

NET ZERO CITIES SGA2-NZC

Progress report on the study visits Deliverable D1.16 Group Study Visits (Cohort 1)

Authors: Chiara Cecchin (EuC), Ermioni Chatzimichail (EuC)

Contributor: Charline Mougin (EuC), Ida Jusic (EuC), Meline Gonzalez Piloyan (EuC)



AWAITING APPROVAL BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Disclaimer

The content of this deliverable reflects only the author's view. The European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

Document Information

Grant Agreement Number	101139652
Project Title	SPECIFIC GRANT AGREEMENT N°2 TO SCALE THE CITIES MISSION PLATFORM
Project Acronym	SGA2-NZC
Project Start Date	1 January 2024
Related Work Package	WP1
Related Task(s)	Task 1.5
Lead Organisation	EuC
Submitted by	EuC
Reviewed by	ICLEI, CARTIF, Demos, EIT-UM, ERRIN, Tecnalia
Submission Date	April 2026
Dissemination Level	Public

Table of contents

Table of contents	1
Definitions, abbreviations and acronyms	4
Executive Summary	4
Keywords	4
Introduction	5
1 Implementation of Group Study Visits (Cohort 1)	5
1.1 Group Study Visit in Bucharest (District 2)	7
1.2 Group Study Visit in Guimarães	13
1.3 Group Study Visit in Mannheim	18
1.4 Mission-minded cities' Action Plans	23
2 Key takeaways from Group Study Visits	24
2.1 Key Takeaways from the Action Plans	24
2.2 Uptake and diffusion beyond the visits	26
3 Taking Stock of Group Study Visits	26
3.1 How the visits were structured	26
3.2 How the visits were designed and delivered	27
3.3 How the visits were communicated	28
3.4 What cities told us	31
3.5 Why is the programme successful	35
4 Cohort 2	35
Conclusion	37
Annex 1 – Action Plan Template	38
Annex 2 – Mentimeter Feedback Survey results	39
Annex 3 – Action Plans Booklet	42

List of figures

Figure 1 - Map of Mission and Mission-minded cities joining Group Study Visits Cohort 1	7
Figure 2 – Bucharest District 2 Mission City profile, extracted from the Expression of Interest for Mission-minded cities	9
Figure 3 -Site visit to the DivAirCity project in Bucharest, District 2, turning a neglected urban square into a vibrant green public space.....	11
Figure 4 - Day 1 of the Group Study Visit, welcomed by the Mayor of Bucharest's District 2 and the hosting team.	11
Figure 5 - The Group Study Visit in Bucharest, bringing together representatives from Mission-Minded Cities and the NetZeroCities facilitation team.	12
Figure 6 - Visiting the UrbanWise pilot site at Campus Verde, Bucharest — where concrete surfaces are being removed to restore the soil's natural capacity, making way for green, permeable spaces that reduce flood risk, and lower temperatures during heatwaves.	12
Figure 7 - Guimaraes Mission City profile, extracted from the Expression of Interest for Mission-minded cities.	14

<i>Figure 8 - Day 1 at the Landscape Laboratory — inspiring welcome remarks by Dalila Sepúlveda, Head of Environment and Sustainability.</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Figure 9 - Francisco Carvalho, General Research & Innovation Coordinator at LabPaisagem, pointing out a nature-based solution in District C, part of the NetZeroCities Pilot Project.</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Figure 10 - Exploring Penha Mountain from above — a scenic cable-car journey with breathtaking views.</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Figure 11 - Discovering Latito Hill, a unique blend of cultural and environmental heritage.</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Figure 12 - Mannheim Mission City profile extracted from the Expression of Interest for Mission-minded cities</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Figure 13 - Site visit to Mannheim's energy-autonomous sewage treatment plant: beyond purifying wastewater for over 725,000 inhabitants, the plant recovers sewage sludge and supplies it to the cement industry for thermal and material recycling.</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Figure 14 - Site visit to Mannheim's waste-fired heating plant: a model of resource efficiency, where waste is incinerated to generate energy and non-combustible residues are recovered and reused, contributing to a closed-loop cycle.</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Figure 15 – Day 2, welcome address and presentation by Mannheim's Deputy Mayor, Prof. Dr. Diana Pretzell.</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Figure 16 – Day 1 of the study visit in Mannheim: the Mission City shares its strategies towards carbon neutrality with representatives from Mission-minded cities.</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Figure 17 - Interview to Mannheim's Deputy Mayor, Prof. Dr. Diana Pretzell.</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Figure 18 - Screenshots of promotional video showcasing GSV Cohort 1</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Figure 19 - Figure 16 - Screenshot of Blog Post Article in the NetZeroCities webpage on Bucharest District 2 GSV</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Figure 20 - Screenshot of Blog Post Article in the NetZeroCities webpage on Mannheim GSV</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Figure 21 - Screenshot of Blog Post Article in the NetZeroCities webpage on Guimaraes GSV.</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Figure 22 - Question on overall satisfaction with the Group Study Visits shared through the Feedback survey ..</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Figure 23 - Question on recommendation of the Group Study Visits shared through the Feedback Survey.</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>Figure 24 - Question on satisfaction with the city matching process in the Group Study Visits shared though the Feedback Survey.</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>Figure 25 - Feedback from cities describing their Group Study Visit experience. Mentimeter answers provided during the final reflection session of cohort 1.</i>	<i>34</i>

Definitions, abbreviations and acronyms

Acronym	Description
CCC	Climate City Contract
MCs	112 Mission Cities
MMC	Mission-minded cities are cities beyond the 112 Mission Cities.
NZC	NetZeroCities
ODG	Online Discussion Groups
GSV	Group Study Visits
Q&A	Questions and Answers
WP	Work Package
PAYT	Pay-As-You-Throw

Executive Summary

European cities play a central role in the transition toward climate neutrality. Within the EU Cities Mission, peer learning between cities helps accelerate this transition by enabling local administrations to exchange practical solutions, learn from real-life examples, and collaborate on shared climate challenges. To support this exchange, several formats of peer learning opportunities have been developed for cities, including Online Discussion Groups (ODG), **Group Study Visits (GSV)**, and Twinning Learning Programme (TLP). These initiatives connect Mission Cities and Mission-minded cities to facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration.

This report focuses on the first **cohort of Group Study Visits** which ran from **April 2025 to December 2025**. The programme brought together three labelled Mission Cities and 9 Mission-minded cities (MMC), engaging **approximately 40 city representatives from 8 European countries and Horizon-associated countries**.

Group Study Visits provided an **in-person** hands-on **peer-learning experience** centred on concrete **climate action**. Through preparatory online meetings and a **2.5-day in-person study visit**, participating cities explored practical initiatives, exchanged experiences, and discussed approaches that could be adapted to their local contexts.

Overall satisfaction with the programme was **exceptionally high**, with an average rating of **4.92 out of 5**, and all participants indicated that they would recommend the Group Study Visits to other cities. Feedback from cities highlighted the **relevance of the matching process and the value of learning directly from peers facing similar challenges**. Participants particularly appreciated the opportunity to explore practical examples and exchange openly with other cities.

This report presents a recap of the first cohort (April 2025 – December 2025) including the activities carried out, the action plans developed by Mission-minded cities and feedback collected from participants. These insights provide lessons to strengthen future activities and will inform the implementation of the next round of Group Study Visits (Cohort 2), starting in May 2026, supporting continued collaboration and knowledge exchange across the EU Cities Mission.

Keywords

Peer learning, Mission Cities, Mission-minded cities, Group Study Visits, knowledge exchange

Introduction

The Cities Mission platform, currently managed by NetZeroCities, launched the **first cohort of Group Study Visits in April 2025**, as a continuation of the Online Discussion Groups (ODG) held from September 2024 to February 2025. The ODG created an online space for knowledge-sharing and inspiration between Mission Cities and other European cities. They also gave Mission-minded cities access to Group Study Visits as a next step to deepen their peer-learning journey.

The GSV, developed as part of NZC-SGA2 T1.5, are designed to support the Mission's second objective, namely ensuring that "Mission Cities act as experimentation and innovation hubs to enable all European cities to follow suit by 2050". Coordinated and facilitated by Eurocities, the visits offered a practical, group-based learning format focused on topics showcased by the hosting Mission cities.

Three Group Study Visits took place **between September and November 2025**. They were hosted by **three Mission Cities Bucharest District 2, Mannheim, and Guimarães**, and brought together **nine Mission-minded cities** from across Europe and Horizon Europe-associated countries. Each Mission-minded city delegation included up to three representatives, such as municipal practitioners, experts in relevant sectors, or other key stakeholders officially designated by the municipality.

The **2.5-day visits** combined exchanges on systemic approaches to climate neutrality, site visits illustrating concrete applications of Climate City Contracts (CCCs), and action-planning workshops to help Mission-minded cities identify transferable practices. Topics included transport, energy, and the built environment (Bucharest District 2); nature-based and innovative climate solutions (Guimarães); and energy, building retrofitting, mobility, and nature-based solutions (Mannheim).

In the feedback collected at the cohort closing, cities valued the openness of host teams and the quality of practices shared, noting that aligned priorities and shared challenges enabled meaningful exchange and practical learning. The programme offered the chance to learn about solutions that other cities have already successfully implemented – a first and essential step towards local adaptation.

As a follow-up to the study visits, each Mission-minded city developed a structured **action plan** based on the insights gained during the exchanges, outlining the learning practice identified, the stakeholders involved, the key drivers and barriers, and the next steps for future implementation. Cities described this as a constructive and collaborative exercise that helped translate visit insights into a realistic roadmap and helped them share with their internal local ecosystem, to enable the adaptation of their learnings back in their own local context. This phase was complemented by a post-visit online reflection session to consolidate insights and explore opportunities for continued collaboration.

Despite differences in city contexts, participants identified **citizen engagement, governance models, and stakeholder cooperation** as the most transferable elements. Peer exchange, networking, and the sharing of both successes and failures were highlighted as key outcomes. Cities consistently emphasised that every municipality has something to gain and offer, and that adapting practices to local context is key to successful transfer.

1 Implementation of Group Study Visits (Cohort 1)

The Group Study Visits (Cohort 1) aimed to foster hands-on learning and practical exchange between Mission Cities and Mission-minded cities, building on six months of online exchanges through the Online Discussion Groups. The visits provided Mission-minded cities with first-hand experience of climate actions discussed online, allowing them to observe how specific initiatives were implemented, understand what enabled or hindered progress, and gain insight into local conditions that are difficult to capture through online exchanges.

The visits also focused on **the key enablers supporting implementation**, such as governance set-up, stakeholder collaboration, financing approaches, and citizen engagement. Through site visits, interactive workshops, and facilitated action-planning sessions, Mission-minded cities reflected on their own local contexts, barriers, and opportunities, and identified transferable practices to integrate into their own climate priority areas. The objective was to strengthen cities' capacity to replicate concrete climate actions and to build long-lasting connections among local climate leaders beyond the duration of the visits.

*"The most important thing is **what we take away from the other city**. I think it's the value of the opportunity itself. It has allowed us to **learn about the best practices and solutions** that other cities have already successfully implemented."*

— City Representative of the Mission-minded city of L'Aquila

*"It's not a matter of who is further ahead. **It's very interesting for us to share our experience and receive information from the other cities that took part in this visit**. Everything is very well organised and the whole environment lends itself to discussion. **It's a great opportunity to learn from other cities**"*

— City Representative of the Mission City of Guimarães

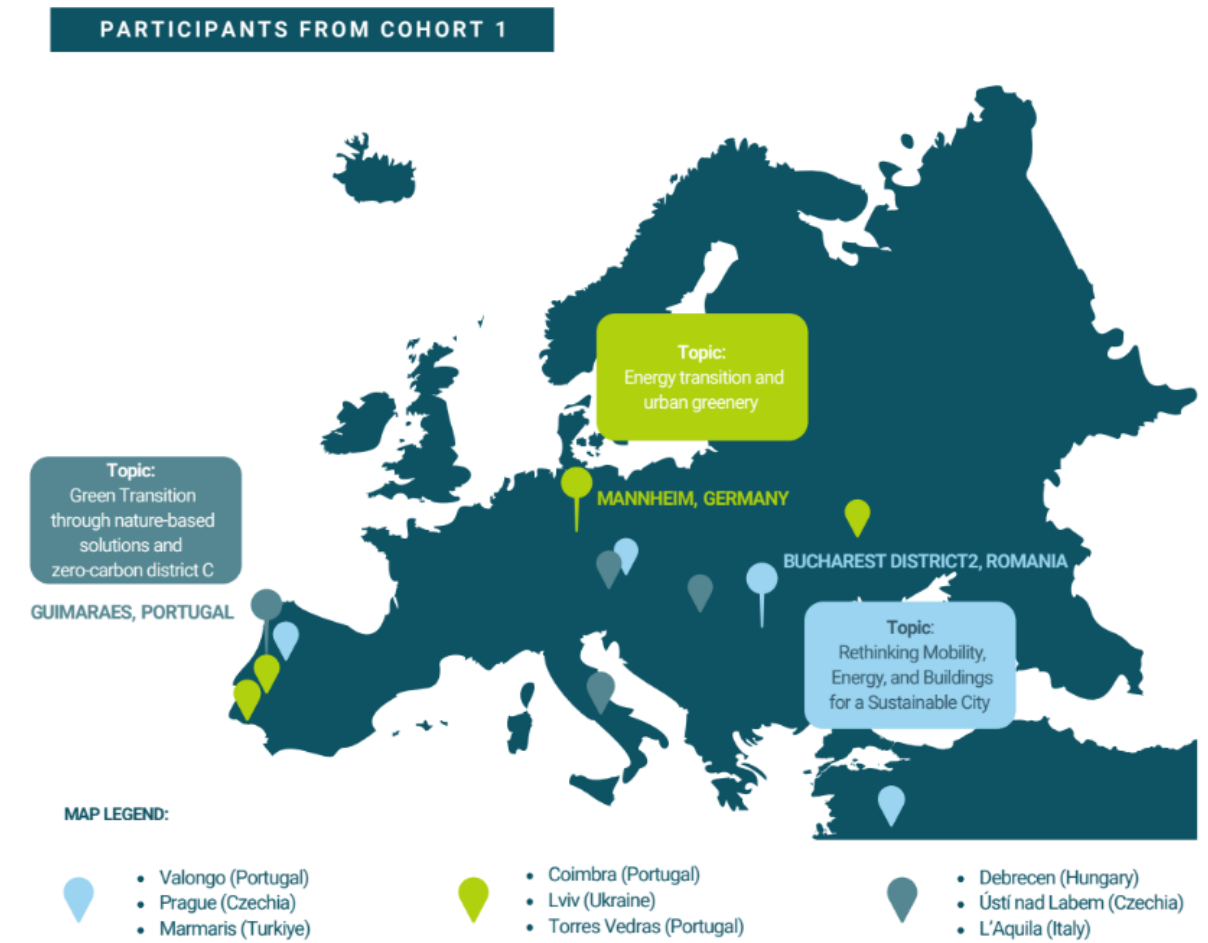


Figure 1 - Map of Mission and Mission-minded cities joining Group Study Visits Cohort 1

*“The **match with Mannheim** was highly appropriate as the city’s strategic priorities, governance approaches, and **climate-neutrality efforts** closely relate to our own needs. This allowed for meaningful exchanges and relevant learning opportunities”*

— City Representative of the Mission-minded city of Coimbra Region

1.1 Group Study Visit in Bucharest (District 2)

The cities of Valongo (Portugal), Prague (Czechia), and Marmaris (Türkiye) participated in the study visit to Bucharest District 2, which took place from 28 to 30 October 2025.

