

DIGITAL Cities Challenge Mayors Summit



European
Commission

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European Committee
of the Regions



Vice-President of the European Committee of the Regions and Rapporteur for the Digital Europe Programme, Markku Markkula, welcomed the city representatives, acknowledged their progress so far and encouraged them “to **continue working in partnership** with other cities in other parts of Europe” to address big societal challenges.

Slawomir Tokarski, Director for Innovation and Advanced Manufacturing at the European Commission stressed the importance of the cities to the European agenda and the links between digital, industrial and urban policies. “**Urban policies and digital policies are at the core of the Commission strategy and they will be further reinforced in the future.**”

Director Tokarski also pointed out the importance of skills. “**We need also to look increasingly at cities as places that attract talents, an important factor to achieve digital and industrial transformation.**”

Dana Eleftheriadou, Head of Advanced Technologies Team at the European Commission encouraged the mayors to support their respective digital strategies that have been formed not only by the municipalities but from all city stakeholders. “**At this stage, we need a strong political leadership: you can give the political push for the strategy to be implemented,**” said Dana.

The success story of Amsterdam metropolitan area



The Mayor of the city of Almere and Member responsible for Digital Connectivity at the Amsterdam Economic Board, Franc Weerwind, called for mayors to be adaptable in an era of technological changes.

Speaking on behalf of the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area Mayor Weerwind outlined five principles that would help guide his peers to better decision making on matters of digital transformation.

Hence, closely following his first principle of **"connecting digital transformation with other transformations** to keep cities liveable and sustainable", Mayor Weerwind's second principle was **"cooperation at different levels** from local government to the business sector and knowledge institutions". **"Putting citizens in the centre of digital transformation"**, was implemented by open data platforms in Almere, Zaanstad and Amsterdam for services such as housing, energy and mobility.

"We want to use the data with respect for our citizens, and we do not want the data to be owned by the private sector. For innovation, companies can use the data, if they accept the terms and conditions that follow directly from our values," explained Mayor Weerwind. "Focus on the **right skills**" through programmes formed in partnership with local governments, business, and education institutions, and lastly **"avoid concentrating too much on finance as enabler or disabler, of digital transformation** but be open to other forms of cooperation".

The meeting continued with the Mayors presenting the strong points, vision, strategy and actions implemented on their cities on thematic sessions. The sessions were themed according to the main challenges and opportunities that have been identified for a city's digital transformation and growth. The sessions were moderated by Taina Tukiainen (CoR), Ulla Engelmann (DG GROW, EC), Dana Eleftheriadou (DG GROW, EC), Fernando Hervas (DG JRC, EC).

The 5 principles of digital transformation of the Amsterdam's Metropolitan Area according to Mayor Weerwind:

- Connect digital transformation with other transformations
- Cooperate in different levels and with all stakeholders
- Put citizens at the centre
- Get the right skills
- Don't concentrate too much on finance but be open to different forms of collaboration

Shaping a winning strategy and brand



Sharing best practices on strategy and branding, [Granada](#) displayed how diversifying the productive model of the city is a key part of its strategy. By focusing on its strengths in research and development in sectors such as e-health and bio-health, the city is working to not only define itself as a tourist destination.

[Heraklion](#) shared how it has developed a vibrant ecosystem for businesses, citizens and tourists. The city continually creates new content and applications to achieve milestones such as the establishment of an e-government portal providing 163 on-line services, the largest municipal wireless network in Greece, the first municipal Internet of Things portal in the country. Building on comprehensive strategies developed over the years, Heraklion has successfully positioned as smart city, recognised as such in various forums and initiatives.

[Derry](#) expressed how the city is leveraging on its history and geographical position to create a branding oriented towards the river, the ocean and global partners. They city is working on addressing the brain drain, bringing back the diaspora, and designing a strategy that includes creativity and environment as resources for innovation. "Priority areas already identified are the need to create a service-driven smart city environment that is inclusive, transparent and sustainable, using existing and future datasets and technologies to support and improve the lives of citizens and businesses."

