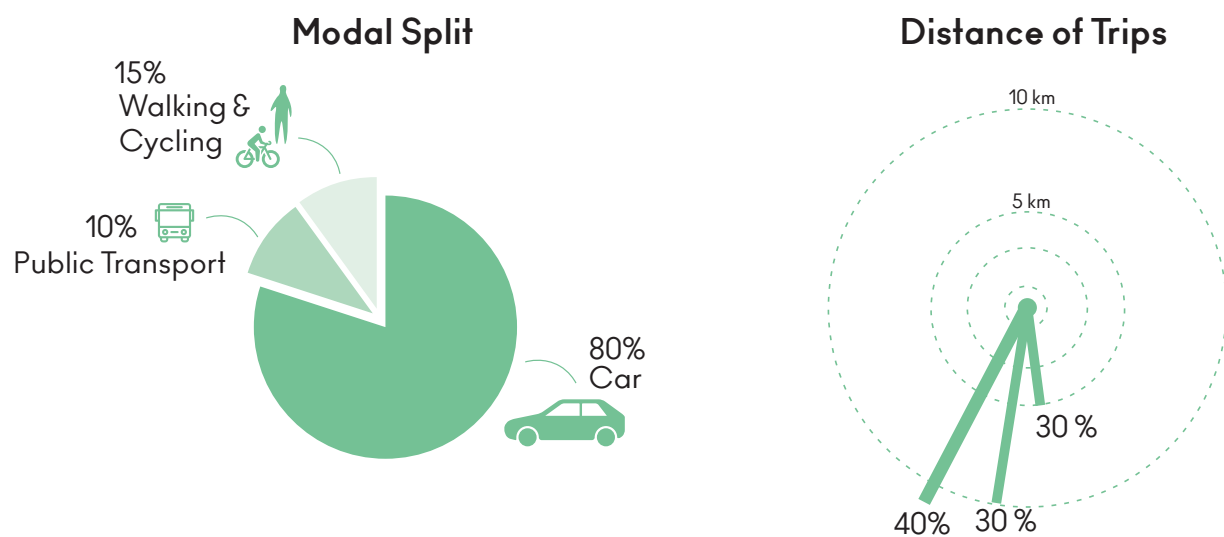
Public transport is only available along the main roads, with a bus to the municipalities of Ptuj and Središ e ob Dravi every 1-2 hours on weekdays, and no public transport on holidays and weekends. Trains run only every 2-3 hours at certain times. A school bus service is available throughout the municipality. The city centre is within walking distance and all major services are within 15 minutes' walk of the bus station, but the business district is outside the centre and not served by public transport. There is no organised transport to the workplaces.

Governance, Policies, Strategies & Actions

The town of Ormož has established transport hubs and interchanges, equipped with real-time timetables and tourist information, which facilitate easy and efficient connections between different modes of transport. These hubs are designed to improve the quality of transport and promote sustainable mobility for the city's residents and visitors. They include connections between buses, trains, cycle paths and pedestrian routes. The municipality is developing an integrated transport strategy with a long-term vision that aims to pave the way for sustainable mobility by 2030 with a detailed action plan.

A mobility system for the elderly called „Prostofer“ has been established, where younger pensioners provide transport services for the elderly to hospitals, doctor's appointments and other health care facilities. There is an offer of individual transport to local centres for vulnerable groups.

The municipality cooperates with more than 26 municipalities in the Drava cycle path partnership, which aims to improve the cycling infrastructure along the Drava river. An electric bike rental system has been set up and a specific application has been developed. The Tourist Board has also developed themed routes for tourists. There is a strong commitment to green tourism.



Strengths

- Partnerships with other municipalities along the Drava
- Steps towards integrated transport strategy
- Mobility for elder people
- Experienced in funding and project delivery

Weaknesses

- Car dependency
- Limited public transport infrastructure
- Long distances of trips
- Not enough workforce for new factories
- Shortage in housing
- Expensive school pick-up system

Opportunities

- Rural sustainable mobility Programs
- Communication and education strategies
- Green tourism initiatives
- Industrialization of Ormoz
- New businesses in the industrial park

Threats

- Persistent car culture
- Inaccessibility of public transport
- Heavy traffic of trucks on the only road connecting Ormoz with the rest of the country and Croatia

Challenges & Objectives

Mobility in Ormoz is still characterised by a strong car culture and a lack of information and services on sustainable mobility. Public transport is infrequent and poorly organised, and there is a lack of pedestrian facilities and limited infrastructure for electric vehicles.

The overall aim is to create sustainable transport options for tourists, schools, the elderly and various other groups. Ormoz wants to develop a sustainable transport strategy and raise awareness of sustainable transport, especially in rural areas.



Together with the Urbact Local Group during the site visit in Ormoz

Learning Needs

- Effective communication strategies to involve the local population & stakeholders
- Traffic management strategies, network planning

Learning Contributions

- Mobility offer for elderly people („Prostofer“)
- School bus service
- Bike rental system
- Construction of several cycling routes
- Experience in funding and delivering projects

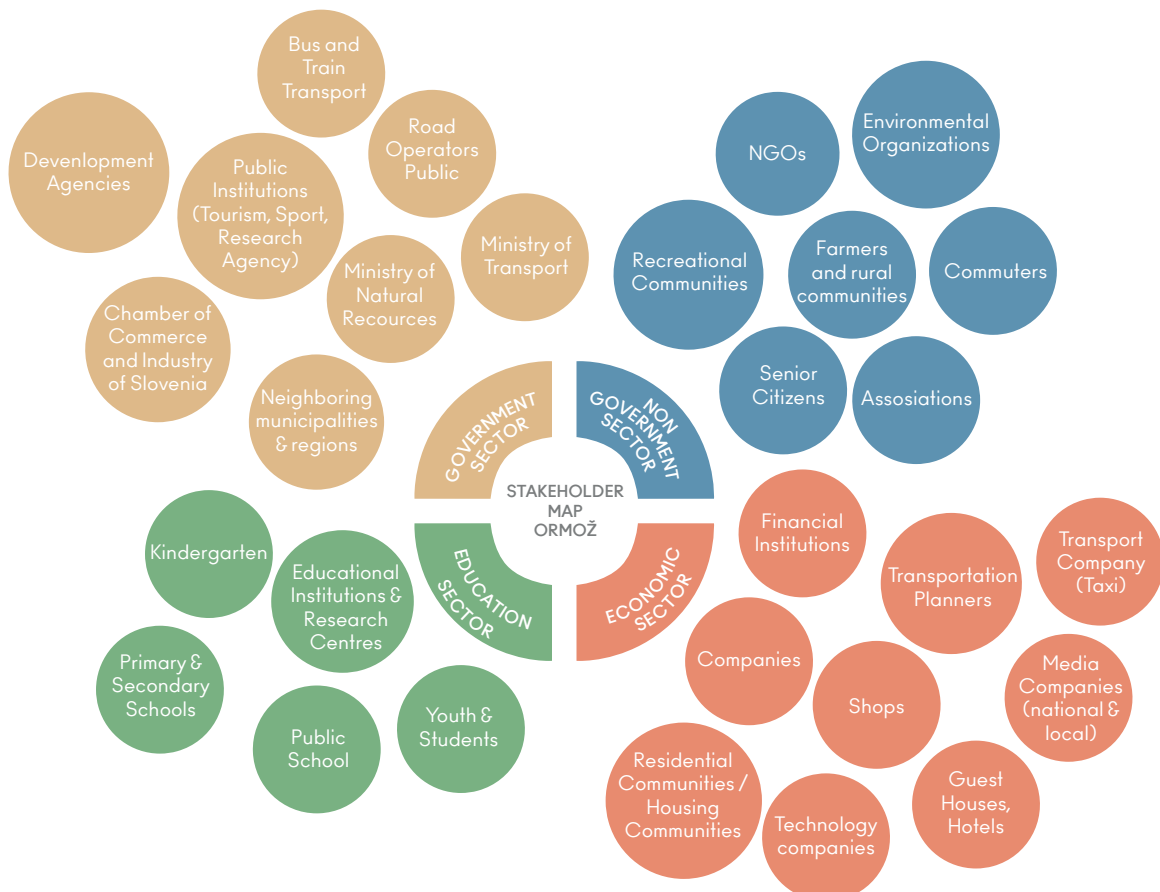
Integrated Action Plan

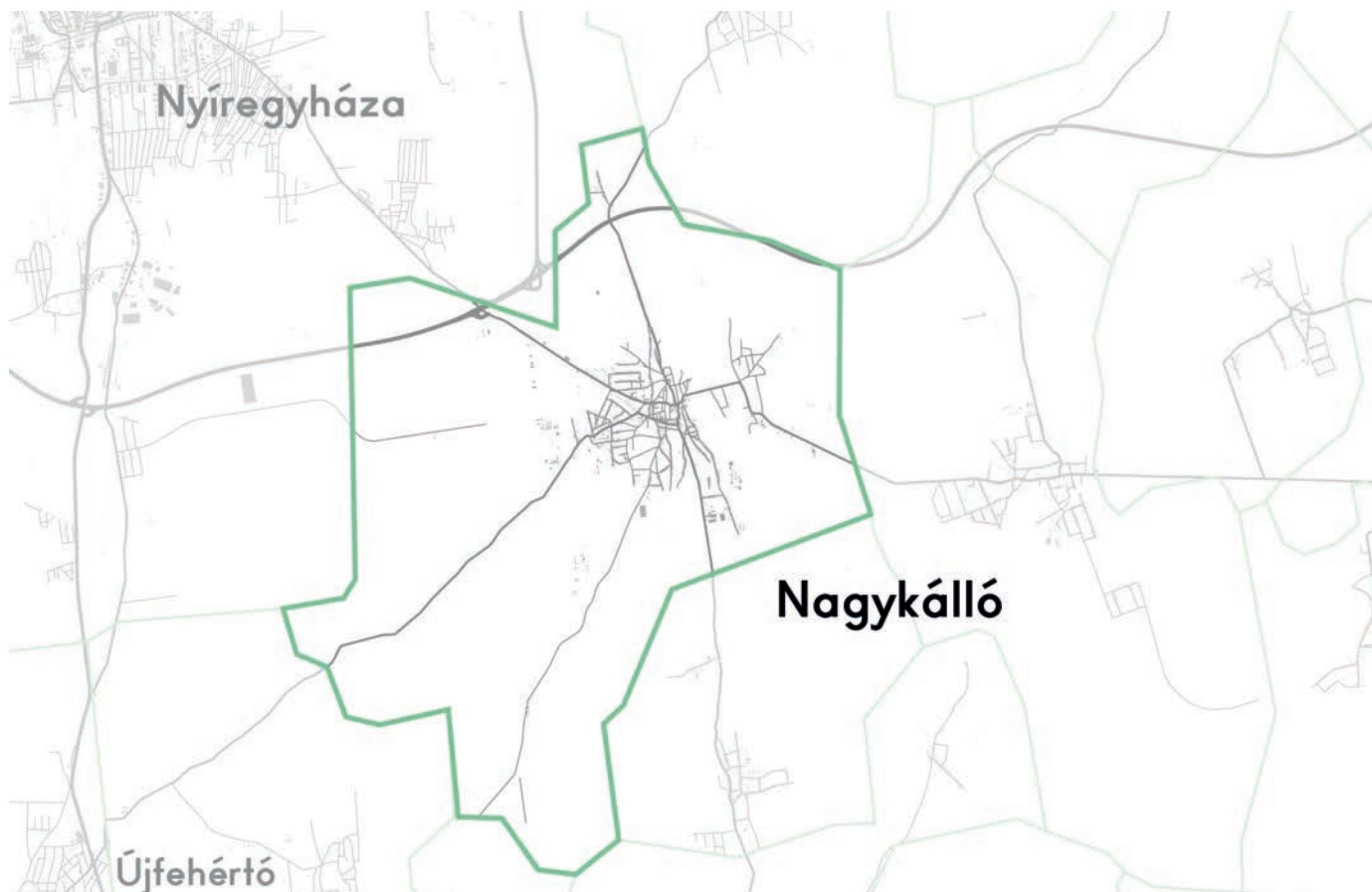
The goal is to develop and implement strategies for sustainable mobility in an environmentally-friendly municipality: In their Integrated Action Plan, Ormož wants to provide solutions for sustainable mobility offers in rural areas, such as cycle to work programmes and develop effective communication and education strategies that accompany new sustainable transport approaches.

Urbact Local Group

RRC Ormož is involved in European projects in the frame of Erasmus and Interreg, it has experience in preparing projects for municipalities, its task is to manage communication with many sectors such as public, economic and private. Ormož is also part of the EcoCore APN of the same project cycle.

Matjaž Kosi will be the coordinator of the Urbact Local Group, he is responsible for public relations at RRC Ormož. The ULG will be composed of various stakeholders, like representatives from local businesses and entrepreneurs, transportation companies, and community organizations focused on sustainability and environmental protection. The ULG will consist of a core group with key stakeholders that have high impact, a co-creation group that includes a broader range of stakeholders, an academic group that includes research and educational institutions as well as information group that raises awareness and is responsible for communication.





