

THE **INNOVATION** HANDBOOK FOR SMALL CITIES

3I SOLUTIONS
FOR PUBLIC SERVICES
2025



The project 3I solutions for PS is implemented in the framework of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region programme

HANDBOOK OVERVIEW

This handbook was developed as part of the 3I Solutions for Public Services (3I solution or PS) project, a collaborative initiative aimed at empowering small and medium-sized cities to innovate effectively and sustainably.

AUTHORS

Katriin Vannik, Iulduz Khairullina, Anna Kruzenshtern, Leonid Chechurin, Bikram Sunar, Sepideh Kasiri

DESIGN AND LAYOUT

Sepideh Kasiri

CONTRIBUTORS

Irma Bagdoniene, Vita Grigule, Ramunė Guogienė, Elisa Jakson, Ieva Kreile, Inguna Kucina, Art Merikotka, Kadri Pihlamägi, Joel Ruotsalainen, Mikhail Shmelev, Adeel Tariq, Marko Torkkeli, Sergey Troshkov



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RESPONSIVE PUBLIC SERVICES

3I solutions for PS



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Smiltenes novads
sanāks!



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HANDBOOK OVERVIEW

The 3I Solutions for Public Services project focuses on  **THREE** areas

Immersive



Using tools like virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) to make public services more interactive and engaging.

Intelligent



This side includes smart technologies like artificial intelligence and data analysis, which can help governments make better decisions, improve services, and work more efficiently.

Innovative



This part looks at new ways of organizing and delivering services, encouraging collaboration, flexibility, and putting citizens at the center of the process.

- Prepare to light up new possibilities and drive innovation where it matters most -

GOALS



Resource Efficiency

Helping cities do more with limited budgets, staff, and infrastructure.



Enhances Public Services

Leading to more efficient systems in areas such as online education, data-driven city planning, and faster administrative processes by updating digital infrastructure.



Positive Societal Impact

Encouraging community involvement, making services easier to access, and supporting sustainable development.

This is especially important for small cities, which often face challenges like old systems, fewer resources, and slower adoption of new ideas. The 3I Solution for PS project gives them the tools and strategies to catch up and thrive.



SCOPE

The project focuses on public sector innovation in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR). It is based on the experiences of small cities and municipalities in the BSR. Still, its ideas and methods can also be applied to other small towns in the European Union (EU) that face similar challenges and aim to enhance their service delivery by being more flexible and creative. Although changes are crucial, many public institutions struggle because their employees lack the necessary skills to adopt new technologies and are hesitant to take risks when they come up with new ideas. The 3I Solutions for PS project tries to solve these problems by giving them new tools, like this handbook, to spark innovation within their organisation.



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READING A CASE STUDY
THROUGH THE FRAME-
WORK

INNOVATION

Innovation means turning ideas into real actions that significantly change how an organization understands problems and delivers services [1].



- It's a process
- It moves from idea to action
- It leads to meaningful change
- In both understanding needs and delivering services



South Bend, a small U.S. city with a 2023 population of 103,395, implemented smart sewer technology with support from nearby Notre Dame University. Instead of spending millions to replace old pipes, they used sensors and real-time data to improve what they already had. This saved money and worked better than the usual method [2].



WHY IS INNOVATION ESSENTIAL FOR SMALL CITIES?

A city doesn't need to be big to be smart. Being a smart city means using technology and information in a smart way to solve problems and make life better. Smaller cities can sometimes make changes faster because there are fewer steps, rules, and people involved in making decisions [2]. Citizens have more community feeling, togetherness.

Innovation is very important for small cities because it helps them solve problems without needing excessive money or staff. This kind of innovation typically involves smart city approaches that apply digital tools, data insights, and better workflows to make services more efficient and enhance everyday life in the community. Big cities usually receive more attention and funding for smart technology, but small cities often face the same or even greater problems, such as aging buildings, limited public services, and weaker local economies. Smart tools, like sensors and data systems, help small cities do more with less [2].

[1] Lewis, J. M. et al. (2018) How innovation drivers, networking and leadership shape public sector innovation capacity. International review of administrative sciences. [Online] 84 (2), 288–307.

[2] Lam, D. & Givens, J. W. (2018) Small and Smart: Why and How Smart City Solutions Can and Should be Adapted to the Unique Needs of Smaller Cities. New global studies. [Online] 12 (1), 21–36.

SMART CITY

A Smart City is an urban area where traditional infrastructure and services, such as transport, energy, water, and waste management, are enhanced through digital technologies to benefit inhabitants and businesses. These cities use data, technology, and planning to improve quality of life, promote sustainability, and support inclusive economic development [1, 2].

Smart cities aim to offer high-quality services by modernising infrastructure and introducing innovative solutions to address old challenges, such as outdated and inefficient buildings, through renovation, making them more energy-efficient and friendly to living. This also includes integrating more innovative urban transport systems, such as smart crosswalks, as well as improving water supply and waste management systems [1]. These cities also promote a cleaner and more sustainable mindset, encouraging people to be more responsible by reducing resource waste. These activities attract investment to the city because they demonstrate that city management is effective in managing resources wisely and integrating the latest technologies [2].

Here are some examples we've collected to provide an overview of the different practices:

[Smart traffic lights](#)

[Smart pedestrian crosswalks](#)

[Mobility-as-a-Service \(MaaS\)](#)

[Smart waste bins](#)

[Smart street lighting](#)

[Energy-efficient buildings](#)

[E-government services](#)

[Community gardens](#)

[Multipurpose community buildings](#)

[Social sustainability](#)

Even if a city does not carry the label of being a *smart city*, it may still be actively implementing smart practices. Across the Baltic Sea Region (BSR), for instance, numerous municipalities are utilising digital tools, community-driven innovation, and sustainability planning to address local challenges in innovative ways [3].

Our upcoming [case study](#) gallery will highlight some of these hidden gems, showcasing practical, inspiring examples of innovation and smart development across the BSR that deserve greater recognition.



[1] European Commission (2024): [Smart Cities Initiative](#)

[2] Saini, S., Chauhan, A., Thakur, G. & Sapra, L. (2023). In: Enabling Technologies for Effective Planning and Management in Sustainable Smart Cities. Springer Nature Switzerland AG. pp. 1–28.

[3] Nordregio (2025): [Smart Communities in the Nordic-Baltic Region](#)



WHO IS INTERESTED IN CITIES TO BE SMART AND INNOVATIVE

This project is especially useful for people working in or with local governments, such as:

- Public service workers who manage daily operations and service delivery
- Urban planners focused on city development, infrastructure, and zoning
- Innovation managers are responsible for bringing in new ideas and digital tools
- Policy designers who create rules and strategies to support public innovation

Any employees in public services who are passionate to bring more innovative ideas to their city and solve problems.



PROJECT DIARY

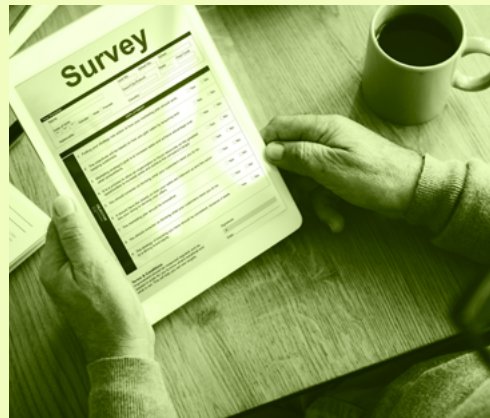
The 3I solutions for PS project used a mixed-methods approach and combined research, data collection, and real-world testing. The aim was to understand how small and medium-sized cities can innovate in public services and to develop practical tools to support them.





Systematic Literature Review

[READ MORE](#)



Surveys in 5 countries (FI, EE, LV, LT, PL)

[READ MORE](#)



Hackathons

[READ MORE](#)



Online course

[READ MORE](#)



Handbook

[READ MORE](#)



CITYA! platform

[READ MORE](#)

