

Innovation for Recovery

Rebuilding València after the DANA Floods



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License. You are free to Share (to copy, distribute and transmit the work) and to Remix (to adapt the work) under the conditions of Attribution (you must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor, but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work), Noncommercial (you may not use this work for commercial purposes), and Share Alike (if you alter, transform, or build upon this work, you may distribute the resulting work only under the same or similar li- cense to this one). www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/



Credits © 2025
Images by their respective authors

Index

Executive Summary	4
Foreword	6
Recovering together	8
Introduction	10
Methodology	12
The DANA Floods: What Happened and What Was Lost	14
Field Visit Observations: Seven Months After the Valencia Floods	18
Partners & Stakeholders	20
Phase 1	
Understanding Recovery Priorities Through Citizen Voices	24
1 Participation Overview - Rebuilding Better and with the People:	
The Citizen Response After the DANA Floods	25
2 A Poor Score for the Recovery Process	26
3 A Crisis of Institutional Trust	27
4 Emotions on Edge: Between Incredulity and Anger	28
Phase 2	
A participatory mapping of needs, actors, and shared purpose	30
A shared diagnosis	31
Voices from the session	33
Mapping people, projects, and priorities	34
Phase 3	
International perspectives on recovery planning	41
Session 1 Innovation for citizen participation.	42
Session 2 Innovation in territorial development	43
Session 3 Innovation in resource, housing, and water management	44
Session 4 The perspective of cities and towns	45
Case studies	51
Ryan Smolar Asheville, USA	52
Hanna Balik, Türkiye	53
Jakub Mazur, Wrocław	54
Guillermo BernalMexico City, Mexico	58
Philipp Rode, LSE Cities	60
Conclusions	64

Executive Summary

Across Europe, extreme climate events are becoming more frequent and severe. The DANA floods that struck the Valencian region in October 2024 revealed not only physical vulnerability, but also the institutional and emotional fractures that emerge when recovery is treated as a technical task rather than a collective process. The floods caused 229 deaths and generated losses exceeding €10.7 billion in the Valencia metropolitan area, exposing the limits of conventional crisis management.



This report *Innovation for Recovery* presents a community-driven model for rebuilding after disasters. It shows how placemaking, as a participatory and place-based methodology, can strengthen resilience by integrating social, cultural, and environmental dimensions of recovery. Developed through collaboration between Placemaking Europe and *elDiario.es*, the initiative engaged more than 1,500 residents, civic leaders, scientists, and local governments in a shared process of diagnosis, dialogue, and design.

The findings confirm that recovery must start with people, not infrastructure. Trust, care, and social cohesion are as critical as drainage systems and emergency protocols. When citizens are included as co-creators, recovery becomes an opportunity for long-term transformation rather than a return to pre-existing fragility.

The lessons from this process extend beyond the Valencian case. They point to the need for public policies that recognise social capital as critical infrastructure, foster collaboration across institutional boundaries, and embed community participation in all phases of recovery — from preparedness to reconstruction. By treating local knowledge as a strategic asset, governments can design more adaptive and inclusive responses to climate emergencies.

At the European level, these findings align with the direction of **EU recovery and cohesion policies**, including the **European Green Deal**, **Cohesion Policy 2021–2027**, and the **Recovery and Resilience Facility**, which all call for integrated territorial approaches. The placemaking methodology offers a practical way to translate such frameworks into local action, bridging the gap between strategic vision and on-the-ground implementation.

Key insights

- 64% of respondents contributed to recovery efforts — volunteering, donating, or organising collectively — while the average satisfaction with institutional response was 3.4/10, showing both civic capacity and governance gaps.

- Grassroots committees emerged as democratic actors, restoring coordination where official structures faltered.

- Cultural and social infrastructures (schools, cultural centres, public squares) proved essential for emotional recovery and collective organisation.

- International dialogue underscored that the challenges of Valencia are shared across Europe: fragmented governance, lack of preparedness, and insufficient integration of social and spatial justice in climate planning.

Foreword

Ramon Marrades,
Director of Placemaking Europe

When the October 2024 floods hit Valencia, they struck not only our territory but also our sense of certainty. The rain fell harder and longer than anyone could remember, up to six hundred litres per square metre in just a few hours, sweeping through streets, schools and homes. Two hundred twenty-nine people lost their lives. Thousands more lost the things that made those lives recognisable: photographs, shops, classrooms, routines. But even in those days of shock and silence, something else began to flow: solidarity.

Neighbours became first responders. Volunteers formed human chains to clear mud and carry food. The spontaneous coordination that emerged across the Horta Sud revealed something essential about this region and its people: our capacity to act together before waiting for permission. This is the very spirit that placemaking seeks to understand and strengthen, the ability of communities to turn shared pain into shared purpose.

As a Valencian, I saw a territory that had been shaped for decades by rapid urbanisation, fragmented governance and unequal investment. As Director of Placemaking Europe, I saw an urgent lesson for all of Europe. The DANA floods were not only a local catastrophe; they were a warning of what is to come if climate adaptation remains a technical checklist instead of a collective project. Recovery cannot be measured solely in kilometres of repaired roads or euros spent on infrastructure. It must

be felt in the restoration of trust, safety and belonging.

This is why we launched Innovation for Recovery, not as a research exercise but as a collaborative process of listening, co-creating and imagining a different future. We did so together with eldiario.es, whose role throughout the tragedy and the months that followed deserves special recognition. At a time when many media outlets move on as soon as the cameras dry off, eldiario.es in Valencia stayed. They told the story of the floods with care, accuracy and honesty, not sensationalism. They gave voice to the affected communities and created the conditions for dialogue, empathy and accountability. Without their generosity and civic commitment, this process would not have been possible.

Through our collaboration, journalism became a bridge between experience and reflection, between what happened and what could happen next. The partnership showed that the media can be more than a messenger; it can be a convening force capable of framing recovery not as blame or bureaucracy, but as a public conversation about how we rebuild and who we become in the process.

International cooperation also played a crucial role. The presence of colleagues from across Europe reminded us that what we lived in Valencia is not an exception but part of a growing pattern of climate-related crises. By connecting our local experience to

global expertise, we were able to translate grief into learning, and learning into action. The visit of placemakers, city officials and cultural leaders from other countries gave shape to a new kind of solidarity, one that travels through ideas, methods and shared commitment rather than aid alone.

Twelve months later, the scars of the floods remain visible. But so does the collective will to recover differently, with more humility, imagination and justice. This report captures a proposal for what should follow: a call for recovery processes that are people-centred, participatory and place-based.

