



## EUDIGIT – SEMINAR ON THE GAP BETWEEN URBAN AND RURAL AREAS

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### Introductory keynote address

L. Falconetti, Project manager, City of Marseille

Dear project partners, dear participants, it is a real pleasure to meet you today for the fifth seminar of our EUDIGIT project.

As an introduction and a reminder, I would like to say that EUDIGIT project was co-funded by the Europe for citizens programme. It brings together the cities of Cluj-Napoca, Genoa, Hamburg, Rotterdam, Varna and Marseille as well as the network of European mayors THEMAYOR-EU.

Until mid-23, EUDIGIT will try to stimulate exchanges between cities, local stakeholders and citizens with the ambition to improve public policies and reduce digital exclusion.

The chosen methodology is based on the organization of regular workshops in each city, which allow the expression of citizens and the identification of good practices undertaken either by cities or stakeholders such as NGOs or businesses; some relevant good practices will be presented to you today in the next panel.

The meeting with citizens is at the heart of our project; even though the COVID crisis has made it difficult to bring together as many citizens as we would have liked, so far we are quite proud of our partnership's activity.

Indeed, despite an entirely online activity for the first 4 seminars, we managed to maintain our mobilization and involvement in our work.

We finally have the chance to meet physically for the first time today and to meet after 2 years of collaboration... it was about time don't you think?

We are here to discuss the issue of the digital divide and the gap between urban and rural areas, where citizens are directly affected in an unequal way.

Regarding digitalization, this gap generates a spatial injustice between citizens which can be observed in many EU regions and which acts as a cumulative effect with social shortcomings.

According to the European Network for the Rural Development, rural areas face the risk of a "double digital divide". On the supply side, they are still lagging behind in terms of the provision

of Next generation access infrastructure – so closing this gap has to be a continued investment priority.

On the demand side, many rural areas lack the basic skills and knowledge of the potential of digital technology so that even if the 'digital highways' are in place, they may remain under-exploited in terms of service provision, business use, or customer take up.

This is the heart of our consortium's example. We all have different issues around the same subject and different concerns, which makes our work rich in multiple experiences.

Of course, not all the partner cities are confronted with the management of a rural territory being fully urbanized cities, but all of us have challenges to face in relation to citizens who may be culturally, socially or geographically distant and even to the need of disconnection in a saturated environment.

I will not take the floor any longer in order to leave room for the exchange of experiences, the ideas that are certainly inspiring and the testimonies of high-level experts we will have the chance to hear throughout the day.

I thank you for your attention.

Dear Bogdan, thank you to be our host and the great organizer of this event.

Dear Mihnea, thank you for moderating the seminar. The floor is yours.