The visit focused on integrated urban climate actions, touching upon several emission sectors: **transport, energy, and the built environment**.

Study Visit overview

The study visit in Bucharest District 2 focused on **integrated urban climate actions** implemented through EU-funded pilot projects and local partnerships. Following introductory presentations on priority climate areas, participants visited several project sites, including:

- URBANWISE, WeGenerate, and Regeneration initiatives, illustrating approaches to **urban resilience, energy transition, and sustainable regeneration**.
- A visit to the DivAirCity project highlighted **air quality improvement measures and nature-**

Transfer of learnings

Across the three Mission-minded cities, several common lessons emerge:

- The value of **place-based, neighbourhood-scale interventions**
- The importance of **citizen participation as a driver of successful implementation**
- The effectiveness of **integrated approaches addressing multiple challenges simultaneously**
- The transferability of solutions when adapted to local context rather than copied

Overall, Bucharest District 2 was perceived as a strong example of how relatively simple, community-focused and integrated actions can generate meaningful urban transformation.

*“We believe that the visit was a very important learning opportunity. The Mission City set an example in terms of **working dynamics with stakeholders**, which we would like to replicate.”*

— City Representative of the Mission-minded city of Valongo



Bucharest's Green Transformation: Rethinking Mobility, Energy, and Buildings for a Sustainable City

Group Study Visit in 2nd District of Bucharest, Romania

Bucharest's 2nd District, one of the city's six administrative units, is driving the transition towards climate neutrality and sustainability. The district is committed to reducing CO₂ emissions, increasing energy efficiency and promoting green urban transformation. Balancing historic and modern infrastructure, Bucharest's 2nd District demonstrates that even in a densely populated urban environment, sustainable transformation is possible through innovation, policy and stakeholder collaboration.

Key Climate Actions to discover

Energy Renovation: Moderate energy renovations for 24 residential buildings, financed through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), targeting a 50% reduction in **heating energy consumption and a 30% decrease in primary energy use**.

nZEB Housing for Youth: Development of 30 near-zero energy buildings (nZEB Plus) for young people in vulnerable communities, alongside 44 electric vehicle charging stations.

Sustainable Mobility: Expansion of cycling infrastructure through a city-wide network of bike lanes, promoting low-emission mobility.

Green Infrastructure: Creation of eco-friendly parks, protected green areas, and enhanced blue-green spaces along Colentina Lakes.

Capacity Development: A governance framework and training program for municipal staff to strengthen climate neutrality efforts.

Urban Regeneration & Social Inclusion: 2nd District of Bucharest pilots Horizon-funded projects to integrate greening, social inclusion, and urban regeneration in key neighborhoods: **DivAirCity** (reducing air pollution & enhancing diversity - Scuar Toamnei-Vitorului); **WeGenerate** (co-creating sustainable neighborhoods - Tei District); **UrbanWise** (building administrative capacity for decarbonization - Tei District); **ReGreenation** (revitalizing marginalized, car-centric areas - Pantelimon-Baicului). These initiatives align with 2nd District of Bucharest's integrated strategy for climate neutrality and sustainable urban development.

NB: The final program for the Group Study Visits, including the topics of exchange, will be designed collaboratively among all participant cities, based on the shared learning interests and climate priority areas of each city.

Learn from these enabling factors for Success

Governance, policy and regulation: exploring regulatory mechanisms, multi-level governance coordination, and institutional capacity building.

Capacity and capabilities: Enhancing knowledge exchange and skill development for stakeholders through workshops, peer learning, and training programs to ensure long-term sustainability of climate actions.

Democracy and Participation: Strengthening citizen engagement and participatory decision-making processes to ensure inclusive climate action, including co-creation workshops, local advisory councils, and behaviour change initiatives.

Learn about the collaboration with the local stakeholders

Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest (UTCB): urban environmental quality monitoring & analysis.

Ion Mincu University of Architecture and Urban Planning Bucharest (UAIM): developing guidelines and regulations for decarbonization in public and private spaces, with urban design solutions for the demo actions in the pilot areas.

Local engineering partners in Horizon projects

Nhood: Urban planning design and permitting.

Climato Sfera: Community information and education

UrbanizeHub: Citizen engagement and co-creation of concept design, Climate Neutrality Training Program.

Institute for Climate, Economic, and Social Resilience (IRCES): leading local policy proposals development for climate neutrality through Policy Labs and creates Net-Zero monitoring tools to assess opportunities and track local impact



Figure 2 – Bucharest District 2 Mission City profile, extracted from the Expression of Interest for Mission-minded cities

Learning outcomes of the study visit

Prague focused primarily on **citizen participation** at district level, inspired by practical engagement methods observed in Bucharest District 2. Key elements planned to transfer:

- Use of simple, low-threshold tools (e.g. workshops, messaging groups) to involve residents in local projects, contributing to community building.
- Empowerment of individual city districts to lead participatory mechanisms
- Building stronger cooperation between municipal institutions and local communities
- Improving project relevance and local ownership, making projects responsive to citizens'

Inspired by the **ReGreenation** approach observed in Bucharest District 2, **Valongo** focused their action plan on coordinated interventions within the same urban area. Key elements planned to transfer:

- Implementation of **multiple projects in a single neighbourhood** to address interconnected challenges
- Integration of environmental, social and urban objectives in one place
- Collaboration among local authorities, universities, NGOs and citizens
- Use of green infrastructure to improve climate resilience and quality of life

Valongo noted that municipal interventions in Portugal are often dispersed across different areas, reducing overall impact. The Bucharest example demonstrated the effectiveness of concentrating efforts spatially to achieve systemic improvements.

The approach will inform projects such as “All Streets with Trees,” aimed at improving air quality, reducing heat island effects and enhancing public space through urban greening measures.

Marmaris selected the **ReGreenation** neighbourhood transformation model as the primary practice to transfer. Key elements planned to transfer:

- Redesign of public spaces through **nature-based solutions and climate adaptation measures**
- Creation of safer, greener, people-oriented environments
- Strong community participation in planning and implementation
- Pedestrianisation and prioritisation of public use over traffic

Concrete applications planned in Marmaris include:

- Renovation of the Grand Bazaar to reduce heat stress and improve safety
- Pedestrianisation of Kordon Street to create a people-centred waterfront
- Integration of shading, greenery, permeable surfaces and sustainable design

These measures aim to address local challenges such as overcrowding, lack of green spaces, tourism pressure and urban heat.



Figure 3 -Site visit to the DivAirCity project in Bucharest, District 2, turning a neglected urban square into a vibrant green public space.



Figure 4 - Day 1 of the Group Study Visit, welcomed by the Mayor of Bucharest's District 2 and the hosting team.



Figure 5 - The Group Study Visit in Bucharest, bringing together representatives from Mission-Minded Cities and the NetZeroCities facilitation team.



Figure 6 - Visiting the UrbanWise pilot site at Campus Verde, Bucharest — where concrete surfaces are being removed to restore the soil's natural capacity, making way for green, permeable spaces that reduce flood risk, and lower temperatures during heatwaves.

1.2 Group Study Visit in Guimarães

The cities of Debrecen (Hungary), L'Aquila (Italy) and Ústí nad Labem (Czechia) participated in the Group Study Visit to Guimarães, which took place from 16 to 18 September 2025.

The visit focused on nature-based solutions and innovative climate solutions for energy efficiency and renewable energy, placing a strong emphasis on citizen and private stakeholder engagement.

Study Visit overview

The study visit in Guimarães highlighted a **long-term, place-based climate transition focused on nature-based solutions, circular economy, and community engagement**. Activities at the **Landscape Laboratory** introduced the city's climate journey and governance model, followed by visits to living-lab environments such as engineered wetlands and ecological restoration sites.

Site visits to **District C**, NetZeroCities pilot project, demonstrated integrated actions, such as:

- PAYT waste schemes,
- green roofs,
- energy communities,
- sustainable local markets within a heritage context.

Additional site visits covered **retention basins, net-zero buildings, biodiversity routes, urban gardens, and greenways**, illustrating ecosystem-based urban planning.

Dedicated sessions on citizen assemblies, climate pact initiatives, private-sector involvement, and SECAP monitoring emphasised participatory governance and implementation.

Transfer of learnings

Across the three Mission-minded cities, the Guimarães visit enabled learning in three complementary domains:

- **Participatory governance** (Debrecen)
- **Low-carbon infrastructure** (Ústí nad Labem)
- **Climate adaptation and nature-based solutions** (L'Aquila)

Common lessons include:

- The importance of integrating climate actions into existing local programmes
- The value of concrete, operational projects as learning tools
- The need to adapt solutions to local institutional and environmental conditions
- Recognition of financial, regulatory and capacity constraints as key implementation challenges

Overall, Guimarães was perceived as a strong example of how systemic climate action can combine citizen participation, mitigation measures and adaptation strategies within a coherent long-term vision.

*"The choice of Guimarães as our Mission City partner was highly relevant and valuable. Their approach to climate transition, particularly the integration of nature-based solutions, citizen assemblies, circularity, and NZEB public buildings closely aligns with our local priorities. **The city offered practical, well-developed examples that we can realistically adapt**, and the openness of their team enabled meaningful knowledge exchange throughout the visit*

— City Representative of the Mission-minded city of Debrecen



Guimarães' climate journey – a Model for a One Planet City

Group Study Visit in Guimarães, Portugal

Known as the "Cradle of Portugal", Guimarães maintains a strong sense of identity, while balancing industry, urban growth and environmental protection. Its historic center was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2001, European Capital of Culture in 2012 and European City of Sport in 2013. Set to be the European Green Capital in 2026, Guimarães aims to be carbon neutral by 2030 and a One Planet City by 2050 - where history shapes the future and the future honors the past.

Key Climate Actions to discover

Energy Transition – District C Zero Carbon Commitment

District C (Bairro C) in Guimarães is a Creative Hub for Zero-Carbon Policies and Citizen Commitment, transforming the World Heritage site into a centre for green, digital, and social innovation. It integrates efforts to reduce emissions from energy, mobility, waste, and land use while promoting social innovation, policy development, and sustainable finance. As a living lab, it fosters collaboration, culture, and community-driven change for a greener future.

Built Environment - Gymnastic Academy NZEB

The Gymnastics Academy was the first NZEB and self-sustainable building, representing our "Do no harm" vision for the public Building Environment. This building has integrated solutions designed to ensure environmental and economic sustainability, including the use of cork for the outer coating, which is 100% eco-friendly and certified by the Environmental Product Declaration, natural light, ecological interior paint, and a Trombe wall.

Nature-based solutions - Retention basins

Guimarães' industries and homes developed along the Costa/Couros stream, relying on its water. As urban growth expanded northeast, land sealing increased stormwater runoff into the stream. District C faced four to five floods yearly, impacting over 2,000 people and causing losses exceeding €500,000 annually. In response, the city constructed three retention basins with a capacity of 25,500m³ using natural engineering techniques. These basins control inflows, lower flood risk, enhance water quality, and prevent erosion. Riverbank interventions have improved the landscape, reinforcing Guimarães' efforts to sustainable development.

NB: The final program for the Group Study Visits, including the topics of exchange, will be designed collaboratively among all participant cities, based on the shared learning interests and climate priority areas of each city.

Learn from these enabling factors for Success

Governance Ecosystem 2030: integrated, holistic, and systemic approach, supported by empowerment and participatory methodologies, integrating public and private sectors, academia and citizens.

Citizens Engagement and Mobilization: Participatory approaches, educational programs and awareness campaigns.

Private Sector Engagement: Strong collaboration between public and private sectors.

Evidence-based decision-making: Investment in science and scientific research through strong collaboration between the Municipality and the Landscape Laboratory as a support for policy decision-making and a driver of the green transition.

Learn about the collaboration with the local stakeholders

City Administration (Mayor, City Council Departments, Municipality-owned companies)

Climate Transition Team (multidisciplinary team – urban planning, mobility, green areas, waste management, energy, housing, biodiversity, water resources)

Landscape Laboratory (scientific research, awareness, and training and education initiatives)

Climate Pact Subscribers (private sector)

Green Brigades (volunteers that act for Nature)

Academia (Universities based in Guimarães)

Figure 7 - Guimaraes Mission City profile, extracted from the Expression of Interest for Mission-minded cities.

Learning outcomes of the study visit

Ústí Nad Labem focused on sustainable construction practices observed in Guimarães, particularly the **Gymnastic Training Center**, a nearly zero-emission building.

Key elements planned to transfer:

- Integration of advanced energy-efficient design and technologies
- Reduction of operational emissions in public infrastructure
- Alignment with broader urban sustainability goals
- Potential replication in educational or public facilities

The city intends to conduct feasibility assessments, engage technical partners and identify suitable sites before implementation. While political support exists, challenges include lengthy approval procedures, limited staffing capacity and funding constraints.

