

# UNLEASH Europe

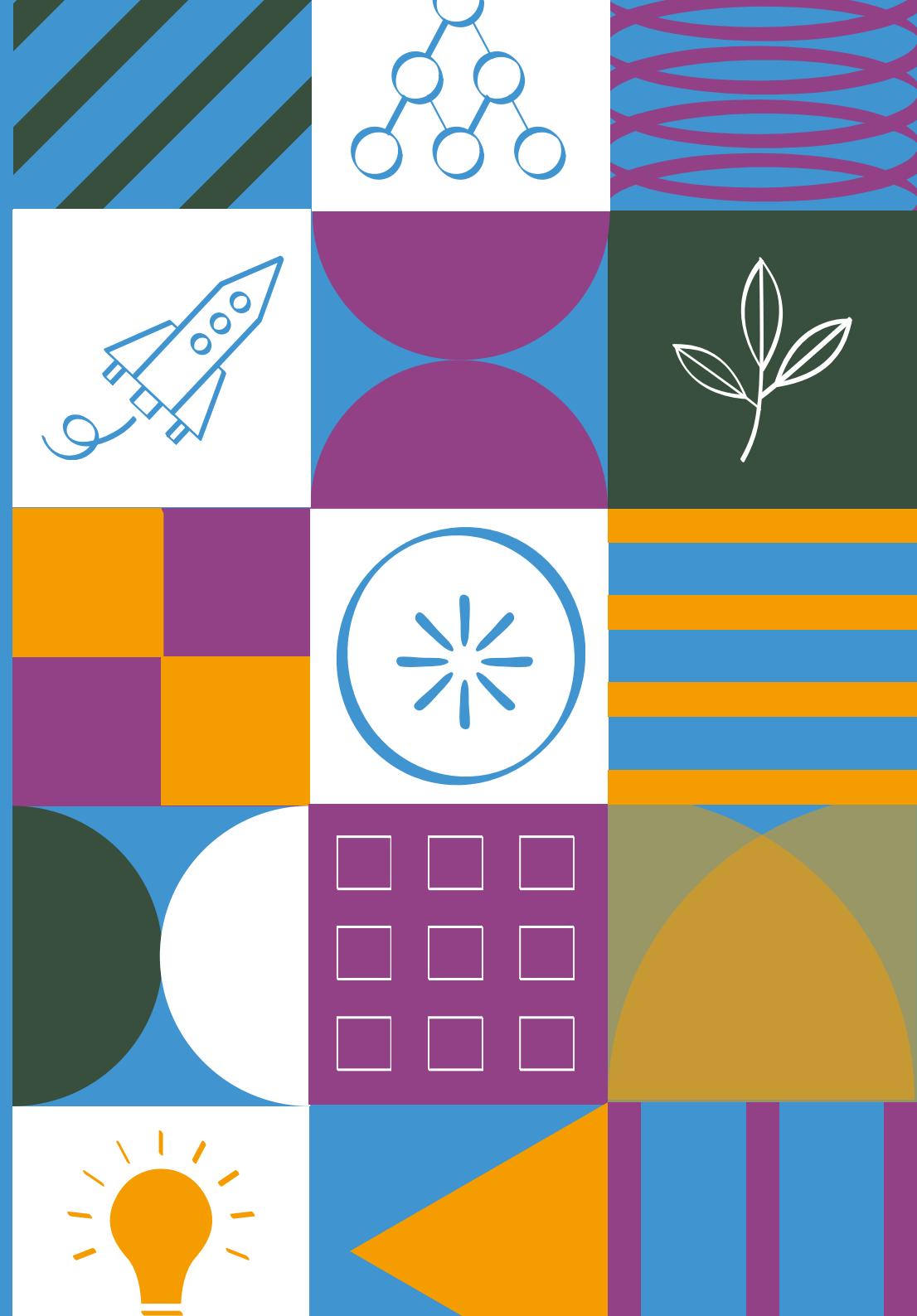
## Thematic Tracks



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EUROPE





## Why the Built Environment in Europe? Why Now?

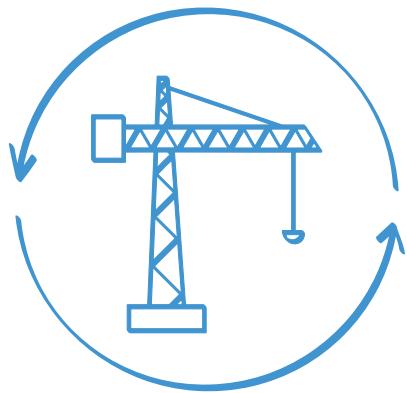
Europe's built environment is at a turning point. Across the continent, cities and communities are navigating profound transitions at the same time: decarbonization, climate adaptation, the housing crisis, and growing social inequality, to name a few. These challenges are deeply interconnected, and increasingly shaped by shared European policy frameworks, markets, and regulatory decisions.

