





## Highlights from Ormož

From September 9th to 11th, Ormož (Slovenia) hosted the fifth meeting of the ECONNECTING network, focused on "Accessible and Welcoming Cities".

The event brought together participants from eight European city partners, who were warmly welcomed by Ormož's Mayor, **Danijel Vrbnjak**, and **Milena Debeljak**, the Director of the Municipal Administration. In their opening keynote, both emphasized the importance of European projects like ECONNECTING in shaping the future of sustainable development in Ormož. In particular, both speakers underscored the importance of addressing sustainable mobility within the municipality. They pointed out that tackling these challenges locally is essential for improving quality of life and laying the groundwork for long-term environmental resilience. By prioritizing pedestrian-friendly spaces, accessible public transport, and integrating green mobility solutions, **Ormož aims to serve as a model for how smaller municipalities** can lead the charge in creating more sustainable and connected urban environments.



Mayor Vrbnjak further emphasized that while international cooperation and external funding are crucial, the true success of such initiatives starts at the local level. He highlighted the essential role of the local community in fostering inclusive and accessible urban development, noting that this grassroots involvement is key to **achieving lasting, impactful change**.

## Highlights from Ormož

The first day of the event focused on the integrated development of cities, highlighting key urban planning principles. These included:

- the active involvement of residents,
- the preservation of city centers,
- the promotion of sustainable mobility.

Discussions also covered the adaptability of public spaces and the importance of aligning architectural solutions with sustainable mobility plans.

Participants expressed strong satisfaction with the ideas presented, emphasizing the importance of **adaptable public spaces**, particularly in response to an ageing population and the increasing need for accessibility in urban areas. They unanimously agreed that integrating architectural designs with sustainable mobility plans is essential for creating more resilient cities. Proposals to enhance public transport, build additional cycling lanes, and prioritize walking as a primary mode of transport were met with enthusiasm.

[Read more on the dedicated article on www.urbact.eu](http://www.urbact.eu)

## ENCOURAGING SUSTAINABLE TOURISTIC EXPERIENCES

A special emphasis was placed on Ormož's tourism strategies, particularly the promotion of the "**Destination Jeruzalem**" brand, which is deeply rooted in sustainability. Participants explored how the region prioritizes eco-friendly tourism by integrating sustainable practices into viticulture, promoting locally-sourced wines, and preserving the natural landscape. These efforts not only enhance the visitor experience but also support the long-term environmental and economic health of the region. Ormož is emerging as a model for sustainable tourism development, particularly within the context of **wine culture**.



# Highlights from Nagykálló



The town of Nagykálló, Hungary, hosted the sixth transnational meeting (Mid-Term) of the ECONNECTING network from 26th to 27th of November.



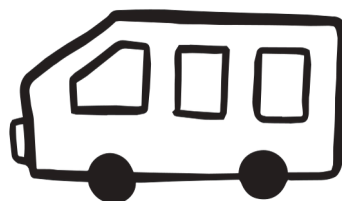
Nagykálló, a small town and former county seat, serves as an administrative hub for a district of eight settlements. It is 13 km from the regional centre of Nyíregyháza, and its 30 km radius includes rural, agricultural areas. Transport is limited to the road and an infrequent, slow train service, with about 600 commuters a day, mainly by car. Transport was also the first topic discussed during the meeting, thanks to a compelling presentation by ad hoc expert András Ekés, focusing on Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) services. András outlined the challenges facing Nagykálló, such as the growing trend of motorisation, the impact of suburbanisation on transport systems, and the lack of large-scale, bold decisions to support green mobility transitions. In addition, András also highlighted the issue of monopolised private mobility services and the slow uptake of digital technologies, particularly in rural areas where limited access to public transport disproportionately affects vulnerable populations. This lack of connectivity often leads to marginalisation and isolation, especially among economically disadvantaged groups.



## Highlights from Nagykálló

Nagykálló has implemented several strategies to address these challenges:

- Developing sustainable urban mobility plans (SUMP)
- Raising public awareness
- Maintaining affordable service costs
- Participating in EU cooperation projects and innovation training programs
- Coordinating spatial and transport development to counter suburbanization trends
- Integrating urban and regional transport systems to improve connectivity
- Renewing the local bus fleet with green technologies and advancing transport digitalization



### THE “GYEREBUSZ” EXPERIENCE

The participants of the meeting also explored the “Gyerebusz” demand-responsive transport service during a tour of the regional public transport provider’s facilities in Nyíregyháza. Since its introduction in 2020, the service has:

- Established new direct links across Nyíregyháza, reducing the need for interchanges and improving access to workplaces and tourist destinations
- Increased bus capacity by 5%
- Launched a new on-demand night transport service

The “Gyerebusz” model continues to evolve, with ongoing experimental initiatives such as Line 71, which serves previously inaccessible areas. This service is expected to be rebranded and expanded by spring 2025, operating under the current public service contract with no additional financial burdens.