To all those who opened their hearts, their institutions and their stories to us, thank you. To our partners at eldiario.es for their professionalism and moral clarity, thank you. And to the communities of the Horta Sud, who showed Europe what resilience really looks like, your example will continue to inspire placemakers everywhere. ■

Recovering Together

Sergi Pitarch,
Director of elDiario.es
Comunitat Valenciana

On October 29, 2024, the greatest human and material tragedy of the 21st century struck the Valencian Country. The floods—exacerbated by the now unquestionable effects of global warming caused by anthropogenic climate change—resulted in 229 fatalities. The poor and negligent management by the regional institution responsible for Emergencies and Civil Protection decisively contributed to the severe human toll of the episode. Thousands of residents across six Valencian counties—home to more than half a million people—were left exposed and defenseless in the face of an extraordinary episode of torrential rainfall. The actions taken by public administrations in the days following the disaster further deepened public concern. The unease and anguish were compounded by a sudden erosion of trust in the institutions, especially the Generalitat Valenciana, the regional authority.

At elDiario.es—a journalist-owned media outlet and one of the five most-read publications in the Valencian Country, as well as one of the top ten nationwide—we immediately understood that we had to dedicate all our efforts to explaining what happened, how it happened, and who was responsible for a negligence that ultimately cost far too many lives. As a newspaper committed to the public and to our more than 10,000 Valencian subscribers, we also felt compelled to go further and understand the consequences of the tragedy and its impact on the communities affected.

To grasp the full scale of the phenomenon and its present and future repercussions, our partnership with Placemaking Europe has proven essential. At elDiario.es, we believe that citizen participation is a cornerstone of a strong democracy and that, in the aftermath of a tragedy like the València DANA, the affected communities must play a central role in the recovery process. While institutions began the physical reconstruction, no one had yet asked residents how they wanted that reconstruction to unfold, nor what emotional toll the catastrophe had taken. Visible wounds may begin to heal; the internal ones will take years.

Thanks to Placemaking Europe's experience in listening and community-engagement processes, we were able to launch a participatory initiative that yielded extraordinarily valuable insights. A survey answered by nearly 1,500 people, together with discussion groups involving civil society, universities, and the business sector engaged in the recovery, allowed us to identify community needs that, even today, remain unaddressed by public administrations. The results reveal a profound distrust of the regional authorities and, although they do not indicate a complete disconnection from institutions, they offer essential information for designing policies that can help curb the spread of populism.

So far, the citizens organized in the Local Emergency and Reconstruction Committees—which actively participated in the listening project developed by elDiario.es and Placemaking

Europe—have managed to contain the emergence of populism that might otherwise have taken hold in regions that suffered particularly acutely from the frivolity and incompetence of a few, but significant, political leaders. Yet the public continues to demand greater participation and stronger decision-making power. Because it is the residents themselves who must define how recovery should take shape; because only through shared commitment can we build a credible reconstruction that strengthens the foundations of a society that will undoubtedly face similar events in the future.

For elDiario.es, the collaboration with Placemaking Europe has been an opportunity to better understand the affected communities and their expectations. This report, rooted in civil society, aims to complement the already exceptional work carried out by the University of Valencia, the Polytechnic University of Valencia, the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC) and the Horta Sud Foundation. Journalism must serve citizens by helping them interpret the complexity of the world we live in, and in the face of a tragedy like that of October 29, 2024, elDiario.es had no choice but to reaffirm its commitment to public-service journalism.

In 2026, we will once again work alongside Placemaking Europe to assess the state of the recovery and identify the needs expressed by citizens in the second year of the reconstruction process ■

Introduction

In October 2024, the DANA storm caused catastrophic flooding across southern Valencia, devastating homes, public facilities, and livelihoods. More than 229 people lost their lives, and damages exceeded €10 billion, making it one of the deadliest and costliest natural disasters in Spain's recent history. The event exposed the structural vulnerabilities of a region long shaped by rapid urbanisation, fragmented governance, and uneven territorial investment. Yet it also revealed a powerful civic response: neighbours helping neighbours, local committees organising spontaneously, and cultural actors using art to rebuild hope and cohesion.

To harness this collective energy and translate it into lasting change, *Innovation for Recovery* was developed within the framework of Placemaking Days — a methodology created by Placemaking Europe to connect international expertise with local action. Placemaking Days are collaborative events that apply the participatory spirit of *Placemaking Week Europe* to tackle concrete, context-specific urban challenges. Each edition combines surveys, workshops, and co-creation sessions to gather evidence, build partnerships, and produce actionable recommendations for cities and regions. In this case, the format was adapted to address the complex recovery needs of post-flood Valencia through a participatory process spanning several months.

The initiative unfolded through three interlinked phases: a citizen survey gathering over 1,400 responses; a participatory mapping session with civic, academic, and municipal actors; and a public forum that brought together local governments, cultural organisations, and international experts. Together, these steps built a shared understanding

of the territory's challenges and opportunities, moving from diagnosis to dialogue and design.

The process combined empirical evidence and lived experience to generate practical lessons for policymakers and practitioners. It demonstrates that the most effective recovery is inclusive, place-based, and future-oriented — one that restores the social fabric alongside the physical environment. Beyond the Valencian case, the initiative speaks to a broader European challenge: how to translate climate adaptation and disaster recovery policies into local action that citizens can shape, trust, and sustain.

Placemaking provides a proven methodology to do so — connecting environmental design with civic participation and turning public spaces into climate shelters, social hubs, and democratic infrastructures. This report synthesises the collective knowledge that emerged from the process into a set of actionable principles and policy directions. It invites EU institutions, member states, and regional authorities to recognise placemaking as a strategic tool for climate adaptation and recovery — one that complements technical expertise with local intelligence and makes resilience both tangible and just.

Methodology

The initiative was developed in three main phases.

First, a public survey collected responses from over 1,500 residents across the areas most affected by the floods and their surrounding communities. The results provided valuable insights into local needs, perceptions, and priorities for recovery.

Second, a co-creation workshop held on 30 April 2025 brought together civic leaders, researchers, business representatives, and municipal officials to map ongoing initiatives, identify gaps, and explore opportunities for collaboration.

Finally, the process culminated in a public forum held at *La Florida University* in Catarroja on 9 May 2025. The event convened local governments, civic organisations, and international experts to deepen the dialogue across four key themes: civic engagement, territorial development, water and resource management, and perspectives from affected municipalities and international experiences. Participants shared lessons from past recovery processes, along with personal stories of resilience and collective learning.