Debrecen was particularly inspired by Guimarães' **District C Citizens' Assembly model**, which integrates citizens participation into climate planning and implementation.

Key elements planned to transfer:

- Structured deliberative processes involving residents in decision-making
- Direct link between citizen recommendations and concrete climate measures
- Use of assemblies to build trust, legitimacy and long-term engagement
- Application to areas such as energy efficiency, mobility and nature-based solutions

Debrecen plans to implement a local Citizens' Assembly focused on a specific topic (e.g. community energy or water reuse) and transfer the participatory climate governance approach to its local ecosystem. The city recognised the need for capacity building, funding and dedicated facilitation to implement this approach effectively.

L'Aquila identified Guimarães' natural retention basins as the most relevant practice for transfer, particularly in relation to its ongoing **Aterno River Contract** programme.

Key elements planned to transfer:

- Nature-based solutions for flood risk reduction and water management
- Multifunctional infrastructure improving water quality, groundwater recharge and ecosystems
- Integration with river restoration and climate adaptation strategies
- Use of monitoring systems linked to civil protection services

L'Aquila highlighted the additional social value of these basins, which function as public spaces in non-emergency conditions. The city plans to implement similar measures as part of the first phase of its river management programme, supported by regional funding.



Figure 8 - Day 1 at the Landscape Laboratory — inspiring welcome remarks by Dalila Sepúlveda, Head of Environment and Sustainability.



Figure 9 - Francisco Carvalho, General Research & Innovation Coordinator at LabPaisagem, pointing out a nature-based solution in District C, part of the NetZeroCities Pilot Project.



Figure 10 - Exploring Penha Mountain from above — a scenic cable-car journey with breathtaking views.



Figure 11 - Discovering Latito Hill, a unique blend of cultural and environmental heritage.

1.3 Group Study Visit in Mannheim

The cities of Lviv (Ukraine), Torres Vedras (Portugal) and Coimbra Region (Portugal) participated in the Group Study Visits to Mannheim, which took place from 21 to 23 October 2025

The visit focused on energy, building retrofitting, mobility and nature-based solutions.

Study Visit overview

The Mannheim visit showcased the city's systemic approach to climate neutrality, with a strong emphasis on **energy transition, sustainable housing, circular infrastructure, and biodiversity**.

Participants engaged with the municipal Climate Action Agency and explored a **demonstration apartment** illustrating energy-efficient living solutions. Site visits included projects providing insights into integrated urban energy systems, such as:

- the municipal housing company,
- an energy-autonomous wastewater treatment plant, and
- a waste-to-energy heating facility,

Additional sessions addressed heat transition strategies, sustainable mobility in **the Franklin district**, and urban biodiversity measures in **Luisenpark**.

Transfer of learnings

Mannheim shared their learnings about enabling conditions for climate transition. The main areas of transfer include **behavioural change and public engagement, monitoring and governance infrastructure and coordination mechanisms at the institutional level**.

Common lessons include:

- The importance of governance and organisational structures that enable implementation, alongside technical solutions.
- The value of robust data systems for tracking progress and informing decisions
- The need to adapt governance models to different administrative scales

Overall, Mannheim was perceived as a strong example of how institutional capacity, public engagement and monitoring systems can reinforce long-term climate neutrality strategies.

*"I am fairly satisfied with the city matching. The visiting cities faced similar challenges to ours, which helped us **identify common issues and several areas where we can learn from each other.**"*

— City Representative of the Mission City of Mannheim



Key Climate Actions to discover

Energy - Heat transition:

Mannheim's transition strategy focuses on phasing out natural gas by 2035, with the Municipal Heat Transition Planning playing a key role. The city is adopting a comprehensive approach to sustainable heating and renewable energy integration, which rely on: **decarbonisation of district heating by 2030** and the **utilisation of a diverse range of energy sources** (thermal waste, biomass power plants, river heat pumps, and ongoing investigations into deep geothermal power plants).

Built environment - Sustainable housing:

Mannheim's largest municipal housing company, GBG, is at the forefront of sustainable housing initiatives. The **SQUARE project** prioritises energy-efficient retrofitting and climate adaptation, incorporating façade greening, soil sealing and roof greening to improve climate resilience.

Urban Greenery:

The city is committed to **enhancing urban biodiversity and ecosystem services through Nature-based-Solutions**. For example, Mannheim aims to increase urban tree coverage with 1000 newly planted trees per year, thus not only contributing to heat protection but also to quality of life. With urban greening initiatives Mannheim engages the community, delivering both environmental and social benefits.

NB: The final program for the Group Study Visits, including the topics of exchange, will be designed collaboratively among all participant cities, based on the shared learning interests and climate priority areas of each city.

Learn from these enabling factors for Success

Governance & Policy: Strategic municipal heat planning for optimized energy use and sustainable urban heating infrastructure.

Stakeholder Engagement: Strong collaboration between public and private sectors, facilitated by MVV's innovative energy model.

Finance & Social Equity: Local funding programs and consulting services ensure an inclusive transition, with support for vulnerable populations through the Climate Action Agency.

Technology & Infrastructure: Investments in waste-fired heating plants, renewable energy sources, and district heating systems.

Capacity & Capabilities: The Heat Transition Academy offers training programs, workshops and events for stakeholders.

Learn about the collaboration with the local stakeholders

City administration (Mayor and First Mayor, Climate, Nature & Environment Department, Local Green Deal Team, EU & International Affairs Department)

Climate Action Agency (provides consulting, awareness, and training and education initiatives)

MVV (regional energy supplier leading decarbonization efforts)

GBG (municipal housing association integrating climate adaptation)

And many other pioneers, too!



1

Figure 12 - Mannheim Mission City profile extracted from the Expression of Interest for Mission-minded cities

Learning outcomes of the study visit

Torres Vedras was strongly inspired by Mannheim's "**Sustainable Model Apartment**", selecting it as a practice to replicate locally through an educational exhibition space.

Key elements transferred:

- Use of a hands-on demonstration environment to promote sustainable lifestyles
- Focus on everyday behaviours: energy efficiency, waste reduction, mobility, food practices
- Experiential learning through guided visits, workshops and educational programmes
- Integration within an existing municipal environmental education centre

The city plans to create a "Living Sustainably" exhibition at its Environmental Education Centre, targeting residents, schools, businesses and professionals. The initiative aims to support behavioural change and strengthen the local Climate Action Plan through public engagement and environmental literacy.

Lviv focused on Mannheim's **climate monitoring system** as a tool to strengthen strategic planning and transparency.

Key elements planned to transfer:

- Development of a digital platform to track emissions and climate indicators
- Support for data-based forecasting and policy evaluation
- Improved coordination across municipal departments
- Public transparency on progress toward climate neutrality

Although the city lacks a comprehensive monitoring system, Lviv sees this tool as essential for effective climate governance. Implementation is planned as a long-term initiative, depending on external funding and technical support. Another challenge for the city is wartime constraints affecting resources and political priorities.

Coimbra Region selected Mannheim's **Climate Action Agency** model as the most relevant practice, aiming to adapt it to an intermunicipal scale.

Key elements planned to transfer:

- Creation of a central body providing technical, financial and participatory support for climate action
- Coordination across multiple municipalities
- Capacity building for public administrations, businesses and citizens
- Alignment with national and European climate objectives

The proposed intermunicipal agency would coordinate climate initiatives across 19 municipalities, addressing the current lack of regional coordination and enabling more efficient mobilisation of funding and expertise. This approach reflects the heterogeneous nature of the territory, combining urban and rural contexts.



Figure 13 - Site visit to Mannheim's energy-autonomous sewage treatment plant: beyond purifying wastewater for over 725,000 inhabitants, the plant recovers sewage sludge and supplies it to the cement industry for thermal and material recycling.



Figure 14 - Site visit to Mannheim's waste-fired heating plant: a model of resource efficiency, where waste is incinerated to generate energy and non-combustible residues are recovered and reused, contributing to a closed-loop cycle.



Figure 15 – Day 2, welcome address and presentation by Mannheim's Deputy Mayor, Prof. Dr. Diana Pretzell.



Figure 16 – Day 1 of the study visit in Mannheim: the Mission City shares its strategies towards carbon neutrality with representatives from Mission-minded cities.

1.4 Mission-minded cities' Action Plans

Following the Group Study Visits, each Mission-minded city reflected on the lessons learned, identified transferable practices, and developed an **Action Plan**. A template to facilitate reflection was provided to participants by NetZeroCities. An online follow-up session after the visits served to review and finalise the cities' action plans. The template is available on [Annex 1](#).

*"The Action Plan is a **very constructive and collaborative exercise** that helped us translate the study visit's insights into **a realistic roadmap**."*

— Mission-minded city participant

As a concluding output of Group Study Visit Cohort 1, an **Action Plan Booklet** has been compiled and is attached as a final annex to this report – [Annex 3](#). This brings together the action plans developed by each Mission-minded city at the end of their respective visit, capturing the concrete commitments, priorities and next steps identified by participating cities for advancing their mission.

[Access Action Plans Booklet](#)

The booklet is intended as a practical resource. Cities are encouraged to use it as a reference tool to benchmark their own progress, draw inspiration from the approaches of other cities, and identify potential areas for collaboration.

The action plans provide a clear picture of the current position of Mission-minded cities and their intended direction, making the booklet a living document for the cities themselves.

Action plans

Overview of Action Plans
submitted by Mission-minded cities (Group
Study Visits Cohort 1, 2025)



1

NET ZERO CITIES
EU MISSION PLATFORM | CLIMATE NEUTRAL AND SMART CITIES



Funded by
the European Union



2 Key takeaways from Group Study Visits

This section draws on observations by NetZeroCities facilitators, reflection workshops held during each visit, and feedback from the closing session in December 2025. It captures the key themes and practical lessons that participating cities took away from the experience.

Across all three visits, participants consistently highlighted:

- the value of direct exposure to real projects,
- dialogue with city practitioners,
- structured reflection supporting local action planning.

The **Group Study Visits served as an effective capacity-building instrument for Mission-minded cities**, as the programme supports cities in moving from inspiration toward concrete planning and early implementation steps. The visits reinforced the understanding that climate neutrality requires not only technical measures but also **governance innovation, stakeholder engagement and political commitment**.

A consistent theme across all three study visits was the **central role of citizen engagement** in driving climate action. Host cities demonstrated that technical solutions alone are not enough as **meaningful progress requires public involvement, behavioural change, and trust**. From co-creation processes with residents and civil society in Bucharest's District 2, to Mannheim's Climate Action Agency showroom and model apartment designed to make sustainability tangible for citizens, to Guimarães' formal citizen assemblies and Climate Pacts with private actors, each city offered a distinct but complementary approach to bringing people along in the transition.

Equally important was the question of **governance and multi-stakeholder collaboration**. Participating cities particularly valued the opportunity to discuss the practical challenges of coordinating climate action across institutions, navigating administrative complexity, aligning different mandates, and working within capacity constraints. The host cities offered concrete examples of how this can be done: through partnerships between municipal departments, academia and NGOs in Bucharest District 2, formal commitments with private companies in Guimarães, and coordinated efforts among municipal agencies, utilities and housing providers in Mannheim. Across all three cities, the visits reinforced that **institutional coordination and collaborative governance are fundamental conditions for effective climate action**, on a par with technical and infrastructural solutions.

2.1 Key Takeaways from the Action Plans

Common thematic topics were identified across the Action Plans submitted by Mission-minded cities. Detailed plans for each city are provided in **Annex 3 – Action Plans Booklet**.

Theme	Drivers and Barriers
Stakeholder engagement and participatory governance: Strengthen citizen involvement in climate and urban planning, improve legitimacy of decisions, and increase acceptance of measures	Drivers: • Strong political commitment to transparency and participation (Prague, Debrecen) • Increasing public awareness of climate issues. (Debrecen) • Availability of digital engagement tools. (Prague) Barriers: • Public scepticism. (Debrecen) • Limited experience with deliberative processes, (Prague, Debrecen) • Administrative workload associated with organising inclusive participation. (Prague, Debrecen, Valongo).

Integrated urban regeneration: Address environmental, social and economic challenges simultaneously through tailored interventions	Drivers: • High visibility of benefits for quality of life and tourism. (Marmaris, Valongo) • Alignment with urban development priorities (Valongo, Prague) Barriers: • Budget limitation and complex regulatory approvals (Marmaris, Valongo) • Potential resistance from stakeholders affected by changes such as pedestrianisation or redesign of public space (e.g. shop owners) (Marmaris)
Nature-Based Solutions and climate adaptation: Reduce climate risks while enhancing ecosystems and resilience through nature-based solutions, green infrastructure, and sustainable urban design.	Drivers: • Availability of scientific expertise and cooperation with local university and research centres (L'Aquila) • Potential access to regional funding. (Valongo, L'Aquila) • Political commitment to sustainability and existing strategic frameworks (L'Aquila, Valongo, Ústí nad Labem) Barriers: • Technical complexity and understaffing (Ústí nad Labem) • Lengthy permitting processes and long planning cycles. (L'Aquila) • Need for coordination among multiple institutions and difficulty cross-referencing environmental databases. (L'Aquila, Valongo).
Climate governance, institutional capacity and awareness: Strengthen municipal structures and public awareness to support long-term climate transition	Drivers: • Political backing and existing climate commitments (Torres Vedras, Coimbra Region, Lviv) • Possibility of using existing municipal facilities (Torres Vedras) • Existing intermunicipal networks and access to EU/national funding programmes. (Coimbra Region) Barriers: • Limited human and financial resources; need for specialised expertise. (Torres Vedras, Coimbra Region, Lviv) • Dependence on sustained and fully aligned political support over time (Coimbra Region, Torres Vedras) • Wartime conditions creating competing priorities and constraints on staff retention (Lviv)
Private sector engagement and local energy initiatives: Mobilise businesses and explore collaborative mitigation and energy solutions	Drivers: • Economic interest in sustainability and innovation can support collaboration. (Ústí nad Labem, Debrecen) • Potential co-investment opportunities can incentivise (Ústí nad Labem) Barriers: • Regulatory uncertainty, financial risks (Ústí nad Labem, Debrecen) • Need to build trust between public authorities and private actors (Debrecen) • Limitations in stakeholder communication capacity. (Ústí nad Labem)
Implementation planning and project development: Translate learning into concrete actions with defined responsibilities	Drivers (all participating cities): • Availability of Action Plan templates. • Peer-learning and capacity-building. • Alignment with existing strategies at city level. Barriers (all participating cities): • Administrative workload and procurement procedures • Coordination complexity across departments • Limited specialised human resources and difficulty retaining qualified staff. (Valongo, Lviv, Coimbra Region)

2.2 Uptake and diffusion beyond the visits

The Group Study Visits programme also supported the uptake and diffusion of practices beyond the visits, enabling cities to transfer, adapt, and share their experiences at regional and national level. In several cases, insights gained during the visits were shared in broader policy and stakeholder settings, contributing to increased visibility, knowledge exchange, and new collaboration opportunities. For example:

- L'Aquila (Italy), paired with Guimarães due to a shared interest in Nature-Based Solutions and Natural Water Retention Measures for the restoration of the Aterno River, developed an action plan to replicate retention basins discussed during the exchange. The results were later showcased at [the XIII National Roundtable of River Contracts \("Il futuro è adesso"\)](#), held in L'Aquila on 20–21 November 2025, a major national event on sustainable river basin management and water-related territorial policies, where the city presented outcomes achieved through the Group Study Visits and other NetZeroCities activities.
- In Ústí nad Labem (Czechia), the Energy Centre of the Ústí Region (ECUK) organised [the Regional Roundtable & Workshop NetZeroCities](#) to support local climate transition efforts and foster collaboration among cities engaged in or interested in NetZeroCities. Representatives from Ústí nad Labem (participants in the visit to Guimarães) connected with colleagues from Prague (who joined the visit to Bucharest District 2) during the programme's kick-off and final sessions, enabling national-level cooperation. As a result, Ústí nad Labem invited the Prague team to the regional event to present their experience with the NetZeroCities Group Study Visits and related opportunities.

