Interreg Danube Region

Co-funded by the European Union

NONA

Country specific recommendations

New gOvernance for New spAces



This project is supported by the Interreg Danube Region Programme co-funded by the European Union

D.2.4.3 Country-specific placebased governance model recommendations

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Abstract

This booklet translates NONA pilot evidence into country-specific enabling measures for green investments in Degraded Areas across the Danube Region. It is addressed to municipal teams, regional authorities, and programme decision-makers who need to move regeneration initiatives from concept to funded, implemented projects.

Ten pilots tested across three territorial typologies, urban-rural functional areas, mid-sized cities, and small-sized cities, confirm a common pattern: the ambition to regenerate is rarely absent. What is consistently missing are the governance and investment conditions that make that ambition actionable.

Each country sheet is structured through four components: (A) country context, (B) priority enabling measures, (C) implementation note, (D) Danube Region alignment. Read your territorial type first, then use the cross-country synthesis in Section 1 to identify shared patterns.



K. Pexels.com



1. Cross-country synthesis for the Danube Region

The cross-country synthesis of the pilot projects from the Danube Region confirms that investment readiness for green regeneration of Degraded Areas (DAs) is primarily shaped by governance capacity, structured project preparation, and the ability to align funding logic with phased implementation. While local contexts differ, recurring barriers and enabling measures show strong common patterns across territorial typologies.

1.1 Identified recurring barriers across countries

Degraded areas across the Danube Region represent significant untapped potential for climate adaptation, economic regeneration, and social cohesion. The ambition to transform them is rarely absent.

Ten pilot cases tested across the NONA project, spanning urban-rural functional areas, mid-sized cities, and small border municipalities, confirm a common pattern - what is consistently absent are the governance and investment conditions that allow that ambition to become a funded, implemented project.

Across all ten contexts, the same five barriers appear, in different combinations and at different intensities:

1. **Fragmented governance and unclear responsibility chains**
2. **Projects treated as ideas rather than investable propositions**
3. **Planning-to-financing mismatch**
4. **Stakeholder engagement initiated too late**
5. **Limited capacity for early de-risking**

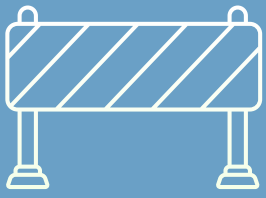
1. No single actor holds clear responsibility for moving a regeneration initiative forward. Decisions that require coordination across departments, governance levels, or municipal boundaries stall indefinitely because no one has the mandate, or the political backing, to convene and decide

2. Regeneration concepts exist but have not been translated into structured project packages. Ownership status is unclear, feasibility has not been assessed, cost logic is absent, and ESG framing has not been considered. Investors and funders cannot engage with what is not yet packaged.

3. Projects are developed through spatial planning logic but not structured into fundable components aligned with available programmes and instruments. The result is spatially sound proposals that cannot be connected to a realistic financing pathway.

4. Participatory processes are launched after key decisions have already been made, reducing their legitimacy and generating rework. Investors are brought in as evaluators at the end rather than as mentors at the beginning, missing the opportunity to shape project quality early.

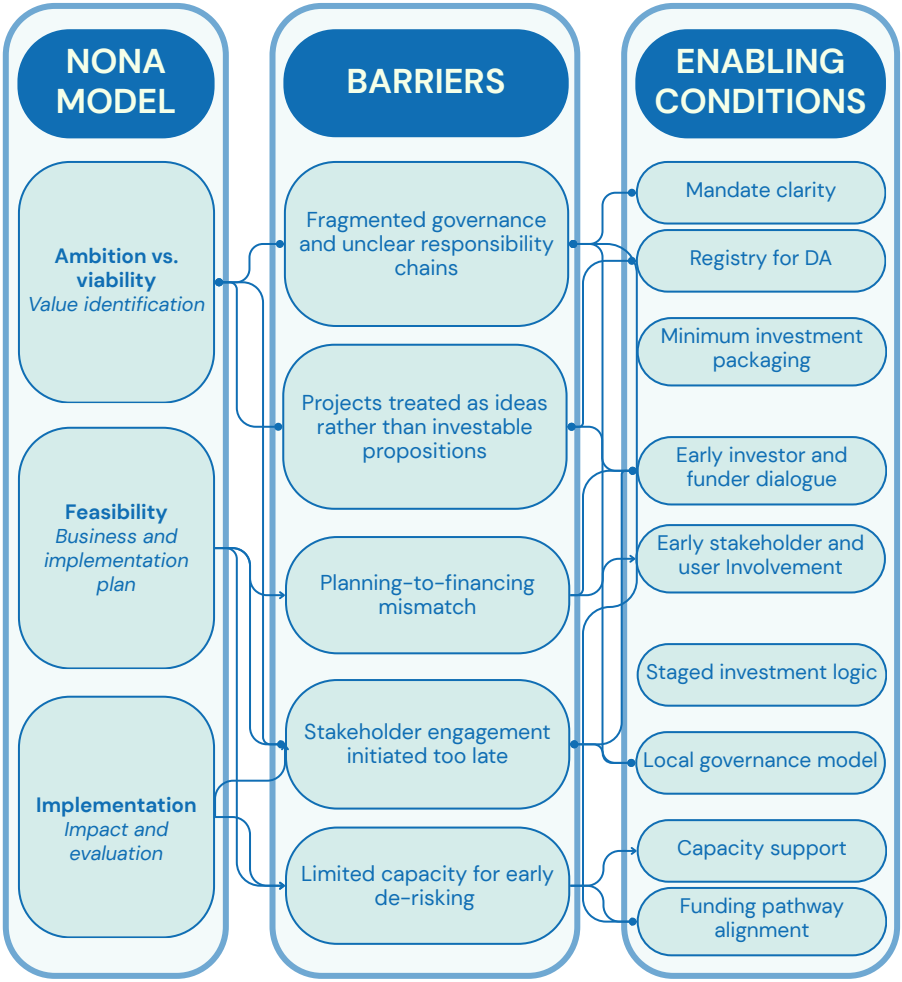
5. Technical, legal, and financial uncertainties are left unresolved until they become blockers. In heritage contexts, small municipalities, and high-risk environments, this is particularly acute, but it appears in every territorial type.



The barriers map onto the investment lifecycle, and getting a degraded area from identified opportunity to implemented project requires distinct transitions.

1.2 Enabling conditions for green investment in degraded areas

Across ten pilot contexts, progress toward investable regeneration consistently depended on the same enabling conditions. These conditions are interdependent requirements: the absence of any one of them tends to stall the others.



