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Newsletter #03

January 2021

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the third Newsletter of the BETTER project! BETTER is an Interreg Europe project that focuses on the promotion of e-Government solutions. With our project we aim to create a win-win situation for everyone by enhancing the use of e-Government solutions. Using these instruments local and regional authorities can stimulate regional innovation while private individuals and businesses gain better public service. In the following pages we would like to give you a short overview of our initiative. You will find information on the BETTER partnership, objectives and methods, and the steps we will make to reach our objectives.

The BETTER Newsletters will be published in every semester through a 3-year period. With these materials we will keep you updated on the progress achieved as well as elaborate on plans for the next period of the project.

Please visit our website to get our latest news! You can also find us on social media, where we welcome your questions and comments. We hope you enjoy reading our newsletter!

The BETTER project team!

Contents

- [The project](#)

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- [Activities](#)
- [Partnership, project duration](#)
- [News since the last issue](#)
- [Thematic event #04](#)
- [BETTER after the first year](#)
- [What is next?](#)
- [Contacts](#)

IN A NUTSHELL

BETTER supports public authorities to develop their regional innovation strategies and improve them with e-government services to stimulate regional innovation chain.



[The project](#)

“BETTER” offers an innovative approach to a crucial priority for the EU: encouraging Public Authorities to develop Regional Innovation Strategies in which e-Government solutions can stimulate Regional Innovation chains, as well as improving their services.

The main problem addressed by this project is the need to support Public Authorities in the development of innovation infrastructures and be the drivers of smart specialization strategies; Insufficient public sector investment in innovation activity poor adaptation to specific needs, particularly in less developed countries has contributed to the 'technology gap' between EU regions and tends to perpetuate or increase the 'cohesion gap'.

Information Communications Technologies (ICT) are crucial in ensuring that citizens have easy access to local government information, services and decision-making processes as well as in helping and improving citizens' participation and consultation of towards local governments. However, the level of innovation among EU regions is not measured only by ICT tools but by the general strategies that regions put in place in order to support and enhance innovative local dynamics and improve the performance of their regional innovation systems.

The EU regions show a wide diversity in regional innovation systems. The implication of this diversity is that there is no one-size-fits-all policy that can be applied to any region.

Rather, policies need to be adjusted to specificities of the industry, innovation culture, political system, and the level of autonomy held by regional authorities.

The CONSORTIUM

The partnership includes 5 partners from 5 Member States covering a balanced geographical spread

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The partners are all Public Authorities selected for their specific abilities related to the project topic. Genoa and Birmingham are already working on digital tools in the IE “Pure Cosmos” project and want to strengthen their competence in regional innovation strategies; Tartu, Gävle and Nyíregyháza have specific skills in Digital Transformation and RIS strategies.

WHAT WE ARE GOING TO DO

BETTER will link e-Government with the “innovation chain” to create a win-win initiative. On the one hand, municipalities and regions need to improve public services, while cutting costs: e-Government is one way to do this. On the other hand, adopting e-Government solutions could be used in turn to stimulate the local or regional innovation chain: for example the design, supply and maintenance of specialist services, such as Artificial Intelligence.

The consortium will:

- analyse partners' plans through four Thematic Events;
- identify good practices that will improve these plans, studying them through Study Visits, importing them via special workshops and Regional Action Plans;
- build the capacity of all relevant public authorities including ERDF Managing Authorities;
- increase the societal impact of the innovation process outcomes.

Objectives



Photo by [Nick Fewings](#) on [Unsplash](#)

With BETTER - as an overall objective - we aim to: strengthen the role of Public Authorities as stimulators of regional innovation chains by improving e-Government solutions by 10% by 2022. This goal will be focused along with the sub-objectives as follows:

- 1) develop by 2022 at least 3 innovative instruments (e.g. digital platforms, Artificial Intelligence) that will improve municipal services
- 2) increase by 10% by 2022 the societal impact of the innovation process outcomes thanks to the development

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of new e-Government services.

3) increase by 20% by 2022 the effectiveness of key decision makers' involvement in Regional Innovation chains and related investments in order to meet their innovation objectives

4) increase by 20% by 2022 the horizontal and vertical cooperation between the different levels of government and relevant actors (including investors) in the development and implementation of the RAPs

Sub objectives 1 and 2 are related to the progress that the partners can make in the field of research and innovation infrastructures. Here ICT systems play a strategic role in ensuring that citizens have easy access to local government information, services and decision-making processes. They are the focus of Public Authorities. They will improve the level and the quality of Public Authorities services in the partners areas.

