Interreg Danube Region

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NONA

Del. 2.2.3: Recommendations for a model for green investing in DAs in mid-sized cities

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Gabrovo (BG) | Veszprém (HU) |
Cazin (BiH) | Šabac (SRB)

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Full term
BG	Bulgaria
BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSR	Corporate social responsibility
CWG	Coordination Working Group
DA	Degraded Area
DRP	Danube Region Programme
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EIB	European Investment Bank
EU	European Union
GIS	Geographic Information System
HU	Hungary
IP	Investment Package
IPA	Instruments for Pre-Accession Assistance, an EU financial fund to support candidate countries
LAG	Local Action Group
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
RIF	Regional Investment Forum
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
SGI	Services of General Interest
SRB	Serbia
TA	Technical Assistance
TOR	Terms of Reference
WB	World Bank

ABSTRACT

This document synthesises the results of the NONA pilot testing and formulates recommendations for a governance-based model for green investing in degraded areas (DAs) in mid-sized cities. In such contexts, regeneration initiatives frequently face a structural gap between spatial planning concepts and their translation into investment-ready projects, reflected in fragmented municipal coordination, limited administrative capacity, and unclear decision-making pathways.

The analysis draws on pilot testing conducted in four mid-sized cities in the Danube region, Gabrovo (Bulgaria), Veszprém (Hungary), Cazin (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Šabac (Serbia), supported by stakeholder engagement processes, structured questionnaires and comparative cross-case analysis. The findings highlight the central role of municipal leadership, the importance of cross-sector coordination, and the need to integrate feasibility considerations and stakeholder alignment from the early stages of project preparation.

Building on this evidence, the NONA model is articulated as a structured governance and project preparation framework that addresses this gap by linking spatial planning, stakeholder processes, and investment logic into a coordinated development process. Rather than presenting a predefined solution, the model emerges from the synthesis of pilot experiences and analytical insights, providing a basis for supporting municipalities in systematically transforming regeneration initiatives into coherent, feasible, and investment-ready projects, adapted to the institutional and market conditions of mid-sized cities.

1 PURPOSE, SCOPE, AND EVIDENCE BASE

1.1 Purpose and scope

The purpose of this deliverable is to define a **replicable model for green investing in degraded areas (DAs) in mid-sized cities**, based on lessons from the NONA pilot action testing in Gabrovo, Veszprém, Cazin, and Šabac.

The document aims to support municipalities and local development actors in structuring regeneration initiatives as coordinated and investment-oriented projects. In particular, it provides guidance for:

- structure regeneration initiatives as an **investment pipeline** (from diagnosis to implementation and monitoring),
- improve **governance readiness** (roles, coordination, decision gates), and
- strengthen **investment readiness** (feasibility logic, business/financial scenarios, stakeholder alignment).

The recommendations presented in this deliverable are derived from a structured synthesis of pilot evidence. Inputs collected through a standardised questionnaire for all pilot cities were consolidated in comparative tables and analysed across the four cases. This analysis was complemented by feedback obtained during pilot testing and joint reflection among project partners. The resulting insights were synthesised into joint outcomes and thematic recommendation packages that inform the development of the NONA model.

1.2 Target users

This deliverable is intended primarily for municipalities and city administrations of mid-sized cities, as well as for local and regional public authorities involved in urban development and regeneration processes. It is also relevant for development agencies, public service providers, research, educational and cultural institutions, civil society organisations, private sector actors and potential investors engaged in urban regeneration initiatives.

The document is designed to support municipal teams that often operate with limited administrative and technical capacities. The proposed model and recommendations are therefore structured in a way that allows adaptation to different institutional settings, governance arrangements and market conditions typical of mid-sized urban contexts.

1.3 Key definitions

Degraded Areas (DAs): sites/areas affected by physical, functional, social, environmental, and/or economic decline, requiring regeneration and reintegration into the urban fabric through coordinated governance and investment logic (working definition for NONA context).

Green investing (in DAs): investment approaches (public, private, blended) that enable regeneration while improving environmental performance, climate resilience, and social inclusion outcomes (scope: investable regeneration projects, not only "green tech").

Mid-sized city (NONA MID-SIZED CITY PILOTS context): urban areas that often face constrained resources and fragmented capacities, where structured governance support can help organise regeneration initiatives into more coherent and investment-ready project preparation processes.

High-level: a comparative overview across governance levels (municipal, metropolitan, regional and national) and across countries. The purpose is not to provide a detailed legal analysis (article-by-article), but to identify the structural conditions that affect investment readiness in degraded areas. These include competent authority levels, key planning and approval instruments, typical bottlenecks or barriers, and available public funding. This high-level framing is used to interpret differences across pilots and to inform the development of the NONA model and its recommendation packages.

1.4 Context: mid-sized cities in the NONA project

The NONA project focuses on regeneration initiatives in mid-sized cities of the Danube region, which often play an important role in regional development while facing structural constraints related to administrative capacity, investment attraction and governance coordination.

Within the project, four pilot cities, Gabrovo, Veszprém, Cazin and Šabac, were selected to test the governance methods in different regeneration contexts. Although these cities differ in demographic size, spatial structure and local development priorities, they share several characteristics typical of mid-sized urban centres. These may include limited institutional capacity for complex project preparation, fragmented coordination across municipal departments, and a strong reliance on public funding programmes for regeneration initiatives.

The pilot cases therefore provide a relevant empirical basis for analysing governance patterns and investment conditions characteristic of mid-sized city contexts. The following figures and tables illustrate the basic characteristics of the four pilot cities and their geographic position within the Danube region.

Medium-sized cities usually have between 20,000 and 100,000 inhabitants. They play an important role in regional development, offering a balance between urban functions and a smaller population scale compared to metropolitan areas. Strengthening their capacity

to regenerate degraded areas is therefore relevant both for territorial cohesion and for long-term demographic stability. The data presented in the table below refer to the urban areas of the respective city territories, representing the most densely populated and functionally developed areas within their administrative jurisdiction.

City	Number of inhabitants*	Area, km²	Density, inhabitants/km²
Gabrovo, Bulgaria	74.521	234	317
Veszprém, Hungary	78.390	127	617
Cazin, Bosnia and Herzegovina	66.149	356	186
Šabac, Serbia	51.163	795	64

Table 1: Population with density per sq. km for selected mid-sized cities.

Sources: www.nsi.bg/en/statistical-data/206/651; www.nepszamlalas2022.ksh.hu/en/database; https://fzs.ba/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Konacni-rezultati-Popisa-2013.pdf; https://data.stat.gov.rs/?caller=SDDB.

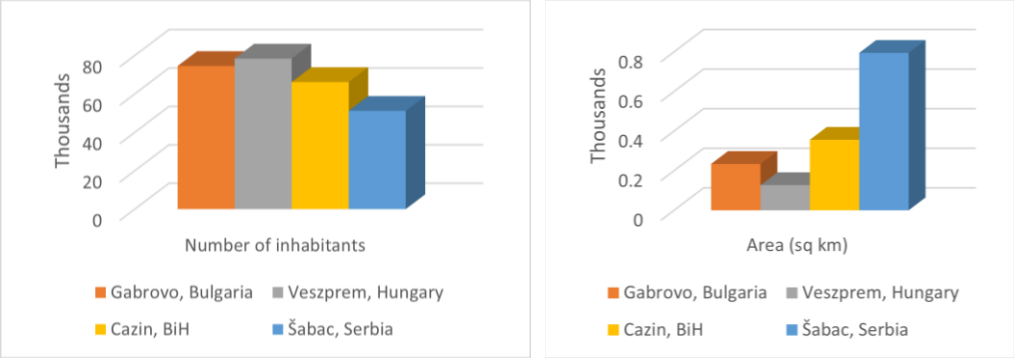


Fig. 1 - Number of inhabitants (left), and city area of Mid-sized cities (right)

Sources: www.nsi.bg/en/statistical-data/206/651; www.nepszamlalas2022.ksh.hu/en/database; https://fzs.ba/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Konacni-rezultati-Popisa-2013.pdf; https://data.stat.gov.rs/?caller=SDDB.

The pilot testing of the investment life-cycle logic was applied through four different urban contexts: **heritage + riverfront regeneration in Gabrovo**, **reuse of a former industrial site in Veszprém**, **inclusive small-scale revitalisation of a degraded central square in Cazin**, and **green, educational and intergenerational public space regeneration in Šabac**.

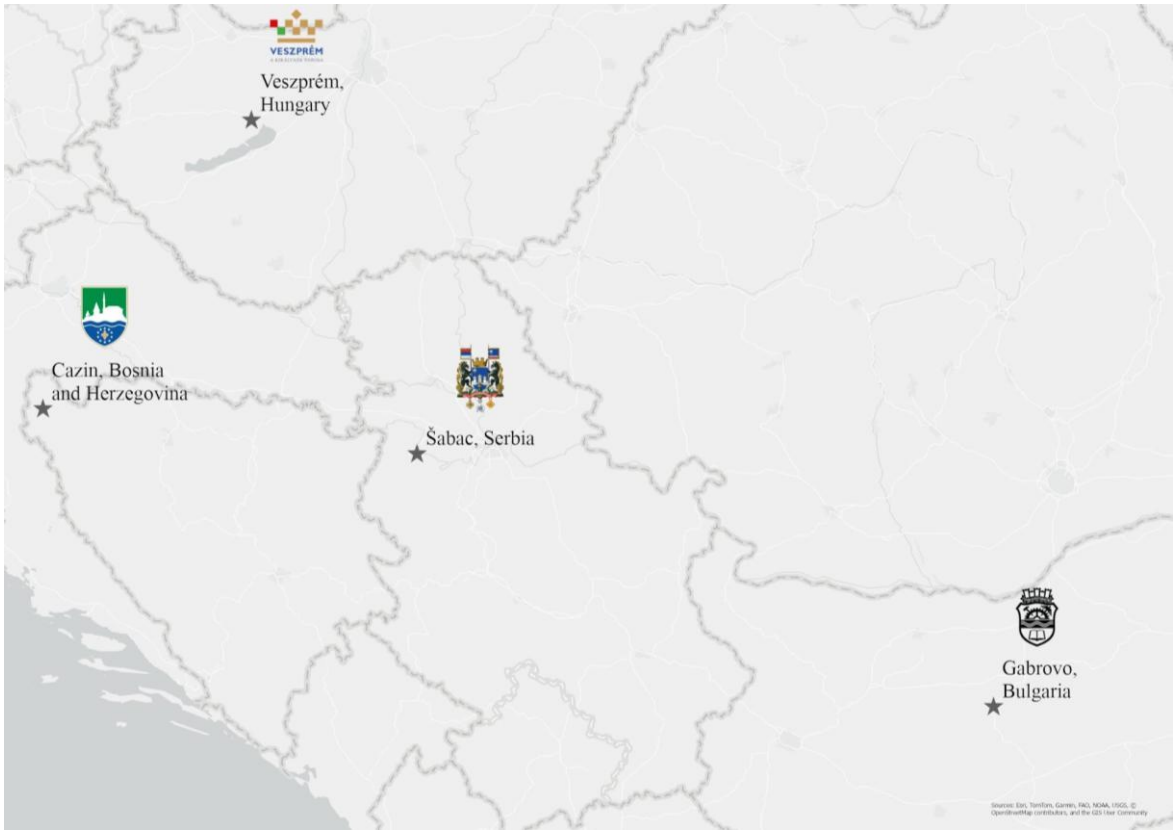


Fig. 2 - Map of the Mid-sized cities from the NONA project

source: IAUS, basemap sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FOA, NOAA, USGS, OpenStreetMap contributors, and GIS user community

Across cases, the testing confirmed that a phase-based participatory governance methods helped mid-sized cities strengthen coordination, clarify roles and responsibilities, mobilise stakeholders, and identify feasibility constraints earlier. It also highlighted recurring bottlenecks: key decision points and approvals are not clearly defined (who decides what, when, and based on which documents), the transition from planning to investment packaging remains weak, and internal municipal coordination is often fragmented, with departments working in silos.

The document provides:

- a comparative snapshot of the four mid-sized pilots;
- a synthesis of what changed through testing; and
- actionable, transferable recommendations to help mid-sized cities move from a degraded site and a local ambition to a credible, investable regeneration project preparation process.

Together, these findings provide an evidence-based foundation for the NONA model for green investing in degraded areas, aimed at helping mid-sized cities structure regeneration initiatives as coordinated, feasible and investment-ready projects.

1.5 Evidence base

This deliverable is based on evidence collected during NONA's pilot action testing in four mid-sized cities and on structured cross-case consolidation. The approach follows a consistent logic: **(i) standardised input capture**, **(ii) comparative analysis across pilots**, and **(iii) synthesis into transferable recommendations and thematic packages** (Chapter 7).

The evidence base includes:

- pilot documentation and territorial inputs
- comparative pilot snapshot tables
- feedback collected during testing and peer exchange
- survey responses from partner cities
- internal NONA methodological documentation

In addition to pilot documentation and testing feedback, the evidence base was complemented by a structured questionnaire distributed to the partner cities (Gabrovo, Veszprém, Cazin and Šabac). The survey collected comparable information on pilot site selection, planning frameworks, stakeholder engagement practices, thematic priorities and potential funding sources.

The responses provide an additional empirical perspective from local project teams and help validate cross-case observations emerging from the pilot testing process. The survey results therefore support the interpretation of governance patterns and investment conditions characteristic of mid-sized city contexts.

2 THEORETICAL BASIS: CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Methodological approach

The NONA project's program basis follows a case-study approach as a methodological base that involves working on a specific “pilot site” where a model is tested and subsequently defined. It sublimates the recommended path to achieve the projected goal of establishing investment packages (IP) for site improvement according to NEB principles. As typical case studies, pilot sites are strategically selected to represent a miniature, functional version of a larger, planned, or complex study. They are designed to test the methodology, feasibility, and logistics before full implementation.
In the theory of knowledge and science, a method is a systematic, objective way of arriving at an unambiguous answer to a given hypothesis.

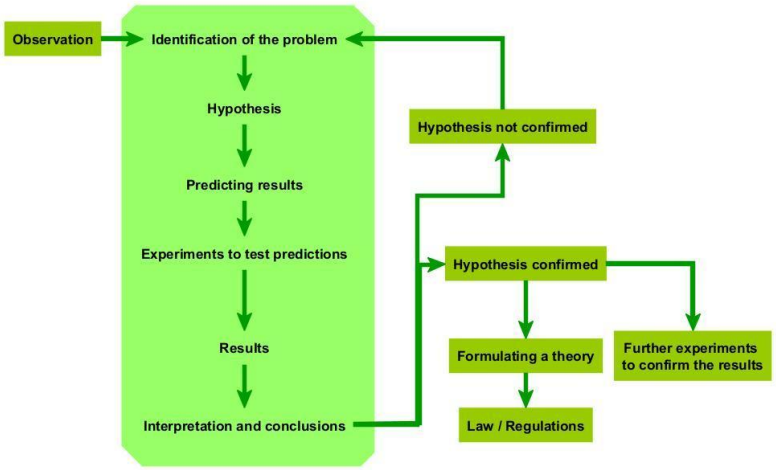


Fig. 3 - Method for researching of the NONA project pilots

source: IAUS

A case study approach was applied on separate, comparable pilot locations in different countries and cities. This method examines in depth one "case" (a specific group, organization, event, or location) in its natural context. The goal of applying this method is to understand complex phenomena, processes, and relationships using multiple data sources.
The approaches applied within this methodology can be descriptive (description of the situation), explanatory (explanation of causes/relationships), exploratory (research of new phenomena), and inductive (development of the theory).
The key characteristics of the method are:
- Focus on the contextual and constructive significance of the case.

- Use of various social research methods, tools, and strategies during analysis and research: interviews, observation, document analysis, surveys, and measurements.
- In-depth, thorough, detailed, comprehensive, and qualitative analysis (but can also be experimental and quantitative).
- Relative flexibility during research.

Approaching a case study, i.e., a practical analysis of a pilot site in the field (in situ), can be done through several preliminary and preparatory actions that include:

- Clearly defining the research objectives and the questions/needs arising from them, what specifically we want to test/study, and what the focus is on, with awareness of the limitations in the transferability/comparability of findings with other case studies/pilot sites.
- Selection of case(s): single case (intensive) or comparison of multiple cases/sites.
- Defining the boundaries of the case: the pilot site area, the duration of the project and research, and the perception of relevant stakeholders.

Available and most suitable methods for data collection and analysis, development of the necessary instruments (questionnaires, interview guides, observation checklists, etc.).

- Possible ethical aspects relevant to the type of site or participants, the necessary obtaining of permits and consents, establishing data confidentiality, and considering the risks when handling data.
- Take measures to minimize harm and conflicts of interest, prepare a contingency plan, and be prepared to document all steps for later reproducibility of results in other locations/case studies.

The key criteria for selecting pilot sites are similarity or adaptability to the main theme of the study/project and a high degree of feasibility. The pilot sites share key characteristics and tasks of the project, and allow for tailored testing and data collection, i.e., it is suitable for a “small-scale trial” of the entire process and evaluation of the results.

Prior to comparative research of case studies, NONA project allowed collecting, selecting, and preparing data on pilot sites through various methods[1]:

- Analysis of available documents, plans, reports, photographs, maps, historical and archival sources, literature, newspaper articles, etc., as well as examples of good practices that can be inspiring for new ideas.
- Structured and in-depth interviews or surveys with stakeholders and focus groups, based on which a statistical database of responses will be formed, and it is desirable to have accompanying graphics, i.e., visualization of responses, choices, and proposals.
- Geospatial data on site, organization of a dedicated and directed "walk" through the space with experts and/or users, observation of all characteristics of the space, quality, and flaws/deficiencies, possibly with the formation of a documentation base (e.g.,

[1] Not all partner cities employed the same methods in implementing the NONA project, but a comparative analysis was conducted using the same methods, including the questionnaire for mid-sized cities.

checklists, photo documentation, drawings/sketches from the field with indicated microlocation details).

The first steps are related to two important components of the location: spatial and user, i.e., to first establish cognitive elements related to the spatial characteristics of the space and its experience among direct users and managers. Based on the collected data, all potentials and limitations can be seen, needs can be defined, and finally, the components of the improvement model can be added (through management, financial, and other recommendations).

Data analysis as a basis for further work and decision-making can be structured as:

- Qualitative, organized, e.g., by topics, in a more narrative and descriptive form.
- Quantitative, which may include comparative indicators, norms and standards, and statistical data.

By comparing the results obtained (e.g., observations made by stakeholders/managers or users and observations formed by experts based on their professional opinions), fairly clear and precise conclusions can be drawn with recommendations related to the context of the case, i.e., the pilot site. Validation and reliability of this data can be carried out through additional verification of the views of stakeholders and team members (member checking), especially if they have different expert knowledge and experience, as well as with other experts from thematic areas related to the specific space and project task (urban governance, financing and budgeting including alternative sources of financing, branding and establishing the image of the space, etc.). The final report/result from the pilot site should contain findings on the current state and ideas and proposals for improvement, conclusions, practical recommendations, and a plan of priority and relevant actions. For verification and possible correction before implementing the model, additional protocols (e.g., an iterative cycle or process) can be used, through feedback to stakeholders and the local community, and repeated discussion about what is expected, what is realistic, and what the next steps, tasks, and responsibilities are for implementing the proposal.