Phase 1 Citizen Survey

- 1,500+ respondents
- Identified needs perceptions, priorities

Phase 2 Co-creation Workshop, April 20, 2025

- Civic leaders, experts, and institutions
- Mapped actions, gaps, and opportunities

Phase 3 Public Forum

- La Florida University – Catarroja, 9 May 2025
- Shared lessons on recovery and resilience

The DANA Floods: What Happened and What Was Lost

The **October 2024 Depresión Aislada en Niveles Altos (DANA)** storm was one of the most severe weather events to strike the Valencian region in recent decades. Over the course of several days, **exceptionally intense and prolonged rainfall** hit the **Horta Sud** —the southern part of Valencia's metropolitan area — and neighbouring municipalities. In some locations, precipitation **exceeded 600 mm within a few hours**, with record peaks of **184 mm in a single hour** and **nearly 640 mm accumulated in Turís**. Rivers, ravines, and drainage systems were rapidly overwhelmed, inundating residential areas, agricultural land, and major transport and energy infrastructures.

The impact on local communities was **immediate and devastating**. Hundreds of homes were damaged or rendered uninhabitable, public services were disrupted, and road and rail connections were cut off. In rural areas, extensive crop losses and damage to irrigation systems compounded the crisis for those whose livelihoods depend on agriculture. The floods claimed **229 lives**, displaced thousands, and caused **economic losses exceeding €10 billion**, making it one of the deadliest and costliest natural disasters in Spain's history. Beyond the physical destruction, the event left a deep psychological mark: many residents experienced **trauma, displacement, anxiety about recurrent risks, and the loss of personal and cultural assets**.

The crisis also exposed serious **policy and governance failures**. Despite early meteorological alerts, emergency systems were quickly overwhelmed. Communication networks collapsed, official warnings reached some areas too late, and coordination between regional

and national authorities was inconsistent. The subsequent recovery revealed deeper structural problems — **institutional fatigue, fragmented responsibilities, and spatial injustices**. Commercial and high-profile areas often received priority assistance, while public institutions such as schools, libraries, and community centres faced slower recovery, perpetuating pre-existing territorial inequalities.

Yet amid this context, **citizens responded with extraordinary solidarity**. Neighbours organised mutual aid networks, volunteers cleared debris and delivered food, and cultural actors mobilised creativity to sustain morale and rebuild trust. Across the metropolitan area, spontaneous community committees and informal alliances emerged to coordinate efforts where formal systems faltered. What began as an emergency response evolved into a demonstration of **civic resilience**, showing the capacity of local communities to organise, adapt, and reimagine recovery from the ground up.



Image I
May 6th, 2025 – Alfafar. Closed public school.



Image II
May 6th, 2025. Alfafar Status of ground floor home.



Image III
May 6th, 2025. Massanassa. Another closed public school



Image IV
May 6th, 2025. Massanassa. Closed public school



Image V
May 6th, 2025 – Paiporta. The closed public swimming pool.



Image VI
May 6th, 2025. Paiporta.



Image VII
May 6th, 2025. Paiporta.



Image VIII
May 6th, 2025. Paiporta – Commuters wait for the bus under the scorching sun, with no shade in sight. Seven months after the floods, metro lines remained closed, forcing many to rely on poorly equipped alternatives.

Field Visit Observations: Seven Months After the Valencia Floods

On May 6, Placemaking Europe carried out a field visit to several neighbourhoods that had been severely affected by the October 2024 DANA floods. These areas, mainly located on the city's urban periphery, were also among its lowest-income zones.

At the time of the visit, the impacts of the disaster were still starkly visible. While some progress had been made in repairing roads and private housing, much public infrastructure remained untouched. Fenced-off playgrounds, vacant elementary schools, and shuttered sports facilities illustrated a slow and uneven recovery. In many cases, there were no visible signs of reconstruction. The continued closure of the local public school underscored how fragile the recovery was. Children and young adults

faced additional challenges when their usual learning environment had been lost and classes were held in temporary or unfamiliar settings, disrupting both their education and well-being.

Access to public transport remained a major issue. Metro lines damaged during the floods were still out of service, despite being a vital connection for many residents — especially those who had lost their vehicles and could not afford alternatives. At Paiporta station, long queues of commuters waited in the heat for infrequent buses, with no shelter or shade (Image VIII).

These conditions highlighted the urgent need for a recovery strategy that would prioritise equity, restore access to essential services, and ensure vulnerable communities were not left behind.



Seven months after the DANA floods, the continued closure of the public swimming pool rose concern as summer approaches. With no accessible public space for families and residents to cool off, the community faced heightened vulnerability during the extreme Spanish heat.

Partners & Stakeholders

The following partners and stakeholders play a critical role in the *Innovation for Recovery* project following the DANA floods. They include local institutions, civil society organisations, research and educational bodies, private sector actors, media, and international partners. Each contributes unique expertise, resources, or influence, helping ensure that recovery efforts are inclusive, collaborative, and grounded in the needs of affected communities. Their involvement was particularly imperative for Phases 2 and 3, the participatory workshop and the public forum at La Florida University where diverse perspectives came together to translate survey insights into practical strategies for recovery. By engaging this network, the project fostered innovative solutions, strengthened civic participation, and supported resilient, sustainable recovery..

Local Stakeholders:

Local and Regional Institutions

Provincial Council of Valencia

Coordinates post-flood recovery strategies across municipalities.

Comissionat per la DANA

Oversees strategic response and coordination efforts following the DANA floods.

Comités de Recuperació (Recovery Committees)

Represent affected communities, ensuring local needs shape recovery plans.

Affected Municipalities

Catarroja, Alzira, Ontinyent, Utiel, Paiporta
– Local political leadership guiding municipal recovery efforts.

Civil Society and Community Organisations

Fundació Horta Sud

Strengthens civic engagement, supports community-led recovery initiatives, and facilitates collaborative projects through local philanthropy.

Coordinadora Valenciana de ONGD

Facilitates NGO coordination and advocacy for inclusive recovery.

Fundación FAD Juventud

Engages young people in social innovation and resilience initiatives.

Metges del Món

Provides humanitarian aid and supports vulnerable communities during recovery.

Mai Més

Advocates for social justice and community solidarity post-DANA.

Comités locals de Benetússer

Coordinates local participation in recovery at the neighbourhood level.

CLER Massanassa i Catarroja

Promotes civic collaboration and inter-municipal recovery efforts.

La Dula

Uses creative placemaking to foster community reflection and resilience.

