

EUROPEAN  
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# Enhancing intermunicipal cooperation for Sustainable Urban Development in Portugal

Capacity Building Event  
Fundão, Portugal  
15 May 2025





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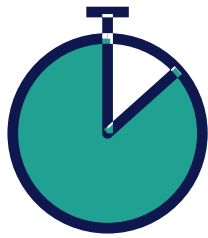
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# 1 - Introduction

## *THE EVENTS' NUMBERS AT A GLANCE*



**2 DAY**  
DURATION



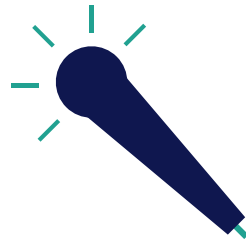
**80**  
PARTICIPANTS



**11**  
COUNTRIES  
REPRESENTED



**13**  
SESSIONS



**28**  
SPEAKERS



**6**  
FACILITATORS



## SETTING THE SCENE

**More than 80 urban practitioners** gathered in Fundão on 14–15 May 2025 for a two-day national capacity building event focused on enhancing intermunicipal cooperation for Sustainable Urban Development in Portugal. The training was organized by the European Urban Initiative (EUI) in close cooperation with the General Directorate for Territory (DGT and the Agency for Development and Cohesion (AD&C) and was kindly hosted by the Municipality of Fundão. The event was designed specifically for Portuguese Municipalities, Intermunicipal Communities (CIMs) and Metropolitan Areas, providing a **space to exchange on how collaboration and coordination across governance levels can address shared challenges in urban sustainability**. From plenary discussions to study visits and thematic workshops, participants explored practical approaches and tools for building territorial partnerships, strengthening institutional capacity, and aligning local action with strategic national and EU goals. The sessions were structured around three **key topics**:

- **Innovation ecosystems and talent attraction**
- **Resilient and sustainable territories, with a focus on mobility and circular economy**
- **Smart territories, including data and digital solutions.**

Participants benefited from a hands-on learning environment, drawing on case studies from Portugal and across Europe, with a particular emphasis on replicable models, multilevel governance and place-based innovation.

## KEY LEARNINGS

The event highlighted that effective intermunicipal cooperation is essential for tackling complex urban challenges. Key success factors include:

- Strong coordination across governance levels
- Inclusive stakeholder engagement
- Adaptable and locally grounded solutions
- Ongoing investment in capacity and peer learning

Collaboration emerged as a strategic tool for delivering sustainable, inclusive, and place-based urban development.



## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The methodological approach was based on the social learning theory in which experience and co-construction are the fundamental learning elements.

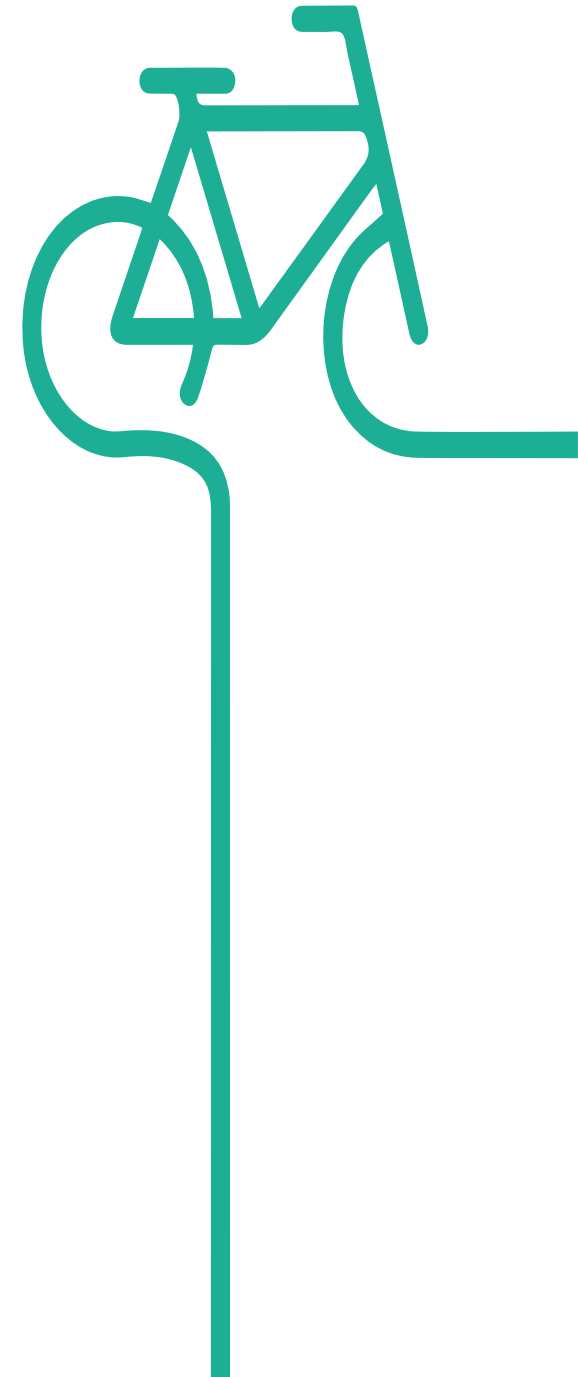
The showcase of inspirational inputs was followed by the analysis of concrete cases: what worked, what did not work and how are they transferable to the Portuguese reality. It included:

- **Plenary discussions** with **Inspirational keynote speakers**
- **Analytical thematic learning workshops with good practices presentation. Study visits** to good practices in Fundão focused on the topics of the event.
- **Deep dive session** to make an in-depth analysis of the replicability and adaptation of the cases and create a “list” of recommendations to be pitched to EU and National policy experts.

The learning pathway ended with **the discussion with the experts** about enablers and blockages and what can be done to foster improvements and overcome the obstacles.

A **collection of good practices** was available in the venue throughout the event duration.

The learning process and diversity of formats allowed participants to gain practical and theoretical knowledge, find inspiration and understand how other cities and territories implemented solutions to similar challenges.



## ***CIMS AND THE CHALLENGE OF INTEGRATED TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT IN PORTUGAL***

In Portugal, the creation of the NUTS III governance level (CIM) – an intermunicipal mechanism – **was designed to overcome municipal scale limitations in public policy and service delivery. It aimed to ensure better coordination in applying structural funds under Cohesion Policy.** Each CIM includes a multistakeholder Strategic Council and a rotating mayoral Board, applying the equity principle. Effective collaboration is key to tackling development challenges, especially within existing ITIs.

To understand cities' and CIMs' main interests, the EUI, in collaboration with AD&C and DGT, launched a survey.

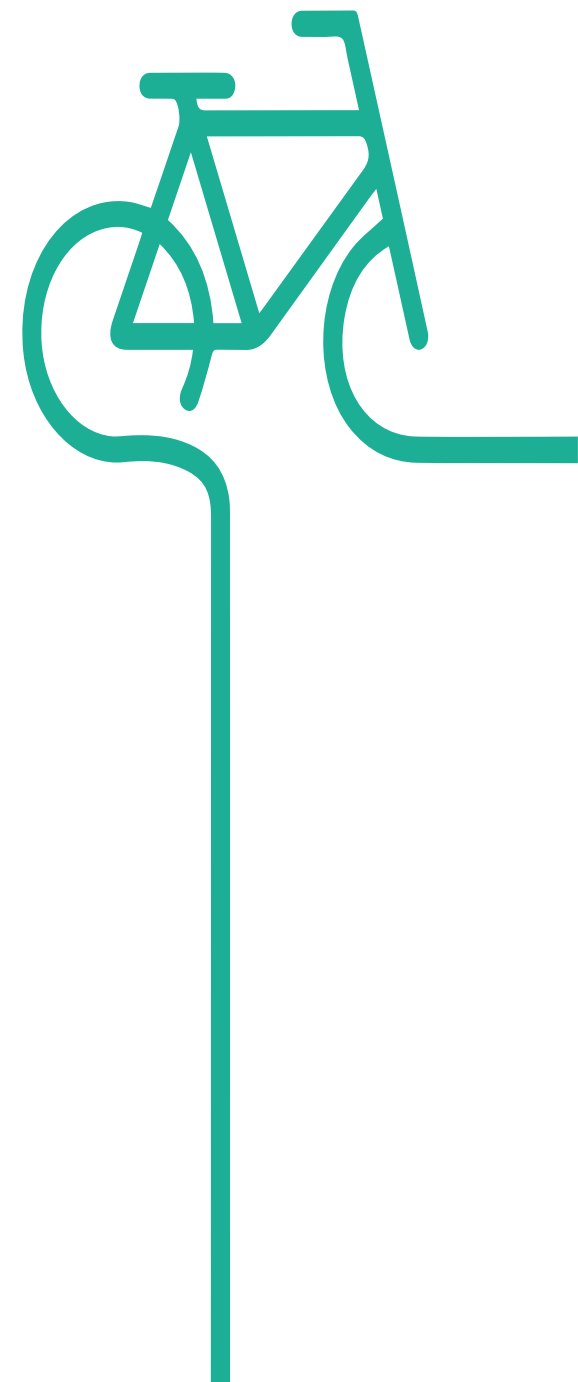
**Results revealed the need to improve governance models due to technical disparities among municipalities and CIMs, leading to inefficiencies and limiting collaborative problem-solving.**

Today's challenges are complex and multilevel, requiring integrated solutions. However, traditional siloed structures hinder participation and cooperation, which respondents identified as the main obstacle to cohesive, sustainable development. Without collaborative governance, addressing most key issues becomes difficult. Themes like Multilevel Governance and Multistakeholder approaches emerge as both enablers and blockers.

Several sustainable development challenges also rely on effective governance and available resources.

### **Identified themes:**

- Innovative ecosystems and attraction and retention of talent.
- Resilient and sustainable territories focused on sustainable mobility services and circular economy related with waste management;
- Smart territories: data and digital solutions



## Welcome session

- Sub-Director General DGT: **Ana Seixas**
- Director of Regional Policy Unit at AD&C: **Nuno Romão**
- Executive Member of the Managing Authority for the Centro 2030 Regional Programme: **Bernardo Campos**
- Mayor of Fundão: **Paulo Fernandes**
- DG Regio, European Commission: **Ana Cardoso da Fonseca**





## 2 - Plenary Session

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Reforçar a Cooperação  
Intermunicipal para  
o Desenvolvimento Urbano  
Sustentável

ório  
de Território



A  
Agência  
Desenvolvimento  
Cooperado





The **main topic discussed on the first Plenary Session was horizontal and vertical governance models.** Two invited speakers shared their experiences, both nationally and internationally, focusing on success case studies and lessons learned.