Sub objectives 3 and 4 are specifically related to the Involvement of stakeholders and Managing Authorities in the decision making. BETTER will not only actively empower the Regional Stakeholders to offer concrete improvements to the policy instruments via the RAPs, but will also empower them through building their capacity – both the key decision makers and the organisations themselves – for continuing effective action after the project-end, applying to R&I programmes and Smart approach.

Activities

BETTER brings together 5 partners from 5 countries, offering an innovative approach to a crucial priority for the EU: encouraging Public Authorities to develop Regional Innovation Strategies in which e-Government solutions can stimulate Regional Innovation chains (as well as improving their services).

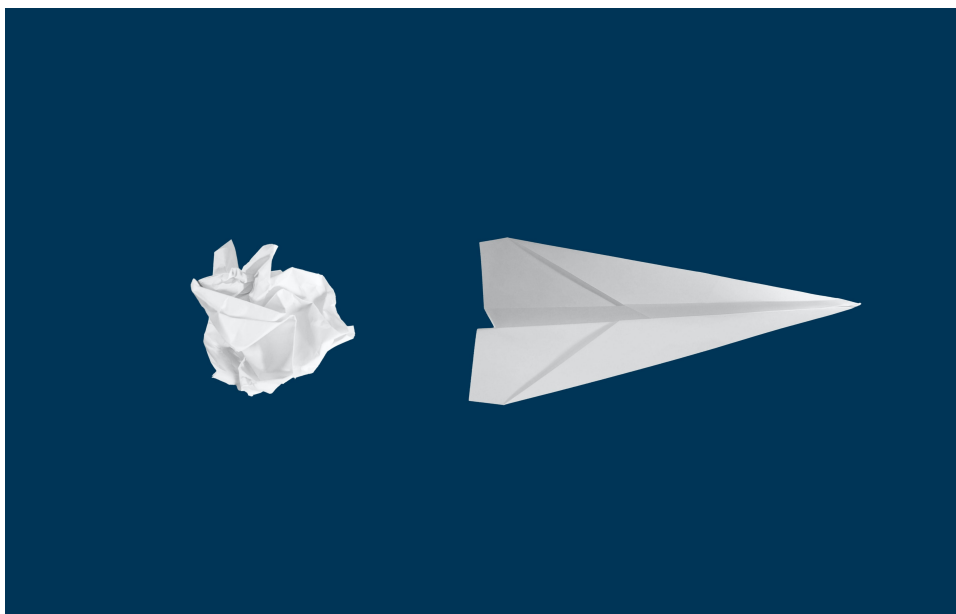


Photo by [Matt Ridley](#) on [Unsplash](#)

To reach this aim and - more specifically - the abovementioned objectives, the project includes a wide range of activities. such as:

Stage 1.- ASSESS NEEDS, ASSEMBLE GOOD PRACTICES by

- THEMATIC EVENTS that involve staff and Regional Stakeholders, focusing on: Physical and virtual infrastructure/assets to support the process for innovation; Development and application of new innovative products and services; Processes to support new business models and ways of working across private public sector and with citizens; People and skills to make it happen
- a REGISTER OF GOOD PRACTICES to collect and document the good practices that are relevant to

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partners' needs.

- BETTER RIS Matrix as a management tool to ensure that Project Partners' learning needs are met, and to provide a guide on good practices to enable policy makers to decide upon investment priorities.

Stage 2.-OBSERVE GOOD PRACTICES by

- 10 in-depth STUDY VISITS using the register of good practices. The good practices will be selected by the partners for their relevance to the identified specifications.

Stage 3.- ADOPT GOOD PRACTICES by

- 'IMPORT WORKSHOPS'. Experts from other partners will assist the importing partner and regional stakeholders to import their good practices and draft their Regional Action Plan.

Stage 4.- IMPROVE POLICIES by

- policy owners using the Regional Action Plan (RAP) to "improve its policy instrument", with continued support from project-partners.

Stage 5.- MONITOR POLICY IMPROVEMENTS by

- partners monitoring the adoption and implementation of their RAP
- a European-level conference to disseminate experiences. Partners will undertake an impact survey #2 to measure impact to 2022.