0 2,5 5 km

Nagykálló

Country and Region	Hungary, Észak-Alföld Region
Population	9.300
Area	68,52 km ²
Population Density	135,72 inh./km ²
Governance Structure	Municipality

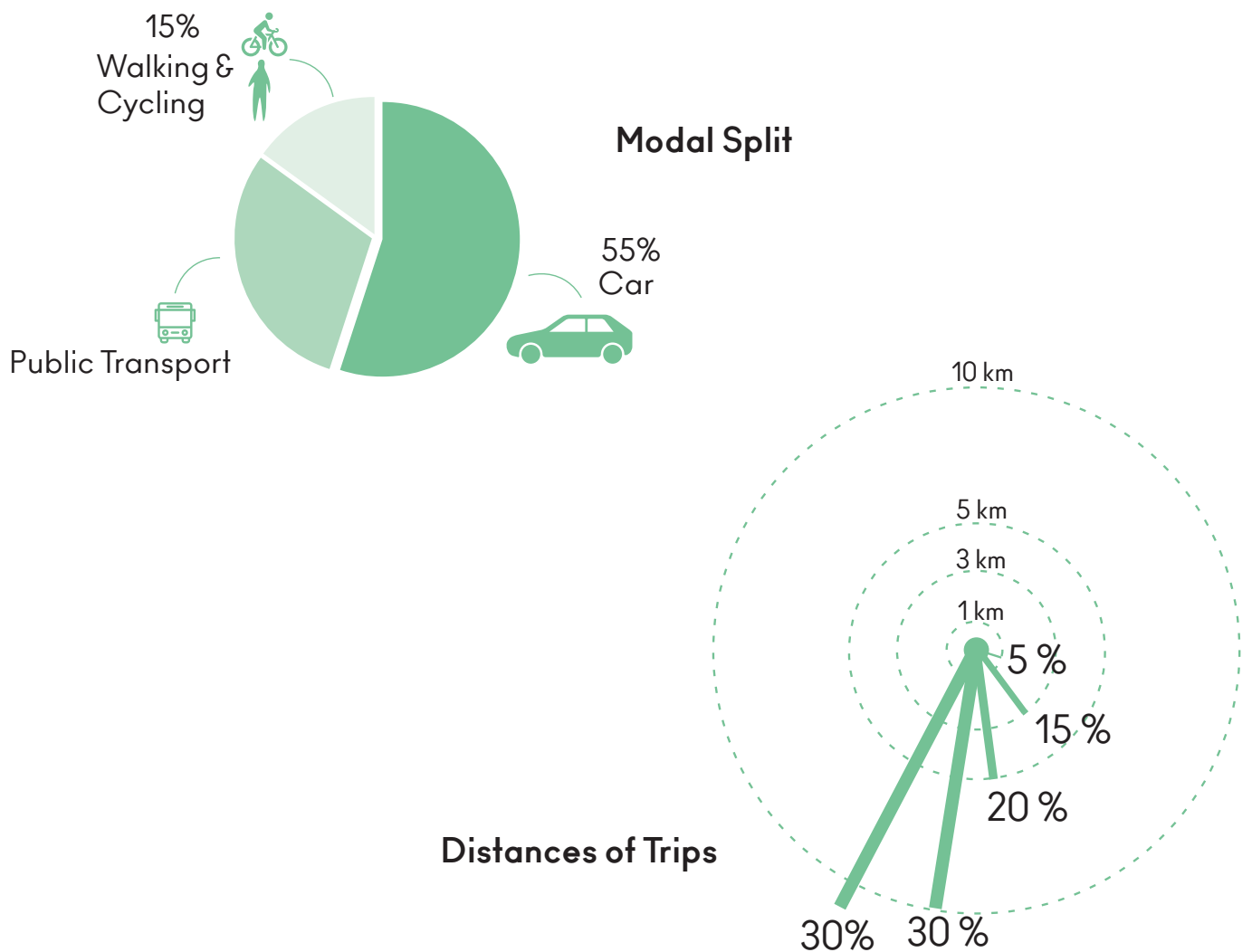
Local Context

Nagykálló is a small town, but as the county seat it has important administrative functions. Its district consists of eight settlements, two towns and six smaller settlements. Nagykovács was a former county town and is 13 kilometres away from the county town of Nyíregyháza, which has a population of 115,000. The functional centre has a radius of about 30 km, as it is surrounded by purely rural, agricultural areas. Agriculture also plays an important role in the economic life of the region. Nagykovács offers public administration services, secondary education, health services, discount shops and housing services. Nagykovács is situated between Nyíregyháza, the regional centre, and the town of Nyírbátor, and is only connected to these towns by road and a slow, infrequently used train connection.

About 600 people commute to the town every day. They mostly come from the micro-region and by car. There is no public transport in Nagykovács, but there are government-funded bus and train services. The buses are relatively new and run hourly for 14 hours a day. The train service is characterised by old rolling stock and slow connections, and the station is located well outside the city centre. Nagykovács has 17 intercity bus stops, some of which have more than 100 stops on an average working day.

Governance, Policies, Strategies & Actions

The integrated town development strategy defines areas for action within the city and medium-term development projects. A platform has been set up to involve citizens in dialogue in the preparation of strategic documents for the city. Nagykovács already has experience with transnational EU projects: As part of the EU Interreg Central Europe project 'RuMobil', Nagykovács installed smart and comfortable bus stops to make public transport more attractive. The aim was to promote public transport and create an attractive image for the city.



Strengths

- Importance as county seat
- Good intercity bus connections to Nyíregyháza
- Experience in creating attractive bus infrastructure

Weaknesses

- Lack of interest among the population
- Insufficient train services
- Distances of trips

Opportunities

- Improve missing connectivity for urban-rural relations
- Opportunity for citizen engagement

Threats

- Lack of connections between urban- and rural areas
- Strong use of private cars
- Old train infrastructure

Challenges & Objectives

Nagykálló faces many challenges: There is no public transport within the municipality, and the number of cars per inhabitant has increased by almost 38% in the last 9 years. Most trips are over 5 kilometres long, with only 20% shorter than 3 kilometres, making them generally less suitable for active mobility. Despite some good bus services, public transport is generally considered to be inadequate and not flexible enough, for example at weekends. The pedestrian network is not safe enough, especially along links between urban and peripheral areas. Although efforts have been made over the last 15 years, the bicycle network needs to be expanded. Another important challenge is to get the local population on board, especially young people and the elderly.

Nagykálló wants to take further steps to make public transport and cycling more attractive to its citizens by improving accessibility and flexibility. The city also wants to promote electric mobility by providing city-operated charging stations and car sharing. The city also wants to create a new culture of participation and community that motivates the population, particularly involving young people and the elderly in decision-making.



Site visit in Nagykovács

Learning Needs

- Developing & attracting transport solutions
- Participation practices & strategies
- Participation in the redesign of public spaces
- Organizing transport with limited means

Learning Contributions

- Community planning of open spaces
- Developing good governance practices, improving local government resources

Integrated Action Plan

The spatial focus of the Integrated Action Plan is likely to be on the main road running through the town, linking Nyíregyháza, Nagykálló and Kállósemjén. A further focus on e-mobility is possible in a municipally owned industrial park next to the motorway. With the IAP, Nagykálló aims to address a number of pressing challenges: Flexible and accessible public transport, popularisation of cycling, car-sharing solutions and e-mobility.

Urbact Local Group

The local Urbact group will involve stakeholders from the Nagykálló Town Strategy Committee, the Technical Department of the Nagykálló Municipality, a secondary school, the University of Nyíregyháza, as well as NGOs and town representatives. The coordinator will be Sándor Véghe from the Nagykálló City Protection Association, who has already gained URBACT experience as a coordinator in the Procure network and has been involved in every transnational project in Nagykálló. Today he works as an external expert for the municipality.





West Mani

Country and Region	Greece, Peloponnese
Population	5.875
Area	402,81 km ²
Population Density	14,58 inh./km ²
Governance Structure	Municipality

Local Context

The Municipality of West Mani is located in the southern part of mainland Greece, on the western side of the Mani in the region of Peloponnese. It is known for its rugged terrain, picturesque coastal landscapes and traditional villages. The municipality stretches from the coast to the mountains in the hinterland, with steep cliffs and rocky shores. The region is sparsely populated; West Mani is primarily a rural area with few small towns and many villages. It has a long agricultural history, with olive growing being a major economic activity. Apart from agriculture, tourism plays an important role in the local economy. The lack of infrastructure, e.g. all-day water supply hinders economic development. West Mani benefits from the proximity of Kalamata, the regional centre, which also has an international airport and port.

Most of the villages have retained their rural character. The majority of the population lives along the coast, where the main services are concentrated, in the towns of Kardamili, Stoupa and Agios Nikolaos. Connectivity is a major issue, with many villages being linked by narrow and winding roads, adapted to the rugged topography. The Mani motorway runs through the municipality, linking it to other parts of the region. In the more rural areas, residents rely on private cars as there is no public transport. There is a daily bus service to Kalamata and a weekly bus service to certain settlements in the interior of the municipality. There is, however, a school bus service for children, and five villages in West Mani have a school (Kardamili, Stoupa, Kampos, Stavropigio and Agios Nikolaos).

Governance, Policies, Strategies & Actions

In its strategy, the Municipality of West Mani plans specific actions in the fields of management and protection of the natural environment, upgrading of public infrastructure, development of agriculture and tourism, and cooperation with other municipalities. The Mani Integrated Territorial Investment Strategy of Mani identifies three investment priorities: Improving access to quality public services, supporting the regeneration of deprived communities and improving regional mobility by connecting infrastructure hubs.

West Mani is constantly working to improve the existing road network, a difficult task given the topography of the area.

Recent urban regeneration projects in several settlements have made progress in improving the pedestrian network as well as public squares. In the villages of Agios Nikolaos and Stoupa, the coastal road is pedestrianised during the summer. The two villages are now also connected by a cycle path.

West Mani has developed a digital transformation strategy and a study for the establishment of a wide network of electric vehicle charging stations. There are also plans to purchase electric shuttle buses. A traffic study is being prepared.

The municipality often works with public consultations, but these are carried out on an ad hoc basis and do not follow any particular strategy.



Waterfront in West Mani

Strengths

- Natural environment
- Rich cultural heritage
- Proximity to Kalamata (Regional centre)
- Well working tourism destination
- Production of Olive Oil

Weaknesses

- Lack of modern road network
- Lack of protective infrastructure
- Low institutionalization of land use
- Lack of tourist infrastructure
- Limited tourism season

Opportunities

- Transformation to a tourist destination that is attractive the whole year long
- Upgrading administration through new innovative technologies
- Fostering ecological consciousness to preserve the environment

Threats

- Overtourism
- High unemployment
- Aggravation of persisting weaknesses
- Short Tourism Period

Challenges & Objectives

A major challenge is to improve the functional links between the various fragmented settlements and the coastal urban centres, particularly the town of Kardamili. West Mani's future development also aims to build on its assets, particularly its rich environmental and cultural heritage, in an integrated and holistic way. The decline in population, resulting in a large number of empty buildings, and the short tourist season are other major challenges. As the population continues to age, attracting new permanent residents and businesses is key to the further development of West Mani.

West Mani is charting a path to sustainable development with a focus on becoming a year-round tourist destination while avoiding overtourism. The municipality wants to integrate innovative technologies in upgrading administrative processes, while efforts to foster ecological consciousness aim to preserve the environment. The municipality wants to position itself as an attractive, tourism destination with a diverse offer. Considering its rich cultural heritage, the municipality wants to drive sustainable development for instance through the adaptive reuse of empty buildings and the improvement of networks and connectivity. The goal is to also attract new residents and businesses following a broader vision for an enhanced quality of life, emphasizing innovation and ecological consciousness through community engagement, inclusivity and age-friendly initiatives.



Characteristic Greek villages in West Mani

Learning Needs

- Effective communication strategies to involve the local population & stakeholders
- Traffic management strategies, network planning

Learning Contributions

- Bike lanes along the coastal front
- Subsidized Taxi transport for residents in remote villages as a social measure
- Evaluation of school transportation program

Integrated Action Plan

The Integrated Action Plan is crucial for the municipality to plan integrated future interventions and projects. The development of services along the coastal zone and the improvement of access to those will be central points in the Integrated Action Plan.

Urbact Local Group

The Integrated Action Plan will be developed through a bottom-up approach, through the URBACT Local Group, the municipality wants to sensitivize and mobilize stakeholders towards an open interaction and new ways of consultation. The ULG consists of Municipal staff, local businessmen- and women, academics and citizens. It actively involves people from cultural associations, volunteer organizations, administration and professional associations. West Mani has no previous experience in EU networks, the ULG is a newly built group. Christina Faidra Nifakou, a civil engineer, has been appointed as the coordinator of the group.





0 10 20 km

Comunidade Intermunicipal Viseu Dão Lafões

Country and Region	Portugal, Centro Region
Population	252.777
Area	3.237,74 km ²
Population Density	78,07 inh./km ²
Governance Structure	Community regrouping 14 municipalities

Local Context

Viseu Dão Lafões is an intermunicipal community made up of 14 municipalities, with Viseu as its core centre with a population of around 100,000. It is made up of three informal sub-regions: Viseu, Dão and Lafões. It is located in central Portugal, about an hour from the cities of Aveiro and Coimbra, an hour and a half from Porto and three hours from the capital, Lisbon.

Almost 70% of the population of Viseu Dão Lafões is concentrated in four municipalities (Viseu, Castro Daire, Mangualde, São Pedro do Sul and Tondela), and the population is generally declining. It is an industrial region, specialised in car manufacturing and construction. Employment has shown a positive trend in recent years.

In 2011, 74% of trips were made by car, but 88% of these were within the same municipality, with the majority of inter-municipal trips to Viseu, the regional centre, and the municipalities of Mangualde and Tondela. Due to the ageing of the population, 15% of the population does not leave the house every day. Most journeys are short, averaging 17 minutes, and most are for education or work. There is no adequate public transport network, less than 1% of trips are made by bicycle and around 15% by foot. All municipalities have at least some form of on-demand public transport, and four municipalities have a train service. Within the municipality of Viseu, there are both interregional and regional connections and municipal services. Not all municipalities have a direct public transport link to the centre of Viseu.

