

Takeaways: “CURIOUS MINDS FOR A STRONGER EUROPE THROUGH INTERNATIONAL URBAN AND REGIONAL COOPERATION”



1. Introduction

In the dynamic realm of regional and city initiatives, international cooperation is a cornerstone for fostering innovation and addressing post-industrial transition challenges. The IURC programme, recognizing the central role of regions and cities in various local, national, and international collaboration endeavors, hosted a session during the 21st EU Regions Week on October 10, 2023, in Brussels, Belgium. The session's primary focus was on the transformative potential of international cooperation, highlighting its capacity to offer diverse perspectives, spur the exchange of experiences, encourage capacity building, and facilitate global networking. This holistic approach contributes to the cultivation of inquisitive minds, inspiring creative solutions that respond to shared challenges in the transition era.

Within this context, the session also underscored the significance of European networks composed of regions and cities. These networks not only support the continual sharing of best practices but also serve as vital components in the expansion of international collaborations. During the session, networks like EURADA and EUROCITIES offered invaluable insights and strategies for regions and cities to optimize their international cooperation activities, shedding light on the remarkable advantages of active network participation. Subsequently, the session transformed the audience into proactive networkers eager to explore the innovative solutions implemented by their fellow participants, fostering engaging discussions and turning participants into 'expertise-givers' who generously shared their key takeaways from these exchanges.

2. Methodology

To accomplish the session's objectives, the following structure and methodology was implemented:

- Introduction and expectation setting of the session
- The use of Slido to gather insights from the audience. Slido questions were integrated throughout the program.
- First Intervention by EURADA who emphasized the importance of taking advantage of being part of a network by being active and grasping opportunities the network provides.
- Second intervention by EUROCITIES who emphasized how networks tailor activities according to needs of members and world affairs priorities.
- Audience intervention by turning the mic to participants who wanted to share their insights the topics and whether their participation in networks proved beneficial along with their international cooperation activities.

This methodology was advertised during the promotion of the session and attracted the registration of 128 participants. During the session, participants took their seats to a full room of 144 seats, thereby demonstrating that actual event participants exceeded the number of registrations. It should be highlighted that the audience were a mix of representatives from IURC participating cities and regions, non-profit organizations, and other entities who are interested in international cooperation activities.



3. Lessons shared and learned

During the intervention from the audience, their international cooperation activities and collaboration were highlighted. In particular, IURC representatives from Hamburg, North East Romania, Genova, Krapina-Zagorje County, Sisak Moslavina County, Murcia, and Extremadura volunteered to describe their takeaways from international cooperation.



3.1 Hamburg

The experience emphasized the importance of aligning with partners who share similarities in various aspects, including technology, governance, legal frameworks, culture, and economic potential. Collaboration revealed commonalities and identified gaps in areas such as digitalization of public services and urban mobility concepts. Exchange programs, such as the one with Melbourne and Canberra, highlighted the value of connecting academia with local government knowledge. Establishing regular communication, mutual invitations, and plans for expert exchanges facilitated a deeper understanding of shared challenges. Finally, the lesson learned from Hamburg's streamlined international collaboration approach is to focus on potential outcomes and perform a "potential benefit analysis" before entering partnerships, ensuring a clear path for future cooperation.

3.2 Krapina-Zagorje County

The establishment of a dedicated Digital Innovation Hub for healthcare and the launch of the Health IT Academy demonstrate the region's commitment to health industry innovation. Their collaboration with EIDH AI for Health is driving pioneering solutions in patient care. Participation in the "INVEST in ZAGORE" conference, guided by insights from China, reflects their role in supporting health industry startups and applying global market knowledge locally. Experiences in China have inspired them to promote cross-cultural collaboration and innovation. Strengthening partnerships with entities like Graz and the Human Technology Styria (HTS) cluster positions them to accelerate innovation, aiming to create a future with smarter, more accessible healthcare in the region.

3.3 North East Romania

The IURC projects facilitated valuable interregional pairings, enhancing understanding of regional development planning across diverse cultural and organizational environments. Exchange of knowledge encompassed topics like local participatory budgeting, business models for technology transfers, and business incubators. Collaborations resulted in methodological guidance for RIS3 governance, green energy technology introduction, and the sharing of circular economy expertise. These partnerships also fostered regional development initiatives, from urban mobility plans to cooperation agreements and knowledge exchange among various clusters and centers.