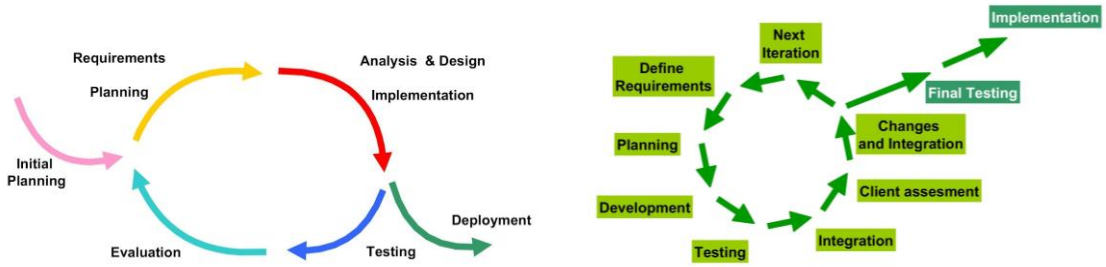


Fig. 4 - Method of analyzing Pilot areas and its relevant data

Sources: IAUS, based on: https://eclipsesource.com/blogs/2010/03/06/p2-and-agile-software-development/, https://www.codefirst.co.uk/blog/agile-vs-waterfall/

As the key research method, which most closely corresponds to the theme of the NONA project, the comparative case study analysis was chosen as an observation of a phenomenon in the context of the research area – the pilot sites, because it is the most applicable and relevant, and provides the opportunity to observe the process through real-life examples. The strength of the method lies in the fact that it allows for the adaptation of procedures to research questions.

The method may also have its limitations, especially in terms of general applicability and transferability to all pilot sites, because in physical and thematic terms, they can be diverse and different, making it difficult to achieve comparability of results. However, four comparative studies, in medium-sized cities of the Danube region within the NONA project (Gabrovo, Veszprém, Cazin, and Šabac), in the same project time span, provide the possibility of comparing the results. Multiple case studies should follow the logic of replication, not the logic of sampling, meaning that four cases are included in a single study because the researchers predict that similar results will be found.

There is a recognised risk of researcher bias and subjective interpretations regarding characteristics, needs, and solutions during case study research. As one way to minimise chances for bias, this research employed data triangulation across different sources (project documentation, questionnaire, survey, observations) and maintained a clear distinction between facilitation and analytical roles to document participants' perspectives. Experience and knowledge integrated into spatial and urban planning contribute to the use of an integrated approach to sustainable development planning, including a balance between planned development and the protection of existing values. The contribution relates to expert analysis and an integrated view of the space within a broader whole, the harmonization and overlap of different interests, sustainable development, protection conditions, technical requirements, the resolution of potential conflicts within the planning process, and active public participation.

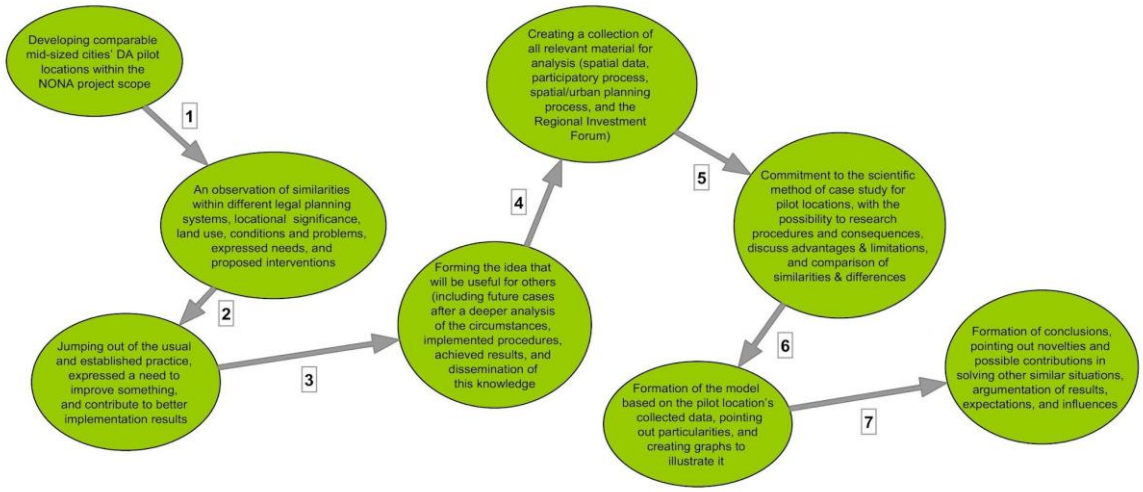


Fig. 5 - The methodological workflow provides insight into the research process from the initial idea to the finalization with conclusions

Source: IAUS

2.2. Urban public space: Social importance and economic value

Public use refers to the use of land, facilities, or services by the general public without discrimination and typically without requiring individual ownership or exclusive rights. It means that a space, infrastructure element, or service is made available for the benefit of all members of the community, regardless of their social, economic, or demographic characteristics.

In urban and planning contexts, public use usually applies to spaces and amenities that are intended to serve the collective needs of society. These may include streets, sidewalks, parks, squares, public transportation infrastructure, schools, libraries, and other facilities that are open and accessible to the public. A key aspect of public use is accessibility: the space or service must be available to the general population under equal conditions. In many cases, public use also implies that the area is managed or regulated by public authorities to ensure safety, maintenance, and fair access. While some forms of public use may involve small fees (for example, public transportation or certain cultural facilities), the defining principle remains that the service or space exists primarily for the common benefit rather than private profit.

In urban planning, the concept of public use is closely related to public goods and public spaces, as these are designed to support collective activities, social interaction, mobility, and the overall functioning of the city. Public use therefore plays a fundamental role in promoting social inclusion, community life, and equal access to urban resources.

Public space refers to open areas accessible to all citizens, regardless of gender, race, age, ethnicity, or socio-economic status, and usable without financial compensation. Typical examples include city streets, squares, parks, and other shared urban environments. Because they are open to everyone, these places function as public goods. Public goods are characterized by non-rivalry in consumption and non-excludability: one person's use does not reduce availability for others, and it is difficult or impossible to prevent people from benefiting from them. Streets, urban greenery, public lighting, and communal infrastructure, as well as public services such as education, health care, and safety, are examples of goods whose provision usually requires state intervention through planning and urban policy.

Beyond their physical function, well-designed public spaces play a crucial role in the social life of cities. They often act as what sociologists call "third places", locations outside the home (first place) and workplace (second place) where everyday social interactions occur. People return to these places not because they are required to, but because of how they make them feel: welcomed, comfortable, and connected to others. Successful public places generally offer more than they demand from visitors. They tend to support low-cost or free activities and provide an environment where people can spend time informally and without pressure to consume.

High-quality public space must therefore meet several key qualities: they should be accessible, comfortable, active, and sociable. At the same time, they should strengthen social bonds and foster a sense of belonging within the community. One indicator of a successful public space is the presence of regular visitors. Repeated encounters among the same users gradually build trust, familiarity, and social cohesion. “Regulars” often become informal stewards of the space, contributing to its character and helping maintain its vitality.

Another way to evaluate the performance of public places is through social interaction and inclusivity. Surveys or observational studies can measure how people use the space, how often they interact with others from different backgrounds, and whether the place encourages encounters across social or economic differences. When a public space facilitates such interactions, it helps reduce social barriers and strengthens community networks. This process, sometimes referred to as “social leveling”, allows people from different social groups to meet on equal terms. Moreover, by encouraging interaction across diverse groups, public places create what researchers call bridging social capital, strengthening connections between individuals who might otherwise never meet.

From an economic perspective, the financial costs of designing, constructing, and maintaining high-quality public spaces can be significant. These costs may include land acquisition, landscape design, infrastructure, maintenance, security, and programming of activities. However, the economic gains generated by well-designed public places often exceed their direct costs, even though these benefits/revenues are not always immediately visible or easy to quantify.

Quality public space can increase nearby property values, stimulate local business activity, attract tourism, and encourage investment in surrounding neighborhoods. More importantly, they generate broader social and economic benefits such as improved public health, reduced crime, stronger community networks, and enhanced urban attractiveness. These outcomes contribute indirectly to economic productivity and long-term urban sustainability.

Despite these advantages, calculating the exact economic value of public spaces remains challenging. Many of their benefits, such as social cohesion, well-being, or a sense of belonging, are intangible and difficult to measure in monetary terms. Urban economists and planners therefore often rely on indirect indicators, including increased property values, higher retail activity, visitor numbers, and survey-based measures of user satisfaction and social interaction. While these methods cannot fully capture the social value of public places, they provide evidence that investing in high-quality public space generates both economic returns and significant improvements in community welfare.

In this sense, well-designed public spaces represent not only a physical component of urban infrastructure but also a vital social and economic resource that supports inclusive, vibrant, and resilient cities.

The usual methods and actions to shape and create a new public space involve using the possibilities provided by the following approaches:

- Urban revitalization is the process of changing the physical, economic, and social components of a neighborhood and future prospects for the inhabitants of an area, through the efforts of the public and/or private sector. Physical components include the improvement of the building stock and public spaces. The economic components refer to the creation of a variety of commercial activities, operations and services, as well as the increase of employment. Social components include building community unity and mutual trust, and reducing crime rates in the community.

- Urban regeneration is a term usually used by planners and politicians for the reconstruction of neglected urban zones and covers a wide range of social measures.

- Urban recycling is the reuse, "processing" of already used construction land, for new purposes or under new conditions, extremely popular in conditions of lack of suitable locations or the impossibility of expanding urban zones, a process close to all forms of urban renewal.

- Urban design is part of the visionary process (the art of creating places), which focuses on the affirmation of individual urban spaces and their overall design. As a process, it is halfway between urban planning and architectural design, encompassing landscape design, dealing with the physical form of cities, buildings, and the space that fills and surrounds them, but also with the connection between physical space and the social forces that operate in space, concentrating on public space and its interaction with private spaces.

2.3. Participatory planning as a key to success

Participatory urban planning and decision-making, often referred to as participatory planning or civic engagement, is a democratic and collaborative process that involves community members, stakeholders, and the public in shaping the development, policies, and governance of their cities and neighborhoods. It emerged as a response to top-down, centralized planning to ensure that urban development reflects the needs, interests, and local knowledge of the people who live and work there.

Participatory planning is defined as a process in which a community takes action to achieve specific social, economic, or environmental goals by identifying problems and creating plans to address them. It goes beyond mere “consultation” (one-way communication) to active collaboration and, sometimes, empowerment, where residents help design, decide, and implement projects. Key stakeholders in participation include: residents, community organizations/stakeholders, business leaders, and planners/urban planners as moderators of the process.

The scope of participation includes the engagement of stakeholders who are not formally required to participate but have a vested interest in the urban environment.

Objectives of active participation in urban planning:

- The primary objective is to foster an effective, transparent, and meaningful dialogue between residents and authorities to create more livable, just, and sustainable cities.
- Aligning perspectives and consensus, bridging the gap between stakeholders with different interests, facilitating the achievement of a compromise that satisfies everyone, and reducing conflict situations around projects.
- Incorporating local knowledge, leveraging residents' experiential knowledge (e.g., knowledge of dangerous intersections, flooding, or community habits) to improve the quality of planning.
- Community empowerment and ownership, building a sense of community ownership and commitment to the project, and ensuring long-term success and sustainability.
- Social inclusion, removing barriers to participation for marginalized groups, including women, youth, and minority populations.
- Increased transparency and trust, building trust between citizens and local government by making the decision-making process open and accountable.
- Improved efficiency and early identification of problems and needs, leading to faster and more efficient implementation of projects with fewer interruptions.

2.4 Implications for the NONA methodological design

The theoretical perspectives discussed in this chapter point to a fundamental methodological shift in approaching regeneration in mid-sized cities. Rather than treating planning, participation, and investment as sequential or loosely connected activities, they need to be understood as interdependent components of a single, structured process.

This implies that regeneration initiatives cannot be developed through isolated interventions or sectoral procedures, but require an integrated framework in which analytical assessment, stakeholder engagement, and feasibility considerations are aligned from the outset. Within such a framework, governance is not a supporting condition, but a structuring mechanism that determines how and whether projects progress.

In this context, participatory planning is reframed from a consultative exercise into a functional component of project preparation, while the value of public space is positioned as a basis for articulating broader social, environmental, and economic returns. Together, these elements redefine regeneration not as a design-driven activity, but as a coordinated process of aligning spatial, institutional, and investment dimensions.

These implications form the basis for the NONA methodological design, which operationalises this integrated logic into a structured approach to project preparation, tailored to the capacities and constraints of mid-sized cities.

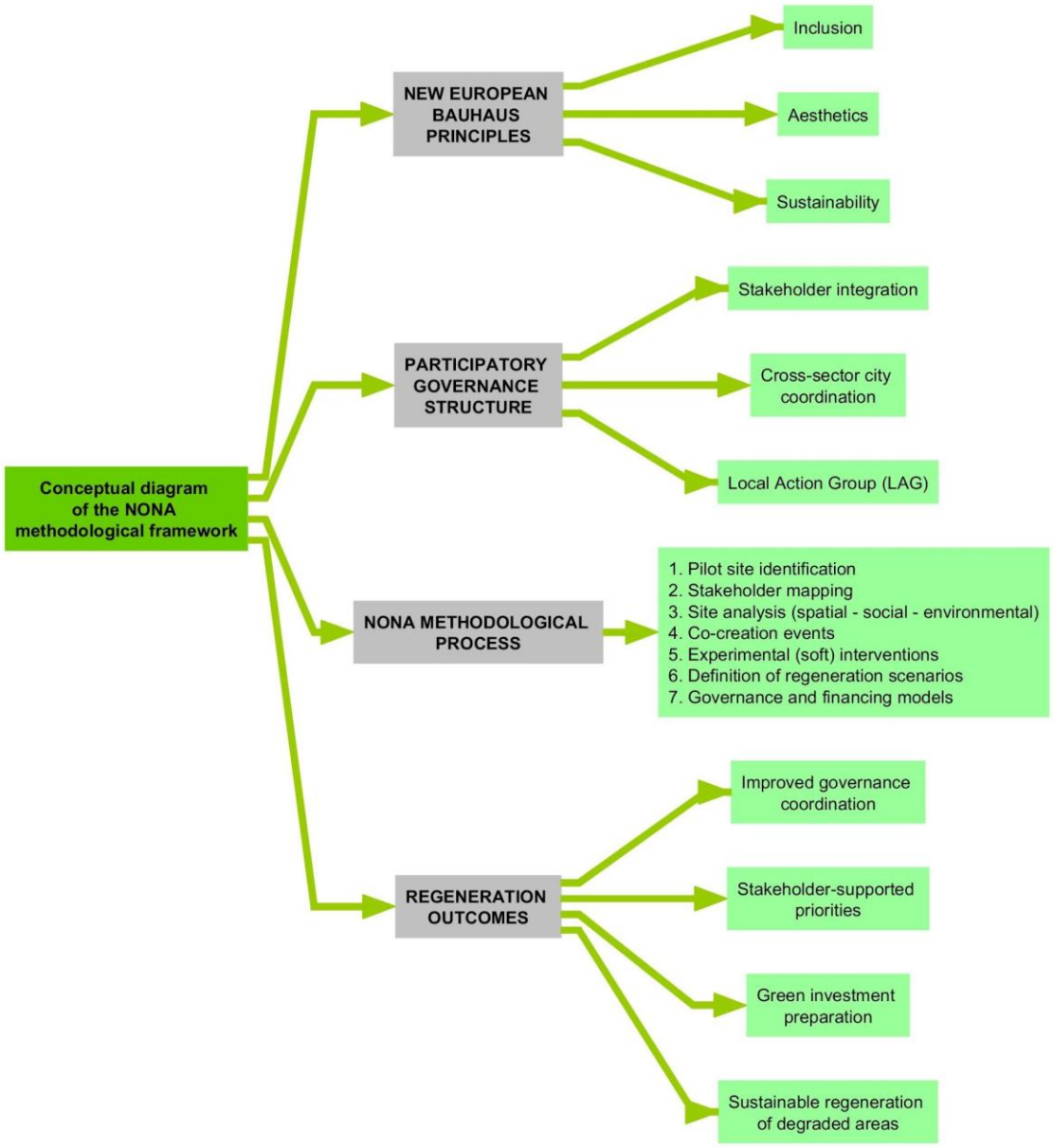


Fig. 6 - Conceptual diagram of the NONA methodological framework

Source: NONA, IAUS

3 COMPARATIVE SNAPSHOT OF PILOT AREAS IN MID-SIZED CITIES

The pilot testing phase provided an opportunity to examine how the NONA governance approach operates in real regeneration contexts of mid-sized cities. By applying the methodology to four pilot areas in Gabrovo, Veszprém, Cazin and Šabac, the project generated empirical insights into how governance arrangements, stakeholder engagement and early feasibility considerations influence the transition from spatial planning concepts towards the preparation of investment initiatives in degraded areas.

Across the pilots, the testing process revealed several recurring challenges typical of mid-sized urban environments. These include fragmented institutional responsibilities, and limited administrative capacity for complex project structuring, and the absence of clearly defined decision and approval pathways during early project preparation. In several cases, spatial regeneration concepts already existed; however, the mechanisms required to translate them into structured and investment-oriented project proposals were not yet sufficiently developed.

The testing phase also highlighted the importance of structured stakeholder engagement and early dialogue between municipal departments, local institutions and community actors. Participatory activities, such as surveys, co-creation workshops and stakeholder consultations, helped clarify local priorities, identify potential implementation constraints and strengthen the legitimacy of regeneration initiatives.

In addition to identifying governance bottlenecks, the testing process generated observable improvements in the preparation of pilot initiatives. In several cities, roles and responsibilities became clearer, coordination mechanisms were strengthened, and early feasibility considerations were integrated into project discussions. These changes illustrate how relatively small adjustments in governance routines and coordination structures can improve the conditions for structuring regeneration initiatives as credible investment opportunities.

The following sections summarise these lessons in two complementary ways. Table 2 provides a concise snapshot of the four pilot contexts, establishing a shared reference for interpreting the testing results. Table 3 then compares similarities and differences across the pilots in governance, stakeholder engagement and investment-related dimensions, highlighting common patterns that inform the NONA model for mid-sized cities.

3.1 Pilot snapshot comparison

Mid-sized cities often develop regeneration initiatives under diverse spatial and institutional conditions. The four NONA pilot cities represent different types of degraded urban areas and regeneration approaches, providing a comparative basis for

understanding how governance arrangements, stakeholder involvement and project preparation evolve in practice. Examining these pilot contexts helps clarify the structural conditions that influence the transition from spatial concepts to investment-oriented regeneration initiatives.

Table 2 presents a concise pilot snapshot across the four mid-sized cities. Each row captures the **DA typology/site**, **project type**, **ownership/mandate**, **main objective**, **readiness stage**, and the main **stakeholder categories** involved. The purpose is to standardise the baseline characteristics of each pilot and to provide a shared reference for interpreting later sections on "what changed" through testing and on the resulting recommendation packages.