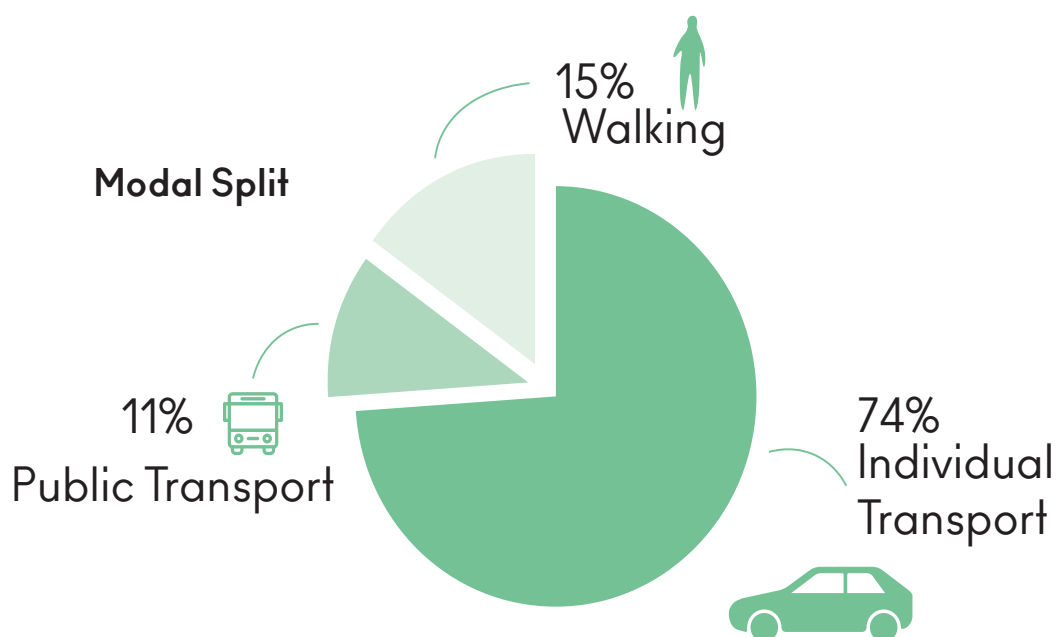
Governance, Policies, Strategies & Actions

CIM Viseu Dão Lafões is a transport authority with its own powers to provide public transport for the 14 municipalities. CIM pays five different companies to operate public transport.

For the regular price of a bus ticket, the CIM has introduced an on-demand taxi service, which has been successful so far. This service connects citizens to locations within the same municipality, to another municipality or to the railway station.

CIM is currently developing a regional mobility management platform to monitor and support mobility management at different temporal and spatial scales. The platform collects, analyses and prepares data for different target groups.

CIM has developed an action plan for sustainable urban mobility, but financial difficulties have so far prevented its rapid implementation. Recently, efforts have been made to promote cycling by providing new infrastructure, new cycle paths have been built and a new free sharing system is being implemented in all 14 municipalities.



Strengths

- Intermunicipal Governance facilitates collaboration in implementing mobility solutions
- Success in On-Demand Taxi service

Weaknesses

- High car dependency
- Limited public transport network
- Financial constraints

Opportunities

- Aging population services
- Cycling infrastructure investment
- Regional mobility management platform

Threats

- Population decline
- Financial sustainability
- Competing transportation modes
- Infrastructure gaps

Challenges & Objectives

There is a lack of multimodal transport interfaces, the public transport network is inadequate, not every community has its own bus station. The service provided does not meet the needs of the population, certain areas are not well served, such as industrial areas. Remote rural areas are not well connected and need to be made more attractive. Today, despite recent efforts, there is a lack of cycling infrastructure and cycling culture in the region. The CIM covers a large area that includes municipalities of very different sizes, from around 6,000 to 100,000 inhabitants, with different connectivity challenges.

Viseu Dão Lafões wants to create attractive conditions in rural areas by improving accessibility and finding flexible mobility solutions that ensure equal access to essential services. CIM wants to establish cycling as a means of transport and actively encourage the population to use bicycles and share the road network with cyclists. It also aims to make town and village centres more people-friendly, greener and with fewer cars.



Mobility measures implemented in the city of Viseu

Learning Needs

- Intelligent and innovative sustainable transport solutions
- Participatory strategies
- Knowledge transfer/educational programmes
- Intermodal network infrastructure

Learning Contributions

- Successful on-demand transportation system throughout the territory that improves inclusivity & accessibility
- Strong intermunicipal cooperation in terms of transport

Integrated Action Plan

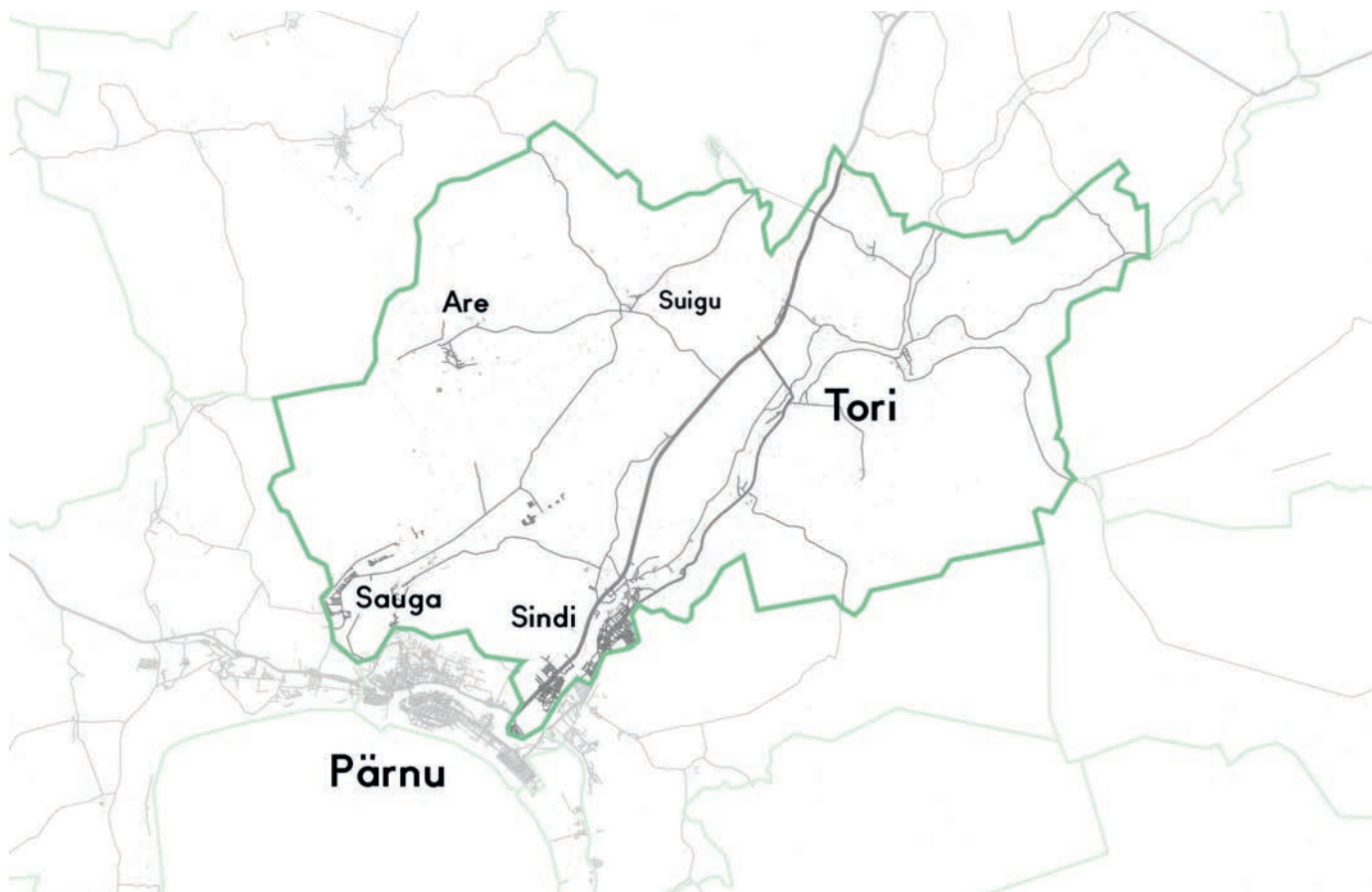
Through its Integrated Action Plan, the CIM wants to create intermodal hubs in the peri-urban areas of Viseu along the main access routes. These hubs should connect multiple modes of sustainable mobility, avoid congestion through car traffic in the centre and reduce the number of trips made by car.

Urbact Local Group

The working group with representatives from the municipalities will be expanded to a larger group that includes representation from NGOs, transport associations, business associations and schools.



Mobility on-demand system Ir-Vir implemented in Viseu



0 5 10 km

Tori Vallavalitsus

Country and Region	Estonia, Pärnu County
Population	12.537
Area	611,11 km ²
Population Density	20,51 inh./km ²
Governance Structure	Municipality

Local Context

Tori is a municipality located in Western Estonia, in the West Estonian lowlands along the Pärnu river, counting 12.537 inhabitants. Its actual borders and large area were the result of the merger of four municipalities in 2017. It is a network based municipality that counts four main centres surrounded by numerous smaller settlements: Sindi, Sauga, Tori and Are. While all of these centres offer different services, the small city of Sindi is the largest centre. The territory is largely rural, except the suburbs bordering the bigger city of Pärnu, which acts as a centre of regional importance and as attraction point for the whole municipality of Tori. Most of the population of the municipality is concentrated up to 15 kilometres away from Pärnu.

The economic activity relies on small companies with few employees, except for a large company in the village of Jõesuu. The largest number of companies are specialized in construction and processing. The job offer in Tori is only sufficient for about half of the working population, resulting in large commuter flows mostly to Pärnu.

Governance, Policies, Strategies & Actions

The Tori municipality development plan pursues the vision of a high quality of life, that Tori becomes the favourite place to live in the Pärnu County. The plan wants to ensure coherent densely populated areas and sustainable peripheral areas through the preservation of the scattered villages. It sets several goals related to mobility and transport. The Pärnu County Climate Plan 2030 also includes the municipality of Tori and is guided by the EU climate policy as well as other strategic documents like Estonia 2035.

In Tori, there is a well-functioning local community involvement system. Civic participation is used in various planning processes. For example, to collect amendment proposals for its development plan, street-corner-meetings with smaller communities on site have been held.