Decision-maker checklist for enabling green investments in DAs

	**Mandate Clarity** Confirm governance ownership: who leads, who decides, who implements, and at which level. For smaller municipalities: identify external technical assistance or shared service arrangements to supplement internal capacity.	☐
	**DA Registry and Portfolio Logic** Use or establish a degraded area registry as a prioritisation and pipeline management tool, not just an inventory.	☐
	**Minimum Investment Packaging** Assemble the minimum investor-ready pack before any financing conversation: ownership clarity, governance design, phased cost logic, ESG narrative, risk register.	☐
	**Early Investor and Funder Dialogue** Institutionalise recurring formats (investment forums, mentoring sessions, review panels) so financing partners enter as mentors at the concept stage, not evaluators at the end.	☐
	**Early Stakeholder and User Involvement** Structure participatory processes from the outset as a source of project intelligence, not as end-stage consultation.	☐
	**Staged Investment Logic** Organise regeneration around a clearly defined first phase ("core first, then expand") aligned with real implementation capacity and feasible funding paths.	☐
	**Local Governance Model** Define the shared spatial or thematic reference that makes cross-boundary coordination rational, and establish the governance routines that sustain it between events.	☐
	**Capacity Support** Identify whether internal municipal capacity is sufficient for project preparation; if not, assign external technical assistance, shared services, or expert partners as a named component of the project governance constellation.	☐
	**Funding Pathway Alignment** Identify available funding instruments for each project phase and structure project components so they connect to a realistic financing sequence.	☐

1.2.1 Mandate clarity

who leads, who decides, who is accountable

The most common reason preparation stalled between events was the absence of a named owner, a site lead, a pipeline coordinator, a LAG with a clear mandate. Accountability must be assigned before preparation begins: who convenes stakeholders, who prepares documentation, who decides when a project is ready to move to the next stage.

Unlocks: continuity between project stages, reduced rework, clearer accountability for funders.



Victor Buzu, Chisinau

1.2.2 Registry for degraded areas

from inventory to decision tool

A degraded area registry is only useful if it functions as a prioritisation and pipeline management instrument. Where registries were used as decision tools (Cluj-Napoca), they enabled portfolio logic: comparing sites, sequencing interventions, and presenting a coherent investment narrative to funders. In contexts with multiple sites, portfolio logic is what makes individual projects legible within a broader urban strategy.

Unlocks: evidence based prioritisation, coherent narrative for funders, reduced fragmentation across sites.

1.2.3 Minimum investment packaging

the evidence base that makes a project discussable

Assembling a minimum investor-ready pack (ownership status, governance design, phased cost logic, ESG narrative, and a risk register) is what opens a productive financing conversation and gives both sides a shared basis for discussion. In Chișinău this meant completing photogrammetry, geological investigations, and preventive archaeology as the foundation for any credible cost estimate.

Unlocks: legal certainty, credible project packaging, reduced investor-side risk, realistic timelines.

1.2.4 Early investor and funder dialogue

mentors at the concept stage, not only evaluators at the end

When investors are brought in as evaluators at the end of preparation, they find gaps that require redesign, wasting time and credibility. When engaged as mentors at the concept stage, as tested in Cluj-Napoca's pilot, they improve project quality early and reduce the distance to financing. Recurring formats, investment forums, mentoring sessions, review panels, need to be done so that financing partners are structuring partners from the beginning.

Unlocks: better-packaged projects, reduced investor risk perception, shorter path to financing.

1.2.5 Early stakeholder and user involvement

legitimacy built in

Stakeholder and user involvement needs to be structured from the outset as a source of project intelligence: identifying priorities, surfacing constraints, and building the local legitimacy that sustains implementation. In Šabac, the 34% citizen willingness-to-participate figure confirmed that trust deficits are as real a constraint as regulatory gaps.

Unlocks: social legitimacy, reduced rework, stronger community ownership of outcomes.



IAUS, Serbia

1.2.6 Staged investment logic

core first, then expand

Across all territorial types, the projects that made most progress were those organised around a clearly defined first phase with low operating costs and essential functions, rather than a comprehensive vision requiring full upfront commitment. This staged logic serves two purposes: it matches real implementation capacity, and it creates proof of concept that reduces risk perception for subsequent phases and investors.

Unlocks: implementation under uncertainty, investor confidence through demonstrated delivery, scalable expansion.

1.2.7 Local governance model

shared reference that makes coordination rational

Where regeneration requires coordination across departments, sectors, or municipal boundaries, a shared spatial or thematic reference is what makes that coordination functional, and sustainable. In Stuttgart it was water and the catchment logic. The local governance model defines what is at stake for stakeholders, who participates on what basis, and how decisions are made between events.

Unlocks: integrated investment logic, cross-boundary coordination, governance continuity beyond individual projects.

1.2.8 Capacity support

matching ambition to delivery ability

Where internal municipal staffing cannot cover project preparation, technical assessment, financial modelling, or investor outreach, these functions need to be explicitly assigned to external partners (technical assistance providers, research institutions, regional development agencies, or expert networks). In Virovitica, external mentoring and verification are identified as enabling conditions in their own right.

Unlocks: realistic project preparation timelines, credible technical documentation, credible technical documentation, and access to expertise the municipality cannot sustain in-house.



1.2.9 Funding pathway alignment

connecting project components to realistic financing opportunities

Projects are frequently developed through spatial planning logic but not structured into fundable components aligned with available instruments and programme cycles. Funding pathway alignment means identifying which instruments, EU programmes, national schemes, blended finance, donor funding, are available for each phase, and structuring project components so they connect to a realistic financing sequence.

Unlocks: financeable project components, reduced planning-to-financing gap, clearer investment sequencing for funders and municipalities alike.

What should be standardised vs. what should remain place-based across the Danube Region

To support transferability while respecting context, the pilots indicate a practical distinction:

Elements to standardise: minimum documentation and decision gates; terminology and shared process logic (phased development, role clarity, governance routines); basic registry fields and prioritisation criteria; core principles for stakeholder integration and early de-risking; the nine enabling conditions as a shared diagnostic framework.

Elements to keep place-based: project functions and programme choices; the governance form (municipal unit vs. LAG-based model vs. multi-institution steering arrangements); the feasible funding mix (public/EU/private/donor) and its sequencing; the pace of delivery based on local implementation capacity; the specific external partners providing capacity support.



Enabling conditions mapping

Country	Mandate Clarity	DA Registry & Portfolio	Min. Packaging	Early Investor	Early Stakeholder	Staged Investment	Local Gov. Model	Capacity Support	Funding Pathway
Stuttgart (DE)	◑	○	◑	○	●	●	●	○	●
Cluj (RO)	●	●	●	●	◑	◑	◑	◑	●
Chișinău (MD)	◑	○	●	◑	◑	●	◑	●	◑
Odesa (UKR)	●	◑	●	○	●	●	◑	●	◑
Gabrovo (BG)	◑	◑	◑	●	●	●	◑	◑	●
Veszprém (HU)	◑	○	●	●	●	◑	◑	○	●
Cazin (BiH)	◑	○	○	○	●	◑	◑	◑	◑
Šabac (SRB)	●	○	◑	○	●	◑	●	◑	◑
Ravne (SI)	●	○	◑	○	●	●	◑	●	◑
Virovitica (HR)	●	○	◑	○	●	●	◑	●	◑

