RURACTIVE

Open Call for Innovators to Co-Develop Sustainable Rural Solutions

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Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
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Swiss Confederation

Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research EAER
State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation SERI

RURACTIVE General information

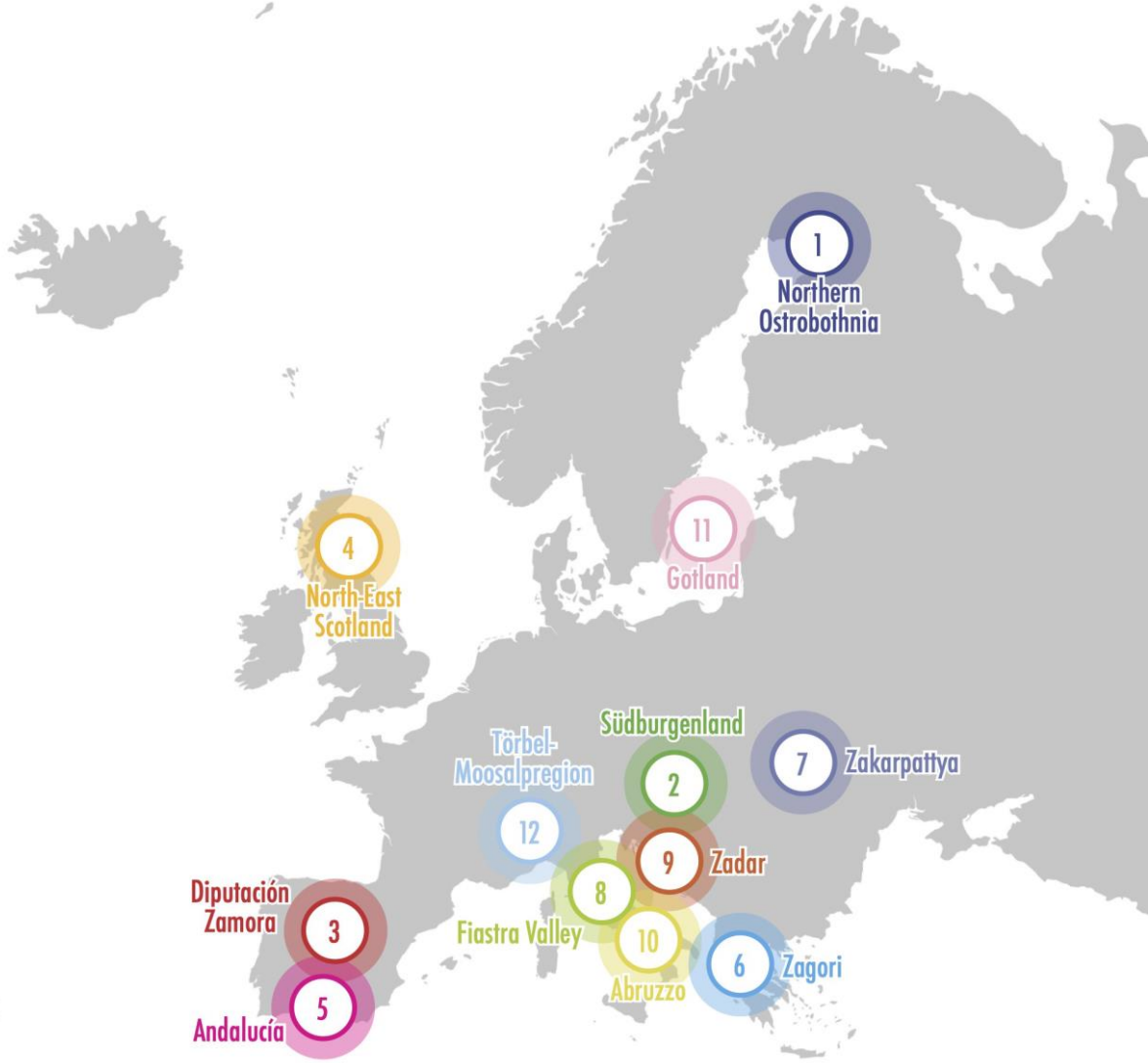
Topic: HORIZON-CL6-2022-COMMUNITIES-02-01-two-stage

Type of Action: Innovation action

Project Partners: 29 partners (12 implementing partners)