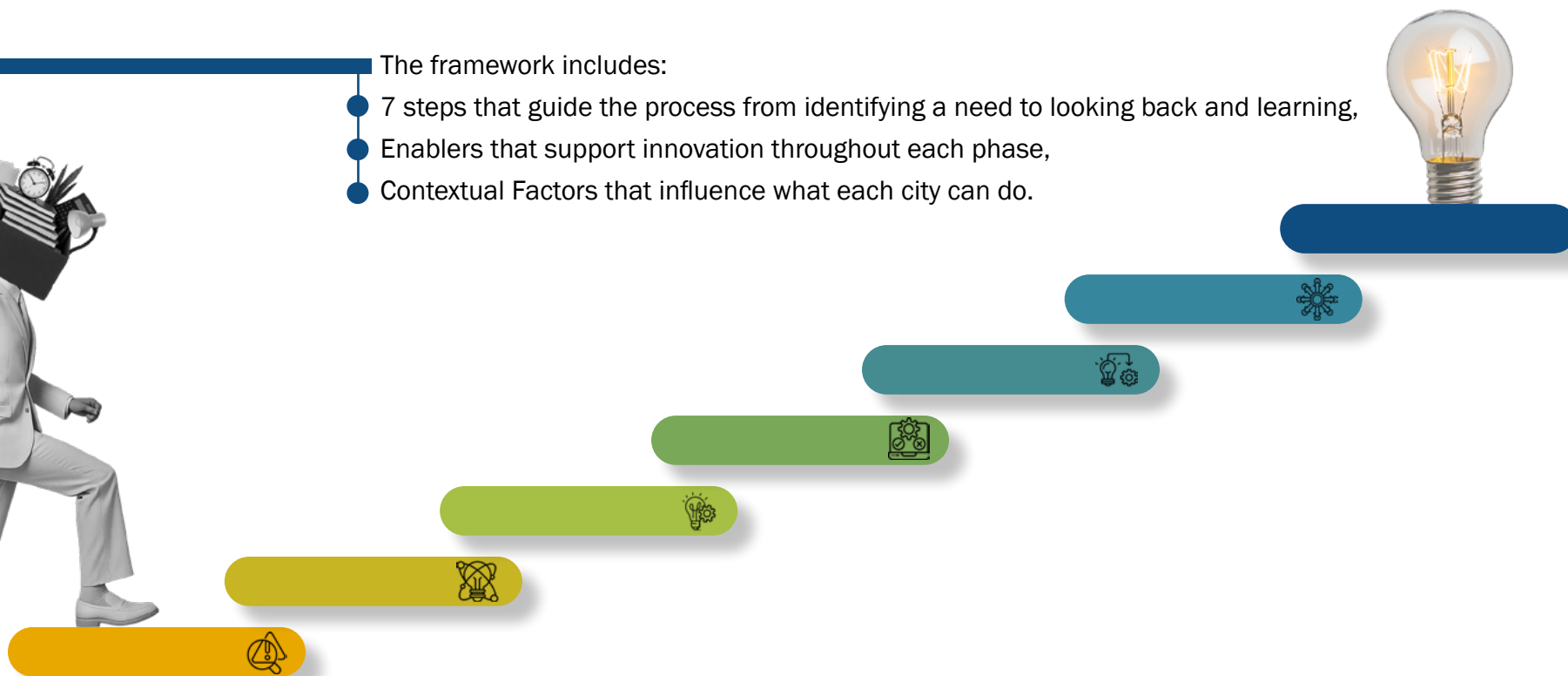


INNOVATION FRAMEWORK

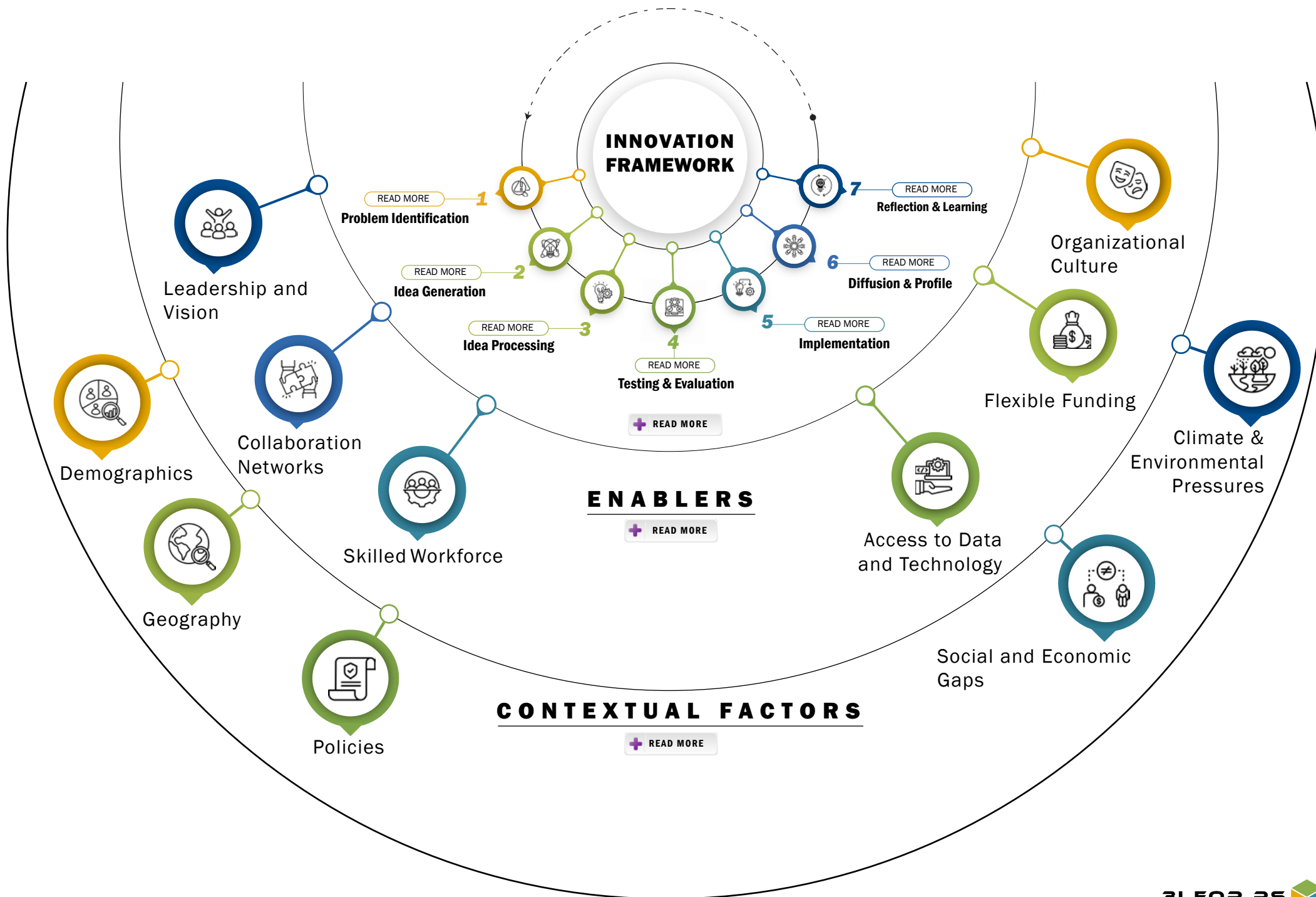
This framework is a useful tool for helping small and medium-sized cities innovate. It gives a clear but flexible process that helps local governments turn ideas into real changes, whether in services, systems, or everyday life. It was created through hands-on research in the Baltic Sea Region. The model builds on the OECD Public Sector Innovation Lifecycle and was adapted through the 3I Solution for PS project to better match the real situations small cities face, like limited resources and close-knit communities [1].

The framework includes:

- 7 steps that guide the process from identifying a need to looking back and learning,
- Enablers that support innovation throughout each phase,
- Contextual Factors that influence what each city can do.



[1] OECD (2020) The public sector innovation lifecycle: A device to assist teams and organisations in developing a more sophisticated approach to public sector innovation. OECD Working Papers on Public Governance, No. 37. Paris: OECD Publishing. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1787/0d1bf7e7-en>



USE IT AS A ROADMAP

For innovation managers, project leads, or service teams

Follow the 7 steps as a clear sequence:

Understanding real needs $\xrightarrow{\text{TO}}$ Prototyping Solutions $\xrightarrow{\text{TO}}$ Scaling

Start [HERE](#) if you're launching a new idea or initiative.

Think of it as our GPS for innovation: It helps to understand our current position, shows the next steps, and guides us toward our goals.

**USE IT AS A DIAGNOSTIC TOOL**

For leaders, planners, or teams reflecting on past or current projects

Stuck? Is something not working?

Use the [STEPS](#) and [ENABLERS](#) to identify where things might be breaking down.

Review the [CONTEXTUAL FACTORS](#) to understand external limits.

Check:

- Did we skip testing?
- Was leadership support missing?
- Were we unclear on the real problem?

**USE IT AS A COMMUNICATION AID**

For anyone explaining innovation to colleagues, city councils, or residents

Innovation can sound abstract. This model gives you a shared language.

Visualize the whole process, so others understand what you're doing and why.

- Show where you are on the journey
"We're in the diffusion step"
- Highlight [enablers](#) like leadership, funding, and collaboration to justify support



This turns "innovation" into something visible and credible.

USE IT AS A LEARNING FRAMEWORK

For teams or departments that are looking back on their work to learn from it

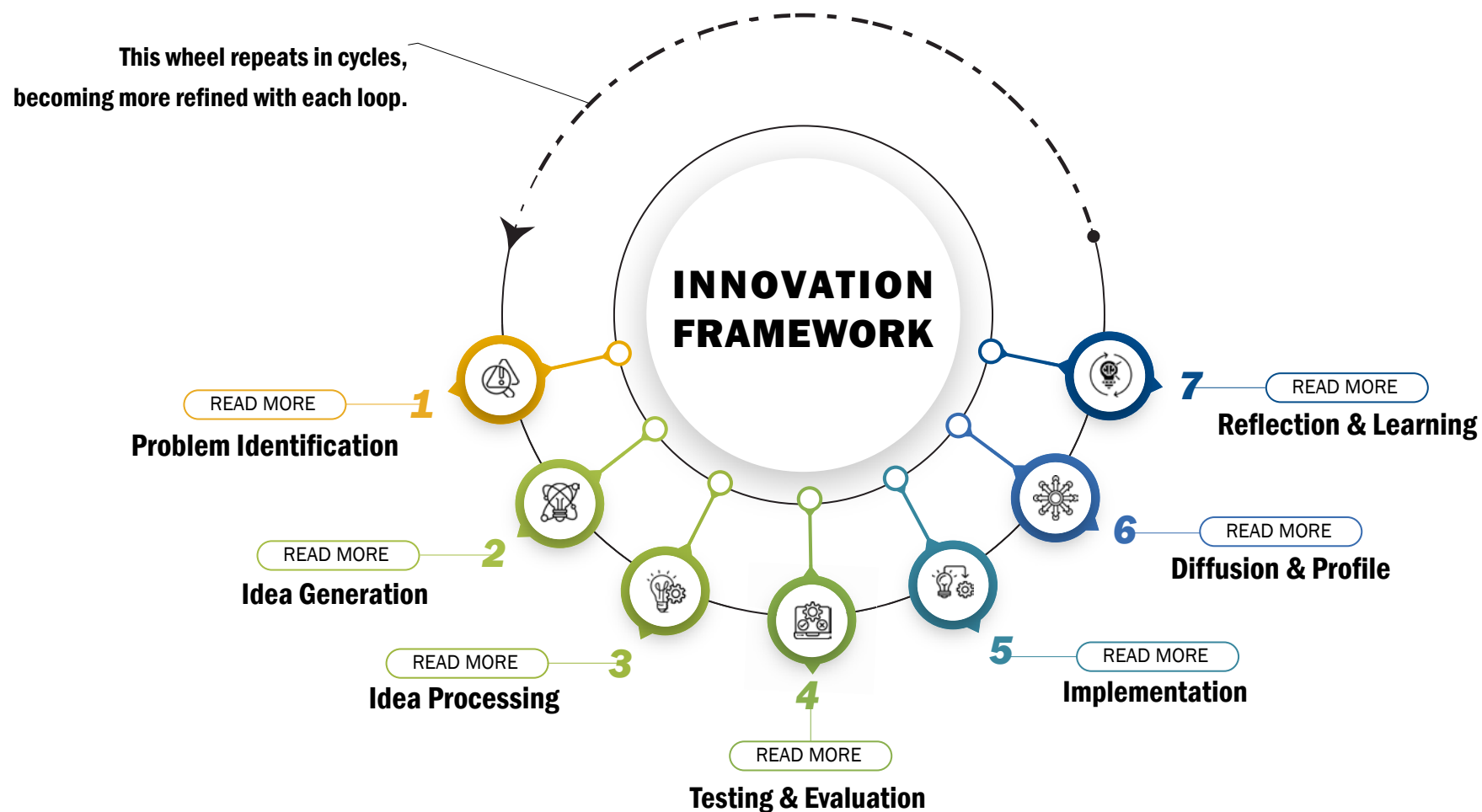
After completing a project

- Take time to go through the process again and ask:
What went well? What didn't? What should we keep for next time?
- Collect lessons from our city to help improve future projects
- Invite other departments or cities to share what they've learned so everyone can grow and improve together



Each cycle makes your city smarter.

This seven-phase cycle guides small cities through identifying, testing and scaling solutions.





STEP

1

7

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

This step focuses on understanding the real issues challenging your city, from service delivery problems to citizen dissatisfaction or inefficiencies. It involves listening to citizens, employees, and data to define the actual need.

WHY IT MATTERS

Solutions without a clear problem waste time and money. Starting here ensures your innovation effort is relevant, justified, and citizen-centered.



EXAMPLES OF TOOLS

- Community listening sessions
- Staff interviews
- Service usage data
- Surveys
- Participatory budget for citizens



STEP

2

7

IDEA GENERATION

Generating potential solutions encourages open, creative thinking from a wide range of stakeholders and not just managers, but also service users, students, planners and IT specialists.

WHY IT MATTERS

Innovation thrives on diversity. New ideas often come from unexpected places, especially when different departments in the public sector collaborate instead of working separately.



EXAMPLES OF TOOLS

- [Hackathons](#)
- Brainstorming Sessions
- Public Co-creation Workshop
- Idea boxes



STEP

3

7

IDEA PROCESSING & PRIORITIZATION

This phase transforms raw ideas into structured, viable pathways for implementation. After collecting ideas, it's essential to evaluate them critically and prioritize the ones with the highest potential for impact, feasibility, and alignment with public needs.

WHY IT MATTERS

In small towns, there aren't enough resources to try out every idea, so it's important to focus on the ones that can actually work. This step helps us use time, money, and people wisely. It also lowers the risk of failure, builds trust with the community, and helps everyone involved understand which ideas will be tested and the reasons behind them.



EXAMPLES OF TOOLS

- Quick reviews by mixed working groups
- Feasibility Scoring
- Short idea brief templates



STEP

4

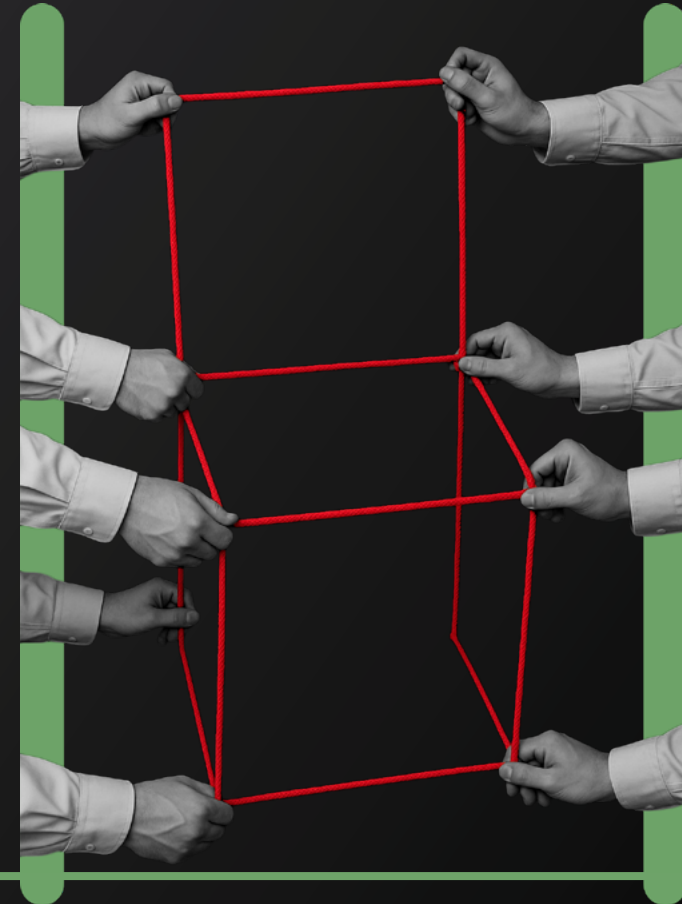
7

TESTING & EVALUATION

The chosen idea should be prototyped and tested on a small scale for a short time. The goal is to test whether it's possible, spot any problems early. This step means setting goals and collecting feedback.

WHY IT MATTERS

Trying out an idea on a small scale helps avoid big mistakes. Cities can learn what works and what doesn't before spending a lot of time or money. It also helps spot any problems early, like technical issues or resistance from people involved.



EXAMPLES OF TOOLS

- Paper or digital prototypes
- Feedback forms and interviews
- Pre/post surveys to measure change
- [Simple A/B testing](#)



STEP

5

7

IMPLEMENTATION

This phase is when the idea moves from a small test to being used for real. The solution is put into action across departments or even the whole community. It needs careful planning to ensure enough resources, training staff, sharing information, and making the idea part of everyday work.

WHY IT MATTERS

Many promising ideas fail during implementation because the rollout wasn't handled well. Strong leadership, careful planning, and clear communication fuel the idea to become a success.



EXAMPLES OF TOOLS

- Implementation Roadmap
- Staff training sessions and materials
- Monitoring dashboards for tracking progress
- Project management



STEP

6
7

DIFFUSION & PROFILE

This step involves sharing ideas and lessons learned with other departments, cities or regions to help others benefit from the experience. That's called diffusion. Profile means building your city's reputation as creative and forward-thinking. This includes sharing a story, communicating with the public and showing leadership in innovation networks.