3 Taking Stock of Group Study Visits

3.1 How the visits were structured

Group Study Visits aimed to:

1. **Bridge the gap between online and first-hand experience** by enabling cities to observe climate actions in practice.
2. **Learn and reflect on the key levers of change for replication**, such as governance setup, stakeholder collaboration, financing approaches, or citizen engagement.
3. **Build a robust network of local climate leaders** across Europe and Horizon Associated Countries, building long-lasting connections beyond the duration of the group study visits.

*"We had a lot of expectations, but our main goal was to identify some practices that we can implement in our case and that we can adapt locally. We also had a lot of questions, but I have to say that **the programme far exceeded our expectations**, and we asked all the questions that we took to the team — they managed to answer almost every question that we have"*

— City Representative of the Mission-minded city of Torres Vedras

Thematic Focus

Group Study Visits focused on **key climate priority areas** identified by Mission-minded cities including mobility, built environment, energy, circular economy, decarbonising industry, nature-based solutions. Through **site visits, presentations, discussions, and workshops**, participants explored both technical solutions and the governance, stakeholder engagement, and institutional conditions that support their implementation.

Participants

The GSV brought together approximately **40 city representatives from 12 cities** across 8 EU and Horizon Europe-associated countries. Three Mission Cities hosted one Group Study Visit each, welcoming a delegation from three Mission-minded cities per visit. Each MMC delegation included up to three representatives, such as municipal practitioners, experts in relevant sectors, or other stakeholders officially designated by the municipality.

Host Mission City	Visiting Mission-minded cities
Bucharest, District 2 (Romania)	- Valongo (Portugal) - Prague (Czechia) - Marmaris (Turkiye)
Guimaraes (Portugal)	- Debrecen (Hungary) - Ústí nad Labem (Czechia) - L'Aquila (Italy)
Mannheim (Germany)	- Coimbra (Portugal) - Lviv (Ukraine) - Torres Vedras (Portugal)

3.2 How the visits were designed and delivered

The GSV were designed as structured peer-learning exchanges between Mission Cities and Mission-minded Cities building on prior engagement in the NetZeroCities Online Discussion Groups.

Following a dedicated Expression of Interest, five **Mission Cities** applied to host a visit. Three were selected based on thematic diversity of proposed climate actions (e.g. energy, built environment, mobility, circular economy, nature-based solutions), as well as geographical balance (maximum one Mission City per country).

In parallel, **21 Mission-minded cities** submitted applications. Nine were selected based on the relevance of their climate priorities, alignment with the host city's thematic focus, commitment to active participation, and submission of a Reflection Roadmap. Each participating city delegation included a maximum of three representatives from relevant municipal departments, ensuring both technical relevance and institutional ownership of the learning process.

*"The Group Study Visit was a positive experience. The **preparation and coordination helped us strengthen and refresh our contacts for stakeholders, which was already a big benefit for us. We also had the feeling that on-site visits were interesting for the participants and were clearly preferred over theoretical presentations. Even though the cities had different technical backgrounds, the visits gave a good insight into our work, and at the same time the experience showed how important good matchmaking is, so that the effort and practical benefit are well balanced for everyone involved**"*

— City Representative of the Mission City of Mannheim

Each study visit followed a common **2.5-day format** structured around **peer exchange, on-site learning, and action-oriented reflection**. The overall structure comprised three phases:

- **Preparatory phase:** Online meetings to introduce participating cities, present local contexts and climate priorities, and align expectations for the visit.
- **During the visit:** Combination of site visits to flagship projects, interactive thematic exchanges and discussion of enabling conditions and governance approaches (e.g. stakeholder

engagement, cross-departmental coordination, transition team organisation). The format promoted dialogue among cities and, where relevant, with local stakeholders. A dedicated action-planning session supported the identification of up to two transferable learnings and the definition of short-, medium- and long-term steps.

- **Follow-up phase:** Each Mission-minded City submitted a structured Action Plan, outlining the selected learning practice, and planned implementation steps, complemented by an online reflection session to consolidate insights and explore continued collaboration.

*“The first **two online meetings** were very useful for aligning what the other cities wanted to see in our city, and for us to share what we have been doing, as well as case studies and projects that we have been working on. **The other cities provided us with valuable insights** into what they would expect to see in the city, which **helped us to design a tailor-made agenda** for them. Throughout the visit, which was short but very direct, we went straight to the point, which is valuable for both the Mission Cities and the Mission-minded cities that want to see specific examples.”*

— City Representative of the Mission City of Guimarães

3.3 How the visits were communicated

The NetZeroCities Communication Team¹ provided communication support to GSV to help host cities showcase their climate actions and increase their visibility, and to spotlight participating cities. This included promoting participating cities' initiatives and sharing key outcomes with a wider audience to amplify learning and inspiration across cities.

- **Articles:** Three showcase articles highlighting a host city's climate actions and its role as a learning reference for other European cities during a Group Study Visit.
 - [Climate neutrality lessons in Europe: learning across longitudes from Valongo, Prague and Marmaris to Bucharest District 2](#) (Bucharest District 2)
 - [All cities are frontrunners for the climate transition](#) (Mannheim)
 - [Place, people, and purpose: climate ambition is rooted in local action and a shared mission](#) (Guimarães)
- **Video:** A short teaser video showcasing the three study visits and featuring speeches from the host teams and NZC facilitators. The video is available [at this link](#).
- **Infographic:** A one-page document outlining the objectives of the group study visits, detailing the participants in Cohort 1 and the application process for Cohort 2. It is intended for cities interested in applying to Cohort 2. The infographic is available [at this link](#).

¹ The NZC Communication Team, coordinated by LGI, operates under NZC-SGA2 WP3.



Figure 17 - Interview to Mannheim's Deputy Mayor, Prof. Dr. Diana Pretzell.



Figure 18 - Screenshots of promotional video showcasing GSV Cohort 1



Figure 19 - Screenshot of Blog Post Article in the NetZeroCities webpage on Bucharest District 2 GSV

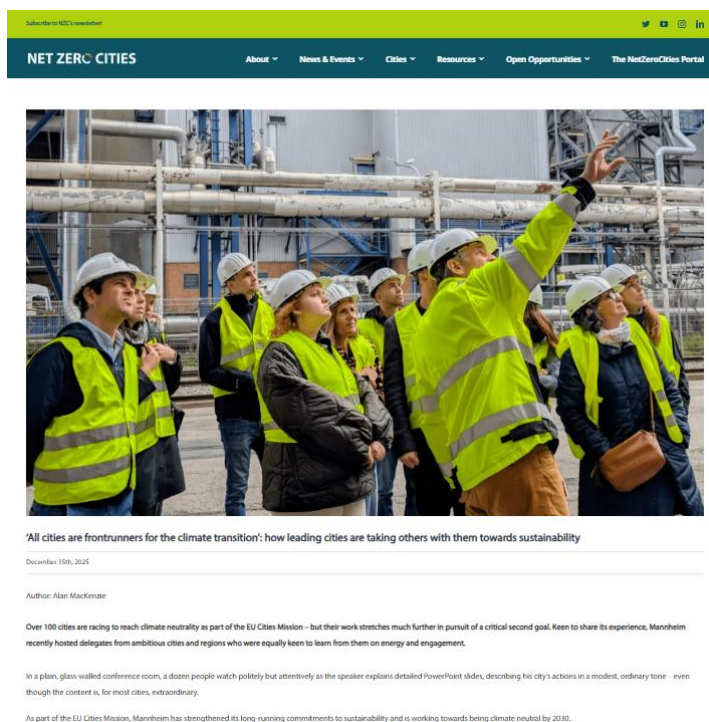


Figure 20 - Screenshot of Blog Post Article in the NetZeroCities webpage on Mannheim GSV

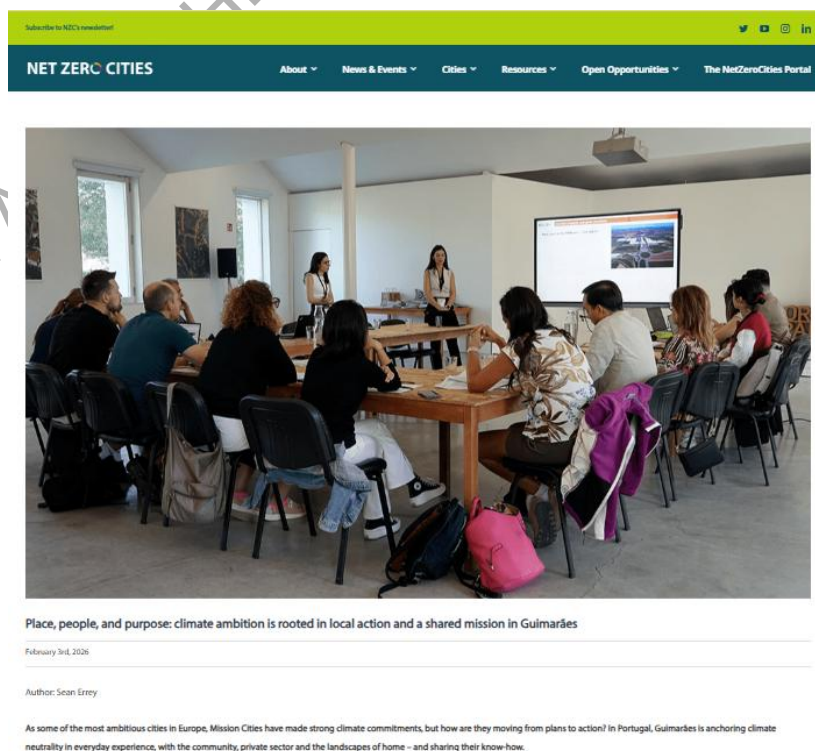


Figure 21 - Screenshot of Blog Post Article in the NetZeroCities webpage on Guimaraes GSV

3.4 What cities told us

A **feedback survey** was circulated to participating cities to collect their views, support the assessment of the programme, and to gather insights and suggestions for future editions, and identify any further learning needs.

Participant satisfaction was exceptionally high, with an average rating of 4.92 out of 5, indicating a strong perception of usefulness. All the cities expressed they would recommend the Group Study Visits other cities.

The results show very high satisfaction with the city matching process. With an average score of **4.75 out of 5**, most participants (10 out of 12) gave the highest rating. This indicates that cities were paired effectively, enabling relevant exchanges and useful learning during the Study Visits.

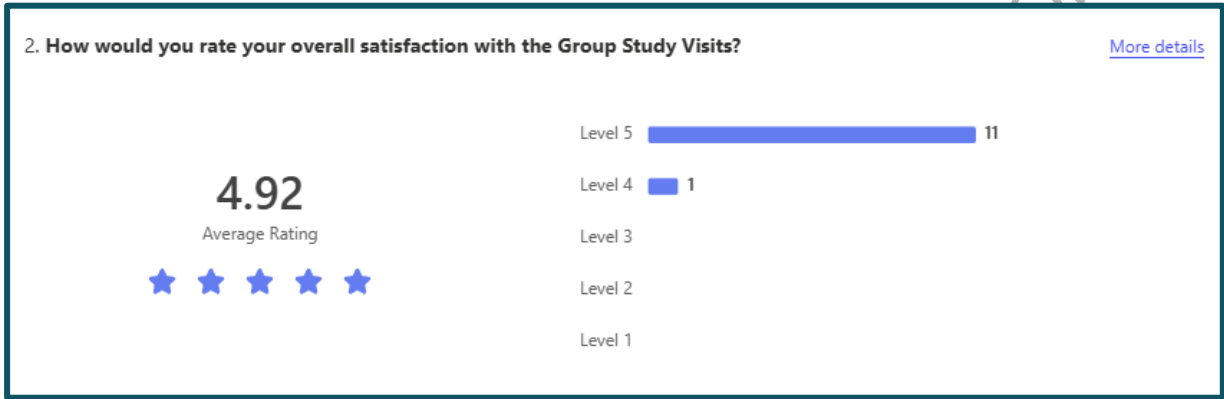


Figure 22 - Question on overall satisfaction with the Group Study Visits shared through the Feedback survey



Figure 23 - Question on recommendation of the Group Study Visits shared through the Feedback Survey

When invited to elaborate on their satisfaction with both the matching process and the programme overall, **several cities expressed strong appreciation for the quality of the matches**. These were considered well-aligned with their strategic priorities and climate neutrality objectives.