Crearqció

Brings architectural and participatory design expertise to sustainable rebuilding.

Grupo Aranea

Contributes innovative landscape and spatial design approaches for flood-affected areas.

Federació Valenciana de la Indústria Musical (Projecte Cànter)

Connects cultural networks to support recovery through arts and music.

Private Sector and Social Responsibility

Responsabilidad Social Corporativa (RSC) y Caixa Popular

Supports social innovation and funds local recovery initiatives.

Egevasa

Provides technical expertise in water management and infrastructure restoration.

Global Omnium

Leads innovation in water management and supports infrastructure resilience.

Educational and Research Institutions

La Florida University/Florida Grup Educatiu

Hosts collaborative dialogues and educational activities on innovation and resilience.

Universidad de Valencia/Econcult

Provides expertise in cultural innovation and territorial development for post-disaster recovery.

CSIC (Spanish National Research Council)

Offers scientific and environmental research for climate adaptation and resource management.

International Partners:

Laboratorio para la Ciudad

Shares global insights on civic innovation and participatory urbanism to inspire inclusive recovery approaches.

STIPO

Contributes expertise in placemaking, urban governance, and community-led transformation processes.

Thrive Asheville

Offers experience in cross-sector collaboration and social resilience initiatives.

LSE Cities

Provides academic research and policy analysis on urban resilience, governance, and sustainable city development.

Media and Communication

El Diario.es

Ensures transparent communication and media coverage of recovery initiatives.



Phase 1 Understanding Recovery Priorities Through Citizen Voices

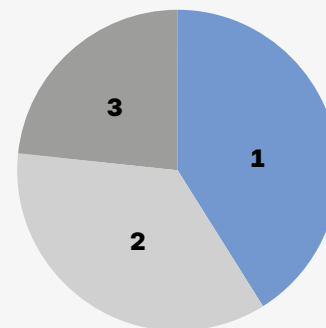
The first phase of Innovation for Recovery focused on listening to residents across the areas most affected by the October 2024 floods. Through a public survey that gathered more almost 1,500 responses, citizens shared their emotions, experiences, and priorities for recovery. Their testimonies revealed not only material and infrastructural needs but also deep concerns about trust, fairness, and institutional responsiveness. These insights form the foundation for the recommendations that follow, demonstrating how community perception can guide more inclusive and adaptive recovery strategies.

1. Participation Overview - Rebuilding Better and with the People: The Citizen Response After the DANA Floods

A total of **1,424** individuals responded to the Innovation for Recovery survey on the DANA floods in southern València. Of these, 33.6% (479 respondents) indicated they were directly affected by the floods. Among those affected, 75.7% reported having received financial assistance for damages.

The survey also revealed strong community engagement in recovery efforts. 64.2% of all participants reported contributing in some form to the recovery process. Their involvement included:

- 1** Volunteering (43.7%)
- 2** Donating money (37.6%)
- 3** Participating in activism or civic organising (24.4%)



The data revealed a strong sense of solidarity and civic engagement in the wake of the disaster. Responses were heavily concentrated in the province of Valencia, particularly in municipalities directly impacted by the DANA floods of November 2023. When postal codes are grouped by municipality, Catarroja and neighbouring towns in the Horta Sud region, including Albal, Massanassa, Sedaví, Alfafar, Benetússer, Llocnou de la Corona, Paiporta, Torrent, Aldaia, Alaquàs, and Picanya, collectively contributed over 300 responses. Significant participation also came from several neighbourhoods within Valencia city, such as Benimaclet, Russafa, Patraix, Marxalenes, and Ciutat Vella. Meanwhile, responses from towns like Algemesí and Alzira further reflect the broader regional involvement.

2. A Poor Score for the Recovery Process

The survey revealed widespread public dissatisfaction with how recovery and reconstruction have unfolded in the areas affected by the DANA floods and the Great Ravine. Although responses varied across regions, a clear pattern emerged: many residents were critical of both the speed and strategy of the recovery process, particularly when it comes to addressing social and economic challenges.

Despite some differences between different areas, the general pattern points to significant dissatisfaction, especially in social and economic aspects. When asked to rate the overall recovery process, the **average score was just 3.43 out of 10**, with a **median of 3.0**.

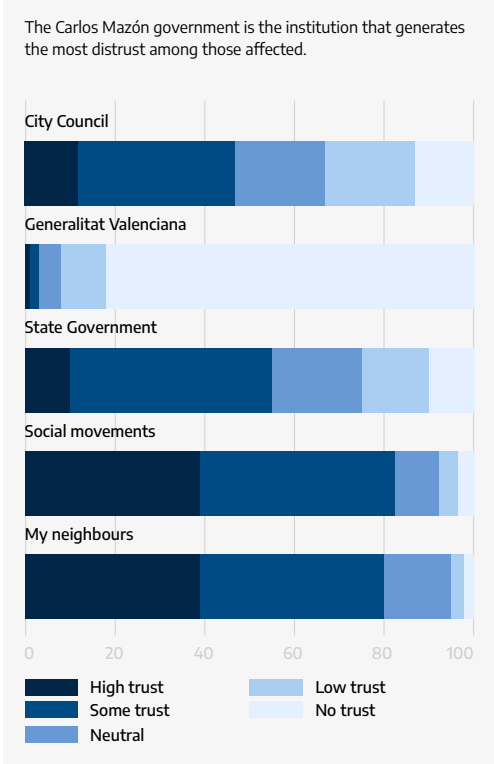
- **Half of all participants** gave a score between **1 and 4**.
- **Only a small minority** gave ratings above **6**.
- Top scores (**9 or 10**) were **virtually nonexistent**.

This pattern confirms a widespread perception of **institutional failure** and a response that, in the eyes of residents, has fallen far short of what's needed.

3. A Crisis of Institutional Trust

The results revealed a deep divide between levels of government and local networks:

Institution	Trust (%)	Distrust (%)
Neighbours	80.10%	2.00%
Social movements	82.50%	3.60%
Local government (town councils)	46.20%	27.10%
Spanish government	56.80%	17.40%
Valencian regional government (Generalitat Valenciana)	2.50%	87.40%



No Trust in the Regional Government, but Support for the Community

By institution, the Valencian Government is the worst off in the survey. 87.4% of respondents distrust the institution presided over by Carlos Mazón, while around half of those surveyed have some degree of trust in local governments and the Spanish government. Without a doubt, social movements and residents are the actors who offer the most confidence in the recovery process. The graph shows the difference in percentages between the regional government and the other actors surveyed.