WHY IT MATTERS

Sharing what works helps others learn faster and turns one success into many. It also builds your city's image as a leader, which can attract support, funding, and new partnerships. A strong profile can inspire your own teams and show the public that real improvements are being made.



EXAMPLES OF TOOLS

- Case study templates
- Webinars and virtual demo sessions
- City innovation blog or newsletter
- Social media content plans



STEP

7

7

REFLECTION & LEARNING

This last step is about looking back at the whole process to see what can be learned. It means taking time to think about what went well, what didn't, and how things could be better next time. It's about creating a culture where teams can talk openly about both successes and failures and use those lessons to improve.

WHY IT MATTERS

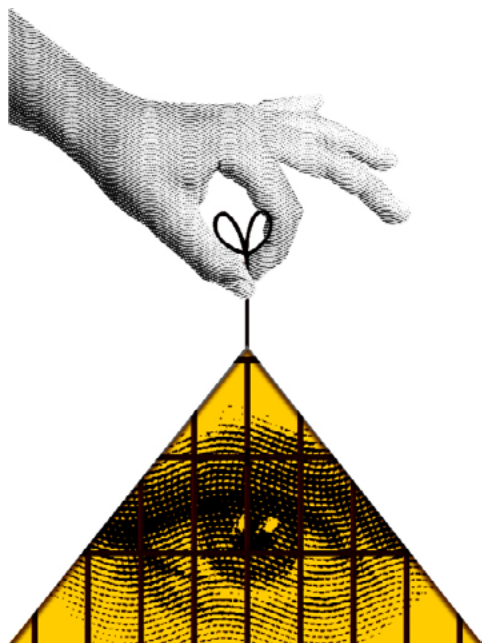
Without learning, the same mistakes repeat. It also helps everyone (staff and citizens) feel more involved and shows that the government is being open and responsible.



EXAMPLES OF TOOLS

- Feedback surveys
- Lessons-learned reports
- Internal knowledge-sharing sessions
- [“Stop/Start/Continue” workshop tools](#)

ENABLERS



Enablers are the tools and supports that help innovation to start, grow, and reach more people. Without enablers, the process can slow down or stop completely. They play a role in EVERY PART of the process.


[BACK TO FRAMEWORK](#)

Leadership and Vision



Support new ideas, helping teams take smart risks, and encouraging new approaches. It also means having a clear vision of the city's future, one that guides decisions and connects innovation to community needs and city goals.

Collaboration Networks



Can happen between departments inside the city, with other cities, or with outside partners like universities, businesses, NGOs, and local communities. These networks help share knowledge, bring in new skills and also build trust.

Skilled Workforce



Is people with the practical abilities (like using digital tools and managing projects) and the right mindset to explore new ideas, keep learning, and adapt to change. Innovation needs curiosity and an open mind as well as know-how.

Access to Data & Technology



Support innovation when they are needed and appropriate. Not all innovation is about technology, and not every solution requires costly tools. Access to data and digital systems can help make smarter decisions and improve services when we use them wisely.

Flexible Funding



For example, local budgets, national or EU programs, or even private partnerships can support innovation. What matters is that funding can be used with enough freedom to test, adapt, and grow new ideas, depending on the city's context.

Organizational Culture



Is about the workplace attitude that encourages trying new things (even if they don't always work out).

CONTEXTUAL FACTORS



Contextual factors are outside forces that affect how innovation takes place. Cities can't control them completely, but they need to understand and adjust to them. These factors set the overall environment where innovation can either **grow** or face **challenges**.


[BACK TO FRAMEWORK](#)

Demographics



Changes like aging populations, young people's migration or growing diversity.

[+ READ MORE](#)

Geographics



Differences between rural and urban areas, how connected places are, and what industries they have.

[+ READ MORE](#)

Policies



EU and national laws and regional-level regulations that affect what cities can do.

[+ READ MORE](#)

Social & Economic Gaps



Inequalities in income, education, access to services or digital tools and more that can limit benefits from innovation, leaving some behind.

[+ READ MORE](#)

Climate & Environmental Pressures



Environmental risks and sustainability targets that are shaping the future of every city.

[+ READ MORE](#)

DEMOGRAPHICS

WHO Lives in Our CITY?

To create useful and meaningful ideas, it's important to know who lives in your city or area. Things like age, background, and population trends affect what services people need, who will use them, and how they might react to new changes.



From the CHECK LIST

- Is the population aging, shrinking, or growing?
- Are young people leaving, or are they coming back?
- Is our community becoming more multicultural?
- Are there new groups (e.g., digital nomads, refugees) with emerging needs?



Match innovation goals to the realities of who lives in your city.

GEOGRAPHICS

WHERE is Our CITY Located?

The location of a city and its main sources of income affect what kinds of new ideas can succeed. Local industries, tourist attractions, infrastructure, transportation, educational and cultural institutions, as well as public services influence how new projects are carried out and whether they can last.



From the CHECK LIST

- Is our city urban, suburban, or rural?
- Do we have access to fast internet and public transportation?
- How is our economy changing, growing or declining?
- What are the dominant sectors in the local economy (e.g., tourism, industry, services)?

What would need to change to make this idea feasible here?

POLICIES

WHAT Laws and Strategies Apply to Our IDEA?

Innovation must align with local, national, and EU laws, strategies, and planning documents, from digital agendas to climate goals. These layers are often connected, and understanding these links early helps cities to design realistic, supported, and ready-to-scale projects.



From the CHECKLIST

- Are there any laws or strategies that affect your idea?
- Are there missing policies or legal barriers that make change harder?
- Does our idea support existing goals, like digital upgrades or climate action?
- Is our idea someone's Intellectual Property (IP)?

SOCIAL & ECONOMIC GAPS

WHO is Being Left Behind?

Not everyone in a city has the same access to opportunities. Social & economic gaps show up in income, education, housing, mobility, language, and access to support. Marginalized groups such as seniors, low-income families, migrants, people with special needs and the unemployed often face extra barriers. Inclusion isn't just about digital access. Someone who can log in to a public service platform but feels isolated or unheard is still excluded. Real inclusion means being able to participate fully in community life.



From the CHECKLIST

- Do all citizens have equal access to public spaces and services?
- Are there big gaps in income that face more problems than others?
- Who isn't getting a say in public opinions?
- Did we consider the marginalized group in this project?

CLIMATE & ENVIRONMENTAL PRESSURES

WHAT Environmental Risks or Goals Shape Our CITY?

It is important to consider climate challenges such as floods, heatwaves, and efforts to meet green goals. These environmental pressures and goals affect what kinds of innovations a city needs. The environment can push cities to take action, but it can also create limits based on local conditions.

From the CHECKLIST

- Are we facing climate-related risks such as flooding, drought, or extreme weather?
- What are our city's energy needs and costs?
- Is our community affected by pollution, biodiversity loss, or waste issues?
- Are we working toward EU or national climate goals?
- How strong is local awareness and support for environmental change?



Sustainability challenges can lead to new ideas, but they can also create extra limitations on what's possible.



“

The [Innovation Process](#) is like planting a tree: choosing the seed, location, watering and helping it grow, step by step.

The [Enablers](#) are the tools, water, and care, like leadership, collaboration, skills, and support.

The [Contextual Factors](#) are the weather and soil, which affect growth but can't always be controlled.

Not all trees will survive, just like ideas or even solutions, but it does not mean we should stop planting.

”





PUBLIC SERVICE INNOVATIONS CASE STUDIES

These case studies show how different cities and organizations have applied elements of the framework in real-life contexts.



This chapter presents a list of all case studies and their respective countries. [The following chapter](#) provides examples of how cases align with the framework's key enablers and contextual factors, helping incorporate the framework into planning efforts.

FINLAND

- ▶ Textile Recycling Revolution, Lahti
- ▶ Smart Geofencing for E-Scooter Safety, Helsinki
- ▶ Ratamo Health Forest nature-based wellbeing, Kouvola
- ▶ CO2 Calculator in the Tampere.Finland App, Tampere
- ▶ From Municipal Challenges to Business Innovation, How App Turned Local Problems into Scalable Solutions, Different Cities
- ▶ Robotics and Digitalization Hub, Riihimäki

LITHUANIA

- ▶ From Nuclear City to Innovation Hub, Visaginas
- ▶ Youth-inclusive participatory budgeting, Tauragė
- ▶ A Digital Way to Speak Up, The Online Bullying Box, Šiauliai
- ▶ Participatory Budgeting for Community Empowerment, Raseiniai
- ▶ ID Vilnius: drone innovation & urban data operations, Vilnius

POLAND

- ▶ Using Open Data to Build a Smarter, More Responsive City, Poznań
- ▶ Accessible Tourist Trails for the Visually Impaired people, Podkarpackie Municipality
- ▶ Smart Parking Management, Rzeszów
- ▶ Virtual Warsaw.app – City of the Senses, Warsaw
- ▶ Smart Waste Management System, Sierpc



This chapter presents a list of all case studies and their respective countries. [The following chapter](#) provides examples of how cases align with the framework's key enablers and contextual factors, helping incorporate the framework into planning efforts.

LATVIA

- ▶ “Zero Waste Latvija” & Lietovelreiz.lv Building a Circular Economy Movement, Different Cities
- ▶ Robotics and Creative Thinking for Rural Education, Smiltene
- ▶ Digital Innovation Park & Smart City Initiatives, Liepāja
- ▶ 3I Solutions for Public Services: Smart Bench, Smiltene
- ▶ Empowering Women in Creative Entrepreneurship, Vidzeme (Latvia) and Ida-Viru (Estonia)

ESTONIA

- ▶ Kopli 93: Breathing New Life into a Historic Space, Tallinn
- ▶ Ball Box Pilot Project Promoting Outdoor Play around country, Different Cities
- ▶ “Ole valmis! app” – Estonia’s Civil Preparedness Tool
- ▶ Sea Container-Based Mobile Youth Center, Toila Municipality
- ▶ Hedgehog Highways for Urban Biodiversity, Tartu
- ▶ Illuminating the Historic Barn for Cultural Revitalization, Virtsu
- ▶ Prepaid Waste Bag System for Visitors, Hiiumaa island

BSR

- ▶ BioBoosters – Boosting Circular Innovation, Baltic Sea Region
- ▶ BSI_4Women – Empower Refugee Women Entrepreneurs, Baltic Sea Region



Textile Recycling Revolution Lahti

Lahti, a city in Finland known for its strong environmental values, is working toward an ambitious goal: becoming a waste-free city by 2050. After being named the European Green Capital in 2021, continued to look for new ways to reduce waste and promote sustainability. In June 2023, The city launched a new idea — a **textile deposit pilot**. The goal was simple: to see if small rewards would encourage people to recycle more textiles.



Image redesigned

How did the pilot work?

A temporary collection point was set up in the Trio shopping center. People who brought in a full bag of textiles received a voucher they could use at places like cafes, swimming pools, or other local services. It was a way of saying thank you for helping the environment.

The **Response** was greater than expected. Weekly textile recycling at the site jumped from 70 kg to 350 kg — a 500% increase. That showed just how powerful small incentives can be in changing everyday habits.

Source and Read More:

<https://www.lahti.fi/en/news/a-world-first-the-city-of-lahti-pilots-a-deposit-system-to-encourage-recycling-of-textile-waste/>
<https://www.ess.fi/paikalliset/6191575>



Integrated Circular Thinking

1. Lahti collected old clothes through a pilot recycling program.
2. Those clothes were turned into raw materials like fiber and insulation.
3. The design competition was created to figure out:

What useful or creative things can we make from those materials?

Lahti launched a *national design* competition focused on creating real products from recycled textiles collected during the program.

Goal: Find innovative ways to repurpose textile waste processed from Lahti's collection system.

Winning Idea: “Birds” — Antti Ylisassi and Anna Kuukka created acoustic panels using recycled textiles. They aimed to make them both visually appealing and functional for indoor spaces.



The competition took recycling a step further by connecting reused materials with design and new ideas.



Smart Geofencing for E-Scooter Safety Helsinki

Helsinki, with the rapid surge in e-scooter popularity, faced challenges like sidewalk clutter, unsightly parking, and rider safety concerns, especially around metro and train stations. Central pedestrian areas also saw increased foot traffic and congestion. [Aalto University](#) highlights the need for additional micromobility measures in Finnish cities. In response, the city launched a geofencing pilot in 2024 to bring order to micromobility, combining digital tools with clear rules and data-driven oversight.

What Changed

The city worked with e-scooter operators to roll out:

- Designated parking zones, enforced by app-based geofencing and photo confirmation.
- Speed limits: 20 km/h daytime, 15 km/h at night, enforced via GPS.
- Nighttime bans: Weekend riding blocked from midnight to 5:00 a.m.
- Fleet caps: Operators limited to 700 scooters each in central zones.

Helsinki also tested AI-powered voice alerts with [Voi and Drover AI](#), helping prevent riding on sidewalks and in off-limits areas.

