

6th Meeting of Living-in.EU Signatories - Cross-border cooperation for smart regions, cities and communities

People, traffic, water and air pollution all flow across borders, so must digital solutions. The 6th Meeting of Living-in.EU Signatories took place on the 9th July 2021 and focused on Cross-border cooperation for smart regions, cities and communities.



Living-in.EU

The 6th Living-in.eu signatories meeting took place on 9 July and was organised in association with the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU, focusing on cross-border digital cooperation. It followed "The European Union as a Community of People" Conference of the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the EU on 8 July, and took forward some of the themes explored there

The meeting was interpreted into FR, DE, EN and ES and counted with close to 60 participants, with signatories from all over the EU.

Eddy Hartog, Head of the Technologies for Smart Communities welcomed participants, announcing that Slovenian Minister Bostjan Koritnik had signed the *Join, Boost, Sustain* declaration at the EU as a Community of the People conference the previous day, making Slovenia the third country to join the Living-in.eu at national level. Issy-les-Moulineaux and Pilsen are the two most recent cities to be part of the movement, bringing the number of signatories close to 100.

The event speakers presented their experiences of cross-border digital cooperation.

Einari Kisel, Head of Partnerships and Strategy at FinEst Twins – Smart City Centre of Excellence, presented the FinEst Twins, a collaborative project between Finnish and Estonian cities led by Forum Virium Helsinki and Taltech. Their goal is to improve city environments by piloting new technologies in at least two cities in two different Member States and continuously grow to a world level research and development centre. You can watch a video on the project [here](#).

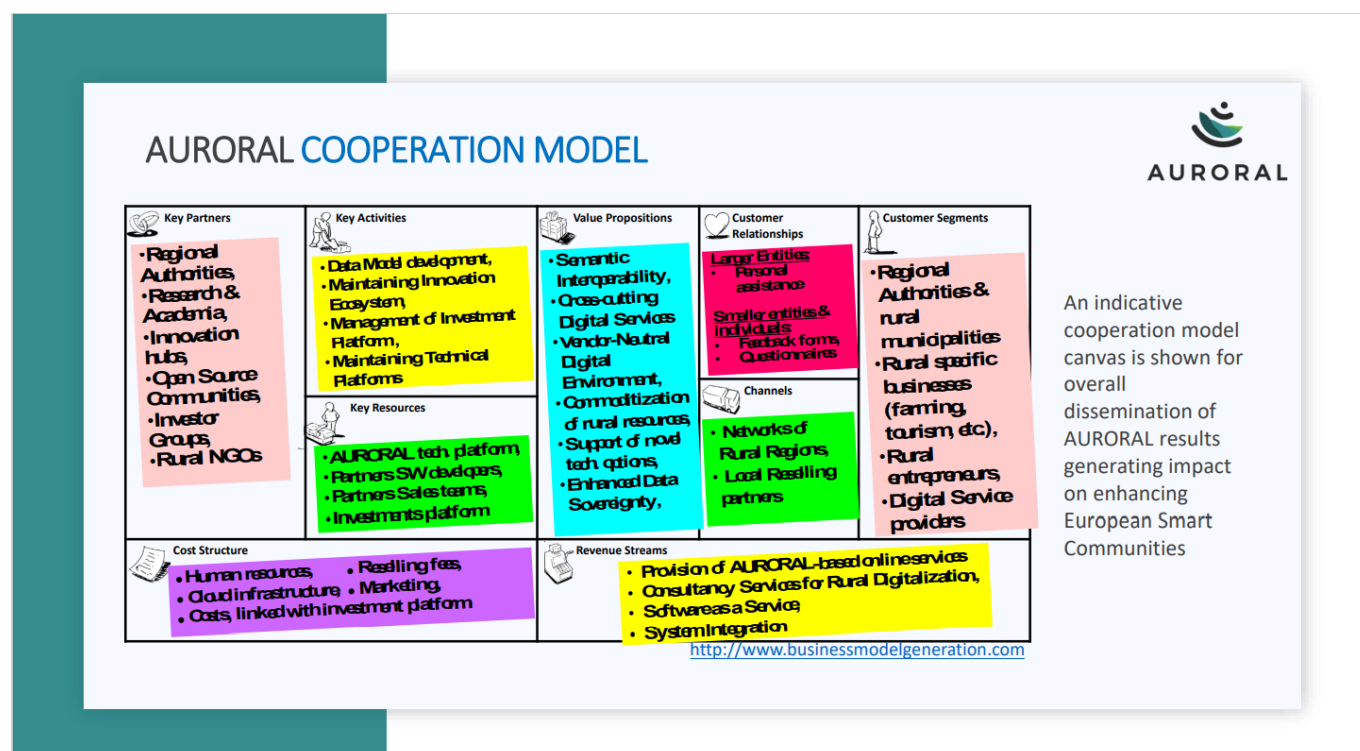
The advantages of this cooperation are establishing a basis **for similar and replicable digital city** services (transport, urban planning, reduction of carbon footprint, energy certification, Urban Open

Platform etc). Further benefits of FinEST Twins are **Knowledge sharing** (Digital Twin Masterclasses), **cost savings** for cities and developers, a **common understanding** of the issues and the possibility to discuss with peers.

This presentation was followed by an example of **cooperation at National level**. Marieke van Putten, Dutch Ministry of the Interior, presented the Coalition of the Willing (a Ministerial level cooperation of 8 Member States to advance digitalisation goals). The Coalition of the Willing is an initiative spearheaded by the Netherlands bringing together a number of digitally advanced Member States that are willing to cooperate more closely using digital solutions to **solve societal challenges**. They work in an applied and practical way on topics such as public sector use cases of AI, human centric digital services, digital identity and data-/open source platforms for cross border data sharing. Their approach is based on using the strengths of each country to achieve results in Europe's **digital transformation** together.

