



VARCITIES' partners meet a final time

10th Progress Meeting in Chania

Project partners were in Chania, Greece on Wednesday 2nd and Thursday 3rd of July 2025 for VARCITIES' 10th and final progress meeting.

As the project comes to its end, representatives from the seven cities and 17 organisations that compose VARCITIES' consortium met face to face one final time in Chania, where the project initially started in September 2020, almost five years ago! Project partners reviewed the progress made over the last 3 months and reflected upon the project's outcomes and wider impacts.



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

Representatives from our seven pilot cities reflected on the lasting impacts of their Visionary Solutions, the challenges they overcame, and how their efforts will continue to shape urban health and well-being beyond the project’s end.

Castelfranco Veneto (Italy)

With momentum growing around its local Landscape Observatory (VS 4), Castelfranco is preparing to expand green and blue infrastructure in other parts of the city beyond the pilot site of the Villa Bolasco . Local funding and healthcare partnerships are being mobilised to scale up elements related to health monitoring. The city’s Visionary Solutions are now embedded in wider urban planning strategies, supported by strong political commitment and cross-sector collaboration.



Chania (Greece)

Chania notably used monitoring data from VARCITIES’ sensors to better understand the relationship between urban form and public health. This evidence is already informing discussions on future urban design and planning, supporting long-term integration of health considerations into local policy.



Dundalk (Ireland)

Dundalk’s pilot “The Still” has become vibrant, self-sustaining community assets, with over 185 events hosted since mid-2024. Sustainable construction practices, such as 100% paving reuse, were combined with smart technology and stakeholder engagement to deliver strong environmental and social results. Upscaling is already in motion, with a council-wide rollout of photovoltaic systems and interest from Belfast in replicating. LCC is also working to integrate sensor data into formal planning policy.



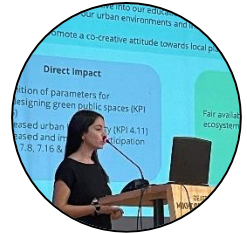
Skellefteå (Sweden)

Skellefteå’s Visionary Solutions will be maintained by the city’s general park administration. The pilot revealed the importance of co-location, long-term funding, and community engagement for successful replication. While technical components like sensors may need additional support, cross-departmental cooperation and strong local buy-in are setting the foundation for applying Visionary Solutions or related approaches in other parks across the city.



Gżira (Malta)

Despite early challenges with construction delays and underground utilities, Gżira’s pilot site established momentum for wider urban greening. With continued support from other projects, Rue D’Argens will be further pedestrianised and enhanced. Schools have embraced the VS by adding their own green features. Pop-up park concepts are also being considered for other urban areas.



Leuven (Belgium)

Leuven’s pilot generated measurable health benefits and informed a more strategic approach to green space design. With nearly 25,000 participants across 89 events, the site demonstrated the role of inclusive, accessible infrastructure in improving both mental and physical well-being. The municipality now sees Visionary Solutions such as Olevodroom (VS1) as key tools for inclusive planning, particularly for vulnerable groups, and is exploring replication.



Novo Mesto (Slovenia)

Novo Mesto’s Cesca Vas park revitalization led to a dramatic increase in community use and engagement. The inclusion of special needs groups and the integration of digital monitoring tools created a strong foundation for both equity and evidence-based planning. Many project elements will continue beyond VARCITIES, including expanded walking routes, co-creation methodologies, and health-focused programming. The pilot is already inspiring replication in nearby communities.



Second Day

VARCITIES’ partners had the opportunity to directly explore one of the **Pilot areas in Chania**, the **Municipal Garden** (known locally as Kypos). Nestled in the heart of the city’s commercial center, between Andrea Papandreou and Tzanakaki Streets, it was originally designed according to European standards, with a mix of evergreen, endemic, and exotic trees. Today, Kypos remains a cherished public space, and through thermal monitoring supported by VARCITIES, the city gathered **data on microclimatic conditions**, demonstrating the garden’s critical role in **mitigating the urban heat island effect**, and further data on broader ecosystem services provided by this



urban green space, not only thermal regulation, but also carbon sequestration and air quality improvement.

We also passed by Chania’s two Visionary Solutions: the Mobile Urban Living Room (MULar) and the bikes and bike-stations with sensors.



Project partners then reconvened to **review the work performed** in the last 6 months by each Work Package (WP) and discuss the final activities of the project before its end.

Presented by the Technical University of Crete, WP2 focused on two key tasks in these final months of the project: First was finalising the report on the **Health & Well-Being (H&WB) Cities External Advisory Board**: composed of nine leading experts in nature-based solutions (NbS) and sustainable urban development, they offered valuable insights and fostering dialogue between work packages throughout the project's duration. Second, WP2 also led the joint **standardisation efforts** of VARCITIES, culminating in the **publication of the CEN Workshop Agreement (CWA)** titled "[Visionary nature-based actions for health, wellbeing & resilience in cities](#)" this June.



For WP4, **Prospex Institute** focused on the outcomes of **co-creation** across the pilots. While structured questionnaires offered valuable feedback, informal approaches, like one-on-one conversations, pop-up events, and social interactions, often led to more meaningful engagement. Trust-building and personal contact with city staff were key to success. The use of clear, citizen-friendly language was essential, though continuity was challenged by staff turnover. In conclusion, **co-creation was widely seen as effective and worth pursuing beyond the project**, but it requires adequate time, funding, and organisational support to be sustainable.



Integrated Environmental Solutions (IES) provided final updates on the ICT aspects of the projects (WP5). **VARCITIES Health and Well-Being Platform** continues to act as a conduit between the reality of our pilot sites (monitored through sensors) and their digital twins, providing valuable insights into usage and environmental conditions, and **GoNature Game**, VARCITIES' own Virtual Reality game is available for all pilot locations.

WP6, led by **E2ARC**, presented the online **Replication Tool**, designed to support cities with a curated portfolio of good practices derived from VARCITIES' Visionary Solutions to enhance urban health and well-being. Additionally, **EURAC** announced the updated analysis of **multiple benefits**, now incorporating data from all **operational Visionary Solutions** across the seven pilot sites.



Led by the **Univeristy of Malta**, WP7 focused on assessing the impact of VARCITIES interventions across the pilot sites through a detailed KPI framework. By comparing final results with the 2020 baseline, the team was able to evaluate whether key objectives were achieved and identify the measurable benefits of each Visionary Solution. Following the **completion of the 10th monitoring period in March 2025**, the work also contributed to report on **upscaling and replication**, outlining how the project's impact can extend beyond its initial scope.

INLECOM and **Crowdhelix** updated partners on VARCITIES' **innovation management and commercialisation strategy** (WP8), this included completion of targeted commercialisation workshops, and the development of sustainability plans for each Pilot. IP management was a core focus in the last year, with **four patents filed**, exceeding the original KPI target of 2-3.



Finally, **Crowdhelix, Institute for Urban Excellence** and **University of Malta** presented the final communication and dissemination activities (WP9) planned for the last months of the project, with specific activities extended beyond August 2025.

To conclude VARCITIES' 10th and final Progress Meeting our Project coordinator Denia Kolokosta thanked her team, Katerina Lili and Elisavet Tsekeri for their continued support throught these five years, and all partners for their work!



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