● primary lever / ◑ secondary / ○ not the focus

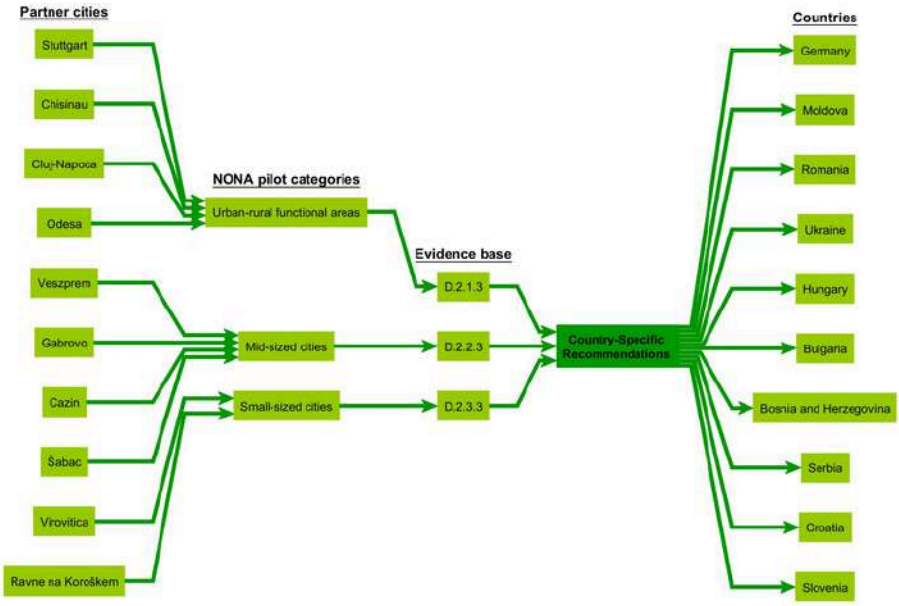
Note: For small-sized cities (Ravne, Virovitica, Reni), Capacity Support includes external technical assistance and expert partnerships as a structural governance component, not only internal role assignment.

2. Country specific recommendations by pilot category

This section is structured according to the three NONA pilot categories: Urban-rural functional areas, Mid-sized cities, Small-sized cities.



Method from evidence base to country-specific recommendations



Source: NONA, IAUS

2.1 Urban-rural functional areas

In these contexts, degraded areas are embedded within wider territorial systems shaped by functional linkages between urban centres and surrounding rural areas. Regeneration processes therefore require coordination across governance levels, sectoral domains, and spatial scales, extending beyond site-specific interventions. The evidence shows that project preparation depends on aligning local initiatives with broader territorial frameworks, including planning instruments, infrastructure systems, and environmental conditions. This involves structuring development processes that integrate analytical inputs, stakeholder involvement, and implementation requirements into a coherent sequence. Across the analysed cases, green investment preparation is predominantly supported through public-sector frameworks and EU programmes. Investment readiness is thus linked to the capacity to position projects within existing strategic and regulatory contexts, while ensuring coordination among relevant actors.



2.1.1
Germany: Stuttgart Region



A. Country context: Water as a frame, law as a gap

In the Stuttgart Region, green investment in degraded areas is framed through a catchment-based, cross-municipal approach centred on the Neckar corridor. The pilot addresses fragmented river and landscape systems affected by infrastructural barriers, altered water regimes, and competing land uses. Its primary objective is to build climate-resilient, multifunctional landscapes using water as a shared planning framework and governance anchor.

Key constraints operate at two levels. Regulatory: hydrological measures remain insufficiently embedded in planning law, limiting the legal traction of water-based interventions within standard development control. Capacity: limited municipal experience with hybrid value creation currently reduces investment readiness, even where strategic interest in climate urbanism is high. At the same time, existing compensation and eco-point systems offer a concrete regulatory pathway for integrating water-based measures without new legislation, and the catchment scale provides measurable climate value through retention, infiltration, and runoff management across municipal boundaries.







B. Priority enabling measures: From spatial logic to operative instruments

Priority enabling measures focus on converting water-based spatial logic into operational delivery using existing instruments. First, formalise catchment-based planning approaches that make interdependencies between settlements, landscapes, infrastructure, and land uses visible across municipal and sectoral boundaries. Second, reform existing eco-point catalogues to explicitly include water retention and infiltration, and replace individual parcel-level approvals with area-wide assessments, the most immediately actionable regulatory change identified, requiring no new legislative framework. Third, clarify responsibility chains for water retention, infiltration, and runoff management across actors and levels, and translate these into investable packages with cooperative governance routines capable of supporting hybrid and scalable implementation.

C. Implementation note: Coordination across levels, delivery across sites

Implementation in Stuttgart is inherently multi-level and cross-municipal. Municipalities lead planning processes, while regional and state levels influence spatial coordination and water/environmental governance. The core implementing constellation includes municipalities, the regional association, public utilities, SMEs, universities, and citizens. A key structural insight from the pilot is that coordination must be organised around shared spatial impact chains, catchment-wide interdependencies, rather than parcel-level decisions alone.

The pilot tested a sequence of investment forums, expert talks, youth participation, and local action group meetings across three focus areas (Neckargröningen, Altbach, Hallschlag), demonstrating that non-financial contributions, knowledge, time, trust, authority, care, are as structurally important to delivery as funding. The next implementation stage requires formalising cooperative governance arrangements, defining decision checkpoints, and mapping responsibility chains for key risks, moving from tested methodology to investable packages with clearer cost ranges and co-benefits.

D. Danube Region alignment: Transferable lessons

The Stuttgart pilot contributes to Danube Region alignment through three transferable elements. First, the use of water as a cross-cutting spatial reference linking land use, actors, and responsibilities, directly applicable to river corridors and peri-urban systems with upstream–downstream dynamics across the region. Second, the eco-point reform pathway, which demonstrates how water-based measures can be anchored in existing compensation instruments without new legislation, relevant wherever analogous systems exist. Third, three process lessons with broad transferability: hybrid investment strategies as a mechanism for sharing risk and enabling scalability; co-creation as the route to joint responsibility and emerging implementation alliances; and regionally representative topics as the vehicle for vertical and horizontal knowledge exchange across sectors and governance levels.

Key takeaway:
Anchor water retention in existing eco-point catalogues: no new legislation required.

2.1.2

Romania: Cluj-Napoca Metropolitan area

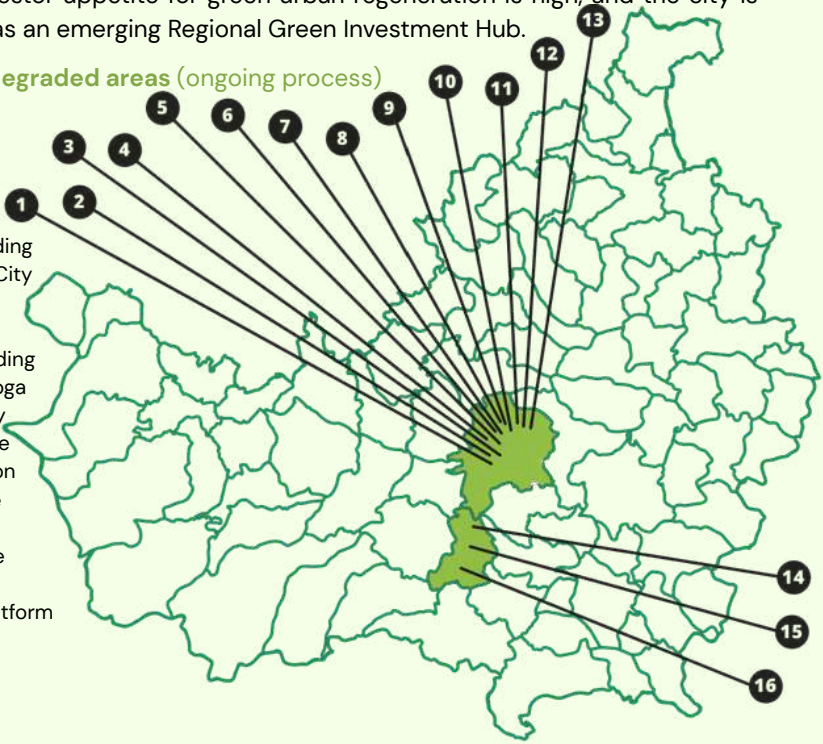
A. Country context: The Investment Readiness Gap

In the Cluj-Napoca Metropolitan Area, green investment in degraded areas is framed through a multi-site portfolio of former industrial sites, underused public and university buildings, infrastructural gaps along mobility corridors, and public land suitable for green and blue infrastructure. The pilot operates across the city and its functional urban area under mixed and predominantly public ownership, with governance and ecosystem-building treated as core conditions of project preparation. Its primary objective is to transform degraded urban sites into investment-ready green assets supporting climate neutrality, social inclusion, and economic viability.