## ***Joaquim Oliveira***

*Université Paris Dauphine, former OECD team*

**The speaker emphasized the critical role of competitiveness and productivity in fostering local development,** particularly within rural areas. The municipality of Fundão was mentioned as a positive example frequently cited by the OECD. A reflection was made on the European focus on environmental sustainability, whereas the current geopolitical context has been repositioning competitiveness as a central - yet often neglected - priority.

A marked increase was noted in regional disparities since 2008, highlighting that the underlying causes of these dynamics remain unclear. However, two key forces shaping urban development were identified, designated this way by the economic theory: convergence and agglomeration.

Convergence forces have weakened, in recent years, significantly across territories, firms, and sectors, while agglomeration forces have strengthened, resulting in a widening gap between rural and urban areas. Portugal was referred as one of the few European countries where regional convergence has occurred, though it could be attributed mainly to weak competitiveness growth in major urban centres.

Joaquim Oliveira stressed that **effective governance is essential for enhancing competitiveness.** He argued that metropolitan areas should leverage agglomeration forces, but structural governance weaknesses have led to underperformance. Conversely, rural areas should focus on convergence to drive productivity, not only in agriculture and industry but also in tradable services. **Achieving these objectives requires decentralised, locally-appropriate strategies, supported by effective decentralisation and suitable policy instruments at the appropriate scale.**



## **Rosário Machado**

### **Rota do Românico**

The invited speaker presented the [Rota do Românico](#) as an ongoing and evolving initiative, underscoring the continuous efforts required to safeguard and enhance the heritage of the region. It was highlighted the medieval origins of the territory. **To achieve a true successful governance model, Machado emphasized the importance of sustained collaboration with national and regional authorities and agencies to build institutional capacity and secure funding.**

Due the acknowledged success, the governance model of the Rota do Românico that initially was based on a network of cities supporting the initiative, is currently being revised to facilitate its extension throughout Northern Portugal. Rosário Machado clarified that the association's primary mission is to improve the quality of life for local communities, prioritizing social objectives over tourism.

This is pursued by fostering a sense of belonging and strengthening local value chains. Among its flagship projects, the "Seal of Quality" was cited as a key contributor to regional identity and distinction. It consists of a recognition of the touristic agents (restaurants, tour operators, hotels, etc.) that commit with the Rota do Românico standards.

The speaker also addressed the challenge of heritage preservation in an era of secularization, drawing attention to the network of "heritage caretakers" - primarily local volunteers - who are responsible for maintaining monuments and engaging the community. The association is actively working to establish a National Heritage Caretaker Day to recognize and attract new volunteers, acknowledging the increasing difficulty in recruiting individuals for these essential roles in cultural preservation.



# 3.1 - Study Visits: Innovation Ecosystems





# Innovation Ecosystems

## Highlights

The study visit to [Fundão Innovation Ecosystem](#) provided a vivid and inspiring example of how local ecosystems can nurture innovation through a **holistic, place-based approach**. The city has strategically revitalised underused infrastructure to create an integrated space where creativity, entrepreneurship, and community participation thrive.

By leveraging tools such as **co-working spaces, fab labs, and social-business incubators**, Fundão has demonstrated how public leadership can actively support the emergence of innovation while remaining deeply rooted in local identity and participation. The initiative known as A Praça embodies this approach, having transformed into a multifunctional hub for prototyping, knowledge exchange, and citizen engagement involving residents directly in the remodelling process.

This immersive experience revealed the power of **smart infrastructure reuse** combined with inclusive governance, where municipalities not only provide physical space but also support, encourage, and promote social innovation. Fundão's ecosystem has shown how to attract talent, retain it through meaningful opportunities, and spark territory-based development that is sustainable and community-driven.

The visit reinforced the importance of **interconnected actions**: providing infrastructure, creating opportunities, supporting local innovators, and communicating impact. Together, these elements form a coherent and replicable model for rural and small urban territories across Europe aiming to strengthen their innovation capacity.



## Key learnings from Innovation Ecosystems

- 01 Integrated ecosystem enhances innovation:** participants saw firsthand how Fundão's innovation ecosystem operates as a cohesive network — connecting the living lab, incubator, coworking space, and business centre — creating a supportive environment for startups, SMEs, and R&D projects.
- 02 Living Labs foster user-centered innovation:** The visit to Cova da Beira Living Lab showcased how public and private actors co-create, prototype, and validate solutions in real-world settings. Participants learned how this hands-on, real-environment testing encourages more relevant and scalable innovations.
- 03 Municipal leadership is a game-changer:** Fundão's proactive municipal role was highlighted as a driving force behind the success of the ecosystem. Attendees understood the importance of political vision, continuity, and institutional backing in sustaining innovation over time.
- 04 Decentralization works with strategic focus:** Fundão, a small town, demonstrated that innovation doesn't only occur in medium or big cities. With the right infrastructure and strategy, smaller cities can also attract tech companies, researchers, and entrepreneurs.
- 05 Talent attraction and retention require lifestyle + purpose:** Beyond economic incentives, Fundão leverages quality of life, local identity, and purpose-driven narratives to retain and attract talent, especially digital nomads and remote workers seeking community and meaning.
- 06 Smart use of infrastructure:** The reuse and modernization of existing infrastructure (e.g., schools turned into coworking or incubator spaces) showed participants how to creatively maximize resources and repurpose public buildings for innovation.
- 07 Innovation must be paired with inclusion:** Participants noted how Fundão's approach includes inclusive policies, targeting young people, returning emigrants, and underrepresented groups, ensuring that the benefits of innovation are widely shared across the region.



## 3.2 - Study Visits: Sustainable Tourism and Mobility





## Historical Villages of Portugal | Study visit

### Sustainable Tourism and Mobility

#### *Highlights*

The project “[Historical Villages of Portugal](#)” exemplifies how integrated, multi-stakeholder strategies can drive transformative change in sustainable mobility across low-density, heritage-rich regions. Through a collaborative ecosystem that brings together local authorities, the private sector—most notably Renault Portugal—and civil society organisations, **the project has successfully provided accessible, low-emission mobility solutions benefiting a broad spectrum of users, including residents, local businesses and tourists.** These efforts have not only reduced carbon emissions but have also strengthened social cohesion, supported regional tourism, and stimulated local economic development through enhanced access to essential services and destinations.

A number of valuable lessons have emerged that can guide similar initiatives elsewhere. First, it is essential to **design mobility services that reflect the specific needs of different population groups**, including the elderly, youth, workers, and visitors. Second, the use of **digital platforms and data-driven tools** for monitoring, optimisation, and user engagement has proven vital in ensuring efficient service delivery and adaptability. Lastly, the experience underscores the importance of **strong institutional cooperation** from local councils to national agencies which creates the governance capacity needed to maintain long-term impact and resilience.



## Mobiflex | Study visit

### Sustainable Tourism and Mobility

#### *Highlights*

The [MobiFlex](#) project, developed by the Intermunicipal Community of Beiras and Serra da Estrela (CIMRBSE), offers an **innovative response to the mobility challenges faced in low-density and ageing regions**. Confronted with the limitations of conventional public transport in dispersed rural areas, CIMRBSE introduced a flexible, on-demand transport service tailored to the specific needs of local communities. This system allows residents to book journeys in advance, enabling routes to be optimised based on actual demand and ensuring mobility coverage in areas where traditional services are often unfeasible.

Launched as a pilot in Fundão in March 2023, the project initially covered six parishes and benefited over 3,300 residents. Its **positive reception has led to a gradual expansion across additional municipalities**, with the goal of extending the service throughout the entire CIMRBSE territory. **Key lessons emerging from the initiative include the value of user-centred service design, the role of digital tools in efficiently managing bookings and adapting to real-time needs, and the importance of coordinated action between municipalities to scale and sustain innovative transport models**. MobiFlex illustrates how digital flexibility and intermunicipal collaboration can significantly enhance access and connectivity in remote regions.



# Key learnings from Sustainable Tourism and Mobility

- 01 Integrated multi-stakeholder partnerships** are essential for developing sustainable tourism and mobility solutions. Collaboration among local authorities, private sector, and community organisations enables the design and implementation of effective, context-specific interventions.
- 02 Tailoring mobility services** to the demographic and geographic realities of low-density and rural regions significantly enhances accessibility and social inclusion.
- 03 Digital tools and platforms play a critical role** in optimising service delivery, monitoring usage, and supporting data-driven decision-making in both tourism and mobility projects.
- 04 Active engagement and participation** of local communities are fundamental to the acceptance, sustainability, and long-term success of initiatives.
- 05 Sustainable mobility solutions**, such as on-demand transport and low-emission vehicles, contribute to reducing environmental impacts and supporting the transition to low-carbon territories.
- 06 Economic and operational sustainability** require the careful design of funding mechanisms and tariff structures, ensuring that services remain accessible while balancing public investment and user contributions.

## Learn more with Fundão

The Fundão case studies in sustainable tourism and mobility demonstrate that meaningful innovation is not defined by scale or visibility, but by a pragmatic alignment of local needs, collaborative governance, and the courage to adapt solutions to real territorial challenges.

What distinguishes Fundão is the way public purpose is placed at the centre: data is shared, solutions are tested in real conditions, and both projects are deeply rooted in the cultural and geographic fabric of the region.

These experiences offer valuable lessons for other European territories. The key is not to replicate specific tools or models, but to embrace the underlying principles of facilitation, openness, and place-based innovation.



## 3.3 - Study Visits: Smart Territories: data and digital





# SMART TERRITORIES: DATA AND DIGITAL SOLUTIONS

## Highlights

The session on smart territories began with a **field visit to [AgroTech Fundão](#)**, offering a grounded perspective on how rural innovation, data infrastructure and climate adaptation can converge in a real territorial ecosystem. Participants explored how IoT, LoRa connectivity, traditional irrigation methods and AI-based monitoring are being used to turn agriculture into a testbed for smart governance and resilience.

