Jean-Paul-L'allier Prize for Heritage

Application: Dubrovnik, a Living City

Introduction

Nine years ago, Dubrovnik was frequently featured on lists of cities struggling with overtourism, congestion, and the loss of local urban life. Today, it is a European model of sustainable tourism, with high ratings from international institutions and, more importantly, a better quality of life for its citizens. Dubrovnik represents a leading example of how a historic UNESCO city can reconcile heritage preservation, quality of life, environmental sustainability, and economic vitality through a habitability-cantered urban strategy.

The transformation began in 2017 with the launch of the "Respect the City" programme, developed through participatory governance – a broad public consultation and transparent decision-making processes. This marked a decisive transition toward placing residents, heritage, and environmental sustainability at the centre of urban development. The adoption of Croatia's first UNESCO World Heritage Management Plan reinforced this approach and established an integrated urban framework for preserving the integrity of the historic city while ensuring that Dubrovnik remains, above all else, a place to live. The plan promotes transversal projects that integrate heritage, social, ecological, cultural, mobility, and economic dimensions into a shared urban vision.

This transformation has produced measurable results. Dubrovnik was named European Capital and Green Pioneer of Smart Tourism in 2026, while the Global Sustainable Tourism Council increased the city's sustainability score.

Project Introduction & Objectives

The "Dubrovnik, a Living City" project is based on the long-term transformation of Dubrovnik from an overcrowded tourist destination into a sustainable, balanced, and functional urban environment where citizens are at the centre of development.

The City of Dubrovnik recognizes that the evolution of historic centres in modern times must respect the principle that the city is made for living in. Fighting the depopulation trend, which rapidly intensified due to overtourism and turning the family flats into short-term rental units, required a strategic approach implemented through a range of multisectoral measures. Housing policies are therefore conceived as instruments for preserving the residential function of the historic centre, strengthening social and generational diversity, and ensuring dignified housing conditions.

The project places demographic revitalisation at its core, focusing on the encouraging residents to remain in or to return back to the historic core through targeted subsidies and renovation programmes.

Closely linked to this is the goal of improving the quality of life for residents by creating better living conditions through enhanced housing provision, infrastructure development, and accessible public

services, with controlled visitor flows, while ensuring a balance between tourism and everyday life. It promotes smart city solutions and digital tools to improve urban management, strengthens citizen participation in decision-making, and supports sustainable urban development.

Funding

Financing for the projects is secured from a combination of EU funds, national state funding, and the City of Dubrovnik's own budget. The income earned from entrance tickets to the City walls, and cultural institutions, Dubrovnik Pass, is reinvested directly into heritage protection, infrastructure development, social programmes, and sustainable urban projects.

Affordable Housing

The City of Dubrovnik is continuously working on increasing the housing stock in its ownership and is developing new programs to ensure affordable, high-quality, and comfortable housing for its citizens. It developed its own model of a systematic housing policy – "Dubrovnik Housing Development" through which support has been provided to more than 110 Dubrovnik families so far. Additionally, 43 apartments were allocated to the City by the Croatian Government are leased on a long-term basis to young families in wider area of the City. The land purchased by the City of Dubrovnik in Pobrežje is for the development of new residential zones.

The "30 x 30" measure has also been introduced providing financial assistance of €30,000 for 30 families per year for purchasing or upgrading a residential property. The owners are obliged to live in that property for the next 10 years. Since its implementation began in 2024, a total of 33 contracts have been awarded: 9 in 2024 and 24 in 2025. With the adoption of the new Affordable Housing Act in Croatia, which includes proposals by Dubrovnik Mayor and MP Mato Franković, the implementation of the city's housing measures has been made more efficient. The City of Dubrovnik no longer has to pay taxes and contributions on subsidies under the Measure 30×30. These savings are now redirected directly to citizens. The popularity of this measure resulted by increase of subsidies from €30,000 to €45,000 per beneficiary, further strengthening support for the families in resolving their housing needs.

Housing for multi-child families in the historic core

The City of Dubrovnik implements programs to renovate city-owned apartments, improving housing conditions and supporting the demographic revitalization of the historic core. The City of Dubrovnik uses the right of first refusal granted to local authorities to acquire new housing units. The aim is to bring life back to the Old City and further reduce the negative impact of tourism. Per example, a private owner of this type of accommodation earns more than 60 thousand euros per year for a short-term rental. The City buys it off, and transforms it into a home for local families. In addition, a portion of the housing units has been allocated to the City by the Croatian Government. The project includes the purchase, renovation, and allocation of apartments to citizens, especially young families. Renovation includes construction works, modernization of installations, and adaptation to modern standards. The long-term goal is sustainable management of the housing stock and preservation of the local community in the city. For this purpose, a Decision was adopted on renting apartments

owned by the City to address the housing needs of families with multiple children in the historic city center. By leasing housing units in the historic core to larger families, the City directly contributes to demographic revitalization, which is one of the goals of sustainable development within Croatia's first Management Plan. So far, the City has allocated four apartments within the city walls, which are now occupied by large families with a total of 16 children. By the end of 2026, two more apartments in the historic core, in the Prijeko area, with surface areas of 81 and 54 square meters respectively, will be ready for two new larger families. €494.178 has been secured for their renovation. Additionally, three more apartments outside the historic core will be renovated by the end of 2026.

Renovation and Equipping of an Apartment for Organized Housing of Residents of Foster care Centre Maslina

Dubrovnik's approach to habitability also includes care and inclusion for vulnerable groups. The project for organized housing for children and young people without adequate parental care provides a safe, family-like environment that supports their independence. The apartment, placed in a Renaissance palace in the historic centre is worth €717,002.27 in fully funded grants. It will renovate and equip a housing unit for six children and young people without adequate parental care.

