



QUARTERLY NETWORK REPORT #2

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SUMMARY

In this report you will find ECONNECTING's progress towards sustainable, green and accessible urban-rural connectivity, in particular some best practices for **good governance** and promoting **participation** in public policy development. You will also find interesting lessons learnt during the network meeting in West Mani (EL) and interesting updates on a small-scale action to reduce car traffic in favour of buses, provided by our partner RCC Ormoz (SI). Finally, don't miss our second videocast with Helle-Triin Hansumae, architect and project coordinator from Tori Vald (EE)!

Highlights from West Mani

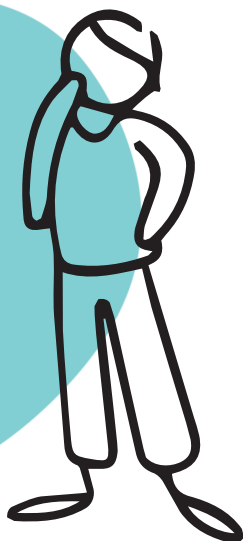


THE CHALLENGING PATH TOWARDS THE TWIN TRANSITION

The green and digital transitions are particularly challenging in rural settlements surrounding urban centers. These areas often face inadequate public transport services, limited essential services, low-quality infrastructure, and consequently demographic decline. The ECONNECTING meeting in West Mani (29-21 June) provided a platform to explore the conditions necessary for **upgrading public services, infrastructure, and connectivity**, thereby creating a favorable environment for attracting permanent residents and economic activities in rural areas.

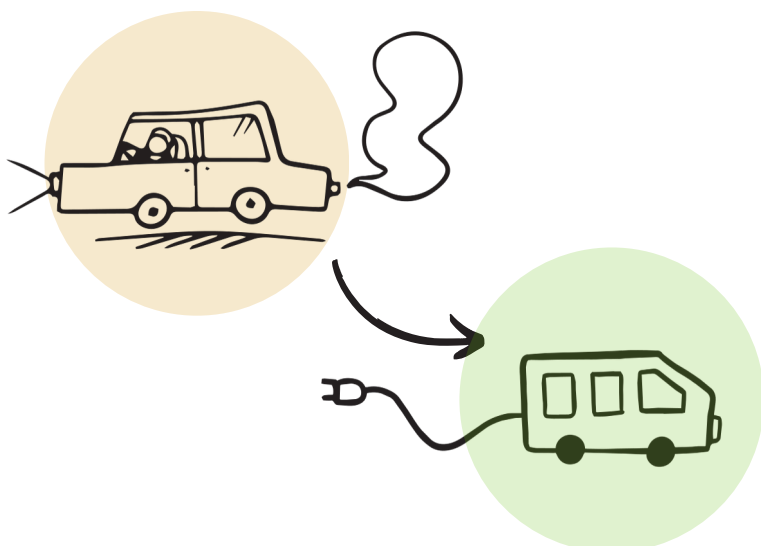
West Mani encompasses both urban-semi-urban towns and mountainous villages, totaling **64 villages**. During the meeting, participants visited Kardamyli and two mountain villages, Kastania and Arahova. These remote villages, despite their challenging accessibility, hold significant value due to their historical and natural resources. Costas Karberis, a local expert, presented discussed ongoing projects aimed at upgrading public spaces in these villages. Expected benefits include improved accessibility and functionality of public infrastructure, enhanced quality of life for residents, and the attraction of new businesses and visitors through regenerated public spaces with new pavements, better lighting, and modern and smart urban equipment.

Can rural areas
aim for
sustainable
green & digital
transitions?