Successful implementation of a bus-stop in Tori

Learning Needs

- Public transport hub infrastructure
- Communication strategies

Learning Contributions

- Newly designed bus stations

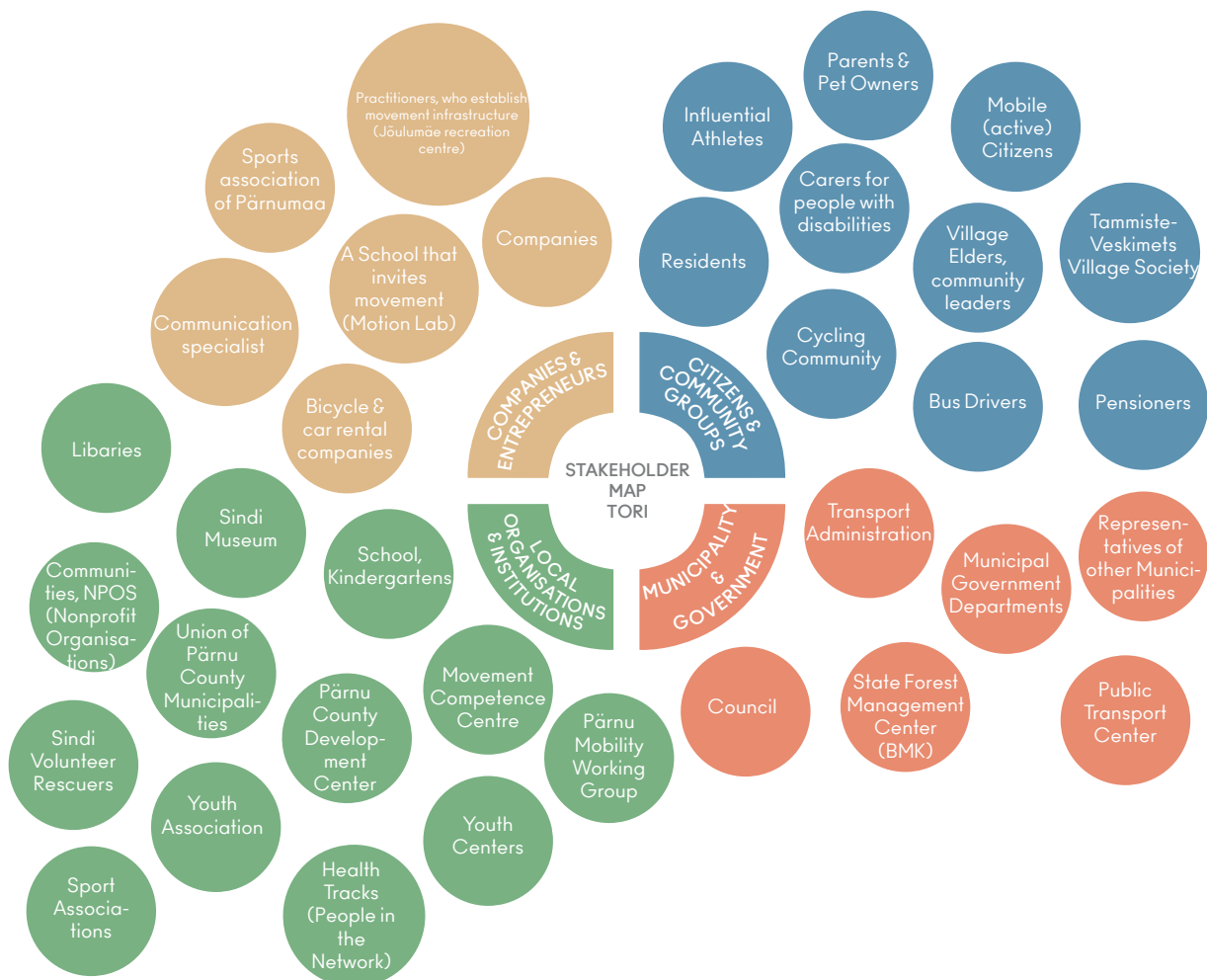
Integrated Action Plan

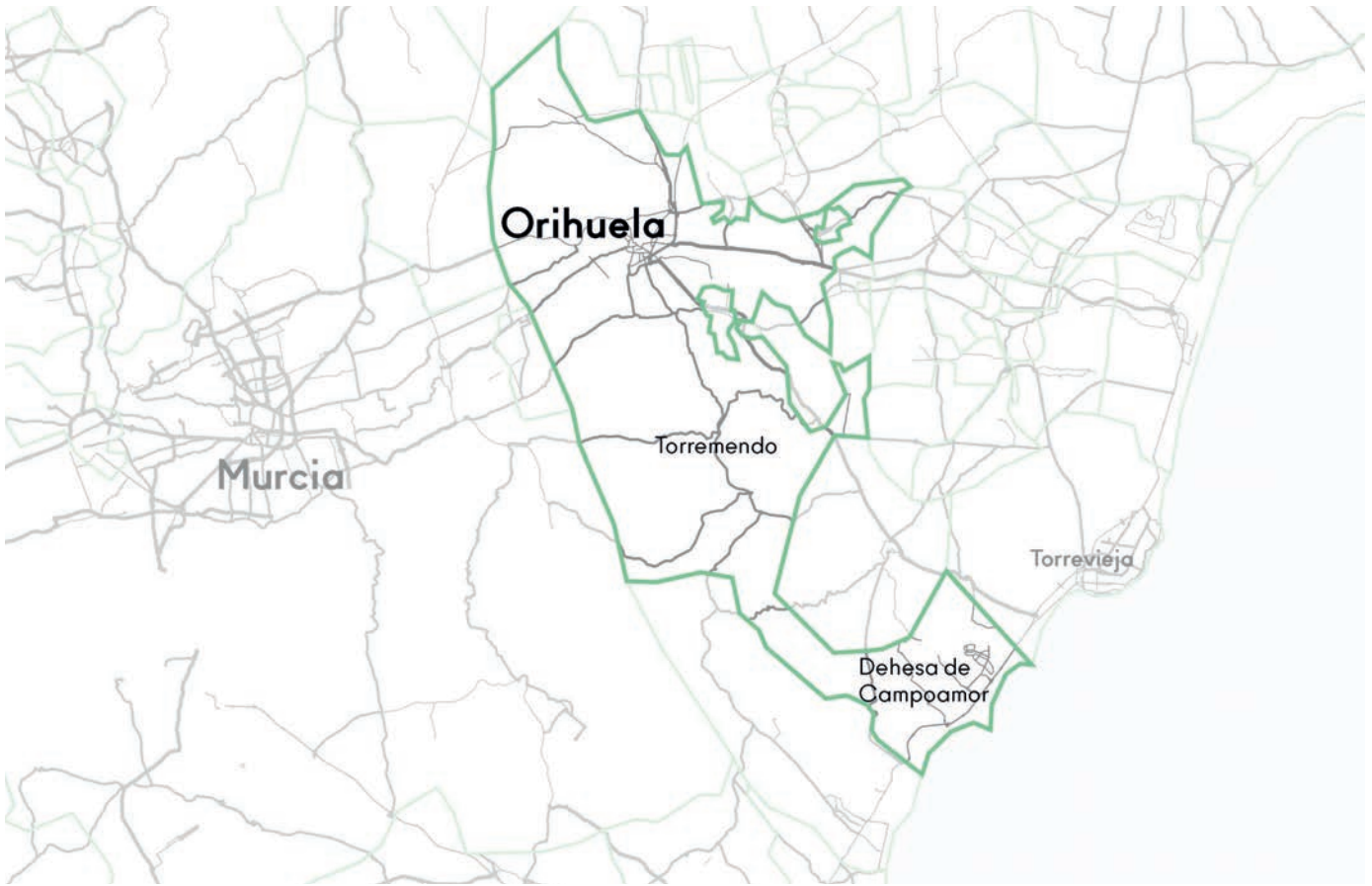
With its Integrated Action Plan, Tori wants to encourage sustainable mobility, reduce the reliance of private cars and modernize the public transport systems through the conduction of a vast mobility survey that serves as a base for proposals and improvements. Possible foci are on the park-and-ride and bike infrastructure.

Urbact Local Group

Tori does not gathered experience in transnational projects so far. The URBACT Local Group will consist of community leaders, representatives of the public transport centre and the neighbouring municipalities (like the city of Pärnu) as well as bike enthusiasts and other groups from civil society.

The coordinator of the group is Kaire Ilus. She is a development advisor at the municipality of Tori, where she prepares and monitors the development plan and leads the main development projects. She has vast experience in project management, marketing and administration, as well as in European Territorial Cooperation projects.





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Orihuela

Country and Region	Spain, Province of Alicante
Population	83.000
Area	365,44 km ²
Population Density	227,12 inh./km ²
Governance Structure	Municipality

Local Context

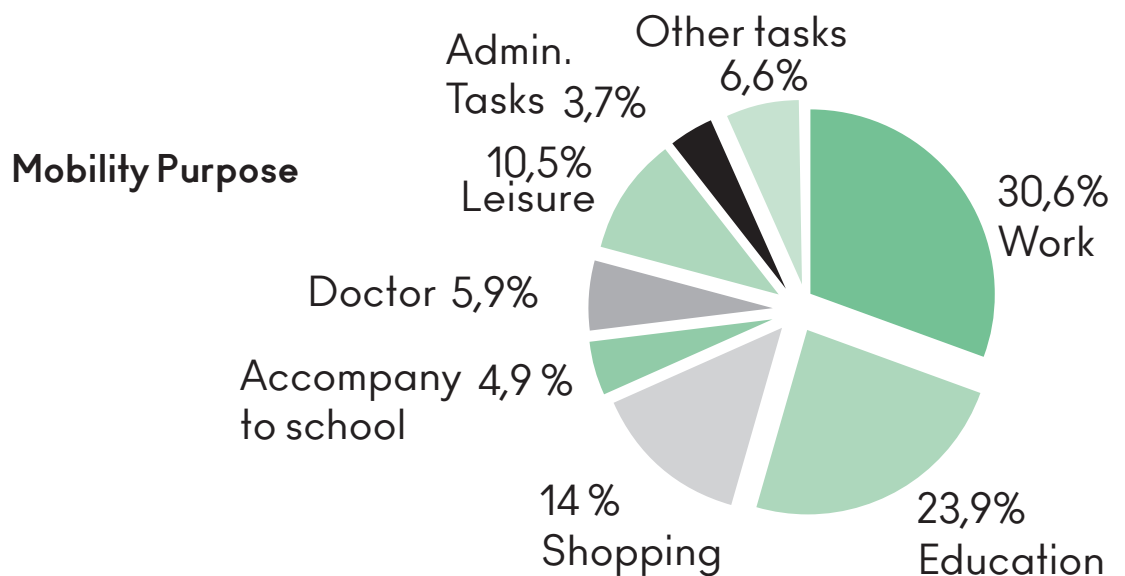
The municipality of Orihuela is the capital of the La Vega Baja del Segura region in the province of Alicante. The urban centre of Orihuela has a population of 33,260 inhabitants, while another 25,780 live in the coastal area of the municipality, known as Dehesa de Campoamor. The municipality also has 22 rural villages with a population of around 25,000. As the main town in the Vega Baja del Segura region, Orihuela provides important services to other smaller municipalities with a total population of 150,000. The Vega Baja del Segura is home to the Huerta de Orihuela (Orihuela Orchard), a unique ecosystem crossed by the River Segura.

The population has fallen by more than 13% in the last 8 years and the region has been hard hit by the economic crisis. The economy is mainly based on services, construction and industry.

Orihuela's public transport network is based on bus and train services: Orihuela has 11 intra-municipal bus lines, 2 urban lines and 23 inter-municipal lines. The intra-municipal lines connect all the districts with the centre of Orihuela, and all the lines depart from the intermodal station in the centre, which combines train and bus services. The inter-municipal lines go up to Alicante and Murcia, connecting the municipalities along the way. Orihuela is well connected to the main cities of Murcia, Elche and Alicante by bus and train from the station in the centre of Orihuela. The town is part of the high-capacity Cercanías rail network, which connects Alicante and Murcia with their functional areas. The majority of trips in Orihuela (57%) are made within the town centre, with more than 30% being made between the rural areas and the town centre.

Governance, Policies, Strategies & Actions

Orihuela has developed a Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan (PMUS) for 2023, which focuses on links between urban and rural areas within the municipality and improving access to services. It also includes measures to promote sustainable agriculture and forestry, innovation in rural areas and entrepreneurship. Orihuela has some experience of citizen participation, with a participatory budgeting platform and an accessibility committee. A Civic Participation Council aims to improve the relationship between municipal institutions and citizens. The city is working with the Miguel Hernández University to make progress in the area of public transparency.



Strengths

- Proximity to Alicante and Elche, connectivity through high capacity rail
- Intermodal Station and established public transport
- Strong offer of services in Orihuela

Weaknesses

- Large number of villages on a vast territory
- Insufficient public transport and sustainable mobility infrastructure
- Population decrease
- Economic challenges

Opportunities

- Collaboration with educational institutions
- Utilization of participatory platforms and committees for community engagement
- Integrated planning of mobility measures

Threats

- Economic challenges
- Demographic challenges

Challenges & Objectives

In recent decades, public space has been redesigned for the use of private cars, resulting in a lack of quality public space. Even today, the high car dependency in Orihuela requires a change towards a more sustainable urban development and a more sustainable mobility system. The main challenge is to connect the small towns to the urban centre, which is difficult given the distances between, for example, the coastal areas and the centre of Orihuela. Public transport does not provide sufficient connections and there is a lack of cycling infrastructure. Rural villages also face demographic challenges, particularly the ageing of the population. As Orihuela is already facing the effects of climate change, such as rising temperatures, strategies must take this into account when developing solutions.

Orihuela aims to work towards a sustainable mobility system that strengthens the links between its different villages and urban communities through quality and accessible public transport and cycling infrastructure.



The historic centre of Orihuela, dominated by the Segura River

Learning Needs

- Smart, technological innovations
- Improve service efficiency
- Energy Transition
- Assessment of needs regarding sustainable mobility

Learning Contributions

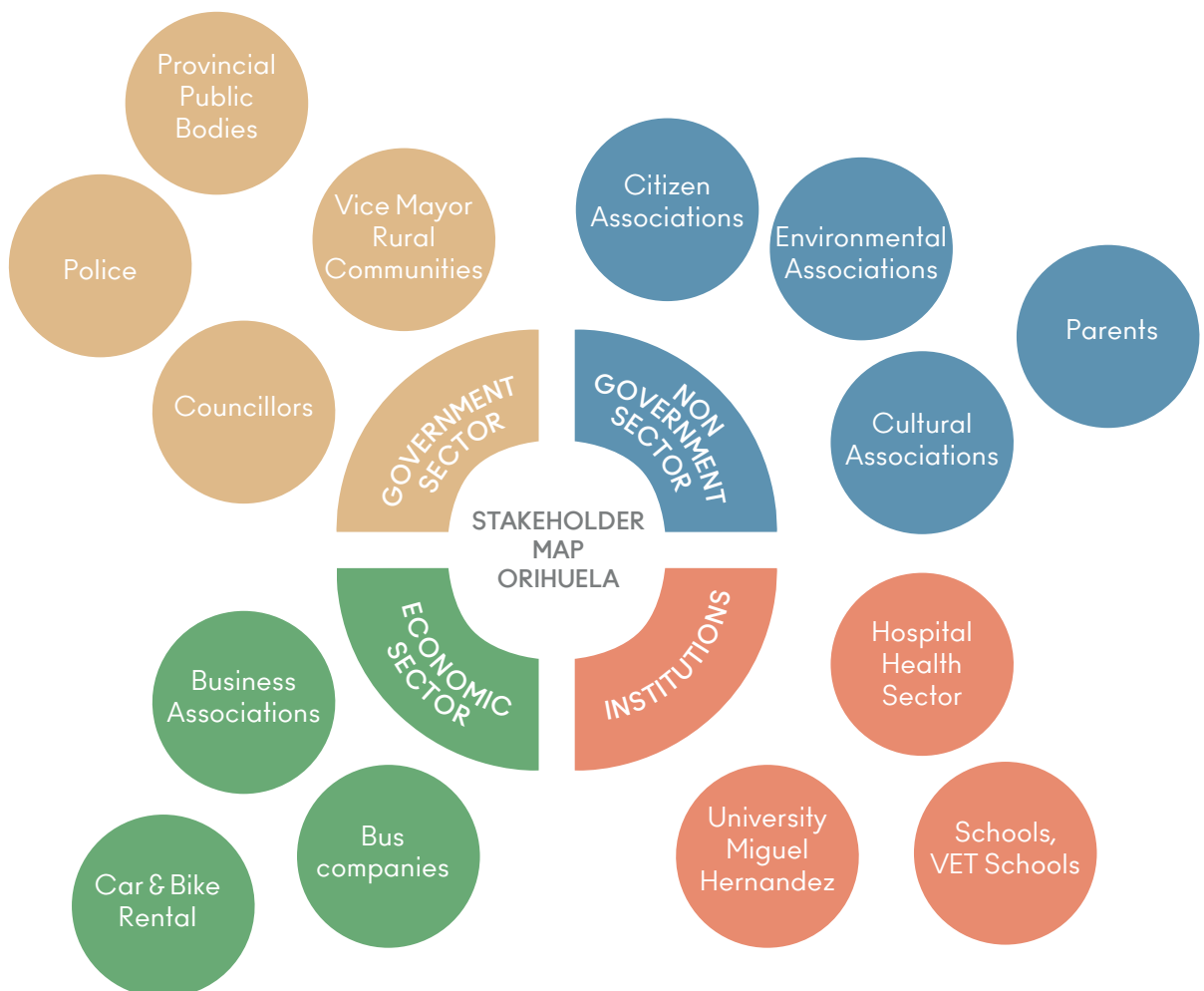
- Sustainable Mobility Plan
- Board of Accessibility
- Transport on demand
- Experience with activities on environmental education
- Civic participation on cultural heritage

Integrated Action Plan

The Integrated Action Plan should address the issue of connectivity between urban and rural areas, with a possible spatial focus on the rural villages of San Bartolomé or Arneva, but in terms of their connectivity with the main centre of Orihuela. The municipality wants to involve existing participation platforms in the development of the IAP.