Pilot city	DA typology/site	Project type	Ownership	Main objective	Readiness stage	Stakeholders (categories)
Gabrovo	Degraded urban / industrial-heritage site	Urban regeneration, cultural infrastructure, green revitalisation	Public (Gabrovo Municipality)	Regenerate the former textile school and Yantra riverside as a cultural and public-use area	Structuring readiness	Municipality, cultural actors, civil society, residents, private sponsors
Veszprém	Underused urban area	Urban regeneration with cultural and green components	Public (Municipality of Veszprém)	Revitalise a degraded industrial area into a multifunctional community and public-use space	Investment readiness	Municipality, planning and heritage actors, university, utilities, private sector, NGOs
Cazin	Degraded urban public site	Urban regeneration, green and inclusive revitalization	Public (City of Cazin)	Define a pilot intervention for revitalising a degraded part of the central square	Structuring readiness	City administration, development and utility actors, heritage office, local community
Šabac	Public-use site with environmental and cultural value	Urban regeneration, educational and social infrastructure, green investment	Public (City of Šabac)	Create an inclusive public space with improved green infrastructure and governance models	Structuring readiness	City administration; LAG members (school, kindergartens, Centre for professional development); citizens; NGOs

Table 2: A concise snapshot of the four pilot cases in mid-sized cities

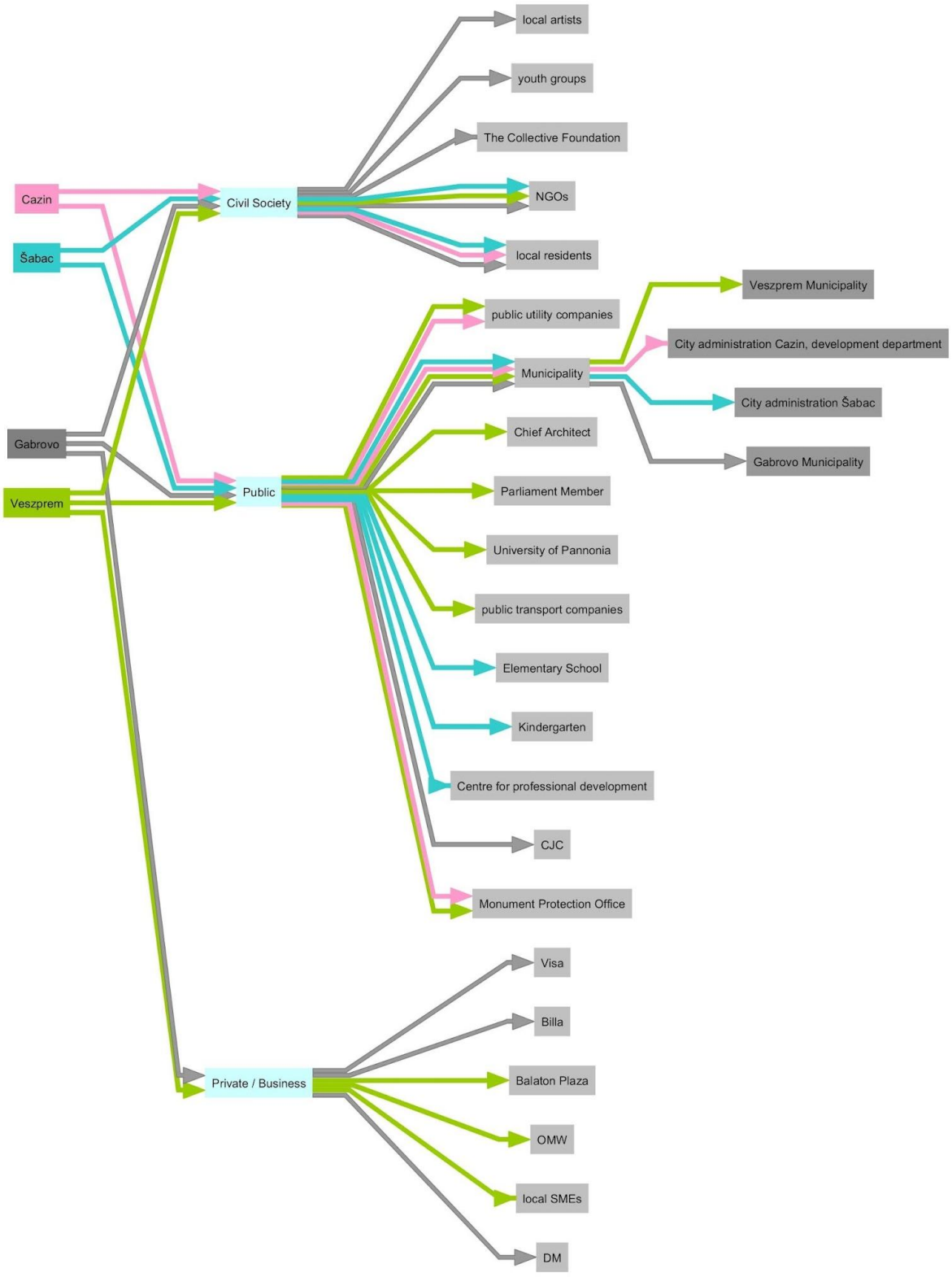


Fig. 7 - Cities and their stakeholders divided being Private, Public or Civil Society

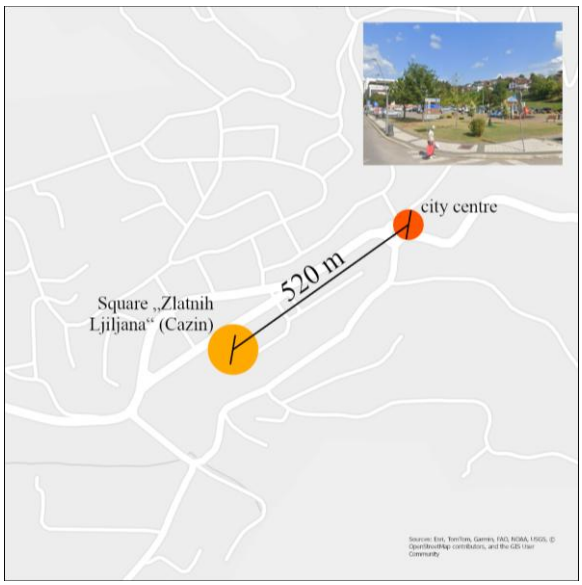
Source: NONA, IAUS



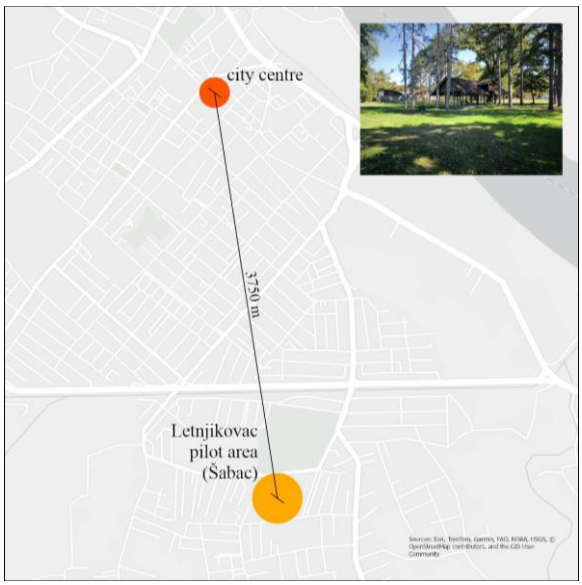
Pilot area in Gabrovo



Pilot area in Veszprém



Pilot area in Cazin



Pilot area in Šabac

Fig. 8 - Map of Mid-sized cities' pilot areas and their distance from city centres

source: NONA, IAUS, basemap sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FOA, NOAA, USGS, OpenStreetMap contributors, and GIS user community

3.2 Similarities and differences across pilots

Although the four pilot cities differ in spatial characteristics, institutional arrangements and project focus, their regeneration initiatives reveal several comparable governance and investment conditions typical of mid-sized urban environments. Examining the cases together helps highlight both shared structural challenges and context-specific approaches that influence the preparation of regeneration projects.

Table 3 provides a comparative overview of these patterns across the four pilots. For each theme, the table summarises key observations for individual cases and synthesises the common trends emerging from the comparison. Rather than evaluating or ranking the pilots, the aim is to identify recurring bottlenecks and enabling conditions that shape regeneration processes in mid-sized cities.

Theme	Gabrovo (BG)	Veszprém (HU)	Cazin (BiH)	Šabac (SRB)	Joint pattern/ synthesis
Governance setup & coordination	Municipality-led governance involving cultural institutions and civil society actors.	Municipality-led coordination through planning departments and stakeholder platforms.	City-led governance with coordination between planning, infrastructure and heritage actors.	City-led governance supported by educational institutions and a Local Action Group.	Effective regeneration relies on municipality-led governance combined with cross-sector coordination mechanisms.
Stakeholder mobilisation & participation	Engagement of residents, NGOs and local actors through workshops and co-creation activities.	Extensive participation through surveys, workshops and stakeholder dialogue.	Stakeholder consultations involving municipal authorities and the local community.	Broad engagement of institutions, NGOs and citizens through participatory activities.	Early and structured stakeholder engagement helps align regeneration initiatives with local needs.
Feasibility constraints (non-financial)	Heritage regeneration requires coordination between cultural programming and planning policies.	Industrial site transformation requires coordination between planning, heritage protection and urban development.	Revitalisation requires alignment between regeneration initiatives and planning procedures.	Integration of green, educational and social functions requires cross-sector coordination.	Regeneration projects require coordination across planning, heritage protection and sectoral policies.
Investment proposition clarity	Vision for transforming a heritage site into a creative and public-use area.	Mixed-use regeneration concept combining cultural, recreational and residential functions.	Pilot intervention focused on revitalising a degraded public square.	Regeneration concept for an integrated green and educational public space.	Investment readiness improves when spatial visions are translated into clearly defined interventions.
Funding/finance needs	Combination of municipal funding and external programmes required.	Mainly dependent on municipal, public, and private funding sources.	Strong reliance on public and external funding instruments.	Dependent on external programmes and additional financial resources.	Mid-sized cities rely primarily on public funding complemented by external programmes.
Social inclusion dimension	Emphasis on inclusive public space and community participation.	Participatory planning focused on quality of life improvements.	Focus on accessibility and inclusive public space use.	Community-oriented regeneration promoting accessibility and intergenerational interaction.	Inclusive public space regeneration strengthens social legitimacy and long-term sustainability.

Table 3: Comparative governance and investment patterns across pilots

The comparison across the four pilots indicates that mid-sized cities share several structural characteristics shaping regeneration processes. While initiatives are typically coordinated at the municipal level, their implementation often depends on cross-sector

coordination and access to external funding opportunities. Across all cases, regeneration efforts combine spatial planning objectives with broader social and environmental priorities, particularly in relation to public space improvement and green transition goals. These shared conditions help explain why translating spatial visions into structured and investment-ready project proposals remains one of the central challenges addressed by the NONA methodology.

4 RESULTS OF NONA TESTING: FEEDBACK & IMPROVEMENTS

The responses from the questionnaire conducted among the partner cities participating in the NONA project confirm that early stakeholder integration, participatory site analysis and iterative dialogue with local actors were key turning points in clarifying the development potential of degraded areas. Across the cases, cities reported that participatory processes helped connect spatial planning concepts with more concrete priorities for green investment preparation. These practices complemented formal planning procedures by introducing earlier dialogue, feasibility reflection and stakeholder alignment within the regeneration process.

4.1 Feedback from pilot reflection and stakeholder processes

Pilot testing provided an opportunity to observe how the NONA governance approach operates in practice and to identify the main challenges encountered during the preparation of regeneration initiatives in mid-sized cities. Reflections collected from pilot teams and stakeholder processes revealed a set of recurring issues related to decision-making procedures, coordination mechanisms and the transition from planning concepts to investment preparation. These insights offer an empirical basis for refining the governance logic of the NONA model and for identifying the key conditions that need to be addressed to support investment-oriented regeneration processes.

Table 4 consolidates the most common feedback themes reported across the pilots during the testing period. For each theme, the table (I) indicates in which pilots the issue was observed and (II) outlines what the feedback implies for the NONA model for mid-sized cities.

Feedback theme	Pilot evidence	Implication for the NONA model
Unclear decision-making and approval pathway; explicit decision gates needed	Observed across pilots: different institutional procedures slowed the transition from vision to implementation; pilots introduced clearer coordination and documentation practices.	The model should define a clear decision and approval pathway with explicit decision gates and responsible actors at each stage.
Planning-to-investment readiness gap (business/finance scenarios)	Several pilots reported that spatial concepts were not yet translated into structured investment propositions or financing scenarios.	The model should introduce a minimum investment-readiness package early in the project preparation process, including preliminary financial scenarios and funding pathways.
Sustaining stakeholder engagement over long cycles	Participatory activities (surveys, workshops, stakeholder dialogue) helped clarify priorities but require continuity during project preparation.	The model should treat stakeholder engagement as a continuous governance process supported by structured participation routines.

Feedback theme	Pilot evidence	Implication for the NONA model
Internal municipal coordination across departments	Pilots highlighted the need for stronger coordination between planning, infrastructure, cultural and environmental actors.	The model should include a light interdepartmental coordination structure with a designated municipal lead and shared project documentation.
Feasibility constraints are identified too late unless structured early.	Early surveys, stakeholder consultations and preliminary assessments helped identify risks before detailed planning.	The model should include an early feasibility screening addressing legal, technical, financial and social conditions.

Table 4: Feedback synthesis

Together, these feedback signals define the minimum governance and coordination conditions that the NONA model seeks to operationalise for mid-sized cities.

Local knowledge acquisition as an input to local governance was approached broadly in Veszprém, Šabac, and Gabrovo. Citizens contributed to defining priorities for degraded areas (DAs) revitalisation through surveys, online questionnaires, and in-situ participatory processes. These activities were implemented with research, education, and cultural institutions, which played an intermediary knowledge-transfer role within governance networks.

In all four cities, public space activation events (i.e., creative public square intervention with youth in Cazin, riverfront festival in Gabrovo, literary and art competition in Šabac and cultural event in Veszprém) enabled legitimacy for determining investment priorities and for "publicly controlled" transformation of DAs into more sustainable environments, providing a laymen/human-scale input and user perspective into the DAs issues and potentials. The Šabac case pointed out the lack of trust in longitudinal effects of citizens' engagement on the planning solution, such as the built urban form, however there was no input on this question from the side of other mid-sized pilot studies to make generalisations across the cases.

4.2 Improvements following testing: before & after

Beyond identifying governance and coordination challenges, the pilot testing phase also generated observable improvements in the preparation of regeneration initiatives. In several cities, the NONA process helped clarify stakeholder roles, strengthen coordination between municipal actors and introduce more structured approaches to project development. Comparing the initial situation with the changes introduced during testing provides insight into how relatively small adjustments in governance practices and project structuring can improve the conditions for preparing regeneration initiatives for future investment.

Table 5 summarises the main improvements observed across the pilots during the testing phase. Each case compares the initial situation with the changes that occurred during the NONA process, focusing on concrete governance and coordination improvements rather than on general challenges.

Pilot	Issue identified (before)	Improvement made (after)	Relevance for green investment preparatio
Gabrovo	Initial planning focused mainly on spatial vision with limited coordination of stakeholders and implementation steps.	A structured co-creation process clarified project priorities, stakeholder roles and phased implementation.	Clearer project structuring improves credibility and readiness for funding and investment discussions.
Veszprém	Stakeholder needs and development priorities were fragmented and weakly connected to decision-making.	Stakeholder input was systematically collected and translated into decision-support materials for planning and investment dialogue.	Structured stakeholder input helps municipalities frame projects more clearly for funding and investment actors.
Cazin	Spatial planning concepts were not clearly linked with feasibility conditions or investment preparation.	A structured planning process defined project phases and aligned documentation with funding and permitting requirements.	Early clarification of feasibility and implementation steps supports the transition from concepts to investable projects.
Šabac	Fragmented management of the Letnjikovac complex created maintenance gaps and unclear responsibilities.	The NONA process established a LAG and used stakeholder feedback to clarify priorities and coordination.	Improved coordination and shared priorities strengthen governance conditions for public-space investment.

Table 5: What was improved because of NONA (before & after)

Taken together, these improvements demonstrate that the main added value of the NONA testing process lies in strengthening governance clarity and investment readiness at early stages of project development. In several cases, the pilot activities helped shift the focus from general regeneration ambitions towards more structured project preparation, including clearer stakeholder roles, phased implementation logic and identification of funding pathways.

These observations suggest that clearer governance arrangements and coordination mechanisms can support the transition from spatial planning concepts towards the structured preparation of green investment initiatives in degraded areas. They also indicate that investment readiness in mid-sized cities depends not only on project concepts, but also on the institutional conditions within which regeneration initiatives are prepared and coordinated.

The following section therefore examines the governance and socio-economic context that shapes these conditions across the pilot cities.

5 COMPARATIVE ENABLING CONTEXT

The enabling context for regeneration in degraded areas is shaped by the institutional, governance, socio-economic and market conditions within which mid-sized cities prepare and advance investment initiatives. The focus here is on the broader policy and institutional environment at city level, including its interaction with higher governance levels where relevant, in order to identify the factors that facilitate or constrain project preparation, stakeholder coordination, decision-making and access to financing. This comparative perspective helps explain how different local settings affect the operationalisation and transferability of the NONA model for green investing in degraded areas.

5.1 Governance and institutional context: high-level overview

Mid-sized cities typically possess baseline administrative capacity to initiate regeneration initiatives. However, responsibilities for regeneration are often distributed across multiple municipal departments and governance levels. This institutional fragmentation can complicate the transition from early project identification to project preparation and implementation, particularly when coordination routines and decision responsibilities are not clearly defined.

Table 6 summarises the main governance characteristics across the four pilot cities, highlighting both enabling conditions and typical institutional bottlenecks relevant for green investment preparation in degraded areas.

Item	Gabrovo	Veszprém	Cazin	Šabac
Municipal leadership and mandate	Municipality leads regeneration initiatives in cooperation with cultural institutions and civil society actors.	Municipality provides strategic leadership through project-based cooperation with institutional partners.	Municipal administration leads planning initiatives with support from external expertise and partnerships.	City administration leads regeneration initiatives and coordinates urban development cooperation.
Cross-sector coordination requirements	Coordination between planning, cultural heritage, tourism and civil society actors.	Coordination across planning, cultural programming, environmental management and community actors.	Coordination mainly between planning departments, infrastructure services and municipal administration.	Coordination between planning, educational institutions, social services and local stakeholders.
Typical institutional bottlenecks	Limited administrative capacity and reliance on project	Fragmentation between strategic visions and operational	Administrative capacity constraints and reliance on	Long planning procedures, limited financial resources and governance

Item	Gabrovo	Veszprém	Cazin	Šabac
	funding affect coordination.	investment mechanisms.	external technical support.	challenges within the site.
Decision-making chain: political level (who decides/approves)	Municipal council and mayor approve planning documents and major development decisions.	Municipal council and mayor approve development strategies and investment priorities.	Municipal council and mayor approve planning documentation and investment decisions.	City council and mayor approve planning documentation and development priorities.
Decision-making chain: technical/administrative level (who prepares/validates)	Municipal planning department prepares proposals with support from external experts.	Municipal departments and development agencies prepare proposals and technical documentation.	Municipal planning department prepares documentation with support from technical services.	City administration and planning departments prepare planning documentation and technical inputs.
Internal coordination routine among municipal departments (how it works in practice)	Project-based coordination through working groups and stakeholder consultations.	Coordination organised through project teams and stakeholder platforms.	Coordination mainly follows administrative procedures between departments.	Coordination supported through LAG and stakeholder cooperation during project preparation.