Education and Community Life within the Historic Centre - New Primary School

The opening of a new Primary School within the restored Renaissance palace represents an important investment in maintaining everyday urban life inside the historic core. It demonstrates how heritage can be adaptively reused to respond to contemporary needs while preserving cultural continuity and reinforcing the sense of belonging.

In the renovated and restored palace in the historic center, a new school building was opened in 2023 as an integral part of the Marin Getaldić Primary School. Six classrooms and supporting facilities were arranged, this enabled the school to operate in a single morning shift, attracting even more children living outside the historic core to attend this school.

Anti-seismic strengthening of building blocks

The anti-seismic strengthening programme for blocks of buildings within the historic core improves structural safety while preserving traditional architectural features. The programme represents a direct investment from the City's budget into privately owned properties, contributing to the earthquake resistance of building structures and ensuring safety for citizens living in the old city centre.

Participatory Governance and Shared Responsibility

Participation and dialogue form the foundation of Dubrovnik's participatory governance model. The city regularly organizes **public hearings** where residents directly discuss urban challenges and propose solutions with city authorities. During these extensive discussions, citizens present their suggestions, comments, and critiques to the mayor in order to reach conclusions and propose solutions that ensure the city develops in a better direction for the local community. In line with this, numerous measures have been implemented — including the installation of noise meters, noise reduction by banning the forklifts and pallet trucks without pneumatic tires, introduction of electric

vehicles for deliveries, a 24/7 package service kiosk and public space improvements — originated directly from citizen feedback. It all made Dubrovnik a better place for its residents.

Through the **participatory budgeting** programme, citizens actively shape the development priorities of their neighbourhoods. The programme strengthens participatory governance and transparency, so citizens become active co-creators of urban development and shared responsibility rather than passive observers. An annual cycle of Participatory Budgeting, enables citizens to actively take part in decision-making. Since the program began in 2023, a total of 496 project proposals have been submitted, of which 75 have already been completed. Up to €60,000 per project is allocated for each local committee, while up to €120,000 per project is provided for each city district, bringing the total value of projects in one year cycle to approximately €2 million.

Preserving everyday life

Home Assistance for Elderly People, a pilot project, "Homo u spenzu" is being implemented as part of Dubrovnik's Participatory Budgeting initiative. The project aims to support elderly citizens (over 70) and persons with reduced mobility in the historic core by helping them access basic groceries and everyday necessities.

The installation of handrails throughout the historic centre and wider city improves accessibility, especially for elderly residents and persons with reduced mobility. This intervention demonstrates how small-scale urban improvements contribute significantly to inclusiveness and everyday habitability. In 2025, handrails were installed in the historic centre of Dubrovnik for a total length of 240 metres. More than 3.5 kilometres of handrails were installed all over the city.

The traditional crafts subsidy programme in Dubrovnik is a long-running initiative that supports and preserves the city's artisanal heritage. By supporting a wide range of trades, from goldsmithing and tailoring to stone masonry, restoration, and souvenir production, the City ensures that traditional skills are preserved.

Urban functions for citizens living in the city centre are provided within a pedestrian zone such as: ambulance, post office, fish market, green market, florist, hairdresser, etc.

Integrating Nature and Improving Urban Quality of Life

Dubrovnik recognizes that environmental sustainability and accessible public spaces are fundamental conditions of habitability within a historic city.

By significantly utilizing funds from the EU in amount of €5,5 million the City of Dubrovnik is developing several investments in three parks, Gradac, Platana and Pile in the vicinity of the Old City, that will, upon completion, contribute to the green revitalization of urban spaces, climate adaptation, and urban well-being.

The renovated Pile Park creates a multifunctional public space at the entrance to the historic city, covering 3,000 square metres. The project includes extensive tree planting and shaded areas, a new amphitheatre-like social space, a thematic children's playground inspired by Dubrovnik's heritage, with direct hands-on involvement of the students of the Luka Sorkočević Art School. The project

reflects the principle that public space is a common good that must remain accessible, and capable of fostering collective identity.

Medieval Sewer System is renovated for the 21st Century needs. The project demonstrates how historic infrastructure can be modernized while preserving cultural value. It combines technical innovation, environmental protection, and heritage conservation. The works on the repair and restoration of the historic mixed drainage channel beneath Stradun and parts of Dubrovnik's historic centre were successfully completed in 2025. The sewerage network of the historic centre, built in the 14th century, remains fully functional and prevents flooding in the events of extensive rain.

Sustainable Accessibility and Reduction of Urban Pressure

Dubrovnik's mobility strategy aims to transform mobility by reducing congestion, improving accessibility, and protecting the historic core through sustainable and integrated transport solutions.

Since 2025, Dubrovnik has implemented a Special Traffic Regime around the historic centre, that restricts vehicle access and prioritizes residents, public transport, and sustainable mobility. The system has already significantly reduced traffic flows and congestion around the UNESCO-protected area, there were 291,587 fewer vehicle entries compared to the previous year.

A major investment in sustainable urban mobility is Park & Ride project in Pobrežje featuring 572 parking spaces to encourage the visitors to leave vehicles outside the historic centre and continue by arranged public transport towards the old city.

Conclusion

The City of Dubrovnik remains committed to developing sustainable and inclusive housing policies, responsibly managing tourism, redesigning regulations, and developing tailor-made solutions. The City is actively improving the quality of life for its residents while preserving the habitability and authenticity of the historic centre. Through these long-term measures, Dubrovnik seeks to ensure that local families can continue to live, work, and build their future in the city, recognizing that its citizens are the true guardians of Dubrovnik's identity and sustainability.

Mayor of the City of Dubrovnik

Mato Franković