Results

- Central zone e-scooter traffic dropped from ~9,000 to 3,600 per day (2022 → 2023).
- The citywide fleet shrank from 18,000 to 12,000 scooters.
- 94% of scooters were parked correctly in approved zones.
- Public feedback showed improved aesthetics and safety perception in city centers.

Source and Read More:

<https://etsc.eu/improving-the-road-safety-of-e-scooters-pin-flash-47/>

<https://www.hel.fi/en/news/give-your-views-on-e-scooter-parking-in-helsinki>

<https://zagdaily.com/places/drover-and-voi-partner-with-city-of-helsinki-to-improve-rider-behaviour-and-city-infrastructure/>

<https://www.helsinkitimes.fi/finland/finland-news/domestic/24368-have-a-say-in-helsinki-s-e-scooter-revolution-city-calls-for-feedback-on-parking-changes.html>

<https://lvm.fi/en/-/legislative-amendments-to-improve-micromobility-safety-into-force-in-summer>

<https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/-/1410829/the-government-proposes-legislation-on-micromobility-to-improve-traffic-safety>





Ratamo Health Forest Nature-based Wellbeing

Kouvola

Kouvola, Finland, has transformed a simple wooded area beside Ratamo Hospital into the Ratamo Health Forest, a nature-based wellbeing space. Launched in 2020 as part of Finland's Public Health from Forests initiative, the project integrates natural landscapes, public art, and healthcare to support recovery, relaxation, and everyday wellness.



What It Offers

The Ratamo Health Forest offers a one kilometer, fully accessible nature trail that meanders through diverse forest habitats, providing a calming and sensory-rich experience for visitors of all ages and abilities. Along the trail, rest areas with benches, picnic tables, and a tranquil “oasis” invite quiet reflection. Public art is thoughtfully integrated into the landscape, tucked among the spruce trees. Many of the benches, birdhouses, and wooden features were designed and crafted by students from local schools, strengthening the community's connection to the space.

How It Works

- Led by landscape architect Emilia Hiltunen
- Developed through collaboration among healthcare, environmental, cultural, and educational sectors
- Engaged local schools and vocational students in design and construction
- Located next to Ratamo Hospital, with wheelchair-friendly access and open to the public year-round

The Ratamo Health Forest was recognized in 2023 by Tekojen Tori as an inspiring wellbeing initiative. The project aligns with both EU and national strategies on mental health, sustainability, and nature-based urban solutions, making it a strong model for low-impact, community-focused development.

Source and Read More:

<https://www.kouvola.fi/asuminen-ja-ymparisto/luonto-ja-ymparisto/luontopolut/ratamon-terveysmetsa/>



CO2 Calculator in the Tampere.Finland App

Tampere

Tampere is on a mission to reach carbon neutrality while improving public health and mobility like many European cities. But *How do you get citizens to care about their daily emissions, especially when the data feels distant or abstract?*

The answer: **make it personal.**

To do that, Tampere built a carbon footprint calculator directly into its official [Tampere.Finland mobile app](#). It helps people see the climate impact of their travel choices in real time and encourages healthier, more sustainable habits. Developed under the EU Horizon 2020 STARDUST project and Tampere's Smart City program, the tool was created in collaboration with Finnish tech firms like Kausal, Codemen, and Hion Digital. It blends behavioral science, passive tracking, and gamified feedback to guide better mobility choices.

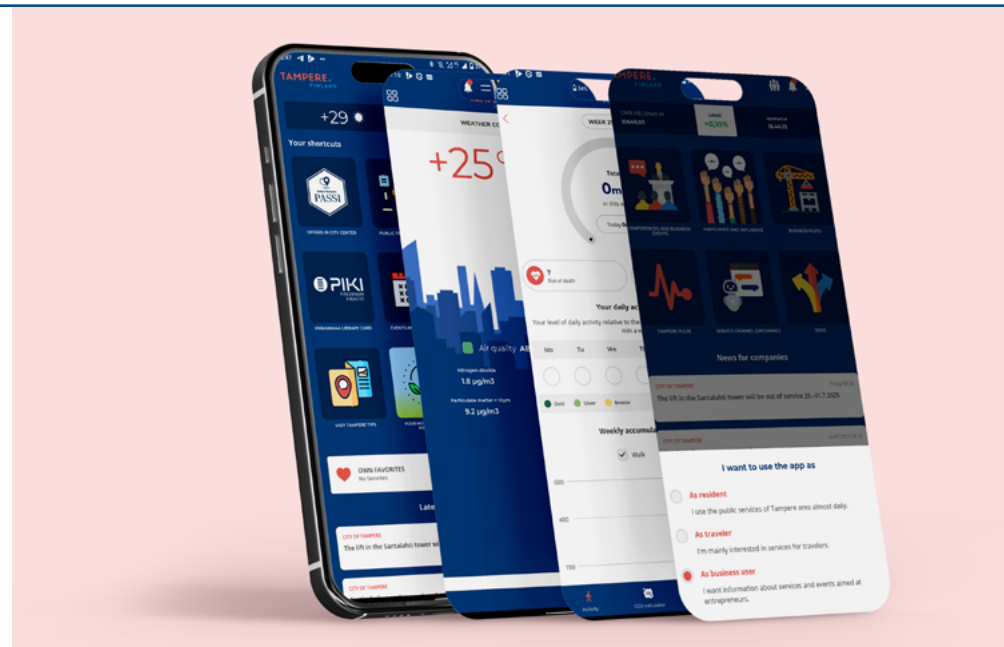
How It Works

Once users enable location tracking, the app:

- Detects travel modes (walk, bus, bike, car)
- Calculates CO2 emissions for motorized trips
- Tracks physical activity for active travel
- Awards monthly badges (bronze, silver, gold) for sustainable behavior
- Allows users to fix misclassified trips within 3 days

Results

- Over 35,000 downloads of the Tampere.Finland app
- Around 1,500 active monthly users for the carbon tracking feature
- Weekly health tips boosted user interaction
- Aggregated data now supports city-wide mobility planning
- A steady user feedback loop continues to guide feature improvements



Source and Read More:

<https://www.tampere.fi/en/nature-and-environment/climate-action-tampere/mobility-carbon-footprint-calculator>



From Municipal Challenges to Business Innovation, How App Turned Local Problems into Scalable Solutions

Finland, known for its clean environment and strong digital infrastructure, still faces persistent challenges in maintaining urban greenery, controlling invasive species, and monitoring infrastructure conditions across its widespread municipalities. With limited public resources, many local governments struggle to collect real-time, area-wide environmental data efficiently and affordably.

Founded in 2020 in Tampere, Crowdsorsa offers a smart solution: **a mobile app that gamifies data collection**. Inspired by founder Toni Paju's work in Africa, the app lets citizens complete microtasks, like filming bike paths or removing invasive plants, for small payments and in-game rewards.

The pilot in Lempäälä proved its efficiency: residents assessed the entire street network in just one day. Since then, over 40 Finnish municipalities have adopted the app. By mid-2024, 65,000 users were actively participating, with some earning over €3,000 in one summer.

Tasks include:

- Uprooting and recording invasive lupines or slugs
- Cycling along bike paths to map surface conditions via video
- Verifying environmental tasks through before-and-after footage

Once tasks are submitted and approved, users receive direct payments to their bank accounts.

Supported by Business Finland, Crowdsorsa has expanded to Sweden, Estonia, the UK, and Malaysia, adapting to local conditions and improving the platform for use in areas with weak connectivity.

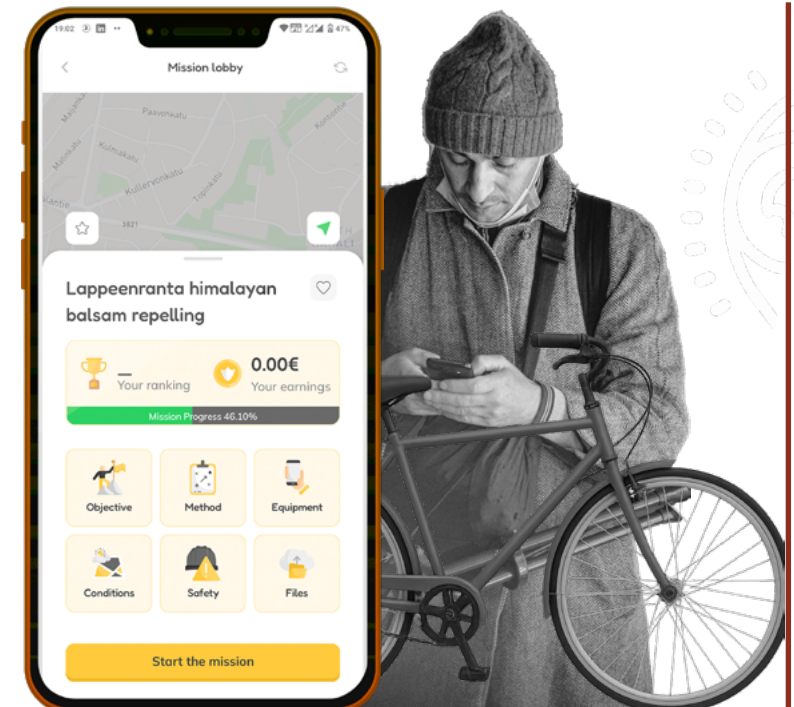
Crowdsorsa empowers communities, supports biodiversity, and extends infrastructure lifespan, all through a mobile game.

Source and Read More:

<https://www.businessfinland.fi/en/whats-new/cases/2025/crowdsorsa-improves-the-world-with-data-and-crowd-power>

<https://www.crowdsorsa.com/>

<https://yle.fi/a/74-20168879?utm>





Robotics and Digitalization Hub Riihimäki

Riihimäki, a small city in southern Finland, faced the challenge of staying economically strong and keeping education relevant in a fast-changing, tech-driven world. Seeing that robotics and digital skills were key to the future, the city set out to become a national leader in robotics education and innovation. **The goal** is to attract talent, keep young people in the area, and prepare the local workforce for what's ahead. The Robotics and Digitalization Hub was born from Riihimäki's strategic vision to bring robotics into education at every level, from early childhood to higher education.

Steps Taken

- Robotics Integrated into Education: From preschool to university, children learn basic coding, robotics, and automation through a structured curriculum.
- Robotics Campus Launched: A city-backed innovation hub established in partnership with Häme University of Applied Sciences (HAMK), offering labs, courses, and startup support.
- Scale Up! Project: Strengthened robotics entrepreneurship and knowledge-sharing across local industries.
- Public-Private Collaboration: Businesses, educators, and the city co-develop robotics applications and career pathways.
- Training Network: A national Robotics Teacher Network helps spread expertise to other Finnish municipalities.

Results

- Riihimäki is acknowledged as a pioneer in robotics education in Finland.
- Hundreds of students across age groups participate annually in robotics courses, with growing interest in STEM subjects.
- New partnerships between schools and local industries have led to practical student projects and internship pathways.
- Local teachers report increased confidence in using robotics tools and digital methods in class.
- Robotics is used in real-world scenarios, such as eldercare pilots and prototype development, though long-term adoption is still evolving.



Source and Read More:

<https://www.riihimaki.fi/en/opi-ja-kasvata/robotiikka/>

<https://www.roboticscampus.com/en/news/the-city-of-riihimaki-and-hame-university-of-applied-sciences-hamk-establish-new-robotics-competence-and-innovation-center/>



From Nuclear City to INNOVATION Hub Visaginas

Visaginas, a city in northeastern Lithuania, was built in the 1970s and 1980s to support the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant (INPP). For years, the city's identity, economy, and daily life revolved entirely around this massive Soviet energy project. But it changed after Lithuania joined the EU. One of the conditions was shutting down the INPP, which officially closed in 2009.

This left Visaginas with serious economic and social challenges, including job losses, declining population, and an uncertain future. Since then, the city has been working on a major transformation—from a nuclear-era mono-city to a diverse and creative hub for innovation.

Turning Things Around: Since 2015, the city has been shifting gears, focusing on innovation, culture, and new industries. A big part of that change is the Visaginas *Innovation Cluster*, launched in 2023.

What's the Cluster All About?

It's a creative, hands-on space open to everyone. Some of the key areas include:

- Textile Lab – for sewing and design
- Wood Workshop – tools and CNC machines
- Ceramics Studio – sculpture and clay work
- Laser Workshop – for engraving and precision cuts

These spaces were built by reusing old public buildings.

Source and Read More:

<https://madeinvisaginas.eu/>

<https://bauland.lt/Feasibility-Study-for-Visaginas>

<https://2014.esinvesticijos.lt/lt/>

A New Vision

With national and EU support, the city began transforming from a single-industry town into a multi-functional innovation center, focusing on:

- Reusing existing infrastructure
- Supporting entrepreneurship and creative skills
- Engaging the community in planning
- Promoting a new cultural identity

Impact So Far

- New jobs in creative fields
- More youth and community participation
- Revived buildings and spaces
- A shift in city image to innovation city





Youth-Inclusive Participatory Budgeting Tauragė

Tauragė, a small city in Lithuania, is actively involving its residents in shaping their community. Since 2021, the municipality has implemented Idėja Tauragei, a participatory budgeting initiative that empowers citizens as young as 16 to propose ideas for enhancing public spaces and community life. From new parks and sports areas to green spaces, the initiative ensures that everyday people have a direct voice in deciding what gets built.