Key constraints are regulatory and structural: lengthy permitting and zoning procedures, limited flexibility in public asset management, ownership fragmentation, and insufficient ESG documentation capacity at project promoter level. At the same time, Cluj operates in a strong market context, institutional finance (EIB), commercial banks, and private developers are present, investor appetite for green urban regeneration is high, and the city is positioned as an emerging Regional Green Investment Hub.

Identified degraded areas (ongoing process)

1. Avram Iancu Street Spaces
2. BRICS
3. Palatul Telefoanelor
4. Ex BCR Building
5. Iris District City Hall
6. FSPAC3
7. Hasdeu Building
8. Octavian Goga County Library
9. Plaiuri Village
10. Cluj Garrison
11. Széki Palace
12. Carbochim Platform & The Rivus Project
13. The Sun Platform
14. CREIC
15. Ongoing
16. Ongoing



B. Priority enabling measures: Three Enabling Moves

Priority enabling measures focus on closing the gap between conceptual project ideas and investable propositions. First, define and apply minimum investment-readiness criteria for each site, covering ownership clarity, governance design, ESG/EU Taxonomy alignment, and credible financial logic, so that projects can move from registry to investing package. Second, formalise early and structured investor dialogue, positioning investors as mentors during project preparation rather than evaluators at submission stage; the pilot demonstrates this significantly improves structuring quality and reduces rework. Third, establish site-specific coordination routines with clear public champions per site, ensuring consistency across the metropolitan portfolio and providing the governance predictability that institutional investors require.

C. Implementation note: Municipal Lead, Metropolitan Reach

Implementation is led at municipal level through a quadruple-helix constellation, municipality and county council, Regional Development Agency (ADR Nord-Vest), financial actors (EIB, BCR), private developers, universities, and NGOs, coordinated under the NONA methodology as a shared governance and investment language. The pilot has already clarified investment-readiness criteria, mapped land and ownership, aligned projects with ESG and EU Taxonomy requirements, and established a shared understanding of the 2028–2034 funding window. The next stage requires selecting priority projects from the registry, preparing minimum bankability packages, and maintaining structured investor follow-up to reduce risk before detailed design.

D. Danube Region alignment: A Replicable Model for Green Investment Readiness

The Cluj-Napoca Metropolitan area contributes to Danube Region alignment through several clearly transferable elements. The first is the minimum investment-readiness checklist, which clarifies what makes regeneration projects investable and is explicitly identified in the source as highly transferable for improving bankability. The second is the use of early investor mentoring, which improves project structuring and the quality of project preparation while reducing rework. The third is the registry / portfolio approach, which supports prioritisation and is presented as transferable to cities with multiple sites requiring portfolio logic rather than isolated interventions.

Its broader contribution to cross-country coherence lies in the way it links governance, investment readiness, and ESG-aligned regeneration with a metropolitan setting. In this sense, Cluj provides a concrete model for how collaborative governance, structured investor dialogue, and evidence-based prioritisation can strengthen long-term feasibility.

Key takeaway:

Define minimum investment-readiness criteria before any investor dialogue begins.

2.1.3

Republic of Moldova: Chișinău Municipality

A. Country context: Heritage as Opportunity, Complexity as Constraint

In Chișinău Municipality, green investment in degraded areas is structured around a strategically significant pilot: the former Moara Roșie, an abandoned inner-city industrial heritage site with high cultural value, central location, and full municipal ownership. The site's public ownership is both its greatest asset, enabling integration with urban planning instruments, heritage protection frameworks, and long-term public-interest objectives, and its most complex governance challenge, given the multi-actor institutional setting required for any intervention. Heritage protection procedures are prescriptive and multi-stage, requiring expert approvals before any physical or even temporary intervention. The absence of completed structural assessments and cost estimates makes it difficult to communicate credible risk and return profiles to investors. Procurement and public finance rules further limit the municipality's ability to engage small operators or test low-cost interim uses quickly.

The site generates interest from public institutions, cultural operators, NGOs, and impact-oriented investors precisely because of its heritage character, location, and alignment with green and cultural regeneration agendas. EU-supported programmes for heritage conservation, climate adaptation, and nature-based solutions represent viable early-stage financing.



B. Priority enabling measures: De-risk first, then finance

Priority enabling measures centre on reducing technical and regulatory uncertainty before financial structuring begins. The first and most consequential measure is systematic early technical preparation: photogrammetry, topography, geological investigations, and preventive archaeology to establish a credible evidence base for structural assessment and cost envelopes. The second measure is repositioning heritage restoration as a strategic regeneration opportunity rather than a conservation-only obligation, integrating adaptive reuse scenarios aligned with green investment logic and New European Bauhaus principles into the site's planning framework. Third, a phased restoration and activation roadmap with clear decision gates, a defined permitting pathway, and incremental cost logic allows the site to move forward without requiring full upfront commitment, and gives investors a structured entry point at each phase.

C. Implementation note: Sequential delivery

Implementation is led at municipal level, which holds decision-making authority over the asset and relies on the national framework for cadastral, ownership, and heritage protection matters. The implementing constellation includes municipal technical and planning departments, heritage and architectural experts, municipal services, and academic, cultural, and civic actors. The governance structure proved effective for strategic alignment and data access but less agile for fast implementation, pointing to the need for simplified coordination mechanisms or delegated operational roles in future phases. Progress is directly tied to completing technical precondition and financial structuring gains credibility as structural assessments and phased cost logic are progressively established.

D. Danube Region alignment: Heritage led regeneration across the region

Chișinău's contribution to Danube Region alignment lies in demonstrating a replicable approach to heritage-led regeneration under strict regulatory conditions. The core transferable insight is sequencing: institutional alignment before design, technical de-risking before financial structuring, phased and reversible interventions before full-scale commitment. This logic applies to any Danube Region city managing protected assets with complex approval cycles. The minimum bankability package developed through the pilot, anchored in technical evidence, phased cost logic, and a defined permitting pathway, provides a concrete model for leading heritage-based degraded areas through administrative complexity toward credible investment readiness, regardless of local heritage law specifics.

Key takeaway:
In heritage-constrained contexts: complete technical de-risking before financial structuring, sequence matters more than speed

2.1.4



Ukraine: Odesa Region / Reni

A. Country context: High risk, high purpose

The Odesa Region is a border and logistics-oriented community with high dependence on external factors. It has a specific high-risk environment for investment processes, exacerbated by technical and security risks, insecure financing, and limited administrative capacity, especially at this time. In that regard, projects are expected to demonstrate resilience, phased delivery, and low operating costs, relying on stable governance to attract partners and possible donors.

Important constraints include severely limited administrative capacity under constant pressure (institutional overload), the need for formal documentation (DPT, land management), and the need for strong coordination to maintain continuity and credibility. All this can pique investors' interest or stall project ideas/concepts in the early stages.