[Gelsenkirchen](#) revealed how it developed its "Connected City" an umbrella brand based on values before formulating the strategy so as to deliver more than just a bundle of technical applications. Through its open data portal, Gelsenkirchen has focused on increasing connectivity to serve citizen needs and has become one of the leading cities in in the very strong economic area where it belongs.

Reinventing growth with technology and data



[Pori](#) showed how focusing on automation and robotics significantly helped to boost the whole region in times when traditional industries were facing the challenges of globalisation. For instance, the ROBOCOAST cluster includes over 100 companies focused on automation and robotics, which are contributing to the revitalisation and strategic orientation of the whole region.

[Alcoy](#) is tackling the challenge of keeping talent in the city by investing on the development of digital skills among young people and re-skilling of the workforce, plus working closely with Valencia University to encourage start-ups. As part of the plans to revitalise the city, Alcoy is working on the building of a technological park.

[Padua](#) focuses on the digitalisation of public data to reduce bureaucracy and help enterprise flourish. One of the initiatives is focused on accelerating the city's conversion to sustainable and smart transportation system. Self-driving vehicles are part of the vision

Finally, [Alicante](#) created 'Smart Costa Blanca' as the trademark for smart tourism in Alicante's province. The digital transformation model is based on four areas of action: Digital culture of organization; Management of data; Technology to connect markets, companies and tourists; and Marketing to facilitate change for a digital world.

Upskilling the city



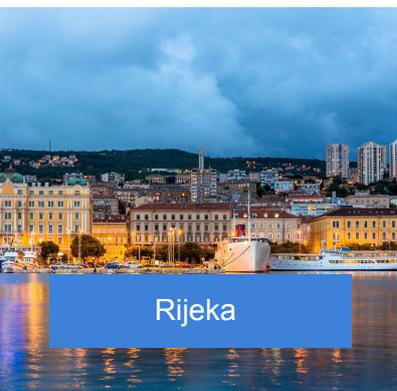
Thessaloniki looked at the strengths of the city, from tourism to transport and logistics, to position itself as a living lab. The city is working with mentors to give concrete feedback to entrepreneurs and on actions to bridge the gap between university and businesses with incubators and other supporting mechanisms and empower young people with the skills that industry needs.

L'Aquila was forced to re-think its development strategy after the earthquake and relied on the support of its university and the Gran Sasso Science Institute (GSSI) to promote the use of the city as an advanced technology test lab. Among the results achieved, the city has been selected for the experimentation of 5G and has attracted a giant of telecommunication (the Chinese company ZTE).

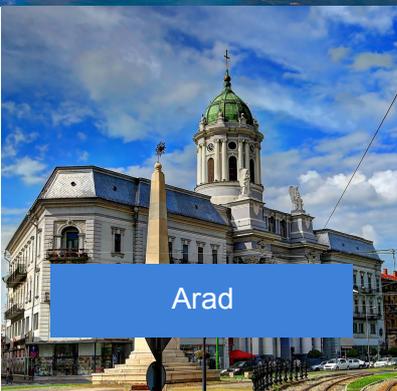
Iasi on the other hand, is working on developing the relationships between its strong ICT sector and healthcare. On the same time it is strengthening its high schools and six universities that are home to 50,000 students, maintaining an ongoing dialogue between the University and the ICT sector, and empowering its young population with IT courses.

Trikala, the agricultural city that early on earned the reputation of a smart city, is focusing on citizens' needs (parking, services, waste management), with the main components of its strategy being: innovation friendliness (hosting the first 5G test bed in Greece), youth training in schools and public private partnerships for ICT skills, and regular monitoring through KPIs.