How It Works

- Residents submit project proposals online
- Residents aged 16 and over, with declared residence in Tauragė District, can submit project proposals.
- Municipal experts assess proposals for feasibility, compliance with regulations, and alignment with community needs.
- Proposals are submitted via the official [platform](#).
- Eligible residents vote for their preferred projects within each category.
- Winning projects receive municipal funding and are executed in collaboration with project authors and relevant stakeholders.

Results

- 16 ideas submitted in 2023 alone, showing strong citizen interest
- 11 projects implemented since launch, with a 12th underway in 2025
- Nearly €340,000 allocated for community-led improvements
- Outcomes include playgrounds, parks, accessible paths, and shared spaces
- Submission rules improved: no more required signatures
- Digital platform upgraded for better accessibility and participation



Source and Read More:

<https://taurage.lt/kvieciame-teikti-idejas-dalyvauk-aurage/>



Innovation Case Study:

A Digital Way to Speak Up, The Online Bullying Box Šiauliai

Lithuania faces a serious issue with bullying among schoolchildren, one of the highest rates in Europe. According to [LRT \(2020\)](#), nearly one-third of 13-year-olds in Lithuania report being bullied, based on findings from the WHO's HBSC survey. This high rate of bullying may contribute to a climate where students feel unsafe reporting incidents to adults.

This system includes a **website**, a **mobile app** (Android and iOS), and a **management dashboard** for school staff. It doesn't replace traditional reporting; it adds a digital option for students who may be more comfortable speaking up online. It's especially helpful for cases that might otherwise go unreported.

How It Works

- Schools request access by email, including domain and admin contact
- A custom Bullying Box site is set up for them
- Students report incidents through the app or website
- Administrators follow up while keeping student identities protected

Results

- Students feel more empowered to report due to anonymity
- Instant notifications help school staff act quickly
- Schools collect data for better bullying pattern analysis
- Greater awareness and proactiveness among educators and students

Source and Read More:

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/18820834/>

<https://patyčiuidezute.sugimnazija.lt/>

Gasinska, K. (2020). Kas yra „Patyčių dėžutė“ ir kaip ją naudotis? Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania

Šiauliai, responding to the broader issue of school bullying in Lithuania, has taken a proactive approach through Didždvaris Gymnasium, which developed a simple yet effective tool called Patyčių Dėžutė, or the Bullying Box. This initiative provides students with a safe and anonymous way to report bullying, whether it occurs in hallways or online.

Key features

- Students can report incidents anonymously with just a few clicks
- Photos can be attached in cyberbullying cases
- Staff receive instant alerts and can respond quickly
- Maintains confidentiality throughout the process

By 2024, around 200 schools in Lithuania had adopted the system, about 1 in 5 nationwide. The Ministry of Education now aims to expand it to 50% of schools. It's low-cost, easy to implement, and proven to help create safer school environments.





Participatory Budgeting for Community Empowerment Raseiniai

Raseiniai, a small city in Lithuania, is empowering its citizens to directly influence their local environment. Through the initiative *Dalyvauk, Raseiniai!* (Get Involved, Raseiniai!), residents have the opportunity to propose and vote on community improvement projects, effectively determining how a portion of the city's budget is allocated. Launched by the municipality, this digital participatory budgeting platform has become a local tradition.

The process is: people submit ideas, the municipality evaluates them, and residents vote.

Projects that gain at least 100 votes are funded and implemented by the city the following year.

Proposal Conditions for Participatory Budgeting in Raseiniai:

- Must serve the public interest (non-commercial use)
- Total cost must not exceed €60,000
- Cannot include street or road reconstruction
- Should be clearly described, with drawings, photos, or visualizations if possible
- Must be feasible and suitable for implementation in 2025–2026
- Project must target public spaces (e.g., parks, recreational areas, community zones)

Results

- 8 community ideas were submitted in 2023–2024
- 773 residents cast votes
- €10,000 was allocated
- 1 winning project has already been built

Source and Read More:

<https://dalyvauk.raseiniai.lt/>



“The participatory budget initiative is becoming a beautiful tradition in the Raseiniai district. Only through joint efforts will we create a more comfortable and closer environment for all of us.”
— Arvydas Nekrošius, Mayor of Raseiniai District Municipality



Innovation Case Study:

ID Vilnius: Drone Innovation & Urban Data Operations

Vilnius

Vilnius, Lithuania, like many cities, once depended on manual staff inspections to monitor roads, rooftops, waste bins, and snow levels. Since 2021, however, it has been transitioning to a more intelligent system, leveraging drones and AI to automate urban monitoring. the city restructured its municipal enterprise, originally *Vilniaus planas*, into ID Vilnius in January 2024, focusing on smart technologies, GIS systems, and drone operations.

How It Works

Drones collect high-resolution imagery across the city, which is then analyzed using AI to detect:

- Road damage and snow accumulation
- Roof and facade issues
- Urban heat islands
- Waste service performance

These drone systems follow EU aviation standards and are integrated with manned airspace systems. In April 2025, ID Vilnius became Lithuania's first holder of a Light UAS Operator Certificate (LUC), allowing autonomous drone operations under EASA

Results and Impact

- Drones reduce administrative workload and response time.
- Data enables preventive maintenance and resource optimization.
- A public drone training facility opened in Šeškinė in August 2024, free for amateur and pro pilots, supporting Lithuania's UAV ecosystem.
- Collaboration with national defense and EU partners to build out a broader drone innovation strategy.
- Ongoing community engagement through outreach and training.

Source and Read More:

<https://vilnius.lt/naujienos/ismanusis-vilnius-dronu-inovacijos-ivertintos-tarptautiniu-luc-sertifikatu?lang=en>
<https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/2332291/drone-training-space-opens-in-vilnius>

[Picture](#)





Innovation Case Study:

Using Open Data to Build a Smarter, More Responsive City Poznań

Poznań, Poland, a mid-sized city committed to digital transformation, bridging communication between residents and city services was a growing priority. To meet this need, the city developed the Urban Data Integrator, a smart city platform that centralizes service access, enhances transparency, and invites citizens to actively shape their urban environment.

The Problem was despite the availability of services, residents often faced barriers to reporting issues or accessing timely updates. Siloed systems and limited feedback loops led to inefficiencies and missed opportunities for engagement.

What It Does

The platform gives residents a simple way to:

- Report issues like potholes, illegal parking, or graffiti
- Get live updates on road closures, weather, and air quality
- Track public transport and waste collection schedules
- Stay informed about city news and events
- Contribute their own data and ideas

What It Achieves

- Over 30,000 users
- 80% of reported issues resolved
- Built for just €30,500
- Developed by a small in-house team
- Regular updates based on user feedback

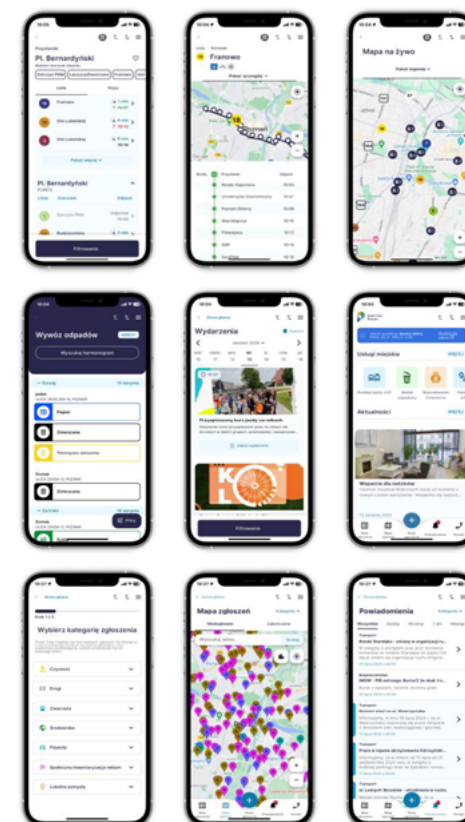
The project also came with its challenges. Coordinating across departments took effort, and we had to keep the platform simple while still adding useful features. After launch, keeping users engaged and the platform updated was an ongoing task.

Lessons for Others

Poznań's Urban Data Integrator shows that smart city tools don't need big budgets to succeed. What matters is the ability to listen, iterate, and align technology with citizen needs.

Key ingredients include:

- Political will
- Investment in cross-functional digital teams
- Commitment to open data and transparency



Picture

Source and Read More:

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/good-practices/open-data-smart-city-poznan-application-urban-data-integrator>

<https://www.poznan.pl/smartcity/>



Accessible Tourist Trails for the Visually Impaired people

Podkarpackie Municipality

Podkarpackie Voivodeship created Poland's first nature trails adapted for visually impaired people, transforming outdoor recreation into a safe, independent experience. In the mountainous and rural landscapes of Podkarpackie, outdoor tourism was long out of reach for people with visual impairments. Most trails lacked basic accessibility, and participation in nature-based recreation was low, only about 15–21% of people with disabilities traveled domestically. Responding to this gap, the Podkarpackie Voivodeship, together with GPR (Mountain Volunteer Search and Rescue Service), launched a unique effort to make outdoor tourism inclusive.

Key Features

- Audio description points narrate landscape and natural elements
- Totupoint GPS system guides users via phone (developed by Jan Szuster, a blind innovator, and is freely available for public use)
- Tandem bikes and adaptive gear available for hilly terrain
- Community-trained guides assist when needed

Trails

- Olchowiec (2021): 4.5 km, 18 description points
- Muczne (2022): 15 audio stops in Bieszczady forest
- Solina (2023): 11 GPS markers, panoramic views, and rental gear

What Changed & Why It Matters

- Visually impaired people can now enjoy nature safely and independently in three trail locations
- Hundreds of users now able to explore nature safely and independently
- Raised awareness among local institutions and authorities
- Built strong partnerships between NGOs, local governments, and tech creators
- Recognized as a model for inclusive tourism and rural innovation



The Podkarpackie Voivodeship is actively supporting inclusive tourism through yearly grant programs and strong cooperation across sectors. Local guides are trained to assist disabled visitors and use accessibility tools, while awareness campaigns help promote the use of these inclusive trails. Thanks to ongoing collaboration between GPR, regional authorities, NGOs, and users, the trails are regularly maintained and improved. Extra services like bike rentals and orientation support are also available through local centers, such as the SOS na Ratunek Training Center in Równia.

Source and Read More:

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/good-practices/tourist-paths-for-persons-with-visual-impairment-in-podkarpackie-region>

<https://www.podkarpackie.pl/index.php/sam-terytorialny/aktualnosci/podkarpackie-dostepne-nie-tylko-dla-pelnospprawnych-2>



Smart Parking Management Rzeszów

Rzeszów, Poland faced challenges in managing limited parking spaces, increasing vehicle traffic, and ensuring compliance with parking regulations. In response, the city partnered with Asseco Data Systems to implement a comprehensive digital parking management system covering its entire paid parking zone that now manages over 2,200 paid parking spaces. In partnership with Asseco Data Systems, the city implemented the **City Lock** platform, introducing modern meters, mobile payment options, and real-time data tools to support city staff in managing urban mobility more efficiently.

Residents and visitors can pay for parking using mobile apps, SMS, contactless cards, or traditional meters. No printed tickets are needed, payment is verified digitally. Municipal inspectors use handheld devices to check compliance on the spot, making enforcement faster and more efficient. Behind the scenes, a city dashboard tracks occupancy levels, payment rates, and system alerts in real time, helping city staff respond quickly and plan smarter.

The system is modular, meaning new features, like EV charging integration, dynamic pricing, or public transport links, can be added as needed.

The shift to a digital system has improved compliance, reduced congestion, and made parking more convenient for users. More than 130 smart meters were installed and 140+ mobile devices issued to inspectors. Residents now have a range of payment options, and the city gains detailed data to improve future mobility planning.

Impact highlights

- 2,200+ spaces now digitally monitored
- Multiple payment options (app, card, SMS, etc.)
- Real-time data for better enforcement and planning
- 140+ mobile inspection devices cut down on paperwork
- Supports broader smart city and environmental goals

Source and Read More:

<https://www.assecods.pl/en/case-studies/smart-parking-zone-for-2-200-vehicles>





Virtual Warsaw.app – City of the Senses Warsaw

Warsaw, Poland is a smart city initiative designed to make urban spaces more accessible for visually impaired residents. Launched in 2014 by the City of Warsaw's Welfare and Social Projects Department, the project began with beacon-based indoor navigation at the Capital Center for People with Disabilities. It quickly expanded to buses and public areas like Discovery Park and the Vistula Boulevards.

How It works

Bluetooth Low Energy (BLE) beacons installed throughout the city send signals to a dedicated smartphone app, which provides real-time voice guidance. Users receive audio information about their surroundings, like bus stops, entrances, or landmarks, enabling safer, independent navigation.

Results

- Thousands of visually impaired users can move through the city more freely.
- The low-cost, modular system is adaptable to other cities and public venues.
- Co-designed with feedback from the visually impaired community.
- In 2014, the project won a \$1.25 million Bloomberg Mayors Challenge award for innovation.