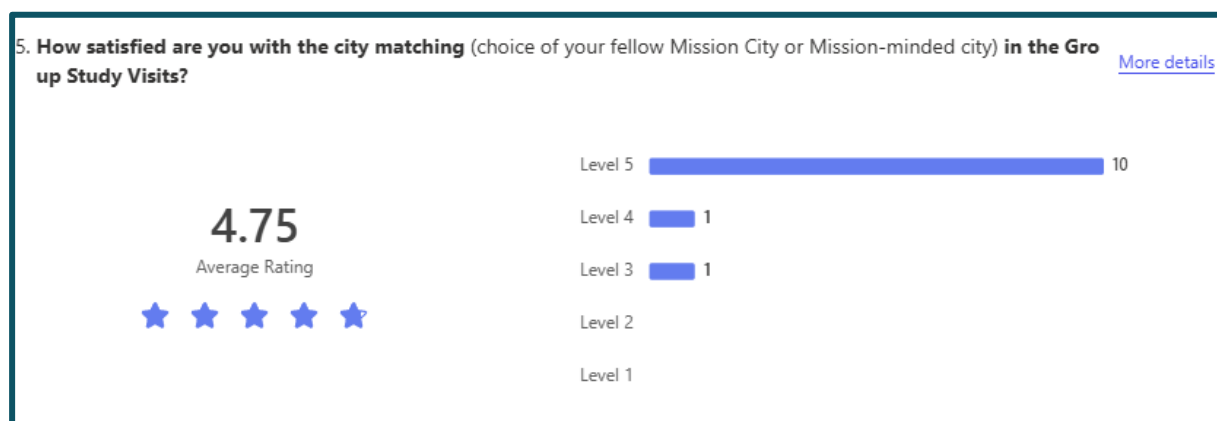


Figure 24 - Question on satisfaction with the city matching process in the Group Study Visits shared through the Feedback Survey

Mission-minded city representatives also highlighted that the visiting cities faced similar challenges to those of the Mission Cities, which facilitated the **identification of shared issues and created valuable opportunities for mutual learning and exchange**.

Mission-minded cities further emphasised the importance of accessing practical, well-developed examples, as well as the **opportunity to observe them in real-life settings**. This enabled a better understanding of their potential for realistic replication and adaptation within their own local contexts.

Additionally, the working dynamics with stakeholders, as observed during the visits, were frequently mentioned as one of the most valuable aspects of the experience.

Wrapping up Group Study Visits, Cohort 1:

In addition, an online **Closing Session** was organised on 9 December 2025 to bring together all participating Mission Cities and Mission-minded cities following the Group Study Visits, providing a dedicated space for collective reflection and exchange. Building on the hands-on learning from the visits to innovative climate actions, **the session provided space to share key insights and discuss how cities are moving from inspiration to early implementation steps within their Action Plans**. It also served to gather initial feedback on participants' experiences during the programme. All Mission Cities and Mission-minded city representatives took part in this final event.

Cities were also invited via a Mentimeter survey to reflect on the ideas sparked by the Study Visits, their experience and challenges in developing the Action Plans, and the first steps taken to translate learnings into their local context. The survey also asked each city to identify one concrete action they commit to implementing in the next three months. The detailed responses are available in [Annex 2](#).

Finally, three Mission-minded cities were invited to share their main takeaways and tips for other cities. Their contributions highlighted the importance of **action-oriented planning, effective governance, early political validation, and strong stakeholder engagement**, as well as the value of **peer learning** in accessing proven solutions and practical insights.

Below are the quotes from the Mission-minded cities.

Tips for other cities

“Prioritise principles over budgets: The essence of the practice is adaptability, regardless of differences in human or financial resources. **Focus on tangible & scalable action:** Use existing infrastructure to replicate tangible models that are easy to understand and adopt. **Secure political validation early:** Use the Action Plan as a tool for governance. Integrate the Plan quickly into the municipal structure to secure political approval and accelerate implementation.

Every municipality has valuable insights to share. Peer-to-peer learning works in all circumstances because all cities have something to gain and offer.”

— City Representative of the Mission-minded city of Torres Vedras

“From this visit, we believe that the three main tips to make the transference of a project from another territory are **step-by-step planning**, starting with small interventions but always looking at the final picture, and **promoting the engagement of private investments**, including those from local citizens’ associations. It is also important to have some **flexibility**, because sometimes the initial idea for a project or for transferring solutions cannot be implemented due to funding or other kinds of restrictions. Therefore, it is necessary to have not only Plan A, but also Plans B and C.”

— City Representative of the Mission-minded city of Valongo

“Participating in visit groups is a useful way to learn about good practices and solutions to problems that other cities have already encountered. **Cities are best placed to implement tailor-made solutions that address their specific local climate vulnerabilities.** It is also an opportunity to identify transferable learning practices, gain practical insights into problems that other cities have already solved and remember to adapt practices to your context and national legislation.”

— City Representative of the Mission-minded city of L'Aquila

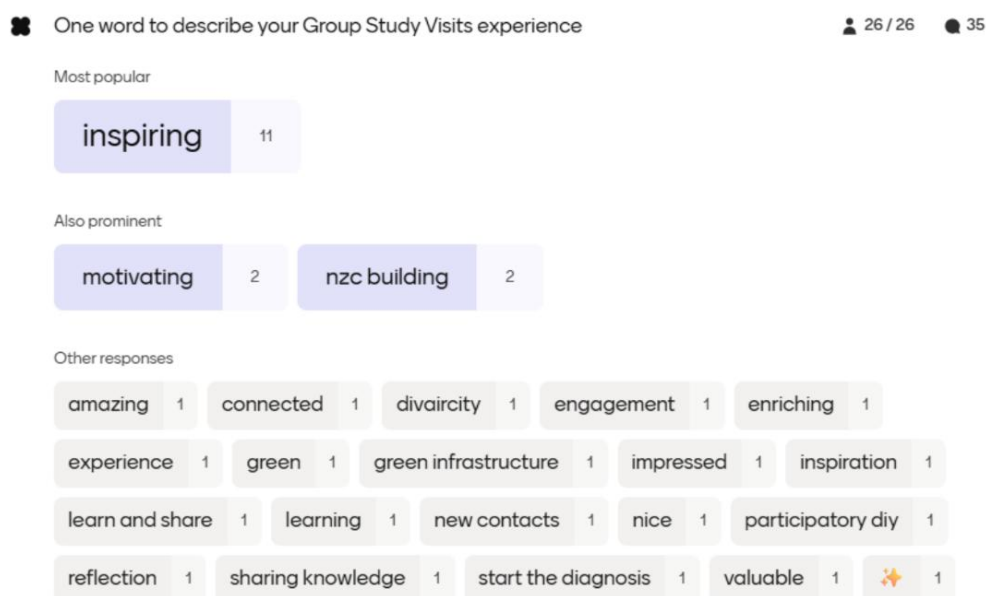


Figure 25 - Feedback from cities describing their Group Study Visit experience. Mentimeter answers provided during the final reflection session of cohort 1.

Mission Cities' Feedback

Mission Cities shared their feedback during a dedicated session for Cohort 2 Mission Cities held in January 2026, aimed at providing direct insights and recommendations to participants from second cohort. Overall, their feedback highlighted three key aspects:

- The importance of preparation and tailored agendas based on cities' expectations
- The mutual learning value for both host and visiting cities
- The relevance of good matchmaking to ensure practical benefits for all participants

As expressed by the participating cities:

- **Preparatory sessions and early exchanges** helped align expectations and shape tailor-made agendas around visiting cities' learning needs and interests.
- **Hands-on, real-life learning is most impactful:** on-site visits and practical examples were clearly preferred over theoretical discussions, offering tangible insights into implementation.
- **Peer-to-peer exchange fosters mutual learning:** cities highlighted the value of two-way learning, independent of their level of advancement, and the openness of the exchange environment.
- **Strong matchmaking maximises relevance and benefits:** despite differing contexts, shared challenges ensured meaningful exchanges and a good balance between effort and practical outcomes.
- **Networking and collaboration opportunities are strengthened:** the visits supported stakeholder engagement, reinforced city-to-city connections, and opened pathways for future cooperation, including joint projects.

*“The matching was very well done from our point of view, and even though the cities are quite different, **we found that many of the challenges we face are very similar**. What we really appreciated is that all cities involved in this programme — not only the Mission-minded cities, but **also us as Mission City** — **learn from each other in both directions**. We get to know each other better, build connections, and exchange ideas, so good practices can be adapted to local context. **These exchanges also help cities see how they could work together in the future**, including as partners in new project proposals. Overall, the experience was very useful and timely for us.”*

— City Representative of the Mission City of Mannheim

3.5 Why was the programme successful

The Group Study Visits programme proved highly effective for several complementary reasons:

1. It operated as **a practical peer-learning format** that made participation feasible even for cities with limited staff capacity, time, or financial resources. Preparation requirements were modest and the overall duration was manageable, enabling a wider range of municipalities to take part while still producing concrete, useful outcomes.
2. Hosting several cities at once significantly expanded opportunities for learning and networking across Europe, **fostering collaboration between peers** facing similar climate transition challenges in different contexts.
3. **In-person exchanges on transversal levers** proved especially valuable for tackling complex, cross-cutting issues. Following the visits, many cities integrated new initiatives into their action plans, particularly to strengthen stakeholder engagement in planning and decision-making.
4. **Careful match-making** between cities with comparable challenges ensured that discussions remained highly relevant and helped participants identify practices that could be realistically adapted or replicated locally.
5. **Dedicated budget support** for both host Mission Cities and travelling Mission-minded cities - higher than in previous programmes (around €900) – reduced financial barriers and enabled participation that might otherwise not have been possible.
6. The visits also generated **positive media attention**, increasing local visibility and helping to reinforce political backing for climate action.

4 Cohort 2

The second cohort of Group Study Visits will run in Fall 2026 to early 2027. Based on the expression of interest for Mission Cities in December 2025-January 2026, ten Mission Cities have been selected to host the second cohort of **nine Group Study Visits** (Espoo and Helsinki offering a combined visit).

A catalogue of opportunities supports Mission-minded cities in their application process (accessed by clicking below on cities' names) by providing an overview of the case study that will be showcased during the visits.

- [Espoo/Helsinki – Climate Action in Energy, Transport and Construction](#)
- [Glasgow – Data-driven Net Zero and Circular Transition](#)
- [Krakow – Citizen-Led Climate Action, Urban Renovation and Clean Energy Solutions](#)
- [Oslo – Governance, Procurement and Zero-Emission Solutions](#)
- [Pecs – Climate Governance, Circular Economy and Urban Decarbonisation](#)
- [Podgorica – Sustainable Mobility, Urban Regeneration and Climate Adaptation](#)
- [Prato – Circular economy solutions and urban governance in a highly industrialised textile city](#)
- [Sarajevo – Participatory governance, Nature-Based Solutions and Sustainable Mobility](#)
- [Zagreb – Urban Greening, Climate Finance and Citizen Participation](#)

As of March 2026, the date of submission of this deliverable, the Expression of Interest for Mission-minded cities, which closed on 18 March 2026, had received 50 submissions. Each Mission City will be matched with a maximum of three Mission-minded cities.

AWAITING APPROVAL BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Conclusion

The first cohort of Group Study Visits (April–December 2025) confirmed **the value of in-person peer-learning format as a concrete follow-up to the Online Discussion Groups**. By bringing together three Mission Cities and nine Mission-minded cities, the programme enabled direct exposure to **real-life climate actions**, strengthened cities' capacity to **move from inspiration to planning**, and supported the development of **nine Action Plans focused on transferable practices**.

Across Bucharest District 2, Guimarães and Mannheim, participants consistently highlighted the benefit of seeing projects on the ground and engaging directly with practitioners, local stakeholders and technical experts. The visits showed that progress towards climate neutrality depends not only on technical solutions, but also **on governance, political commitment, stakeholder cooperation and citizen engagement** – elements that many cities identified as the most transferable across different contexts and scales.

Feedback from cities confirms the **overall success of the cohort**. Satisfaction with the Group Study Visits and with the city matching was exceptionally high, underlining the importance of a needs-based matching process and well-prepared, tailored agendas. The Closing Session in December 2025 further consolidated learning, allowing cities to reflect on early implementation steps and commit to short-term actions.

From an implementation perspective, consortium partners stressed that facilitation and preparatory meetings were essential to ensure a smooth process and meaningful outcomes. At the same time, the cohort highlighted areas for improvement, including reducing language barriers, fostering more interaction among visiting cities, and balancing site visits, workshops and informal time to maximise peer exchange.

Building on these lessons, Cohort 2 will see an expanded set of host cities and a refined selection and matching process. The experience and evidence gathered in Cohort 1 provide a strong foundation to further scale the programme's impact, strengthen transferability and support more cities - within and beyond the Mission - on their road to climate neutrality.

Annex 1 – Action Plan Template



NET ZERO CITIES

Group Study Visits – Action Plan Peer Cities (Cohort 1)

City representatives are asked to prepare one action plan for each selected learning practice. Please select at least one practice—preferably more—and complete an action plan for each. Copy the table below and fill it in accordingly.

For any questions or support in completing the Action Plan, please contact Chiara Cecchin at chiara.cecchin@eurocities.eu and your NZC facilitator.



Contact Information

Please provide the contact details of the person completing this Action Plan

Name & Surname: Click or tap here to enter text.

Email address: Click or tap here to enter text.

City: Click or tap here to enter text.

Group Study Visit Location: Click or tap here to enter text.

1

NET ZERO CITIES

Learning Practice #1

Description

Please describe one concrete learning practice that your city is planning to transfer from the Mission City to the local context. Please provide brief reasoning for the chosen practice, i.e., innovative aspects of the chosen practice, relation to the ongoing work or existing challenges in your city, etc.

Click or tap here to enter text.

Timing: Indicate whether the practice will be transferred locally within the next six months (Short Term) or beyond six months (Long Term).

☐ Short-term action

☐ Long-term

Stakeholders

Internal Stakeholders

Indicate which municipal departments and/or affiliated organisations within the city administration to be involved.

Click or tap here to enter text.

External Stakeholders

Select the relevant external partners from the list on the left. On the right, identify who they are in your city and describe their role.