On the other hand, the opportunities in this region include defining the most realistic and suitable financial mix (donor/public + partners) and ensuring the project can proceed under any uncertainty. It also emphasizes creating legal/planning readiness with clearer timelines and permitting pathways, which are critical for investability and donor/investor confidence. Odesa pilot points out that improved strategic relevance can enable stronger justification for green infrastructure funding.

B. Priority enabling measures: Core first, then expand

Priority enabling measures for Reni centre on a staged, low-cost-core approach designed to maintain progress under uncertainty. The first and most critical measure is securing formal planning readiness, completing the land management documentation to establish the legal basis for investment and removing the single largest early-stage blocker.

The second measure is the adoption of a "core first, then expand" delivery model, as embodied in the Center of Life 2.0 concept: a multifunctional structure combining daily services, social and cultural functions, civil protection infrastructure all within a design that prioritises low operating costs and all-season flexibility. Essential functions are delivered first; expansion follows as conditions allow. Third, scenario-robust design must be built into the project from the outset, ensuring that the investment remains viable across a range of security and financial scenarios rather than depending on a single funding pathway.

C. Implementation note: Local authority, distributed partnership

Implementation is led at municipal level, with Reni City Council as contracting authority, owner, and planning body. The implementing constellation includes SERIGG (responsible for pilot coordination, GIS, and the registry of degraded areas), the Odesa Oblast Regional Development Agency (development support and investment packaging), local NGOs, residents, and businesses as co-creators and future users. The immediate time horizon is governed by the DPT process; once complete, the core phase of the Center of Life 2.0 can move to detailed design and financing. Subsequent phases expand functions and green infrastructure along the gully corridor, with a long-term ambition to revitalise approximately 8% of the city's territory.

D. Danube Region alignment: Context relevance

Reni's contribution to Danube Region alignment lies in demonstrating that structured green investment preparation can proceed even under acute crisis conditions. The transferable model is the combination of: formal planning readiness as the first investment step; a phased, low-cost-core delivery sequence; and dual-use design logic that integrates resilience functions (shelter, emergency power, civil protection) into green and public space from the outset. This framework applies directly to any Danube Region municipality managing high uncertainty and positions degraded areas not as problems deferred by crisis but as entry points for building long-term community resilience.

Key takeaway:
Formal planning readiness is the first investment step, not a precondition for starting.



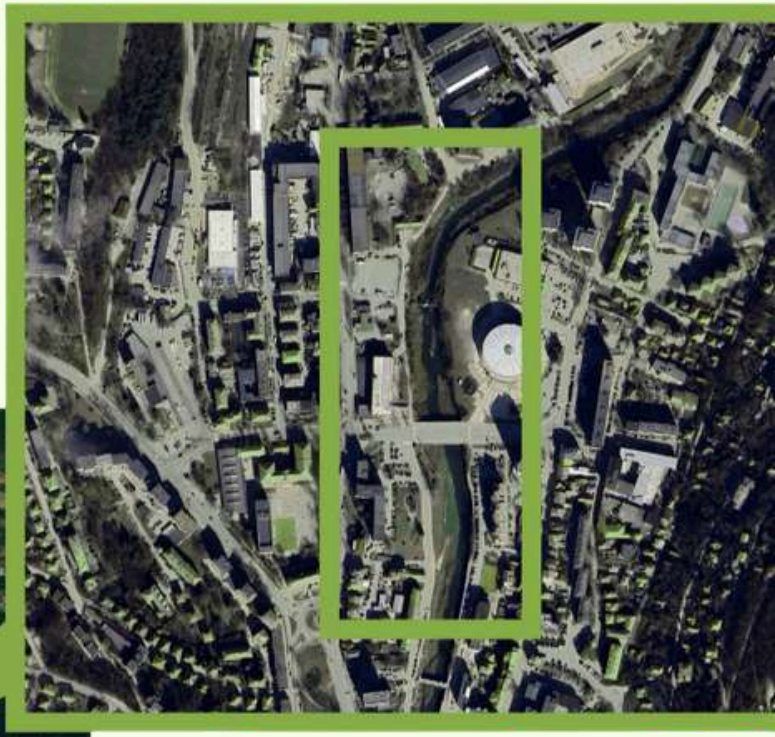
2.2 Mid-sized cities

This section presents country-specific enabling measures for NONA pilot cities in the mid-sized category, based on the evidence and synthesis developed in D.2.2.3 and supported by survey findings across partner cities. The analysis identifies a set of shared structural conditions shaping regeneration processes in these contexts. DAs are predominantly publicly owned, project initiation is typically led by municipal actors, and funding relies largely on public and EU sources, while the role of market-based investment remains context-dependent. Project preparation is consistently supported by participatory and evidence-based approaches, including stakeholder mapping, needs assessment, and field-based analysis, which contribute to the definition and structuring of regeneration initiatives. Interventions address a range of functions, including environmental improvement, public space development, and the integration of social and educational uses. Within this common framework, variation occurs in the organisation of governance coordination, project structuring, and implementation processes, reflecting differences in institutional settings and local development conditions.



2.2.1





Bulgaria: Gabrovo

A. Country context: A vision for riverfront

In Gabrovo, the pilot area is associated with the Yantra riverfront and includes publicly accessible spaces combining environmental, cultural, and public-use functions (post-industrial corridor of brownfields and neglected public spaces). Project preparation is led by the municipality and supported through a combination of funding frameworks, as indicated in the comparative analysis of mid-sized city pilots. Also, private investor appetite exists, but is conditional on revenue models.

Survey findings indicate the presence of multiple funding sources and contributions from civil society and partnership-based initiatives. These elements suggest a diversified funding structure, within which project development requires alignment between local priorities and available financial instruments.

B. Priority enabling measures: From riverfront to investment

Priority enabling measures in Gabrovo focus on establishing a coordinated approach to project preparation that links spatial planning, environmental priorities, cultural programming, and stakeholder involvement within a shared development framework.

A key measure concerns the structuring of interventions into phases, allowing for the gradual development of the pilot area and alignment with available funding opportunities. This phased approach supports the transition from initial concepts towards implementable project components.

In addition, enabling measures include the continued use of participatory processes as part of project definition, contributing to the identification of priorities and the alignment of stakeholder inputs. The combination of coordination, phased structuring, and stakeholder engagement forms the basis for advancing regeneration in this context. The most concrete financing route identified is an ITI (Integrated Territorial Investment) approach combining EU public funding for early de-risking with phased private co-investment in revenue-generating functions.

C. Implementation note: Municipal lead, cross-sector delivery

Implementation in Gabrovo is led at the municipal level, with the municipality responsible for coordinating project development and aligning inputs from relevant sectors and stakeholders. Implementation is carried out through existing institutional structures, with the involvement of local actors depending on the scope and phase of interventions. At broader governance levels, support is provided through access to funding programmes and alignment with relevant policy frameworks.

The implementation process follows a phased progression. Initial stages focus on coordination and definition of priorities, followed by the structuring of project components and preparation of implementation conditions. Subsequent phases are linked to the mobilisation of funding sources and the gradual realisation of interventions over time.