4. Emotions on Edge: Between Incredulity and Anger

The emotional toll of the DANA floods is undeniable. From the shattered homes to stalled reconstruction, people are left grappling with a mix of disbelief, sadness, and frustration.

When asked how they felt at the point of the survey, **nearly two-thirds (64.7%)** of respondents reported feeling **angry and frustrated**. But this frustration isn't the only feeling that lingers.

34.8%

say they were **trying to move forward**,

26.8%

felt **sad and overwhelmed**,

24.1%

still **couldn't believe it happened**,

18.7%

were still **trying to make sense of it all**.

Different Experiences, Different Emotions

Those **directly affected** by the floods feel the aftermath more deeply:

- **33.5%** of affected individuals felt **sad and overwhelmed**, compared to **27%** of the non-affected.
- **23.2%** were **still trying to understand what happened**, vs just **16.8%** of non-affected respondents.
- Yet, affected residents were also **more likely to say they're trying to move forward** (42.1% vs 18.8%).

Surprisingly, **anger was more common among those not directly affected** (69.3%) than those who were (59.2%), possibly reflecting broader disillusionment with institutions and solidarity with neighbours still waiting for support.

Phase 2

A participatory mapping of needs, actors, and shared purpose

On April 30, around 30 participants¹ came together at the *eldiario.es* newsroom in València for a unique working session. Scientists, municipal staff, journalists, youth organisations, health professionals, activists, and cultural agents, many already engaged in recovery efforts, took part in an open, non-hierarchical dialogue. The goal was to connect local knowledge and map the initiatives, gaps, and opportunities that could guide a more effective, just, and community-led response.

1 Participants included:

- Francesc Miralles Borrell
Mai Més València
- Joan Romero González
Universitat de València
- Adrián Flores Sornosa
Fundación FAD Juventud
- Lourdes Mirón Mirón
Coordinadora Valenciana de ONGD
- Eva Gil Alapont
Metges del Món

- Irene Fornes Moros
Comité local de Benetússer
- Rut Moyano Lon
Comité Emergència i Reconstrucció Benetússer
- Antonio Ariño Villarroya
Comité d'Emergències i Reconstrucció Massanassa
- Josep Vicent Codonyer Soria
CLER Massanassa i Catarroja

- Aleix Pujol Puigmal
Fundació Comunitària Horta Sud
- Vicente Fajardo
Global Omnium
- May Ibáñez
Federació Valenciana de la Indústria Musical, Projecte Cànter

A shared diagnosis

The session opened with a frank discussion about the current state of recovery. Participants highlighted wmajor concerns:

● **No space has been made for collective mourning.** The emotional impact of the floods has not been addressed. Trauma, they warned, is only now beginning to surface.

● **The social and relational damage caused by the DANA,** the breaking of daily routines, relationships, and community infrastructures, remains unacknowledged.

● **Municipalities have not provided proximity support.** There have been few on the ground visits, and official information has been scarce or absent.

● **There is no functional “comarca” (county-level) strategy,** despite shared conditions and interdependencies among towns.

● **Technical staff are lacking** across many municipalities, limiting the ability to plan, respond, or coordinate effectively.



Voices from the session

Participants offered grounded, context-rich insights into what was already being done and what was urgently needed:

● **Antonio Ariño** described how the *Massanassa Emergency Committee* had drafted guidelines for municipal emergency planning and called for recognising socio-cultural organisations as legitimate interlocutors in governance.

● **Vicente Fajardo**, from *Global Omnium*, explained the urgent need to improve both water infrastructure and public communication around the water cycle, noting the system's fragility and the invisibility of its real cost.

● **May Ibáñez**, representing *projecte Cànter*, highlighted the role of culture in recovery, from public space programming to legal and marketing support for affected artists.

● **Eva Gil**, from *Metges del Món*, called for reinforcing mental health support through primary care, creating a mental health cluster, and ensuring those who care for others are also supported.

● **Irene Fornes Moros** warned of the risks of “surviving the reconstruction” — of rebuilding what was broken instead of transforming it. She also highlighted the need for municipal interlocution and inclusive approaches that move beyond small affinity groups.

● **The Comité de Catarroja** representative voiced disillusionment with institutional inaction and the rising popularity of anti-political narratives.

● **Francesc Miralles**, from *Mai Més*, offered a European lens, encouraging participants to frame local recovery efforts within wider European policies such as the Green Deal, and to seek strategic alliances and funding at EU level.

Mapping people, projects, and priorities

Participants collaborated in small groups to create visual maps linking actors, ongoing initiatives, unmet needs, and potential synergies. These maps helped visualise what had previously been fragmented, and laid the groundwork for future action.

Emerging themes included:

- **The need to align civic and institutional efforts** without reproducing top-down dynamics.

- **The importance of “soft infrastructures”**, social ties, cultural spaces, everyday interactions, as much as roads or drainage systems.

- **The potential of music, youth, and care sectors** to lead community-centred recovery.

- **The challenge of translating technical knowledge into accessible, actionable strategies.**

The session closed by articulating a clear and actionable roadmap grounded in three areas of focus: ongoing initiatives, institutional demands, and long-term transformation. These reflect what is already happening on the ground, what is urgently needed from public authorities, and what kind of future the region can build collectively.



Ongoing initiatives: What communities are already doing

Participants and their organisations were not waiting for change to be handed down—they are already driving it. Through people-centred processes and practices, they were restoring trust and rebuilding communities from the ground up.

Dissemination of clear, community-level information

Reliable and localised communication is essential for building trust and enabling people to act. Grassroots groups are translating technical data into accessible formats, countering confusion, and making sure no one is left in the dark during future emergencies.

Strengthening social infrastructure and civic trust

Beyond roads and drainage systems, communities invest in the social fabric: meeting places, support networks, and neighbourhood-level coordination. These soft infrastructures are often the first to respond and the last to be recognised.

Cultural programming in affected areas

Music, theatre, and arts play a key role in healing and reconnecting communities. Initiatives such as Música en la Zona 0 are not only giving voice to affected artists but also reactivating public space as a site of recovery and celebration.

Early and primary mental health care

Emotional recovery needs to start early and close to home. Health professionals and local associations pushed for a mental health response that is decentralised, continuous, and embedded in primary care systems.

Support for vulnerable groups

Civil society worked to identify and support those who are most at risk—families without housing, migrants, elderly people living alone—ensuring that no one is excluded from the recovery process due to structural barriers.

