

URBACT - Good Practice Summary

VAM – Municipality Attendance Vehicle, Palmela City Hall

In an initial phase, VAM project started with the transnational project “Periphèria – Network Smart periphèria cities for sustainable life styles”, a transnational initiative co-financed by European Union through the “The Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP) 2007-2013- PSP.2010-4 – Objective 4.1 – Open Innovation for Future Internet - Enable Services in Smart Cities”.



This need arises in Palmela because it is a county where urban and rural communities coexist together with a strong industrial presence, particularly in the automotive industry, and the decline of the rural areas is significant (mainly due to the low quality of living conditions, scarce access to urban services, and poor public transportation). In parallel, the rural population

is rapidly increasing in average age, leading to a significant digital divide.

The Challenge was defined as: “How can rural citizens (or other isolated people) access public services?” This Challenge is part of a broader global concern related to the urban-rural conflict, and it fits a model of governance that seeks to serve all citizens equally, providing the best solutions by using Future Internet platforms and services.



To respond to this challenge and considered the tradition of Palmela municipality to promote conditions and capacity for dialogue among different community groups, a broad range of stakeholders was engaged: the general population (e.g., public debates, “Parish Weeks” - decentralization of the local administration to the five parishes for a week to be close to the inhabitants and gather their opinions) and community representative groups (e.g., neighborhood

associations, ONG's), the Parish council, several municipal services (urban planning, strategic planning, governance, communication, attendance, finance, culture and tourism), the industrial sector (FIAPal – Economic Development Association, Volkswagen Autoeuropa, Autovision, and CEIIA an R&D Company) and ADREPES, the Rural development association constituted in the LEADER programme.

All stakeholders participated in a laboratory for citizenship and public policies (according to a living lab methodology that includes co-design and co-production) to redefine the interface between the back and front office of public services. The final



proposal consists in a mobile Van equipped with ICT e-government services that however leads to a new model of decentralized service delivery, integrated and multi-channel, with the purpose of providing “urban” level services to rural citizens. Following a view of human smart city using the internet of things and services, citizens in rural areas can access all municipal public services without having to travel to the county seat to satisfy their needs.

The prototype VAM was proposed not only as a platform but above all as a way of helping citizens reflects on possible service ideas and participate in co-design processes.



The broader objective is to see how innovative municipal services can contribute to local development, improve the performance of the public sector, and promote innovation for the benefit of local communities, without ever forgetting the compromise between the organization and citizens and businesses (namely, maintain the quality of the public services provided in the different formats). In addition, this "Less money, more innovation policy!" aims to increase the resilience, cohesion of territories, social inclusion and public shareholding, promoting an approximation between the urban and rural communities.



Since 2009, the VAM is still operating in Palmela County with continuous improvements. Today, in VAM the citizens can access not only the local public services but also to central administration services (through a protocol with the Portuguese government, who acknowledged the tremendous merit and pioneering of this project), like citizen card and passport;

the On Line library, booking books and documents online with pickup through the VAM; and QR Codes for access to important information for both citizens and tourists.

The innovation of this project merited the journalistic coverage in various media (e.g., national TV, and national and regional newspapers) and even today, almost 10 years after its creation, this format is a huge success (e.g., the increasing number of VAM users and the various possibilities of format replication).



In essence, Palmela Municipality discovered a new way of innovating together with its citizens, with the Challenge process as a support tool for strategic planning, land management, and policy making. Citizens can actively participate in the governance process through the organizations that represent them without giving up their individual participation. Geographical and social isolation can be overcome with simple and efficient technological processes accessible to a range of citizen groups. Is a project recognized in Portugal for its originality and innovation, but also for its ability to replicate in different types of territories and with different public services (e.g., administrative, health and education).