Bridging Continents as URBANAGE Facilitates Transatlantic Knowledge Exchange on Age-Friendly Urban Planning

20 February 2024 – The URBANAGE project started 2024 in full force, by participating in an online joint webinar - "Digital Twin Cities for All: Inclusive Virtual City Planning" – under the umbrella of Equity by Design initiative of American Association of Retired Persons (AARP International), the US's largest nonprofit nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering Americans 50 and older to choose how they live as they age.

The mission of Equity by Design initiative of AARP is to influence local influencers with the final goal of promoting health and wellness for all people at every age.

The URBANAGE project was three-year initiative funded by the European Commission. Its aim was to improve the quality of life and well-being of older people living in urban areas by creating and promoting age-friendly tools and solutions with the final goal of creating more inclusive, more resilient and age-friendly cities. URBANAGE published a document summarising the main lessons learned from its experience of developing and implementing age-friendly tools, practices, and influencing policy creation in 3 partner cities: Flanders Region, Helsinki, and Santander.

In the digital era, Digital Twin Cities (DTC) utilize advanced technologies including Artificial Intelligence (AI) to create real-time models of cities, and these models that inform the physical urban environment where we live, must be people centred. DTCs must consider the accessibility barriers that some older adults are facing while walking in urban settings preventing them to enjoy their living environment or creating concerns about privacy and safety Additionally, to develop inclusive, user-centric, and personalised solutions, DTCs must also consider the lack of access and possible digital skills gaps in the model-development process.

The main goals of this webinar were
- to emphasise the importance and benefits of DTCs and how they can transform urban planning,
- to share the data challenges and the lessons learned by URBANAGE project in Europe with AARP International so they could be promoted and shared in the US.

DTCs can help urban planners by simulating and testing their tools, policies and solutions before their actual implementation. Using this solution, urban planners can see the impact their actions and solutions will have on the city and on its population. URBANAGE was one of the first projects in Europe that involved users in developing DTC. The users were involved in the sense that they provided the data that was used in the digital twin and were consulted to co-design the tools. This was a real, accurate and based on their specific needs.

The main challenge from the URBANAGE project was the data challenge. It was difficult to access data from two departments of the same city and it was a total lack of data or if the data was existent, it was of bad quality or obsolete.

The URBANAGE solution for overcoming this lack of data was to involve people of all ages in the co-design of the apps that were created and in using digital tools. The use cases developed in URBANAGE involved data coming from users and together with open data from municipalities. In Helsinki, users were provided with IoT devices and their input was real-time. Via the IoT device and the URBANAGE solutions they could provide feedback on their city issues: accessibility issues, safety issues, amenities feedback etc.

For further information on the URBANAGE project, including access to the platform and comprehensive lessons learned and results, please visit www.urbanage.eu

Notes

- **URBANAGE** has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101004590.

- **URBANAGE** is focused on researching and developing innovative solutions to address the complex challenges older adults face in urban environments. The project aims to create smarter, more resilient, and inclusive cities through cutting-edge technologies and sustainable practices, with a special emphasis on making cities more age friendly. More information at www.urbanage.eu

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