

## HORIZON-NEB-2026-01-BUSINESS-03

### Approaches to reuse vacant, obsolete or underutilised spaces

*Pilot Projects and our partners are seeking a consortium for collective systems thinking on infrastructure revitalization with co-benefits. Join us on this journey!*

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#### Project Concept - **DRAFT Feb 26, 2026**

### **“Circular Market Places: Reviving underutilized infrastructure as community-led entrepreneurship and exchange hubs”**

Across European cities, towns and countryside two phenomena are growing in parallel. The urgent need for neighborhood revitalization and development, and in the same neighborhoods existing spaces, buildings and infrastructure are being abandoned due to lack of viable use-cases. This disconnect is a tremendous opportunity. We are convinced that with creative and systemic solutions these underutilized spaces can be matched with the neighborhood needs to unlock new synergies between people and place. This is not a new idea, of course. It has been tried successfully and unsuccessfully in thousands of locations over centuries. In today’s context\*, however, achieving this goal will require bold new ideas, business models, partnerships, and a stable framework that will allow healthy roots, patterns and values to form over time. The approach must acknowledge the interdependent roles of the *market*, of *regulation*, of *technology* and of *culture*. And the approach must pioneer a way to rebalance these social systems to achieve synergistic and sustainable pairings of values, goals and infrastructures.

Our approach builds on several conceptual cornerstones that are felt across European urban, periurban and rural communities. These cornerstones do not represent the *totality* of the challenge or opportunity but we have chosen them as the unique

foundation for our specific approach. These four cornerstones allow unlimited variation in response to local context, built environment and community needs.

1. Youth - inheritors of our infrastructure, intentionally paired with multi-generational leadership and wisdom.
2. Circularity - as the basis for all sustainable systems, requires heightened *attention, awareness* and *agency* to be implemented.
3. Entrepreneurship - the critical flux between ideas, ambition, agency and economic development.
4. Socio-spatial skill development - a vital missing link increasingly lost in the cracks between generations, digital tools, and social isolation. These skills are characterized by practical wisdom, problem-solving ability, hands-on skills, and mature innovation. They must be cultivated with intentionality and care.

While these cornerstones each have flexible boundaries, the zone of overlap offers a unique place to focus creative ideas, innovation and investment. We will apply a systems thinking approach to this focused area and co-design a framework for engagement and sustainable change. This framework will allow a scalable and replicable approach to co-create an envisioned future where underutilized infrastructure is repurposed in service of neighborhood needs in cities, towns and suburbs, and rural areas.

**Further Concept details *Circular Market Places: Reviving underutilized infrastructure as community-led entrepreneurship and exchange hubs***

**One foundational concept here is that “markets” represent a unique blend of public space, physical infrastructure, social diversity (age, gender, skills, education etc etc.) all of which are crucial for a circular and sustainable economy.**

Markets are, to a large extent, where social values are negotiated. This applies most directly to physical goods such as food and hard goods, but it also applies to fashion,

ideas, politics, education, sexuality, domesticity, family... A market is the “watercooler” writ large in human communities the world over. It is where we exchange.

Market areas have always been one of the central features of cities and towns, creating “neighborhoods” in a dynamic way. They are the places where humans navigate the relationship between labor, value, capital and other impacts and factors.

Equally important, urban markets are places of skill transfer, from learning to count, to measure, to compare, to trade and to produce. These are skills that the “green transition” must embrace and develop in new ways for it to take root and grow independently.

*This project seeks to tap into the legacy of urban peri-urban and rural market spaces and harness them for the co-development of a circular and sustainable future. The project will identify and restore strategic neighborhood spaces using a combination of new compelling infrastructure, new product and service concepts that serve the circular economy, and a focus on skill development and skill transfer between generations, classes and subcultures. At the heart of this project are ideas about identity in the social sphere, crafting new value pathways on the public stage...*

- Identify second tier EU cities, towns areas with historic (market) spaces in key locations that are poorly utilized (such as \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, )
- Outline a program for the space that emphasises:
  - Circular and bio-based products and services
  - Re-use of products and materials (flea markets, repair services, niche craft skills)
  - Cool factor of retro products, craft made goods and elevated status of repair skills
  - Focus on goods, services and skills that bridge historic and future culture and needs.
- Work with multi generational city residents to co-create a vision for the Circular Market Place