Building on this immersive experience, the workshop sessions unpacked the key enablers of smart territorial transformation, focusing on data governance, interoperability, infrastructure ownership, platform regulation, and intermunicipal cooperation. Discussions emphasized that smart solutions only succeed when they are embedded in long-term public vision, clear governance frameworks, and local identity.

The need for structured collaboration, policy alignment, and adaptive experimentation emerged as an integrated approach requisite. The visit provided practical **insights and strategic reflection on how to move beyond fragmented “smart city” logics toward a truly territorial and systemic innovation agenda.**



## Key learnings from AgroTech Fundão

01

**AgroTech Fundão** proves that innovation can start in rural territory, not just in major urban centres. Here, soil and climate are as central as sensors and dashboards.

02

**It combines tradition and technology organically:** goats are used for biodiversity management; LoRa sensors measure soil moisture; AI cameras detect fruit fly infestations; and clay shards act as traditional yet effective irrigation sensors.

03

**The LoRa infrastructure** covers the entire rural area, enabling continuous agricultural data collection that feeds into the city's urban control room and integrated dashboard systems.

04

**Experimentation is real and shared:** they test species like Pêra Rocha do Oeste, explore the relocation of cherry crops to other latitudes, and trial new agricultural techniques to anticipate future climate conditions.

05

**Governance is enabling, not controlling.** The municipality provides legitimacy, open data, and technical support — but avoids micromanaging the innovation process.

06

**The space never calls itself a “smart lab” or “living lab”,** yet it functions as one — and perhaps better — because it is authentic, hands-on, and embedded in real territorial needs.

07

**Knowledge is shared freely:** data is open, mistakes are discussed, and lessons are intended to scale up to regional or national levels.

08

**The real value lies in resilience:** AgroTech Fundão is not about showcasing gadgets, it's about testing the future — with hands in the soil, eyes on the data, and decisions grounded in collective purpose.

### Learn more with Fundão

The AgroTech Fundão visit showed that smart innovation doesn't require massive investment or glossy branding — it requires curiosity, collaboration, and courage to experiment.

Here, technology is not the goal. It's a tool for climate adaptation, agricultural resilience, and collective learning.

What makes Fundão different is how it aligns public purpose with technical pragmatism. It opens data, tests in real conditions, and integrates the rural economy into the wider smart territory vision — all without losing sight of people, land, or local culture.

Cities across Europe can learn from this. Not by copying tools, but by embracing the principles of facilitation, openness and place-based innovation.



# 4 – Thematic Workshops



# 4.1 - Thematic Workshops: Innovation Ecosystems in Action

The thematic **workshop was designed to support cities and regions in advancing their approaches to innovation ecosystems and talent attraction**. The workshop was structured into two main working sessions, each combining knowledge-sharing with collaborative reflection and peer learning.

The session kick-off started with a concise framing presentation introducing the thematic focus, highlighting the relevance of innovative ecosystems and the strategic importance of attracting and retaining talent for local development. This introduction served to align participants around shared concepts and provided a foundation for the case studies that followed.

Each working session featured two invited case studies, offering diverse territorial experiences and practical insights. The invited case studies were: Go Vilnius, Elevadora Centro de Capacitação Empresarial de Paredes de Coura, Amarante and its Tech Hub initiative, as well as the integrated path of Aragón and Zaragoza towards building innovation ecosystems.

These case studies showcased different governance models, partnerships, and strategies being applied to foster innovation and talent development at the local and regional levels.



# Innovation Ecosystems

## Working Sessions

Following the presentations, participants were divided into working groups and engaged in a structured reflection exercise to capture key learnings from the case studies. The canvas tool included four main dimensions:

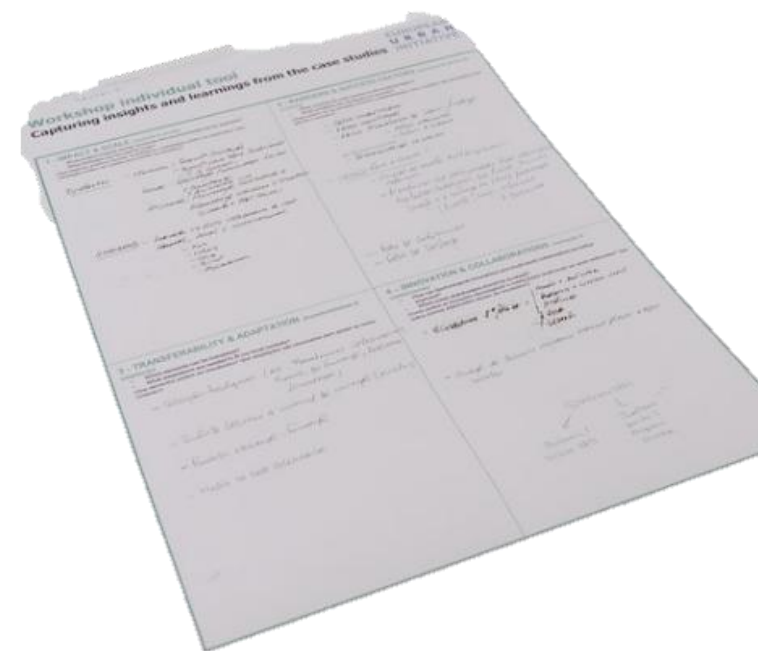
**1. Impact & Scale** – Participants discussed the potential social, economic, and environmental impacts of the practices presented, and how such practices might be scaled.

**2. Barriers & Success Factors** – Groups identified potential obstacles to implementation and the conditions necessary to ensure success.

**3. Transferability & Adaptation** – This section focused on which elements could be transferred to other contexts and what adaptations would be required.

**4. Innovation & Collaborations** – Participants explored opportunities for improving technological innovation and multi-level collaboration, and reflected on which new stakeholders could be engaged.

The group work fostered exchange across territories and allowed participants to reflect on the relevance of the presented practices to their own local challenges and priorities. To close each session, participants shared key insights in plenary, enabling broader collective learning and identifying areas for continued cooperation.





# Innovation Ecosystems

## Working Sessions

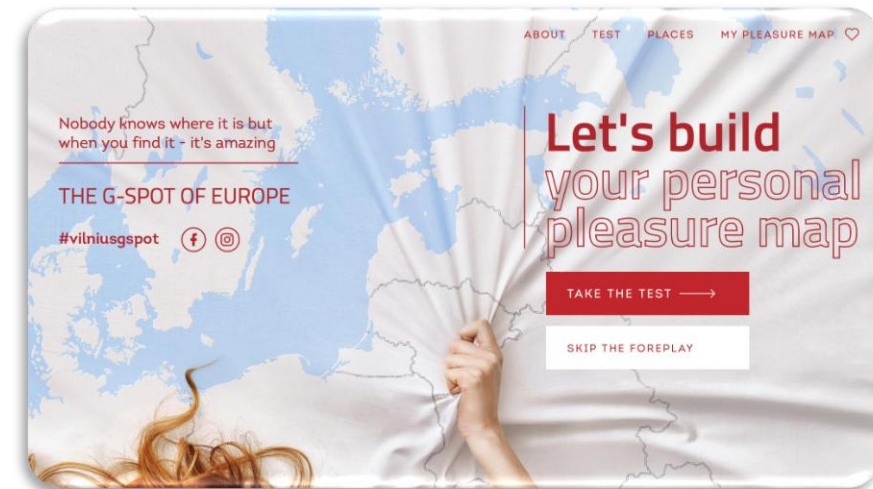
*Case Study Go Vilnius – Mangirdas Sapranaukas*

The [Go Vilnius](#) case study introduced the **city's strategic approach to attracting international talent, investors, tourists, and conference organizers, with the aim of creating long-term economic value and enhancing Vilnius's global visibility.** The Vilnius famous marketing campaigns, like "The G-Spot of Europe" were also showcased.

Vilnius, positioned as a green, innovative, and livable capital, is recognized for its strong work-life balance, digital infrastructure, and sustainability, named European Green Capital 2025. The city's innovation ecosystem includes over 1100 companies, 4 startup unicorns, and leadership in sectors such as cybersecurity, lasers, and fintech. It's the fastest-growing startup ecosystem in Central and Eastern Europe, with a high rate of foreign direct investment and scalable projects.

Talent attraction is supported through a comprehensive lifecycle management approach that includes soft-landing services (via [International House Vilnius](#)), integration programs, marketing campaigns, and satisfaction monitoring. The strategy focuses on five key audiences: international professionals, diaspora, students, family members, and entrepreneurs. It **blends data-driven KPIs with a customer-centric methodology to enhance relocation, integration, and retention outcomes.**

Mr. Mangirdas closed with a clear message: Vilnius is ready and waiting to welcome international talent.



## Do's

- ✓ Align innovation strategy with international positioning and branding.
- ✓ Invest in customer-centric services (e.g., International House Vilnius).
- ✓ Focus on the full talent lifecycle: attraction, relocation, integration, and retention.
- ✓ Use measurable KPIs (e.g., NPS, student retention) to monitor progress.
- ✓ Build coordinated governance by integrating multiple institutions under one roof.

## Don'ts

- ✗ Don't treat international talent as a one-time relocation issue—long-term integration matters.
- ✗ Don't overlook the importance of cultural and social experience in talent retention
- ✗ Don't rely only on marketing campaigns—practical support services must follow.



# Innovation Ecosystems

## Working Sessions

*Case Study Amarante Tech Hub – Tiago Ferreira*

The [Amarante Tech Hub](#) case study outlined the city's strategic vision to become a leading technological center, aiming to create 1,000 jobs in the tech sector by 2030. The hub's mission focuses on boosting the local economy through innovation, talent development, and investment attraction.

The initiative is structured around an action plan that combines economic impact with social and cultural benefits. It seeks to improve quality of life, promote regional development, and strengthen Amarante's identity as a hub of innovation.

Key programs include:

- **Talent Check-In:** A digital platform mapping tech talent connected to Amarante, linking professionals with companies and tracking market trends.
- **Talent Move to Amarante:** Offers free accommodation, integration support, cultural experiences, and mentorship to incoming tech professionals, who in return contribute by leading local workshops.
- **Move Your Business:** Provides businesses with free office space (4–12 months), recruitment support, and integration assistance to establish operations in Amarante.