## Green communities

### PROMOTING A GREEN TRANSITION IN THE REGIONAL CONTEXT

**Reducing car dependency** is a key strategy for creating more sustainable, resilient rural communities.

ECONNECTING promotes the concept of **green communities**, where residents can meet their daily needs within walking or cycling distance or at least with a bus or on-demand transportation, thereby reducing the reliance on cars and minimizing the environmental impact of transportation. One of the most effective ways to achieve this is through the **reimagining of public spaces** and the **development of community hubs**. These hubs can serve as centers for social, economic, and environmental activities, providing residents with access to essential services, green spaces, and sustainable mobility options.

By activating public spaces, such as **community gardens** and **tree-lined streets**, green communities can enhance the sense of place and improve the local environment.

For example, ECONNECTING partner RRC Ormož in Slovenia has implemented a vibrant town center with an outstanding **cultural centre and music school** that was completed in 2011. Now, they the city is developing ideas for a new town square that will prioritize pedestrians over cars in the public space design and that will help to revitalize the all empty ground floor zones.

Another topic is the integration of **green economy principles** into rural development can help foster a holistic approach to community buildings. This includes promoting **sustainable conservation of vacant buildings** and enable the conversion into public buildings like libraries with co-working spaces. By creating green communities that prioritize environmental sustainability and social cohesion, ECONNECTING seeks to build resilient and harmonious communities that safeguard the natural environment while enhancing the well-being of residents.

# About Tori Vald

## Unlocking the potential of rural villages

**How much potential do our rural villages hold?** And how can we ensure a future for the communities living in them, without neglecting the environmental and social sustainability? We are talking about this in the **interview** with the Project Partner Coordinator **Helle-Triin Hansumäe**, from Tori Vald (EE), hosted by Roland Krebs, urbanist and Lead Expert from the ECONNECTING network.

In this interview, Helle-Triin discusses how Tori Vald prioritizes **high-quality living** through initiatives like biodiversity preservation and a public space strategy that includes residents' participation. Their journey towards sustainability isn't just about buildings or infrastructure; it's about **transforming how people move, live, and connect**.



Their involvement stems from a **deep commitment to sustainability**, due to the presence of a rich and fascinating natural heritage (marshes, bog forests, several rivers, dense wood fields, several natural preserved areas...). This mechanism is easily understandable through the Small Scale Action that involved **Jõesuu**, a small village of only 250 inhabitants.

Helle-Triin explains that how local residents are involved in the planning process of **designing a new park**, through think tanks and entertainment. Through this experimental project, Tori Vald hopes to provide basic services and create sustainable transport connections for its residents.

### Curious about this SSA?

Discover smart, innovative approaches by watching [this video from Tori Vald!](#)



Being part of the ECONNECTING network has opened Tori Vald's eyes to new possibilities, particularly in digital solutions. Inspired by the **digital hubs in Ennis, Ireland**, they're considering introducing similar hubs to connect young people and students to new educational and social opportunities.

# EUROPEAN MOBILITY WEEK 2024

The European Mobility Week 2024 proved to be a resounding success for the ECONNECTING network, as its partners showcased a variety of **impactful and innovative initiatives** to promote sustainable mobility across Europe. Each partner brought its unique perspective and tailored activities to inspire citizens and stakeholders alike. Here's a recap of their remarkable contributions!

The **Unione della Romagna Faentina (ITA)** engaged different roundtables on sustainable urban logistics through micro-hubs and on region's sustainable mobility strategies, with expert and technicians from mobility sector. The national **Giretto d'Italia cycling challenge** brought Faenza to an excellent position in the ranking, 2nd for number of trips of micro-mobility in relation to resident population and 7th for total number trips out of 22 participating cities! The EMW24 was also an opportunity to award the students who distinguished themselves in the **Bike to School** competition, demonstrating that commitment to a healthy, active and environmentally sensitive life begins at school.



Berane Municipality (MT) offered two interesting initiatives. A special episode of "Wednesday- Up to Date" was aired on Radio Berane featured ULG members and the project manager discussing the ECONNECTING project, Berane's Integrated Action Plan, and mobility strategies. The, during the EMB, the Small Scale Action "**Better Parks, Safer Spaces**" took place: through enhancements in three major parks, Berane citizens now enjoy safer, more inclusive public spaces.



# EUROPEAN MOBILITY WEEK 2024



West Mani, Greece, embraced the bicycle as a symbol of sustainable mobility. Thanks to the “**Cycle Week**” citizens, students, and municipal employees rode bicycles throughout the week, promoting a cycling culture in the region. The municipality also organised an **information event** at the Stoupa Cultural Centre. This was followed by scenic sunset cycling activities that combined leisure with awareness.

