

LEVERKUSEN DECLARATION 2026

Towns, History and Democracy - Shaping Europe Together

Adopted in the context of the European workshop 'Europe on the Ground - Urban Development, Democracy and Remembrance Culture in European Towns', Leverkusen and Jülich, 10-14 September 2026.

Mission

Cultivating a culture of local remembrance as a foundation for shaping a shared democratic future.

Preamble

We, the representatives of the European network StadtRäume / UrbanSpaces, are united by the conviction that Europe is built in its Towns and communities. It grows wherever people encounter one another, engage with their history, assume responsibility and shape their shared future democratically.

The historical experiences of our Towns are different, yet closely connected. They show the value and fragility of democracy and the consequences of exclusion, propaganda, authoritarianism, war and the erosion of the rule of law. Engaging with history is therefore not an end in itself. It is a resource for democratic judgement, participation and action in the present.

With this Declaration, we combine shared principles with a concrete programme of work extending to 2030. It is a political and organisational self-commitment of the undersigned, but does not establish legally enforceable claims or automatic financial obligations.

Our three pillars

- 1. Network:** We will strengthen StadtRäume / UrbanSpaces as a permanent, open European network linking municipalities, historical societies, museums, educational and cultural institutions, civil society, academia and interested individuals.
- 2. Youth participation:** Young people are core participants with their own voice, representation and responsibility. Their involvement will lay the ground of a lasting European network.
- 3. Education:** We will connect local history, European comparison and democratic practice in accessible historical and civic education. Critical thinking and media literacy are central goals.

Thematic guidelines

- 1. Remembrance culture:** We preserve and communicate diverse local memories, make experiences of exclusion, persecution and resistance visible, and understand remembrance as a shared, critical and open European task.
- 2. Democracy:** We strengthen democratic awareness, civic participation and the rule of law. Historical knowledge should enable people to recognise threats to democracy and to act responsibly.
- 3. Urban development:** We examine how planning, architecture, industry, infrastructure, migration, social change and civic engagement have shaped our Towns - and how citizens can help shape sustainable and inclusive Towns today.
- 4. The European idea:** We understand Europe as a community of shared values, responsibility and solidarity. Exchange between Towns turns different experiences into mutual understanding and practical cooperation across borders.

Shared principles

- We** uphold human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, human rights, pluralism, tolerance, solidarity and peace.
- We** protect open debate while opposing discrimination, racism, antisemitism, hatred, historical distortion and anti-democratic narratives.
- We** regard Towns, historical sites, archives, museums and public spaces as living spaces of democracy and shared learning.
- We** make participation inclusive, **multilingual** and as accessible as possible, while keeping English as the common working language, and actively including perspectives that have too often remained unheard.
- We** learn through comparison: local experiences are placed in a European context without erasing differences or equating distinct histories.
- We** work transparently, respectfully and on the basis of shared responsibility between generations.

Proposed work programme 2026-2030

- 1. Network and governance:** Each partner designates two project contacts, one of which has to be a young person. A joint steering group meets at least quarterly online; an open European network forum takes place at least once a year.
- 2. Youth participation:** Young people are fully integrated into project work at all levels. In addition, they might organize dedicated meetings of the youth representatives, including in-person meetings.
- 3. Education programme:** The partners aim to jointly develop transferable modules on urban development, democracy and remembrance culture, using local case studies and the story-data-debate approach. Each participating partner tests or adopts at least one suitable format by 2030.
- 4. Shared public outputs:** The network aims to further develop the Europe-wide exhibition on the urban development of European Towns, multilingual digital presentations, audiovisual documentation and a common methods and good-practice collection.
- 5. Democratic resilience and media literacy:** Educational and media activities link historical reflection with current challenges, including polarisation, disinformation and the misuse of history.
- 6. Inclusion and safeguarding:** Activities follow common anti-discrimination standards, gender equality, accessibility, data protection and the protection of children and young people.
- 7. Project development and resources:** The partners will prepare suitable joint initiatives under CERV, Erasmus+ and other programmes. Cooperation and agreed core activities will continue regardless of individual funding decisions. All project partners will try to find additional funding and support.
- 8. Expansion and accession:** The network welcomes further Towns and organisations that support this Declaration. They may join by submitting the attached declaration of accession.
- 9. Review:** Progress is reviewed annually. In 2030, the partners will jointly evaluate implementation and adopt a renewed strategic perspective.

Roadmap (subject to funding)

Target	Action	Responsibility	Evidence
By Dec 2026	Confirm contacts; establish steering group and shared workspace	Coordination + all partners	Contact list; agreed structure
By Jun 2027	Adopt roadmap; agree first educational modules and project priorities	Steering group	Roadmap
2027-2028	Pilot joint education and media formats; update the European exhibition and digital presentation	Thematic teams	Pilots; public outputs
Annually	Hold European network forum; review progress; share good practice and new project ideas	Host partner + steering group	Forum record; annual review
By Dec 2030	Evaluate the Declaration and decide on the next strategic period	All signatories	Impact review; renewed strategy

Call from Leverkusen

We invite Towns, organisations, educational and cultural institutions, civil society initiatives, young people and other interested parties throughout Europe to join this endeavour. Europe's democratic future will be strengthened when history is understood locally, discussed across borders and translated into shared action.

Locally rooted in urban history - connected across Europe.

Signatures

Adopted in Leverkusen on 13 September 2026. The undersigned act as representatives of the participating towns and organisations.