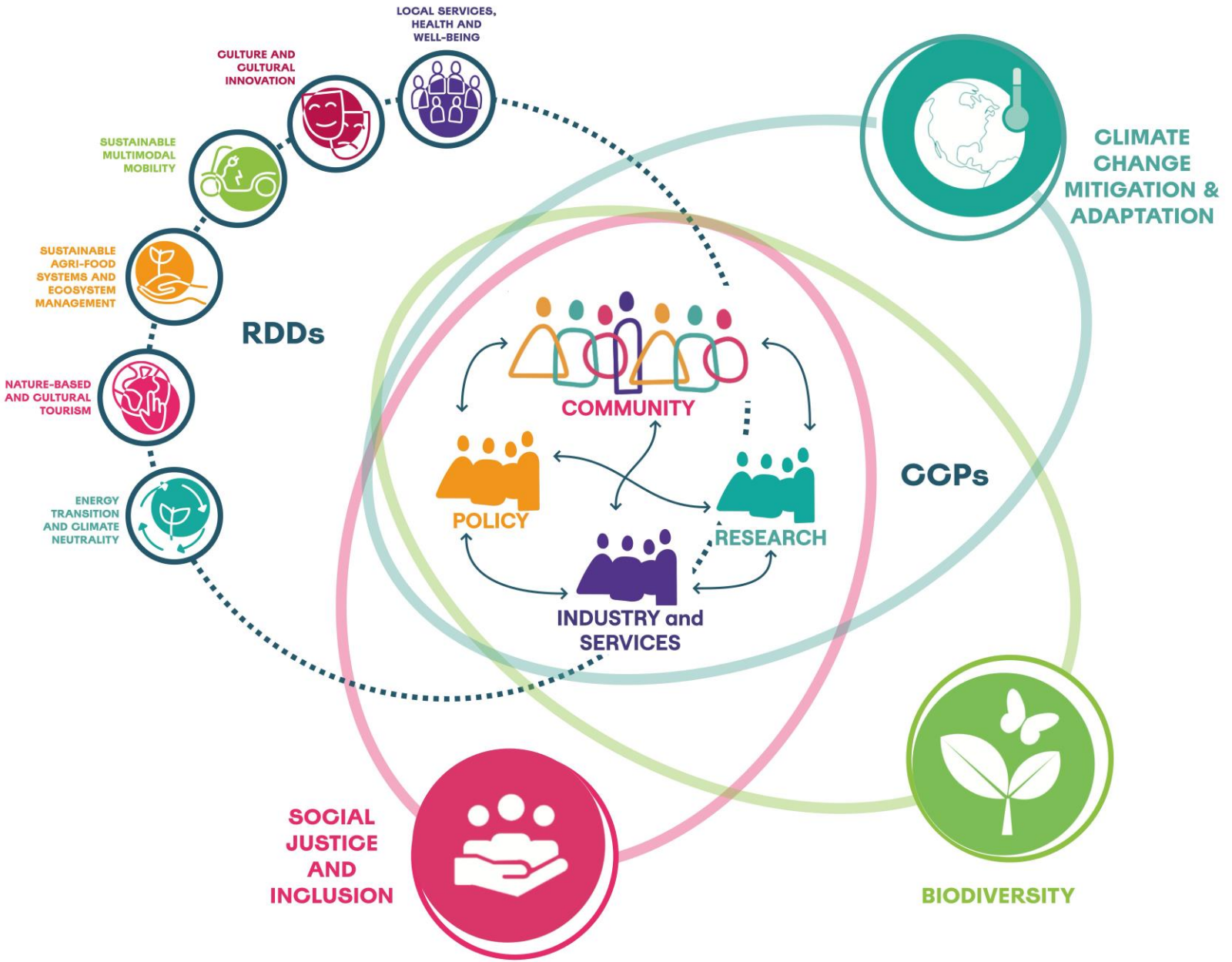
Project Duration: 4 years, 1st September 2023 - 31st August 2027