3.4 Murcia

Through the collaboration with their partner city in China, they gained valuable insights into culture, heritage preservation, and urban sustainability. The exchange of innovative solutions and best practices allowed them to adapt local policies, ultimately enhancing the quality of life for their residents. This cross-cultural engagement facilitated dialogue and understanding, opening doors for future collaborations. The IURC proved to be a robust platform for knowledge sharing, innovation, and collaborative urban governance. Their commitment to expanding this partnership to include academia, business, and commerce reflects their dedication to the mutual growth of both Murcia and their partner city in China.

3.5 Genova

The collaboration with Mar del Plata highlighted the transformation from a peak-season beach-tourism destination to a year-round attraction. They were impressed by the comprehensive approach that involved various municipal sectors and private stakeholders working together to achieve this goal successfully. The exchange of innovative platforms, particularly the "Citizen Folder," showcased the potential for digitalization in public services and its positive impact on citizens' interactions with the Municipality. This collaboration resulted in the development of valuable guidelines for future endeavors.

3.6 Sisak Moslavina County

During their visit to China, the team had the opportunity to explore the e-sport infrastructure in Zhong county, Chongqing. This included a visit to the world's largest e-sport arena, where they gained insights into competitor preparation and the development of the e-sport and gaming ecosystem. The trip revealed substantial similarities between their own initiatives and those in China, laying the foundation for potential cooperation in building the e-sport sector in Croatia and mutual projects focused on nurturing e-sport talents and VR implementations. While specific steps are still under negotiation, plans are underway to sign a Memorandum of Understanding in the near future. Additionally, the team has extended an invitation for their Chinese counterparts to visit Croatia, eagerly awaiting their response.

3.7 Extremadura

The exchange of sustainable model experiences for developing a regional Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) ecosystem in Piura has been highly impactful. This collaboration has led to support for the creation of a management foundation or intermediary in STI at the regional level and the design of a regional technology park or network. Additionally, a catalogue of services has been crafted to promote Research and Development and Innovation (R&D&I) within Piura's STI ecosystem. Notably, the impact is evident in the form of two visiting delegations: one comprised of technical experts and another from the regional government, both focused on the establishment of a Technology Park and the co-design of an innovation ecosystem. Furthermore, valuable collaboration in the field of medicine has occurred, with two research medical entities expanding their knowledge on Paroscopic Surgery, namely, CCMI and CEPSEA.

4. Impact

The key takeaways from the exchange of experiences suggest a range of significant impacts not only for the audience who presented but also for those who listened. In particular, it must be highlighted that knowledge exchange and capacity building activities based on Regional Innovation Strategies and Smart Specialization Strategies provide an enriched knowledge base for regions. This knowledge can be harnessed in specific projects and initiatives, leading to a more informed and innovative approach to regional and urban development.

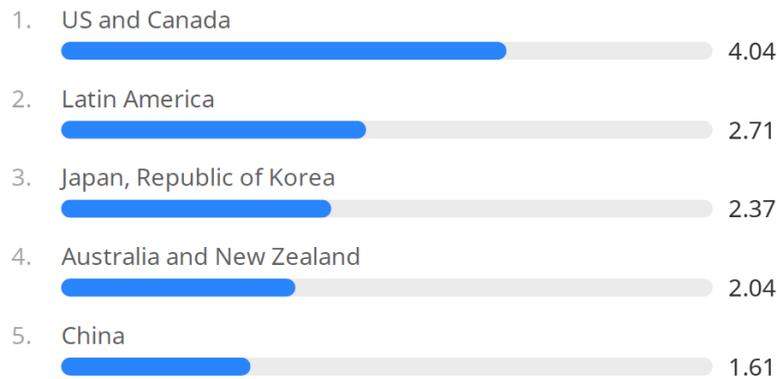
Furthermore, these engagements have the potential to establish long-term collaborative partnerships, fostering ongoing knowledge exchange and economic development. This initiative could not only diversify the regional and urban economy but also drive regional and urban specialization in key areas.

Ranking poll



Please rank your interest in the following world areas:
(1/2)

0 5 1



In addition, the slido used during the sessions also demonstrate the continued interest and involvement of the public in the field of international cooperation.

Open text poll



In a few words, can you tell us about a concrete experience on international cooperation?

0 0 5

- Diferrence beetwen international region or country laws and strategic development was the biggest challenge
- Connection of very locally specific projects in an interreg project and receiving great tagible outputs with the help of exchange and embedding into something bigger.
- Learning exchanges between cities and regions on sustainable energy and climate actions under Horizon 2020 programme
- City Science Initiative
- inspired new insight for research and for cities on how to do research on cities
- Urban mobility plan for large companies.