More than ever, Europe needs a shared sense of direction in how it responds to these pressures. While conditions and histories differ across regions, the continent faces a common task: finding pathways that allow people to thrive in their communities while navigating environmental, social, and economic change. Europe's strength lies in its capacity to learn across contexts, turning local experimentation into shared insight, and using that collective intelligence to build resilience and opportunity across borders.

The question is not whether solutions already exist, but how Europe can turn fragmented efforts into approaches that travel, adapt, and endure. Bringing together diverse perspectives (from designers, engineers, planners, technologists, health workers, and policymakers from across the continent) makes it possible to move from isolated responses toward ideas that are scalable, inclusive, and grounded in the realities of everyday life.

UNLEASH Europe exists to create that shared space: a platform where diverse minds come together to explore common challenges, learn from one another, and co-create solutions that reflect Europe's complexity while working toward a future that benefits all who live in the continent.

Working in teams, participants will work on finding solutions for the following Thematic Tracks.



**Circular Futures**



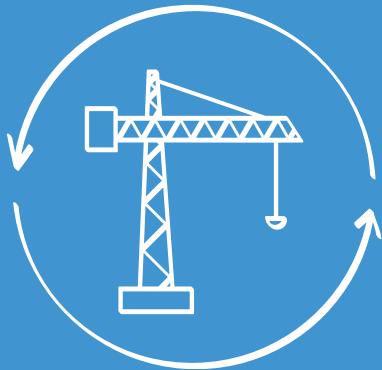
**The Just Green Transition**



**Rapidly Changing Environments**



**Thriving Cities**



## **Circular Futures**

### **Scaling circularity in building practices**

Across Europe, circular economy in construction has significant untapped potential. Innovative materials, reuse strategies, and circular design principles are increasingly present across the built environment, but these solutions remain difficult to adopt, replicate, and scale across regions and markets.

The timing is critical. Europe is entering a new phase of the green transition, with stronger regulatory alignment, increased focus on product standards, and greater clarity on circular economy requirements at a European Union level.

Circularity is no longer a niche ambition, but a shared direction creating real opportunities to move from isolated projects to replicable models that work across borders and contexts.

At the same time, some of the biggest opportunities lie not in new construction, but in renovating and transforming Europe's existing building stock. Millions of square meters of underutilized office space, outdated housing, and inefficient buildings represent a significant resource. Unlocking this potential requires circular approaches that are practical, financially viable, and designed for replication from the outset.

The main roadblocks are not technological, but structural. Short-term investment cycles, uncertainty around material availability, and a project-by-project mindset make it difficult to build confidence and demand. Shifting from unique pilots to product- and platform-based approaches designed to be adapted, reused, and scaled is key to making circularity work in practice and embedding it into how Europe renovates, builds, and transforms its cities.



## Challenge areas teams could explore

- How might circular building solutions be scaled, maintained, and adapted over time, rather than remaining one-off pilots?
- How can making circular choices be easier and cheaper for small developers, municipalities, or community builders?
- How might users and tenants become active stakeholders in the project and stewards of the result?
- How might we renovate and transform existing building stock across Europe?
- How might we overcome uncertainty around replicability in the circular economy?

# The Just Green Transition

## Making sustainable cities livable, affordable, and accessible

Europe's green transition is reshaping cities at speed, but it is unfolding alongside a deep and growing housing crisis. Across the continent, tens of millions of people struggle with housing affordability, even as the built environment remains the world's largest and most valuable investment area. This paradox sits at the heart of the just green transition: rapidly decarbonizing buildings and infrastructure, as well as adapting them to climate impacts such as flooding, heatwaves, and water stress, requires major up-front investment. In markets shaped by short-term returns and high capital demands, this can jeopardize housing affordability, security, and people's ability to remain in their neighborhoods.

Too often, climate action and social well-being are treated as separate, or even competing, priorities. In practice, they are inseparable. Many of the neighborhoods most exposed to flooding,

overheating, poor air quality, and inadequate water management are also those with lower incomes, less secure housing, and fewer resources to adapt. Climate adaptation measures, whether related to water systems, cooling, or resilient infrastructure, that do not reach all parts of the city risk deepening existing inequalities. At the same time, efforts to improve affordability that ignore emissions, energy use, and long-term climate resilience risk locking in environmental vulnerability and social cost for decades to come.