Project Budget: about 6.5 mil. – 1.2 million FSTP



RURACTIVE Conceptual Framework

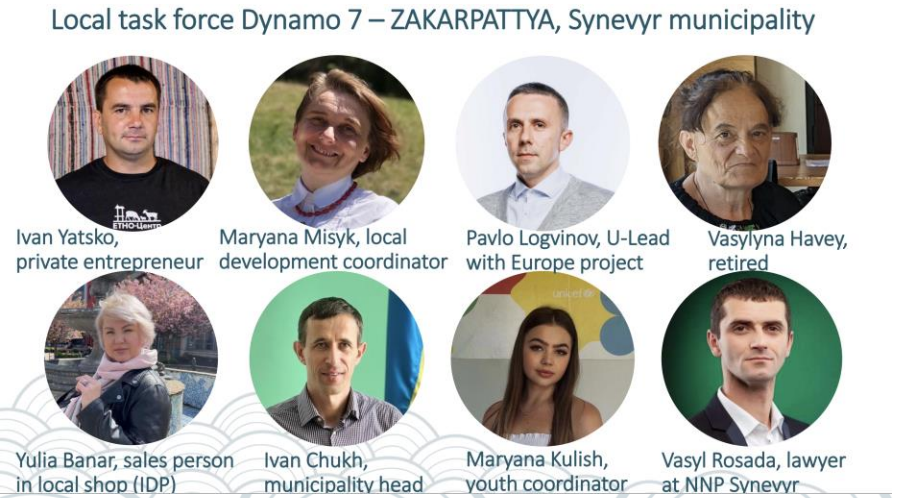
RURACTIVE works on six strategic sectors called **Rural Development Drivers** (RDDs) considering **3 Cross-Cutting Priorities** including 4 stakeholder domains forming the **Multi-Actor Rural Innovation Ecosystem (RIE)**



Multi-Actor Rural Innovation Ecosystem

People (stakeholders), **places** (territories) and **practices** (current or planned solutions) that form collaborative environments to **identify local challenges** and **co-create place-based solutions**

- 12 Pilot Cases (Aka **Dynamos**)



People

Places

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Practices

Challenge Formulation

- Through the first of a series of local workshops, stakeholders co-created a vision for their territory
- Identified the most significant challenges to realising this vision
- **Place-based solutions** were co-created drawing on project funding and available community resources (currently being implemented)
- Challenges that could not be addressed through local resources and capacities were published in an open call to ttract external innovators
- **Innovator solutions** were selected and funded through the project's cascade funding scheme

Challenge 3

Smart digital tourism and accessibility solutions for Southern Burgenland

Challenge 4

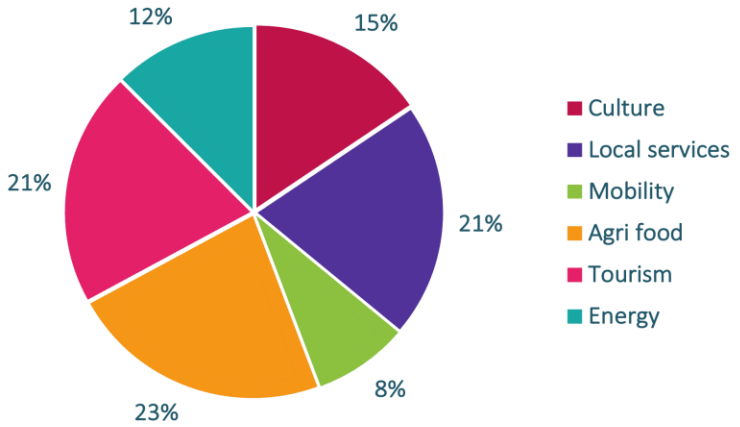
Cooling system for the grape harvest

Challenge 5

Cycling without age

Multi-Actor Rural Innovation Ecosystem

38 Place-Based Solutions



16 Third Party Solutions

Funded through an open call for innovators that departed from co-created challenges