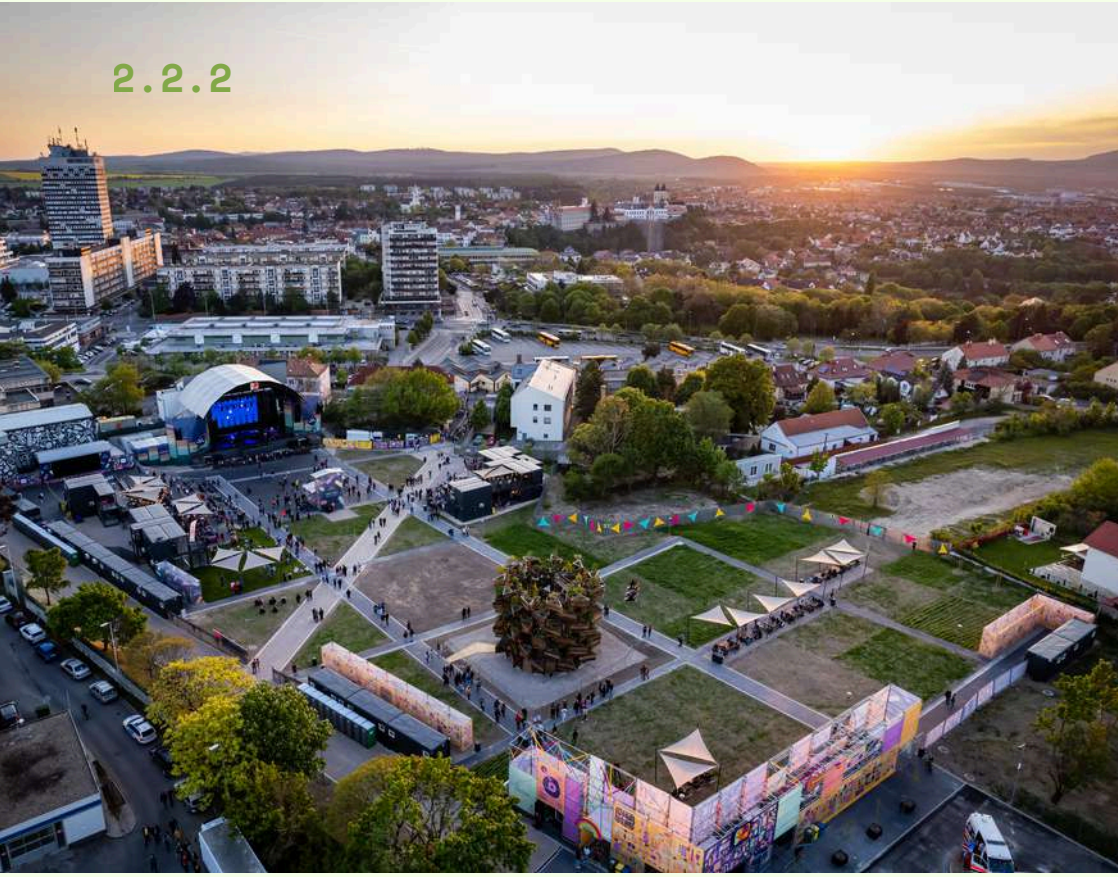
D. Danube Region alignment: Prototype with regional range

The Gabrovo pilot demonstrates a transferable approach based on coordinated project preparation, phased development, and the use of multiple funding sources within a structured process. Transferability lies in the organisation of regeneration as a sequence of defined steps, where project scope, stakeholder inputs, and funding opportunities are aligned progressively. This approach can be applied in other mid-sized cities where regeneration depends on coordinating public actors, civil society, and diverse funding sources.

Cross-country coherence is supported through the application of a shared operational logic, in which project preparation is structured as a coordinated and phased process. This enables different local contexts to develop comparable pathways for advancing regeneration initiatives, while adapting to their specific institutional and financial conditions. Three transferable lessons: anchor in strong public leadership but open the process early; translate vision into phased delivery models and revenue logic as soon as possible; anticipate permitting and procurement bottlenecks rather than discovering them mid-process.

Key takeaway: Translate spatial vision into phased delivery models and revenue logic as early as possible.

2.2.2



Hungary: Veszprém

A. Country context: Where investor logic meets municipal vision

In Veszprém, the preparation of green investments in degraded areas takes place within a context where municipal leadership is combined with a broader range of funding sources, including public, EU, and private contributions, as indicated in the survey findings across mid-sized city pilots. The pilot site is a 2.5-hectare former downtown furniture factory under municipal ownership. The central tension is not lack of investor interest but a value conflict: investors want maximum residential development, the municipality wants green space, water infrastructure, and community functions.

Project development is shaped by the need to coordinate regeneration initiatives that integrate cultural, environmental, and public-use functions, while aligning project concepts with available funding opportunities. The presence of multiple funding sources introduces additional requirements in structuring projects in a way that allows different contributions to be combined within a coherent development framework.

B. Priority enabling measures: Finding the balance

Priority enabling measures in Veszprém focus on structuring project preparation in a way that enables the alignment of specific EU programmes and private investment within a coordinated development process.

A key measure concerns the organisation of project components so that funding sources, including EU programme-based funding and private investment, can be linked to clearly defined phases or elements of regeneration initiatives. This requires a precise definition of project scope and the sequencing of interventions.

In addition, enabling measures include the coordination of stakeholder inputs across public institutions and private actors, ensuring that project development reflects both local priorities and the conditions associated with different funding mechanisms. The specific financial mechanism under discussion is a cross-subsidy model, municipality provides land, developer builds residential units and returns social rental apartments, revenues fund the green programme. The binding timeline constraint is the local spatial plan.

C. Implementation note: Timeline as constraint

Implementation in Veszprém is led at the municipal level, with the municipality responsible for coordinating project preparation and aligning contributions from different stakeholders and funding sources.

Implementation is carried out through existing institutional structures, with the involvement of public actors, private partners, and other stakeholders depending on the structure of projects.

The process follows a phased progression. Initial stages focus on defining project scope and aligning stakeholder inputs, followed by the structuring of project components in relation to available funding sources. Subsequent phases are linked to the mobilisation of funding and the implementation of interventions over time.

D. Danube Region alignment: Negotiating green in a market context

The Veszprém pilot demonstrates a transferable approach based on the integration of EU programme-based funding and private investment within a structured project preparation process.

Transferability lies in the ability to organise regeneration initiatives in a way that connects these funding sources through clearly defined project components and phases. This approach is particularly relevant in contexts where programme-based funding and private investment can be combined within a single development framework.

Cross-country coherence is supported through a shared structuring logic that aligns stakeholders and funding within a coordinated project preparation process adaptable to different local conditions. The cross-subsidy model logic, using residential development revenue to fund green and community functions, is directly applicable where land value exists but green objectives cannot be financed through public budgets alone.

Key takeaway:

Model the cross-subsidy terms before the spatial plan locks in, the viable residential density, the land swap conditions, and what that generates for the green programme.



2.2.3

Bosnia and Herzegovina: Cazin

A. Country context: Small square with big principles

In Cazin, the preparation of green investment projects in degraded areas is carried out at the municipal level, within a planning framework defined by the General Urban Plan and supported through public-purpose land use. The site is a degraded central square, modest in scale but high in symbolic value, treated as a model for inclusive, intergenerational public space regeneration under NEB principles in a limited-capacity context.

Project development is based on an experiential and needs-driven approach, where pilot selection and concept definition respond directly to locally identified priorities . The process integrates multiple analytical steps, including stakeholder mapping, spatial and functional analysis, identification of deficiencies, and assessment of user needs and site potential, indicating a structured approach to project definition grounded in local context.