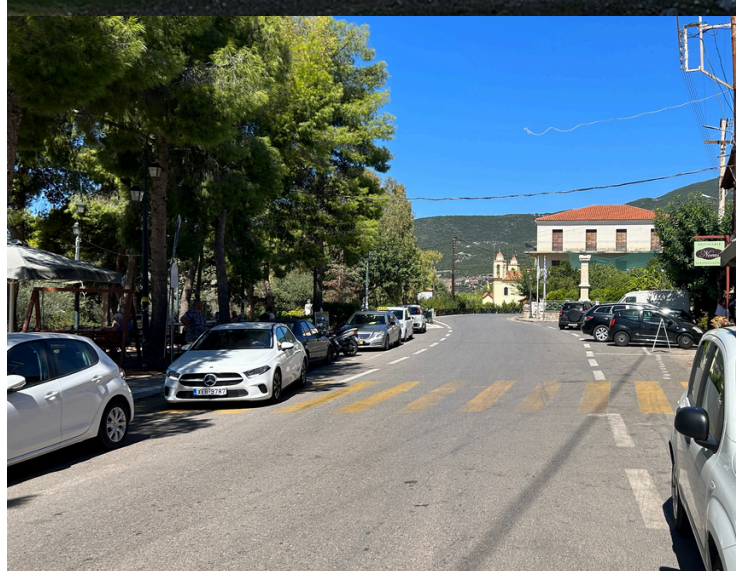


Highlights from West Mani

West Mani's approach to addressing these challenges is encapsulated in the **Integrated Territorial Programme**, presented by Project Coordinator Anna Nickitopoulou. This framework includes various projects aimed at upgrading public spaces and promoting digital and green transitions. Four projects focus on the digital transition, modernizing tourism sector businesses, and enhancing the attractiveness of natural and cultural heritage sites. Five projects address green community goals, including wastewater and household waste management, improving accessibility, residential environment upgrades, and enhancing sports infrastructure.



Panagiotis Papantoniou, President of the Association of Greek Transport Engineers, provided valuable data on the green parameters of a **traffic study** in West Mani. This study, considering the region's unique characteristics, identified significant parking issues and narrow streets that hinder pedestrian traffic. The development of an **electric vehicle charging plan** could encourage the use of electric vehicles and reduce traditional vehicle pollution, improving the area's quality of life. Infrastructure improvements, better public transport connections, and a comprehensive electric vehicle charging network are essential for the region's sustainable development.



Highlights from West Mani



According to our Lead Expert Roland Krebs, proximity is crucial in **transforming urban spaces** to meet diverse needs within a short distance, thereby reducing reliance on cars. This transformation involves integrating various modes of transport such as car-sharing, car-pooling, and bike rentals, with a strong emphasis on enhancing public transport and promoting active mobility. If essential services become easily accessible, then it won't be necessary anymore to take long trips and even rural villages could be self-sufficient entities. Restrictions to the use of cars must be accompanied by community-centric strategies and environmental consciousness education.

OSTANA'S CASE STUDY

The URBACT Expert Simone D'Antonio, hosted by our network as ad-hoc expert, highlighted how the green transition can **positively impact small towns** in rural areas by promoting sustainable housing regeneration and creating new economic opportunities. The Municipality of Ostana in Italy's Piemonte region exemplifies this approach. Ostana, one of Europe's first "**Smart Villages**", has countered population loss and geographical isolation with innovative and sustainable strategies such as:

- carpooling systems
- electric charging stations for e-bike and e-car
- strategy for attracting "city quitters"

Ostana's objectives focus on creating a **green community**, increasing affordable housing with fast broadband, and fostering cultural and social innovation. This participatory approach, involving extensive resident and stakeholder engagement, has defined a clear vision for addressing urgent local challenges and new needs like remote working.



Good Governance & Participation

ACTIVATING YOUR LOCAL GROUPS

The URBACT methodology emphasizes the formation of **URBACT Local Groups** (ULGs) at the outset of the project cycle. During the development of the Integrated Action Plan, key stakeholders are identified from a diverse range of sectors, including municipal departments, non-governmental organizations, culture and arts, education, and entrepreneurship, among others. Additionally, efforts are made to engage the "*unusual suspects*" – stakeholders who are often overlooked in traditional planning processes. The ULG is a dynamic group, capable of adding new members as needed. It meets regularly and **plays a crucial role in mobilizing and engaging the community.** Throughout the project cycle of the URBACT Action Planning Networks, our partners deploy such a ULG-led planning approach. For example, in West Mani, the group is quite diverse and active - from local olive producers to outdoor-sport companies.

WHY DO WE NEED THIS?

We need the local groups to promote **transparent decision-making processes**, foster citizen engagement, and integrate sustainable development goals into local policies. By implementing good governance practices across villages, towns, and city unions, **we can ensure inclusive and equitable growth.** The regional decision-making process for creating multi-functional hubs involves all stakeholders, highlighting the importance of collaboration with neighboring cities to develop sustainable mobility nodes. Strengthening intra-municipal cooperation is essential for improving connectivity and accessibility between towns. Some partners like Faenza, Viseu and Ormoz are city-unions and/or regional agencies that lead the develop of certain topics of their respective region. A well-working **multi-level governance** there is key to the success of regional planning. Additionally, financial partnerships are crucial in securing funding for regional projects that support long-term growth and resilience.