Slovenia’s RRC Ormož spearheaded the **Bike to Work Week**, where employees took up the challenge of commuting by bicycle. The campaign highlighted the physical, environmental, and financial benefits of cycling while reducing traffic congestion and carbon emissions. This initiative set a stellar example of how workplaces can actively promote sustainable lifestyles.



In Estonia, Tori Vald invited residents of the village of Jõesuu to come together to brainstorm ideas for **a new community park**. This small-scale action demonstrated how collaborative planning and local engagement can foster thriving, sustainable communities and perhaps become a model for other communities.

**CIM Viseu Dão Lafões** (PT) had been planning a series of activities across its 14 municipalities under the banner of "Soft Mobility in Viseu Dão Lafões" when it was struck by the widespread forest fires in the region. This dramatic event forced CIM Viseu Dão Lafões to cancel the activities in order to address the dangerous situation. The fires lasted for five days (from September 15 to 20), affecting nine municipalities. Two villages had to be evacuated, and 44,600 hectares of land were burned. In the end, the importance of caring for the environment became even more evident. While it was not possible to celebrate Mobility Week, this event has raised everyone's awareness of the need for sustainable practices to protect the planet.



# THE ECONNECTING PODCAST LANDS ON SPOTIFY

The ECONNECTING series of interviews and inspiring stories is now available on the world's most popular podcast hosting platform, Spotify! Listening to the stories of the ECONNECTING network partners couldn't be easier: **five episodes** are already available on the channel:



## #1 Ennis in Ireland

Leading Digital Trends for Urban-Rural Linkages



## #2 Tori in Estonia

Promoting Nature-friendly Practices and Urban Regeneration of Villages



## #3 Berane in Montenegro, The Hub of the North

A city in the Search of Sustainable Mobility and Urban Development



## #4 West Mani in Greece

Looking for Smart Mobility Solutions and Urban Regeneration of Hub Towns



## #5 Transnational Meeting in Ormoz, Slovenia

Knowledge Exchange between Faenza, Ennis and Ormoz

Scan the qrcode to get directly to the channel or click on this link:  
[ECONNECTING\\_podcast](#)



then click the + button to **follow** and remember to **turn on notifications** so you don't miss any episode!

# Tools of the month

## GOAL GRID ANALYSIS

The Goals Grid is a simple, easy-to-use tool to help you develop **goal clarity** in your project. The Goals Grid provides a structure for examining the multi-dimensional nature of decisions and actions being contemplated within an urban strategy. The tool also provides a structure for analyzing goal patterns as well as **detecting potential conflict** with the objectives of others.

The Goals Grid Analysis tool should be presented as a 2×2 matrix containing the following questions: What do we want? What do we not want? What do we have? What do we not have?

The participants will then discuss what they already have and whether it should be preserved or eliminated. The results will reveal whether the intervention and its goals are important for a community. In urban planning projects, this tool helps define and structure the project goals and vision of the planned intervention.

## INTEGRAL SCENARIOS

Integral Scenarios aims to **involve the community** in the design of the intervention area and include them in the decision-making process. This tool makes it possible to break down complex planning processes into simple discussions about local needs and ways to fulfil them. The goal is to convey to the participants a sense of ownership of the space and thus increase public acceptance of the eventual design.

Participants are asked to develop scenarios for the area according to the outcomes of the preceding exercise(s). They may use any of the materials available to create the scenarios in the way they prefer (drawings, sketches, models, etc.). The moderator can guide the groups' discussions by asking the following questions:

What elements is our urban scenario made of?

How can we respond to trends affecting the planning area?

What elements is our urban scenario made of?

How can we reverse decline and let potential unfold?

What types of intervention are needed to improve the area?

How can we strengthen the various dimensions of sustainability—social, economic, cultural, environmental, and governmental?

After the development of the scenarios, each group is invited to briefly present their scenario to the whole group. After the presentations, the moderator can decide to launch a discussion. The outcome is a **range of scenarios** that reflect the ideas, wishes, and visions of the participating stakeholders. The scenarios also serve as a foundation for an urban strategy and Integrated Action Plan.



## Looking ahead

### NEXT STEPS

As 2024 draws to a close, the network partners are fully immersed in development of their Integrated Action Plans. The mid-term reflection meeting held in Nagykallo was pivotal in shaping strategic directions towards the shared vision of a more connected and accessible territory for all its inhabitants. Have you seen the network video yet? If you're curious about ECONNECTING, we highly recommend [this short video](#): it highlights the core principles driving our efforts for sustainable mobility and greener, closer communities.

As 2025 begins, our heartfelt thanks are with all of you who have been part of this journey so far. Together, let's hope the new year brings fresh energy to fuel our shared dream.