Measures to mitigate immediate climate risks

Local committees implemented practical, low-cost solutions to anticipate autumn rains and reduce exposure to future hazards. This includes community-based early warning systems, educational campaigns, and basic preparedness training.

Institutional demands: What is urgently needed from public authorities

To scale these efforts and ensure long-term impact, participants made a series of concrete demands to public institutions, calling for support, coordination, and political will.

Improved public transport and mobility

Many towns remain poorly connected, which complicates emergency response and isolates affected communities. A more integrated and equitable mobility system is crucial to ensure access to services, aid, and opportunities.

Urgent measures considering new autumn rains and floods

The new wave of torrential weather in the Valencia region underscores that flood risk remains real and systemic. One year after the devastating floods, it is crucial that municipalities maintain clear channels, stabilise critical infrastructure, and communicate emergency protocols effectively.

Support for local resilience and emergency preparation

Civil protection must go beyond sirens and sandbags. Local actors asked for training, equipment, and legal frameworks that allow them to act quickly and effectively when the next crisis hits.

Public education in emergency prevention

Risk awareness must be integrated into schools, local media, and everyday life. Educating the public on how to respond—and how to prevent harm—is one of the most effective forms of resilience-building.

Public space planning: climate shelters, social hubs, and water management systems

Public spaces should serve multiple functions in times of crisis. Offering shade and refuge during heatwaves, space for community gatherings, and systems for absorbing and redirecting floodwater. Recovery is an opportunity to reimagine these places as infrastructure for collective wellbeing.

Mapping of local capacities and resources

Institutions must support the co-creation of territorial maps that visualise existing initiatives, gaps, and assets. This will enable more coordinated responses and reduce duplication of efforts in future emergencies.

Long-term transformation: What a resilient and just future requires

Beyond immediate recovery, participants expressed a bold and hopeful vision for long-term territorial transformation. It is not enough to rebuild what was lost. The goal is to build something better, more just, and more resilient.

A green and permeable territory, resilient by design

Urban and rural landscapes must be redesigned to live with water rather than against it. Nature-based solutions, permeable surfaces, and regenerative land use practices can help absorb future shocks and restore ecological balance.

Communities that are informed, prepared, and connected

Empowered communities are those with access to knowledge, tools, and mutual support. A resilient future requires that every neighbourhood — not just centralised authorities — knows how to act, how to help, and how to stay safe.

Justice and repair for affected people and places

Recovery must not reproduce inequality. It must address historical vulnerabilities, provide meaningful redress for those harmed, and ensure that marginalised groups are included in decision-making and rebuilding.

Shared infrastructure and communications networks

From interoperable data systems to community radio and WhatsApp groups, horizontal information flows can accelerate recovery and strengthen local autonomy. These networks must be planned, maintained, and supported — not improvised at the last minute.

A territory with coherence, solidarity, and shared consciousness

The DANA has shown that what affects one municipality affects the whole region. Participants called for a new territorial imagination that recognises interdependence, centres care, and sees the region not as a collection of isolated towns but as a living, learning, and collectively governed whole.





Phase 3 International perspectives on recovery planning

- 1** Innovation for citizen participation.
- 2** Innovation in territorial development.
- 3** Innovation in resource, housing, and water management.
- 4** The perspective of cities and towns.

Session 1

Innovation for citizen participation.

The opening session explored how active citizen involvement can drive community reconstruction and build collective resilience in the face of climate emergencies. Moderated by eldiario.es editor Laura Martínez, the panel brought together voices from civil society, culture, and international urban innovation. Julio Huerta (Fundació Horta Sud) stressed the need to create independent community-run spaces as future social coordination centres, emphasizing that rebuilding trust is essential for a shared future. Borja Ramírez, representing the Local Emergency and Reconstruction Committees, traced their grassroots origins to the institutional void left by the DANA floods, asserting that any meaningful recovery must be participatory and transformative. He also made a strong political call for justice, denouncing the current regional leadership's denialist and exclusionary stance. May Ibáñez (FIVM - projecte Cànter) showcased how music can foster emotional recovery and territorial cohesion, detailing efforts to support 150 affected artists through concerts and digital platforms. Gabriella Gómez-Mont (Laboratorio para la Ciudad) shared international insights on civic innovation, underlining that real participation heals, builds trust, and accelerates transformation when it is transparent, inclusive, and culturally grounded.

Learnings:

- Citizen participation is not an accessory but a necessity for a just and effective recovery process.
- Local committees emerged as a grass-roots response to institutional absence and are demanding a seat at the table.
- Cultural actors, especially in the music sector, play a vital role in both emotional recovery and territorial cohesion.
- Building trust in institutions requires transparency, co-creation, and long-term engagement from the outset.
- Participation must be deep and real, not symbolic or limited to consultation, and should include cultural and emotional dimensions.

Session 2

Innovation in territorial development

This session focused on strategies for building a resilient, sustainable, and connected territory in the wake of disaster. Moderated by journalist Raquel Ejerique, the panel featured Hans Karssenberg (Placemaking Europe), Joan Romero (Universitat de València), Pau Rausell (economist), Júlia Pineda (urban architect), and Paco Alós (Caixa Popular). Karssenberg opened with global lessons on adapting to climate-driven disasters, drawing from examples in Singapore, the Netherlands, and Ukraine to argue for proactive, green, and community-rooted cities. Romero warned of an alarming disconnect between academic consensus and public policy, calling for a shift toward territorial innovation strategies, true metropolitan coordination, and horizontal social policies. Rausell echoed the need for metropolitan thinking, particularly in cultural policy, while Pineda emphasized the geographic and socioeconomic disparities across affected regions, urging the protection of green and blue infrastructure beyond urban centres. Alós assessed the DANA's economic impact at 20–30% of the province's economy and highlighted the barriers posed by bureaucracy and lack of institutional outreach. The panel converged on a critical message: rebuilding the territory must involve bold, structural changes, not repeating old mistakes in the same vulnerable places.

Learnings:

- There is a clear academic consensus on what needs to change, but a persistent gap between knowledge and policy action.
- Metropolitan coordination is essential for resilience but remains structurally absent in much of Spain.
- Green and blue infrastructure must be protected and prioritised across the entire territory, not just central urban areas.
- Innovation requires political courage and strategic investment, particularly in vulnerable or overlooked regions.
- Climate adaptation must be structural, not patchwork — rebuilding in the same way, in the same places, is no longer acceptable.