Good Governance & Participation

PARTICIPATORY ACTION PLANNING

Participation is about the co-creation of solutions by engaging a diverse range of stakeholders.

The more varied the input, **the richer the outcomes** for the project. However, without proper structure, participation can lead to confusion and derail progress. Therefore, strong facilitation and clear guidance are essential.

- It is crucial not to initiate the process without first establishing **clear goals and expectations**.
- Define **specific objectives** and boundaries for the participatory process to ensure it achieves its intended purpose.
- Prepare **guidelines** and **structured agendas** for public meetings, and anticipate potential questions or concerns that may challenge the project.



Participatory session on the street in Bernardgasse in Vienna.
Source: Superwien



Townhall meeting in Vienna during the presentation of a design of a public space in the 9th district.
Source: Superwien

Participation is key to the **Integrated Planning Approach**. By engaging a diverse range of stakeholders in the participatory process, you create a foundation for more comprehensive and effective planning actions. This inclusive approach ensures that **voices from various sectors** — such as local government, civil society, business, and community groups — **are heard**, leading to solutions that are well-rounded and address multiple aspects of urban and rural development. Moreover, participatory processes promote collaboration, transparency, and shared ownership of the outcomes. By aligning stakeholder input with the goals of the project, the Integrated Planning Approach becomes more **adaptive, sustainable, and responsive** to the actual needs of the community.

Bridging the Urban–Rural Divide

A glimpse into RCC Ormož

Reducing the carbon footprint is a central focus for RCC Ormož, especially given Slovenia's deeply ingrained "**car culture**" and the current lack of sufficient public transport options. To address this, it's essential to bridge the gap between urban and rural areas by expanding public transportation rather than increasing car usage. As Ormož hosts numerous events, such as concerts, particularly in the summer, the reliance on cars is overwhelming. However, this presents an opportunity to develop flexible transport alternatives that cater to both residents and tourists. **Encouraging visitors to use public transportation** and promoting alternative travel behaviors, such as cycling and car-sharing, can significantly reduce car dependency.

A STRATEGIC SHIFT TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY

The strategy for Ormož focuses on reducing greenhouse gas emissions by **strengthening the connection between urban and rural areas** and promoting sustainable tourism. Key initiatives include enhancing public transportation by **increasing frequency** and optimizing routes to better serve all communities. In parallel, the town will encourage active mobility by promoting walking and cycling as viable **alternatives to car use**. To support a more sustainable lifestyle, the strategy also explores ideas for remote work, reducing the need for daily commutes.

Additionally, while urban areas may have adequate transport services, **rural areas** like Ormož's surroundings suffer from **limited options**, especially during school holidays when bus services are reduced. The infrequent and time-consuming train connections further exacerbate the problem, making it difficult to cover even short distances. By focusing on enhancing public transport and offering sustainable travel alternatives, RCC Ormož can address these challenges and create a more environmentally friendly and connected community.



Additionally, a community-wide education campaign will be launched to raise awareness and motivate residents and visitors to choose public transport over private vehicles, fostering a culture of eco-friendly travel and helping to create a greener, more connected Ormož.

"Leave the Car, Come with Us"

SMALL SCALE ACTION

In a tangible step towards sustainable tourism, RCC Ormož has introduced a **pilot project** designed in collaboration with the URBACT Local Group. This initiative aims to reduce car traffic by offering a **flexible shuttle service** that encourages both locals and visitors to choose public transport during their leisure time.

Running from June 22 to August 31, this service operates on **Saturdays** between 15:00 and 22:00, with a half-hour cycle covering two carefully selected routes. The first bus route covers Ormož-Podgorci-Osluševeci-Ormož, while the second connects Ormož with Središče ob Dravi and back. By strategically linking these locations, the service aims to better integrate the diverse landscapes of Ormož, from its town center to the rural areas.