Urbact Local Group

The Urbact Local Group will be created by taking into account the stakeholders already involved in other municipal initiatives, such as the Accessibility Committee and the Urban Agenda. The coordinator is likely to be the deputy mayor of Orihuela. Orihuela does not have much experience in projects at EU level.





Ennis Municipal District

Clare County Council

Country and Region	Ireland, Province of Munster
Population	33.778
Area	173,09 km ²
Population Density	195,14 inh./km ²
Governance Structure	Municipal District

Local Context

Ennis, located in County Clare, is a historically significant town functioning as a central hub with essential service offerings. The historic town center and public spaces contribute to its cultural heritage. The town exhibits a concentration of schools, commercial activities, and high-quality public spaces. Ennis features a compact layout, enabling major retail, employment, and education accessibility within a 15–20-minute walk. The town’s relatively flat topography promotes pedestrian mobility, accommodating individuals with varying physical capabilities.

Despite these strengths, Ennis faces mobility challenges. While the pedestrian network is well-established in the town center, connectivity to suburban and rural areas is limited. Ongoing efforts are underway to improve local bus services, addressing the current gaps in public transportation. Cycling infrastructure in Ennis is inconsistent, demanding attention for more sustainable transport modes. The prevalence of households owning multiple cars (47%) underscores the dominance of private vehicles in the area. The train station connecting to Galway and Limerick contributes to regional connectivity. Ennis, recognized for cleanliness and friendliness, is Ireland’s nomination for the 2023 International Communities in Bloom competition. Located 20 minutes from Shannon Airport, Ennis benefits from regular bus services, enhancing regional accessibility. Prioritizing sustainable mobility, strengthening connectivity, and refining cycling infrastructure are essential components in shaping Ennis’s urban resilience and inclusivity.

Governance, Policies, Strategies & Actions

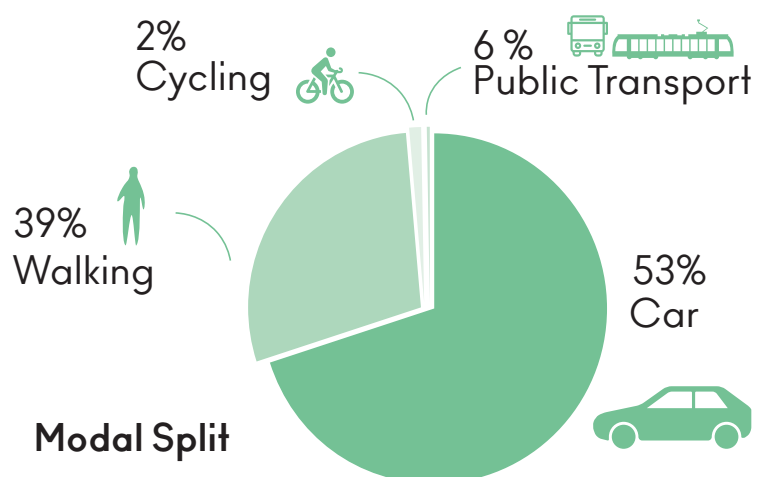
Ennis, in its 2025 vision, is committed to enhancing its urban mobility and public spaces. The implementation of a new town bus service is underway, targeting significant coverage for residents. The goal is to provide a bus stop within 400m for 70% of residents and within 800m for 90% of them, providing service from Monday to Sunday for 18 hours.

A proactive approach to cycling infrastructure is evident, with a preliminary design phase supported by secured funding from the National Transport Authority. Simultaneously, Ennis utilizes funds from the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund to enhance city center accessibility. This involves widened footpaths, shared surface treatments, and improved amenities through high-quality paving, seating, tree planting, street lighting, and signage.

Ennis has an age-friendly town strategy, focusing on footpath enhancements, pedestrian crossings, age-friendly seating, parking improvements, extended crossing times, and enhanced accessibility to recreational areas. The implementation of a digital system for disability parking further supports inclusivity.

Decisions on public space improvements are guided by a walkability study, ensuring targeted enhancements. Ennis actively manages parking and enforces speed limits to streamline urban mobility.

The Southern Regional Assembly’s 10 Minute Towns Accessibility Framework Report influences Ennis’s urban planning. The objective is to ensure essential services are within a 10-minute walk, cycle, or accessible by public transport. Ennis employs varied structures, including an online consultation platform, statutory consultations, and town team structures, fostering community participation and collaboration in shaping its urban landscape.



Strengths

- Favourable topography
- Government support for sustainable mobility
- Community engagement
- Increasing populations
- Bus and Rail Station
- Connections via local Airport

Weaknesses

- Car dominance
- Lack of public transportation with high frequency
- Inconsistent bike network
- Financial situation
- Climate conditions

Opportunities

- New Town Bus service with Park and Ride opportunities
- Cycling infrastructure in progress
- Proposed Greenway
- Active travel funding
- Permeability measures to reduce walking times

Threats

- Centralised funding models
- Car culture
- Lack of safety for cyclists
- Perceived lack of public parking

Challenges & Objectives

The rural areas in Ennis faces a lack of viable alternatives to car use, which is a significant barrier to diversifying transport modes and reducing dependence on private cars. In addition, the existing cycling infrastructure is characterised by fragmentation and safety concerns, which discourage its adoption as a viable mode of transport.

The climatic conditions of the region, characterised by a wet and windy climate, are an additional barrier to active mobility. Unfavourable weather conditions act as a deterrent and hinder the promotion of walking and cycling as viable alternatives. Public transport faces connectivity challenges that may limit its effectiveness and accessibility.

Sustaining participation in initiatives to promote sustainable mobility is an ongoing challenge. Despite recognising the benefits of active mobility, only 2% of the population choose to cycle to work or school, highlighting the impact of inconsistent infrastructure on adoption rates. In addition, the pedestrian unfriendliness of the link between the city centre and the railway station makes it more difficult to improve overall walkability.

Addressing these challenges, Ennis wants to promote active mobility and its new attractive public transport offers and find solutions to engage its community on the path towards sustainable urban-rural linkages. As a County seat and important regional centre, accessibility to the city is important for an inclusive development.



The historic centre of Ennis and its natural assets

Learning Needs

- Solutions for attractive and safe active mobility infrastructure

Learning Contributions

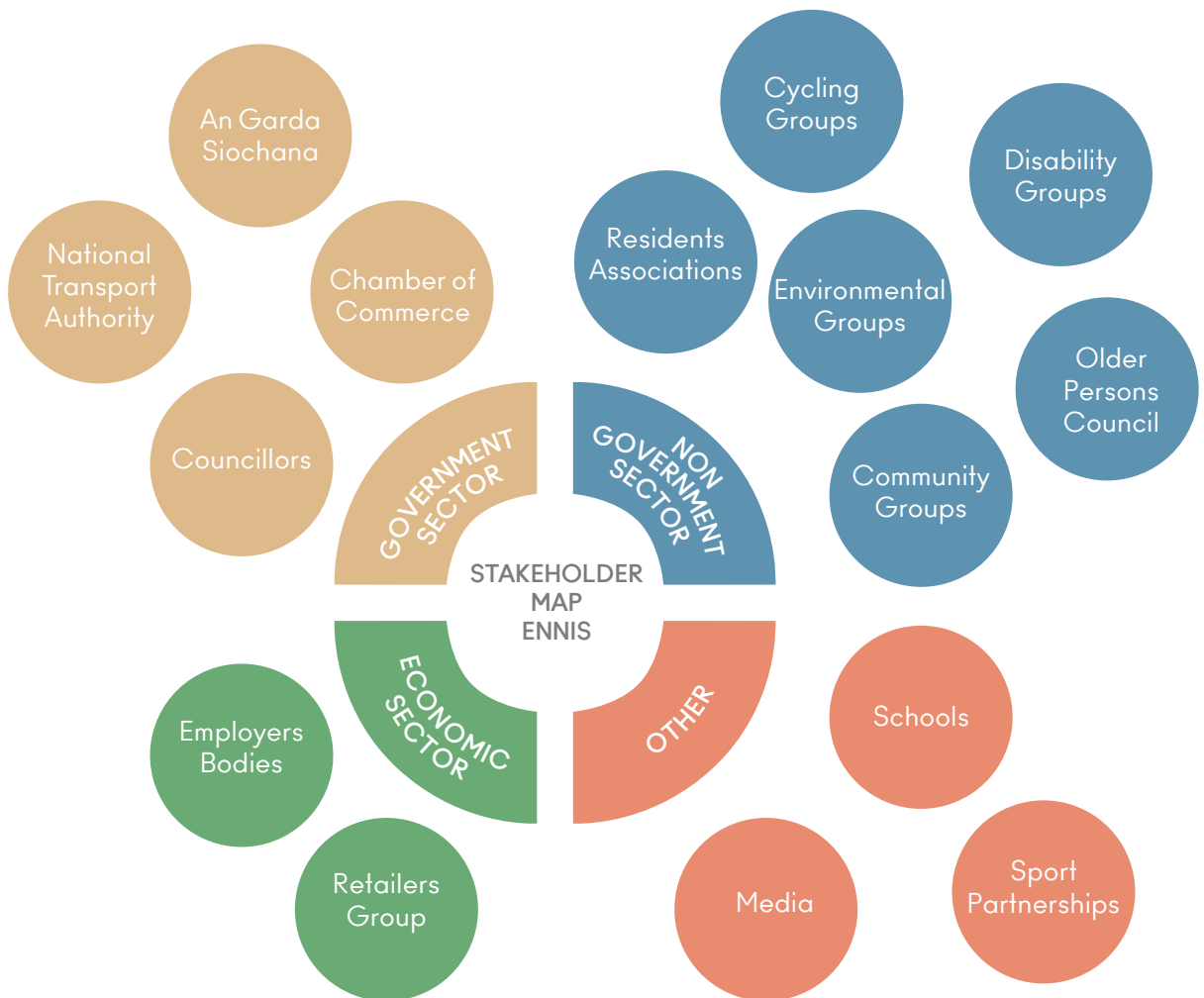
- Newly planned bus network
- Age-friendly town strategy

Integrated Action Plan

Possible foci of the Integrated Action Plan are the introduction of permeability measures in line with the 10-minute town, the master planning of an intermodal mobility hub, the introduction of a bike share scheme, or the design of Park and Stride sites. Other priorities are the creation of stakeholder engagement infrastructure and effective communication strategies.

Urbact Local Group

The Urbact Local Group will aim to include members from various groups of stakeholders (Older Persons Council, Chamber of Commerce, National Transport Authority, Residents Associations, Schools, ...). It is possible to build on the existing group for the area-based transportation assessment. Leonore O’Neill will be the coordinator of the ULG. She has experience in leading multi-disciplinary and cross-sectoral groups in Ennis as proved in previous projects (Ennis Age Friendly Town Team, Covid-19 Mobility Plan).