☐ Governments

☐ Civil servants

☐ Business

☐ Citizens

☐ Academia

☐ Other stakeholders

Click or tap here to enter text.

2

Annex 2 – Mentimeter Feedback Survey results

During the study visit, what ideas did the experience spark for your city?

15 / 26

17

Tourist density Street availability for green infrastructure
Participatory approaches DIY approach Strong political involvement

Context replicability

community Bucharest works very deeply with local communities. Great inspiration.

Integrated management

The study visit helped us see our own challenges and opportunities with fresh eyes. It sparked several concrete ideas for Marmaris

Innovative green climate actions combined with strong stakeholder and citizen engagement

How much impact structured citizen engagement can truly have.

Involving citizens in the decision making

practical advice to citizens

connection systems for river monitoring with civil protection and river parks used by the population

how technical capacity, structured stakeholder engagement, and clear coordination mechanisms can help translate climate ambition into concrete action

Strengthening internal collaboration, integrantes monitoring platforms

Green infrastructure

the visit inspired us for the strong citizens engagement

Data&Digital information is key - transparency and decision-making.

Stakeholder engagement and support

The creativity some cities have to find solutions for their problem

SION

AWAITING APPROVAL

During the Action Plan development, what was your experience? What challenges did you face? 10 / 26 12

We have learned the conceptual approach. We decided to evangelize them through the city - but it is difficult to tackle these but action plan.

Administration workload and internal process in our city

It was a very constructive exercise and collaborative process that helped us translate the study visit's insights into a realistic roadmap

Summarize the project

Limited local data and fragmented information

A feasible plan. Political discontinuity is a challenge.

Lack of local data.

Challenges: aligning different political and institutional priorities across municipalities, navigating administrative timelines, and ensuring sufficient technical capacity and resources for implement

How to make the city leaders believe in citizens engagement

Lack of local data

Finding responsible people haha, someone to be in charge and manage everything, or just their part, not the whole project

It is still a struggle, not just to create an action plan, but to follow it, it is hard to foresee the problem in advance

After the Action Plan, how did you begin translating the learnings into your local context? 11 / 26 11

Initiating discussion and proposing participatory solutions within most of the project.

Participation across municipal companies and city officers

We contacted the Mission City team for more information. Internal discussion regarding the concept and necessary adaptations.

Prioritizing realistic actions and high impact for Marmaris
Strengthening interdepartmental collaboration

preparing its political validation, a feasibility assessment and research for funding

We have presented the action plan to the vice-mayor

We have included the practice in an already funded project

convening of technical tables to explain the ways in which all the problems will have to be addressed and the solutions used

We started to analyse our local context, comparing it to the visited city, presented the good practiced to the leaders of our company

Launching a pilot citizen assembly as part of our climate transition in the future.

Present the action plan to the climate council

What is ONE concrete action your city commits to taking in the next 3 months?

8 / 26 9

Discovering the potential of developing the participatory features of local digital twin

Discussion about the DigitalTwin approach to properly set the openness.

Engage internal and external stakeholders and establish cooperation agreements

Present the Climate Action Agency proposal to the Intermunicipal Council

Present the action plan to the city leaders

Approve the first phase of the project

Grand Bazaar Renovation: *Preparing technical project and cost analysis *Securing approvals, initiating procurement *completing the concept plan and engaging local stakeholders

Present the action plan to the internal and external stakeholders

Establish a Transition Team in Torres Vedras

AWAITING APPROVAL BY THE EURC

SION

Annex 3 – Action Plans Booklet

AWAITING APPROVAL BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Action plans

Group Study Visits

from Mission-minded cities

Overview of Action Plans from
Mission-minded Cities after the Group
Study Visits to Mission Cities in fall 2025



PART OF THE

EU MISSIONS

CLIMATE-NEUTRAL & SMART CITIES

Funded by
the European Union





Table of contents

Introduction	➔	4
Replication plans	➔	5
Paired with Bucharest	Marmaris	6
	Prague	8
	Valongo	10
Paired with Guimarães	Debrecen	12
	L'Aquila	14
	Usti Nad Laben	16
Paired with Mannheim	Coimbra Region	18
	Lviv	20
	Torres Vedras	22
Lessons learned	➔	24



From visits to action

From visits to action

The EU Mission for Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities aims not only to support 112 cities in becoming climate neutral by 2030, but to ensure that the solutions they pioneer can be replicated across Europe by 2050. At the core of this ambition lies the ability to share knowledge across cities, learn from one another, and turn proven practices into scalable climate action.

To support this goal, the Cities Mission platform, managed by NetZeroCities, launched the first cohort of Group Study Visits in 2025. These immersive, peer-learning exchanges brought together Mission Cities, already implementing bold climate action, and Mission-minded cities eager to learn from these experiences, to adapt and accelerate their own transition toward climate neutrality.

How the visits worked

Each visit was hosted by a Mission City that shared its climate journey, from governance and planning to hands-on implementation.

Delegations from nine Mission-minded cities explored solutions ranging from energy and mobility to nature-based adaptation and integrated urban regeneration. These exchanges offered a rare opportunity to experience proven approaches first-hand and engage with the people and partnerships making them possible.

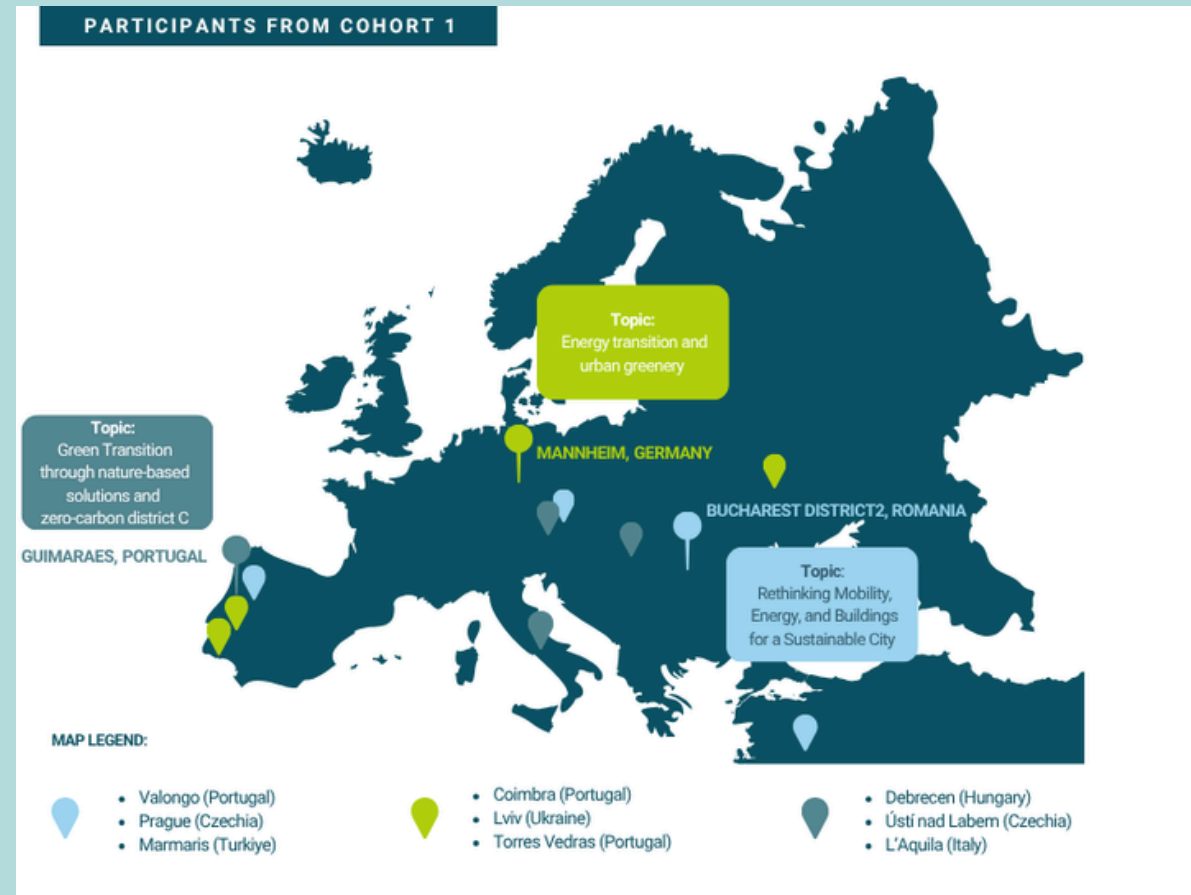
Why it worked

Participants highlighted the openness, honesty, and practical focus of the visits. Host cities shared both achievements and setbacks, offering a realistic view of what climate neutrality requires in practice. Despite differences in scale, geography, and resources, cities found strong alignment in their challenges and priorities. Citizen engagement, governance models, and cross-stakeholder collaboration emerged as particularly transferable themes. Peer exchange can be a powerful tool for accelerating climate action. Seeing solutions in context and discussing them with those who have already implemented them, helps cities build confidence, share common challenges, and adapt ideas more effectively.



From learning to action

This booklet captures the direct outcomes of these exchanges. Each Mission-minded city has developed a structured action plan that identifies the practices most relevant to its context, the stakeholders involved, the key drivers and barriers to adaptation, and its concrete next steps. More than a record of intentions, these plans are designed as living tools to support replication, track progress, and spark new collaboration. By compiling these action plans, the booklet highlights how peer learning can translate into tangible commitments and advance the Mission's broader objective: ensuring that climate solutions developed today can be scaled, adapted, and shared across Europe tomorrow.





Action plans





Marmaris

Turkiye

Marmaris visited Bucharest and selected the regeneration neighbourhood transformation model as the learning practice to be transferred. This model focuses on **redesigning urban spaces** through **community participation**, **nature-based solutions**, and the creation of **safer, people-oriented public areas**.

Marmaris intends to apply this approach to two strategic areas: the renovation of Kapalı Çarşı (Grand Bazaar) to make it greener, cooler, and safer, and the pedestrianisation of Kordon Street to create a waterfront public space accessible exclusively to people. Both areas currently face challenges such as heat stress, overcrowding, limited green elements, and safety concerns.

By implementing the ReGreenation model, Marmaris aims to **improve climate resilience**, **enhance tourism quality**, and **strengthen public life**.



Paired with

Bucharest District 2

Drivers

- **Political support:** The municipality prioritises sustainable urban transformation and pedestrian-friendly public spaces
- **Cross-departmental collaboration** on climate and urban transformation projects
- Availability of **nature-based solutions** and **urban design tools** locally
- Sufficient **technical capacity** through municipal staff and external experts
- **High citizen interest** in the project

Barriers

- Limited municipal **budget**
- **Concerns from shop owners** regarding access and temporary disruptions
- **Regulatory framework:** conservation rules and formal approval procedures may slow progress, despite existing planning tools supporting redevelopment



Steps

Conduct assessment and stakeholder consultations

Conduct a detailed assessment of current conditions and organise consultation meetings with shop owners and local stakeholders.

Urban design concept

Preparation of the initial design proposals including shading structures, green elements, permeable surfaces, and lighting.

Technical project and cost analysis

Development of detailed technical documentation and financial assessment.

Secure approvals, initiate procurement, and identify funding

Completion of formal approvals, launch of procurement procedures, and exploration of funding opportunities.

Implementation of renovation works

Execution of works in the selected areas.

Monitor environmental and social impact

Evaluation of climate, public space use, and social impacts of the renewed areas.

Internal stakeholders

The following departments will be involved:

- Directorate of Public Works: Technical design and implementation
- Directorate of Urban Planning & Zoning: Approval of spatial designs
- Directorate of Environmental Protection & Control: Nature-based solutions & environmental criteria
- Directorate of Culture & Social Affairs: Public engagement processes
- Transportation Unit: Traffic circulation and pedestrianisation planning
- Municipal Police: Safety and regulation in renewed areas
- Press & Communications Unit: Awareness and public communication

External stakeholders

The following external stakeholders will contribute:

- Muğla Metropolitan Municipality (transport integration)
- City planners and local officers involved in urban development
- Marmaris Çarşısı shop owners, Kordon businesses, and tourism stakeholders
- Residents, youth, community groups, and tourists
- Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University (technical support and nature-based solutions expertise)
- Architects Chamber, Landscape Architects Chamber
- Local NGOs and neighbourhood committees





Prague

Czechia

Prague visited Bucharest District 2 and was inspired by its approach to **participatory engagement at the local level**. During the peer-learning exchange, Prague observed how local participation can be effectively fostered through simple yet impactful tools, such as workshops and accessible community messaging channels, **enabling residents to take an active role in local projects**. This approach not only strengthens project outcomes but also contributes significantly to community building.

In Prague, one of the recurring challenges is the limited **involvement of citizens** in project planning and implementation. This is partly due to the city's large and complex administrative structure. However, Bucharest demonstrated that even individual city districts can successfully establish strong participatory mechanisms.

Building on this insight, Prague sees strong potential in promoting **closer cooperation between its city districts and their local communities**. For Operátor ICT (Prague's city ICT operator), which has already cooperated with several districts on smaller initiatives, this represents an opportunity to deepen and systematise participatory practices. By strengthening engagement at the district level, Prague aims to **enhance local ownership**, improve the relevance of urban innovation projects, and ensure that citywide initiatives are more responsive to citizens' needs.

In addition, Prague intends to explore whether the existing Prague Visitor Pass (PVP) product could be used to collect data on tourist density. If feasible, such data could support more effective management of overtourism.



Paired with

Bucharest District 2

Drivers

- **Strong collaboration mechanisms** between municipal companies and departments facilitate coordination and knowledge transfer.
- **Active city-level working groups** bring together institutions, experts, and civic actors, supporting participatory and co-creation processes.
- **Robust technological infrastructure**, including an open-source city data platform and participation applications.
- Operátor ICT has **strong internal expertise**, including innovation managers, data scientists, developers, and smart city project managers, ensuring implementation capacity.

Barriers

- City Hall's engagement in supporting European and national projects could be further enhanced.
- **Administration's relatively modest experience** with such initiatives, slowing decision-making and reducing momentum
- **Administrative and procedural bureaucracy**, particularly when coordinating across multiple departments and external partners
- **Funding constraints**, as Operátor ICT depends on city-level financing and experimental or participatory activities may be difficult to prioritise within municipal budgets.