Partnership and project duration

Municipality of Genoa (IT)



COMUNE DI GENOVA

Tartu City Government (EE)



Birmingham City Council (UK)



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Gävle Municipality (SE)



Municipality of Nyíregyháza (HU)

NYÍREGYHÁZA
MEGYEI JOGÚ VÁROS
ÖNKORMÁNYZATA

NYÍREGYHÁZA

PROJECT DURATION

Phase 1 - Interregional Learning (3 years, semester 1-6) August 2019 - July 2022

Phase one will include activities to help each partner develop a regional action plan to improve European Regional Development Fund policy instruments.

Activities comprise:

- thematic events for interregional learning
- study visits
- an import workshop where the good practice is transferred from one region to another
- a regional event
- 6 stakeholder meetings

Phase 2 - Monitoring (1 year, semester 7-8) August 2022 - July 2023

Phase two will involve monitoring the results of the policy change. The objective of the project is to obtain an increase of 10% in regional innovation activity stimulated by eGovernment initiatives by 2022.

[How have we proceeded since the last Newsletter?](#)

When the last edition of the Newsletter was published, we were right after the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, and hoped that life will get back to normal again soon. Unfortunately the second wave of the coronavirus turned out to be much more severe than most of us expected and circumstances forced the consortium to keep implementing the project by using virtual tools alone.

Since the last edition, we have held our last Thematic Event, focusing on People and skills behind e-government innovations. Being an international consortium, and therefore being exposed to travelling and entering restrictions, the event (similarly to Thematic Event #03) was held in a virtual-only method. With the

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event concluded, BETTER has entered into Stage 2 - Observe good practices.

For detailed information, please read our colleague: Heather Law's (Birmingham) summary.

Thematic Event #04

An ecosystem is like a finely tuned Swiss watch. Poetry in motion if you have all the relevant cogs and springs in place, but with one wheel out of kilter, the movement can go to pot. Investment in people and skills is the oil which helps to keep the innovation ecosystem ticking along. The Interreg NW Europe project Better-stimulating innovation through better 'e' government services, hosted its fourth and final thematic event online, focusing on people and skills on 3rd November 2020. Both Birmingham City Council and West Midlands Innovation Alliance participated in the event which was led by Nyíregyháza, Hungary. The overall aim of the Better project is to foster a policy environment where innovation can flourish. In the Birmingham context, there is a focus on influencing the West Midlands Innovation Fund to achieve a 10% increase in innovation.

Samu Szemerey, the Hungarian expert, provided an insight into the various parts of a well-functioning ecosystem, placing people (and their understanding of the ecosystem) and their skills at its heart. He provided an interesting example of how innovation can succeed or fail depending on whether the right ecosystem support structures are in place and how, regardless of policies or strategies, a city needs to embrace a culture of innovation in order to succeed. In Budapest in 2009, a car-sharing initiative sprang up spontaneously as a response to a local transport strike; it was very similar to the Uber model which also was established that year. The Budapest example was practice driven, responding to a specific need, it was innovative, having private individuals sharing their car and organised by mobile phones and Facebook. Why did Uber become a global company whilst the similar initiative disappeared? According to Samu, the lack of ecosystem meant the Budapest example never took flight. The city and transport company failed to see how the model could be integrated into the transportation network and thus help the city become more sustainable.

Further examples of successful ecosystem/ initiatives supporting people and skills from the five transnational partners included:

a. Technology Transfer Centre: Nyíregyháza



One way the ecosystem was strengthened in the Hungarian city of Nyíregyháza has been addition of a Technology Transfer Centre. Opened at the beginning of 2020 and inspired by Barnsley UK's, Digital Media Centre, the centre focuses on digitalisation and has a multi-functional purpose, including: investment in people and skills, economic development and business support. The centre promotes an ethos which is keen to ensure both the attraction and retention of young talent by creating a dynamic, appealing environment. This focus addresses a major societal challenge caused by the out-migration of highly educated, young people. It is

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hoped that the centre will be a catalyst for high value jobs and investment that will challenge the current situation where companies locate there for cheap labour via a low-skilled work force. The strategy underpinning the approach is one of value extraction, whereby infrastructure is exploited to generate high value jobs. (currently no website available)

Nyíregyháza's inspiration...