The initiative also supports a **Tech Pool of 17 companies** and promotes diversity and inclusion through collaborations that amplify impact. The overall message is clear: Amarante is where tech meets quality of life, creating a fertile environment for professionals and businesses alike





## Do's

- ✓ Create an actionable vision with a clear goal (e.g., 1000 jobs by 2030).
- ✓ Offer concrete benefits for talent and businesses (housing, mentorship, office space)
- ✓ Promote reciprocal value (e.g., workshops by relocated professionals).
- ✓ Leverage regional quality of life as a unique differentiator.
- ✓ Connect talent to local companies through curated programs like Talent Check-In.

## Don'ts

- ✗ Don't assume infrastructure alone is enough; community-building is essential.
- ✗ Don't centralize efforts only around startups; include scaling companies and networks.
- ✗ Don't underestimate the onboarding process; mentorship and integration matter.



# Innovation Ecosystems

## Working Sessions

*Case Study* Aragón and Zaragoza towards building innovation ecosystems – Daniela Sarasa Funes

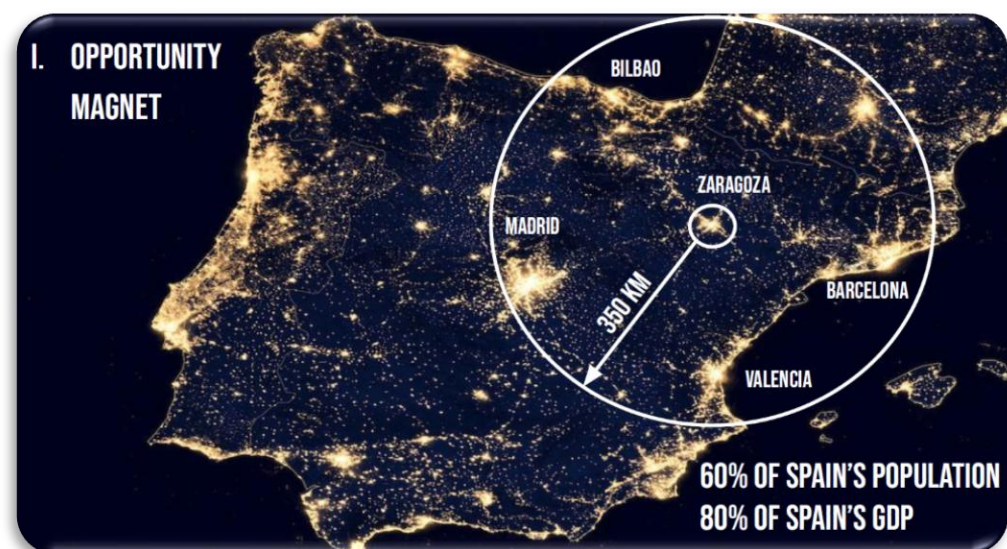
The case study showcased the evolution of Aragón and Zaragoza's innovation ecosystems, **emphasizing the strategic role of logistics, talent, and urban transformation.**

**Zaragoza** benefits from its central location within 350 km of 60% of Spain's population and 80% of its GDP making it a natural logistics hub. The *Zaragoza Logistics Platform* (PLAZA), with strong intermodal connectivity and anchor tenants like Inditex (Zara), plays a central role in this ecosystem. This sector contributes 5.5% of Aragón's GDP and supports 20,000 jobs.

**Key "hardware" elements include infrastructure and strategic location, while the "software" side is shaped by co-governance, training, and R&D,** highlighted by institutions like the *Zaragoza Logistics Center* (affiliated with MIT). A culture of lifelong learning, quality of life, and civic engagement also supports talent attraction and retention.

Looking ahead, Zaragoza builds on 20+ years of innovation strategy from the "Digital Mile" district to "Open Source City" and future metropolitan ambitions ("The 1 Million City"). Aragón's energy surplus (88.8% renewable in 2024) and the AI/data center boom offer major opportunities.

Finally, the region aims to leverage this momentum into a full-fledged innovation ecosystem through strong public policy, investment, talent development, infrastructure, collaboration, and a commitment to inclusion and quality of life.



## Do's

- ✓ Build ecosystems around anchor sectors (e.g., logistics in Zaragoza).
- ✓ Combine "hardware" (infrastructure, strategic location) with "software" (training, governance, culture).
- ✓ Use long-term urban and innovation planning across district, city, and metro levels.
- ✓ Promote lifelong learning and adaptability through education partnerships
- ✓ Integrate quality of life as a core pillar of your innovation strategy.

## Don'ts

- ✗ Don't silo innovation—connect logistics, digital, energy, and civic development.
- ✗ Don't neglect regional equity—low-density areas need specific support mechanisms.
- ✗ Don't delay strategic coordination—ecosystem thinking requires early planning.





# Innovation Ecosystems

## Working Sessions

*Case Study Elevadora Paredes de Coura – André Viana*

The case study highlighted Paredes de Coura's bold steps toward building a vibrant technological and entrepreneurial ecosystem through the [Elevadora](#) initiative. Despite challenges such as aging population, youth exodus, and low startup density, the Paredes de Coura territory is actively transforming these constraints into opportunities.

Key strategies include:

- **Creating a local tech cluster**, supported by infrastructure for startups and micro-enterprises;
- **Forging partnerships** with nearby academic institutions (Minho, Porto, and Viana do Castelo);
- **Launching talent development programs**, including internships and innovation events;
- **Encouraging entrepreneurial culture** through maker spaces, creative hubs, and co-working environments.

Since its launch in 2021, Elevadora has supported dozens of local ventures—ranging from digital design studios to 3D printing, musical instrument manufacturing, and sustainable construction startups. Its integrated infrastructure includes *Elevadora*, *EmpreendeMakers*, and *Biological Coura*, managed with a strong focus on capacity building and innovation.

Expected outcomes include reversing depopulation, attracting qualified professionals, revitalizing the local economy, and retaining young talent. The presentation concludes with a clear message: with strategic cooperation and investment in people, Paredes de Coura can become a sustainable, high-potential innovation hub.



# Innovation Ecosystems

## Key learnings:

01

### Innovation Ecosystems Thrive on Local Identity and Strategic Vision

Across all the case studies, it became clear that successful ecosystems are built on **deep local anchoring** combined with a forward-looking strategic vision. Cities like Zaragoza leveraged logistics and location, Amarante capitalized on quality of life, and Vilnius positioned itself as an international soft-landing hub. **Fundão further reinforced this principle:** it has systematically aligned its innovation agenda with its identity as a rural, inclusive, and future-oriented territory—demonstrating how small cities can lead with clarity and purpose.

02

### Talent is Both the Driver and the Outcome

The concept of **talent as a central pillar** was echoed throughout the event. From Go Vilnius' lifecycle approach to Paredes de Coura's effort to reverse youth flight, all initiatives showed that **attracting talent isn't enough**—integration, retention, and co-creation are critical. In Fundão, the site visits highlighted **concrete initiatives** to train digital skills locally, promote youth entrepreneurship, and attract digital nomads, reinforcing the idea that **investing in people equals investing in place**.

03

### Infrastructure Must Be Matched by Community, Culture, and Coordination

While physical assets (tech hubs, incubators, logistics platforms) are crucial, they must be paired with strong **governance, community engagement, and a culture of collaboration**. Zaragoza's co-governance model, Vilnius's integrated service provision, and Fundão's commitment to cross-sector collaboration all illustrate that **ecosystems grow not just from buildings, but from relationships and trust**.

04

### Infrastructure Must Be Matched by Community, Culture, and Coordination

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05

### Peer Learning and Immersive Experience Deepen Capacity and Confidence

The format of the event—combining **practical case studies, collaborative group work, and immersive site visits**—proved highly effective. The working sessions helped participants **translate inspiration into context-aware action**, using a structured canvas to explore impact, barriers, transferability, and innovation potential. The site visits in Fundão offered **first-hand exposure** to real initiatives, adding authenticity and grounding the discussions in concrete examples. Participants left not only with ideas, but also with renewed confidence that change is possible at all territorial levels.

## 4.2 - Thematic Workshops: Resilient and Sustainable Territories mobility

The **workshop was built to inspire cities and regions with novel approaches to the mobility challenge** through the sharing of two real-life examples: an international case study, from Castilla-La Mancha, and a national case study, from Guimarães.

The featured case studies showcased different ways of approaching two different mobility-related challenges through two distinct territorial experiences: a rural challenge, grounded in the need to tackle depopulation, and an urban one, focused on addressing sustainability and equity of mobility.

The presentations covered topics such as governance models, stakeholder engagement, and implementation strategies.

Once the presentations finished, a lively Q&A followed with a collaborative reflection to capture insights and learnings from the knowledge-sharing panel.

The conversations highlighted the **necessity of wide stakeholder engagement and citizen participation in development of a strategic policy-making process, as well as strong political support.**





# Castilla-La Mancha Regional Depopulation Strategy

## Mobility

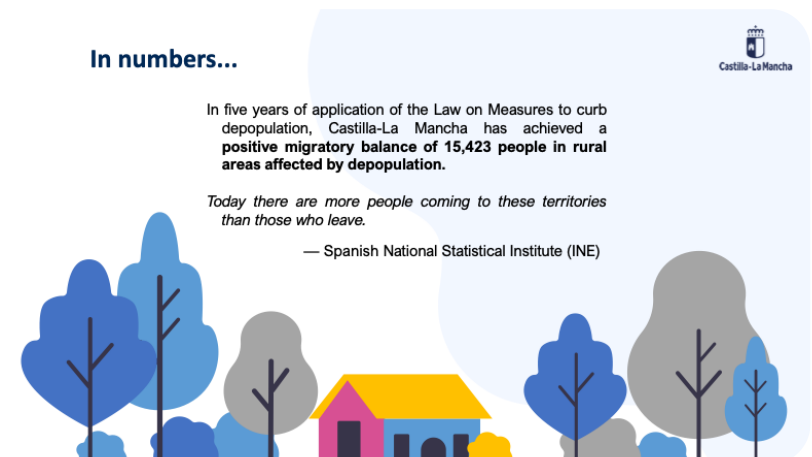
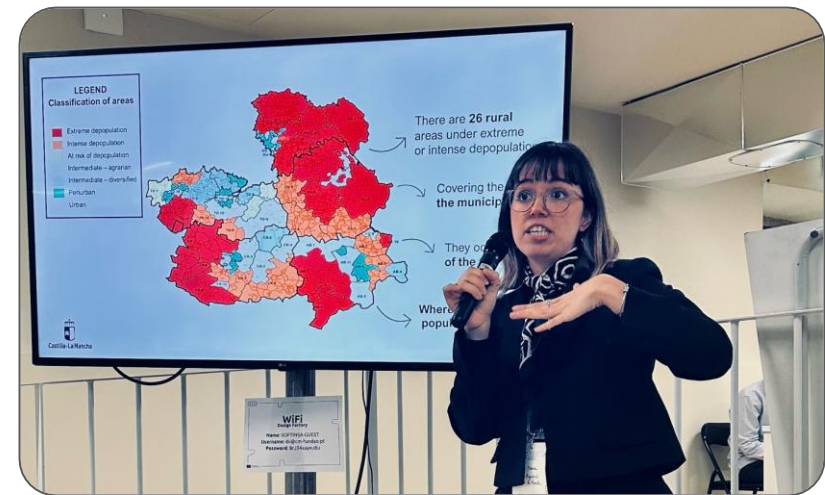
*Letícia Velencoso, Regional Government of Castilla-La Mancha, Spain*

Castilla-La Mancha case explored a **five-phase participatory planning process** integrating multi-level governance, strategic diagnosis, stakeholder consultation, and political alignment to design actionable anti-depopulation policies.