Table 6: Governance and institutional context: key enablers and bottlenecks

NONA enabling partners are city administration. They provided coordination, planning documentation and a guarantee of the activities; and as an investor in public resources.

The intermediary role of research and development institutions in a governance setting contributed to gathering empirical data and translating it among local actors and professional community - horizontally; and, from practice into learning and policy inputs, checking alignment with other policy - vertically, was particularly pronounced in Veszprém and Šabac cases. This role was, in the Gabrovo case, held by the cultural institution on site. They supported local administration in facilitating participation and stakeholder engagement; and an assessment of the idea solutions for green project ideas (Šabac case).

Advocacy role in a local governance setting in four cities was related to engagement of grassroot organisations and NGO sector with close experience working in pilot. Gabrovo demonstrated a close cooperation with the NGO operating in the field of cultural and ecological development, as well as co-creation, which contributed wider visibility of the NONA project initiative and importance of the activation potential of local rivers.

International organisations and their representatives in pilot cases (through different formats such as NONA travelling academy, presence of international partners at local investment forums) provided a necessary boost and opened a space to discuss

opportunities for cities to seek for international alliances; support governance approaches and seek funding outside of the established practices.

At the same time, across all four pilot cases a number of obstacles related to substantive organisational change and transforming usual planning and governance practices are related to the path dependency of post-socialist planning systems, where decision-making processes have traditionally been organised in a top-down and sectoral fashion. Although participatory practices and collaborative governance approaches are increasingly promoted through European programmes and contemporary planning discourse such as NONA project, in practice decision-making processes often remain semi-closed, while stakeholder engagement is still developing as a complementary rather than fully integrated component of governance processes.

This institutional legacy can limit the continuity of stakeholder involvement after the project finalisation, reduce the perceived influence of citizen input on final planning outcomes, and slow the transition toward more collaborative governance models for green investments. The pilot cases therefore illustrate an ongoing transition, where new participatory and partnership-based approaches are gradually layered onto existing administrative structures and planning cultures.

5.2 Socio-economic and market context: investment relevance

In addition to governance arrangements, the capacity of mid-sized cities to implement regeneration initiatives is strongly influenced by their socio-economic and market context. Pilot reflections indicate several recurring structural constraints: limited municipal resources, challenges in aligning strategic development visions with available financial instruments, uneven stakeholder commitment, and gaps between expert planning processes and political decision-making.

These conditions shape investor confidence and influence the feasibility of regeneration initiatives. Understanding the local investment environment, including the availability of funding sources, the role of public institutions and the level of private-sector engagement, is essential for structuring green investment initiatives in degraded areas.

Table 7 summarises key socio-economic, market and funding conditions observed across the four pilot cities that influence the preparation and feasibility of regeneration initiatives. The table highlights differences in investor interest, administrative capacities, context-specific risks and potential funding structures. Rather than providing a detailed economic analysis, the purpose is to identify structural factors that shape the investment environment in mid-sized cities and that must be considered when preparing green regeneration projects in degraded areas.

Indicator	Gabrovo	Veszprém	Cazin	Šabac
Market appetite/investor landscape	Moderate interest linked to cultural tourism and place-based regeneration; larger investment depends on external programmes and phased structuring.	Relatively favourable context supported by cultural visibility and local partnerships; private investment is identified among potential funding sources.	Limited private investor presence; development relies mainly on municipal initiative and external public funding sources.	Uncertain interest from CSR-oriented donors; private sector engagement remains limited and project-based. Relying mainly on project-based partnerships.
Capacity constraints (staff/data/skills)	Limited capacity for complex project structuring and reliance on cross-sector coordination and external support.	Administrative capacity is relatively stable, but specialised expertise for investment structuring remains limited.	Administrative and technical capacity constraints; project development depends on externally supported preparation and phased documentation.	Reliance on project-based expertise and cooperation with external partners and institutions.
Context-specific risks	Dependence on project funding cycles and the need to balance tourism-led activation with community needs.	Uncertainty of private investment engagement and the gap between strategic ambition and long-term financial viability.	Limited market demand and strong dependence on external funding instruments.	Long planning procedures, limited financial resources and uncertain private-sector participation.
Potential co-financing / funding logic	Combination of municipal funding, EU programmes and partnerships with cultural and civil society actors.	Mix of municipal funding, EU programmes and project-based cultural or tourism funding.	Reliance on EU and international funding programmes combined with municipal contributions.	Combination of City resources, EU programmes, project-based funding and CSR sponsorship.

Table 7: Socio-economic / market context from pilots

The comparative analysis indicates that mid-sized cities operate in institutional and market environments where regeneration initiatives depend strongly on public leadership and access to external funding opportunities. Municipalities typically initiate regeneration projects and coordinate planning processes, yet limited administrative capacities and fragmented governance structures often slow the transition from spatial concepts to structured project preparation. The survey responses from the partner cities provide additional insight into the funding environment for regeneration projects in mid-sized cities. The funding role in a local governance setting was present in all four mid-sized

cities' cases through co-financing, alliance building and innovation. While all cities rely on EU funds, Veszprém was the only city to identify Private investment as an important funding source. Meanwhile, Šabac and Gabrovo cases lean on NGO programs and foundations.

Regeneration initiatives therefore require governance approaches that clarify decision responsibilities, strengthen cross-department coordination and support the structured preparation of projects before major investments are mobilised. Building on these contextual insights, the following section examines the key results emerging from the pilot territories and identifies the elements that can inform the development of a transferable model for green investment in degraded areas.

6 KEY RESULTS AND NEXT STEPS ACROSS TERRITORIES: EVIDENCE FOR JOINT OUTCOMES

Building on the comparative analysis of pilot contexts, feedback signals and enabling conditions, this chapter consolidates the key results emerging from the four mid-sized city pilots into a structured set of joint outcomes. These outcomes capture what has been concretely achieved and clarified through testing, particularly in relation to governance arrangements, decision-making processes, capacity development and early investment readiness. By linking pilot-level evidence with transferable patterns, the chapter establishes an evidence-based bridge between empirical findings and the operational recommendations developed in Chapter 7. Each outcome is explicitly grounded in pilot experience, while also indicating the extent to which it can inform regeneration practices in other mid-sized city contexts.

6.1 Key results collected from pilots

his section focuses on the tangible results emerging from the pilot territories, with the aim to identify which aspects of the testing process produced improvements in coordination, decision-making and project preparation, and to assess the extent to which these results can inform a transferable approach for preparing green investment initiatives in degraded areas.

Table 8 summarises the principal results reported by each pilot and groups them into four analytical categories: Governance, Process, Capacity and Investment readiness. The transferability note indicates under which conditions these results may be relevant for other mid-sized cities. The transferability note indicates under which conditions a particular result may be relevant for other mid-sized city contexts.

Pilot	Key result	Category tag (Governance/Process/Capacity/Investment)	Transferability note
Gabrovo	A municipality-led cross-sector governance structure strengthened coordination between spatial planning, cultural actors and civil society. This replaced fragmented decision-making with a shared coordination framework.	Governance	Transferable where municipalities can convene cross-sector actors and formalise a coordination routine.
Gabrovo	Decision-making shifted from ad-hoc project ideas to evidence-based prioritisation of degraded riverside areas.	Process	Transferable where cities establish shared criteria or baselines for prioritising degraded areas.

Gabrovo	The pilot produced a phased conceptual design (temporary–seasonal–permanent) for the riverside regeneration area.	Investment readiness	Transferable where cities can phase regeneration interventions and align them with funding opportunities.
Gabrovo	Civil society capacity was strengthened through structured participation and the Civil Society Bootcamp.	Capacity	Transferable where local civil society organisations can be mobilised through capacity-building formats.
Veszprém	Inclusive governance was strengthened through broad stakeholder involvement in regeneration planning.	Governance	Transferable where municipal leadership supports structured stakeholder participation.
Veszprém	A population survey was prepared to integrate citizens' needs into planning and decision-making.	Process	Transferable where cities can conduct basic surveys and integrate results into planning processes.
Veszprém	The pilot introduced a flexible governance approach supporting adaptive coordination between actors.	Capacity	Transferable where governance arrangements remain adaptable across project cycles.
Veszprém	A regeneration model was developed with potential application to other urban areas in the city.	Investment readiness	Transferable when cities treat pilot initiatives as replicable templates.
Cazin	Cross-sector coordination between planning departments, utilities and municipal administration improved alignment of public-space investments.	Governance	Transferable in cities where municipalities coordinate planning and infrastructure services.
Cazin	Decision-making became more transparent through the use of spatial and functional indicators for project evaluation.	Process	Transferable where cities introduce simple indicator-based assessment in planning decisions.
Cazin	Technical and administrative capacity for infrastructure project preparation was strengthened through conceptual and main design development.	Capacity	Transferable where cities can secure technical expertise for project documentation.
Cazin	Investment readiness improved through phased structuring of the project area into implementation stages.	Investment readiness	Transferable where projects can be implemented through modular phases..
Šabac	A Local Action Group (LAG) was established, improving coordination between city departments, institutions and external stakeholders.	Governance	Transferable where municipalities can convene a structured stakeholder platform.
Šabac	Planning processes shifted toward iterative decision-making supported by stakeholder dialogue and pilot actions.	Process	Transferable where cities introduce feedback loops between stakeholders and decision-making.
Šabac	Investment readiness improved through clearer roles, implementation steps and identification of diversified funding sources.	Capacity	Transferable where cities can map multi-source funding and clarify governance responsibilities.
Šabac	Stakeholder participation evolved from consultation to co-creation, with actors contributing proposals and resources for implementation.	Investment readiness	Transferable where participation is designed as co-creation with defined roles.

Table 8: Key results from pilots

Taken together, the pilot results indicate that the main contribution of the NONA testing phase lies in strengthening coordination practices, clarifying decision-making processes and improving the institutional capacity required to prepare regeneration initiatives. Across the four cities, the testing process helped introduce clearer stakeholder roles, more structured planning routines and improved alignment between spatial concepts and implementation steps.

These observations suggest that, in mid-sized city contexts, governance routines, coordination mechanisms and participatory practices therefore emerge as critical enabling factors for translating spatial regeneration concepts into investable initiatives.

Building on these results, the following synthesis highlights the main joint outcomes emerging from the pilot experience and identifies which elements are broadly transferable across mid-sized cities and which remain context-dependent.

Joint outcomes for the NONA methodology:

- Municipal-led cross-sector governance platforms institutionalized routine coordination across planning, culture, environment, and utilities, reducing fragmentation and enabling integrated decision-making.
- Evidence-based prioritization methods (surveys, spatial-functional indicators, shared baselines) shifted decisions from ad hoc ideas to needs-led, transparent project selection.
- Phased investment frameworks made projects financially aligned interventions with realistic funding and permitting windows.
- Capacity-building combined with co-creation (workshops, bootcamps, contests, festival events, LAGs and stakeholder co-production) moved stakeholders from consultation to active implementation partners, lowering delivery risk.
- Iterative, learning-oriented planning processes embedded feedback loops and adaptive governance, increasing strategic flexibility for future replication.

Context-dependent outcomes (not directly transferable)

- Where municipal mandate, convening power, or political will is weak, governance platforms and multi-actor institutionalization may fail to sustain beyond the pilot and thus are not directly transferable.
- In settings lacking minimum technical expertise or access to phased funding instruments, achieving permit-ready designs and staged investment readiness will be constrained and require tailored capacity or financing arrangements.

Taken together, these results provide the empirical basis for the NONA model for green investing in degraded areas in mid-sized cities.

To complement the pilot-based evidence presented above, an additional questionnaire survey was conducted among the partner cities participating in the NONA project (Gabrovo, Veszprém, Cazin and Šabac). This survey provides supplementary empirical validation of the methodological patterns identified through pilot testing.

The questionnaire confirmed several common features across the four pilot contexts. All pilot sites are publicly owned or publicly used areas, all are covered by a general urban planning framework, and all applied stakeholder mapping, problem analysis and user-needs analysis as part of their site assessment. The responses also confirm that arrangement and design of public areas, sustainability and resilience were shared thematic priorities across the pilots.

In methodological terms, the survey reinforced the importance of early stakeholder integration, expert walk-throughs, public communication and participatory formats for clarifying development priorities. The responses further showed that European funding programmes were perceived as the most important shared funding source, while private investment remained more limited and context-dependent. In this respect, the survey supports the broader conclusion that regeneration in mid-sized cities is shaped by strong public leadership, participatory preparation and reliance on mixed public and programme-based funding sources.

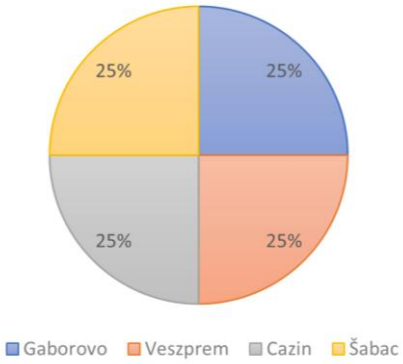
Some differences were also visible across the cases. Gabrovo reported a more formalised planning setting, while Veszprém was the only pilot to identify private investment as an important funding source. Cazin placed stronger emphasis on social cohesion and municipal support, while Šabac and Gabrovo highlighted the importance of NGO programmes, foundations and partnership-based funding. These differences confirm that, although common governance patterns exist, the practical structuring of green investment initiatives remains sensitive to local institutional and financial conditions.

A detailed presentation of the questionnaire structure, individual questions and graphical results is provided below.

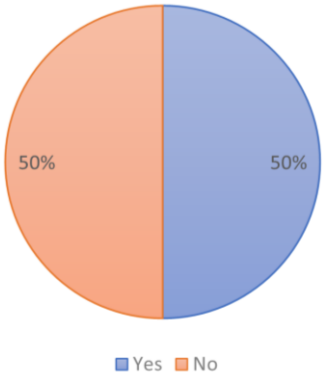
Questionnaire for the development of the methodology for medium-sized cities in NONA project: Gabrovo, Veszprém, Cazin, and Šabac (*form with questions asked and a graphic representation of the answers received)*

Please fill out this online questionnaire to make it easier to form the final document on the overall applied methodologies for medium-sized cities in the NONA project. All questions are mandatory, and the answers are defined in advance to make it easier to process and to see common starting points and to notice differences in approach. There is a possibility of giving multiple answers that describe a specific situation, and if none of the offered answers are adequate to the situation, you will have space to write your own answer. Questions are filled in by only one representative/person of the NONA partner and the particular pilot location.

1. Which city do you represent as a partner of the NONA project?
a. Cazin, b. Gabrovo, c. Šabac, d. Veszprém



2. Did you have a chance to implement NEB projects other than NONA? In one sentence, how would you describe the added value of NEB principles in relation to statutory planning in your country?
a. Yes,
b. No,
c. optional for answer a.



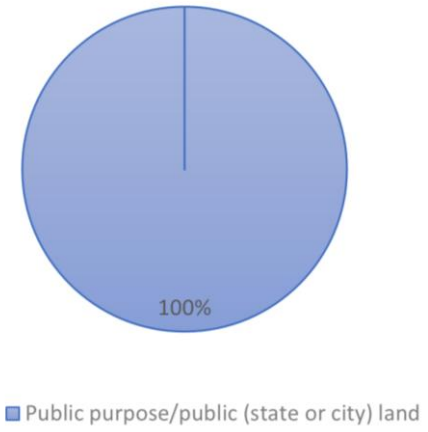
According to the provided answers, Gabrovo and Cazin had previous experience with NEB projects other than NONA, while Veszprém and Šabac didn't. Cazin additionally stated: "NEB principles add value to planning documents by making projects in Cazin, Bosnia and Herzegovina, more sustainable, inclusive, and better adapted to the needs of citizens." Gabrovo noted that: "It has helped us develop a strong methodology for project realization for our projects. It certainly has turned the attention of different project managers to addressing issues of participation of stakeholders, sustainability and aesthetics, which in the Hastings of project realisation may otherwise be skipped."

3. How was the pilot site for the NONA project selected?
a. Decision/recommendation of the local self-government
b. Based on previous research and actions (previous projects, priorities in development strategies, etc.)
c. Experiential, based on the topic of the project and perceived needs
d. Other (to be added)



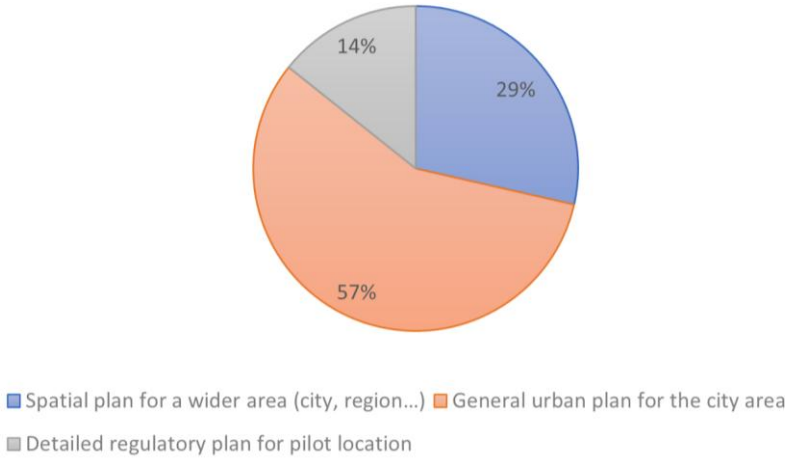
Šabac and Gabrovo decided on the selection of the location based on all three criteria, based on the recommendations of the local government, regarding the project topic and previous actions. Veszprém was guided solely by the decision of the city administration, while Cazin chose the location in accordance with the theme of the NONA project.

4. What is the status of the pilot site?
a. Public purpose/public (state or city) land
b. Private property
c. Other (to be added)



All four pilot sites have the status of public land/use.

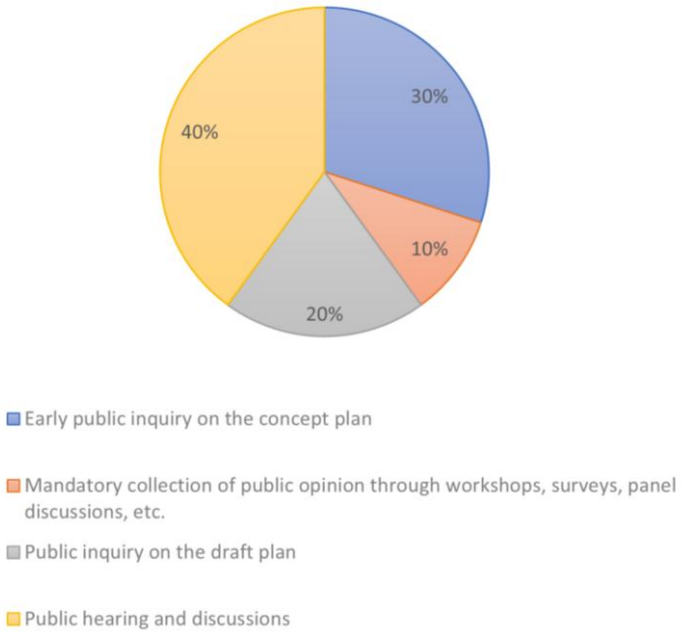
5. What type of statutory planning documents exist in your pilot location - please list them, with a brief explanation of the hierarchy, role/nature of the planning documents
a. Spatial plan for a wider area (city, region…)
b. General urban plan for the city area
c. Detailed regulatory plan for pilot location
d. Urban project/design for the pilot location
e. Other (to be added) and a brief explanation of the national/local context



All four pilot locations are "covered" by the General Urban Plan, and Gabrovo also has a more detailed urban planning document.