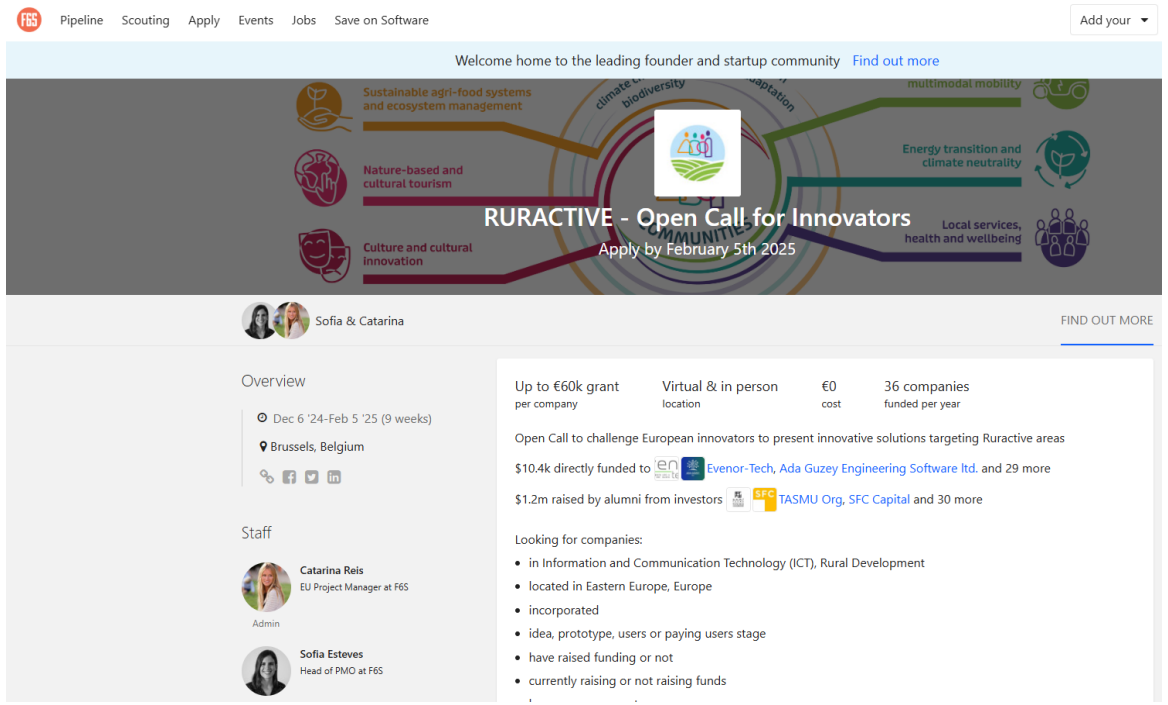
Introduction & Open Call Scope

Cascading / FSTP Funding:

A competitive mechanism where EU Horizon Europe projects distribute financial support to third parties (startups, SMEs, researchers, and innovators). Calls invite external innovators to solve specific, real-world regional challenges co-created with local stakeholders.

Strategic Objective:

Directly connect European tech/social innovators with place-based rural challenges to co-develop, demonstrate, and validate smart, community-led solutions on the ground. Selected applicants receive direct grants (non-dilutive funding), technical mentoring, and access to testing ecosystems without giving up equity.



Outreach & Applicant Eligibility

Promotion & Outreach:

- Launched via the F6S platform (>4.5M founders/SMEs), EC Tenders portal, social media, and dedicated webinars.
- Reached 172 total proposal submissions across all 12 Dynamos.

Applicant Eligibility & Structure:

- Single SMEs/startups or small consortia (up to 2 legal entities, led by an SME/startup) established in EU Member States, Horizon Europe Associated Countries, or Switzerland.
- Consortia could include SMEs, mid-caps, research/academic institutions (funded up to 40% of sub-project budget), and registered rural associations.

Non-Funded / Direct National Funding Route:

- Awarded entities from non-EU/Associated frameworks (e.g., UK national frameworks and SERI for Switzerland) were onboarded under direct national funding arrangements to maintain full compliance with Horizon Europe rules

Selection Process & Selected Organisations

What Made a Winning Proposal?

- **Concept & Innovation (Criterion 1):** Solutions tailored precisely to the local Dynamo context, combining novelty with local feasibility.
- **Implementation Approach (Criterion 2):** Clear, realistic test and validation timelines with no vague commitments.
- **Impact & Community Adoption (Criterion 3):** High potential for long-term adoption, community engagement, open data, and post-grant sustainability.
- **Team & Effort (Criterion 4):** Demonstrated technical/business capacity, transparent resource allocation, authentic effort, and zero unedited AI output.

Types of Innovations Selected:

Mobility & Logistics: AI call center + rural parcel/grocery logistics, shared multimodal mobility

Water & Drought Resilience: soil probes & drought warning, irrigation tracking, transhumance water infrastructure

Digital Heritage & Smart Tourism: AI visual recognition, Medieval XR, placemaking

Healthcare, Agriculture & Sustainable Energy: voice-first AI senior care, 2000 satellite pasture tracking, Smart AI streetlights, climate festival infrastructure, island community composting, energy guidance tool, water footprint calculator).

The RURACTIVE Co-Creation Methodology

Stage 1: Co-Tuning Phase (2 Months)

- Selected innovators received upfront funds (€5,000) to visit the rural territories, meet local stakeholders, and observe real-world challenges firsthand
- Initial concepts were presented during local workshops
- Innovators listened to local feedback, learned about regional constraints and adapted their ideas to fit true community needs
- To unlock up to €85,000 for full implementation, innovators had to resubmit their proposals showing exactly how local feedback reshaped their final project plan: **34 payouts processed** via RURACTIVE FSTP (€170,000 total); 2 international entrants funded via national agencies.