The output of this process, the [Regional Depopulation Strategy](#), entered into force in 2021 and consists of a **10-year strategy entailing over 200 actions that aim to reverse depopulation trends in the region of Castilla-La Mancha**. It was approved unanimously in the Regional Parliament, **with social and political consensus**.

The strategy includes measures such as differentiated taxation for citizens and companies, reinforcement of public investment in particularly depopulated areas (e.g. schools for as less as 4 children), alternative health provision solutions, and overhaul of the public transport system.

In the first 5 years of implementation, Castilla-La Mancha has achieved a **positive migratory balance of 15,423 people in rural areas affected by depopulation**. And in just 3 years of operation, the on-demand transport service cost 3,8 M€, in contrast with the circa 5 M€ per year the region used to spend in transport.



## Do's

- ✓ **Comprehensive multi-stakeholder participation, with broad engagement across government levels and civil society.** It is key to reach consensus across the board, through various methods such as working tables and interviews.
- ✓ **Conduct a phased strategic development with iterative validation** through multiple working groups, territorial subcommittees, etc. A multiple-step approach helps building the strategy incrementally while balancing diverse stakeholder expectations.
- ✓ **Use of both quantitative and qualitative data, and integrate with legislative instruments and regional planning frameworks.** A comprehensive strategy based on sound evidence and supported from the legal and planning context will help reach agreement.

## Don'ts

- ✗ **Don't rush.** You cannot work with a political cycle mindset as that will jeopardise the long-term sustainability of the strategy. Work steadily with wide support to reach as much consensus as possible.

## Key learnings from Castilla-La Mancha

- 01 Inclusive, phased **participation fosters stronger ownership and better policy outcomes.**
- 02 The combination of **qualitative engagement with legislative anchoring** not only improves policy legitimacy, but it also helps delivering impact and the solution's sustainability
- 03 **Political consensus and long-term vision are key** for lasting impact.

# Sustainable Mobility Guimarães

## Mobility

*Anita Pinto, Municipality of Guimarães, Portugal*

Guimarães case study focused on the city's strategy towards creating a more sustainable, inclusive, and accessible urban mobility system, to improve overall quality of life and promote climate resilience.

The city challenge was (and still is) to overcome high levels of car dependency and increasing traffic congestion, as well as the repurposing the public space heavily occupied by roads and parking infrastructure.

The strategy involved a multi-level and integrated approach which entailed the design of various measures such as the expansion of pedestrian areas, stricter parking policies, enhancement of cycling infrastructure, full territorial coverage of public transport via [Guimabus](#) (municipal), [AveMobilidade](#) (intermunicipal), and [Vitrusb](#) (flexible service), and cheaper public transport fees.





## Do's

- ✓ **Involve your stakeholders, including citizens, and promote co-design** of interventions. Early, sustained public participation and collaboration fosters ownership and eases transitions.
- ✓ **Set clear and transparent goals** to help tackle unforeseen challenges and manage clear expectations.
- ✓ **Create a vision that encourages change.** By promoting the idea of near-free public transport as a public good, aligning affordability with environmental and social equity goals, Guimarães was able to bring different parties together with a shared goal for the city.
- ✓ **Have well-established responsibilities.** This allows to ensure accountability and responsiveness during the process.

## Don'ts

- ✗ **Don't force a fixed, immutable plan.** You will learn from the process and with the interaction with stakeholders along the way. It is therefore critical to be open to accommodating different opinions and adapting your initial ideas.

## Key learnings from Guimarães

- 01 The **most valuable insights emerged from the implementation process** itself.
- 02 **Bringing together stakeholders and citizens** through platforms such as an eco-parliament and citizen assemblies can foster mutual understanding and help comprehend the different (met and unmet) needs and perceptions which can become obstacles to a successful implementation.
- 03 **Political consensus and long-term vision are key** for lasting impact.

# Key learnings

01

**Political commitment** is pivotal in the sustainability of any strategy. The ownership of the process by the governing team, grounded in a clear vision for the city or region, and the support from the opposing parties, are key ingredients for the effective implementation and long-term sustainability of the policies, beyond political cycles.

02

**Engagement of stakeholders should not be limited to generic consultations.** The active participation in the different steps of the process will enable voicing diverse views, facilitate mutual understanding and cultivate shared ownership of the outputs. The more participatory process one conducts, the stronger the outcomes one gets.

03

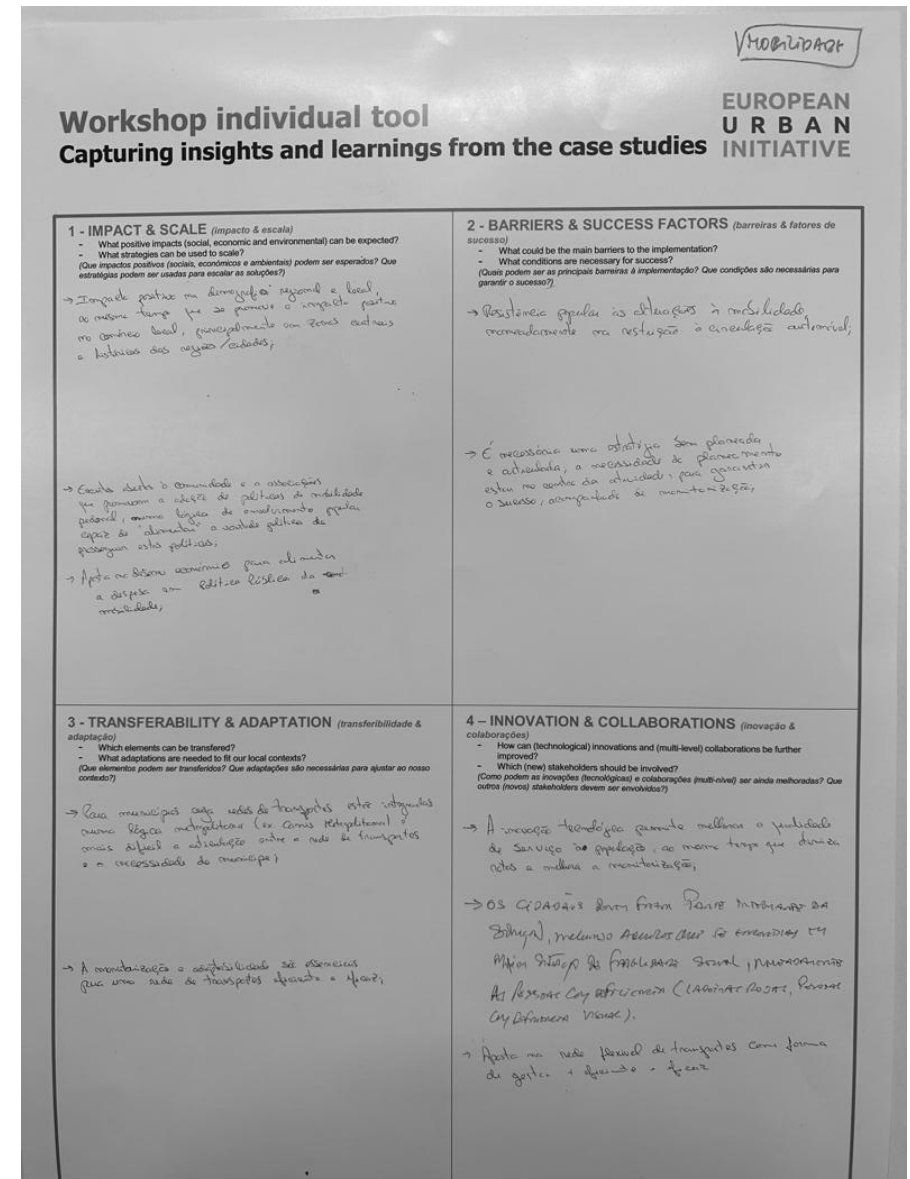
**Strengthen the investment** in order to nudge behaviours. Offering high-quality services, tax incentives and other positive supply-side solutions incentivise bigger, meaningful change, rather than the implementation of restrictive demand-side policies.

04

**Monitoring and Evaluation** of the implemented policies helps tracking progress and assessing performance, besides bringing transparency to the process. It also enables more evidence-based decisions and builds credibility among the different stakeholders.

05

**Communication, communication, communication.** Establish trustworthy channels of communication with stakeholders. Communicate your intentions, let people know how the process is evolving regularly, and disseminate the results.



# 4.3 - Thematic Workshops: Resilient and Sustainable Territories circular economy and waste management

The **workshop on circular economy and waste management** examined key **cross-cutting issues** such as the **integration of technical innovation, stakeholder engagement, and the alignment of policy frameworks with local needs**. Discussions highlighted the necessity of systemic approaches that connect waste management to broader sustainability and bioeconomy objectives, emphasising the importance of collaboration across sectors and governance levels.

A case study from the city of Moura was presented, demonstrating practical application of circular economy principles at the municipal level. The example showcased how stakeholder engagement, adoption of innovative waste valorisation methods, and citizen participation can drive effective waste reduction and resource recovery, reinforcing the need for holistic and locally adapted strategies.