Internal stakeholders

The following municipal departments and affiliated organisations will be involved in planning and implementation:

- Department of European Funds
- Department of Project Support (City Hall)
- Management of OICT (Operátor ICT)

External stakeholders

In Prague, several external stakeholders could play an important role in supporting participatory approaches and citizen engagement:

- City Districts: Potential partners for piloting local participatory initiatives, given their direct connections to residents and ability to test engagement models locally.
- Universities: Provide expertise in participation and community engagement, offering research and methodological support.
- Municipal Companies: Experienced in strategic planning, innovation, and public involvement.
- Citizens and Citizen Groups: Ensure projects reflect local needs and priorities.
- Non-Governmental organisations: Support communication and organisation of participatory activities.
- Prague City Tourism (PCT): Owner of the Prague Visitor Pass (PVP) including the digital application



Steps

Internal knowledge sharing

Presentation of lessons learned within Operátor ICT to align internal teams and define preliminary priorities.

City-level dissemination

Sharing outcomes of the peer-learning visit within professional and working groups at the city level

Cooperation with Prague Institute of Planning and Development

Initiate discussions on potential integration of inputs into the Digital Twin framework.

Engagement with city districts

Identify interested districts and explore opportunities to integrate participatory approaches into ongoing or upcoming European/national projects.

Open debate on Prague Visitor Pass data potential

Initiate internal and interdepartmental discussion on whether the PVP application or could collect geolocation data.

Define use cases for tourist density data

If technically and legally feasible, define concrete use cases of tourist density data. Timeline dependent on PVP assessment.



Valongo

Portugal

Valongo visited Bucharest and was inspired by the **methodology of combining different projects and strategies within the same area of intervention**, using the ReGreenation project as a practical example. During the visit, it was presented as an effective way to address multiple challenges in a single territory through coordinated and complementary actions, involving local authorities, universities, and NGOs in the design and testing of solutions.

In Valongo, as in other places in Portugal, budgetary constraints make it necessary to allocate funds across different areas and projects, which limits the ability to perform multiple initiatives in the same area. The example observed in Bucharest demonstrated how **concentrating different actions in one area can create a stronger and more measurable impact**.

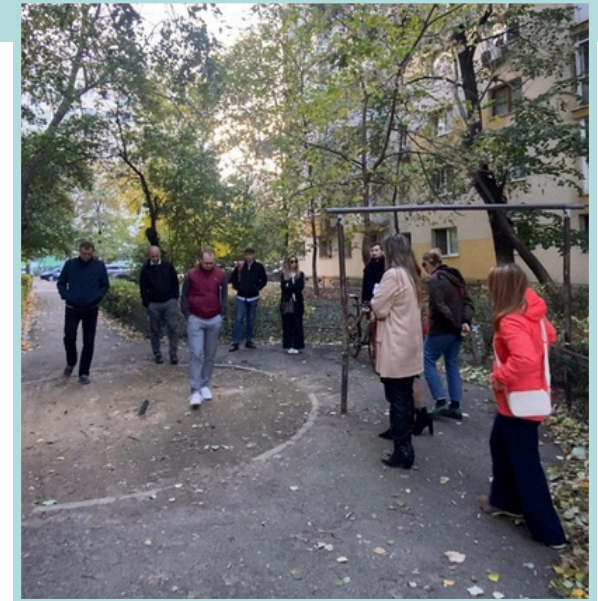
This connects directly with the **upcoming project "All Streets with Trees"** promoting tree planting through direct planting or flower boxes where needed, alongside green walls in a school and a municipal building. The project targets **carbon capture, improved air quality, soil permeability, and climate adaptation**. Valongo intends to pair it with a more integrated approach, including pre- and post-intervention assessments of air quality and public space use, as well as citizen perception surveys.

Drivers

- **Consistent political support** for sustainable development within the Municipality of Valongo
- **Recognition** through distinctions such as the European Green Leaf Award and the European Mobility Week Award
- Existence of the **Municipal Climate Action Plan**, defining the climate transition framework
- **Regulatory framework** (when it supports multidisciplinary projects and the involvement of different partners)
- **Stakeholder participation** (when active, it enriches project development and ensures alignment with real needs)

Barriers

- **Regulatory constraints**, particularly in collaboration between private entities and the municipality
- Limited availability of **time and resources** on the part of the relevant local authorities for participatory processes
- **Scarcity of human resources** and difficulty allocating staff to projects
- Limited municipal **budget**, which requires prioritizing actions
- Challenges in accessing **European funding** due to limited specialised staff and complex procedures
- **High workload** within municipal ICT services



Paired with
Bucharest District 2



Steps

Perform diagnosis and define needs

Assessment of challenges and identification of needs

Choose implementation area

Selection of a specific area where interventions can be implemented

Initial meeting with stakeholders and citizens

First engagement moment with different stakeholders

Evaluate possibilities, costs and ease of implementation

Technical and financial assessment of potential interventions

Second meeting with citizens and stakeholders

Engagement moment with different stakeholders

Prepare projects, plans and regulation

Formalisation of technical documentation and regulatory framework

Perform public procurement

Launch and completion of procurement procedures

Project implementation

Execution of planned interventions

Project management meetings and follow-up

Ongoing coordination and monitoring during implementation

Maintenance and continuous monitoring

Post-implementation monitoring, including evaluation of impacts considering an estimated implementation period of 6–7 months.

Internal stakeholders

The following internal stakeholders will be involved:

- Environment Division
- Mobility and Public Space Management Division
- Department of Innovation, Information technologies and Communication
- Urban Planning Division
- Department of Building, Projects, and Mobility.
- Division of Citizenship, Collaborative Networks, and Special Projects
- Vallis Habita Municipal Company
- Municipal civil protection and forest protection service
- Department of Logistics, Urban Hygiene and Maintenance

External stakeholders

The following external stakeholders will contribute:

- Local governments - Parish councils: important partners in the implementation of multidisciplinary projects, collaborating in various areas such as: needs assessment, definition of implementation locations, financial and human resources support, and close contact with the population. The selection of the parish council would be related to the area of project implementation. It may also refer to the metropolitan area of Porto as a promoter of access to financing.
- Colquimica Adhesives Company: Potential partner in funding and maintenance of green spaces; already engaged in environmental and climate initiatives and in the development of a local Green Deal.
- Residents' associations: ensure citizen participation and guarantee that projects and solutions effectively meet local needs.
- University of Porto - Faculty of Sciences: provides expertise to design and assess green space solutions, considering different constraints such as funding.
- Association of Municipalities of Porto Mountain Park or the Association of Municipalities of Leça River Corridor: may contribute with local knowledge, experience in citizen participation, and implementation of nature-based solutions.
- LIPOR - Association of Municipalities for Sustainable Waste Management of Porto Area: may support awareness-raising and training activities.



Debrecen

Hungary

Debrecen visited Guimarães and was inspired by the **Citizens' Assembly model** implemented within the District C climate pilot programme. Debrecen would like to replicate and adapt this model to **encourage inclusive and structured citizen participation in its local climate transition planning**.

The Citizens' Assembly approach used by Guimarães provides a concrete and well-structured method for **involving residents** in joint decision-making processes related to **urban planning and behavioural change**. The format promotes trust, accountability, and long-term civic participation. Debrecen aims to adopt this model to involve citizens more systematically in climate-related planning, particularly in areas such as energy efficiency in **public buildings, sustainable urban mobility, and circular resource use**.

A particularly inspiring element of the Guimarães model is the direct link between the outcomes of the Citizens' Assembly and the implementation of District C measures, including energy communities, Pay-As-You-Throw (PAYT) waste management systems, and green infrastructure. Debrecen intends to replicate this result-oriented approach, starting with a pilot Citizens' Assembly focused on a specific theme (e.g., community energy or water reuse).



Paired with
Guimarães

Drivers

- **Openness of city decision makers** to strengthen public involvement in local governance
- **Flexible local government structure** allowing experimentation with innovative initiatives
- Expected **interest** from citizens, civil society organisations, and professional partners

Barriers

- **Regulatory and guideline framework** for Citizens' Assemblies in Debrecen remains an important area to start with
- **Internal procedures need to be shaped**, with opportunities for piloting and refinement
- **Structured interdepartmental cooperation** is still evolving
- **Need for time and trust-building** to ensure meaningful participation
- **Dedicated platforms** for structured and hybrid (online–offline) citizen engagement remain a relevant consideration
- **Internal experience** in the design and facilitation of Citizens' Assemblies is a crucial area to be developed
- Need for **capacity building measures and/or partnerships with external facilitators** to ensure high-quality process design and implementation



Steps

Internal presentation and alignment

Presentation of lessons learned from Guimarães and discussion with municipal leadership and key departments to secure political and institutional support

Stakeholder mapping and engagement

Identification and engagement of relevant stakeholders (citizens, municipal staff, NGOs, facilitators) to explore local adaptation needs.

Definition of institutional framework

Establishment of responsibilities, governance structure, and operational framework for a local pilot Citizens' Assembly.

Funding search

Identification of potential funding sources (e.g., Horizon Europe, national climate funds, private funding opportunities).

Design and implementation of pilot Assembly

Selection of topic, outreach to participants, facilitation design, and implementation of the pilot Citizens' Assembly in Debrecen.

Internal stakeholders

The following municipal departments and affiliated organisations will be involved in the planning and implementation of the adapted Citizens' Assembly model:

- Mayor's Cabinet
- Urban Planning Department
- Financial Department
- Green Area Department
- EDC Debrecen

External stakeholders

The following external stakeholders will be involved:

- Local government representatives (active role in preparing and supporting the Citizens' Assembly process)
- Citizens (core members of the Assembly, selected to reflect the diversity of Debrecen's population; responsible for deliberating on climate-related topics such as energy use, mobility, or resource efficiency, and producing recommendations for municipal strategies)
- Businesses (not directly involved in the initial co-design; may contribute later as implementation partners or participate as guest experts or affected stakeholders)
- Public service providers (energy providers, transport, waterworks, etc.; engaged at later stages to integrate citizens' recommendations into practical solutions)





L'Aquila

Italy

L'Aquila visited Guimarães and was particularly inspired by its implementation of **Nature-Based Solutions (NBS)**, specifically Natural Water Retention Measures (NWRM), including the construction of multifunctional retention basins. Based on the peer-learning visit, L'Aquila intends to replicate this approach as part of the first phase of the **Aterno River Contract project**.

L'Aquila is currently facing the **challenge of environmental restoration of the Aterno River**. The **retention basins** implemented in Guimarães were identified as a highly relevant solution due to their capacity to **deliver multiple environmental and social benefits**, including flood risk reduction, water quality improvement, groundwater recharge, and habitat improvement.

L'Aquila also appreciated the construction of the retention basins in Guimarães, which allows the areas to be used as **urban parks during non-emergency situations**, thereby responding to social and recreational needs. A particularly innovative factor is the **sensor monitoring system installed in the basins and directly connected to the civil protection operations centre**. This system enables rapid response to rising water levels, including the closure of sluices towards the city centre and the controlled flooding of the basins when necessary.

The replication of this measure is closely aligned with L'Aquila's **Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Plan**, which focuses on heatwaves and water resource management. Implementing retention basins under the Aterno River Contract will further support the city's strategic objectives, by engaging citizens in climate action, and fostering greater public participation.



Paired with
Guimarães

Drivers

- **Supportive regulatory and strategic framework** at European (Nature Restoration Law), national (National River Contracts and Experimental Programme on Climate Change), and regional (Abruzzo Region legislation) levels
- **Strong municipal commitment** through leadership of the Aterno River Contract project, involving 27 municipalities and two Natural Parks, with €5,500,000 allocated by the Regional Water Department
- **Development of the Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Plan** ensuring strategic alignment
- **Cooperation with the local University** (Environmental Department), CETEMPS (Climate and Meteorological Department), **and local water agencies strengthening technical capacity**
- Planned events in 2025 (workshop on “Water” and the “National River Contracts Table”) supporting knowledge exchange and institutional backing

Barriers

- Difficulty in identifying and cross-referencing various environmental **databases for planning and monitoring**
- Need for **additional human resources** despite strong and highly qualified in-house expertise
- Necessity to ensure sufficient **administrative capacity** to manage project complexity and scale



Internal stakeholders

The lead department for the implementation of this initiative will be the Ecological Transition and Civil Protection Department of the Municipality of L'Aquila. Additional internal stakeholders include:

- Mayor's Office
- Procurement Office
- Other relevant municipal departments involved in consultation and interdepartmental cooperation

External stakeholders

External stakeholders that will be involved:

- 28 Municipalities of Aterno River Contract,
- Abruzzo Region,
- Ministry of Environment
- Gran Sasso Monti della Laga National Park,
- Sirente Velino Regional Park,
- Central Apennine District Authority
- Citizens of 28 Municipalities of Aterno River Contract,
- Environmental Associations,
- Multipliers in the targeted areas (ex. sports association, community initiatives),
- The University of L'Aquila
- CETEMPS (Center of Excellence Telesensing of Environment and Model Prediction of Severe events
- Multipliers in the targeted areas (ex. sports association, community initiatives),
- Actors on climate action,
- Local media partners

Steps



Internal reporting

Presentation of the replication proposal to relevant municipal departments during the "National River Contracts Table" workshop.

Design phase

Technical design of the retention basins as part of the first phase of the Aterno River Contract.

Construction phase

Construction of the retention basins under the first phase of the Aterno River Contract.



Ústí nad Labem

Czechia



Ústí nad Labem visited Guimarães and was inspired by the **implementation of a nearly zero-emission building**, specifically the Gymnastic Training Center developed as part of Guimarães' climate-focused urban development efforts. Based on the peer-learning visit, Ústí nad Labem would like to replicate and adapt this approach in its own public infrastructure projects.

This practice is considered innovative because **it integrates advanced sustainable building technologies designed to minimise carbon emissions and reduce overall energy consumption**, while aligning with broader climate neutrality goals. By transferring this concept, Ústí nad Labem aims to strengthen environmental sustainability within its public buildings and address ongoing challenges related to reducing the carbon footprint of urban development.