Municipality of Berane

Country and Region	Montenegro
Population	28.488
Area	506,2 km ²
Population Density	56,27 inh./km ²
Governance Structure	Municipality

Local Context

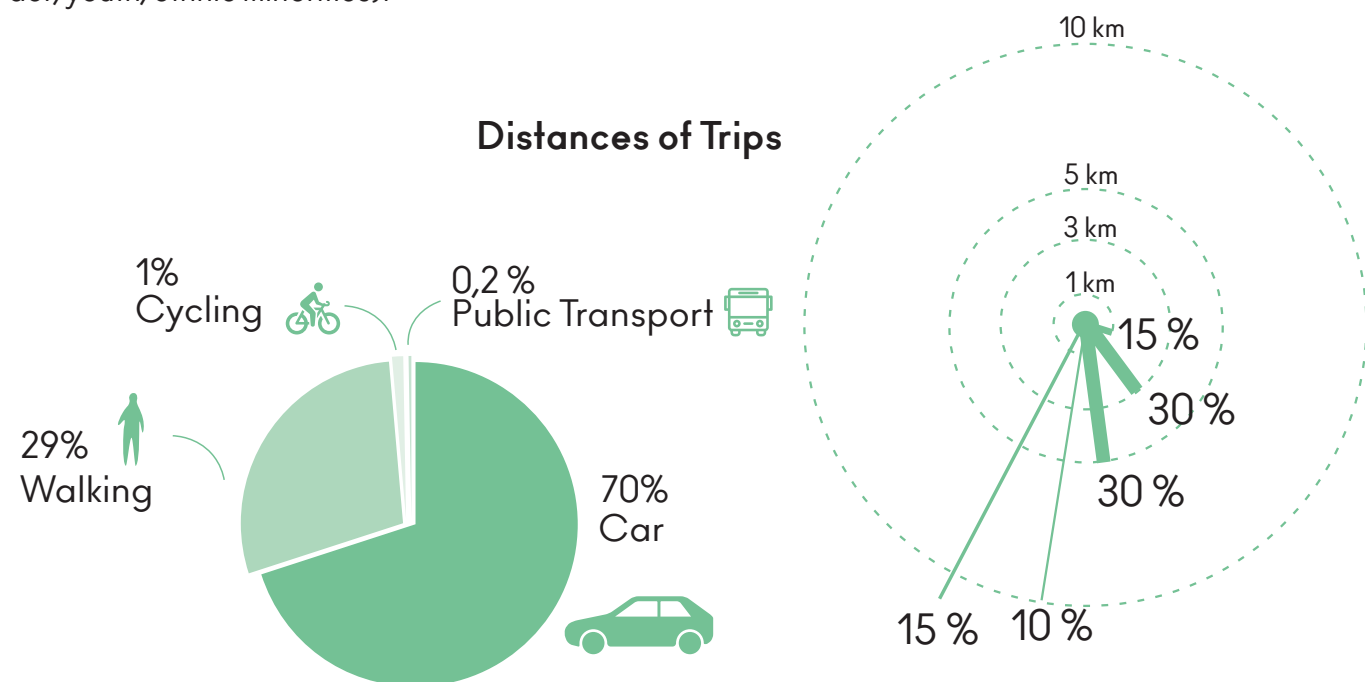
The municipality of Berane is located in the north-east of Montenegro, on the Lim River in the Beran Basin. The capital of Montenegro, Podgorica, is 143 kilometres away. The nearest railway is 36 km away (Bijelo Polje), and the airport of Berane is currently not in operation. Berane has a population of 28,488, of which 39% live in the town centre and 46% in the suburbs. About 20.5% of the population is aged between 0-14 years. The population is decreasing due to emigration. In total, 5218 people were employed in Berane. The main industry is wood processing. Tourism also increased in the year before the Covid-19 pandemic. The number of unemployed is also high (4932), and a large proportion of them suffer from long-term unemployment (almost 80%).

The commune is divided into 34 cadastral districts and has 46 settlements, most of which are rural. Today, there is only one bus line, and the main means of public transport is the car taxi. In the centre of Berane there are primary and secondary schools, administrative services and medical facilities (health centre and hospital), as well as a market and shops. Every day, about 3,300 inhabitants commute to the city from the suburbs and rural areas without public transport, except for car taxis. Overall, 70% of trips are made by car. Due to the relatively short distances, walking is also a popular means of transport (29%). There is currently no bicycle network.

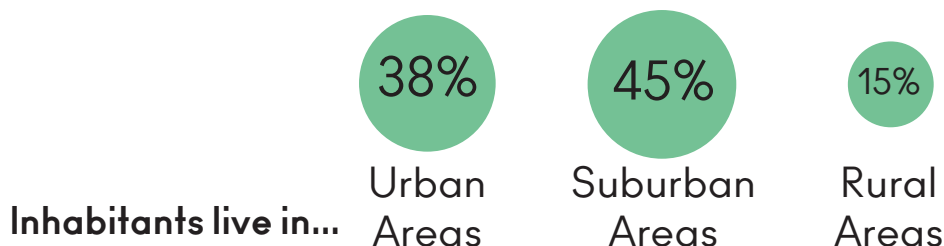
Governance, Policies, Strategies & Actions

The municipality has not drawn up a plan dealing directly with sustainable mobility, but it has adopted certain decisions on traffic regulation, such as a general speed limit or quiet zones. Parking Service Berane, a private company in public ownership, manages the public car parks and parking fees. The road network is in good condition.

The Spatial Development Plan (PUP) formulates the general use of space, which is elaborated in various Detailed Urban Plans (DUP). There are also local policies on other areas of action, such as a local biodiversity action plan and several action plans on equal opportunities and social inclusion (gender, youth, ethnic minorities).



Modal Split



Strengths

- City size, location of the core, accessibility by foot
- Good Planning documentation

Weaknesses

- Few financial & personal resources
- Lack of infrastructure for active mobility
- Inaccessibility for people with disabilities
- Lack of public transportation

Opportunities

- EU funding
- Connection of suburban areas by foot
- Development of tourism
- Arrangement of the coastal area

Threats

- Financial situation
- Inconsistent legal regulation in the field of public transport

Challenges & Objectives

There is a lack of public transport: out of 9 planned bus lines, only one is currently in operation. The others are not economically viable for private companies. The main bus station for intercity connections is currently out of service due to the bankruptcy of the operating company, and since then there has only been a temporary stop. Since 2013, there has been a massive increase in the number of private cars, which has risen by 350%. There is a lack of pedestrian and cycling infrastructure along the urban-rural corridors. Public spaces and parks need to be improved. The current infrastructure is not accessible to people with disabilities. In general, there is a lack of financial and human resources in the municipality. 60% of the population lives in suburban or rural areas, where sustainable mobility infrastructure needs to be improved.

The municipality aims to promote walking and cycling, in particular, and to establish walking as the main mode of transport, based on favourable spatial conditions. By creating good conditions for soft mobility and public transport, it aims to reduce the use of cars.



The riverfront and historic centre of Berane

Learning Needs

- Awareness raising campaigns
- Knowledge transfer and innovation programmes and climate change impacts
- Innovative ways to include the wider public in policy decisions

Learning Contributions

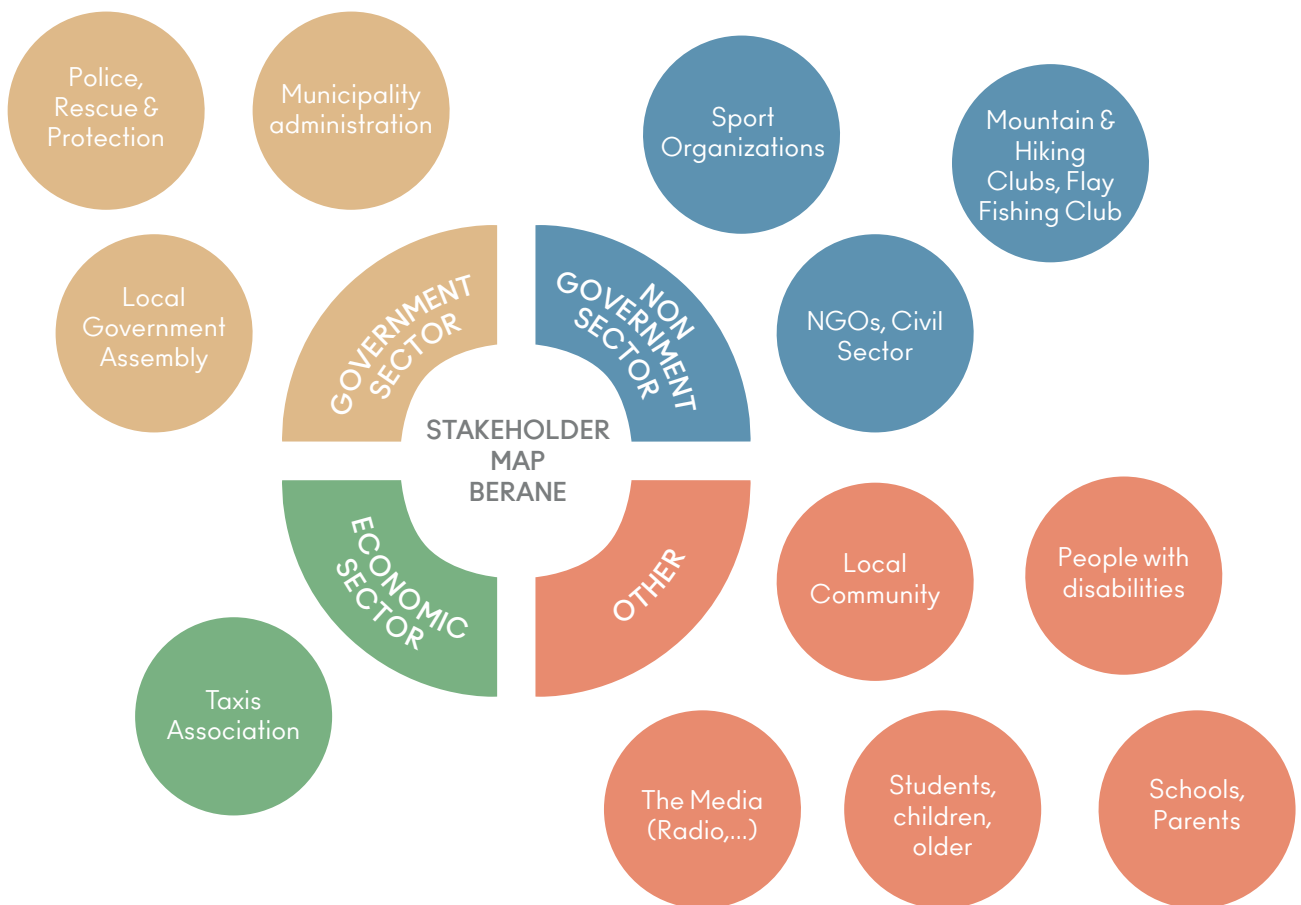
- Working Groups for different action plans & strategies
- Implementation of projects in waste management & energy efficiency

Integrated Action Plan

The spatial focus of the Integrated Action Plan is probably set on the arrangement of the left bank of the Lim River, where Berane aims to work towards its goals to strategically plan sustainable mobility, create attractive biking and walking conditions and revitalize public transport.

Urbact Local Group

The Secretariat for social activities of the Municipality has a civil service employee for cooperation with local communities. The different concerned Secretariats will also be involved in the process. The coordinator of the Urbact Local Group is Danka Golubovi from the Secretariat for economy, development and investments. She is experienced with EU funding projects and the coordination of local groups for local strategy plans. As Berane is located in an EU candidate country, it expects to strongly profit from the exchange within the ECONNECTING network.







3

Synthesis, Methodology & Roadmap

3.1 Synthesis

ECONNECTING is an Action Planning Network (APN) comprising diverse cities and regions, marked by **significant variations in size and demographic development**. The participating entities encompass a spectrum of urban landscapes – some characterized by population decline, others witnessing growth. Within this dynamic framework, certain **regions host shrinking villages adjacent with growing cities within the same municipal boundaries**. There is a **tendency that the villages are losing population and the hub-cities grow**.

The governance structure within ECONNECTING partners is notably diverse. For instance, two key partners, Faenza and Viseu, have established a union and agency of municipalities. This joint entity governs over specific domains, including mobility and urban planning. In contrast, the remaining partners consist of a mix of smaller and larger municipalities that currently lack substantial collaborative initiatives with neighboring counterparts.

This disparity in governance structures and collaborative practices among partner municipalities underscores the **unique challenges and opportunities inherent** in the network. The spectrum of urban dynamics and governance models within ECONNECTING offers a rich ground for collaborative exploration and the development of innovative solutions, particularly in the realms of mobility and urban planning.

3.1.1 Common Challenges

Insufficient, poor, or nonexistent public transportation networks remain a significant obstacle for the ECONNECTING partners. This issue not only contributes to **car dependency** but also hampers the **accessibility of alternative modes of transportation**, reinforcing the prevailing **car culture**. The **dominance of car infrastructure** poses a dual challenge, making it difficult to shift societal preferences away from private vehicles and **impeding the development of sustainable transportation solutions**.

Moreover, the **lack of safe cycling and pedestrian infrastructure** further limits the options for active mobility, discouraging people from adopting healthier and environmentally friendly modes of transportation. This issue is particularly pronounced in suburban and rural areas, where **inadequate infrastructure exacerbates connectivity challenges between settlements**. Improving cycling and pedestrian pathways is therefore crucial for creating a more sustainable and accessible transportation network.

The **dispersed population and settlements** characteristic of the ECONNECTING partners compound these challenges. The **scattered nature of communities** not only makes it difficult to implement efficient public transportation systems but also results in **unequal access to essential services** in rural areas. This inequality fosters a sense of isolation among residents and underscores the **need for comprehensive and inclusive solutions that address the unique needs of rural communities**.

Participation and community engagement also emerge as critical aspects in addressing these challenges. The **lack of active involvement from residents in decision-making processes** related to transportation infrastructure can hinder the successful implementation of initiatives. Therefore, promoting community participation is vital to ensure that the solutions implemented are tailored to the specific needs and preferences of the local population.

In addition, the partners recognize the importance of addressing **insufficient community participation, fostering engagement as well as the challenges of the digital transition** and involving residents in the **planning and implementation of mobility solutions**. By doing so, the ECONNECTING partners aim to create a more inclusive and sustainable urban and rural development that actively involves and benefits the communities it serves.

3.1.2 Common Objectives

The ECONNECTING Action Planning Network is committed to a comprehensive set of objectives, strategically designed to address the multifaceted challenges prevalent in its partner cities, towns and regions. These objectives collectively aim to cultivate sustainable mobility, bolster accessibility, and foster inclusive urban and rural development. The ECONNECTING APN aspires to cultivate a sustainable, inclusive, and resilient mobility ecosystem that contributes to the well-being and connectedness of urban and rural communities alike.

Implementing and Improving Green Public Transport Infrastructure

Forge eco-friendly public transportation solutions to mitigate carbon emissions and alleviate reliance on private vehicles. Upgrade existing networks to enhance efficiency, coverage, and accessibility across diverse geographies.

Improving Cycling and Pedestrian Infrastructures

Enhance and expand cycling and pedestrian pathways, promoting active mobility. Ensure safety and connectivity to encourage sustainable and healthier transportation alternatives.

Raising Awareness for Active Mobility

Initiate awareness campaigns to educate the public on the benefits of active mobility, fostering a cultural shift towards healthier and environmentally friendly transportation choices. Collaborate with local communities, schools, and businesses to instill a culture of active transportation.