The city partnered with local startup Ifinity for beacon technology and app development. <https://getifinity.com/>

Continuous feedback from visually impaired users has been integral to refining the system.



Source and Read More:

https://oecd-opsi.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Virtual-Warsaw_Poland_2014.pdf

<https://www.intelligentcitieschallenge.eu/good-practices/virtual-warsaw>

<https://www.weforum.org/stories/2019/09/smart-cities-visually-impaired-new-outlook-urban-life/>



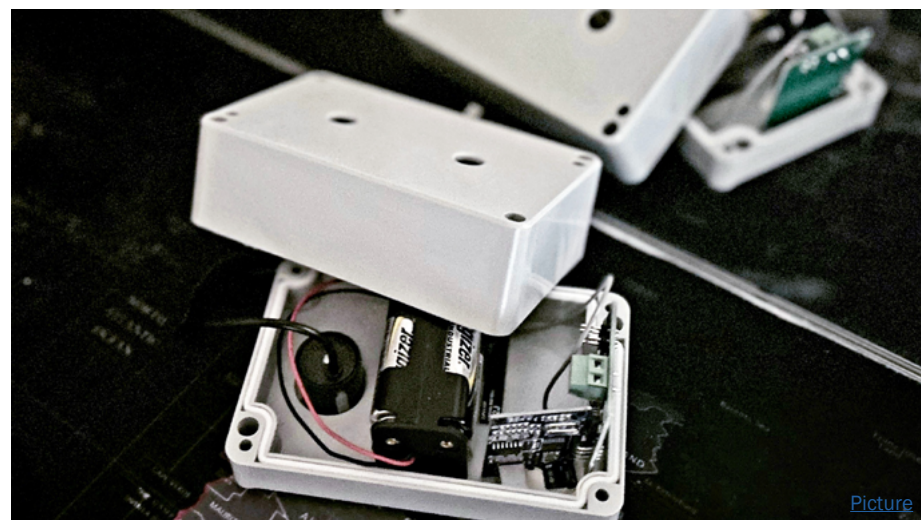
Smart Waste Management System Sierpc

Sierpc, a town of around 20,000 residents in the Mazowieckie Voivodeship of Poland, faced challenges in managing municipal waste efficiently. Traditional waste collection methods led to unnecessary fuel use, higher labour costs, and overflowing bins. To address these issues, the city launched the “Sierpc 2.0 – EcoSmart Solutions in Town Management” project between 2019 and 2022. Co-financed by the Operational Programme Technical Assistance 2014–2020 and the Polish state budget under the Human Smart Cities competition, the initiative focused on using smart technology to modernise urban services, starting with waste management. The pilot involved collaboration with innovators from the Warsaw University of Technology.

Results

- Smart route planning reduced unnecessary bin collection trips, saving fuel and labor hours.
- Lower fuel usage contributed to reduced CO2 emissions.
- Full bins were emptied more promptly, reducing overflow and complaints.
- Sensor battery life increased tenfold (from 3 months to 3 years) after switching to LoRaWAN.
- Ultrasonic sensors outperformed lasers in dirty/dusty conditions, ensuring consistent data flow.

Sierpc's smart waste project made waste collection cleaner and more efficient by using ultrasound sensors that work well even in dusty bins. The system helped cut down on fuel use and overflow, while residents took part in shaping the solution. It also supports EU green goals by reducing waste and improving recycling.



Ultrasonic Sensor

Source and Read More:

<https://eng.pw.edu.pl/News/Smart-rubbish-bins-success-of-an-idea-from-WUT>

<https://smartcity.sierpc.pl/prototyp-ultradzwiekowego-czujnika-wypelnienia-kontenerow/>



“Zero Waste Latvija” & Lietovelreiz.lv Building a Circular Economy Movement

Latvia has long struggled with waste. Too much still ends up in landfills, and too many reusable items are thrown away. A large portion of its municipal waste, over 40%, still ends up in landfills, and recycling rates, while improving, remain below EU targets. It faces the challenge of changing everyday habits from throwing away to thinking twice.

A New Vision: Zero Waste Latvija

Zero Waste Latvija, a local non-governmental organization, saw the need for change.

THEIR MISSION is to help Latvia move away from a “take–make–dispose” culture and toward a circular economy, where products and materials are kept in use for as long as possible. In 2023, they launched Lietovelreiz.lv, a simple but powerful digital platform that helps people find places to fix, borrow, or donate everyday items instead of throwing them away.

The platform includes:

- A map of over 1,300 reuse points: from repair shops and rental services to donation centers and community DIY spaces.
- An educational section with how-to guides and videos.
- A user-friendly design in the local language to make reuse feel accessible and familiar.

THE GOALS

- Keep reusable items out of landfills.
- Support local repair businesses.
- Encourage people to share, borrow, and fix more—and waste less.



Source and Read More:

<https://www.lietovelreiz.lv/lv>



Robotics and Creative Thinking for Rural Education

Smiltene

Smiltenē, Latvia, took a step toward bridging the digital divide in early 2024. A former school principal in Smiltene, Una Reķe, decided to tackle a big gap in rural education: children had very little access to creative digital learning.

Her idea was simple: start a small centre where kids could explore **robotics**, **programming**, and **problem-solving** through play.

That idea became **REKUROBO**.

With public support and a modest startup grant, Una bought LEGO robotics kits and 3D pens, and began classes at the local technical school. The response was immediate, within months, REKUROBO grew from 34 children to over 130, expanding into seven rural towns and villages. Children as young as two learn early programming with colour-coded train cards. Older kids build robots, invent creative machines, and design in 3D. Alongside tech skills, they learn how to work together, solve problems, and stay curious.

REKUROBO is open to all children, including those with special needs. It also works closely with local kindergartens and schools. Families pay a small fee, and the programme reinvests it in new tools and learning materials. This small, local project is now seen as a model for rural innovation. It shows how much is possible with the right mix of imagination, support, and community energy.

REKUROBO was named “Innovation of the Year” by Smiltene Municipality (2024)

“We don’t just teach coding. We teach kids to think, and not to lose their curiosity.”

— Una Reķe, founder of Rekurobo



Picture

REKUROBO shows how local entrepreneurship and education policy can come together to drive innovation. The concept is designed to be easily scaled to other rural regions in the EU. It runs on a resource-light model, using modular tools and strong partnerships to stay flexible and efficient. Funding comes from a mix of participation fees, grants, and public-private cooperation, making the model financially sustainable. Alongside its main programs, REKUROBO also organizes school holiday camps and is exploring new ways to support digital and hands-on learning.

Source and Read More:

<https://ziemellatvija.lv/smiltenes-novada-atver-jaunu-izglitibas-iestadi/>

<https://www.smiltenesnovads.lv/lv/jaunums/pasvaldiba-atbalsta-jaunos-uznemejus-un-veicina-izaugsmi>



Digital Innovation Park & Smart City Initiatives

Liepāja

Liepāja, a city in Latvia, faced with a shortage of IT talent and limited innovation capacity, took a bold step in August 2020 by launching the **Digital Innovation Park (DIP)**, a dedicated hub aimed at developing local digital skills, attracting young professionals, and testing smart city solutions to directly improve public services. The initiative was born out of collaboration between the City of Liepāja, the Special Economic Zone Authority, local industry (UPB AS), and media partners. It now plays a central role in the city's climate-neutral and smart city strategy under the EU's Horizon Europe framework.

What the Digital Innovation Park Does?

Liepāja's Digital Innovation Park (DIP) acts as a local engine for smart city transformation. It connects city departments, tech companies, universities, and residents to co-develop low-cost digital solutions that serve public needs. Key initiatives include:

- Public Mobility App: real-time public transport tracking (4,000+ users)
- Digital Twin & CO2 Monitoring: supports low-emission planning
- Old Libau AR App: blends history and tourism via augmented reality
- Smart City Roadmap: co-created with Valencia for civic engagement
- Youth Tech Programs: hackathons, digital skills training, and retention tools

What's Changed?

- Strengthened local tech ecosystem and cross-sector collaboration
- Increased youth engagement and digital career pathways
- Improved public services through co-created digital tools
- Gained EU-level visibility via RAPTOR, TAIEX, and Horizon Europe

Source and Read More:

<https://investinlatvia.org/en/news/digital-innovation-park-founded-in-liepaja>

<https://labsoflatvia.com/en/news/digital-innovation-park-founded-in-liepaja>

<https://raptorproject.eu/projects/liepaja>

<https://www.liepaja.lv/projekti/projekts-liepajas-viedpilsetas-cela-karte-uz-izmainam-versta-mentoresana-zinasanu-apmaina-un-sadarbiba-ar-valensijas-pilsetu>



Latvia faces a national shortage of ~16,000 IT specialists. DIP offers young people practical ways to gain experience while contributing to city innovation. With a budget under €1M, it proves that smart city progress can be affordable, inclusive, and community-driven.



3I Solutions for Public Services: Smart Bench Smiltene

Smiltenē, a small town in Latvia, is embracing innovation head-on in an era where public services often struggle to meet growing digital expectations. As part of the 3I Solutions for Public Services project under the Interreg Baltic Sea Region program, the town is piloting a unique approach to civic engagement and tourism, using augmented reality (AR) and a location-based metaverse platform to bring local experiences to life in new and interactive ways.

The Vision: Making Public Services Interactive

Launched in August 2023, the project is led by LUT University (Finland), AR-GO Lab Oy, Kaunas Science and Technology Park, the Municipality of Smiltene (Latvia), Mazovia Development Agency and other. It aims to overcome barriers like low digital readiness and limited citizen participation by introducing immersive technologies into everyday public services.

In Smiltene, this means turning benches, parks, and public spaces into interactive digital environments, bringing together tech, tourism, and civic participation in one user-friendly experience. This system uses GPS data and AR overlays to offer content that is both immersive and locally relevant.

How It Works

The pilot centers around the CITYA! metaverse platform, accessed via smartphones or AR headsets and continues through July 2025.

Key elements include:

- Smart benches that display location-based tourism and civic information
- AR-enhanced walking tours with 3D models of historical landmarks
- Real-time local news and updates shared directly through the platform
- Participatory tools like citizen voting, feedback forms, and virtual consultations
- The smart bench has a free Wi-Fi spot and device charger, which allows you to use all the [CITYA!](https://interreg-baltic.eu/project/3i-solutions-for-ps/) platform functions.

Source and Read More:

<https://interreg-baltic.eu/project/3i-solutions-for-ps/>

The project continues through July 2025, with a published Roadmap for Sustainable Innovation in Public Services available as a handbook, hackathon manual, and training modules. Future steps include integrating citizen linkages, refining platform features, and promoting replication across Latvian and Baltic Sea Region municipalities. The 3I solution in Smiltene offers a low-risk, visible approach to public service innovation that can be easily activated by other towns and cities.





Empowering Women in Creative Entrepreneurship Vidzeme (Latvia) and Ida-Viru (Estonia)

Women over 40 in rural and small-town areas who work in creative fields often struggle to launch or grow a business. They may face challenges such as limited confidence, lack of networks, or insufficient business knowledge tailored to their needs. To address this, the project **Creative Bloom** (*Uzplaukt radoši*) was created. Launched in 2024 by Vidzeme Planning Region (Latvia) and Ida-Viru Entrepreneurship Centre (Estonia), the project offered a supportive path for women to turn their creative talent into viable entrepreneurship. Co-financed by the Interreg Central Baltic Programme, the pilot helped 20 women (10 from each country) gain hands-on tools, confidence, and community through mentoring and cross-border learning.

How It Works

- Participants were selected through an open call targeting women aged 40 and above in the creative industries.
- Six *mentor club* sessions were conducted between September 2024 and June 2025, focusing on:
 - Starting and developing a creative business
 - Branding and pricing strategies
 - Marketing and public communication
 - Sustainable design and storytelling
- Each session was led by experienced professionals from the creative sector and included peer-to-peer discussions.
- A three-day cross-border experience exchange tour was held in January 2025, including site visits to creative businesses and networking events.
- The final mentor club session in June 2025 in Cēsis featured open reflections and presentations of participants' business progress.

Key Features

- The program integrated professional mentoring, practical business skill-building, and community support.
- It combined formal content delivery (e.g., pricing tools, marketing strategies) with informal, shared experience learning.
- Partners included the Latvian Investment and Development Agency (LIAA), local artists, marketers, and sustainability-focused business owners.
- Content was designed with adaptability in mind, making it transferable to other regions and creative contexts.

Participants reported greater confidence in setting prices, presenting their work, and communicating their value. Many gained clarity in brand identity, while some began actively developing or relaunching products and services. Strong regional connections were formed, and the project demonstrated how low-cost, peer-driven models can effectively support underrepresented entrepreneurs in creative and rural sectors.

Source and Read More:

<https://www.vidzeme.lv/en/projects/uzplaukt-radosi-sieviesu-radoso-uznemeju-iedrosinasana/about/>

<https://centralbaltic.eu/project-news/the-first-mentor-club-of-the-project-creative-bloom-has-taken-place-in-vidzeme/>



Kopli 93: Breathing New Life into a Historic Space Tallinn

Tallinn, Estonia is home to a lot of history, and one building that really stands out is Kopli 93. since 1937 it's been everything from a sailor's club to a school to a cultural center. But after all that activity, it ended up abandoned and forgotten. That started to change when the local community, with support from the EU-backed CENTRINNO project, stepped in to give it a new purpose.