This initiative, aptly named "**Leave the Car, Come with Us**", is not only about providing transportation but also about gathering valuable **feedback**. To assess the effectiveness of this initiative, the project team will gather feedback through **questionnaires**, asking users for their opinions on how the service can be improved. They will also inquire about passengers' willingness to pay for the service in the future. Initially, the pilot will cover two municipalities, with plans to expand to a third municipality in a later stage. Additionally, there is potential to extend this flexible transport service to coincide with the wine festival in November, offering further opportunities to refine and enhance the service based on real-world use and community feedback.





Videocast with Helle-Triin from Tori Vald (Estonia)

LEADING DIGITAL TRENDS FOR URBAN-RURAL LINKAGES

Roland: Hello, my name is Roland Krebs, I'm the Lead Expert of ECONNECTING and together with my colleague Mariachiara from Faenza, we are co-hosting this podcast with Tori Vald, from Estonia. We have here Helle-Triin Hansumae. She is our Estonian partner and Tori Vald is a small municipality, rather small population but huge territory in the South-West of Estonia, and Tori is a municipality in the metropolitan region of Parnu, which is an important region, but for many reasons is like a real hub city. And it's a pleasure to have you here, Helle-Triin, at our podcast on the ECONNECTING project. How are you doing?

Helle-Triin: Hello, good. Thank you for having me.

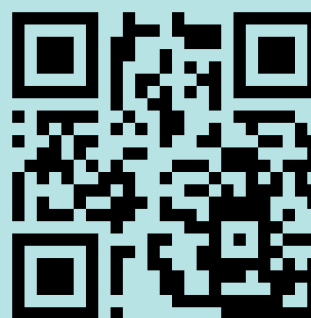
Mariachiara: It is always a pleasure.

Roland: Yes, could you tell us a little bit about you and about your town? Where is located? What is particular about Tori Vald?

Helle-Triin: Tori is an agricultural and rural municipality, but, what makes us unique - in my mind - is that we have an incredibly diverse environment. We have very fascinating history and abundance of heritage

monuments. We have marshes, bog forests, several rivers, dense wood fields, several nature preserve areas, as well as a small historical industry town with around 3,500 residents. So, personally what really captivates me is heritage and the environmental diversity in our municipality. Undoubtedly, the area is very attractive, because our population is steadily increasing...

Listen the whole interview!



<https://vimeo.com/956176845>

Tools of the month

DAY IN THE LIFE

This tool is a way to learn about an area through the **daily experiences of women** and of **sexual and gender minority members** of the community. Thanks to it, the area can be approached by taking into account the realities and perspectives of social minorities; moreover, problematic and unsafe spaces can be identified. **The activity also brings an awareness of how minorities perceive the city** and how it impacts their everyday lives. How do different groups perceive the area? Which places do they like, which don't they like, and why? Which features of the space have a direct impact on the daily lives of the participants? How could daily travel behavior be included in the analysis? Each participant is handed a **printed map of the neighborhood**, where they can map out their daily routes.

STEP UP

The Step Up tool gives an opportunity to create a shared understanding of why gender perspectives are being addressed in urban planning and design. The organizers prepare profiles of all participants beforehand and write these down on the name tags. The moderators give each participant a name tag with a profile on it and ask them to read their name tags silently, but not display them. The participants are then asked to stand on a horizontal line marked on the floor with adhesive tape. The moderators read out loud **several scenarios** (i.e., a new shopping mall has been built in the heart of the neighborhood) and, by the end of each scenario, each participant thinks about **how their profile would feel under that scenario** and either **take a step forward** if they would feel comfortable or **a step backward** if they would feel uncomfortable. After each scenario has been presented, participants continue to step forwards or backward, without returning to their original positions. After the facilitators have finished reading all the scenarios, each participant puts their name tag on, says their profile out loud, and takes stock of what position they ended up in. Moderators begin a conversation about why each character ended up in a certain position by asking **guiding questions**. Participants learn how to put themselves in positions they might never have thought of. Also, **the tool gives an overview of the difficulties that minorities face in everyday life** and shows obstacles in the intervention area.



Looking ahead



NEXT STEPS

The ECONNECTING project is progressing toward its next significant milestone with the upcoming 6th Transnational Meeting, scheduled to take place in Nagykálló, Hungary, on the 26th and 27th of November 2024. This meeting will serve as a crucial platform for all partners to present draft versions of their Integrated Action Plans (IAPs), with a focus on collaboration and feedback through workshops and interactive sessions. Thanks to the insights from the recent meeting in Ormož by all partners, there is room for further refinement of the Integrated Action Plans.