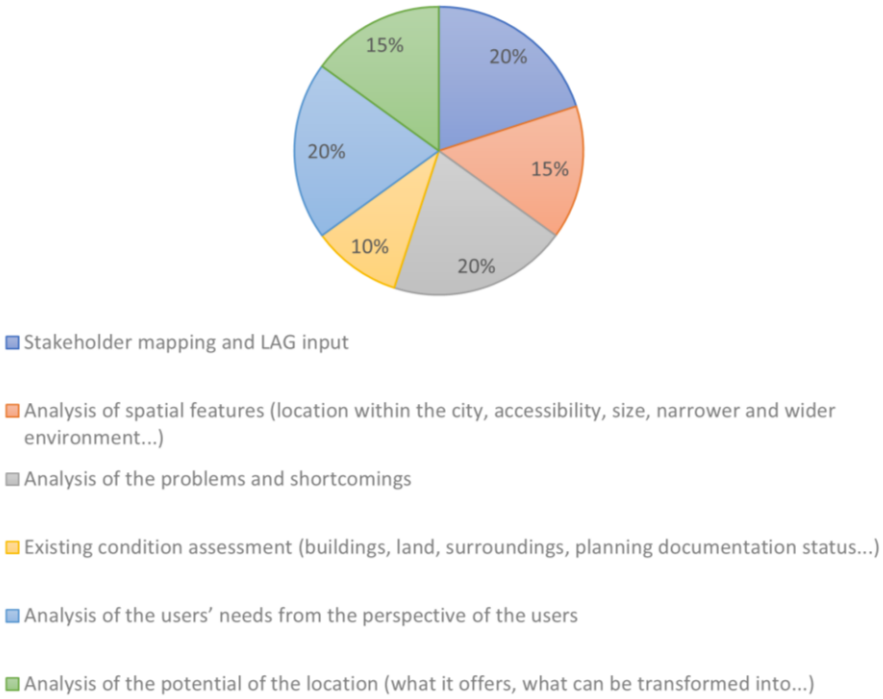
6. If your pilot area has adopted the planning document, please describe the statutory participatory process employed (for example, statutory participation in Serbia for all types of plans requires 15 days of early public inquiry on the concept plan and 30 days of public inquiry on the draft plan - final stages of the planning process)

a. Mandatory notification of all residents within the planned intervention boundary
b. Early public inquiry on the concept plan
c. Mandatory collection of public opinion through workshops, surveys, panel discussions, etc.
d. Public inquiry on the draft plan
e. Public hearing and discussions
f. Other (to be added or/and/or briefly explained)



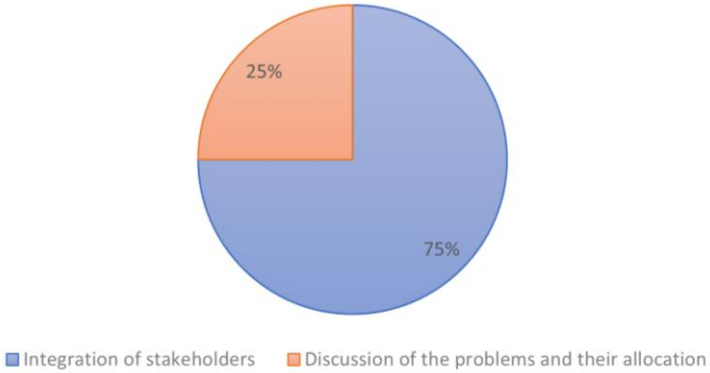
All four pilot locations had organized public insight in the planning document adoption phase, Šabac, Veszprém and Gabrovo also had early public insight in the conceptual phase of the plan, while only Gabrovo conducted broader citizen affirmation.

7. Mark the steps that you applied in the pilot site analysis.
-Stakeholder mapping and LAG input
-Analysis of spatial features (location within the city, accessibility, size, narrower and wider environment…)
-Analysis of the problems and shortcomings
-Existing condition assessment (buildings, land, surroundings, planning documentation status…)
-Analysis of the users' needs from the perspective of the users
-Analysis of the potential of the location (what it offers, what can be transformed into…)
-Other (to be added)



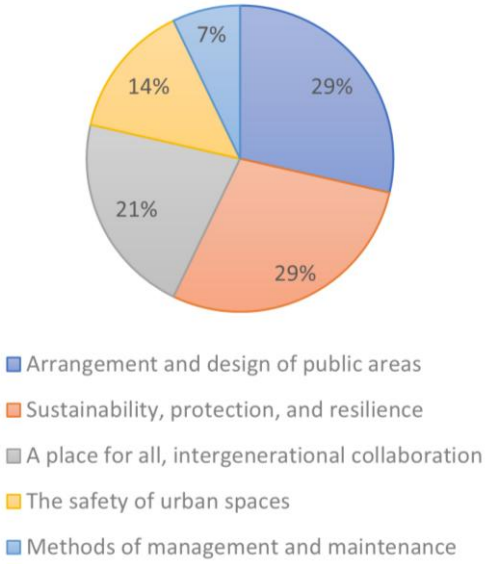
Gabrovo and Šabac applied all six methodological steps suggested by the question in organizing the site study; Veszprém opted for the identification of stakeholders, problems, and needs, while Cazin emphasized almost everything except the analysis of the environment and planning conditions.

8. What was the breaking point for understanding the local context and potential for integrating green investments in the revitalisation of degraded areas?
a. Integration of stakeholders
b. Discussion of the problems and their allocation
c. Meeting with investors and pitch session
d. Festival day as creativity and image booster
e. Other (to be added)



Stakeholder integration was assessed as the most important turning point for further work on the project task.

9. What are the main topics related to the pilot site?
-Reconstruction and infrastructure equipment
-Arrangement and design of public areas
-Sustainability, protection, and resilience
-A place for all, intergenerational collaboration
-The safety of urban spaces
-Methods of management and maintenance
-Other (to be added)



Arrangement and design of public areas, as well as sustainability, protection, and resilience, were major topics related to the pilot site. In addition, the opportunity to create a place for all through intergenerational collaboration was also an important factor for most pilot locations.

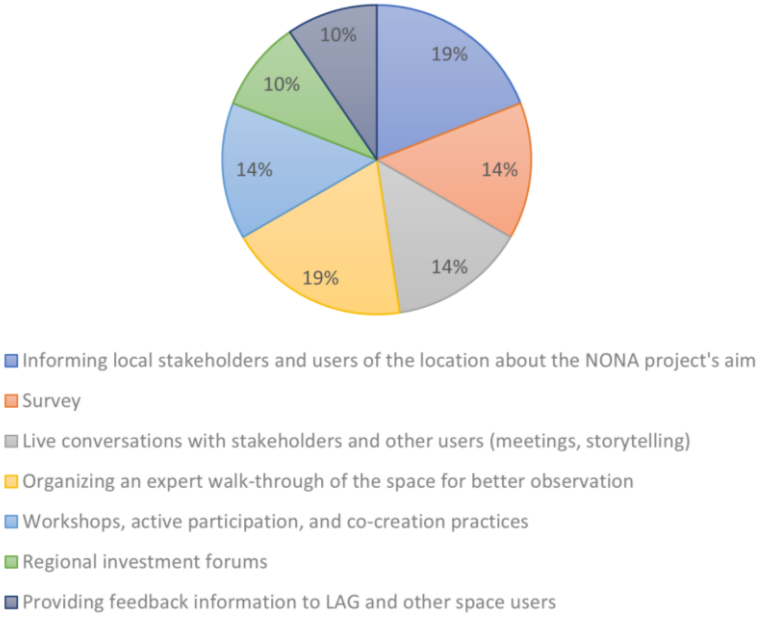
10. How did you conduct the research and define green investment priorities in the location?
a. Through user surveys (citizens and stakeholders)
b. Joint LAG meetings with the City Administration and stakeholders
c. Analysis of the historical significance of the site (archives, old photographs, records…)
d. Analysis of urban planning documents (plans & projects)
e. Fieldwork (observations, photos of the site, sketches…)

f. Data about budgeting and financing of development
g. Collecting examples of good practice
h. Other (to be added)



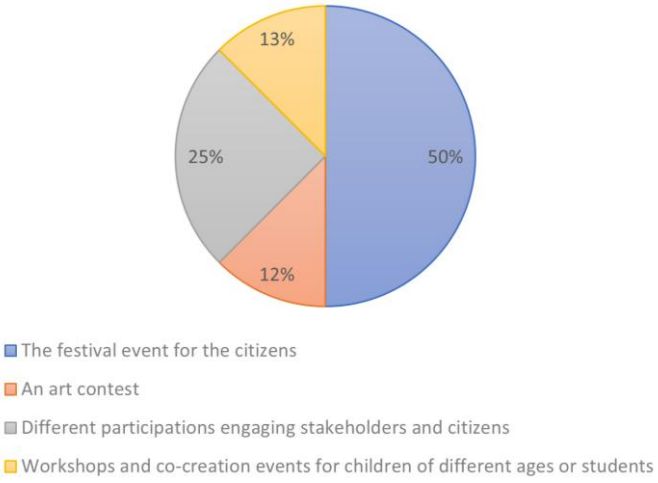
The most commonly used method for all four cities was practical fieldwork and collecting important information through observations and recording (documenting the situation). Also, methods such as surveys, meetings and discussions with relevant stakeholders, and the collection of examples of good practice as inspiring and reputable, are widely used in Šabac and Veszprém, partially in Cazin and Gabrovo.

11. What level and methods of participation did you use for mapping users' needs to direct green investment packages?
a. Informing local stakeholders and users of the location about the NONA project's aim
b.Survey
c.Live conversations with stakeholders and other users (meetings, storytelling)
d.Organizing an expert walk-through of the space for better observation
e.Workshops, active participation, and co-creation practices
f.Regional investment forums
g.Providing feedback information to LAG and other space users
h.Other (to be added)



For mapping users' needs to direct green investment packages, partners mostly used methods of directly informing local stakeholders and users of the location about the NONA project's aim and organizing an expert walk-through of the space for better observation. Other popular methods in Šabac, Veszprém, and Gabrovo, were surveys, conversations with stakeholders and other users (meetings, storytelling), and organization of workshops, active participation, and co-creation practices. The regional investment forum was recognized as a significant event too.

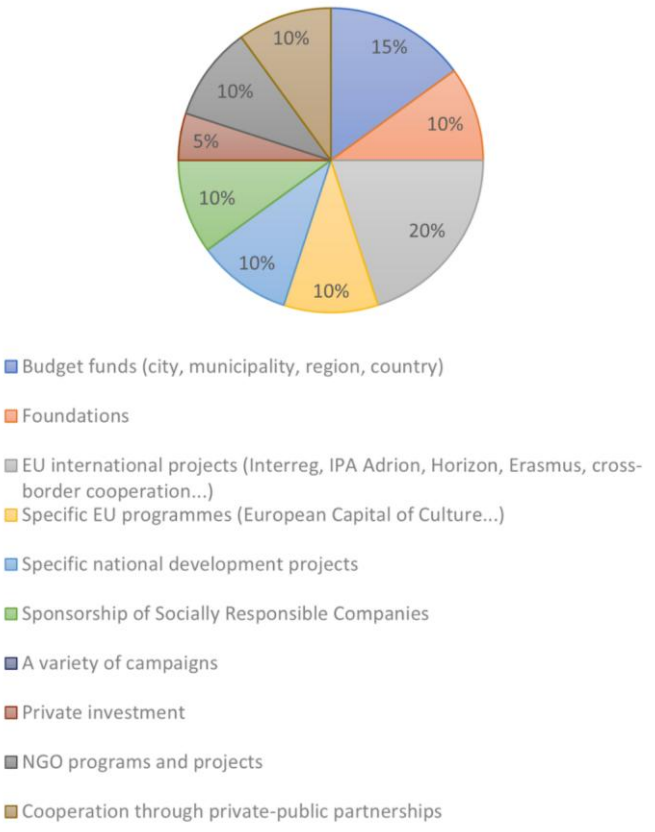
12. What did you organize and implement at the pilot location?
a.The festival event for the citizens
b.An art contest
c.Different participations engaging stakeholders and citizens
d.Workshops and co-creation events for children of different ages or students
e.Other (to be added)



It seems that the festival day for citizens has been recognized as the most desirable method for broader animation and, at the same time, presenting the project's goals. Apart

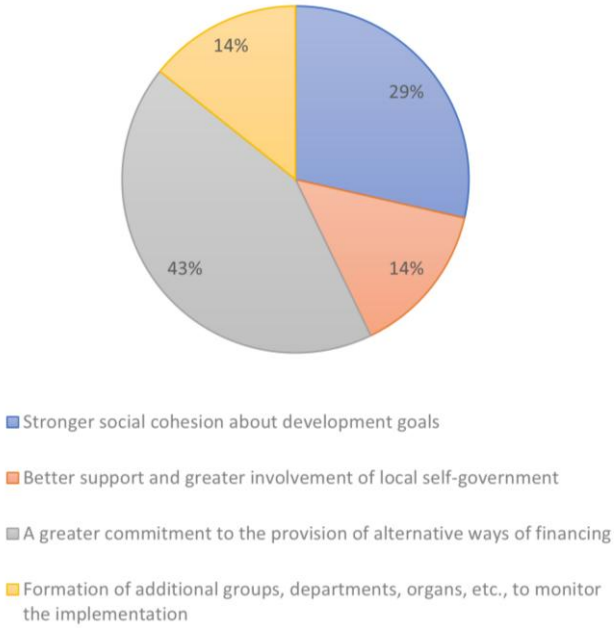
from this application, other methods have also been partially used, such as different participations engaging stakeholders and citizens.

13. Which sources of funding for the development of the pilot site have you identified as the most important?
a.Budget funds (city, municipality, region, country)
b.Foundations
c.EU international projects (Interreg, IPA Adrion, Horizon, Erasmus, cross-border cooperation...)
d.Specific EU programmes (European Capital of Culture...)
e.Specific national development projects
f.Sponsorship of Socially Responsible Companies
g.A variety of campaigns
h.Private investment
i.NGO programs and projects
j.Cooperation through private-public partnerships
k.Other (to be added)



Since the pilot sites are publicly owned, it is logical that their development is financed mostly from budget funds. However, the key information is that EU funds (international projects (Interreg, IPA Adrion, Horizon, Erasmus, cross-border cooperation...), were predominantly used for the development of pilot locations, which indicates the importance of various projects and programs for activation at the local level, both in EU member states and in candidate countries. All other offered sources of financing were used equally, and only in Veszprém was financing from the private sector applied, while special fundraising campaigns have not been launched anywhere.

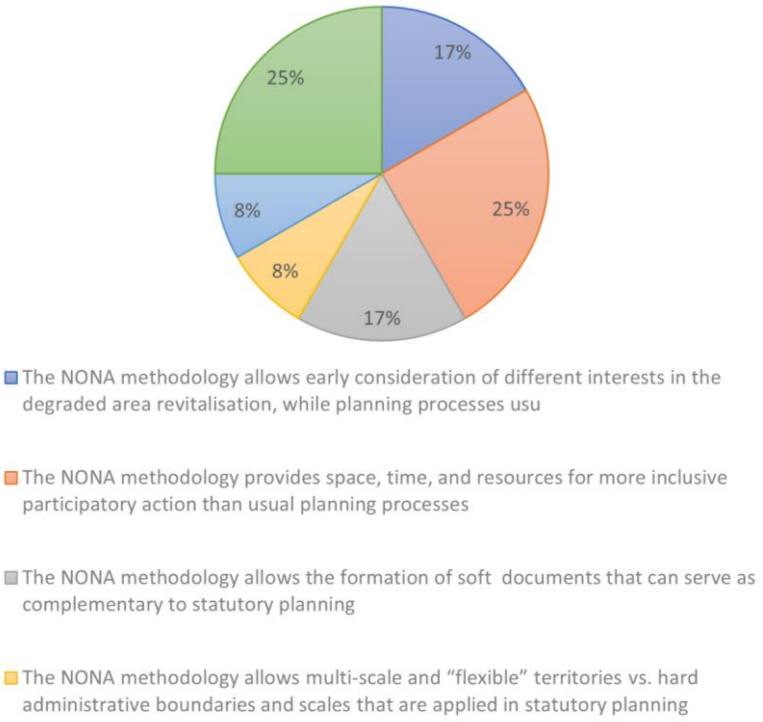
14. What recommendations do you give for your pilot site and further development?
a.Stronger social cohesion about development goals
b.Better support and greater involvement of local self-government
c.A greater commitment to the provision of alternative ways of financing
d.Formation of additional groups, departments, organs, etc., to monitor the implementation
e.Other (to be added)



Gabrovo, Veszprem and Šabac believe that the best recommendation is the further development of pilot locations and a greater commitment to the provision of alternative ways of financing. Cazin opted for stronger social cohesion about development goals and better support and greater involvement of local self-government. Šabac has already taken steps to Formation of additional groups, departments, organs, etc., to monitor the implementation of all projects in the city, and considers this approach as advisable for monitoring all actions and investments.

15. In what ways does the NONA methodology for integrating green investments into the revitalisation of degraded areas differ from statutory planning processes?
a.The NONA methodology allows early consideration of different interests in the degraded area revitalisation, while planning processes usually involve diverse actors at later stages, when decisions have already been made
b.The NONA methodology provides space, time, and resources for more inclusive participatory action than usual planning processes
c.The NONA methodology allows the formation of soft documents that can serve as complementary to statutory planning
d.The NONA methodology allows multi-scale and "flexible" territories vs. hard administrative boundaries and scales that are applied in statutory planning
e.The NONA methodology supports the formation of governance initiatives that may last longer than the project itself, based on the developed knowledge and capacities for mobilising resources for agreed-on actions

f.The NONA methodology provides a clear outline of the priorities of green financing with a clear spatial dimension, while traditional plans do not contain any information on implementation beyond the technical description (norms and standards for development)
g.Other (to be added)



In conclusion, regarding how the NONA methodology for integrating green investments into the revitalization of degraded areas differs from statutory planning processes, Šabac, Veszprem and Gabrovo believe that it provides space, time, and resources for more inclusive participatory action than usual planning processes. Also, Cazin, Šabac and Gabrovo concluded that NONA methodology provides a clear outline of the priorities of green financing with a clear spatial dimension, while traditional plans do not contain any information on implementation beyond the technical description (norms and standards for development). Šabac recognized that NONA methodology allows early consideration of different interests in the degraded area revitalization, while planning processes usually involve diverse actors at later stages, when decisions have already been made, and allows the formation of soft documents that can serve as complementary to statutory planning.

Summarized results

- Sample Size: 4 participating cities (Gabrovo, Veszprém, Cazin, and Šabac).