Session 3

Innovation in resource, housing, and water management

This session addressed how infrastructure, housing, and water systems must be rethought in light of climate change, calling for structural transformation rather than reactive fixes. Moderated by Ramon Marrades (Placemaking Europe), the panel featured Andrea Ariza (architect and urban planner), Vincent Marzà (MEP), Marta García Chico (agricultural engineer), and Joan Àngel Conca (Egevasa). Ariza underscored that the DANA was not just a natural event, but the result of a flawed territorial model, and warned that post-emergency planning must challenge the systemic roots of vulnerability. Marzà stressed the urgency of aligning recovery with international frameworks like the Sendai Framework and called for truly transformative adaptation strategies. García Chico expressed frustration with the political inertia that buries ambitious green infrastructure projects, sharing how she now redirects her efforts to participatory schoolyard transformations. Conca highlighted how public companies ensured rapid water supply after the floods, but argued that more municipal and supra-municipal coordination is needed. Before the panel, international speakers — including Ryan Smolar (USA), Philipp Rode (LSE), Jakub Mazur (Poland), and Hanna Balik (Turkey) — shared lived experiences of recovery, underscoring the importance of citizen-led resilience

centres, adaptable infrastructure, long-term investment, and deep local knowledge. The session concluded with a shared conviction: climate adaptation must be anticipatory, participatory, and brave enough to confront the territorial and political systems that deepen vulnerability.

Learnings:

- Disasters are not just natural events but the consequence of territorial models and socio-economic inequalities.
- Climate adaptation requires governance models that are collaborative, cross-sectoral, and future-facing.
- Many transformative plans remain in drawers due to political turnover and lack of implementation mechanisms.
- Public utilities can and must play a proactive role in resilience, but they need clearer mandates and stronger coordination.
- International experiences highlight the need for flexible, community-based resilience frameworks that evolve with new challenges.

Session 4

The perspective of cities and towns

The final session centred the voices of local mayors from affected municipalities, highlighting the practical challenges, urgent decisions, and long-term visions emerging at the frontline of the DANA recovery. Moderated by eldiario.es's Sergi Pitarch, the session featured Lorena Silvent (Catarroja), Ricardo Gabaldón (Utiel), Alfons Domínguez (Alzira), and Jorge Rodríguez (Ontinyent). Silvent recounted the chaos and solidarity of the first hours in Catarroja, calling for a recovery plan that prioritises people, protects natural buffers like the orchard, and prohibits risky urban designs like underground parking in flood zones. Domínguez stressed the value of a population trained in self-protection and described how Alzira has redirected funds from road expansion to flood prevention infrastructure. Rodríguez shared Ontinyent's pioneering decision to relocate an entire flood-prone neighbourhood after the 2019 DANA, turning it into a park — a bold, long-term solution not easily replicated but illustrative of the scale of intervention required. Gabaldón described how early school closures in Utiel likely saved lives and lamented the bureaucratic paralysis that, despite €46 million in state funds, has stalled basic reconstruction. All mayors agreed: recovery requires extraordinary tools, technical capacity, and community

involvement — not a return to old models, but a rethinking of how and where we build.

Learnings:

- Local governments are leading recovery with creativity and courage, often in the face of limited resources and excessive bureaucracy.
- Rapid, life-saving decisions were made by mayors regardless of political affiliation, underscoring the need for depoliticised collaboration.
- Self-protection culture and local risk awareness are critical assets that must be nurtured and institutionalised.
- Some municipalities are pioneering bold strategies such as neighbourhood relocation, but these require long timelines and state support.
- Reconstruction must go beyond surface repairs to rethink urban planning, land use, and flood defence infrastructure.



Gabriella Gómez-Mont, Borja Ramírez, May Ibáñez & Julio Huerta
Julio Cebolla



Attendees chat outside at the venue entrance
Julio Cebolla



Project team and event staff
Julio Cebolla



Raquel Pérez Ejerique, Hans Karssenberg, Joan Romero, Pau Rausell, Júlia Pineda & Paco Alós
Julio Cebolla



Case studies

- 1** Ryan Smolar Asheville, USA
- 2** Hanna Balik, Türkiye
- 3** Jakub Mazur, Wrocław
- 4** Guillermo Bernal Mexico City, Mexico
- 5** Philipp Rode, LSE Cities



Ryan Smolar Asheville, USA

Ryan Smolar, co-director of Placemaking US, reflected on his experience supporting recovery efforts in Asheville, North Carolina, after Hurricane Helene. With no warning and no emergency systems in place, residents were suddenly left without running water, showers, or basic services for two months. What made the biggest difference, he explained, was the spontaneous response of communities themselves. People came together to form resilience hubs where they sheltered neighbours, offered support, shared resources, and found creative ways to cope. Although a plan for such hubs had existed since 2018, it had never been activated until communities took matters into their own hands.

The main takeaway from this experience is that true power of recovery lies not in top-down interventions but in the local connections and leadership that emerge in moments of crisis. He warned that without continued support, these grassroots efforts risk fading away, despite their success. To build long-term resilience, Smolar argued, we need to trust and invest in communities, not just with infrastructure, but with the tools, space, and flexibility to shape their own futures.



Hanna Balik Türkiye

Hanna Balik, originally from Türkiye and trained in urban planning, was inspired to study community-led recovery after the 2023 earthquakes. She observed how young people used social media like Twitter (now X) and Instagram to organise aid and share vital information when official systems struggled. Her research examines how these grassroots efforts formed, the challenges they faced, and lessons for future disaster recovery.

Local knowledge, collective action, and collaboration proved essential for an effective response. Communities often acted faster and more effectively than formal organisations, using digital tools to coordinate support. However, they faced barriers such as limited resources and occasional restrictions on communication platforms. When internet connection and electricity were disrupted, local TV became a crucial channel for sharing information. In such cases, broader broadcast platforms must ensure community-sourced knowledge reaches everyone. For recovery to succeed, policymakers must prioritise bottom-up approaches and centre local voices in planning and decision-making. This support strengthens resilience and empowers communities to lead their own recovery.



Jakub Mazur Wrocław

Jakub Mazur, Vice Mayor of Wrocław and former President of METREX, shared the long-term perspective of a city that has faced major floods. The most devastating event occurred in 1997, when 40% of Wrocław was submerged. At that time, Poland was still a relatively poor country rebuilding its economy. Despite the hardship, recovery was made possible through solidarity at multiple levels: international support from institutions like the World Bank and EIB; national leadership, with immediate on-site presence from the Prime Minister and emergency services; and local civic action involving residents, volunteers, and the municipality. Over the past three decades, Wrocław has invested billions in resilient infrastructure and proactive risk planning.