? What's Going On at Kopli 93

Community Garden & Beehive

Started in 2020, the garden now has around 50 people involved. They grow veggies, swap gardening tips, and take care of a beehive that helps pollinate plants and support local biodiversity.



DIY Makerspace

In the courtyard, there's a small maker-space where people can use tools to fix stuff or build things. It's open on some evenings and totally free. More than just repairing things, it's about learning, sharing skills, and getting creative.



Workshops and "Community Wednesdays"

From building wind turbines to learning about permaculture, the workshops cover all kinds of hands-on topics. And every Wednesday, neighbors gather to hang out, share ideas, and support each other.



Source and Read More:

<https://www.tallinn.ee/en/kopli93aed>

<https://www.tallinn.ee/en/jaatmekeskus/kopli-93-makerspace>

<https://centrinno.eu/blog/impact-influence-tallinn/>



Ball Box Pilot Project Promoting Outdoor Play around country

Estonia is facing a growing challenge among students: increasing physical inactivity, rising obesity, and worsening screen-related mental health issues. [Research from the University of Tartu](#) shows that only 7–11% of youth aged 10 to 17 spend time outdoors on a daily basis. At the same time, according to [the Estonian National Institute for Health Development \(2024\)](#) more than 30% of school-aged children are overweight, a trend that continues to worsen. Mental health issues are also on the rise. [National health reports](#) reveal growing levels of depression, anxiety, and behavioral addiction among young people. Around 17% of students show signs of gaming addiction, while up to 10% of girls and 7% of boys are affected by social media dependence.

Although many communities have public sports areas, these spaces are often underused. The problem isn't a lack of infrastructure, it's the lack of accessible equipment. [Local governments across Estonia](#) commonly observe the same issue: children have places to be active, but not the tools they need to engage in spontaneous play or physical activity.

A Simple Solution: Ball Boxes

To bridge this gap, the Sports and Recreation Competence Centre launched a nationwide pilot in 2024: Ball Boxes, durable, weatherproof containers placed in parks, school yards and public sports grounds. Each box is stocked with 4 footballs and 4 basketballs, freely available for anyone to use. Local governments manage and maintain the boxes, contributing just €50 + VAT per unit. This low-cost model empowers municipalities to encourage movement with minimal investment. The simplicity of the concept, paired with local ownership, makes it easy to scale and adapt across communities.

Results

By mid-2024, the Ball Box project had been implemented in more than 10 locations across Estonia, with over 90 boxes installed, including 44 in Tallinn, 22 in Pärnu, and 18 in Tartu. Smaller towns like Keila, Rakvere, and Järva County also took part. The initiative also drew community support, with local residents, businesses, and nonprofits donating sports balls to supplement the public stock.

The project was recognized by Interreg Europe as a Good Practice for its replicability, simplicity, and potential to improve youth well-being through open access to play equipment.

Source and Read More:

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/good-practices/ball-pits-in-public-playgrounds>



Picture



“Ole valmis! app” – Estonia’s Civil Preparedness Tool

Estonia responded to growing security concerns and natural risks with a fast, scalable solution to boost public preparedness. In 2018, the volunteer-led organisation Naiskodukaitse launched Ole valmis! (“Be Ready!”), a free mobile app that offers citizens practical guidance for handling emergencies, from power outages to military threats.

“We knew we couldn’t train the entire population fast enough. That’s why we turned to mobile technology—to meet people where they are.”

— Elisa Jakson, app creator and Naiskodukaitse volunteer

Origin and How It Works

Created as a digital extension of civil defence training, the app offers simple, offline-accessible instructions on first aid, evacuations, cyber threats, and household preparedness. Content is based on Estonia’s national guidelines, co-developed with government partners, and regularly updated by volunteers.

The Ole Valmis app was initially developed in 2018 with a modest budget of approximately €17,000. Despite having no dedicated marketing funding, its visibility has grown significantly through the efforts of Naiskodukaitse volunteers at public events, national media exposure such as on Hommik Anuga, and extensive cross-promotion with the Estonian Rescue Board via television, radio, and street advertising. As a result of this community-driven outreach, the app has become widely regarded as a central element of Estonia’s national crisis prevention strategy.

Source and Read More:

<https://www.olevalmis.ee/>

https://www.naiskodukaitse.ee/OLE_VALMIS_3680

Results

- 157,000+ downloads by 2024
- Widely used in schools, families, and local governments
- Recommended by national rescue and police authorities
- Usage spikes during real-life crises (e.g. Ukraine war, major storms)

Impact

- Trusted, low-cost model for crisis communication
- Empowers citizens and strengthens national resilience
- Replicable for other countries with strong volunteer networks
- Proof that grassroots tech can become critical infrastructure



Picture



Sea Container-Based Mobile Youth Center Toila Municipality

Toila Municipality in northeastern Estonia faced challenges in reaching young people in its scattered rural areas, as traditional youth centers were only in larger towns. To address this, local youth, design students, and the Sports and Culture Center teamed up to create **Estonia's first mobile youth center**, housed in a 20-foot repurposed sea container.

- Teens aged 13–15 co-created the concept with design students and local institutions.
- The container is moved by forklift truck to places like parks, beaches, and villages.
- Staffed by youth workers and volunteers, it offers relaxed programming shaped by young people's input.
- Rotates seasonally, ensuring outreach to underserved areas.

What Changed & Why It Matters

- 191 young people (ages 7–19) joined activities in the first 44 days, including 34 who'd never participated in youth services before.
- Events like BBQs, board game nights, and language cafés built trust and connection.
- Teens helped plan, host, and fundraise, raising €515 for a local peer in need.
- Even Estonia's Minister of Education took notice of this bold, grassroots idea.

The mobile youth center works because it was co-created with young people and brings activities directly to remote areas, turning them into lively, inclusive spaces.



Source and Read More:

<https://europegoeslocal.eu/good-practice-short/mobile-youth-center-in-toila-municipality/>

interreg-baltic.eu/project/3i-solutions-for-ps/



Hedgehog Highways for Urban Biodiversity

Tartu

Tartu, a city in Estonia, is home to many hedgehogs that roam through parks, cemeteries, and even densely built residential areas. However, as the city continues to grow, so do the challenges for these quiet nighttime visitors, fences, roads, walls, and pesticides are increasingly threatening their ability to move freely and survive.

The campaign was created through collaboration between the City of Tartu, the Estonian Wildlife Association, and University of Tartu researchers, led by Katariina Kuusaru, a student and national Young Nature Conservationist award winner. It's part of Tartu's broader biodiversity goals and reflects a growing movement to support urban wildlife through low-cost, high-impact actions.

The Idea

At the heart of the campaign is a small but powerful fix: a 13×13 cm opening in garden fences called a **hedgehog gate**.

These gates allow hedgehogs to roam freely between yards, parks, and nesting areas without having to cross busy streets or face dead ends.

The City of Tartu continues to promote the campaign and educate citizens through its municipal website and public information channels. Future developments may include integrating hedgehog habitat connectivity into broader green corridor planning and encouraging more schools, institutions, and neighborhoods to participate.

Source and Read More:

<https://www.tartu.ee/et/hedgehogs-tartu>

<https://animalsurvival.org/appeal/greece-anima-hedgehogs/>

Residents Are Encouraged To

- Create hedgehog gates in their fences
- Pick up a free awareness sign from the Town Hall to mark their participation
- Use wildlife-friendly garden practices like avoiding pesticides, leaving brush piles, and offering water
- Report sightings through apps like PlutoF GO



Picture



Illuminating the Historic Barn for Cultural Revitalization Virtsu

Virtsu, a small coastal village in Estonia with a population of around 500, embraced its Smart Village Strategy to breathe new life into a historic site. A barn-stable from 1806, part of the old manor complex, had long sat mostly unused due to poor lighting. Seeing its potential, the Virtsu Development Society took action to transform the neglected heritage building into a vibrant cultural space. Through a modest yet impactful infrastructure upgrade, they installed energy-efficient lighting while preserving the building's historical features. Now, the barn-stable is accessible year-round for local exhibitions, art shows, and educational events. Managed by the community, the venue is free to use upon request (via virtsu@virtsu.ee), fostering local engagement and creativity. The pilot involved installing a modern lighting network within the barn-stable, ensuring the preservation of the building's historical integrity. The project aimed to create a versatile space accessible to local artists, historians, and community groups for various exhibitions and cultural activities.

What Changed & Why It Matters

- Cultural Revival: The barn is now a lively venue for exhibitions and public events.
- Low-Cost Innovation: A simple lighting upgrade turned an underused building into a year-round cultural hub.
- Community Activation: Local groups are now more involved in organizing and hosting cultural activities.
- Heritage Preservation: The building's original structure remains intact, now actively contributing to village life.

The 1806 barn-stable, part of the historic Virtsu manor, reflects the village's heritage and supports its Smart Village Strategy by adapting old structures for modern community use.



Picture

Source and Read More:

https://www.smartrural21.eu/villages/virtsu_ee/



Prepaid Waste Bag System for Visitors

Hiiumaa island

Hiiumaa, Estonia's second-largest island, experiences a significant seasonal population increase due to tourism, which brings economic benefits but also strains the local waste infrastructure. Many short-term visitors generate household waste without access to standard collection services, leading to overflowing bins, contaminated recycling, and illegal dumping. To address this, the island introduced a prepaid garbage bag system in 2020, an easy, low-cost solution that allows visitors to responsibly dispose of waste during their stay.

How It Works

The municipality partnered with local producer Dagöplast AS to launch bright orange prepaid garbage bags. Tourists can purchase these biodegradable bags for €3 (originally €1.70) at grocery stores and ferry kiosks. The cost includes both the bag and its collection/disposal. The process is simple:

- Buy a bag
- Fill it with household waste
- Drop it at any of five designated points across the island
- Waste is collected via regular routes, sorted separately

Recyclables can still be deposited at existing sorting stations.



Results

- 9,800 bags sold since launch – ~2,000 per year
- Cleaner recycling streams, reduced misuse of public bins
- High user adoption after ferry and social media campaigns
- Cost-neutral for the municipality – no subsidies required

Source and Read More:

<https://hiiumaa.ee/en/practical-information/>

<https://news.err.ee/1117953/visitors-to-hiiumaa-can-put-their-rubbish-in-a-prepaid-waste-bag>

<https://www.chemicallyclever.com/guide-organisations/prepaid-garbage-bags-visitors-hiiumaa>

Challenges & Lessons Learned

- Unlocked bins are sometimes misused; future upgrade may include lockable containers with code access
- Promotion matters, stronger messaging improved uptake
- Stakeholder cooperation (retailers, producers, tourism services) is crucial
- Ongoing public education helps maintain trust and correct usage



BioBoosters – Boosting Circular Innovation Baltic Sea Region

THE BSR is rich in bioresources and industrial expertise in forestry, agriculture, and food processing. Countries such as **Finland, Sweden, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland,** and **Germany** are actively working toward a transition to a circular bioeconomy. However, these efforts are often fragmented, limited by regional silos, lack of transnational cooperation, and low interaction between companies, startups, and research institutions. To overcome these barriers, the BioBoosters project was launched in 2023 under the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme. The project brought together 10 partners from 9 countries, led by JAMK University of Applied Sciences (Finland), to create a structured, cross-border innovation model focused on accelerating circular transition through collaboration.

How It Works

The core of BioBoosters is a cross-border, innovation-focused hackathon model:

- Companies and public institutions submit real-world circular economy challenges.
- Open calls invite international innovators, startups, SMEs, researchers, and students.
- Selected teams are matched to challenges and agree to NDAs.
- Teams receive expert mentoring during a multi-day, structured hackathon.
- They co-develop and pitch viable solutions to the challenge providers.
- Promising ideas move into pilot testing, R&D partnerships, or new ventures.
- All events follow the Business Hackathon Model for quality and flexibility.

Results

- 23 R&D or business partnerships launched (13 cross-border)
- 10 companies moved forward with pilot tests
- 66% of winning teams came from outside the host country
- 12 organizations adopted new R&D tools or methods
- A cross-border network of 1,700+ professionals was formed

What Changed

BioBoosters began as a pilot for a regionally scalable hackathon model focused on circular innovation. Between 2023 and 2025, 18 hackathons were held across 7 countries, engaging 246 teams from 20+ countries and 140+ companies and public institutions. The model connected international solution providers with real-world industry challenges through a structured, high-engagement process. BioBoosters transformed from a pilot into a replicable system driving circular innovation across borders, institutions, and sectors.