## PAYT Moura | Case study

### Pay-as-you-throw in the city of Moura

*Ana Poeiras e Sílvia Monteiro*

The Moura project, initiated in January 2020 and promoted by Resialentejo and the Municipality of Moura, is designed to advance the circular economy through improved municipal waste management. The project's primary objectives are to reduce the total volume of waste generated, achieve a significant increase in recycling rates, and implement the polluter-pays principle in an efficient and equitable manner. This is pursued through the **adoption of appropriate tariff structures that serve as economic incentives for both waste reduction and enhanced separation at source.**

**A key focus of the initiative is to drive behavioural change within the local population,** encouraging both a reduction in waste generation and an increase in the separation of recyclables. By integrating technical, economic, and social measures, the project aims to establish a model for sustainable waste management that is both locally effective and transferable to other contexts.



## Do's

- ✓ **Promote ongoing information and awareness campaigns** to reinforce the importance of waste prevention and separation, building on the increased public understanding already achieved.
- ✓ Ensure that tariff structures and collection systems remain **convenient and accessible for residents**, maintaining the principle of polluter-pays and supporting continued growth in recycling rates.

## Don'ts

- X **Do not underestimate resistance to behavioural change** regarding waste separation; targeted engagement and support are necessary to overcome reluctance.
- X **Avoid relying on generic information systems** that are not tailored to the specific needs of the PAYT system, as this can hinder effective monitoring and enforcement.

## Key learnings from Moura

- 01 Selective waste collection in Moura **increased by over 40%** between 2019 and 2021, demonstrating the effectiveness of targeted local strategies and citizen engagement.
- 02 The **opening of the new ecocentre** in 2024 has further strengthened the support network for residents, improving access to recycling infrastructure and services.
- 03 **Interinstitutional cooperation**, particularly with Resialentejo and AIRC, enabled the integration of digital and operational solutions, enhancing the efficiency and monitoring of waste management processes.
- 04 **Collaboration with local businesses** facilitated greater accessibility and distribution of materials, supporting both operational goals and community involvement.
- 05 **The articulation between the municipality, intermunicipal entities, technology providers, and citizens** has delivered more integrated and effective responses to environmental challenges, fostered greater public acceptance, and created sustainable, locally-adapted solutions that can be replicated in other regions with similar needs

# Key learnings from Circular Economy

- 01 **Incentives for best practices** and the adoption of circular models at all stages of the value chain are essential to drive systemic change. Economic, regulatory, and recognition mechanisms should be implemented to encourage organisations and individuals to integrate circularity from production to end-of-life processes.
- 02 The definition of **a clear national strategy** and ambition is crucial to accelerate the circular transition. This strategy should set measurable targets, align stakeholders, and provide a coherent policy framework to guide both public and private action
- 03 Broad **engagement of the population** is needed, with a focus on promoting literacy and active participation in circular economy initiatives. Educational campaigns and participatory programmes can empower citizens to adopt sustainable behaviours and contribute to collective goals
- 04 The **use of digital platforms** and integrated solutions enables real-time monitoring and optimisation of circular economy outcomes. These tools facilitate data-driven decision-making, transparency, and the efficient allocation of resources across the value chain.
- 05 **Effective and consistent monitoring** is necessary to ensure that circular economy objectives are achieved. Robust monitoring and compliance mechanisms must be in place to guarantee accountability and the credibility of the transition process.

Circular Economy

**Workshop individual tool**  
Capturing insights and learnings from the case studies

EUROPEAN  
URBAN  
INITIATIVE

<p><b>1 - IMPACT &amp; SCALE</b> (impacto &amp; escala)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What positive impacts (social, economic and environmental) can be expected?</li> <li>- What strategies can be used to scale?</li> <li>(Que impactos positivos (sociais, económicos e ambientais) podem ser esperados? Que estratégias podem ser usadas para escalar as adaptações?)</li> </ul> <p>- Incremento de Recolha Seletiva - Redução de Resíduos em Aturo  - Acumulação / Variação - Redução de Custos - Optimização do Processo</p>	<p><b>2 - BARRIERS &amp; SUCCESS FACTORS</b> (barreiras &amp; fatores de sucesso)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What could be the main barriers to the implementation?</li> <li>- What conditions are necessary for success?</li> <li>(Quais podem ser as principais barreiras à implementação? Que condições são necessárias para garantir o sucesso?)</li> </ul> <p>- Resistência à Mudança - Custo de Instalação e Manutenção do Processo - Dificuldade de Ativar a População (sucos) - Baixa Comunicação (com a comunidade de TOPOS ou ATORES LOCAIS) - Financiamento do Sistema - Disponibilidade da População / Separado - Bom Design do Sistema</p>
<p><b>3 - TRANSFERABILITY &amp; ADAPTATION</b> (transferibilidade &amp; adaptação)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Which elements can be transferred?</li> <li>- Which adaptations are needed to fit our local context?</li> <li>(Que elementos podem ser transferidos? Que adaptações são necessárias para adaptar ao nosso contexto?)</li> </ul> <p>- Modelo de Negócio (Adaptado a cada realidade)</p>	<p><b>4 - INNOVATION &amp; COLLABORATIONS</b> (inovação &amp; colaborações)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How can (technological) innovations and (multi-level) collaborations be further improved?</li> <li>- Which (new) stakeholders should be involved?</li> <li>(Como podem as inovações (tecnológicas) e colaborações (multi-níveis) ser ainda melhoradas? Que outros (novos) stakeholders devem ser envolvidos?)</li> </ul> <p>- Plataforma Integrada - Grupos de Trabalho de Apoio Local</p>



# 4.4 - Thematic Workshops: Smart territories: data and digital solutions

## Smart territories: data and digital solutions

**Smart territories are not defined by connectivity or dashboards, but by how they balance ambition with inclusion, technology with legitimacy, and innovation with identity.**

These five cases show that there is no single model — but that the principles of shared governance, systemic thinking and adaptive experimentation are universally relevant.



# Foundation Data Exchange Circular Construction

## The case of Amsterdam, Netherlands

*Ron van der Lans, City of Amsterdam.*

The **Amsterdam case** focused on the challenges of enabling **circular construction through data governance**. Construction and demolition are responsible for 11% of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and over one-third of material consumption in the Netherlands. Ron presented the concept of a Foundation Data Exchange (FDE): a neutral, open-source intermediary that enables material traceability and facilitates reuse by connecting developers, demolition companies, suppliers and city authorities.

This approach builds on **urban mining dashboards, permitting systems for circular deconstruction, and certification schemes tied to data flows**. The vision is to make cities part of the product loop, not just consumers of raw material, by embedding data transparency and legal tools into the circular economy.



## Do's

- ✓ Pilot TTPs in real demolition-reuse chains with public oversight.
- ✓ Use dashboards and APIs to enable traceability of materials.
- ✓ Align with EU frameworks (Data Act, DSA) to scale legally.

## Don'ts

- ✗ Don't rely on informal or voluntary data sharing.
- ✗ Avoid building platforms without user governance and legal clarity.

## Key learnings from Amsterdam

- 01 Circular construction requires more than technical solutions — it demands trust **frameworks, legal instruments** and shared incentives across sectors.
- 02 A neutral **Trusted Third Party (TTP)** can resolve data asymmetries between cities and private platforms.
- 03 Cities can lead by **embedding reuse requirements into permit systems** and linking them to data flows.



# Aragón and Zaragoza's path towards innovation ecosystems – The Future

## The case of Zaragoza, Spain

*Daniel Sarasa Funes, Government of Spain.*

*Valter Ferreira, EUI Expert.*

The Zaragoza case explored how a regional strategy can evolve over 20 years, creating a **multiscale innovation ecosystem across district**, city, and metropolitan levels. Aragón, a low-density territory with strong industrial and logistics sectors, has positioned Zaragoza as its innovation anchor, particularly through the PLAZA logistics hub and partnerships with companies like Inditex.

Daniel presented how the region is now transitioning from logistics to green energy leadership, becoming a net exporter of renewable power while attracting data centres and new digital infrastructure. But this transition also brings governance challenges such as balancing energy and water use, integrating local talent into high-value sectors, and managing innovation narratives across scales



## Do's

- ✓ Build innovation narratives progressively, with a clear timeline of transformation.
- ✓ Leverage anchor sectors (e.g. logistics) to attract private investment and talent.
- ✓ Align energy policy, land use and digital infrastructure under a single metropolitan vision.

## Don'ts

- ✗ Don't pursue growth without assessing trade-offs (e.g. water demand from data centers).
- ✗ Avoid strategies that treat innovation as tech-only — governance and local ownership matter equally.

## Key learnings from Amsterdam

- 01 A successful smart territory strategy builds over time — from **district-level pilots** to **regional-scale ecosystems**.
- 02 Strategic sectors (like logistics or energy) can act as **anchors for innovation but** must be tied to **local benefit** and **public capacity**.
- 03 Civic quality of life and long-term public vision are as important as infrastructure.

# Digital Infrastructure and Governance in Porto

## The case of Porto, Portugal

*Paulo Calçada, Porto Digital.*

Porto presented a unique model in which the municipality acts as a non-commercial telecom operator, managing fibre networks, Wi-Fi infrastructure, sensors, and digital services without selling them. **This model enables Porto to retain control over critical data flows, design smarter services, and support interoperability across public entities.**

The city is implementing a modular governance model, grouping IT services into functional blocks and analysing their readiness for centralisation. It has also developed a city-wide Urban Data Platform, supported by real-time monitoring (e.g. soft mobility, climate), fostering both internal innovation and external data-driven services.

**Porto's approach showed that territorial intelligence doesn't require flashy apps it needs infrastructure, internal capacity, and long-term thinking.**





## Do's

- ✓ Treat infrastructure (fibre, Wi-Fi, sensors) as a strategic public asset.
- ✓ Design modular governance structures, respecting each entity's digital maturity.
- ✓ Promote internal co-creation and experimentation with municipal staff.

## Don'ts

- ✗ Don't over-centralise systems where local ownership is strong.
- ✗ Avoid creating innovation teams disconnected from real city operations.

## Key learnings from Amsterdam

- 01 Public ownership of infrastructure (e.g. fibre) can be a **key enabler** of smart governance.
- 02 A **functional block governance model** allows selective and context-driven centralisation.
- 03 Internal capacity-building — especially through innovation workshops with civil servants — is critical.