Paired with
Guimarães

Drivers

- Strong political support providing a favourable foundation for the initiative
- Cross-departmental collaboration within the municipality facilitating coordinated planning between strategic development and different units
- Existing technological infrastructure

Barriers

- Lengthy administrative and approval procedures that may delay implementation
- Limitations in stakeholder communication capacity affecting engagement processes
- Understaffing within the municipal administration
- Funding constraints due to significant upfront investment needs and the requirement to identify reliable financial sources



Steps

Reporting and internal presentation

Preparation of a detailed report on the nearly zero-emission building concept and presentation to relevant municipal departments.

Stakeholder engagement

Engagement of local stakeholders such as school representatives, environmental NGOs, waste management companies, community groups, and other relevant actors to gather input and build support for implementation.

Technical adaptation of design

Collaboration with architects, engineers, and technical experts to adapt the nearly zero-emission building design to local conditions and regulatory frameworks

Feasibility assessment and site identification

Conducting technical, financial, and environmental analyses to assess feasibility and identify a suitable site for implementation.

Start of construction

Initiation of the construction phase.



Internal stakeholders

The following municipal departments will be involved in the planning and implementation process:

- Department of Strategic Development
- Department of the City Architect
- Department of Building and Transport
- Department of Culture and Sportse

External stakeholders

External stakeholders will play an important role in both the design and implementation phases:

- University of Jan Evangelista Purkyně – support with the designing and participation process
- Citizens – involvement in the participation processes
- Government authorities – potential financial support
- Businesses – participation in innovation processes



Coimbra Region

Portugal

Coimbra Region visited Mannheim and was inspired by the **Climate Action Agency model**, which focuses on integrated governance and strong community engagement for climate neutrality. Based on the peer-learning visit, Coimbra Region intends to transfer and adapt this model to an intermunicipal scale, coordinating 19 municipalities within its territory.

The region plans to adapt Mannheim's methodologies for **citizen participation, technical advisory services, and financing mechanisms** into a single intermunicipal structure. This approach will allow simultaneous **capacity building** for municipal staff, citizens, and local businesses, while bridging local initiatives with national and European climate priorities.

The innovative aspect of this replication lies in scaling a municipal-level practice to a regional, intermunicipal framework. By fostering structured cross-municipal collaboration and integrating technical, educational, and financial support within one agency, Coimbra Region aims to address the current lack of **coordination among municipalities in climate action**.

Given the heterogeneous nature of the territory, comprising both urban and rural municipalities with diverse population densities, economic structures, and environmental challenges, **a regional approach ensures broader impact**, improved efficiency, and enhanced access to funding and technical expertise necessary for implementing climate-neutral projects across the entire region.



Paired with **Mannheim**

Drivers

- **Existing networks facilitating active participation** among municipalities, citizens, and organisations
- **Planned financing** through national and international funding programmes supporting financial sustainability

Barriers

- **Need for strong and fully aligned political support** from Coimbra Region leadership and municipal leaders; insufficient or fragmented commitment may delay or weaken the initiative
- **Institutional adjustments** required to formally establish and operate the intermunicipal agency, including ensuring active engagement of internal departments
- **Limited office space and infrastructure** could potentially delay operational launch
- **Challenges in recruiting highly qualified staff**, particularly with expertise in climate governance, financing, and community engagement



Steps

Preparation of activity and financial sustainability plan

Development of a detailed activity plan and economic-financial sustainability strategy for the intermunicipal Climate Action Agency.

Approval by participating municipalities

Formal approval of the initiative by all 19 municipalities through the Intermunicipal Council.

Recruitment of qualified human resources

Hiring of specialised staff.

Installation and logistics preparation

Preparation of office space, administrative systems, and operational infrastructure.

Capacity building and communication strategy

Training of staff, development of materials, and preparation of a communication and dissemination strategy to support regional engagement.

Internal stakeholders

The following internal bodies will play key roles in the establishment and operation of the intermunicipal Climate Action Agency:

- Coimbra Region Executive Secretary – strategic oversight and coordination
- Intermunicipal Council – approval of policies, allocation of funding, and monitoring
- CIM-RC Departments (Finance, Environment, Mobility, Civil Protection, Public Procurement) – operational execution and technical expertise

External stakeholders

External stakeholders will contribute to implementation, engagement, and technical support:

- Municipal Mayors and Policymakers (19 municipalities) – local-level implementation and citizen engagement
- Schools, Universities, and NGOs – awareness-raising activities and capacity-building programmes
- National Energy Agency and Regional Water Agency – technical guidance and potential funding support
- Citizen Associations – engagement, feedback, and co-creation of climate solutions





Lviv

Ukraine

Lviv visited Mannheim and was inspired by its **climate monitoring and evaluation platform**, which visualises emission trends and tracks progress toward climate neutrality. Based on the peer-learning visit, **Lviv plans to adapt and implement a similar digital monitoring system tailored to its local context.**

Currently, no comparable system exists in Lviv, and there is no comprehensive mechanism to systematically track climate-related indicators. In the long term, **the development of such a platform is considered essential for effective climate governance.** It would enable data-based forecasting, improve coordination across municipal departments, and increase transparency toward citizens. Illustrating the gaps in climate action with concrete data, together with a general assessment, could be a powerful way to communicate to all stakeholders the importance of prioritising strategic climate solutions.



Paired with

Mannheim

Drivers

- **Strong national focus on digitalisation**
- **Dynamic IT sector** with local startups capable of developing advanced digital solution
- **Existing cooperation between the City Institute and municipal departments** providing an institutional foundation for joint data processes

Barriers

- Wartime context, where climate action competes with urgent national priorities related to defence and security. High public **sensitivity toward municipal spending on projects** not directly linked to defence
- Lack of specific national standards for local climate monitoring systems
- **Human resource limitations** due to wartime conditions affecting retention and recruitment of qualified specialists
- **Need for external financial support**, particularly from EU programmes, for development and long-term maintenance



Steps

Consultation with Mannheim

Exchange with Mannheim's responsible departments for the monitoring tool to understand technical architecture, governance structure, and lessons learned.

Self-assessment of local capacities

Assessment of Lviv's institutional, technical, and human resource capacities to implement a similar system.

Development of project concept

Preparation of a detailed project concept.

Identification of external funding

Exploration and application for external financial support, particularly from EU programmes and international partners.

Realisation of the monitoring tool/dashboard

Development, testing, and launch of the climate monitoring and evaluation platform.

Awareness campaign for citizens

Implementation of a communication and awareness campaign to promote the platform, explain its benefits, and encourage citizen engagement.

Internal stakeholders

The following municipal departments will be involved in the development and implementation of the climate monitoring platform:

- City Institute
- Department of Ecology
- Department of Architecture and Urban Development
- Department of Economic Development
- Department of Mobility

External stakeholders

External stakeholders will contribute to the design, development, and implementation of the platform:

- Businesses
- Citizens
- Academia
- NGOs
- EU networks and programmes





Torres Vedras

Portugal

Torres Vedras visited Mannheim and was inspired by its **“Sustainable Model Apartment” concept**. Based on the peer-learning visit, Torres Vedras plans to replicate and adapt this practice by **establishing an interactive demonstration space** within the Environmental Education Centre of Torres Vedras (EEC).

As a central hub for the Municipal Environmental Education Programme, the EEC plays a crucial role in promoting environmental literacy, behavioural change and citizen participation in sustainability initiatives. The project will leverage the **Centre’s educational capacity and technical infrastructure to create a “Living Sustainably” demonstration exhibition – a model space showcasing practical examples of energy efficiency, sustainable materials, waste reduction, circular design and eco-living practices**, like the correct handling of food and the adoption of sustainable mobility practices. When visiting the exhibition, visitors will find small tricks that can be easily integrated into everyday life, that together and in the end save money on the one hand and help to protect the environment on the other.

The exhibition will function as an **experiential learning tool**, supporting guided group visits, school programmes and thematic workshops targeting residents, educators, local businesses and professionals. This initiative strengthens the city’s Climate Action Plan and its mission to inspire sustainable urban lifestyles through education and engagement.



Paired with
Mannheim

Drivers

- **Strong political commitment** to sustainability and alignment with the Municipal Environmental Education Programme
- **National and municipal frameworks** promoting sustainable practices, climate action, and environmental education
- Established **cooperation among educational services and active sustainability organisations**
- **Adequate physical space** at the Environmental Education Centre to host the demonstration exhibition
- Availability of **skilled municipal staff and educators**
- Initial **financial resources** available from the municipal budget
- **Recognition through distinctions** such as the European Green Leaf Award and the European Mobility Week Award
- Existence of the **Municipal Climate Action Plan**, defining the climate transition framework
- **Regulatory framework** (when it supports multidisciplinary projects and the involvement of different partners)
- **Stakeholder participation** (when active, it enriches project development and ensures alignment with real needs.

Barriers

- **Differing priorities among internal stakeholders** affecting coordination and decision-making
- **Engagement often limited to recurring stakeholders**, making it difficult to reach new audiences and sectors
- Need for **additional technical training** and strengthened communication capacity
- Need for **complementary funding** from partnerships or sponsorships despite initial municipal resources



Steps

Set up internal project team

Establish a dedicated project team and define the scope, objectives, and budget framework.

Feasibility and adaptation study

Conduct a feasibility assessment and adapt the concept based on Mannheim's Sustainable Model Apartment model. ction of a specific area where interventions can be implemented

Municipal approval and Stakeholder engagement

Submit the proposal for municipal approval and engage internal and external stakeholders, formalising cooperation agreements.

Technical design and educational content

Develop the exhibition layout, select equipment, and prepare educational materials and workshop plans.

Procurement phase and installation

Procure materials, equipment and installation services, and install the demonstration space within the Environmental Education Centre.

Training and capacity building

Deliver training and capacity-building activities for the team responsible for managing and operating the exhibition.

Official launch

Launch the demonstration space and begin guided visits, works, and educational programmes.

Monitoring and evaluation

Evaluate participation, learning outcomes, and impact, and prepare an improvement plan for future development.

Internal stakeholders

The municipal departments and affiliated organisations within the city administration to be involved are:

- Environment and Sustainability Division – Strategic alignment with the Municipal Climate Action Plan and sustainability objectives.
- Environmental Education Office – overall coordination of the project, educational programming and public engagement.
- Educational Service of the Municipal Water and Sanitation Services (SMASTV) – integration of water efficiency, waste reduction, and circular resource management topics into educational activities.
- Construction and Buildings Department – technical support on sustainable construction demonstration and material selection.
- Energy Management and Efficiency Unit – energy efficiency tips and incorporation of renewable energy systems.
- School Food and Health Unit – integration of climate-friendly eating habits and actions to reduce food waste.
- Sustainable and Smart Mobility Office – embedding sustainable mobility practices.
- Communication Office – communication strategy, branding and promotion.
- Procurement and Finance Division – management of procurement processes and budgeting.

External stakeholders

External stakeholders that will be involved are:

- National public agencies (e.g., ADENE – National Energy Agency; APA – Environment National Agency): Provide technical guidance, policy alignment and access to relevant data on sustainable energy and climate action.
- Business: Local and regional companies in renewable energy, sustainable construction and green technologies contributing as suppliers, service providers, sponsors or co-creators of workshops.
- Citizens (residents, schools and associations): Participate in guided visits, workshops and behavioural change initiatives within the demonstration space.
- NGOs and civil society associations: Environmental organisations and community groups that support public outreach, awareness-raising activities and citizen mobilisation around sustainability and climate education.
- Media and communication partners: Increase public visibility and disseminate project results and good practices.



Conclusion

The first cohort of Group Study Visits has demonstrated the value of in-person, peer-to-peer learning as a catalyst for climate action. By connecting Mission Cities already implementing bold climate solutions with Mission-minded cities eager to adapt and transfer the learnings, the programme created a unique space for honest exchange, mutual inspiration, and practical capacity building. The action plans presented in this booklet are the most tangible outcome of that process. They show how nine cities have translated insights gained during the visits into concrete commitments and realistic next steps for their own local contexts.

Across Bucharest District 2, Guimarães, and Mannheim, a consistent message emerged: learning from peers who have already implemented solutions is one of the most effective ways to accelerate progress. The visits confirmed that the transition to climate neutrality goes far beyond technical solutions, requiring strong governance, political commitment, stakeholder cooperation, and active citizens

engagement - elements that are strengthened when cities can see how others have addressed similar challenges.

The action plans further highlight shared priorities and challenges across cities. Strengthening stakeholder engagement and participatory governance is a common focus, alongside integrated urban regeneration and the use of nature-based solutions to address climate and urban challenges simultaneously. Cities also emphasised the importance of strong institutional capacity and long-term political support, while identifying recurring barriers such as limited financial and human resources, administrative complexity, and the need for coordination across departments and stakeholders. Engagement with the private sector and the development of local energy initiatives also emerged as key areas, where trust-building and clearer regulatory frameworks are essential.

Several cross-cutting insights stand out. Exchanges are most effective when cities share similar challenges, making



solutions more relevant and their transfer more feasible. Careful preparation and alignment of learning needs are also key to maximising impact. Host cities gained as much as their guests, discovering new perspectives, strengthening stakeholder networks, and opening doors to future collaboration.

Participant satisfaction was overwhelmingly positive, with an average rating of 4.92 out of 5 and unanimous willingness to recommend the programme to other cities. This reflects not only the quality of the experience but also the growing demand for structured peer learning as a way to move from inspiration to action.

These action plans represent a starting point, not a conclusion. They reflect concrete commitments and realistic next steps, while laying the foundation for continued collaboration. Building on the experience of this first cohort, a second round of Group Study Visits is already underway, expanding the programme's reach and supporting more Mission-minded cities in adapting and transferring effective climate solutions across Europe. The work of turning inspiration into action continues, one city at a time.



NET ZERO CITIES

EU MISSION PLATFORM | CLIMATE NEUTRAL AND SMART CITIES



www.netzerocities.eu



[NetZeroCitiesEU](https://www.linkedin.com/company/NetZeroCitiesEU)



[@NetZeroCitiesEU](https://twitter.com/NetZeroCitiesEU)



[netzerocitieseu](https://www.instagram.com/netzerocitieseu)



PART OF THE
EU MISSIONS

CLIMATE-NEUTRAL & SMART CITIES

The content of this document reflects only the author's view. The European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

Funded by
the European Union