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## **Work Package (2?)**

### **Understanding the drivers of underutilization - research and analysis**

Building on the principles of circularity and sufficiency, one key Work Package will

analyse the drivers of underutilisation, including spatial, regulatory, economic and governance barriers, and assesses the potential of these spaces to contribute to social inclusion, environmental sustainability, cultural value and local economic resilience. Through participatory and co-creation methods, the WP engages local stakeholders in the design and implementation of adaptive reuse strategies that combine renovation, conversion and bio-based modular interventions, while evaluating potential side-effects such as displacement, affordability pressures or impacts on existing ecological or social functions. The approach is validated across urban, peri-urban and rural neighbourhoods in different European contexts, and includes the development of governance and financing mechanisms to support long-term implementation. The WP contributes to strengthening municipal capacity to systematically identify and quantify reuse opportunities and provides transferable recommendations for scaling the approach across diverse neighbourhood settings.

#### Needs of the Overall Call

- Analysis/Research (WP 2)
- Identification
- Needs Matching
- Risk Assessment
- Governance of Special Areas (Protected Areas) (WP4)
- Co-Creation Methodology (WP 3)
- Financing Strategy (WP 4)

#### **Work Package (3?) - Demonstration/Implementation/Validation**

##### **Adaptive Reuse of Community and Civic Spaces as Circular Neighbourhood Infrastructure**

This Work Package operationalises and validates the project's systemic reuse framework through the adaptive transformation of **vacant and underutilised** community use spaces, civic spaces, and cultural infrastructure into circular

neighbourhood assets. Drawing on analytical, governance, participatory and financing models developed in preceding work packages, WP5 implements and evaluates context-sensitive **reuse strategies across demonstration sites in urban, peri-urban and rural settings.**

Rather than developing new methodologies, the WP applies and tests the project's integrated approach within real spatial environments where community interaction, cultural identity and **local service provision converge.** These environments including historic markets, community halls, civic gathering areas, cultural venues and historic public-use infrastructure are strategically selected due to their potential to address neighbourhood challenges while supporting circular resource use, social inclusion and cultural value generation.

Through site-based interventions, the WP coordinates the co-designed renovation, conversion or modular adaptation of selected spaces using circular and bio-based principles. Demonstration actions may include flexible multi-use configurations, material reuse systems, repair and exchange functions, low-impact infrastructure retrofits, and programming that supports local skill circulation and intergenerational engagement. Implementation is conducted in collaboration with local authorities, community stakeholders and sectoral partners to ensure alignment with governance structures and long-term operational feasibility.

The WP systematically documents outcomes and evaluates the social, environmental, cultural and economic impacts of the interventions, including **revitalisation of vacant, unused space,** accessibility, cohesion, aesthetic value, resource sufficiency, climate resilience and local value retention. Particular attention is given to monitoring unintended consequences such as affordability pressures, displacement dynamics, or disruption to existing ecological or social functions.

Findings are fed back to project-level evaluation and replication activities, strengthening the evidence base for scaling reuse strategies across neighbourhoods

# PILOT PROJECTS

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affected by **vacant dereliction**. In doing so, WP5 contributes demonstrable transformation outcomes, validates the applicability of the project framework, and enhances municipal confidence in implementing circular reuse approaches within community-centred spatial typologies.

Work Package	Tile	Role
WP 1	Project Co-Ordination	Management of Project
WP 2	Systemic Analysis and Mapping Frameworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drivers of Vacancy</li> <li>• Identification Methods</li> <li>• Data Infrastructure</li> <li>• Prioritisation Models</li> </ul>
WP3	Community Needs & Co-Creation ( <b>Pilot Projects Collaborative</b> ) (should be linked with WP5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Sciences and Humanities Engagement</li> <li>• Participation Models</li> <li>• Needs Mapping</li> <li>• Social Impact Logic</li> </ul>
WP4	Governance & Financing Models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regulatory Pathways</li> <li>• Ownership Pathways</li> <li>• Financial Mechanisms</li> </ul>
WP5	Demonstration & Validation ( <b>Pilot Projects Collaborative</b> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Use Spaces</li> <li>• Civic Spaces</li> <li>• Cultural Infrastructure</li> <li>• Circular Communities</li> </ul>
WP6	Impact Assessment and Replication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation</li> <li>• Scaling Guidance</li> <li>• Policy Recommendations</li> </ul>
WP7	Dissemination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publications</li> <li>• Media</li> <li>• Conferences / Events</li> </ul>