Improving Connectivity Between Urban Centres and Rural Settlements

Develop solutions that bridge transportation gaps between urban centers and remote rural settlements. Facilitate seamless travel options to enhance social and economic connections between different regions.

Ensuring Equal Access to Services

Identify and address service access disparities in rural communities, ensuring equitable access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and employment. Implement transportation solutions that consider the unique needs of diverse communities.

Development of Innovative Mobility Services

Promote research and development initiatives to create innovative mobility services tailored to the specific needs of partner regions. Integrate cutting-edge technologies and digital solutions to enhance transportation efficiency and sustainability.

Creation of Attractive, Accessible Public Spaces

Design and implement aesthetically pleasing, user-friendly, and accessible public spaces. Foster community engagement in the planning and design of public spaces to ensure alignment with diverse population needs.

Engaging the Population in Development Processes

Establish platforms for community participation in decision-making processes related to transportation and urban development. Encourage active involvement in shaping the vision and implementation of mobility solutions, ensuring a bottom-up approach that reflects local aspirations and priorities and is adapted to the ongoing digital transformation.

3.1.3 Common Learning Needs

The common learning needs identified by the ECONNECTING project encompass a range of crucial areas, they collectively reflect the multidimensional challenges faced by the project partners in creating a more sustainable, accessible, and inclusive transportation and urban development framework.

Communication and Participation Strategies

Understanding and implementing effective communication and participation strategies to actively involve the local population in decision-making processes, ensuring their perspectives and needs are considered in the development initiatives. Develop strategies that actively address challenges of the ongoing digital transformation of our society.

Traffic Management Strategies

Gaining knowledge and skills in traffic management strategies to address the challenges associated with transportation, mitigate congestion, and optimize the flow of traffic within urban and rural areas.

Innovative Transport Solutions

Exploring and adopting innovative transport solutions that can effectively connect scattered settlements, overcome geographical challenges, enhance overall accessibility and include digital solutions.

Network Planning and Design

Developing expertise in network planning and design for transportation systems, including road networks, public transit routes, and infrastructure layout, to optimize connectivity and efficiency.

Implementation of Intermodal Infrastructure

Learning the intricacies of implementing intermodal infrastructure, which involves integrating various modes of transportation seamlessly to provide more efficient and sustainable transportation solutions.

Planning of Flexible Transportation Systems

Understanding and incorporating flexibility into transportation system planning to adapt to evolving needs, technological advancements, and changing population patterns over time.

Review of Transportation Programs

Conducting comprehensive reviews of existing transportation programs to assess their effectiveness, identify areas for improvement, and ensure alignment with sustainability and inclusivity goals.

Lively City Centres

Creating lively, accessible and diverse centres in regional hub cities to create attractive centres that offer necessary services to the population in the functional area.



Learning	30-minutes Territories		Accessible and Welcoming Cities	
	Contributions	Needs	Contributions	Needs
Faenza	Sustainable Urban Mobility Plan developed by the six municipalities of URF	Concepts for sustainable urban-rural linkages	/	/
Ormož	Construction of cycling routes	Traffic management strategies	Organized transport for elderly people, transport for schoolchildren	/
Nagykálló	/	Flexible public transportation concepts, organized transport with limited means	/	/
West Mani	New bike lanes along the coastal front, subsidized taxi-service for remote villages	Traffic management strategies, network planning	SEATRAC service offers sea access to people with disabilities, accessibility consultations	/
Viseu Dão Lafões	Flexible on-demand transportation service throughout the territory	Infrastructure for active mobility, Improvement of network design, traffic management strategies	/	/
Tori	Newly designed bus stations	Intelligent solutions to connect scattered settlements	/	/
Orihuela	Sustainable Mobility Plan, transport on demand	Smart technological innovations to improve service efficiency	Accessibility plan, strong laws regarding accessibility	/
Ennis	Newly planned bus network	Safe active mobility infrastructure	Age-friendly town strategy, digital facilitation of disability parking	/
Berane	/	Solutions for sustainable mobility with limited means and urban-rural connectivity	/	Solutions for adaptation of infrastructure suitable for people with disabilities

	Green Community		Good Governance		
	Contributions	Needs	Contributions	Needs	Learning
	Sustainable mobility projects in collaboration with NGOs (Piedibus, BiketoWork,...)	/	Model of strong inter-municipal collaboration	/	Faenza
	Bike rental system	Effective communication and education strategies	Cooperation with municipalities along the Drava for cycling infrastructure	/	Ormož
	/	Attraction strategy for sustainable mobility solutions & start-ups Local energy communities	/	Involving young people in participatory decision making	Nagykálló
	/	/	/	/	West Mani
	/	Knowledge transfer and educational programmes	Strong inter-municipal cooperation on mobility	Participatory strategies for decision-making	Viseu Dão Lafões
	Well-functioning community involvement system	/	/	/	Tori
	Experience with activities on environmental education	Local solutions for the energy transition	Civic participation on cultural heritage, Urban Agenda project	Collaboration with local and regional stakeholders	Orihuela
	/	/	/	/	Ennis
	Projects in waste management and energy efficiency	Awareness raising campaigns for sustainable mobility, knowledge transfer	Model of working groups for different action plans & strategies	Innovative ways to include the wider public in decisions	Berane

3.1.3 Network topics related to the IAP

30-Minute Territories and Humanized Sustainable Mobility: ECONNECTING envisions the establishment of „30-minute territories,“ where essential services, workplaces, and recreational spaces are conveniently accessible within a 30-minute radius, minimizing environmental impact.

For us matters:

- Explore business models for busses
- Explore taxi on demand as a service
- Including private sectors partnerships for urban development
- Regenerate vibrant towns and villages
- Create hubs in a rural-urban and/or metropolitan context
- Contribute to hubs with public space design

Green Community: ECONNECTING’s mission centers on establishing green communities that prioritize environmental sustainability through initiatives such as community gardens and tree-lined streets.

For us matters:

- Explore greening measures of villages and towns
- Involve cities in community building efforts
- Explore placemaking and tactical urbanism measures
- Explore low to zero-carbon urban development options

Accessible and Welcoming Cities: ECONNECTING prioritizes the development of inclusive and accessible cities, aiming to create environments that welcome everyone and provide equal opportunities.

For us matters:

- Gender balanced urban development, caring service for all
- Design complementary Software and Orgware measures for the use public spaces
- Activate empty buildings and urban voids for community uses
- Create inclusive strategies for villages and towns
- Job-creation for all

Good Governance: Recognizing the important role of governance in sustainable development, ECONNECTING advocates for the implementation of good governance practices across participating cities and city unions.

For us matters:

- Improve and create multilevel governance structure for urban and regional development
- Just split of municipal budgets to villages and towns
- Co-create solutions with the communities
- Decentralize governmental services to villages and towns
- Explore participatory budgeting
- Create inclusive and multisectoral urban/regional development plans that include mobility measures

Complementary subtopics are:

Business Models for Sustainable Mobility Projects

Developing sustainable business models for mobility projects involves more than just financial considerations; it incorporates a broader framework that intertwines **economic viability with social and environmental responsibility**. In addition to **designing an efficient pricing system**, these models should include **digital solutions while being rooted in inclusivity strategies to ensure that the benefits of sustainable mobility are accessible to diverse populations**. For instance, integrating a taxi-on-demand system can serve as an alternative to traditional public transportation, offering flexibility and convenience. However, determining when a bus is a better option than a taxi-on-demand involves assessing factors such as the volume of commuters, traffic patterns, and overall efficiency. This **strategic decision-making process goes beyond profit margins, encompassing social impact and inclusivity**. By tailoring business models to consider the unique needs of different demographics, sustainable mobility projects can contribute not only to environmental conservation but also to social progress, creating transportation solutions that are both economically viable and inclusive.

Gender-balanced Urban Development

Gender-balanced urban development entails the creation of complementary inclusiveness strategies to foster **a fair and equitable environment for both girls and women in rural areas**. This approach seeks to ensure that integrated actions **provide equal opportunities for individuals of all genders**. The goal is to break down existing barriers and challenges that may disproportionately affect women and girls, facilitating their active participation in various aspects of urban life. This involves not only economic considerations but also the **provision of social and educational opportunities**. By promoting **job opportunities for all, irrespective of gender**, gender-balanced urban development aims to **dismantle traditional gender roles and empower individuals to contribute meaningfully to the growth and prosperity of their communities**. The emphasis on inclusiveness signifies a commitment to creating a cityscape where everyone, regardless of gender, can thrive, ensuring that the benefits of urban development are shared by the entire community.

Funding Strategies for Integrated Urban Development

Funding strategies for integrated urban development often leverage various financial instruments, with a prominent focus on tapping into EU funds, including the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), among other available opportunities. The **utilization of EU funds is a crucial pillar in supporting comprehensive urban development initiatives**. These funds, often distributed through multi-year programs, provide a **significant resource pool for projects that aim to enhance sustainability, resilience, and inclusivity in urban areas**. The Horizon framework, part of the EU's research and innovation initiatives, further complements urban development efforts by fostering innovation and future-oriented solutions. Integrated urban development, which addresses economic, social, and environmental aspects, aligns with the EU's strategic objectives for sustainable growth. By **strategically navigating and accessing EU funds**, **cities and regions can not only secure financial support but also benefit from the knowledge exchange and collaborative networks** facilitated by these funding mechanisms, contributing to a holistic and forward-looking urban landscape.

For the complimentary sub-topics, ECONNECTING will engage ad-hoc experts.



3.2 Methodology & Roadmap

3.2.1 The Action Planning Process

The innovative planning process within the ECONNECTING Action Planning Network is characterized by a **dialogue-oriented approach, ultimately guiding the development of Integrated Action Plans**. This process adheres to the URBACT methodology, a framework founded on participatory tools and **co-creation methodologies that actively involve a diverse array of stakeholders** in the planning process. By fostering collaboration and inclusivity, the methodology ensures that the **perspectives and needs of various stakeholders, including local communities and authorities, are taken into account**. The planning process embraces **experimentation and testing of novel tools**, seeking to explore the efficacy of transit-oriented development within the context of rural-urban linkages. This approach enables the project to adapt and refine strategies based on real-world experimentation. Moreover, the planning **integrates mobility planning with urban planning and strategic management**, fostering synergy between these domains. This holistic approach not only enhances the efficiency of the planning process but also facilitates the expedited implementation of crucial investments for the ECONNECTING partner cities, ensuring a swift and comprehensive approach to sustainable urban and rural development.

As mentioned, the ECONNECTING network has **identified four thematic pillars** (30-Minutes Territories, Green Community, Accessible and Welcoming Cities, Good Governance). In addition, **three complementary subtopics** were defined (Business Models for Sustainable Mobility Projects, Gender-balanced Urban Development and Funding Strategies for Integrated Urban Development). These topics are aligned with URBACT IV's cross-cutting principles and will thematically guide the transnational meetings and accompany the journey towards the individual Integrated Action Plans.



Site visit in Faenza

3.2.2 Roadmap

The networks journey is structured by the URBACT methodology in four phases, the URBACT Toolbox will be used in each step of the process to ensure a continuous progress towards nine final Integrated Action Plans. The nine transnational meetings will support a regular exchange throughout the process and ensure through their thematic foci that all topics will be reflected in the partners IAPs.

Activation

The first phase dedicated to the activation of the network will be concluded with the present Baseline Study & Roadmap and the Communication Plan of the network. During this phase, project partners have started analysing and **identifying** problems in their **local context** with methods from the URBACT-Toolbox (Problem Tree, SWOT) and set up the Urbact Local Group (Stakeholder Mapping, Power/Interest Analysis). Partners start developing an **overall vision**.

Action Planning

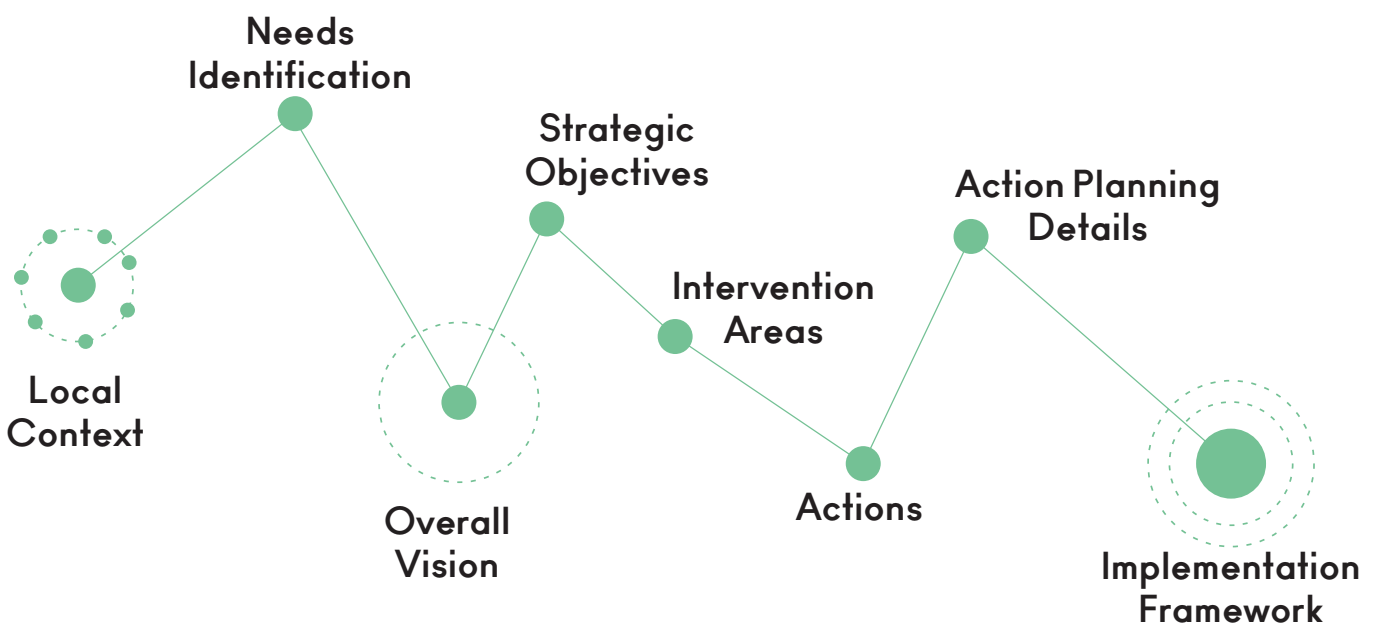
This phase is followed by the Action Planning phase, that focuses on developing an integrated approach through visioning, analysing problems, defining challenges and **strategic objectives**, defining **intervention areas**, and refining and testing actions. Within this phase, drafts of the Integrated Action Plans will be elaborated and assessed. This stage of the APN will be concluded by a midterm review that focuses on exchanging feedback and knowledge on the nine IAPs. Again, the URBACT Toolbox will support these steps in concretizing the **Action Planning Details** through different tools (Visioning, Problems & Solutions Table, Action Table, Integration Assessment Grid, Four C's). The development of the Action Plans will be supported by expert inputs. Peer-review feedback will strengthen the learning exchange between partners.

