



6th Progress Meeting in Leuven

Project partners met in Leuven, Belgium on Thursday 14th September and Friday 15th September for VARCITIES 6th progress meeting.



*Officially started in September 2020, the EU-funded project **VARCITIES** aims to implement real, visionary ideas and to add value by establishing sustainable models for increasing the health and well-being of citizens who are exposed to diverse climatic conditions and challenges in and around Europe.*



Representatives from the seven cities and 17 organisations that compose VARCITIES' consortium met face to face in the Town Hall of Leuven to review the progress made in the project over the past six months and discuss the implementation of the different visionary solutions developed in VARCITIES' seven Pilots. This September, the project enters its fourth year!

First day



The first day focused on the **implementation of the Visionary Solutions** and each Pilot city together with their Pilot experts was given the opportunity to present their progress. Castelfranco Veneto (Italy), Chania (Greece), Dundalk (Ireland), Leuven (Belgium), Gżira (Malta), Novo Mesto (Slovenia) and Skellefteå (Sweden) discussed their updated implementation plan for each Visionary Solutions, showcasing the real progress made on the ground following the co-design phase.

It was also the occasion for all project partners to take part to the **third cross-learning workshop**, facilitated by Prospex Institute (PI). During this workshop, partners engaged in discussions to identify **shared challenges, collaborate on potential solutions, and gain valuable insights from external experts**. The workshop included two sessions and featured members from VARCITIES' External Advisory Board.

The first session focused on **how to assess the impacts of nature-based solutions (NBS) with stakeholders**. Dr Daniela Rizzi from ICLEI shared insights from prior and ongoing EU-funded NBS projects, underscoring the significance of assessment and monitoring for the sustainability of NBS. Notably, the Coordination and Support Action NetworkNature led by ICLEI has compiled impact indicators utilized in Horizon 2020 projects, creating the first European compendium of indicators tailored to assessing the impacts of NBS in addressing various social challenges. Daniela emphasized the



importance **of transparent and open impact assessment procedures**, particularly given the intricate nature of NBS impacts. Within the VARCITIES project, the evaluation and monitoring process is an integral part of the collaborative development with stakeholders. Under the guidance of PI, participants had the opportunity to discuss and generate ideas for implementing the co-evaluation process in each Pilot.

Fabrizio Tavaroli from RINA presented a second session on the challenges linked with the **implementation of nature-based solutions and procurement rules**. Fabrizio presented the pros and cons of public and private procurement from the engineering perspective, illustrating his arguments with several case-studies (patented sand bag solutions for artificial dunes, green roofs in Dublin).



In the afternoon, VARCITIES partners explored the **Pilot site in Leuven**, formerly the 'Hertogensite' hospital area, which is currently undergoing a transformation into a versatile and environmentally friendly neighbourhood. The project partners strolled through the site, inspecting the ongoing construction activities and the utilization of sensors for monitoring health and weather conditions. Their walk concluded at the temporary Velodrome, a wooden structure serving as a social and cultural hub.



Second Day

On the Second Day, Project partners **reviewed the work performed** in the last 6 months by each Work Package.



Prof. Denia Kolokotsa from the Technical University of Crete (TUC), VARCITIES's project coordinator, reviewed the general management of the project and the main milestones that were achieved.

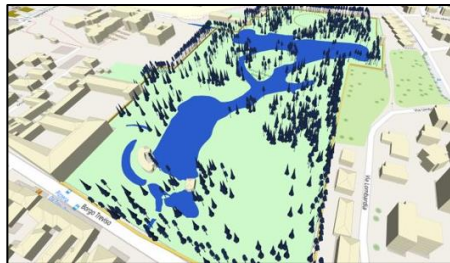




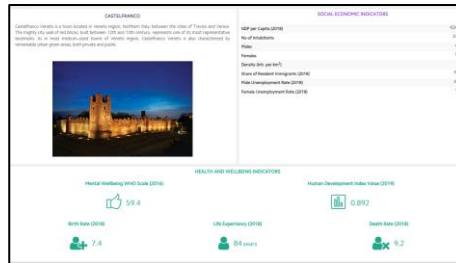
PI presented their efforts to organize and shape the engagement activities for the pilots throughout the co-implementation phase, which aims to ensure that feedback from stakeholders is gathered and duly considered.



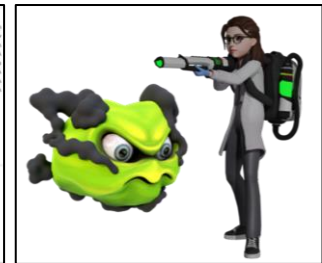
Integrated Environmental Solutions (IES), SENSEEDGE and KORONA provided updates on the ICT aspects of the projects. They reported that 3-D digital twins have been created for all pilots. Additionally, the Health and Well-Being Platform is currently in the prefinal stage, with data flow functioning in real time. The final layout for the platform has been agreed upon and is in the finalization phase. The GoNature Game is anticipated to be ready by February 2024, featuring gameplay where players hunt pollution sources, multiplayer options, and a strong educational focus on introducing players to Visionary Solutions within the pilot projects.



3-D model



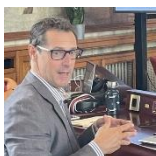
H&WB Platform



Models from GoNature Game



E2ARC, who leads the challenging task of guiding the implementation of 28 Visionary Solutions in seven Pilots presented the overall implementation status, highlighting risks and contingency measures. While most Visionary Solutions are on track, specific interventions are impacted by challenges linking with rising costs and procurement difficulties. E2ARC together with Pilot experts monitors these issues and propose mitigation measures to ensure all Visionary Solutions are implemented by February 2024.



University of Malta (UM) presented their on-going work devising a methodology for Monitoring and Evaluation, which is entering its fourth monitoring period for the selected set of indicators. For each pilot, a selection of prioritised indicators will also publicly available on the H&WB platform, thus allowing users and local stakeholders to check in real time the benefits brought by the Visionary Solutions to indicators such as air quality and noise. UM and EURAC also presentend an updated methodology to conduct a Social Return on Investment Analysis in all Pilots.





INLECOM and Crowdhelix updated partners on VARCITIES's innovation management strategy, with an update on technologies developed within the project with patent potential.

Finally, Crowdhelix, the ISOCARP Institute and University of Malta presented on-going communication and dissemination activities and their plan to ramp up event participation and dissemination towards specific target audiences, especially with the ICT components of the project going live soon.

To conclude VARCITIES' 6th Progress Meeting, project coordinator Prof. Denia Kolokotsa was happy to report that VARCITIES' successful implementation is on track. Project partners will be meeting again physically in February 2023 for the 7th Progress Meeting.

Stay tuned for the next updates on the project: <https://www.varcities.eu/>

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