After the example of National Level cooperation, we heard three examples of **City and Regional cooperation**.

Marcos Nogueira, Co-ordinator H2020-AURORAL project and Head of Alentejo EU Office, focused on the AURORAL project for digital-based services in rural regions. The AURORAL project has partners in Portugal, Austria, Sweden, Norway, Italy and Spain and seeks to implement **in a rural context** a set of **digital technologies** and approaches to **interoperability** that have been pioneered in cities.



Mr Nogueira also highlighted the latest partnership between Alentejo and the Spanish region of Extremadura, the SWING Bauhaus is the acronym standing for South Western Iberian New Bauhaus. This open, cross-border movement aims to create beautiful, inclusive and sustainable projects in line with the New European Bauhaus objectives

Loic Delhuvette, Director of the GECT Eurometropole Lille / Kortrijk / Tournai. This presentation centred on the structured cooperation between the cities of Lille (FR) and Kortrijk and Tournai (BE) based on a European Group of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), an instrument under Cohesion Policy It encompasses more than **2.1 million inhabitants, 152 cities and towns, covering 3550 km²**.

Digital cooperation has been instrumental in tackling shared challenges, namely managing air

pollution and managing water supply.

Peter Geršič, *Expert for development and smart communities from Novo Mesto, Slovenia*, his city's engagement in the Horizon 2020 project VARCITIES. VARCITIES aims to develop and test **a universal, scalable monitoring, evaluation, and replication framework** for **different scales of Nature-based Solutions** for **Future-cities**. Challenges encountered relating to developing common KPIs to measure health and well-being. The Minimal Interoperability Mechanism (MIMs Plus) proved very useful in the creation of a platform for the cities to share data with one another.

A Holistic Project



Future-city:
Solutions fostering a healthier, sustainable and resilient urban future.

VARCITIES



Green public spaces:
Public spaces as people-centred areas supporting creativity, inclusivity, health, and happiness.



Human-centred:
Putting citizens and the human communities at the centre of the cities' vision.



Smart and resilient:
Nature-based Solutions integrated with smart devices and exploited digitally.

Panel discussion, moderated by Prune Gautier, Luxembourg Institute of Science and Technology.

The speakers participated in a lively panel discussion, moderated by Prune Gautier from the Luxembourg Institute of Science and Technology. Prune and colleagues have begun work on a National Digital Twin of Luxembourg and shared the panellists strong interest in overcoming barriers to cross-border digital cooperation.

Amongst other topics, the panellists discussed common challenges to cross-border digital cooperation, and solutions at EU level to respond to cities, regions and Member States' needs. The role of Living-in.EU in scaling up these good cooperation examples was also debated.

Points raised during the debate included:

In addition to technical challenges, issues relating to legal and cultural differences can be a barrier to cooperation.

In terms of culture or organisational issues, there is sometime a reluctance to share information about failure. This can be important for example in relation to cyber security, where sharing information about the occurrence of a cyber attack can lead to improvements in cyber security,

Culturally, organisationally, it can be difficult to break out of silos. Difficult to encourage IT people to share views with policy-makers.

Regarding the benefits of cooperation, common challenges lead to common solutions.

Skills shortages will always be a challenge due to the nature of the digital transition. Technology is constantly evolving.

Important to think of the practical benefits. An example are the many people who commute across borders every day to work. Why can they not buy an integrated ticket, covering different transport modes in different Member States? Tallinn and Helsinki are working together to solve this type of mobility issue.

Regulatory differences can pose a huge challenge, different KPIs for air quality, different standards for buildings etc. Need to further standardise these solutions.

Integration of legacy systems cannot be avoided, at local and national level, and is a reality for smart communities and not something to be ashamed of.

The value of cross-border digital cooperation is huge for businesses operating across border, facilitating life for them. Not just of benefit to public authorities.

A suggestion for EU data-sharing is a digital platform which geographically illustrates various EU funded projects, providing details of the impacts. This would help to visualise impacts, maximise synergies and avoid conflicting initiatives.

A shared vision is needed to drive cross-border digital cooperation. The example provided by the Covenant of the Mayors on Climate and Energy is very positive.

Funding Opportunities

Lieve Bos, from the Digital Innovation unit at the Commission's DG CNECT, presented Horizon Europe and other EU funding opportunities for innovation procurement of technological solutions by Member States, regions and cities. Public investment through procurement has enormous capacity to fuel innovation, yet at present, it is far from reaching its full potential. The European Commission is running a series of seminars for public buyers to attend to learn more about innovation procurement. There are also many funding opportunities for cities to work together to procure innovative solutions to address shared challenges.

Several EU programs (2021-2027) in which innovation procurement plays a growing role



Conclusion

Eddy Hartog wrapped up the event by announcing that Commission Breton will participate in the next Living-in.eu meeting on 30 of September 2021. It will be held in conjunction with the Intelligent Cities Challenge, and several Mayors from both organisations will be invited to actively participate in the event, which will be a meaningful dialogue between the EU and local level on shared challenges and how to approach them. Further details will follow.

Downloads

1. Living-in.eu meeting - Einari Kisel presentation
Download

2. Living-in.eu meeting - Marieke van Putten presentation
[Download](#)

3. Living-in.eu meeting - Marcos Nogueira presentation
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4. Living-in.eu meeting - Loic Delhuvenne presentation
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5. Living-in.eu meeting - Peter Gersic presentation
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6. Living-in.eu meeting - Lieve Bos presentation
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