At the same time, the process relies on coordination between local administration and stakeholders, with stakeholder integration identified as a key factor in understanding development potential. The application of NEB principles contributes to shaping projects as sustainable, inclusive, and responsive to citizens' needs, reinforcing the alignment of regeneration initiatives with broader green investment objectives.

B. Priority enabling measures: Participation as the method

Priority enabling measures in Cazin focus on strengthening stakeholder integration as a central component of project preparation, supported through LAG-based collaboration and direct engagement formats.

Project development is structured through combined analytical and participatory processes, including joint meetings with the city administration and stakeholders, as well as field-based observation and site analysis, which inform the definition of investment priorities.

Additional measures include the alignment of project concepts with key thematic areas such as public space design, sustainability and resilience, intergenerational use, and urban safety, ensuring that project objectives are clearly articulated and socially relevant.

C. Implementation note: Municipal coordination, LAG engagement

Implementation is led at the municipal level, with the city administration coordinating project preparation in collaboration with stakeholders engaged through LAG and participatory processes.

The process is organised through iterative coordination between analysis, stakeholder input, and project definition, supported by public consultation formats such as hearings and discussions.

In temporal terms, project development progresses from initial stakeholder integration and site analysis, towards the definition of project priorities and implementation steps aligned with available funding sources, including public budgets, EU programmes, and national development schemes.

D. Danube Region alignment: A replicable approach

Cazin pilot demonstrates a transferable approach based on the integration of stakeholder input, field-based analysis, and needs-driven project definition within a municipal development process.

This approach supports cross-country coherence by showing how green investment priorities can be defined through participatory and analytical methods, while remaining compatible with different planning frameworks and funding structures across the Danube Region.

Key takeaway:
Needs-driven participatory preparation can produce coherent investment priorities even with limited capacity.

2.2.4

Serbia: Šabac

A. Country context: A space with fragmented management responsibilities

In the Serbian context, the preparation of green investments in degraded areas takes place within institutional arrangements where responsibilities for spatial development, public services, and project implementation are distributed across multiple administrative domains. In the case of the Letnjikovac site, these conditions are further defined by its character as a publicly accessible and community-oriented space, where regeneration does not rely on conventional market-based investment models. Project development is therefore framed through public and participatory approaches.

At the operational level, the site is characterised by the absence of a unified framework for coordinating interventions, financing, and long-term maintenance. Management responsibilities are distributed among several on-site institutions. In addition, the current use of the site indicates the need for more structured financial arrangements to support its educational, ecological, and recreational functions.

At the same time, the pilot process has demonstrated a strong basis for advancing regeneration. Co-creation activities and the Regional Investment Forum confirmed the capacity of local stakeholders to articulate a coherent development vision.







B. Priority enabling measures: Guided governing

Enabling measures in the Šabac context focus on structuring coordination at the level of the site, allowing for alignment between maintenance, programmatic development, and longer-term project preparation. This includes the gradual consolidation of management approaches that integrate operational and strategic dimensions of regeneration.

A key measure concerns the development of participatory governance arrangements adapted to publicly accessible and community-oriented spaces. The strengthening of cooperation between public institutions, educational actors, civil society, and local initiatives supports the distribution and coordination of responsibilities related to activation, programming, and maintenance. In parallel, enabling measures address the structuring of diversified financing approaches. Regeneration is supported through the combination of city resources, EU funding programmes, sponsorship, and community-based contributions. The alignment of these sources with defined project components and development phases enables the gradual establishment of financial frameworks suited to contexts where market-based investment is not applicable.

C. Implementation note: City as coordinator, LAG as activator

The City of Šabac acts as the central coordinating body, responsible for structuring the development process and ensuring continuity between project definition, stakeholder involvement, and implementation. This role is complemented by stakeholder networks activated through the LAG, which contribute to programme development and participatory governance arrangements.

In temporal terms, the process follows a phased progression. Initial stages focus on coordination and further development of project concepts. Subsequent phases address the structuring of project components and alignment of funding sources, while longer-term development is oriented towards stabilising governance arrangements and adapting programme and financing structures over time.

D. Danube Region alignment: Governance as absorption capacity

Transferability lies in the structuring of project preparation as a coordinated process that integrates stakeholder participation, phased development, and the alignment of multiple funding sources. This approach can be applied in other Danube Region contexts where degraded areas require alternative financing models.

Cross-country coherence is supported through the consistent application of these structuring principles, enabling the development of regeneration initiatives as coordinated processes. The reliance on participatory formats, iterative coordination, and combined funding approaches provides a common basis that can be adapted to different institutional and territorial conditions.

Key takeaway:

Participatory governance learning must be formally embedded in planning instruments to have lasting effect.



2.3 Small-sized cities

This section focuses on country-specific enabling measures derived from the small-sized city pilots, building on the evidence and synthesis of D.2.3.3, with a capacity-first emphasis. In the NONA framework, small-sized (border) municipalities are characterised by limited administrative capacity, constrained municipal budgets, and reduced access to technical expertise, while facing comparable regeneration challenges to larger cities. In these contexts, green investment readiness depends less on "bankability" in the classical sense and more on strengthening the local ability to coordinate, define a credible development pathway, and build legitimacy through step-by-step implementation.

The pilots confirm that progress must match real implementation capacity and should be organised around a clear "catalyst intervention" that enables learning-by-doing. This approach helps municipalities establish internal coordination routines, clarify roles and ownership, and translate long-term ambitions into phased, feasible actions. The section therefore prioritises enabling measures that support (i) internal coordination and decision-making, (ii) structured project preparation through small, tangible demonstrators, (iii) early stakeholder alignment, and (iv) phased funding logic suitable for low-capacity environments in the Danube Region.



2.3.1

Slovenia: Ravne na Koroškem

Ravne na Koroškem represents the small-sized, border municipality context where regeneration ambitions often exceed available implementation capacity. The pilot focuses on the revitalisation of the Old Ironworks Museum Area as a multifunctional space with cultural, educational, and innovation functions. Key constraints relate to ensuring long-term governance and operational viability (who leads, who manages, and how programme and maintenance are secured over time), as well as aligning stakeholder commitment and political support with realistic delivery capacity. At the same time, the pilot shows a strong opportunity to use heritage-led regeneration as a local "development catalyst", mobilising institutions and community actors around a shared place-based identity and a visible, phased transformation pathway.



Priority enabling measures in Ravne emphasise a capacity-first approach. A first measure is to formally embed an "implementation potential check" as a decision gate in early project preparation, ensuring that project scope, timelines, and responsibilities reflect real available capacity (human and organisational, not only financial). A second measure is to structure regeneration around a clearly defined catalyst intervention ("core first, then expand"), which enables learning-by-doing, builds a critical mass of engaged actors, and creates the organisational routines needed for subsequent phases.

In addition, enabling measures include systematic outside verification and partnership building: small municipalities benefit from external mentors and expert partners who already implement comparable approaches, helping reduce risk, improve quality, and accelerate institutional learning. Finally, the pilot highlights the need to redefine "investment value" in small-city contexts, treating municipal spending as a catalyst that generates long-term economic and social returns through functional use, programming, and new local services, rather than relying on immediate market returns.