The inspiration for the centre resulted from an URBACT Tech Revolution project which brought together Nyíregyháza and Barnsley Council. Barnsley developed a successful business support programme and a landmark hub for creative and digital business in the town centre which inspired the Hungarian partner. Barnsley's transformation from a town dominated by the coal industry (till the 90s) to an economy revitalised by the creative and digital economy was underpinned by a powerful vision. To realise this vision, the 'Enterprising Barnsley' team worked to build relationships with companies, helping them to embrace the digital agenda and grow. The Digital Media Centre opened in 2007, with the council taking direct management of it in 2015. At this point the focus shifted with the recognition that the power of the centre lay in its dual function as both a platform and a physical space. Having an open-door policy with a welcoming, community space, the centre was successful in bringing people and ideas together. A community of businesses, creatives and digital was quickly established. A key ambition was to drive digital adoption, so the centre ran programmes such as Connected Healthcare, plus a programme targeting manufacturers to improve workforce skills and increase turnover. Barnsley had bigger ambitions still and was keen to create high value jobs, but at the same time recognised it needed a better skilled workforce. A robust, co-created solution emerged by bringing together the right people: decision makers, money, citizens. The result was a co-created DMC.2 digital campus, called The Seam which brings together business, education, people in one place. A local education college has transformed one of their buildings into a digital skills hub and is an integral element of the new hub. The college goes beyond the digital curriculum and ensures every student has digital skills. Capitalising on the momentum created, Barnsley worked in partnership to secure funding from a national innovation agency to run an IoT Tribe accelerator resulting in 10 companies receiving very intensive business support to develop their company and customer base. Barnsley's international profile grew as a result as 10 global start-up companies were attracted to the initiative. These were located as far afield as Columbia, Poland and Russia. Such was its success, an additional 30 international companies came, including one from Singapore! Now there is a third cohort. The key to success, according to Tracy Johnson, Director of the Barnsley Digital Media Centre is having access to a small amount of money, plus willingness to take informed risk and accepting things may go wrong. The result of this is that rather than going to big companies when the council needs IoT solutions, they now approach the IoT Tribe companies for innovative solutions. In this way, Barnsley Council has positioned itself at the heart of the tech ecosystem and is truly an enabler of opportunities.

For further information, go to: <https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/news/phase-two-of-techrevolution-to-begin/>

2. The School of Code, Birmingham

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What happens when you missed out on university, didn't recognise your inner digital talent or chose a university course with no digital skills content? Well, if you have a spare £10,000 in your back pocket you can enrol on a coding course in New York or London, or alternatively, you can get yourself a place on the School of Code boot camp in Birmingham for free. Brainchild of Chris Meah PhD, this skills accelerator recognises the lack of diversity in tech. It offers an opportunity to level up through providing access to a supercharged training course for people who don't have digital skills. The boot camp plugs a gap in the skills market, responding to employers needs for digital skills not provided through traditional educational routes. Intensive training is provided over a 16-week period to attendees who are work ready at completion. An impressive 90% find employment including former bakers, farmers and work-at-home mums. The course is funded by the employers who need the talent now and are willing to pay the costs to get the employees they need, rather than the cost being the responsibility of the learner.

For further information, go to: <https://www.schoolofcode.co.uk/>

3. New Voices of Innovation, Birmingham



The power of role models to inspire future generations is undisputed. Birmingham and the West Midlands is incredibly diverse and is home to a rich source of digital talent. The New Voices of Innovation platform gives young, ethnically diverse people, who don't normally get a platform, visibility. It is a rich and diverse database of people that cannot only inspire our next generation of innovators but also act as ambassadors for diversity in innovation.

For further information, go to: <https://innovationwm.co.uk/events/birmingham-tech-2030-next-gen-and-new-voices/>

4. Competence Centre 4.0: Italy

START4.0

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Genoa is home to one of Italy's eight Competence Centres supported by the Ministry of Development. Industry 4.0 is the latest wave in the digital revolution and the centre supports development in this field. For the uninitiated, Industry 4.0 is the application of smart technology and the Internet of things (IoT) to boost industrial companies output through digital transformation. The Centre's strategic objective is to provide guidance to SMEs regarding 4.0, giving them insight in assessing their digital and technological maturity, providing training for 4.0 competencies and promoting implementation of innovation. The centre also offers training including Masters' courses with the University of Genova e.g. MSc. Cyber security, plus further training around: 4.0 capability, digital transformation, cyber security, data science and IT. Support with digital infrastructure is available in various fields, including energy, water, transport, port and 4.0 industry.

For further information, go to: <https://www.start4-0.it/>

5. Smart, Sustainable Cities and Societies: Gavle, Sweden

The example provided by Gavle shed light on a project implementing a novel approach to build sustainable cities and communities through smart solutions. The project set about tackling complex problems in the field of sustainable development by implementing a democratic, horizontal approach to identifying a solution. By coalescing all the actors involved in the issue, and then by working through the problems through a series of workshops (9 workshops over 10 weeks), teams were able to devise co-owned solutions. One result of this process is demonstrated in the slide below. This example highlights how a food production hub was created by bringing together excess heat to provide a power supply and create a 'growing hub'.