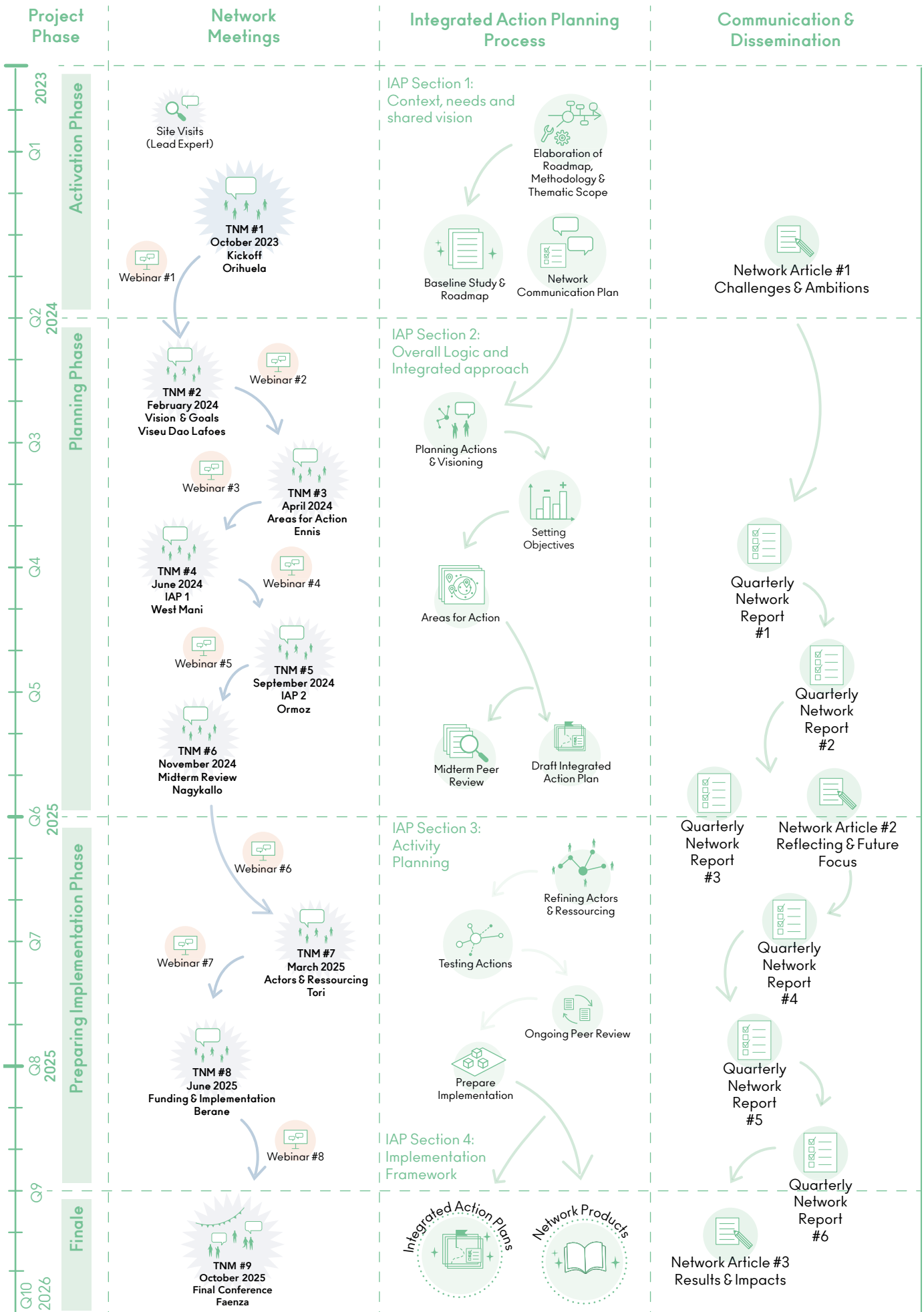
Preparing Implementation

The Preparing Implementation stage that follows, serves to test **actions** and further develop and finalise the IAPs, supported by expert inputs and URBACT-Tools (Implementation Capabilities Grid, iPestle method, Self-Assessment of IAPs). First **actions** are tested and the **implementation framework** of the IAP is defined.

Final Stage

The final IAPs will be jointly presented in a final meeting hosted by the Lead Partner in the final stage of the project, where results will be shared, and future possibilities evoked. This marks the end of the 31-months-long APN period.





3.2.3 Meetings

Each network partner will host a transnational meeting of 2-3 days. Every transnational meeting will have a thematic focus on one of the mentioned ECONNECTING topics or subtopics. They will also mark important steps in the development of the IAPs and accompany as well as monitor the progress.

Between each of the transnational meetings, online-meetings will monitor the progress. In each webinar, the homework consisting of URBACT-Tools will be discussed and the topic of the next transnational meeting will be prepared, in order to directly dive deep into the topic at the next meeting.

October 2023 Transnational Meeting #1 - Orihuela: The inaugural meeting in October 2023 in Orihuela served as the Kick-Off for the network, discussing ECONNECTING-topics, working on common goals and visions. The first results from the analysis through URBACT-Tools were discussed, the goal was to prepare the network to get ready for action.

Webinar #1 – Visions & Goals for integrated planning

February 2024 Transnational Meeting #2 - Viseu Dão Lafões: The second meeting focuses on the „30-Minutes Territories“-topic, finding a vision and developing goals for the IAP. The partners will also get an input on Small Scale Actions.

Webinar #2 – Funding Strategies (ad-hoc expert Miguel Sousa)

April 2024 Transnational Meeting #3 - Ennis: Reflecting the needs of the partners, the third meeting in Ennis will thematically focus on funding strategies, accompanied by ad-hoc expert Miguel Sousa. Furthermore, the focus will also lie on the areas for action of the IAP and developing a preliminary structure of the IAP.

Webinar #3 – Green Community & Participative Strategies (ad-hoc expert Simone D'Antonio)

June 2024 Transnational Meeting #4 - West Mani: The fourth meeting, held in West Mani, focuses on the aspects of Green Community and participatory strategies as well as digital transition issues. Steps towards the IAP-Draft are made through the application and discussion of URBACT-Tools. The meeting will be supported by ad-hoc expert Simone D'Antonio.

Webinar #4 – Assessing IAP Draft

September 2024 Transnational Meeting #5 - Ormož: Marking the last meeting before the midterm review, the fifth meeting in Ormož will discuss issues of accessibility and equality and provide support for the finalisation of the IAP-Draft.

Webinar #5- Preparing Peer Review

November 2024 Transnational Meeting #6 - Nagykálló: The meeting in Nagykálló is dedicated to the Midterm Review of the network, where the partners will exchange feedback on their IAP-Drafts through peer review. This marks an important step in the APN-process on the threshold of the implementation phase. Furthermore, it will introduce a gender-perspective in planning through ad-hoc expert Mary Delenbaugh-Losse to ensure a gender-balanced IAP.

Webinar #6 – Activating Actors & Resources, Implementation Assessment of IAP

March 2025 Transnational Meeting #7 - Tori: The meeting in Tori strongly focuses on governance and cooperation, especially on how to refine actors, target groups and activate the necessary resources. URBACT-Tools like the iPestle-method will help to review the obstacles in implementing the IAPs.

Webinar #7- Business Models for Sustainable Mobility Solutions

June 2025 Transnational Meeting #8 - Berane

In Berane, partners will work on developing strategies business models for sustainable, inclusive and digital mobility solutions, supported by an ad-hoc expert. They will individually assess their IAP concerning their implementation capabilities and further refine their Action Plan.

Webinar #8 – Final IAP Feedback

October 2025 Transnational Meeting #9 - Faenza

At the final meeting of the network, hosted by the lead partner Unione della Romagna Faentina, the final Integrated Action Plans will be presented and discussed. Partners can compare their results and assess the progress of implementation as well as exchange on future prospects and dissemination opportunities.

3.2.4 Exchange with other URBACT Action Planning Networks

Recognizing the shared concerns and common interests in addressing mobility challenges, urban-rural connections, and linkages, we are **actively cultivating collaboration with additional Action Planning Networks: BEYOND THE URBAN and ECOCORE**. The foundation for this collaboration was laid at the mobility hub during the URBACT Summer University in Malmö, Sweden. Furthermore, we have extended our reach to include FEMACT among our potential knowledge exchange partners, with a specific focus on gender-related issues and the pressing concerns impacting women, particularly in rural areas where there is a noticeable absence of care work provided by municipalities and communities. Additionally, ECONNECTING will exchange with the SCHOOLHOODS, BREAKING ISOLATION and AGENTS OF CO-EXISTENCE networks on the topics of school mobility, social cohesion and civic participation.

BEYOND THE URBAN is an Action Planning Network that aims to play a vital role in crafting sustainable mobility Integrated Action Plans (IAPs) within functional areas encompassing both urban centers and rural territories. The initiative is committed to advancing more sustainable, accessible, and integrated mobility solutions. Key focal points include promoting intermodality, embracing multilevel governance, fostering inclusion and gender equality, and leveraging digital tools. The project envisions the development of local IAPs and a shared open-source digital platform, tested across various scales, to contribute insights for a comprehensive Policy Brief on urban-rural sustainable mobility.

ECOCORE is an Action Planning Network that comprises nine small cities strategically located in transport corridors, collaborating to devise sustainable local economic development strategies. The partner cities will address challenges and opportunities for green growth and the transition to sustainable energy and transportation practices. Notably, the project aims to overcome the disparity between small cities and their larger counterparts along the corridors, aiming to create a distinctive profile for partner cities committed to sustainable development. This profile, featuring active measures for energy transition and green growth, is envisioned to attract investment, entrepreneurs, skilled workers, and local support.

FEMACT-Cities aims to facilitate the creation of eight „Local Action Plans on Gender Equality“ focused on enhancing women’s freedom and empowerment in urban settings. The initiative addresses key challenges related to women’s autonomy by emphasizing the need for adaptable and protective societies, those that foster education and personal development, and those that support emancipation and economic autonomy. A central theme throughout the plans is the concerted effort to combat gender stereotypes, representing a comprehensive and cross-cutting approach to advancing gender equality in urban environments.

Through the aforementioned Action Planning Networks, **we will facilitate collaborative initiatives by organizing joint meetings**. These gatherings will serve as platforms for the exchange of ideas and the exploration of potential collaborations.

2023	Host City	Subject & Topics	Capacity Building	Methodology
October 2023 Transnational Meeting #1	Orihuela	Kick-Off Getting ready for action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing an ULG-Group Visions & Good Practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Site Visit Stakeholder Mapping SWOT Problem Tree
2024				
February 2024 Transnational Meeting #2	Viseu Dão Lafões	Visions & Goals 30-Minutes Territories, Strategies for Humanized Sustainable Mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IAP Roadmap Good Practice for Small Scale Action (SSA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visioning Workshop Newspaper of Tomorrow SSA Input
April 2024 Transnational Meeting #3	Ennis	Areas for Action Funding Strategies for Integrated Urban Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preliminary IAP Structure Defining spatial focus of IAP Define challenges of IAP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Site visit with Place Game Problems and Solutions Table
June 2024 Transnational Meeting #4	West Mani	IAP I Green Community: Participative sustainable development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participative strategies First steps towards IAP-Draft Set IAP objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action Table Integration Assessment Grid
September 2024 Transnational Meeting #5	Ormož	IAP II Accessible and Welcoming Cities: Promoting equality in urban development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IAP-Draft support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refining an Action Individual support and feedback by Lead Expert
November 2024 Transnational Meeting #6	Nagykálló	Midterm Review Gender-balanced Urban Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment of IAP-Drafts Reflection on Progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer Review Four C's method Gender Planning Workshop
2025				
March 2025 Transnational Meeting #7	Tori	Actors & Ressourcing Good Governance: Co-creating solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refine Actors Activate Ressources Assess IAP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Target groups Planning Small Scale Actions iPestle-Method
June 2025 Transnational Meeting #8	Berane	Funding & Implementation Business Models for Sustainable Mobility Models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding Strategies Assess IAP Products & Dissemination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Input Ad-hoc Funding Expert Implementation Capabilities Grid
October 2025 Transnational Meeting #9	Faenza	Final Conference Comparing IAPs, Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation of Final IAP Share results Future possibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final Event discussing results, presenting IAP

TRANSNATIONAL MEETING - ORIHUELA





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