- Instrument: A 16-item questionnaire concerning the implementation of the NONA project, integration of New European Bauhaus (NEB) principles, statutory planning, and green investments. The survey included both single-choice and multiple-choice questions.
- Scope: Analysis of pilot site selection, statutory frameworks, participatory methodologies, thematic priorities, funding sources, and policy recommendations.
- Land Ownership and Status: All four cities selected "Public purpose/public (state or city) land" for their pilot sitesStatutory Baselines: Every city reported having a general urban plan for the city area in place.
- Core Analytical Steps: In pilot site analysis, all cities applied identical foundational steps: stakeholder mapping, analysis of problems and shortcomings, and analysis of users' needs from the users' perspective.
- Thematic Focus: All pilot sites are universally focused on the arrangement and design of public areas as well as sustainability, protection of public space and environment, and resilience.
- Engagement Mechanisms: For mapping users' needs, all locations successfully utilized Informing local stakeholders, organizing expert walk-throughs, and hosting a festival event for citizens.
- Funding Reliance: EU international projects were unanimously identified as a crucial source of funding for development.
- Site Selection: Pilot sites were primarily chosen based on a mix of top-down and bottom-up factors: Decision/recommendation of the local self-government (3 cities) and experiential, based on perceived needs (3 cities).
- The "Breaking Point" for Success: 3 out of 4 cities (Šabac, Cazin, Gabrovo) identified the integration of stakeholders as the pivotal breaking point for understanding local context and the potential for green investments.
- Participatory Methods: Surveys, live conversations with stakeholders, and active co-creation workshops were widely adopted by 3 out of the 4 cities (Šabac, Veszprem, Gabrovo) as primary data collection methods.
- Future Recommendations: A majority (Šabac, Veszprém, Gabrovo) recommended a greater commitment to the provision of alternative ways of financing moving forward.
- Regulatory Nuances: Gabrovo is the only municipality operating with a "Detailed regulatory plan for the pilot location,"
- Funding Diversification: While all cities rely on EU funds, Veszprém was the only city to identify private investment as an important funding source. Meanwhile, Šabac and Gabrovo use NGO programs, foundations, and public-private partnerships.
- Socio-Political Needs: Cazin uniquely prioritized stronger social cohesion about development goals and better support/involvement of local self-government in their final recommendations
- The NONA methodology contributed to improvement of traditional, top-down statutory planning, which only focuses purely on technical norms. This shows municipalities highly value NONA because it provides what statutory planning lacks: inclusive participatory action and a clear outline of green financing priorities with a spatial dimension.

- Final Observation: The revitalization of degraded urban areas in these specific cities is not viewed strictly as an infrastructural or engineering challenge. It is being treated as a socio-environmental and economic sustainability challenge, heavily reliant on early stakeholder mapping, intensive public engagement (festivals, walk-throughs, co-creation), and the pursuit of diverse, cross-border European funding mechanisms to ensure long-term resilience and sustainability.

6.2 Pilot-tailored next step

This section describes the next steps, adapted from the pilot projects, needed to continue the transition from the test results to the regeneration investment process in each medium-sized city. *Each pilot contains* 3–5 action-oriented steps specifying: action, responsible organization/body/unit, and expected output, and reflects the main gaps: decision clarity, coordination, feasibility screening, stakeholder engagement, and planning-to-investment translation.

City-pilot location	Action-oriented steps	Lead - responsible organization/body/ unit	Expected output
Gabrovo (BG)	**Formalize the cross-sector coordination platform established during the pilot** to ensure continued cooperation between spatial planning, culture, environment, and civil society actors.	Municipality of Gabrovo – Mayor's office / Urban Planning Department.	Formal municipal decision establishing a standing cross-sector coordination routine and meeting schedule.
	Validate the phased conceptual design for the riverside regeneration area (temporary–seasonal–permanent interventions) through stakeholder review and municipal approval procedures.	Urban Planning Department with Cultural and Environmental units.	Endorsed phased regeneration concept linked to municipal development priorities.
	Conduct an early feasibility screening for priority interventions (technical, environmental and financial aspects) to prepare selected phases for funding applications.	Municipal technical services with external experts.	Feasibility note and shortlist of investment-ready actions.
	Expand the Civil Society Bootcamp model to mobilise local organisations as implementation partners in	Municipal culture department in cooperation with civil society organisations.	Capacity-building programme and stakeholder partnership list for implementation.

	cultural and environmental activation of the riverside area.		
	Prepare a preliminary funding mix for the phased investment plan prioritising EU programmes and complementary national or municipal sources.	Municipal development and project office.	Funding strategy outline and shortlist of applicable programmes.
Veszprém (HU)	**Complete the citizen survey and present results to decision-makers** to embed user needs into the next stage of regeneration planning.	Municipality of Veszprém – Urban Development Department.	Survey report formally presented to municipal council and integrated into planning priorities.
	Institutionalise the multi-actor governance approach tested in the pilot as a regular practice for area-based development projects.	Mayor's office and urban development coordination unit.	Municipal governance protocol defining stakeholder participation procedures.
	Translate the pilot methodology into a reusable urban regeneration model applicable to other degraded sites in the city.	Strategic planning unit with external experts.	Methodological guideline or internal toolkit for municipal project teams.
	Conduct an early feasibility and financing screening for the pilot area to identify priority interventions and potential investment partners, including private sector actors where appropriate.	Municipal development agency.	Shortlist of feasible interventions and potential funding pathways.
Cazin (BiH)	**Consolidate the cross-sector coordination mechanism between urban planning, utilities, and development administration** established during the pilot.	Municipality of Cazin – Municipal administration.	Operational coordination structure for public-space projects.
	Adopt spatial-functional indicators and green transition principles as part of routine project approval procedures.	Urban planning department	Indicator-based evaluation checklist for regeneration proposals.
	Finalize technical documentation (conceptual and main designs) for the pilot area to ensure readiness for permitting and external funding applications.	Municipal technical services with external engineering consultants.	Permit-ready project documentation.

	Implement the phased development strategy (Area A and Area B) to align project implementation with available funding and administrative capacity.	Municipal development and finance units.	Phased investment plan with timeline and funding options.
	Strengthen stakeholder communication and social cohesion around development goals to support long-term project implementation.	Municipal communication office.	Stakeholder engagement plan and validation meetings.
Šabac (SRB)	**Formalise the Local Action Group (LAG) as a permanent coordination platform** for urban regeneration projects. on-site, in coordination with CWG	Municipality of Šabac – City administration.	Municipal decision establishing the LAG and defining its mandate.
	Introduce iterative planning checkpoints linking stakeholder feedback to decision-making, create adequate urban planning document, based on the study with a catalogue	Urban planning department.	Planning workflow integrating consultation, feedback review, and decision milestones.
	Develop a diversified funding strategy for the pilot area, combining municipal resources with EU programmes and partnership opportunities.	Municipal project development office.	Funding-mix shortlist aligned with phased investment priorities.
	Strengthen the city's internal project monitoring structure to oversee implementation of regeneration initiatives.	Newly established municipal coordination units - CWG.	Monitoring framework and reporting schedule.
	Maintain co-creation practices with stakeholders to generate implementation proposals and mobilise community capacities for the pilot site.	Local Action Group and municipal participation office.	Co-creation workshops and stakeholder-generated project proposals.

Table 9: Next steps, adapted from the pilot projects

What emerges from the pilot testing is not simply a set of recurring challenges, but a structural gap between how regeneration initiatives are conceived and how they are prepared for implementation. In mid-sized cities, this gap is most visible in the absence of mechanisms that connect spatial planning, governance coordination, and investment logic into a coherent process.

Rather than addressing isolated issues, the analysis points to the need for a reorganisation of the project preparation process itself—one that integrates decision-

making, stakeholder alignment, and feasibility considerations from the outset. This shift requires moving from fragmented, project-based approaches towards structured and coordinated development processes.

In this context, the NONA model is introduced as a methodological response to this structural gap. It does not propose new types of projects, but a different way of organising existing regeneration initiatives, enabling them to progress from local ambition to implementable and investment-ready interventions.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS: NONA MODEL FOR GREEN INVESTING IN DAS

This chapter translates the evidence from the four mid-sized city pilots into actionable recommendations for municipalities and local development actors on how to integrate green investing into the revitalisation of degraded areas (DAs). The recommendations are structured as thematic packages addressing typical mid-sized city conditions: fragmented internal coordination, limited project development capacity, and a frequent gap between planning ambition and investment readiness. While the guidance is designed to be broadly applicable for municipalities across the EU, it is written with direct relevance for the Danube Region context and for cities facing similar institutional and market conditions. The chapter supports local teams in moving from a degraded site and a local vision towards a credible and investable regeneration project.

To support this transition, the chapter presents a structured approach that connects spatial and urban planning priorities with governance, financial and organizational instruments needed to implement regeneration projects. By grouping interventions into thematic investment packages, municipalities can better prioritize actions, coordinate stakeholders, and align development goals with available funding sources. This approach helps transform strategic intentions into feasible projects, enabling cities to gradually build investment-ready initiatives that improve degraded areas while delivering environmental, social, and economic benefits.

Some recommendations for the formation of the investment packages and models are connected directly with the used & proposed methodology:

- The economic factor and the estimate of the costs of construction, equipment, development, and maintenance must be an integral part of the document proposing actions on specific location, whether it is a formal urban plan or study, strategy etc. The good *practice of forming an overview of all necessary resources at the initial planning stage should be restored*, especially when it comes to public land financed from the budget of local governments.
- If there are multiple micro-locations within the pilot site, or different themes and ideas, it is recommended to create *catalog sheets for each proposed intervention*, in which everything proposed would be located, described in detail, with an estimate of the price/cost and with proposed financing model in accordance with legal framework. For example, for an intervention within a public purpose/land/interest, financing options could be provided from: local/national budget funds, private-public partnership, sponsorship, through national and international programs and projects, etc. Such "*catalog of offers*" would enable the manager and decision-maker to quickly and easily plan and form the necessary budget, or if an opportunity arises for some other type of financing and investment, to have a conceptual idea ready to offer and a formalized cost overview.

- Also, if the pilot site or case/topic is considered at a strategic level and requires certain systemic solutions, the increasingly popular form of a *guide/roadmap can be used*, which contains the sequence and explanation of all steps to achieve the goal, including those steps that are thematically and hierarchically much broader, i.e. their solution is outside the site itself, i.e. at a "higher" city or national level (legal framework, organizational and managerial changes, etc.).
- *Not all benefits are easily measurable in financial terms, nor immediately visible and tangible*, but "investment" can also be a pledge for the future, more visible through social changes, such as the association and empowerment of the community and stakeholders, a new image and brand of the space, higher quality and attendance thanks to varying degrees of interventions, from repurposing to small design solutions.
- *Using GIS (Geographic Information System)* as well as other digital tools with clear spatial dimension can significantly improve, support, and organize data collection, as it can store it as a database, manage it, analyze, edit, display, and visualize geographic data.
- *Formation of a LAG (Local Action Group)* as an interest group of direct stakeholders/beneficiaries and representatives of local government/decision makers, *and a CWG (Coordination Working Group)* as a coordination body/council/working group for monitoring implementation of priority projects at the location and harmonizing and coordinating various programs and projects, as well as funding sources. These two bodies can be separate, but in close cooperation, with the proviso that the LAG is specifically and only related to the pilot location, while the CWG can monitor multiple locations and actions/projects on the territory of the local government/city.
- *Community participation* through various actions: surveys to collect views/opinions and create a list of potential shortcomings/problems and common solutions, workshops with documented results similar to surveys, interviews etc..

7.1 Guiding principles for green investing in DAs in mid-sized cities

NONA pilot activities confirm the hypothesis that wider outreach towards and sustainability of investments depend on both technical planning as well as the appropriate involvement of stakeholders throughout the process, and a clear understanding of the local context, needs, and development objectives of the concerned area of intervention. Wider informing and advertising the governance initiative, presence of an international consortium within pilot cases, and engagement of lay persons and intermediary stakeholders such as academic and research institutions in mid-sized cities can contribute to a **more explicit and transparent account of decision-making**. Formation of LAGs and CWGs aims to **strengthen internal coordination** of pilot activities, where each LAG member may hold a role of a local interest group gatekeeper and enabling factor for implementation of green investments in a wider context, i.e., via local or RIFs. The unfolding coordination via local investment forums contributes to

translating vision into bankable propositions through the co-creation of green investment project ideas as a base for transparent green investment packages. Participatory actions and timely discussions between stakeholders, acquiring of new knowledge and skills through collaboration, and understanding of others' values and perspectives, may allow for an **early de-risk** among conflicting parties.

At the same time, evidence from the pilot cases analysed within the NONA project indicates that, in practice, many initiatives currently remain between the project planning and implementation phases - as per the investment life cycle. This represents a limitation for developing a more complete empirical model of the lifecycle, but also highlights the need to **sustain stakeholder commitment** and strengthen governance capacities in mid-sized cities through **scalable capacity building** to support the green investments from planning to long-term monitoring and evaluation beyond the project duration.

Guiding principle	Practical meaning (1 line)
1. People-centred and inclusive value	Ensure projects deliver clear benefits to residents and users, including access, safety, and quality public space through simple, understandable language for different local community groups including community mapping.
2. Clear public value and credible investment logic	Translate green ambition into a realistic and transparent value proposition, or a non-monetary value.
3. Transparent governance and accountability	Make ownership, roles, and decision routes explicit to reduce risk of overreaching roles and power disbalance.
4. Evidence-based decision-making (minimum data set)	Use a minimum baseline available evidence (spatial data, field work data, archival data - if available etc.), and clearly present reference base set for non-expert participants, to avoid rework and reduce uncertainty.
5. Risk-aware packaging and de-risking	Identify key risks early and sequence evidence, permits, and funding to manage them.
6. Iterative development with investor feedback	Engage investors and delivery actors early in cases, where possible (taking into account that in

	examined mid-sized cities it is not easy to establish these links early in the process) as reviewers to test assumptions and improve further steps of the investment.
7. Long-term resilience, operations, and maintenance	Account for lifecycle performance, operational capacity, and maintenance needs so benefits persist over time. Roles and assignments should be clearly defined and all actors should be aware of the roles of others.

Table 10: Principles for green investing in DAs in mid-sized cities

7.2 The NONA model for mid-sized cities

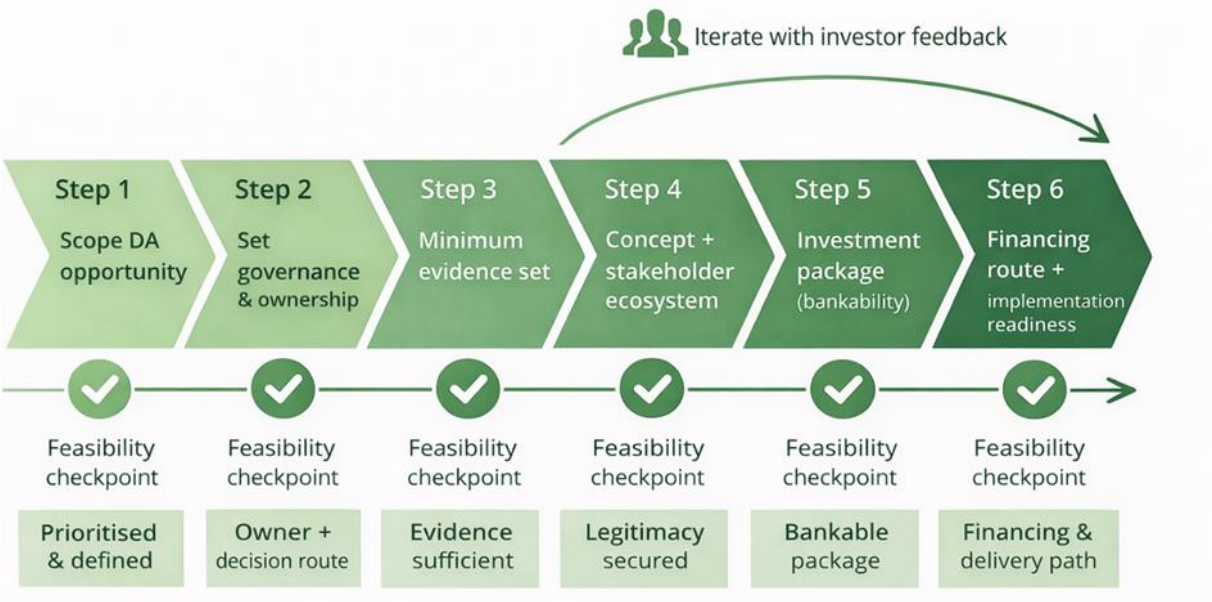


Fig. 9 - NONA model from DA identification to an investable package and implementation

Source: NONA

Before choosing the best ways to use green investments in sustainable urban projects (especially in pilot locations), it's important to first understand and prepare the key elements that make these projects possible and less risky.
These elements include:

- Legal frameworks – clear laws and regulations that support the project
- Institutional setup – strong organizations and defined responsibilities
- Capacity building – ensuring people and institutions have the right skills and knowledge
- Feasibility studies – checking if the project is practical, affordable, and beneficial
- Permitting – getting the necessary approvals and licenses

- Land acquisition – securing the land needed for the project
- Revenue reforms – improving how the project generates or manages income to reduce financial risk

In summary, it is essential to establish appropriate institutional frameworks, regulatory conditions, and resource capacities in advance to enable the effective implementation of green urban investments, enhance their financial viability, and minimize associated risks. This involves securing budgetary resources for development, as well as for the ongoing maintenance and management of utility services, potentially complemented by public–private partnership (PPP) models. It also requires broader outreach and the strategic blending of resources to support integrated urban development. In parallel, strengthening institutional capacity for urban governance is critical, including the integration of institutional and educational programs, infrastructure improvements, coordinated actions to enhance climate resilience, and the promotion of knowledge exchange and relational capacity building.

7.3 Recommendation packages

This section provides thematic packages of recommendations tailored to typical mid-sized city needs: coordination across departments, maintaining momentum over longer cycles, and converting plans into investable propositions. To achieve this, planning must connect spatial priorities with realistic financial frameworks that reflect the specific conditions and development potential of each location. By linking identified urban needs with structured investment packages, cities can move from conceptual ideas toward implementable actions, ensuring that spatial improvements generate broader social, economic, and environmental benefits. The following approach therefore explains how investments in public spaces can influence urban vitality and outlines a system of financial packages that help prioritize interventions, organize funding sources, and support continuous monitoring and adaptive urban development.

From the perspective of planning, financial packages should be tied to specific characteristics and conditions of the space, i.e., to the expressed and prioritized needs for more rational or better use of locations.
The recommended prioritization through the creation of roadmaps and catalog sheets for each idea/proposal spatially related to the location, with an overview of costs and possible sources of financing, leads to generalization in the sense of forming groups of financial packages, from those that are basic and necessary, through those that represent an addition and improvement, to finally those that are the superstructure of everything, a higher degree of functionality, efficiency and rationality.
development.

Package types are formatted in line with proposed relevant thematic areas, and focus on specific subjects including governance, local development, economic development, financing and de-risking, resilience, data management, and smart digital solutions, and mobility and availability as crucial parts of these below-mentioned packages. Every package consists of multiple recommendations that better focus on a specific field of intervention that is beneficial for degraded areas in mid-sized cities.

