



VARCITIES enters its Final Year

8th Progress Meeting in Dundalk

Project partners were in Dundalk, Ireland on Wednesday 4th and Thursday 5th of September for VARCITIES' 8th progress meeting.

As the project enters its final year, 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.



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement No. 869505.

First day

Pilot updates

The first day focused on the **co-implementation of the Visionary Solutions**: each Pilot city, together with their Pilot experts, took the floor to showcase the real progress made on the ground. While our Skelleftea (Sweden) and Novo Mesto (Slovenia) pilots have been operational since the beginning of the year, our Dundalk (Ireland), Leuven (Belgium) and Chania (Greece) pilots have **unveiled their solution in the past few months!** Summer 2024 was also rich with **socio-cultural events at our pilot sites**, with a total of more than 60 events organised, focusing on health and well-being for all!

We are happy to report that our Pilot Cities are mostly done with the implementation of their respective Visionary Solutions and the majority of our 28 VS are now fully operational, providing direct health and well-being benefits to the users of their pilot sites.



VARCITIES' partners had the opportunity to directly explore the **Pilot site in Dundalk**, known as The Still, located in the courtyard of Dundalk Library and Museum Quarter. Inaugurated in June 2024, the pilot site proposed a new regenerated area, with a learning pod (VS1), a sensory



garden (VS2) and bike-station (VS3), and is dotted with a number of sensors to monitor Health and Well-Being parameters.

Knowledge exchange workshop

To promote the **exchange of knowledge** between VARCITIES' partners, Prospex Institute proposed two cross-learning workshops. A first workshop delved into the arduous question of the **sustainable financing** of VARCITIES' Visionary Solutions beyond the end of the project. A discussion between Isobel Fletcher (Horizon Nua CEO) and Colin Keogh (from partner INLECOM), moderated by Marc Gramberger (Prospex Institute Managing Director) offered insights into the different pathways for financial sustainability, commercial or not and the different types of existing financing that can be mobilised for nature-based solutions. A second workshop led by the Prospex Institute team gave us the opportunity to reflect on the **local engagement activities**, what worked best and what could have worked better. Our pilot teams shared their experiences and reflections, which will help the continuation of the local engagement processes, notably for the **co-evaluation phase**, but also beyond the project.



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, confirming the 6-month extension granted to the project. A key task in the last year of the project for WP2 will be organisation of a **Standardisation Workshop**.





Prospex Institute presented the preliminary take-aways from their on-going research on the **governance of the happy and sustainable cities**, based on interviews with our seven pilots. In the next months, the **final round of Stakeholder Engagement & Co-Creation Workshops** will be organised as part of the co-evaluation phase, gathering feedback from stakeholders is crucial to consider users' experience.

Integrated Environmental Solutions (IES)

provided updates on the ICT aspects of the projects (WP5). Following the public release of VARCITIES Health and Well-Being Platform this spring, a small update was implemented this summer to improve the data flows between the Pilots and the Platform. **DARTTEK** took the floor to present a final 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 and will soon be released publicly.

VARCITIES' Health & Well-Being Platform is now publicly available, with live data-feed from the seven Pilot 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 most Visionary Solutions are fully operational with the remaining ones coming into operations in the Autumn. Their presentation focused on the new task introduced last year as part of an amendment to to VARCITIES' grant agreement, which sees the development of an online tool to support the replication of VARCITIES' Visionary Solutions.

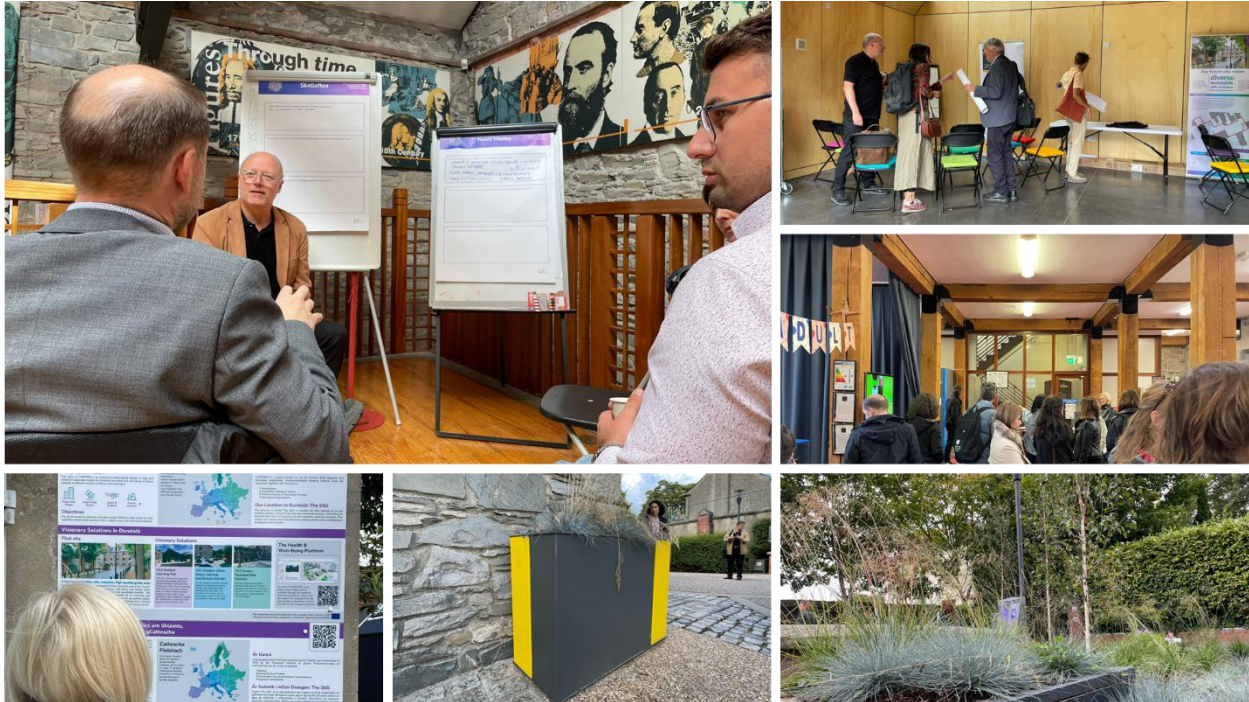


University of Malta presented their on-going work monitoring and evaluating the impacts (WP7) of VARCITIES' interventions in the Pilot sites, notably through the data collected from the sensors installed on-site. Now that the co-evaluation phase is starting, stakeholders are invited to contribute to the co-evaluation of these impacts and benefits. Pilots will perform their 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 on the business plans developed for the SMEs present within VARCITES' consortium.



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, notably at the New European Bauhaus Festival. In the coming weeks, pilots will engage in city-to-city exchange with partner cities to present their Visionary Solutions and collect replication feedback from other municipalities.



To conclude VARCITIES' 8th Progress Meeting our Project coordinator, **Technical University of Crete**, looks forward to the final year of the project. Project partners will be meeting again physically in the first quarter of 2025 for the 9th Progress Meeting in Castelfranco Veneto, Italy.

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