

International Meeting in Paredes brings together EU delegations for Town Twinning Project SEED Communities

From the 26th of September to the 3rd of October 2024, delegations from Italy, Cyprus, Malta, Portugal, Lithuania, Latvia, Czech Republic and Hungary gathered in Paredes, Portugal, for the first International Meeting of the Town Twinning Project funded by the European Union, SEED Communities: Sustainable, Empowered, Ethical Democratic Communities. This initiative aimed to foster cooperation among European communities, primarily focusing on rural areas, to embrace sustainability through an inclusive and grassroots approach that empowers all members of the community.

The rationale behind this project stemmed from recognizing that sustainability is often associated with urban areas and more dynamic environments, while small, rural communities and hard-to-reach groups tend to view sustainability as a lower priority. SEED Communities sought to address this gap by rethinking local habits and practices in a sustainable way, engaging older generations and marginalized groups. It also emphasized the connection between sustainability and human rights, ensuring a just and inclusive transition for everyone.

The event featured a series of seminars, workshops, debates, and practical activities designed to tackle key topics related to sustainability and social justice. The main focus was on "Environmental EU Policies: Sustainability and Social Justice," encouraging participants to discuss how European environmental policies could be implemented at the local level in a socially equitable manner.

The exchange of good practices among the participants was one of the key outcomes of this gathering. For example, the delegations shared information on potential EU funding opportunities that could be leveraged to develop local, sustainable, and socially just projects. This exchange of knowledge proved invaluable in helping communities understand how to access financial resources that would allow them to implement sustainability projects tailored to their specific local needs.

In return, delegates from each country also provided insights into the local issues they faced concerning sustainability. Participants from Portugal, for example, highlighted the challenges faced by rural communities in adopting green energy solutions, while Italy shared strategies for engaging older generations in sustainability efforts.

The organizations involved in this first international meeting included both public and non-profit entities. The lead applicant, Lighthouse Languages from Italy, partnered with entities such as the St. Julians Local Council from Malta, former Yeri and Derineya Municipalities from Cyprus, Arnot Municipality from Hungary, Panevezys Municipality from Lithuania, and APPIS Association from Portugal, Krimulda from Latvia, and Jevisovice from Czech Republic.

The success of the meeting was evident in the collaborative spirit and the depth of the exchanges that took place. By the end of the event, participants had not only deepened their understanding of EU environmental policies but had also shared practical strategies for overcoming local challenges and ensuring that sustainability efforts would be both inclusive and community led.

This first meeting marked the beginning of what is hoped to be a long-term collaboration across borders, as SEED Communities continues to develop initiatives that bring rural and marginalized communities to the forefront of the EU's sustainability agenda.