



Shaping Greener, Healthier Cities

Varcities Final Event

Brussels, 5 June 2025 – As part of EU Green Week 2025, VARCITIES celebrated its Final Event at CIVA in Brussels, “Shaping Greener, Healthier Cities.” The event brought together city representatives, researchers, urban planners, policymakers, and EU officials to reflect on four years of innovation, co-creation, and measurable impact in seven European cities.



VARCITIES’ Final Event marked the end of VARCITIES’ formal journey, but also the beginning of its legacy: a call to action for cities to lead the green transition with creativity, evidence, and deep citizen engagement. With tools, data, and partnerships in place, VARCITIES now stands as a blueprint for healthier, greener and more inclusive urban futures across Europe!



The day opened with Dr. **Dionysia Kolokotsa**, Project Coordinator from the Technical University of Crete, who set the tone by highlighting the ambition and legacy of VARCITIES: **creating people-centered public spaces that integrate nature-based, digital, and social innovation to enhance urban health and well-being.**



SESSION 1: From Vision to Reality: Local Impacts Across Europe

Eleni Goni (E2ARC) and Koldo Urrutia-Azcona (IES) introduced the session with an overview of the VARCITIES framework, a portfolio of 29 Visionary Solutions deployed across seven pilot sites, supported by a common ICT infrastructure to measure impact and drive digital innovation.

Each pilot city, **Castelfranco Veneto, Chania, Dundalk, Gżira, Leuven, Novo Mesto, and Skellefteå**, then presented how VARCITIES transformed their local environments. These short pitches highlighted what conditions were in place before VARCITIES, what changed during the project, and how local actions aligned with wider city strategies.

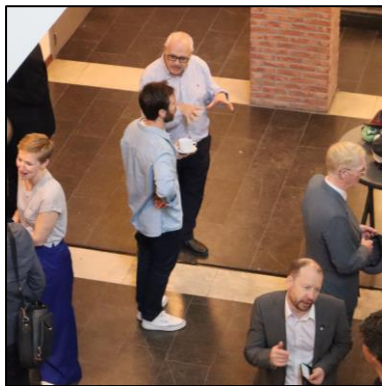
The session also featured the presentation of two digital tools developed to enhance awareness and decision-making: IES introduced the **Health & Well-Being (HWB) Platform**, a digital twin designed to visualize and monitor real-time data from the pilot sites. The platform supports evidence-based urban planning by offering insights into environmental conditions, space usage, and sensor-based feedback. DARTTEK then presented the **GoNature Game**, a virtual reality application aimed at raising awareness about sustainability and environmental challenges. The game invites users to explore stylized digital twins of the pilot cities, encouraging community engagement and learning through interactive missions and real-time data integration.

The session concluded with a moderated panel discussion between the pilot representatives, led by Sara Van Rompaey (E2ARC), which allowed for deeper reflection on the challenges and lessons learned during implementation.



Session 1 underlined the diversity of local contexts and the shared value of co-creation, digital innovation, and nature-based interventions as levers for sustainable urban development with four cross-cutting insights:

- The value of long-term stakeholder engagement
- The importance of embedding well-being in city policy
- The need for early alignment between planning and sensor/tech strategies
- The role of municipal leadership in replication and upscaling



SESSION 2: From Knowledge to Policy: What Comes Next?

After a lively break featuring demos of the **GoNature game**, and the **Health & Well-Being Digital Platform**, and a sneak peek of **VARCITIES Replication Toolkit** the second session opened with a keynote by **Dr. Barbara Widera**, highlighting the role of design, architecture, and citizen-driven innovation in shaping the green and healthy cities of tomorrow.



This transitioned into a panel discussion, moderated by Dr. Widera. The conversation brought together voices from across the VARCITIES consortium, including Adriano Bisello (EURAC), James Cosier (Prospex Institute), Koldo Urrutia-Azcona (IES), Dr. Dionysia Kolokotsa (Technical University of Crete), Jenny Rainbird (INLECOM), Eleni Goni (E2ARC), and Daniel Micallef (University of Malta).

Together, the panelists explored the critical challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for cities to promote public health and well-being. They discussed necessary orientations for future research, particularly in how nature-based solutions can deliver measurable and lasting benefits. A



recurring theme was the potential role of the New European Bauhaus Facility, and how it could help accelerate integrated, cross-sectoral initiatives across the continent.

The conversation also delved into the importance of securing long-term financing mechanisms, leveraging technology and digital infrastructure, and ensuring that citizens are actively engaged and empowered to co-create change. From implementation strategies to data monitoring, the panel drew on the practical lessons of VARCITIES to highlight what works—and what needs to evolve—to scale impact.

Following the panel, Urban Tocci from DG RTD and Georgios Charalampous from REA offered the European Commission's perspective, reinforcing the importance of research, collaboration, and policy frameworks in supporting cities as they move toward greener, more inclusive futures, and the wider impacts a research project such as VARCITIES must have.

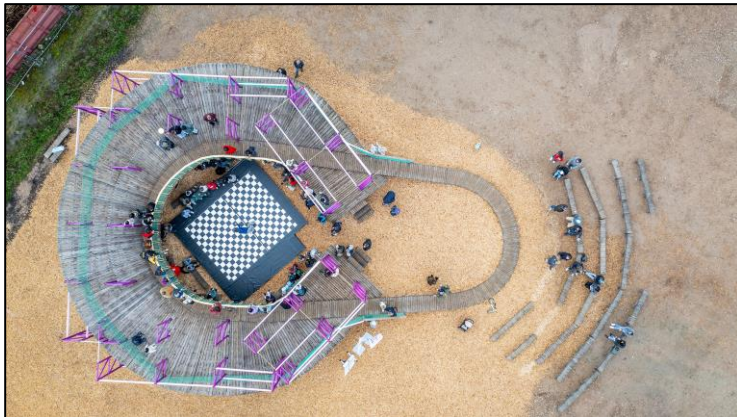


The session concluded with two presentations highlighting **lessons learned** from the implementation of Visionary Solutions and VARCITIES' work to develop **standards** for integrating health and well-being into urban design through Visionary Solutions.

Closing the day, VARCITIES coordinator Dr. Kolokotsa offered final reflections, underscoring key takeaways across policy, financing, technology, and research. Her remarks brought the event full circle: linking local action and pilot results to a broader European agenda for sustainable urban transformation.

A Final Celebration in Leuven

To conclude the day, participants were invited to a side event at the Olevodroom in Leuven, one of VARCITIES' Visionary Solutions. Despite the Belgian rain, the evening featured a vibrant performance by Los Callejeros, offering music, community, and a hands-on experience of how public spaces can be reimagined for health, culture, and connection.



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

For any inquiries: contact@varcities.eu

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