A further example, 'The good life in Gavle 2030' project was designed to generate an idea of what a good and sustainable life in Gavle will look like in 2030. It is open to all schools and subjects to participate and connects secondary school students to their physical city environment encouraging them to develop solutions and a vision for what a sustainable life will look like in 2030. The programme starts with a bus tour of Gavle where pupils are introduced to the city, the plans and challenges. Pupils are put into small groups to work through their ideas including utilising digital skills. Both their ideas and solutions are presented to a wide audience at a sustainability council. One idea was the creation of the Garden of Harmony near Gavle University <http://detgodalivetigavle.se/>

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These were just some of the inspiring examples provided at the event. What came across through the workshops was the enormous demand for digital upskilling either within or outside a formal educational context. Role models have an important, motivational part to play in encouraging more people to update their skills as does demonstrating the power of digital to provide sustainable solutions. The next phase of the project requires each partner to reflect on the practices they have seen, undertake a deep dive into their minutiae to evaluate their relevance to the local context and then trial them. Watch this space to see what happens next...

(Author: Heather Law – Senior Programme Co-ordinator, European and International Affairs, Birmingham City Council)

How do we see BETTER after the first year?

Genoa:



The main difficulty we had and still have to manage is the changes we faced due to the COVID pandemic. The inability to travel for a long period of time is going to impact mainly on the interregional learning process. On the other hand this crisis is giving us the opportunity to use the project to foster internal challenges and goals. Some of the activities we wish to carry out in the next few months are:

- Organizing a study visit to Gävle & Birmingham Innovation Hub to better understand the business model, services and policies and to explore what evidence of success do they have of incubators/accelerators /hubs/innovation centres.
- Schedule stakeholder meetings and events together with representatives of public institutions to raise awareness of the benefits of e-services and digitalization and to design the next steps for the Municipality of Genoa

Birmingham:

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It has been an intense year of activity. The project has morphed from one requiring travel to see practice and discuss the key themes in situ to working on-line through thematic events. There has been a trade off with this shift. What we have lost in terms seeing the city and its innovation in person, we have gained through the ability to bring in local stakeholders to on-line thematic events. This has been very useful as it has sparked a local conversation around issues such as how data can be used to support the objectives of public administrations and foster more integrated working and management models.

There are a number of ideas we have heard about from our partners that we are keen to explore further. These include:

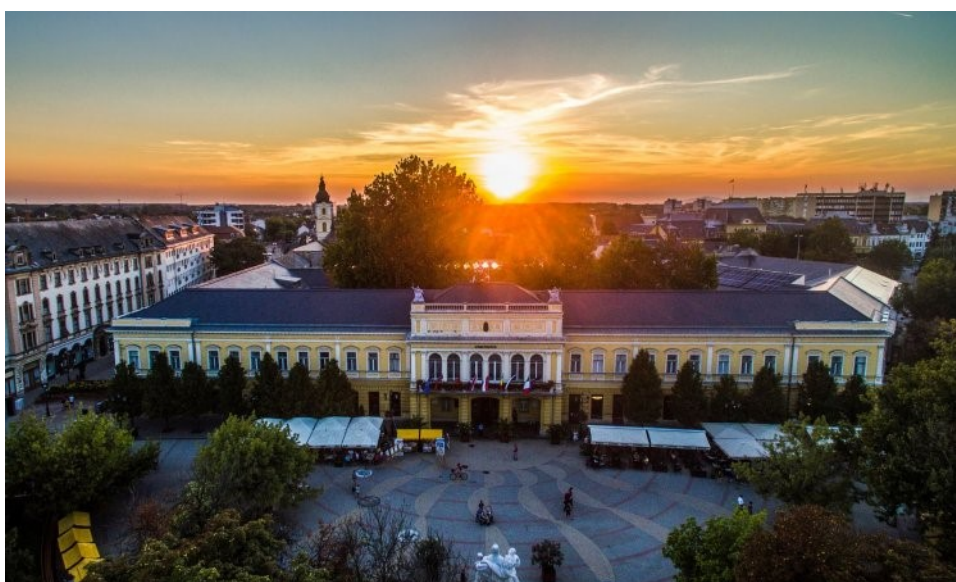
- Gavle food van
- E Estonia
- Application of AI to Social Care assessments (Gavle)
- Community Innovation Hub concept (Hungary and Barnsley)

Tartu:

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Almost every new project needs time to start functioning as planned. For Tartu, the most challenging was to understand the duties of the activity leader of the Exchange of Experiences. Realizing there is not enough expertise inside our organization to support and guide other partners did not make the start easier. Still, every following event, as well as the best practices the partners have shared, confirm there are a number of opportunities we are interested to study deeper with the support of this great partnership.