Sources:

<https://interreg-baltic.eu/project/bioboosters/>
<https://www.jamk.fi/en/jamk/focus-areas/sustainable-bioeconomy-and-energy-solutions/bioboosters>
<https://circulareconomy.europa.eu/platform/en/knowledge/bioboosters-impact-review-2024>
<https://interreg-baltic.eu/project-posts/bioboosters/adfis-hackathon/>
<https://interreg-baltic.eu/project-pilots/bioboosters/the-story-about-toksika-hackathon-accelerated-remediation-of-contaminated-soils/>
<https://interreg-baltic.eu/project-pilots/bioboosters/the-story-about-nando-hackathon/>
<https://interreg-baltic.eu/project-pilots/bioboosters/the-story-about-refal-hackathon-maximizing-the-value-of-apple-biomass/>
<https://interreg-baltic.eu/project-pilots/the-story-about-stora-enso-hackathon/>



BSI_4Women – Empower Refugee Women Entrepreneurs Baltic Sea Region

THE BSR has been supporting refugee women, especially those from Ukraine, in pursuing entrepreneurship as a pathway to economic independence and social integration, through the BSI_4Women project launched in 2023. Coordinated by partners from seven countries of the BSR: **Poland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Estonia, Latvia** and **Lithuania**, and co-funded by Interreg BSR. The initiative offers mentoring, workshops, incubation, and national networks tailored to women's specific needs.

How It Works

- In its first year, over 700 women were engaged across Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark.
- Programs in Lithuania and Norway helped dozens of refugee women develop and pitch business ideas, from food services to sustainable design.
- The 2025 Transnational Demo-Day in Poland gathered 11 refugee women to present their ventures, awarding prizes for VR learning and ethical products.
- Surveys and local research identified major challenges, like lack of confidence and funding, helping shape more effective support programs.
- Local networks connected women to mentors, municipalities, and innovation hubs, creating a stronger foundation for long-term integration.
- A transnational toolkit is in development to help other regions replicate the model, embedding gender- and migration-aware support in mainstream services.

BSI_4Women reframes refugee women not as beneficiaries but as builders of their own futures. It shows how inclusive entrepreneurship support, when coordinated across borders, can unlock new energy and leadership in our communities.

The project doesn't just support individuals; it also informs EU and national policy by contributing real-world data and recommendations, particularly for the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) Action Plan, on social innovation, gender-sensitive entrepreneurship, and refugee inclusion.

Source and Read More:

https://interreg-baltic.eu/project/bsi_4women/

<https://interreg-baltic.eu/top-news/collaborating-for-enhanced-resilience-social-example/>

https://interreg-baltic.eu/project-posts/bsi_4women/bsi_4women-project-at-the-annual-forum-of-the-eu-strategy-for-the-baltic-sea-region/

https://interreg-baltic.eu/project-posts/bsi_4women/a-year-of-empowerment-and-progress-in-2024/

https://interreg-baltic.eu/project-posts/bsi_4women/the-situation-of-refugee-women-in-estonia/

https://interreg-baltic.eu/project-posts/bsi_4women/the-resilient-spirit-of-refugee-women-in-norway/



HOW to Read a Case Study Through the Innovation Framework

These examples show how an innovation case can be aligned with key enablers and contextual factors, ideally as part of the planning process. In our own city or project, we can use this framework early on to guide design choices and ensure stronger impact and sustainability.



Why These Cases Were Selected?

The main goals of the BSR are defined by the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) and supported by the Interreg BSR Programme 2021–2027 [1, 2]. The EUSBSR focuses on three objectives: saving the sea, connecting the region, and increasing prosperity [1]. These are further supported by the Interreg Programme's four priorities: innovative societies, water-smart societies, climate-neutral societies, and cooperation governance.

Hence, five cases were selected to demonstrate how local innovation can align with the key enablers and contextual factors of the innovation framework, while also contributing to the overarching goals of the EUSBSR and the Interreg BSR Programme.

Each illustrates a practical and scalable approach:

- [Finnish Nature Trail \(Kouvola, Finland\)](#): accessible nature trail encouraging sustainability and social inclusion.
- [Community Innovation \(Visaginas, Lithuania\)](#): community-driven innovation and resilience through local participation.
- [Smart Waste Management \(Sierpc, Poland\)](#): smart waste management aligned with circular economy and environmental protection.
- [Robotics in Preschool Education \(Smiltene, Latvia\)](#): robotics in preschool education promoting early STEM skills and digital inclusion.
- [Mobile Youth Centre \(Toila, Estonia\)](#): mobile youth services supporting inclusion and equal access.

Together, these cases highlight how small municipalities contribute meaningfully to the EUSBSR and Interreg BSR Programme objectives through context-aware, locally driven innovation.

[1] Interreg Baltic Sea Region (n.d.) Priorities 2021–2027. Interreg Baltic Sea Region Programme. Available at: <https://interreg-baltic.eu/about/priorities-2021-2027/>

[2] European Commission (EUSBSR). (2021) EUSBSR Action Plan 2021. EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. Available at: <https://eusbsr.eu/wp-content/uploads/action-plan-2021.pdf>



Innovation in Context:

Ratamo Health Forest – nature-based wellbeing

Kouvola

ENABLERS

**Leadership and Vision**

Kouvola integrated health, nature, and art into a public urban space, clearly aligned with long-term wellbeing goals.

**Collaboration Networks**

Partners from healthcare, culture, environment, and education co-developed the forest, with students from Eduko and Xamk building key elements.

**Skilled Workforce**

Professionals in landscape design, health, and environmental planning shaped the space, ensuring it met diverse user needs.

**Access to Data and Technology**

This was a low-tech initiative, showing that innovation can happen without digital tools when local knowledge and design thinking are applied.

**Flexible Funding**

The project was funded through a national initiative, coordinated by Tapio Oy.

**Organizational Culture**

Kouvola embraced an open, cross-disciplinary approach, showing readiness to try new, human-centered solutions.

CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

**Policies**

Aligns with Finnish and EU strategies on mental health, green infrastructure, and climate adaptation, particularly in post-COVID recovery.

**Social and Economic Gaps**

The forest was designed to be inclusive, accessible to patients, hospital staff, people with limited mobility, and the wider public, addressing unequal access to restorative spaces and mental health support.

**Climate & Environmental Pressures**

It promotes nature connection, biodiversity, and climate resilience through sustainable land use and access to restorative green space.



[Read This Case Study](#)



[Read The Framework](#)



Innovation in Context:

From Nuclear City to INNOVATION Hub

Visaginas

ENABLERS

**Leadership and Vision**

The city and national government redefined Visaginas's identity after the INPP closure, focusing on innovation, creativity, and resilience.

**Collaboration Networks**

The innovation cluster brings together public institutions, community groups, and national ministries, with support from urban planners and EU-level strategies.

**Skilled Workforce**

Training in business and creative skills supports a new generation of entrepreneurs in a region formerly centered on heavy industry.

**Access to Data and Technology**

Facilities like laser workshops, CNC machines, and textile labs provide modern tools that support hands-on, tech-enabled creativity.

**Flexible Funding**

The project is supported by Lithuania's Smart Specialisation Strategy, the EU Just Transition Fund, and other regional development programs.

**Organizational Culture**

By repurposing abandoned buildings and promoting open participation, Visaginas fosters a culture of reuse, experimentation, and inclusive growth.

CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

**Demographics**

By opening spaces to residents of all ages, from students to retirees, the cluster supports multigenerational engagement in a shrinking, aging city.

**Policies**

The transformation aligns with national and EU-level strategies for regional revitalization, sustainability, and post-industrial transition.

**Social and Economic Gaps**

The city faced unemployment, population loss, and loss of identity after the INPP shutdown, challenges the cluster directly addresses through inclusion and skills-building.


[Read This Case Study](#)

[Read The Framework](#)



Innovation in Context:

Smart Waste Management System

Sierpc

ENABLERS

**Leadership and Vision**

Sierpc launched “Sierpc 2.0” to embed smart, sustainable practices into daily city management. It reflects clear, forward-looking leadership at the local level.

**Collaboration Networks**

The city worked closely with Warsaw University of Technology, turning research into real-world solutions.

**Skilled Workforce**

City staff adopted new tools and routines, showing readiness to work with data and technology.

**Access to Data and Technology**

Ultrasonic sensors and LoRaWAN tech transformed bins into responsive, low-energy infrastructure.

**Flexible Funding**

The project was funded through Poland’s “Human Smart Cities” competition and the EU Operational Programme 2014–2020.

**Organizational Culture**

Sierpc showed adaptability by switching technologies mid-project and involving the public in smart city development.

CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

**Policies**

The project was developed under Poland’s “Human Smart Cities” initiative and co-financed by an EU Operational Programme, aligning directly with national and EU priorities on digitalization and sustainable urban services.

**Climate & Environmental Pressures**

Reducing unnecessary waste collection trips helped lower emissions and fuel use, directly addressing environmental efficiency goals.


[Read This Case Study](#)

[Read The Framework](#)



Innovation in Context:

Robotics and Creative Thinking for Rural Education

Smiltene

ENABLERS

**Leadership and Vision**

Founded by a former principal, REKUROBO reflects a clear vision to bridge rural education gaps through creativity and technology.

**Collaboration Networks**

The initiative partners with kindergartens, municipalities, and technical schools, combining local resources and support.

**Skilled Workforce**

Driven by an educator-entrepreneur, REKUROBO integrates hands-on teaching with digital tools and inclusive methods.

**Access to Data and Technology**

Modular tech (LEGO kits, 3D pens, sensors) supports interactive learning and builds early digital skills in underserved areas.

**Flexible Funding**

Funded through a national self-employment grant and a municipal competition, with sustainability supported by parent fees.

**Organizational Culture**

The program embraces openness, creativity, and inclusion, welcoming children with special needs and encouraging curiosity over competition.

CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

**Geographics**

REKUROBO works across small rural villages, bringing early STEM learning to areas typically underserved by formal education systems.

**Social and Economic Gaps**

The program reduces educational and digital access gaps by engaging rural children, including those with special needs, in creative, tech-based learning.



[Read This Case Study](#)



[Read The Framework](#)



Innovation in Context:

Sea Container-Based Mobile Youth Center

Toila Municipality

ENABLERS

**Leadership and Vision**

Toila Municipality and its partners supported a bold, youth-centered idea to make services mobile and accessible across dispersed settlements.

**Collaboration Networks**

The project brought together youth, design students, local institutions, and volunteers, showing how cross-sector teamwork can produce creative, practical solutions.

**Skilled Workforce**

Youth workers, mentors, and international volunteers created a supportive, flexible environment, guided by professional and peer collaboration.

**Access to Data and Technology**

Though low-tech, the project used transport logistics, seasonal planning, and feedback to design rotating, place-specific programming.

**Flexible Funding**

Initial support came from local and national channels, with ongoing efforts to secure sustained funding and scale the program.

**Organizational Culture**

Toila embraced co-creation and gave young people real ownership, from concept design to fundraising — building a culture of empowerment and trust.

CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

**Geographics**

Scattered rural settlements made traditional youth centers inaccessible, prompting a mobile, flexible solution to bridge geographic divides.

**Social and Economic Gaps**

The initiative reached young people who had never engaged in formal youth activities before, addressing deep inequalities in access to public services.


[Read This Case Study](#)

[Read The Framework](#)



CONCLUSION

At the end of this handbook, we would like to reflect on the key messages that emerged from our exploration of innovation in small and medium-sized cities across the Baltic Sea Region and beyond.

The first and most important thing we want to convey to people working in the public sector is that they deserve to be innovative and smart. Even though small towns and municipalities face numerous challenges, both external and internal, they should not stop striving to make changes for the better, both within the organisation and around it. One step is just one step, a lot of small steps, is already a way to something new and interesting. Thoughtful strategy and planning, combined with financing, can unlock new opportunities. It is essential to be proactive and not be afraid of taking a risk. The 3I approach demonstrates that impactful transformation often begins with trying to solve real-world problems, and together, people find the way to solve them.

Secondly, successful innovation is a process, not a one-time event. The seven-phase Innovation Framework presented in this handbook demonstrates that innovation must be iterative, context-aware, and supported by enabling conditions. Small cities can adopt this cycle to navigate constraints and transform limitations into opportunities. Start by reading the provided cases and digest them, then think about them. Review the section on using the framework, and last but not least, attempt to implement it in your organisation. Success or failure, it doesn't matter! If you need any help, the Authors of the book are always happy to assist in implementing the framework or finding solutions.

Thirdly, collaboration is the green light. Collaboration within the work community, with citizens, local businesses, educational organisations, and others – it is all the same. It is a core value that signals readiness to move forward. It opens new pathways for creative thinking, resource sharing, and collective ownership of innovation. Whether it's hackathons for cities or businesses, a new digital solution, or a slight change inside the organisational routine, these all transform isolated efforts into systemic change. In many of the case studies presented, collaboration was the decisive factor. These innovations did not emerge from a lone genius but from many minds working together. This is especially true in small cities, where everyone can be a changemaker.

Finally, innovation in small cities is **not about perfection**; it is about courage to do something, care about the people who live around, and continuity. It's about trying new things in a manageable way, learning from both success and failure, and sharing what you've learned with others.

We hope this handbook has provided you with both inspiration and practical tools – a spark that will ignite your new project. We also encourage you to visit and re-view our course, gaining a deeper understanding of [Innovative Decision-Making in Public Services](#). The course was developed based on the needs of Public service workers in today's fast-changing world in the region.

Thank you for spending your time!

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