# Trusted Third Party for Short-Term Rentals

## The case of Amsterdam, Netherlands

*Ron van der Lans, Amsterdam Smart City*

Ron presented a **pioneering approach to managing short-term rentals (STR)** through the creation of a Trusted Third Party (TTP) a neutral data intermediary between cities and platforms like Airbnb. The model addresses the challenges cities face in regulating platforms that resist sharing real-time data, often citing legal or financial disclosure limitations (e.g. SEC constraints).

The TTP model includes licensing integration, automated tracking of nights stayed, and enforcement actions triggered by data irregularities. It enables real-time control while respecting legal boundaries and facilitating platform compliance.

**This case showed how data governance can be operationalised through structured intermediaries,** unlocking cooperation in otherwise asymmetric power dynamics.



## Do's

- ✓ Establish TTPs as legal entities with representation from all actors.
- ✓ Link platform licensing and enforcement to data-sharing agreements.
- ✓ Use the TTP model to scale across cities with shared legal frameworks.

## Don'ts

- ✗ Don't rely on fragmented, city-by-city negotiations.
- ✗ Avoid voluntary data agreements without clear legal backing and accountability structures.

## Key learnings from Amsterdam

- 01 Data governance for STRs is a legal, technical and strategic challenge — not just a technical one.
- 02 A **TTP can enable structured, enforceable agreements** with platforms without relying on goodwill.
- 03 Transparency and neutrality are key to trust between private platforms and public authorities.



# Scaling Digital Services through Intermunicipal Cooperation

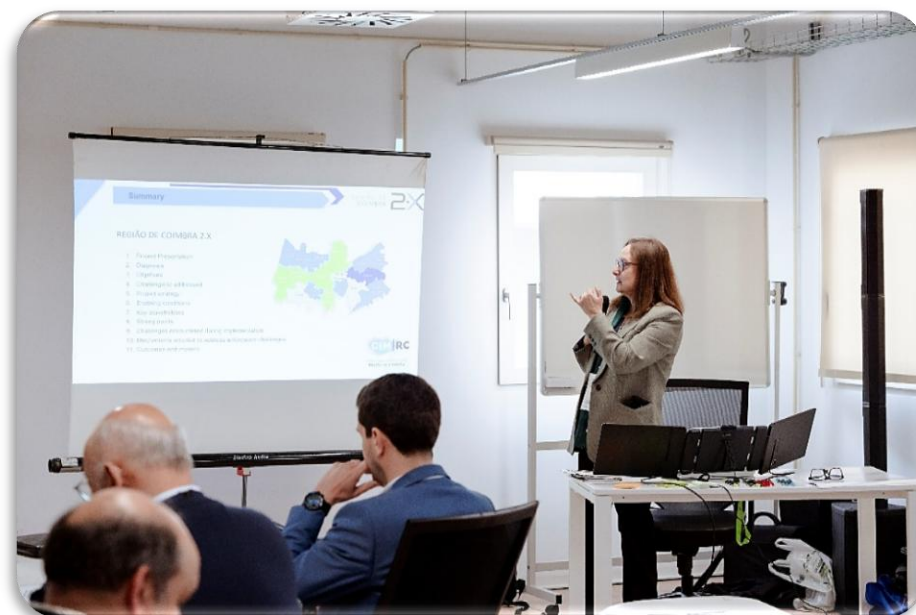
## The case of Região de Coimbra, Portugal

*Paula Silvestre, CIM Região de Coimbra*

The Região de Coimbra presented its project “Região de Coimbra 2.X”, an intermunicipal strategy to standardize and scale digital public services across 19 municipalities. This ERDF-funded **initiative responded to disparities in digital maturity, infrastructure and human resources, aiming to promote cohesion, inclusion and efficiency.**

The project began with an extensive digital diagnostic assessing infrastructure, business systems, staff capacity, and citizen service channels before designing shared platforms (e.g. entrepreneurship tools, a tourist app, and a supra-municipal portal). Rather than imposing uniformity, it focused on **harmonising services while respecting municipal autonomy.**

The case offered a robust example of how shared governance and technical levelling can build collective digital capacity in fragmented territories.



## Do's

- ✓ Use diagnostics to reveal real disparities in infrastructure and capacity.
- ✓ Design supra-municipal portals with modularity, allowing local adaptation.
- ✓ Combine central coordination with clear governance policies and local buy-in.

## Don'ts

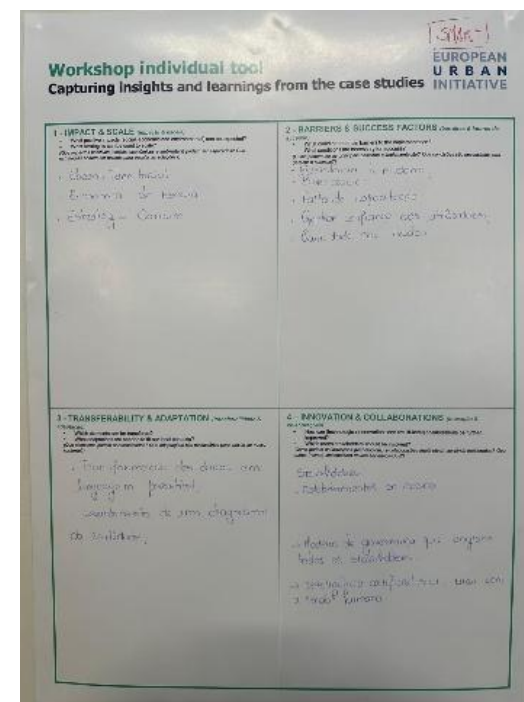
- ✗ Don't assume all municipalities are ready for the same digital tools.
- ✗ Avoid one-size-fits-all platforms that don't consider context or user literacy.

## Key learnings from Amsterdam

- 01 A detailed diagnostic phase is essential to **tailor solutions** across municipalities.
- 02 Intermunicipal strategies need **political alignment, shared platforms, and capacity-building**.
- 03 User-centricity is crucial: services must work for citizens, not just comply with technical standards.

## Key learnings on Smart Territories

- 01 **Smart territories are built on governance, not gadgets.** Whether it's fibre networks in Porto, STR regulation in Amsterdam, or multi-municipality digital platforms in Coimbra, the critical success factor is not technology, but the governance structure that frames it, including ownership, trust, legal clarity, and shared purpose.
- 02 **Interoperability must be political as well as technical.** All five cases dealt with fragmentation: between municipalities, between cities and platforms, or between public and private data. Bridging these divides requires not just APIs and standards, but political coordination and strategic alignment.
- 03 **Data is not just a tool; it's an infrastructure and a currency.** Cities like Porto and Amsterdam treat data not as a by-product, but as a strategic asset to be governed with the same care as physical infrastructure. Legal frameworks (TTPs, licensing rules) and civic accountability must evolve in parallel.
- 04 **Digital maturity varies and scaling must respect that.** Coimbra's approach demonstrated the importance of starting with diagnostics and building digital equity among municipalities before pushing shared platforms. One-size-fits-all approaches are doomed to fail.
- 05 **Experimentation thrives in clarity.** Zaragoza's transformation shows that successful innovation ecosystems grow when pilots are supported by long-term public vision, talent retention strategies, and civic value — not just corporate acceleration.
- 06 **Trust must be structured.** Whether between platform and city (TTP), municipality and citizen, or data producer and user, trust does not happen spontaneously. It must be embedded in roles, rules and routines.





# SMART TERRITORIES: DATA AND DIGITAL SOLUTIONS

## Do's

- ✓ **Treat governance as infrastructure:** Just like fibre or sensors, effective governance structures (including clarity of roles, shared decision-making, and long-term commitment) are essential for territorial intelligence to function.
- ✓ **Create space for experimentation:** Allow for real-world testing, in agriculture, construction, services, where failures are accepted and learnings are shared.
- ✓ **Start with what exists and works:** Begin with diagnostics. Understand the digital maturity, infrastructure and organisational culture before designing platforms or pushing standardisation.
- ✓ **Build trust through shared tools and transparent data:** Use mechanisms like Trusted Third Parties or open dashboards to facilitate coordination, manage conflicts, and enable monitoring across sectors and governance levels.
- ✓ **Align digital with territorial identity:** Whether cherries in Fundão or logistics in Zaragoza, smartness gains traction when it reinforces, not replaces, local economic and cultural anchors.

## Don'ts

- ✗ **Design solutions without political anchoring:** Innovation that is not politically supported, across mandates and levels, won't scale. Technical readiness without political will equals fragility.
- ✗ **Impose uniformity across unequal territories:** Standardised platforms that ignore asymmetries in capacity, resources or priorities between municipalities tend to fail or breed resistance.
- ✗ **Conflate technology with purpose:** Avoid letting the tool define the strategy. AI, IoT or dashboards should serve a civic goal, not be implemented for their own sake.
- ✗ **Outsource innovation to consultants:** Don't exclude civil servants, citizens or local actors from shaping digital policies. Internal capacity and co-creation are smarter than external branding.
- ✗ **Ignore the rural dimension:** Smart Territories are not urban-only. Leaving rural municipalities behind weakens territorial cohesion and ignores places with enormous innovation potential.