Effective disaster response relies on **three key pillars**: infrastructure, procedures, and people—especially those who contribute local knowledge and coordinate communication. Citizens play a vital role in sharing timely, critical information, supported by a well-prepared city management team ready to respond 24/7. To conclude, President Mazur expressed solidarity with Valencia and encouraged European cities to not only share technical expertise but also build trust and mutual support.



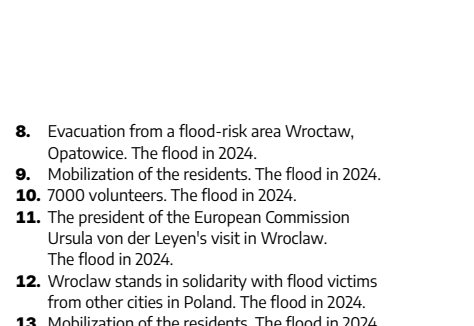
Wrocław, 3rd largest city in Poland



The flood in 1997. Flooded estate in Wrocław - Kozanów



1. The flood in 1997.
2. Wrocław before the flood risk in September 2024.
3. Dry retention tank in Racibórz.
4. The residents cooperating with the local services. The flood in 2024.
5. Mobilization of the residents. The flood in 2024.
6. Soldiers securing the embankments. The flood in 2024.
7. Updating the flood protection plan on an ongoing basis. The flood in 2024.



8. Evacuation from a flood-risk area Wrocław, Opatowice. The flood in 2024.
9. Mobilization of the residents. The flood in 2024.
10. 7000 volunteers. The flood in 2024.
11. The president of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen's visit in Wrocław. The flood in 2024.
12. Wrocław stands in solidarity with flood victims from other cities in Poland. The flood in 2024.
13. Mobilization of the residents. The flood in 2024.



Guillermo Bernal Mexico City, Mexico

Guillermo Bernal from The Place Institute shared how their work in Acapulco responded to the devastation caused by Hurricane Otis. The impact went beyond physical damage; it disrupted daily life and a sense of community. The team focused their efforts on La Laja, one of the hardest-hit neighbourhoods, by restoring a vital public staircase used daily by schoolchildren and residents. Together with the community, they planted native vegetation, installed benches, and painted colourful murals, transforming the space into one of joy, healing, and connection.

What made the project successful was the process itself. They listened, co-designed, and built alongside residents. Community members took active roles, from watering plants to cleaning the site, showing how placemaking can foster ownership and solidarity. The experience revealed that recovery is not a one-time event. It is a continuous, relational effort.

Scaling such interventions is not about replication. Instead, it involves applying a flexible model grounded in participation and local leadership. Policy-makers must invest in strong community networks **before** disaster strikes. Those rooted in place are best positioned to respond with care, trust, and agility.





Philipp Rode LSE Cities

Dr. Philipp Rode, Executive Director of LSE Cities, stressed the importance of rethinking how cities prepare for complex emergencies caused by climate change, pandemics, and other broad challenges. While many cities manage routine crises effectively, they are less ready for large-scale, interconnected events such as severe floods. These require coordinated regional planning and long-term strategies. Examples include Tokyo's underground stormwater tunnels and Hamburg's flood-resilient neighbourhoods designed to safely manage periodic flooding without major damage.

Community awareness is essential for resilience. Sharing information about local risks like floods or fires in schools or through "welcome kits" for new residents helps people understand how to stay safe. Grassroots groups often provide faster and more effective support than formal organisations during emergencies, highlighting the power of local knowledge and community-led action. Building lasting resilience requires integrated leadership that connects housing, transport, energy, and infrastructure sectors. Prioritising climate adaptation, community preparedness, and strong coordination across city departments is crucial to ensure no critical service is overlooked during emergencies.

Conclusions



This decalogue gathers the main conclusions of the Innovation for Recovery initiative, developed over several months and three interlinked phases: a citizen survey, a participatory mapping process with local actors, and a public forum bringing together community leaders, institutions, and international experts. It reflects the collective intelligence of hundreds of people and organisations who are already working toward a better future for the Valencian territory. These ten principles distill what we have learned, not only about what went wrong, but about how to rebuild fairly, effectively, and with a long-term vision. They work as a practical compass for action: grounded in lived experience, supported by technical knowledge, and driven by a deep sense of justice.

1 Put people at the centre of recovery

Recovery must respond to human needs first, emotional, social, material, recognising trauma, caring for the most vulnerable, and supporting everyday life before infrastructures.

2 Recognise and support grassroots self-organisation

The local committees that emerged after the floods are not temporary actors but key democratic agents. Their role must be legitimised, resourced, and institutionally recognised.

3 Build trust through transparency and co-responsibility

Public institutions must communicate clearly, act transparently, and share decision-making power. Trust is built when people see themselves reflected in both the process and outcomes.

4 Invest in social and cultural infrastructure as resilience infrastructure

Community centres, schools, cultural spaces, and places of sociability are not secondary. They are the glue of collective recovery and must be protected, activated, and reimaged.

5 Integrate health and mental wellbeing into emergency response

Disasters leave invisible wounds. Public health systems, especially primary care, must incorporate long-term psychosocial support, including early intervention and care for caregivers.

6 Transform public space as climate shelter, social hub, and water system

Plazas, parks, and streets must serve multiple functions: cooling spaces during heatwaves, gathering places in times of crisis, and permeable surfaces that manage water intelligently.

7 Coordinate at the metropolitan and territorial scale

Floods don't respect municipal boundaries. Effective recovery requires cooperation across cities, villages, and sectors, with a metropolitan governance structure that enables joint planning.

8 Redesign housing and infrastructure with climate adaptation in mind

We must stop rebuilding in risk-prone areas and rethink the design and regulation of housing, public facilities, and water systems to anticipate, and not just react to, future disasters.

9 Turn cultural practices into drivers of recovery

Music, art, and storytelling are not luxuries. They are tools to restore meaning, strengthen belonging, and activate participation. Recovery must include cultural programming and support for local creators.

10 Move from emergency to transformation

Recovery cannot mean returning to a failed normality. It must be the lever for structural change—toward a greener, fairer, and more democratic territory, ready for the challenges to come. The focus must shift from merely “surviving the reconstruction” to driving real transformation rather than just rebuilding what was broken. This transformation is not only about process innovation but also about creating permeable, regenerative public spaces that embody and sustain this change in everyday life.

OeIDiarlo.es | Comunitat Valenciana

placemaking ■ **europe**

Innovation for Recovery

Rebuilding València after the DANA Floods