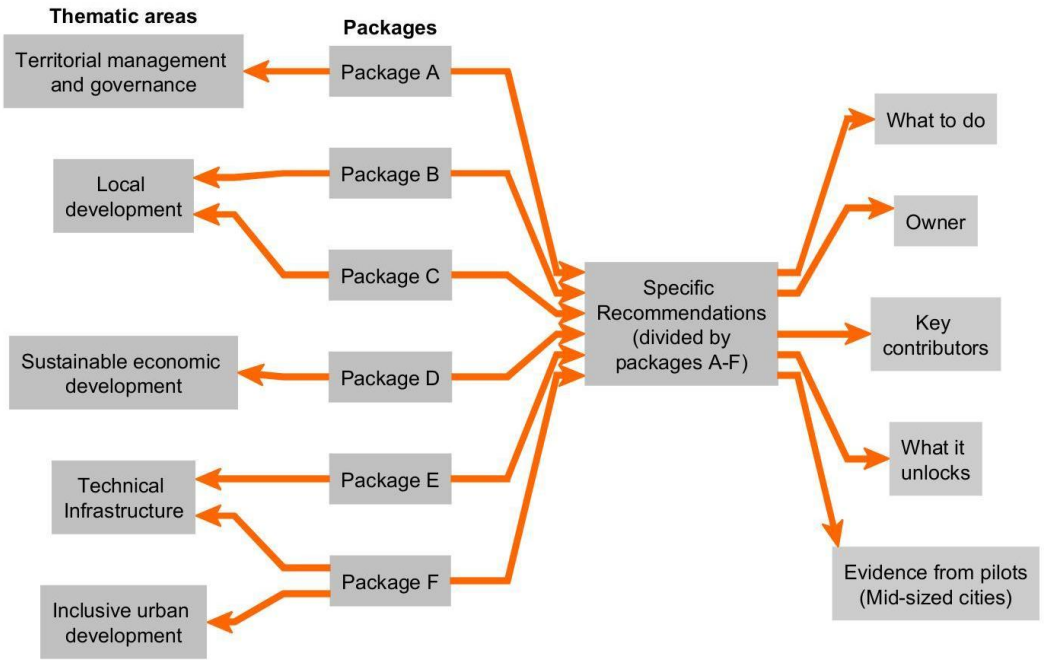


Fig. 10 - Scheme for defining package types and their recommendations

Source: NONA, IAUS

Types of packages	Thematic areas	Level of necessity and importance	Primary/ dominant character of the package	Usual financial source
Package A: Governance and participation - Chapter 7.3.1. - recommendations A1-A4	Territorial management and governance	basic/essential -serves a more efficient and transparent administration (prevent administrative bottlenecks in all subsequent packages)	technical, managerial-organizational, driving force	local community/ authority/governmental budget, national funding and potentially grants for specific utilities (EBRD; EIB; WB; IPA)
Package B: Stakeholder management for mid-sized cities (best-case approaches) -	Local development	basic/essential -serves a more efficient and transparent administration -crucial for community alignment	managerial-organizational, driving force	local community/ authority/governmental budget, national funding and potentially grants for specific utilities (EBRD; EIB;

Chapter 7.3.2. - recommendations B1-B6		and project/plan viability		WB; IPA)
Package C: From planning to investment readiness (closing the mid-sized city gap) - Chapter 7.3.3. - recommendations C1-C3	Local development	basic/essential -serves a more efficient and transparent administration - package should be fully satisfied before approaching international financial institutions or private investors	managerial-organizational, driving force, economical and social	local community/authority budget, national funding and grants, IPA
Package D: Financing pathways and de-risking (public/private/blended logic) - Chapter 7.3.4. - recommendations D1-D3	Sustainable economic development	additional - more and more imposed as a need and a response to the changed conditions of life in cities, depends on location conditions -large scale, and micro scale resilient "tools" (infrastructure)	technical, environmental, ecological	local community/authority budget, national funding and grants, international programs, projects and grants (DRP, IPA, EBRD, EIB, WB), environmental green or climate funds, low-interest loans, and/or PPP arrangements
Package E: Data, monitoring, and evaluation - Chapter 7.3.5. - recommendations E1-E7 (indicators EI7.1-EI7.4)	Technical Infrastructure	upgraded - the package represents a superstructure, if all others are implemented and satisfied, it can contribute to improvement, and be fully financed after the core infrastructure is fully operational	managerial-organizational, technical (digitalization)	local community/ authority/governmental budget, PPP arrangements, potentially grants for specific utilities (EBRD; EIB; WB; IPA)
Package F: Availability and Mobility -	Inclusive urban development;	additional - serves to improve existing systems, better	technical, social	local community/ authority/governmental budget, PPP

Chapter 7.3.6. - recommendations F1-F4	Technical Infrastructure	comfort, focused on achieving specific social inclusion metrics, and upgrading urban mobility bottlenecks		arrangements, potentially grants for specific utilities (EBRD; EIB; WB; IPA)

Table 11: Overview of financial packages

This division is arbitrary, based on the most common city/location needs and topics, but it has the possibility to elaborate or contain other larger or smaller packages as needed. For the pilot location of public land use and ownership, it is suggested to use a combination of local governmental budgets, national funding and grants, low-interest loans from international partners and/or PPP arrangements, and environmental green or climate funds, rather than business loans and private investments. A blended financing approach is used in cases where grants and technical assistance support enabling activities and provide reserves for first losses, concessional debt finances long-term infrastructure, and commercial debt or equity is used for projects supported by user fee revenues.

7.3.1 Package A: Governance and participation

Through acquiring green investments for revitalisation of DAs across the mid-sized pilot cases, we identified how internal roles, responsibilities, and coordination can be organised to move the regeneration pipeline forward in a mid-sized city, with particular focus on the enabler role and coordination capacities.

Besides the enabler role, other diverse stakeholder roles within the helix governance model were identified, which unfolding of the governance initiatives at the local level. These are: the local knowledge and legitimacy provider role, funding role (public or private/business sector), the intermediary/knowledge transfer role, advocacy role (NGO), and standardisation and alignment role with national or supranational policy.

Table below summarises the key recommendations to strengthen governance and coordination for green investing in degraded areas. It focuses on clarifying roles and ownership, establishing decision routes and steering routines, and reducing governance-related implementation risk through clear responsibility.

Recommendation	What to do	Owner	Key contributors	What it unlocks	Evidence from pilots
A1. Appoint a pipeline	Appoint accountable stakeholder	Municipality / Department	Local economic development department;	More efficient decision making;	NONA enabling partners are

owner (enabler) + site champions	(enabler) and a champion (active local stakeholder) with clear decision making rights.	for urban developmen t; or, Department for SGIs / societal wellbeing	Unit for implementatio n of strategic projects (IPA, Cohesion funds); legal/cadastre, technical services;	clearer accountability ; faster spread of information;	city administration . They provided coordination, planning documentatio n and a guarantee of the activities; and as an investor in public resources;
A2. Run a steering routine aligned to the NONA checkpoints	Hold a monthly steering (LAG and CWG) to establish continuous and cross-disciplinary and cross-sector collaboration	Enabler, intermediary	Department heads (enablers, intermediaries) ; key local stakeholders (LAG members, investors, NGO, local institutions and citizens)	Openness and trust towards the process.	Pilots confirmed that the steering routine enhanced trust.
A3. Map responsibility chains for key risks (infrastructure/ water/permits)	Roadmap of who is responsible for key tasks (e.g., utility works, permits).	Enabler, intermediary	Research organisations, urban planning departments of local administration.	Clearer coordination; lower delivery risk	Integration of stakeholders to define a joint roadmap was a breaking point in Šabac, Veszprem and Gabrovo.
A4. Use a shared spatial reference to coordinate decisions	Define a system logic that connects actors with the pilot location site (organisational, spatial)	Planning lead (municipal)	Research organisations, urban planning departments of local administration (GIS).	Coherent investment narrative; stronger public value / trust at the local level; active participation instead of tokenism.	Šabac LAG members have a strong spatial and functional (green, educational) reference to Letnjikovac.

Table 12: Recommendations for Package A

7.3.2 Package B: Stakeholder management for mid-sized cities - best-case approaches

Stakeholder categories in mid-sized city urban projects, based on the evidence from four pilot locations, typically include local administration, including the departments for urban planning, societal wellbeing and local economic development (enabler role), as well as

community representatives (the local knowledge and legitimacy provider role), business sector (funding role), academia, research organisations, local educational, societal and cultural institutions (intermediary/knowledge transfer role), NGOs (advocacy role), and international organisations (standardisation and alignment role with national or supranational policy). These core stakeholders may act as part of the Local Action Groups (LAGs) for sustained co-creation.

Stakeholder management and definition of participatory engagement are conducted by the local enabler body (i.e., city administration, specific department) in collaboration with the intermediary institutions (i.e., research and academia) on the basis of the stakeholder engagement strategy.

Participatory engagement follows a phased approach tied to the project lifecycle: informing (kick-off events, surveys, walk-throughs), co-creation (workshops, festivals, bootcamps), and validation (pilot activations, investment forums, formal events), ensuring participation across long cycles. Feedback is conducted through lightweight toolkits (surveys, GIS logs), reflected in priorities through transparent preview of how participants inputs were incorporated into investment priorities. Sustained engagement demands capacity building through application for micro-grants and quick wins (pop-up activations) to maintain beginning impulse (i.e., the example of participation of the elementary school "Stojan Novaković" representatives from Šabac at the Global Children Designathon in Belgrade).

Stakeholders may be identified and categorized by role, power, legitimacy, and urgency, with mid-sized city contexts prioritizing local actors like LAGs, and in later phases, depending on needs, the process of implementation may incorporate other external facilitators, research partners and investors. The important intangible result is to inspire, train and empower stakeholders to continue on their own in the realization of the desired ideas and the allocation of appropriate financial packages.

The following table shows the selected recommendations for better and more efficient stakeholder management and engagement in a way that is realistic for mid-sized cities and can be sustained across longer project cycles.

Recommendation	What to do	Owner	Key contributors	What it unlocks	Evidence from pilots

B1.Establish Local Action Group (LAG) as permanent site-level stakeholder forum and validate core members with potential for their growth	Form LAG with clear mandate, membership rules, meeting schedule and simple TOR; register minutes and decisions	Municipality (mayor's office / participation unit)	Community reps, NGOs, schools, cultural institutions, local businesses, utilities, planning department, local economic development department	Local platform for co-creation, rapid mobilisation, clarity of local priorities.	Šabac (LAG created and improved coordination); Gabrovo (civil society bootcamp fed implementation partners).
B2. Create a phased engagement plan per site/package (Inform → Co create → Validate) tied to project lifecycle	Map stakeholder categories; define touchpoints per phase (kick-off info, surveys & walk throughs, co design workshops, pilot activations, formal validation events); frequency and resource estimate.	Enabler / Project lead (municipal project office / urban planning department)	LAG, CWG, communication office, external facilitator/consultant.	Participation that sustains interest across long cycles.	All four pilots used walk throughs, surveys, festivals, workshops to shift from info to co creation (Gabrovo, Veszprém, Cazin, Šabac).
B3. Light engagement toolkit and digital log (templates + GIS feedback)	Provide templates (invite, survey, workshop brief, feedback form), simple GIS map layer of stakeholder inputs, and a shared online feedback log.	Municipal ICT / project office	Planning dept, research partners/university, LAG members.	Consistent documentation, faster reporting to decision makers, re-use across sites.	Veszprém and Šabac used surveys, GIS/field data and research partners to systematise inputs.

B4. Formal feedback and prioritisation mechanism	Record inputs, code by theme/impact/ feasibility, present a transparent preview of how participants inputs were incorporated into investment priorities	Enabler /Project lead + participation officer	LAG, CWG, external facilitator, planning/finance units.	transparency, trust-building, traceable link between community views and municipal priorities.	Cazin improved transparency using spatial/functional indicators; Gabrovo translated co creation results into phased priorities.
B5. Institutionalise decisions - Appoint permanent unit for project application, implementation and stakeholder management	Require documented stakeholder validation (summary report + LAG endorsement).	Enabler /Project lead + Municipal council / urban planning department	Project office, legal/permits unit, LAG.	prevents rework, embeds participation into governance, strengthens funder confidence.	NONA testing showed clearer decision pathways and faster transition to investable phases where stakeholder input was formalised (Veszprém, Gabrovo).
B6. Sustain engagement through capacity building and small, visible quick wins	Run periodic capacity sessions for micro grants or pop up activations to demonstrate progress; publicise results.	Municipal social welfare/culture / participation unit	NGOs, schools, local businesses, donors/partners.	maintains momentum, builds local implementers, demonstrates impact between funding cycles.	Gabrovo river festival and pop up activations used across pilots to boost legitimacy and maintain engagement.

Table 13: Recommendations for Package B

7.3.3 Package C: From planning to investment readiness - closing the mid-sized city gap

Table below consolidates recommendations for developing a credible investment package for degraded-area regeneration in medium sized cities on the basis of the NONA project experience. It focuses on showing that the project is realistic and feasible, by defining clear implementation phases, estimating costs and future operating needs, and preparing the basic information for investors.

Recommendation	What to do	Owner	Key contributors	What it unlocks	Evidence from pilots
C1.Create a phased delivery plan or a section in the planning document or specific study, regarding economical/financial plan for the revitalisation of DA.	Prepare catalogue sheets for each intervention with linked funding sources, and organise them into phases defined by scope, benefits, and operational implications, aligned with project maturity and financing.	Municipal council / urban planning and local economic development department and LAG	LAG, CWG, planning/finance units.	Clarity of local priorities, willingness to compete for funds or offer a range of opportunities to different/potential investors	City of Šabac works on the formation of the Urbanistic Study for the area of Letnjikovac which will have an integrated part of a phased delivery plan.
C2.Define indicative cost ranges early for each phase of the project	Define both investment costs (CAPEX) and ongoing maintenance costs (OPEX), how each phase will be delivered (procurement and	Enabler, local economic development department	Technical experts; legal/procurement	Credibility and legitimacy	Investment forums in medium sized cities emphasised logic of "bankable and societally acceptable, not only green" - blending of public and

	responsibility)				private funds requires specific attention
C3.Define a minimum ESG indicators	Select small number of indicators to evaluate how investment affects the environment, society, and how it is governed	Enabler	Urbanistic unit; GIS/data; research and academia	Legitimacy and impact	Will be defined in Period 5

Table 14: Recommendations for Package C

7.3.4 Package D: Financing pathways and de-risking - public, private and blended logic

This section outlines how to structure financing options for the regeneration of degraded areas in mid-sized cities while reducing uncertainty through early and proactive preparation. It presents a practical menu of financing routes alongside the key conditions and risks such as legal, market, operational, and external, that should be identified and addressed upfront, without requiring detailed financial modeling. By linking financing choices with early constraint mapping and staged mitigation approaches, it supports more realistic timelines, credible project scopes, and sustained viability under uncertainty. It is necessary to consider all possible scenarios in advance and be ready for various conditions of uncertainty, from climate change and natural disasters to external and internal crises and disruptions (pandemic conditions, war, energy shortages, business and market conditions), and everything that can slow down funding, postpone it, and direct it to other more urgent and crisis tasks.

The accompanying table further provides recommendations for identifying non-negotiable constraints and managing risks through phased delivery, enabling projects to remain adaptable, fundable, and resilient in complex and evolving contexts.

Recommendation	What to do	Owner	Key contributors	What it unlocks	Evidence from pilots

D1. Identify non-negotiable constraints early and design around them	Translate constraints (heritage, safety/resilience requirements, and land-use limits) into phasing and design rules.	holders of public authority, issuance of terms of use and protection, permitting authorities	Heritage and nature protection experts; civil protection and emergency department	Realistic timelines; credible scope	Heritage, nature protection or public safety approvals and high-risk contexts shape delivery logic and timing.
D2. Use staged mitigation in high-uncertainty contexts	Apply scenario planning and minimum operable core, using a recognised risk management approach for identification and mitigation, and integrating resilience requirements into phasing.	Municipal/ regional and national leadership	Resilience actors (civil protection, emergency services, critical infrastructure operators), social and economical departments of local authorities.	Continuity; reduced downside risk; funder confidence,readiness for various conditions of uncertainty, caused by external and internal crises, and disruptions (pandemic conditions, war, energy shortages, business and market conditions)	Design suitable and adapted to different implementation conditions (pre-planned scenarios), phased approach that supports projects in conditions of uncertainty.
D3. Sustainability and resilient upgrades	Mitigate climate changes and natural disasters	Municipal/ regional and national leadership	Resilience actors (civil protection, emergency services, critical infrastructure operators), environmental departments of local authorities.	Reduce the consequences of possible pollution, accidents, global warming, droughts, floods, etc.	Design suitable, resilient and well adapted pace, or upgrade it through the phases of implementation and monitoring

Table 15: Recommendations for Package D

7.3.5 Package E: Data, monitoring, and evaluation

Package E focuses on strengthening data, monitoring, and evaluation as essential components for informed decision-making and building investor confidence in urban regeneration projects. Drawing on the experiences of Gabrovo, Veszprém, Cazin, and Šabac, it proposes a minimum dataset that is simple, comparable across cities, and sufficient to demonstrate planning clarity, stakeholder validation, and financial feasibility. This dataset integrates spatial, governance, financial, and project readiness information, enabling municipalities to systematically track progress from early planning stages to implementation. By structuring key information into clearly defined components, municipalities can reduce uncertainty and present more credible and investable project proposals. The approach also emphasizes the importance of stakeholder engagement and institutional coordination as integral parts of the dataset, ensuring that projects respond to real needs and have broad local support. Furthermore, the package introduces monitoring indicators to assess planning, institutional, investment, and delivery readiness over time. Overall, Package E provides a transparent and structured framework that helps cities transition from vision-driven planning to a portfolio of feasible, well-prepared regeneration projects, while maintaining accountability and enabling access to diverse funding opportunities.

Minimum Dataset for Decision-Making and Investor Confidence includes:

Recommendation	What to do	Owner	Key contributors	What it unlocks	Evidence from pilots

E1. Site and Planning Baseline (essential spatial and regulatory information confirming that the project can proceed within existing planning frameworks)	Pilot site location and boundaries (GIS reference). Land ownership and use status (public/state/municipal). Applicable statutory planning documents (e.g., General Urban Plan, detailed plans). Current physical condition and identified degradation factors. Strategic relevance (alignment with city development strategies or regeneration goals).	Municipality + GIS/data sector	Cadastre; technical services; consultants	Provides legal certainty, public availability and planning compatibility which are critical preconditions for investment preparation.	Pilots confirmed early evidence reduces uncertainty and enables credible packaging. Šabac has a GIS portal.
E2. Needs and Stakeholder Evidence- demonstrating that the project responds to real community needs and has local support	Stakeholder mapping (public institutions, utilities, civil society, businesses); Summary of participatory activities (surveys, workshops, walk-throughs, public events); Key user needs identified (accessibility, public space quality, safety, mobility); Stakeholder validation or endorsement of the proposed interventions.	Municipality, LAG, CWG	Community, academia/researchers (Intermediaries)	Stakeholder mapping: public institutions, utilities, civil society, businesses.	Pilots confirmed early evidence reduces uncertainty and enables credible packaging

E3. Spatial and Functional Concept - a clear description of the planned interventions and expected outcomes	Conceptual design or spatial development concept. Functional program (public space functions, mobility improvements, environmental measures). Sustainability and resilience elements (green infrastructure, climate adaptation). Alignment with principles such as those promoted by the NEB	Municipality	Urban planning, traffic, environmental departments	Provides clarity on what will be delivered, enabling early feasibility checks.	Veszprem and Gabrovo examples
E4.Investment Structure - basic financial and implementation framework for the regeneration project	Phased intervention structure (e.g., temporary–seasonal–permanent). Estimated investment ranges per phase. Potential funding sources (municipal budget, EU programmes, PPP, climate funds). Implementation partners (municipality, utilities, NGOs, private actors).	Munucipality	NGO, LAG, SME, PPP, EU programmes	Demonstrates investment readiness and realistic funding pathways.	Šabac pilot location, Development strategy, integration of different projects and locations, preparation of a study with a catalog of possibilities
E5. Governance and Delivery Framework- definition of institutional responsibilities and coordination mechanisms	More efficient organization, clear steps of the roadmap for responsibilities and continuous coordination.	Lead institution or municipal department.	Cross-sector coordination structure (e.g., LAG, CWG), decision-making pathway (approval milestones, planning procedures).	Ensures clear accountability and project governance, increasing investor and stakeholder confidence	Veszprem, Gabrovo and Šabac examples.