5

Deep Dive

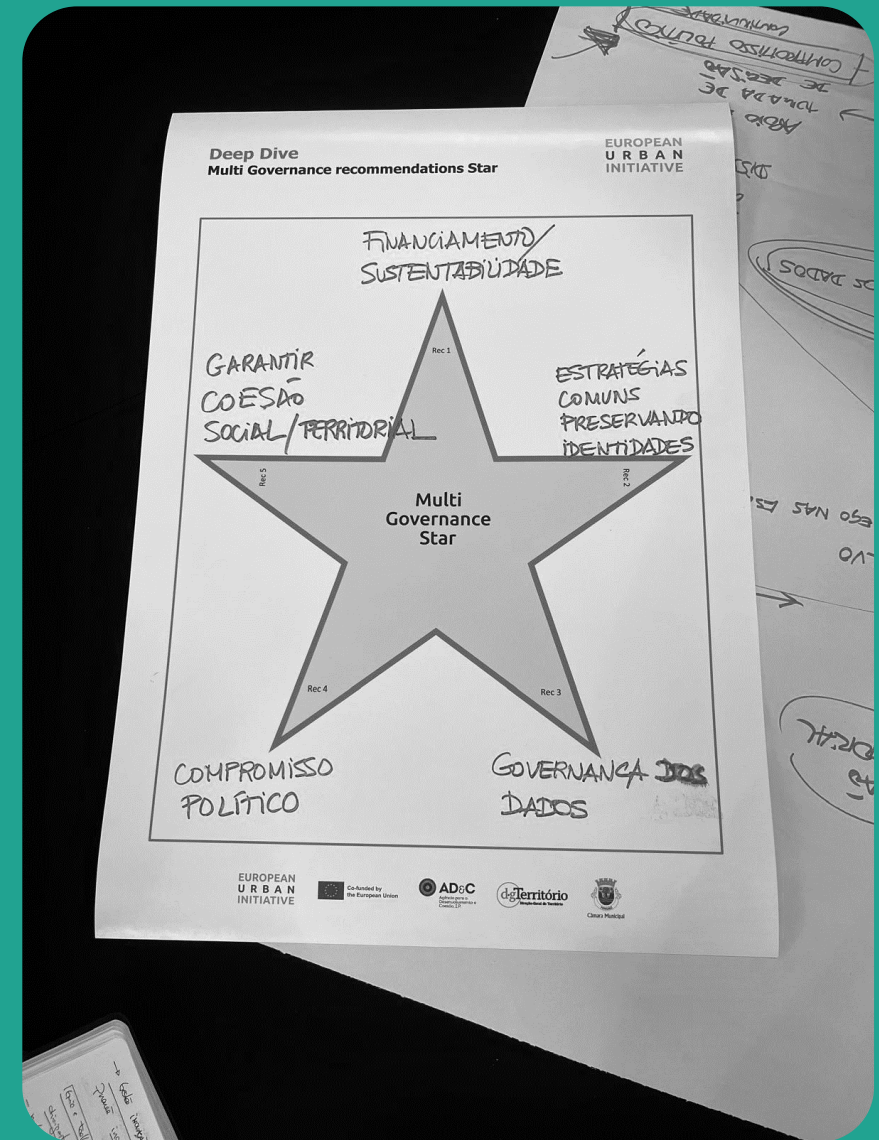
## Deep Dive – Smart Territories Enablers

The deep dive focused on **how to make multilevel and interdepartmental governance work effectively in the context of smart territories**. Participants co-developed a set of practical recommendations to ensure that data, digital tools and governance frameworks serve citizens rather than complexity.

Key reflections highlighted the need to:

- Establish clear roles and mandates between national, regional and local levels;
- Promote interoperability of platforms and services, avoiding silos;
- Ensure political and operational continuity, beyond election cycles;
- Create shared data ethics frameworks to build trust;
- Embed citizen-centred design principles in all technological solutions.

Participants also stressed that **smart territory governance should simplify people's lives not add layers of bureaucracy**. Tools like shared dashboards, integrated service portals, and AI-assisted planning were seen as enablers but only when backed by human-centred design and co-creation.



## Key recommendations from the deep dive

As for the **Innovation Ecosystems** group, they highlighted the following points:

- Reconsider the current administrative areas and instead create functional/thematic ones to facilitate grouping of cities/regions with the similar challenges, rather than similar demographic profiles;
- Flexibility in the implementation of projects to accommodate non-linear processes;
- Incentivise a holistic approach;
- Simplify/harmonise the legal and financing frameworks as it is a heavy administrative burden for participants;
- Improve the coordination between support structures.

The **Mobility** group presented a very lean set of recommendations, namely:

- Foster stronger political and community involvement;
- Ensure continuity of the policies across election cycles;
- Create an urban agenda for public participation;
- Learn from the process;
- Aim for cohesive, resilient and fair territories.





## Key recommendations from the deep dive

The **Circular Economy** group presented the following recommendations:

- Engage civil society through awareness raising actions to different age groups;
- Establish a national circular economy strategy;
- Create monetary incentives to good practices;
- Develop an urban management platform to support operationalising and monitoring;
- Ensure enforcement.

Concerning the **Smart Territories** group, they shared the following thoughts:

- Develop clear regulation on the governance of data, establishing clear roles and mandates between national, regional and local levels;
- Ensure political commitment and operational continuity, beyond election cycles;
- Establish a common strategy beyond administrative borders;
- Embed citizen-centred design principles in all technological solutions.
- Aim for cohesive and social territories.

The group also stressed that smart territory governance should simplify people's lives — not add to the bureaucracy.



## Deep dive and pitches

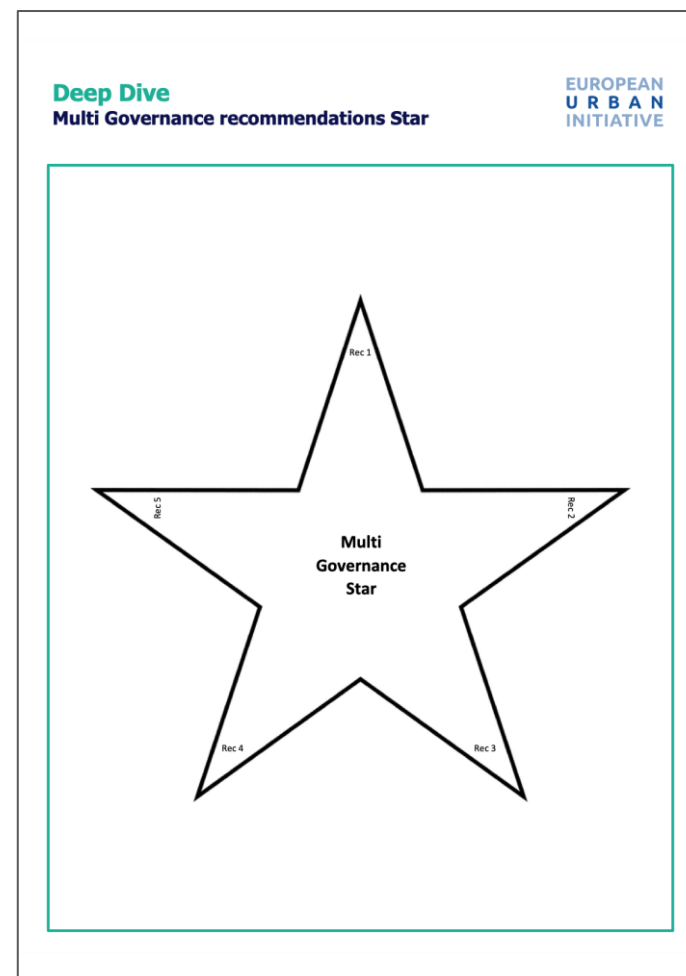
The deep dive session focused on how to make multi-level governance work effectively in the context of the different topics.

Each group brainstormed a set of practical recommendations, using as a facilitating tool the «multi-level governance star», and shared them in an elevator-pitch type of intervention with a panel of experts, namely:

- Gonçalo Crisóstomo, EUI Urban Contact Point for Portugal, DGT
- Maria João Matos – URBACT National Contact Point for Portugal, DGT
- Marta Coutada – CIM Ave, Portugal
- Nuno Romão, AD&C

The experts welcomed the groups remarks and made some recommendations. For instance, it was argued the functional/thematic areas would not be practical, as each city/region would likely be assigned to functional different areas, depending on the challenge.

It is important to highlight that **during the deep dive a list of requests for city-to-city projects was established by the participants with more than 10 requests.**



6

Conclusions



## WHAT DID WE LEARN FROM THIS EXPERIENCE?

The Fundão Capacity Building event demonstrated that **intermunicipal cooperation** is not just a governance tool, but a **strategic enabler for delivering sustainable and inclusive urban development**.

Participants highlighted key insights:

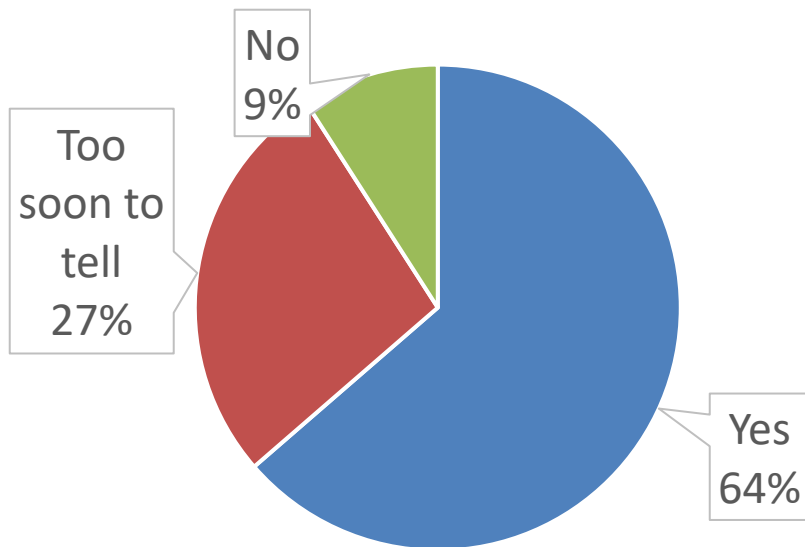
- **Effective coordination** across municipalities is essential to address complex and shared challenges.
- **Local ownership and context-based solutions** increase the impact and sustainability of interventions.
- **Learning from peers**, through open exchange and hands-on cases, is a powerful driver of innovation.
- **Digital tools and smart governance must serve people** simplifying processes and improving service delivery.

The event also reinforced the importance of sustained investment in capacity building, policy alignment, and collaborative action, particularly in low-density and transitioning territories.

Above all, the experience in Fundão reminded us that **impactful urban development starts with people, partnerships, and place-based thinking**.

The European Urban Initiative (EUI) provides funding and support for cities to build on the lessons shared in Fundão. Instruments such as [Innovative Actions](#), [City-to-City Exchanges](#) and [Peer Reviews](#) help scale up solutions, strengthen cooperation, and turn ideas into impactful projects.





## ***SOME SURVEY RESULTS***

### **Did you build your capacity in relation to multi-level governance?**

It is rather encouraging to see that 64% of the participants feel that the capacity in relation to the multilevel governance was improved and 27% consider that they see potential that it will happen.

### **Would you say the participation to this event brought you knowledge or a new perspective encouraging you to make some changes in your work?**

When coming to the individual perspective of knowledge improvement and inspirations to promote changes at work it is rewarding to see that almost 80% are in this situation while more 18% consider that this can happen in the future.