Implementation is led at municipal level, with the Municipality of Ravne na Koroškem coordinating the process and ensuring continuity between project definition, stakeholder engagement, and phased implementation. In the short term (0-12 months), priority is placed on clarifying governance/operational ownership, confirming the catalyst intervention, and establishing the decision gates (capacity check, roles, responsibilities). In the medium term (1-3 years), the focus shifts to consolidating partnerships (expert support, programme partners, potential funders) and stabilising a realistic programme-and-maintenance model. Longer-term (3+ years), measures aim at scaling from the catalyst intervention to broader area activation, anchored in established coordination routines and a stable operating framework.

The Ravne pilot demonstrates a transferable logic for small municipalities: progress is maximised when the regeneration pathway is matched to implementation capacity and organised around a tangible catalyst intervention. Transferability lies in the structured sequencing (capacity check → catalyst project → scaling) and the deliberate use of outside verification/mentoring to strengthen institutional performance. Cross-country coherence is supported by applying the same NONA principles (phased development, clear decision gates, stakeholder alignment, and broadened value logic), while adapting the operational model to national and local governance conditions across the Danube Region.



Croatia: Virovitica

Virovitica illustrates the small-city context where strategic regeneration must be built with limited resources, while local development pressures (including housing demand and land prices) continue to increase. The pilot focuses on transforming an underused area (including an industrial zone context) into a green, sustainable, and inclusive development pathway, with early work based on a public poll on needs, initial concept definition, and preparatory planning reflections. Key constraints relate to limited financial capacity, the absence of a clear business model at early stages, and the need to strengthen both internal coordination and stakeholder outreach. At the same time, the pilot demonstrates that small, visible interventions (such as the "green pocket" sensory park) can create momentum, support inclusion goals, and build readiness for larger residential and public-space investments.

Priority enabling measures in Virovitica focus on strengthening internal capacity and structuring regeneration as a phased process. A first measure is to institutionalise inter-departmental coordination through a small internal task structure that links spatial planning, property management, and project development functions, ensuring that housing, green infrastructure, and inclusion objectives are addressed together. A second measure is to use a small-scale demonstrator intervention (e.g., the “green pocket” sensory park) as a practical learning platform, supporting experimentation with inclusive design and improving implementation capacity without requiring full-scale investment frameworks at the outset.

In addition, enabling measures include advancing strategic and integrated planning for residential zones and public green spaces, supported by early project briefs and minimum documentation that clarify goals, target groups, and phased implementation logic. Finally, early stakeholder awareness-building (citizens, relevant institutions, potential partners) supports legitimacy and prepares the ground for broader engagement once the project pipeline matures.

Implementation is led at municipal level by the City of Virovitica, with coordination anchored in the administration’s spatial planning and related departments. In the short term (0-12 months), priority actions focus on maintaining the internal coordination structure, finalising the demonstrator intervention concept and brief, and consolidating early stakeholder communication. In the medium term (1-3 years), the focus shifts to aligning spatial planning steps (including plan changes where needed), developing a phased package of interventions, and clarifying funding logic. In the longer term (3+ years), measures support the transition from demonstrator actions to structured delivery of wider housing and green-space investments, supported by stronger stakeholder partnerships and an investment-ready preparation approach.

The Virovitica pilot demonstrates a transferable approach for small and medium-sized cities: internal capacity-building and inter-departmental coordination can be advanced through methodology-driven work even before formal investment frameworks are in place. Transferability lies in the use of small-scale, tangible interventions to build institutional readiness, stakeholder awareness, and strategic clarity. Cross-country coherence is supported through consistent NONA principles (phased structuring, integrated planning of green and social functions, and capacity-first sequencing) adaptable across Danube Region municipalities facing similar resource constraints.

3. Conclusions

Ten pilot cities. Three territorial typologies. One consistent finding: the distance between a degraded area and a funded, implemented project is governed by institutional conditions more than by financing conditions. Money, when it arrives, can only flow through structures that already exist. What the NONA pilots document, across contexts as different as Stuttgart's catchment corridors and Reni's crisis-context public space, is the precise nature of those structures, and what happens when they are absent, partial, or out of sequence.

The nine enabling conditions identified through the pilot evidence are interdependent in ways that matter for how they are applied. Mandate clarity without minimum packaging produces governance without projects. Staged investment logic without early stakeholder involvement produces phasing without legitimacy. Early investor dialogue without ownership clarity produces conversations that stall and restart. The conditions function as a system, where the weakest link determines how far the whole can progress.

Three patterns deserve particular attention for anyone using this booklet to diagnose their own context.
The first is that sequencing matters as much as completeness. The Chișinău case illustrates this most sharply: moving into financial structuring before technical de-risking was complete did not accelerate the processs, it created a credibility gap that had to be closed before any financing conversation could resume. The Reni case makes the same point from a different angle: formal planning readiness was the first investment step, not because it was bureaucratically required, but because without it no other enabling condition could be meaningfully activated.

The second is the difference that portfolio logic makes. Where municipalities managed their degraded areas as a portfolio, comparing sites, sequencing interventions, constructing a coherent investment narrative, they produced something qualitatively different from what individual project preparation can achieve. Cluj-Napoca's approach demonstrates that portfolio logic is not primarily a technical tool. It is a governance posture that signals strategic intent to institutional investors and builds a pipeline larger and more resilient than any single site. For the many Danube Region municipalities holding multiple degraded sites in varying states of readiness, this shift in framing may be the highest-leverage move available.

The third is that small municipalities face a different challenge. The enabling conditions identified across all ten cases are equally relevant regardless of city size, but they are not equally reachable. In small border municipalities, Ravne, Virovitica, Cazin, Reni, the gap between ambition and delivery capacity reflects the structural reality that the human and organisational resources required for structured green investment preparation simply exceed what a small administration can sustain internally. This makes external capacity support, technical assistance, expert mentoring, shared service arrangements, a structural component of investment governance in these contexts.

What the NONA project leaves behind is a shared understanding of what the preparation phase actually involves, and what it requires. Regeneration at the scale of a degraded area begins as an institutional design challenge. Vision arrives early and drives the process; enabling conditions are built in close dialogue with it, shaping what is spatially possible and financially reachable at each stage. Spatial vision and financing logic are present throughout, tested and refined as the institutional substrate develops. What changes across the preparation lifecycle is which elements are load-bearing at a given moment. Getting that sequencing right, knowing when to consolidate governance, when to advance the spatial concept, when to open the financing conversation, is the practical intelligence this booklet is designed to support.



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List of abbreviations

BG - Bulgaria
BiH - Bosnia and Herzegovina
CSO - Civil Society Organisation
CSR - Corporate social responsibility
CWG - Coordination Working Group
DAs - Degraded Areas
DE - Germany
DRP - Danube Region Programme
EBRD - European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EIB - European Investment Bank
ESG - Environmental, Social and Governance
EU - European Union
GIS - Geographic Information System
HR - Croatia
HU - Hungary
IP - Investment Package
IPA - Instruments for Pre-Accession Assistance, an EU financial fund to support candidate countries
LAG - Local Action Group
MD - Republic of Moldova
NEB - New European Bauhaus
NGO - Non-Governmental Organisation, non-profit, voluntary citizens' group
NONA - New Governance for New Spaces (Project acronym)
PPP - Public-Private Partnership
RDA - Regional Development Agency
RIF - Regional Investment Forum
RO - Romania
SME - Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
SGI - Services of General Interest
SI - Slovenia
SRB - Serbia
TA - Technical Assistance
TOR - Terms of Reference
UKR - Ukraine
WB - World Bank

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