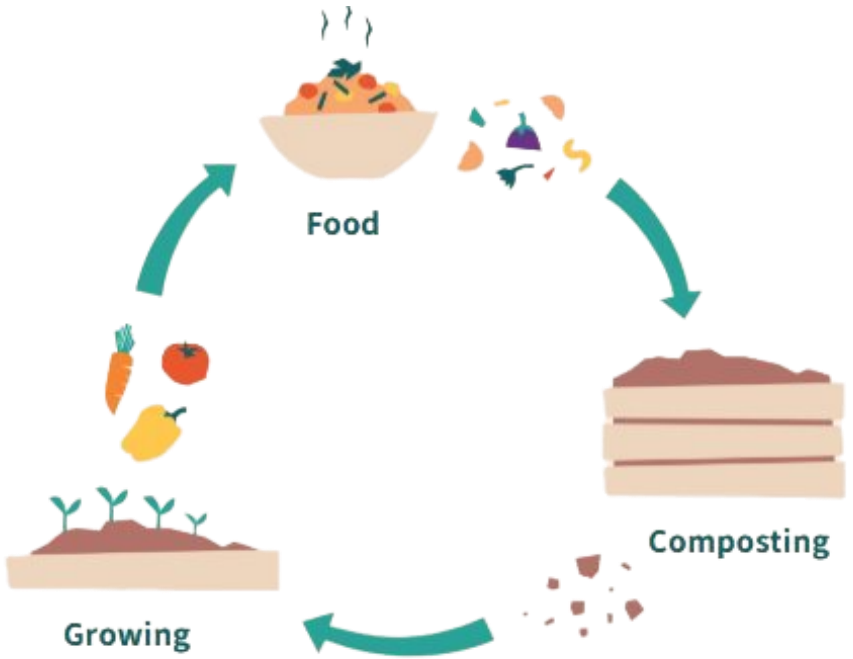
Stage 2: Implementation & Demonstration Phase (9–18 Months)

- Selected projects won up to €60,000 for single entities / up to €85,000 for consortia for transition from planning to real-world deployment, building and installing their solutions directly in the rural communities: Total Funds Disbursed to Date: **€765,000.00**
- Every innovator is paired with dedicated technical experts and regional mentors who guide deployment, troubleshoot issues, and help build local community adoption.

Zadar, Croatia

Challenge: Bio-waste management and reuse on islands

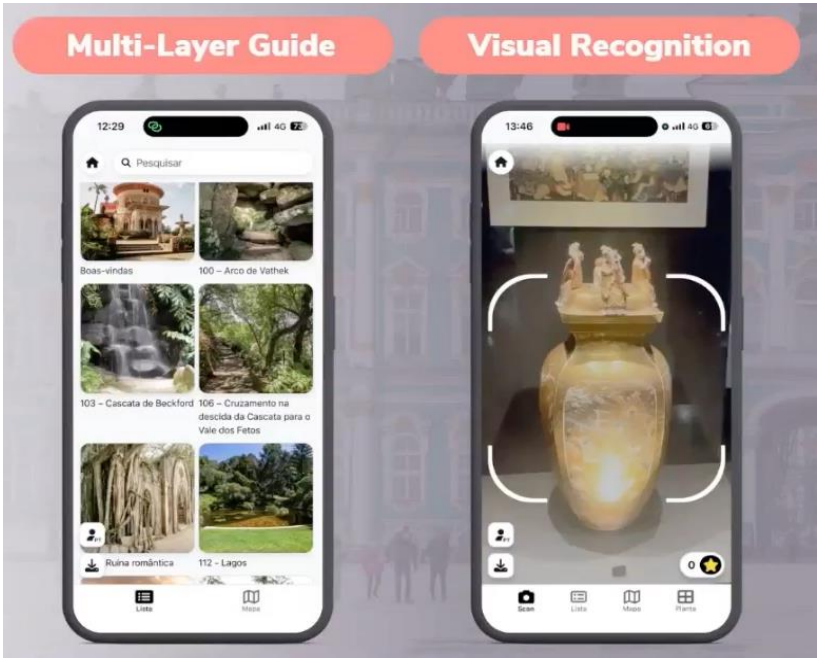
- **Raised awareness:** education and community outreach
- **Assessed local needs:** expression-of-interest survey to determine number and type of composting units, and identify support required to encourage uptake and ownership
- **Built community ownership:** engaged key local stakeholders, utilising community networks to drive the solution
- **Expanded engagement:** partnering with tourism board and integrating into cultural events



Südburgenland, Austria

Challenge: Smart digital tourism and accessibility solutions for Southern Burgenland

- **Enabled local ownership:** tools allowing local teams to independently create and manage digital experiences.
- **Navigated local priorities**: aligning stakeholder needs with project objectives and funding constraints.
- **Monitored and adapted:** pre-planned and communicated upgrades based on visitor engagement data and emerging needs
- **Promoted inclusive access:** multilingual and accessible experiences for diverse audiences



Thank you

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