Nyíregyháza:



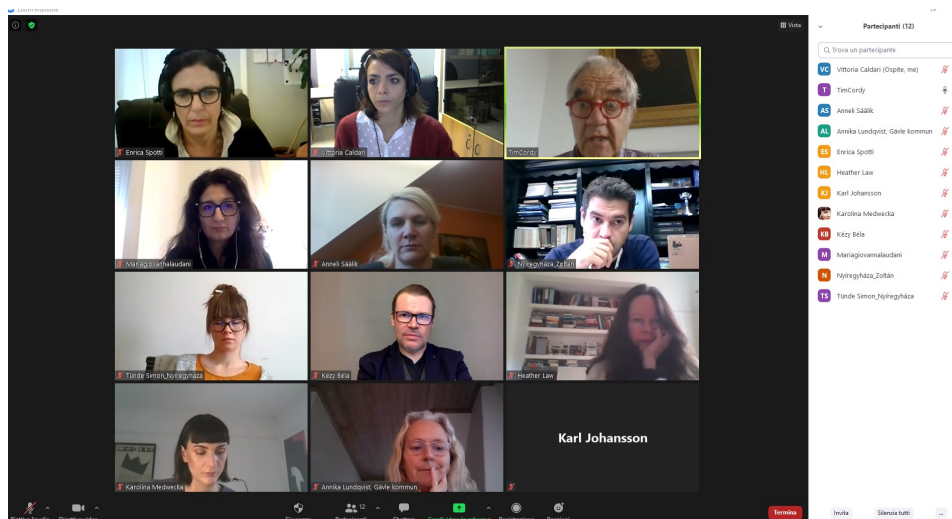
It has been a rough year. At the beginning we found it difficult to spot our key messages from the project and the starting point which determines how to contribute to the project and get benefited from it. A clearer vision was created for Nyíregyháza, when we identified our learning needs. From this standpoint we can focus our attention to what is key to us:

- How to avoid the so-called 'low-skill trap'?
- What can we do to nurture, retain and attract talent?
- How can we take advantage of the existing opportunities to strengthen innovation? We identified four

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crucial innovation ingredients: innovation champion(s), good practices, decision-makers and real needs.
Follow-up question: What are we missing? We will find out!

So where are we now and what is next?



BETTER commenced in August 2019, and is being built in a systematic fashion. stage 01 was devoted to assess the learning needs and assemble good practices in the field of innovation driven e-government solutions. Up to this time the project partners held four Thematic Events in the following key areas:

Dates	Agenda	Host
October 2019	Physical and virtual infrastructure/assets to support the process for innovation	Gävle, Sweden
January 2020	Development and application of new innovative products and services	Tartu, Estonia
June 2020	Processes to support new business models and ways of working across private public sector and with citizens	Birmingham, United Kingdom (virtual-only format)
November 2020	People and skills to make it happen	Nyíregyháza, Hungary (virtual-only format)

Thematic Events helped partners to identify their specific learning needs and to collect good practices having the potential to stimulate their innovation chains.

In stage 02, partners are to focus their attention to the selected good practices through 10 in-depth Study Visits, where hosts and visitors analyse them in action and assess how the visitors can best adopt them. Given the focus of BETTER, the events will have a high level of involvement from stakeholders and key decision-makers.

These collected practices cover a wide range of methods. Some partners focus on new horizons concerning Artificial Intelligence (AI) issues applied to e-Government solutions to resolve resource allocation problems. Others pay special attention to introducing more

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"user friendly" E-Systems in public administration.

In connection with Study Visits Key elements are established as follows:

- selection of good practices and hosts will be "demand-led", and based on the outcome of the Thematic Events.
- format and content to be agreed between visitors and host, but in principle led by the visitors
- each visit will be reported according to the agreed procedures, and the reports shared between project-partners

Due to continued public health concerns related to coronavirus / COVID-19, until travelling and entering restrictions are in place, the Study Visits will be held in a virtual-only format.

For the results of the events and more information about BETTER please visit us at <https://www.interregeurope.eu/better/>

Contacts

Do you want to be updated? Get in touch with us through:

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