E6. Upgrading existing functions with new smart technologies	More efficient operationalization, simplified billing for services related to public transport, parking via mobile applications, security control via CCTV, notification of the need for non-routine garbage removal, watering of green areas, etc. through appropriate sensors	Municipality and responsible utility companies, communal police	PPP and SME for development of various applications	In step with modern digital technologies, according to smart city principles, enables easier, faster and more efficient functioning and use of space	No evidence, form of a recommendation for future steps towards improvement.
E7. Continuous monitoring of the implementation and use	Track a set of indicators regularly, link results to checkpoints, and portfolio decisions. Create a monitoring and reporting mechanism	Municipality	Relevant departments (planning, traffic, environmental, social, economic), communal operators, LAG, and CWG	Learning and experience; evaluation of the process and performance, credibility over time, feedback for correction of the process and phases	NONA relies on checkpoints and iterative improvement. Not all results will be easily measurable through indicators, because some of them are in the sphere of social well-being, stronger sense of belonging, image improvement, etc.

Table 16: Recommendations for Package E

With the addition of the E7. Package monitoring indicators should be defined prior to implementation to track progress toward investable regeneration outcomes. Municipalities are encouraged to focus on a small set of simple readiness and delivery indicators, supported by a minimum dataset that combines planning, stakeholder, spatial,

financial, and governance information. Together, these elements create a transparent framework for decision-making and investment preparation. This approach enables municipalities to transition from visionary and participatory planning to a structured pipeline of regeneration projects, while maintaining stakeholder confidence and facilitating access to diverse funding sources.

Indicators for monitoring and evaluation	Purpose	Examples
EI7.1.Planning Readiness Indicators	Measure progress from concept to investment preparation.	• Statutory planning alignment confirmed (Yes/No). • Stakeholder validation completed (number of engagement activities). • Concept design approved by municipality (Yes/No). • Feasibility screening completed (technical/financial). Phased investment plan defined.
EI7.2.Institutional Readiness Indicators	Track governance and coordination capacity.	• A cross-sector coordination platform established. • Number of municipal departments actively involved. • Stakeholder partnerships formalised (MOUs or agreements). • Capacity-building activities implemented (bootcamps, workshops).
EI7.3.Investment Readiness Indicators	Assess financial preparation and funding opportunities.	• Identified funding sources per project phase. • Funding applications submitted to programs (e.g., Interreg, national funds). • Estimated investment value for priority interventions. • Private or external partners engaged.
EI7.4.Delivery Indicators	Monitor implementation progress once funding and approvals are secured.	• Projects entering the design or permitting stage. • Projects approved for funding. • Number of implemented interventions (temporary or permanent). • Measurable improvements in public space usage or accessibility.

Table 17: Indicators included in Package E

7.3.6 Package F: Accessibility and Mobility

Improving the availability and accessibility of urban public spaces requires coordinated financial and organizational measures led primarily by municipalities. The first recommendation focuses on upgrading or redesigning degraded areas into affordable, safe, and attractive public spaces, which encourages frequent use and fosters a stronger sense of belonging among citizens. These interventions have already shown positive results across all pilot locations, where revitalized spaces gained new social and functional value. The second measure emphasizes integrating accessibility into the design process from the outset, ensuring that public spaces are inclusive for people with disabilities, the elderly, children, and other vulnerable groups. Evidence from Šabac and projects like

AGE+ demonstrates that participatory design, especially involving children and seniors, leads to more equitable and widely used spaces. The third recommendation highlights the importance of connectivity, ensuring that public spaces are easily reachable by walking, cycling, public transport, and, where appropriate, car access. The package includes planning within walking distance, according to the 15-minute city model, taking into account the relief and leveling of the terrain, uses in the surrounding area, and planning safe pedestrian and bicycle paths. By improving links between different urban areas, municipalities can increase usage beyond local neighborhoods and enable larger social gatherings. Finally, introducing smart technologies such as mobile apps for transport and parking, can enhance the efficiency and usability of public spaces, aligning them with modern smart city principles. Although this last measure currently lacks pilot evidence, it represents a forward-looking step toward more responsive and user-friendly urban environments.

Recommendation	What to do	Owner	Key contributors	What it unlocks	Evidence from pilots
F1. Creating and designing desirable public goods and spaces	Upgrade or re-create DAs to the affordable, livable, and safe public space for citizens	Municipality, touristic organization, art community,	Urban planning department, LAG, CWG, NGO, CSO	Frequent and high-quality use of new spaces, or old ones in a new way, a sense of belonging, creating an image of the space	All pilot locations, especially Gabrovo and Veszprem

F2. Basic measures for location accessibility	Integrate accessibility as essential task in the design	Municipality, LAG, local community	Urban planning department, NGOs, CSO, LAG, neighborhood community, EU and national programs and projects, Intermediaries	Equal conditions for everyone (people with special needs and disabled people, the elderly, children and youth, gender sensitive space)	Šabac, engagement of preschool and school-aged children in the co-creation of public space, AGE+ project, integrated space for elderly citizens,
F3, Measures for easier accessibility and connectivity within the network of urban spaces	Analyze the position of the location in relation to other facilities in the environment, ensure easy and safe accessibility for everyone (first of all on foot, by bicycle, by public transport; provided certain number of parking spaces in accordance with the standards)	Municipality	Urban planning and traffic department, and responsible utility companies,	Easier and therefore more frequent use of space by citizens who are not in its immediate surroundings, creation of space for larger gatherings	All pilot locations

F4. Upgrading existing functions with new smart technologies	More efficient operationalization, simplified billing for services related to public transport, parking via mobile applications etc.	Municipality and responsible utility companies, communal police	PPP and SME for development of various applications, Intermediaries	In step with modern digital technologies, according to smart city principles, enables easier, faster and more efficient functioning and use of space	No evidence, form of a recommendation for future steps towards improvement.

Table 18: Recommendations for Package F

7.4 Transferability and tailoring - adapting the model to mid-sized city contexts

The experience from the four pilot cities, Gabrovo, Veszprém, Cazin, and Šabac, shows that the tested methodology provides a number of broadly transferable practices for integrating green investments into the revitalisation of degraded areas. At the same time, several elements require adaptation depending on institutional, financial, and local contextual conditions. Distinguishing between what can be widely replicated and what must be tailored helps municipalities apply the approach realistically within their own governance and development environments. Across all pilots, several methodological components proved consistently effective and broadly transferable elements that can be applied in other mid-sized cities with minimal adjustment.

Municipal-led cross-sector governance platforms significantly improved coordination between planning, culture, environmental, and utility departments. Establishing a simple coordination structure, such as a working group or Local Action Group, helped reduce institutional fragmentation and enabled integrated decision-making.

Evidence-based prioritisation of degraded areas proved crucial. All pilots combined stakeholder mapping, site observation, and participatory tools such as surveys, expert walk-throughs, and public events to identify user needs and development priorities. This approach shifted planning from ad-hoc project ideas toward transparent and needs-driven decision-making.

Participatory and co-creation practices demonstrated strong value in strengthening local ownership and implementation capacity. Workshops, citizen festivals, and collaborative design processes moved stakeholders from passive consultation toward active involvement in shaping regeneration initiatives.

Phased investment frameworks helped cities translate planning concepts into financially realistic development strategies. By structuring projects into temporary, medium-term, and permanent interventions, municipalities were able to align implementation with available funding opportunities and reduce investment risks.

Finally, **the integration of sustainability and public-space quality objectives**, including resilience, accessibility, and environmental improvements, proved relevant across all contexts. These themes reflect common priorities for degraded urban areas and align with broader European policy frameworks such as the New European Bauhaus.

While the overall methodology is broadly applicable, several aspects require context-specific adaptation, and must be calibrated depending on local governance structures, financial conditions, and administrative capacity.

Governance arrangements and institutional mandate. The ability to sustain cross-sector coordination depends on municipal authority and political commitment. Cities with strong administrative mandates can institutionalise governance platforms more easily, whereas municipalities with fragmented responsibilities may need additional agreements or external facilitation to maintain cooperation.

Market appetite and funding availability. Although all pilots relied heavily on public budgets and European programmes, the potential for private sector participation varied significantly. In contexts with stronger local markets, regeneration initiatives may attract private investment or public-private partnerships. In weaker market environments, projects must rely more heavily on public funding, grants, and phased implementation strategies.

Internal municipal capacity. Differences in administrative expertise affect the ability to prepare complex projects, technical documentation, and funding applications. Cities with limited technical staff may need external consultants or targeted capacity-building measures to reach investment readiness.

Context-specific risks. Local socio-political conditions, stakeholder dynamics, and institutional stability influence implementation outcomes. In some cases, stronger community engagement is needed to build consensus around development goals, while in others the primary challenge may be administrative coordination or regulatory complexity.

Feasibility and implementation constraints. Even when planning frameworks and conceptual designs are in place, practical constraints such as permitting procedures, infrastructure requirements, or limited funding cycles can affect project timing and scope. For this reason, the phased investment approach used in the pilots is particularly valuable, allowing municipalities to adjust implementation according to available resources.

Overall, the pilot experiences demonstrate that the methodology's **core principles, cross-sector governance, participatory planning, evidence-based prioritisation, and phased investment structuring, are widely transferable to other mid-sized cities**. However, successful implementation requires careful adaptation to local governance capacity, financial conditions, and contextual risks. By combining transferable practices with flexible, context-sensitive adjustments, municipalities can realistically transform degraded areas into investable and socially supported regeneration projects.

7.5 Pilot-tailored next steps

This section outlines the priority next steps for each pilot city to translate pilot results into actionable and investable regeneration projects. The steps are aligned with the thematic recommendation packages, covering arrangement and services, governance, investment readiness, mobility, resilience, and digital solutions, and reflect both transferable practices and context-specific considerations. Each step is designed to be actionable within the municipal delivery framework, specifying responsibilities, outputs, and connections to broader investment and financing strategies.

Gabrovo

1. Develop catalog sheets linking spatial interventions to investment packages.
   Recommendation packages: Arrangement & Services, Investment.
   Output: Formalised document ready for municipal review and funding alignment.
2. Establish a municipal cross-sector coordination routine integrating spatial planning, culture, environment, and civil society actors, building on the pilot governance platform.
   Recommendation packages: Economic & Management Revitalization, Governance.
   Output: Official decision and operational schedule for ongoing coordination.
3. Prepare and submit proposals to relevant EU and national funding programmes, including low-interest loans or climate funds, targeting phased interventions in the pilot site.
   Recommendation packages: Investment, Resilience.
   Output: Submitted funding applications and shortlist of eligible programmes.

Veszprém

1. Integrate the pilot methodology into a reusable urban regeneration model for other city areas, including catalog sheets linking actions to investment and financing packages.
   Recommendation packages: Arrangement & Services, Investment.
   Output: Internal guideline/toolkit for municipal replication of pilot approach.
2. Institutionalize multi-actor governance for long-term area development, ensuring standing participation from local stakeholders and municipal departments.
   Recommendation packages: Economic & Management Revitalization, Governance.
   Output: Formalised municipal protocol and schedule for participatory planning.
3. Conduct targeted funding assessments and feasibility checks for priority interventions, including EU, national, and potential private sources, aligned with project phasing.
   Recommendation packages: Investment, Resilience.
   Output: Feasibility report and funding shortlist for immediate implementation.

Cazin

1. Develop a comprehensive planning and investment roadmap for the pilot sites (parking area, square, playground) with catalog sheets linking interventions to funding packages.
   Recommendation packages: Arrangement & Services, Investment.
   Output: Roadmap document endorsed by municipal administration.
2. Strengthen cross-sector coordination between urban planning, utilities, and municipal development administration to ensure aligned project implementation.
   Recommendation packages: Economic & Management Revitalization, Governance.
   Output: Formalized coordination body and decision-making framework.
3. Prepare phased interventions with modular design and financing strategy, enabling step-by-step implementation based on funding availability and administrative capacity.
   Recommendation packages: Investment, Mobility, Resilience.
   Output: Phased investment plan ready for submission to funders and municipal approval.

Šabac

1. Creation of the integral planning document that focuses on the whole pilot area, with catalog sheets with a link to investment packages;
   Recommendation packages: Arrangement & Services, Investment
   Output: Formalized planning document ready for municipal review and alignment with investment priorities.
2. Harmonization of all programs and projects at the city level, especially for the pilot location, through the newly formed working body - CWG, and in coordination with the LAG;
   Recommendation packages: Economic & Management Revitalization, Governance
   Output: Operational coordination framework and harmonized project schedule.
3. Active participation in sponsorship competitions, preparation of project proposals aimed at concrete implementation at the pilot location.

Recommendation packages: Investment, Resilience
Output: Submitted project proposals and shortlist of secured or potential funding sources.

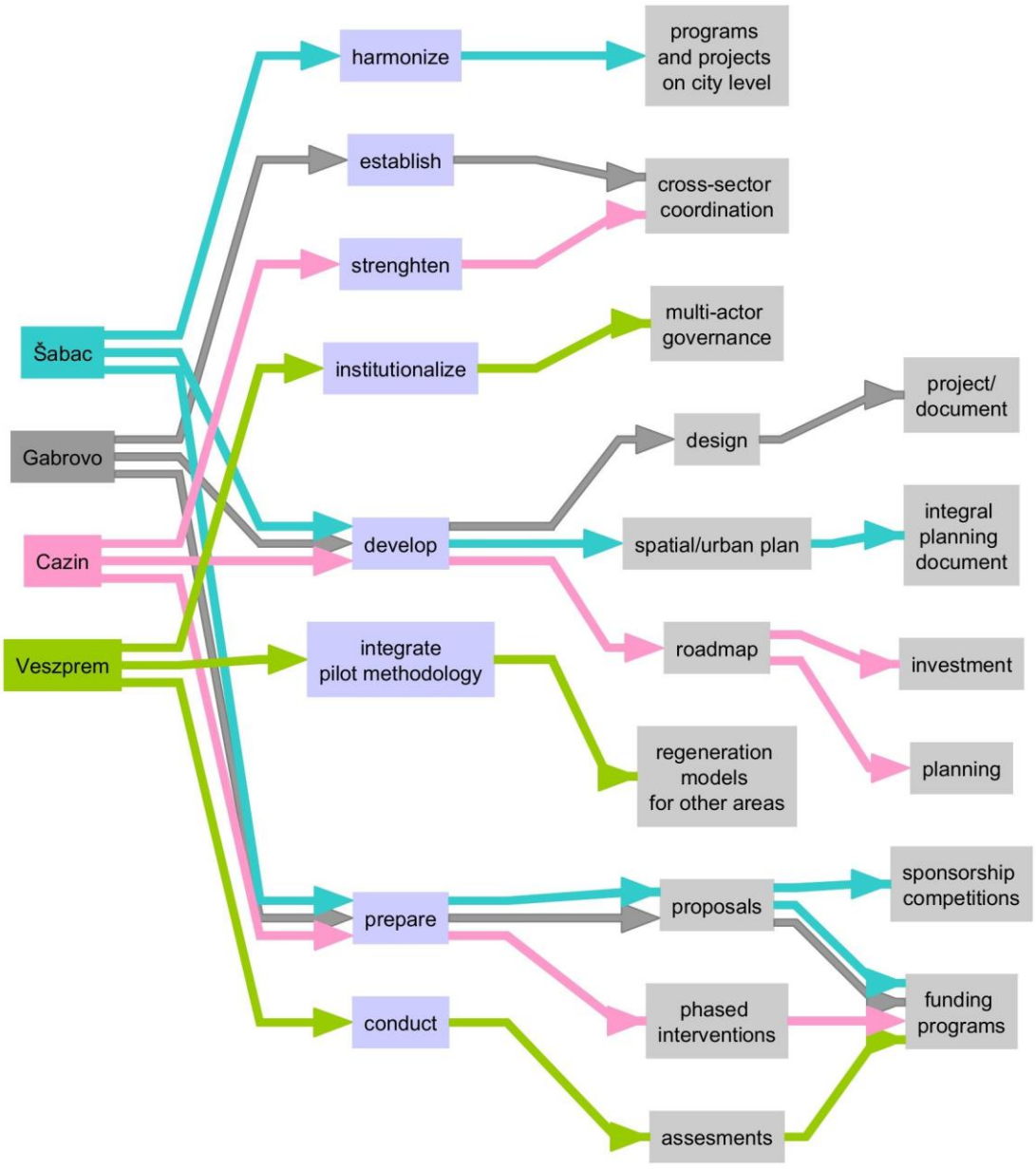


Fig. 11 - Next steps for the Pilot areas

Source: NONA, IAUS

CONCLUSION

The transition from conceptual spatial planning to actionable, investment-ready urban regeneration projects remains a structural challenge for mid-sized cities. Empirical findings derived from the NONA pilot testing in Gabrovo, Veszprém, Cazin, and Šabac demonstrate that municipalities frequently encounter systemic barriers, including fragmented administrative coordination, limited institutional capacity, and ambiguous decision-making pathways. Consequently, traditional statutory planning processes often fail to bridge the gap between vision and financial feasibility.

To address these constraints, this document includes recommendations for mid-sized cities, focusing on a governance-based framework designed to streamline and ease the path for green investments in degraded urban areas. The core point of this document is that investment readiness is not solely a product of design, ideas, or initiatives, but is fundamentally contingent on the organizational and governance conditions under which these initiatives are prepared. The pilot implementations highlight several critical success factors for urban regeneration. First, effective revitalization requires strong municipal leadership, coupled with cross-sectoral coordination, to replace ad hoc project ideas with an evidence-based, shared decision-making framework. Second, sustained stakeholder engagement, initiated through mechanisms such as Local Action Groups (LAGs), proves essential for generating consensus, acquiring local knowledge, and mitigating long-term project risks. The integration of participatory methodologies ensures that spatial interventions and plans align with the social needs of different citizen groups while fostering municipal transparency.

Furthermore, this document underscores the necessity of early feasibility assessments and the formulation of structured investment propositions. Transforming degraded sites into public assets requires a minimum dataset that synthesizes spatial, financial, and governance metrics, thereby facilitating a transparent decision-making pipeline. By properly phasing and modularizing intervention strategies, mid-sized cities can adapt implementation steps to align with available funding cycles and often stringent administrative procedures.

Ultimately, the findings confirm that the most transferable elements across different urban contexts are not specific physical (design or planning) solutions, but rather the underlying governance routines, participatory practices, and coordination mechanisms. By adopting the recommendation packages outlined in the NONA model, ranging from internal municipal alignment to data monitoring and stakeholder management, mid-sized cities can systematically de-risk regeneration initiatives. This approach ensures that green investments not only restore the physical qualities of degraded areas but also enhance nonmaterial aspects for specific locations and the wider governance mechanism, creating more sustainable socioeconomic and environmental benefits for the local community.

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