



## 7<sup>th</sup> Progress Meeting in Novo Mesto

Project partners met in Novo Mesto, Slovenia on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> and Friday 8<sup>th</sup> of March for VARCITIES' 7<sup>th</sup> progress meeting.



Representatives from the seven cities and 17 organisations that compose VARCITIES' consortium met face to face in Novo Mesto 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.



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.

## First day

### Pilot updates



The first day focused on the **co-implementation of the Visionary Solutions** and each Pilot city, together with their Pilot experts, took the floor to showcase the real progress made on the ground. We are happy to report that our Pilot Cities of **Skellefteå (Sweden)** and **Novo Mesto (Slovenia)** are done with the implementation of their respective Visionary Solutions: they are now **fully operational**, providing direct health and well-being benefits to the users of their pilot sites.

Castelfranco Veneto (Italy), Chania (Greece), Dundalk (Ireland), Leuven (Belgium), Gżira (Malta), will finalise their implementation of their respective solutions in the coming months. We are aiming to have most if not all our Visionary Solutions operational in the next six months!



### Knowledge exchange workshop



To promote the knowledge exchange between VARCITIES' partners, project partner E2ARC, who coordinates the implementation of VARCITIES' Visionary Solutions across 7 Pilot sites, facilitated a **Workshop on the Lessons Learned from the Implementation Process**.

Each Pilot team was invited to reflect on what worked best, what external factors impacted the process, what expertise was required, which internal processes they had to follow, etc. This self-reflection exercise will also inform the upcoming replication activities of VARCITIES.



In the afternoon, VARCITIES' partners explored the **Pilot site in Novo Mesto**, known as the recreational area of Češča Vas, located in the western part of Novo mesto, a mere 2-3 km from the city centre.



They were welcomed by **Gregor Macedoni, Mayor of Novo Mesto**, who presented the development strategy of the municipality for the area. A former military complex, it was abandoned in the early nineties and later reclaimed by the Municipality of Novo Mesto to develop a comprehensive sport and leisure complex in the area, with a renovated Velodrome, a new swimming-pool complex attached to an Olympic Sport Center, horse-riding facilities and a number of outdoor activities suitable for children, youth, the elderly and people with special needs.



Following a tour of the facilities led by Peter Geršič VARCITIES' Pilot Team Leader in Novo Mesto, Project Partners were introduced in detail to the five Visionary Solutions that are currently operational in Novo Mesto, which include nature restoration and landscaping, the creation of sustainable forest trails, an integrated programme of activities, IoT tools, and a centralised information management system. Project partners were thoroughly impressed by the Pilot site and how the Municipality of Novo Mesto and its partners managed to leverage diverse complementary funding sources to finance the different interventions at their site, VARCITIES supporting the most innovative ones.



## Second Day

On the Second Day, Project partners reconvened to **review the work performed** in the last 6 months by each Work Package (WP).



**Technical University of Crete**, VARCITIES's project coordinator, reviewed the general management of the project (WP2) and the main milestones that were achieved, highlighting that no major deviations are to report. Following an amendment to the grant agreement, they were happy to report that VARCITIES' replication activities will have a larger scope than initially planned, promoting the adoption of our digital, social and nature-based Visionary Solutions beyond our seven Pilot Cities.

The **Prospex Institute** presented their efforts to organize and shape the engagement activities for the pilots (WP4). With the co-implementation phase ending in several projects, gathering feedback from stakeholders is crucial to consider users' experience.

**Integrated Environmental Solutions** (IES) provided updates on the ICT aspects of the projects (WP5). Final fine-tuning of the Health and Well-Being Platform is currently happening to ensure that the data flows between the Pilots and the Platform functions perfectly well. **DARTEK** took the floor to present a demo of the GoNature Game, VARCITIES' own Virtual Reality game, which sees players hunt pollution sources in 3-D renders of the seven pilots' sites.

**E2ARC**, who coordinates the co-creation of VARCITIES' Visionary Solutions across seven Pilots (WP6) presented the overall implementation status, highlighting risks and contingency measures. They were happy to report that us of 29 Visionary Solutions, 18 are fully operational!

Their presentation focused on the new task introduced last year as part of an amendment to the VARCITIES' grant agreement, which will see the development of an online tool to support the replication of VARCITIES' Visionary Solutions.

**University of Malta** presented their on-going work monitoring and evaluating the impacts (WP7) of VARCITIES' interventions in the Pilot sites, notably through the data collected from the sensors installed on-site. Now that the co-implementation phase is coming to a close, stakeholders will be invited to contribute to the co-evaluation of these impacts and benefits, notably with the performance of Social Return on Investments analysis (coordinated by **EURAC**). The evaluation results will support the development of VARCITIES' replication tool.

**INLECOM** and **Crowdhelix** updated partners on VARCITIES's innovation management and commercialisation strategy (WP8), with an update the preparation of envisaged commercialisation pathways and the identification of potential barriers.

Finally, **Crowdhelix**, the **ISOCARP Institute** and **University of Malta** presented on-going communication and dissemination activities (WP9), with several participations in events in the last six months.

To conclude VARCITIES' 7th Progress Meeting, a general assembly was held to discuss several internal matters. Our Project coordinator, the University of Crete, looks forward to the next six months. Project partners will be meeting again physically in September 2024 for the 8<sup>th</sup> Progress Meeting in Dundalk, Ireland.

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

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**For any inquiries:** [contact@varcities.eu](mailto:contact@varcities.eu)

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