Cities across Europe face shared pressures: rising housing costs, unequal access to public and green spaces, exposure to climate risks, and infrastructure systems struggling to meet both environmental and social needs. Delivering a just green transition requires moving beyond single-actor solutions and establishing co-responsibility among public authorities, private actors, communities, and residents to align affordability, decarbonization, climate adaptation, and quality of life. How Europe navigates this dual challenge will shape not only its cities, but also social cohesion and the lived experience of the transition itself.

## Challenge areas teams could explore

- How can access to affordable, adequate housing be ensured as cities retrofit, densify, and transition to lower-carbon models?
- How might housing, neighborhood design, and shared infrastructure support sufficiency, making it easier to meet everyday needs with less space, energy, and resource use?
- How can mobility systems support access to jobs, education, and services while reducing emissions and avoiding new forms of exclusion?
- How can community, culture, and design drive bottom-up innovations about housing, infrastructure, and public space that directly affect their lives?
- How might we foster co-responsibility for affordable housing so that public authorities, private developers, financial institutions, and civil society share mission, risk, and accountability?



# Rapidly Changing Environments Enabling Adaptation in Arctic and Remote Regions

Across Europe, climate change is placing growing pressure on the built environment, but nowhere is this happening faster or more visibly than in the Arctic and other remote regions. In Greenland and other Arctic regions, melting permafrost, coastal erosion, shifting ecosystems, and changing livelihoods are already undermining buildings, infrastructure, and settlement patterns, intersecting with questions of sovereignty, cultural continuity, and access to services.

These conditions are not isolated. Similar pressures (depopulation, climate exposure, and fragile infrastructure) are affecting remote and peripheral regions across Europe. Together, they expose a wider European challenge: how planning, construction, and infrastructure systems designed for stability can respond to rapid environmental and social change.

Seen through Arctic and remote contexts, Europe's transition challenges come into sharper focus, revealing where existing planning, construction, and infrastructure models are already under strain and where new approaches are becoming unavoidable.





## Challenge areas teams could explore

- How can planning and collaboration be possible in remote regions where  
→ environmental conditions, population patterns, access to resources, and long-term viability are uncertain or shifting?
- How might housing, mobility, and public services be reimagined for communities facing relocation or transformation?
- How can remote regions reduce dependency on distant supply chains and centralized systems through the way buildings and infrastructure are designed?  
→
- How can Indigenous and local knowledge shape design, construction, and decision-making?  
→
- How might solutions developed in Arctic contexts inform resilience in other remote or climate-vulnerable regions?

# Thriving Cities

## Designing urban spaces that support health and well-being

Cities that support health and well-being are not automatic. They are shaped by everyday design choices that influence how people move, interact, rest, and relate to their surroundings. Housing quality, air and noise pollution, access to nature, and the availability of social and community spaces all play a decisive role in shaping physical, mental, and social health over time. Equally important are the factors that protect well-being in everyday life including safety, access to services, and the strength of local social infrastructure. In other words, health and well-being are shaped in daily life, not only in healthcare systems.

Across Europe, these conditions are unevenly distributed. Lower-income neighborhoods are more likely to be exposed to traffic, poor air quality, noise, and a lack of green space, while also facing higher barriers to healthy food, safe movement, and social

infrastructure. As cities grow denser and more complex, the challenge is not only to reduce emissions, but to ensure that urban environments actively support well-being and livability for everyone.

The success of a city is not only determined by economic performance or environmental efficiency, but also by the mental, physical, and social health of its communities. Understanding urban success through this lens means looking beyond emissions and economic output and recognizing health and well-being as a central outcome for determining how cities are designed and governed.



## Challenge areas teams could explore

- How can cities define and measure success beyond emissions or economic growth, capturing health, well-being, and lived experience as core urban outcomes?
- How might cities treat nature as essential urban infrastructure that supports livability, resilience, and well-being?
- How might urban spaces reduce everyday health risks, such as air pollution, noise, and urban heat, that disproportionately affect certain communities?
- How can urban environments be strengthened as a foundation for mental well-being?
- How might housing and local infrastructure better support social connection and reduce isolation, especially for people with limited mobility, time, or resources?



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[www.unleash.org/europe](http://www.unleash.org/europe)