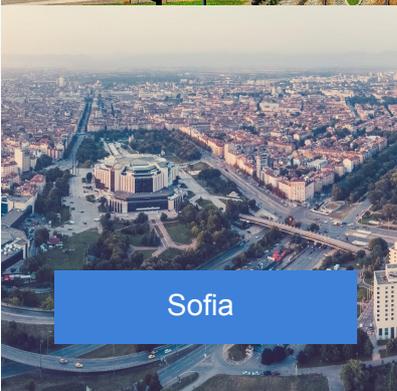
Unlocking investments



Rijeka



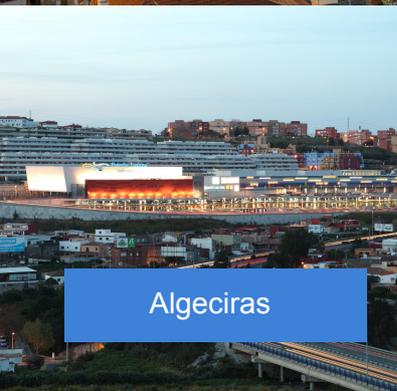
Arad



Sofia



Kavala



Algeciras

With regards to unlocking investments, [Rijeka](#) is in the process of establishing the Centre of Competence for Smart City, an innovation cluster to foster effective cooperation on research and development projects on the 3 areas identified by Croatia's Smart Specialisation Strategy. The city also offered an example of use of EU funds (ERDF and CF) for digital transformation: the 'Powerhouse project', which concerns the reconstruction of a paper company with the view to enable favourable environment for ICT business creation and development.

[Arad](#) launched the 'Leadership and community' programme that foresees participatory budgeting and the involvement of citizens in the elaboration of projects. Today, in Arad, significant investment projects are ongoing that leverage on different funding channels, including a Public Lighting with LED project based on a Swiss-Romanian cooperation programme.

[Sofia](#) is experiencing a steady growth and is developing as a start-up hub, with about 15 funds (private and public), over 500 start-ups, incubators, and accelerators as part of the start-up ecosystem.

In order to better attract investments, the Sofia Investment Agency has been set up inside the municipality to support Bulgarian and foreign businesses.

[Kavala](#) is focusing its efforts on its strategic sectors, with the ambition to become a logistics and agro-Food centre. The city's connectivity was significantly improved the last years and now Kavala is working towards attracting investments through the development of a regional technological park that will act as a launchpad for the industrial transformation of the city.

Finally, [Algeciras](#), that will also be the host of the 4th City Academy of the Digital Cities Challenge, aims at a continuous digital transformation and modernization process, to become the 'open, dynamic, social inclusive and talent-based doorstep of Europe'. The work done through ERDF is substantial, while the city intends to use the Digital Cities Challenge as a tool to introduce digitalisation as a compulsory component in all strategic projects in the city.

Where do the cities see strong potential?

- Creation of a collaborative vibrant ecosystem with all city stakeholders that work bottom-up to fulfil the city's vision.
- Digitalisation and collection of data from physical infrastructures and utilities: transport, energy, water
- Facilitation of the access to technology and open data: fab labs, innovation labs, clusters, business accelerators, venture capital.
- Attraction and maintenance of digital skills and talents as well as upskilling the workforce.
- Identification of alternative ways of finance and attracting private investments.
- Turning into living labs for testing and demonstration of innovative solutions in the service of people.

Signature of the Declaration of Cooperation

The fruitful meeting was capped off by the mayors of the participating cities in the Digital Cities Challenge signing a Declaration of Cooperation on Digital Transformation and Smart Growth. As part of the agreement, the mayors committed to regularly assess the achievements and progress of the Declaration and the adoption of appropriate actions supporting digital transformation and the opportunities and challenges related.

The feedback was very positive in the informal networking in the reception that followed, with many Mayors acknowledging that they learned a lot from others and started planting the seeds for further multilateral collaborations.

Click to see the full text of the [Declaration of Cooperation on Digital Transformation and Smart Growth](#).

Click to see [gallery of the Mayors Summit](#).

