

Event Report

14 - 16 May 2025

SERN

General

Assembly



By: SERN Secretariat

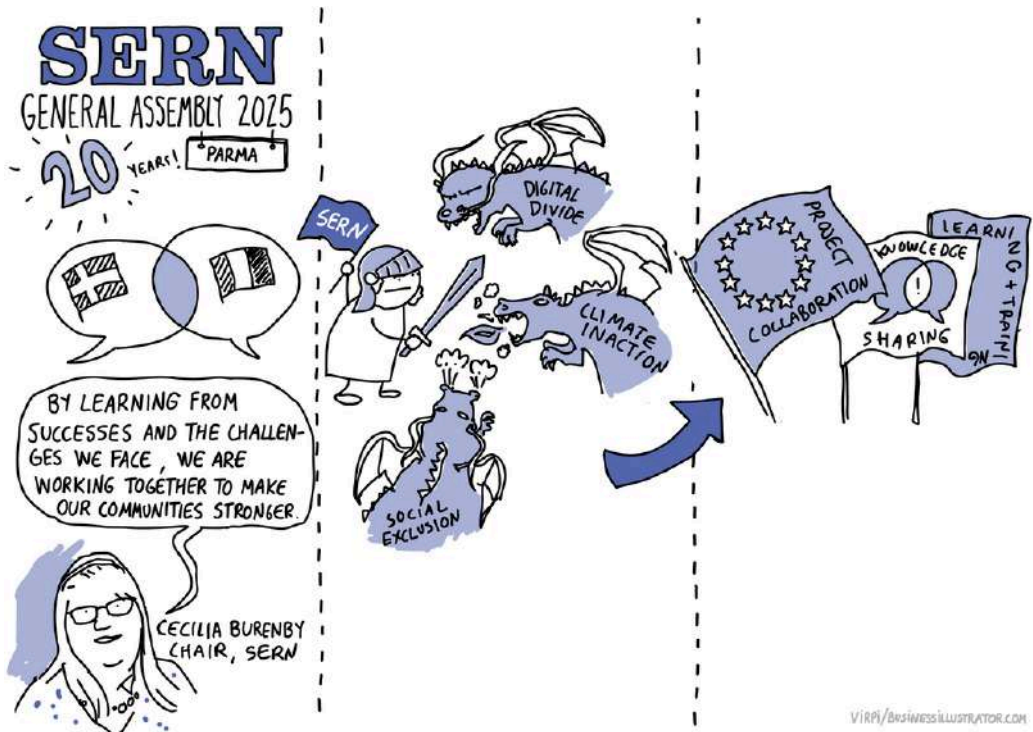


SERN



Introduction

The SERN General Assembly 2025 took place from 14 to 16 May in Parma and Fontanellato, marking a special edition of our annual gathering: the celebration of 20 years of the SERN Network, established in 2005 with the shared vision of strengthening cooperation between Italy and Sweden.



Under the motto *Italy and Sweden Building Europe Together*, this year's Assembly reaffirmed the founding values of SERN while looking to the future, through new partnerships, joint initiatives, and exchange among members.

The 2025 edition brought together more than 100 participants from across Italy and Sweden, as well as guests from Germany and Finland, representing a wide range of municipalities, public organisations, and thematic sectors. The programme was designed around three key professional target groups:

POLITICAL REPRESENTATIVES

SERN CONTACT PERSONS AND STAFF WORKING ON INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

MANAGERS

This year's programme introduced new formats and spaces, including:

- Thematic sessions focused on pressing societal challenges
- Scenario sessions, where participants tackled practical issues in role-based groups
- A project development track to encourage collaboration and future planning
- A new peer-to-peer exchange space to support learning among members
- And the GA Club, an informal hub for reflection and networking

Opening plenary

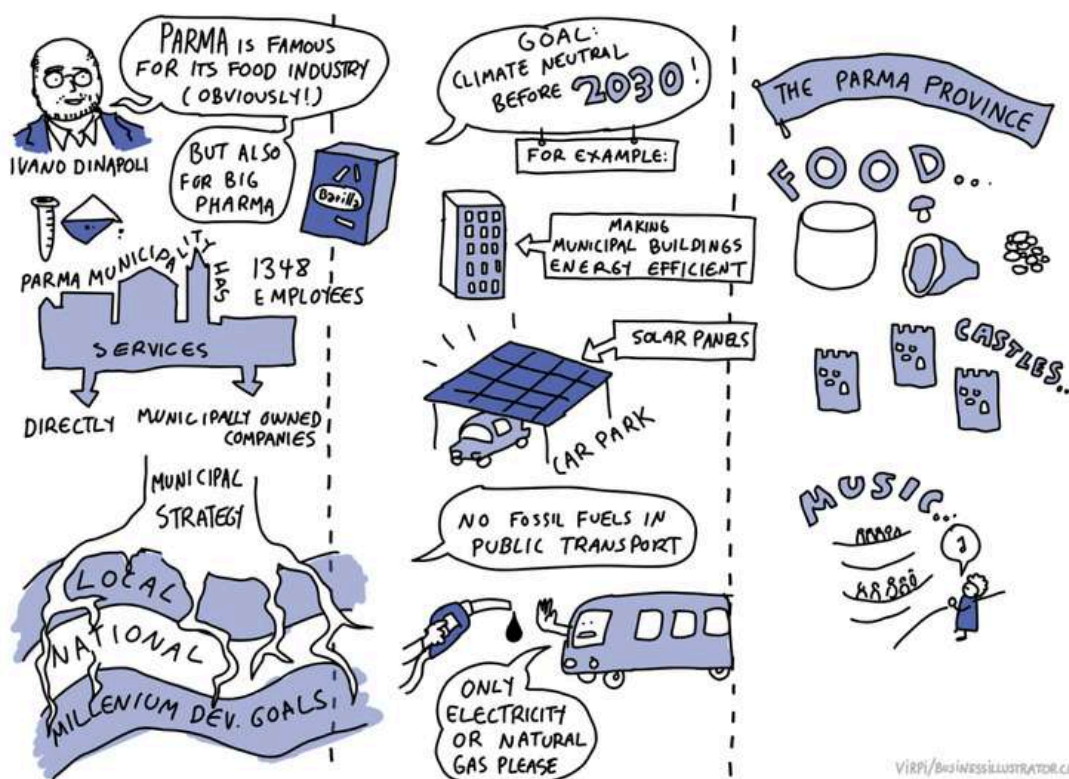
The General Assembly opened with a moment of institutional recognition and welcome. Participants were greeted by key representatives of the local and regional institutions:

- Cecilia Burenby, Chair of the SERN Executive Board and Mayor of Mjölby
- Michele Guerra, Mayor of the City of Parma
- Alessandro Fadda, President of the Province of Parma
- Andrea Massari, Councillor of the Emilia-Romagna Region

Their speeches reaffirmed the importance of local-level engagement in European processes and the value of long-term partnerships such as SERN.

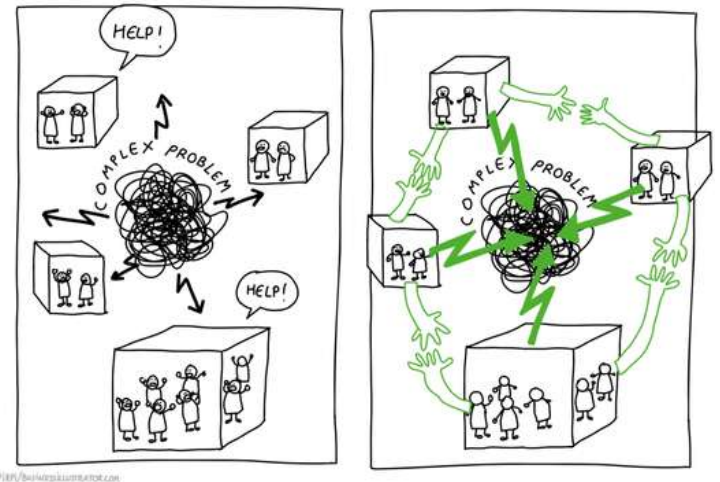


The opening also featured a presentation on the city and the province by **Ivano Dinapoli** (Municipality of Parma) and **Barbara Usberti** (Province of Parma). They highlighted Parma's commitment to innovation, sustainability, and inclusive growth, offering participants a broader perspective on the local context hosting this year's event.



Scenario Sessions

One of the most engaging components of the General Assembly 2025 were the Scenario Sessions: workshops structured by professional role rather than thematic area. Three professional groups were involved, SERN contact persons and staff dealing with international affairs, managers, and political Representatives, each of which took part in two consecutive sessions over the second and third days of the General Assembly.



SERN contact persons and staff dealing with international affairs

The SERN contact persons and staff dealing with international affairs participated in two Scenario Sessions aimed at strengthening their strategic role within organisations.

SESSION 1 – FOSTERING A COLLABORATIVE MINDSET

This session focused on overcoming internal resistance to internationalisation. Through structured group discussions, participants explored practical strategies to engage colleagues who perceive international work as burdensome or irrelevant. They worked on identifying institutional barriers, motivational levers, first engagement steps, and long-term strategies to embed internationalisation in everyday practice. Key themes included low-effort engagement tactics, safe entry points for hesitant staff, and framing international cooperation as a professional development opportunity.

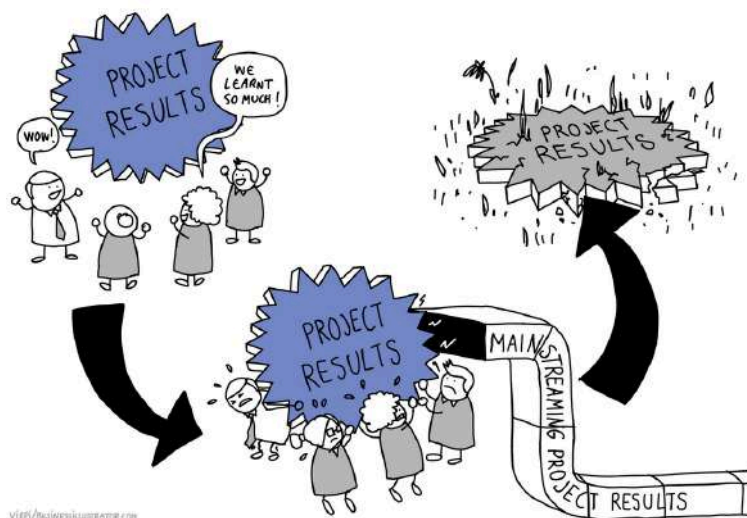
SESSION 2 – RECOGNISING STRATEGIC VALUE

This session addressed how to raise the internal and political profile of international cooperation. Participants discussed how to align international work with organisational priorities and how to effectively communicate its added value to senior management and political leaders. They analysed perception gaps, built strategic narratives, and proposed mechanisms to foster internal ownership and cross-sectoral support. The session concluded with a focus on how to sustain recognition over time, including during political change.

📄 Each session has a dedicated summary report available for download. Participants are invited to consult the documents to revisit key takeaways and continue the dialogue within their organisations.

Managers

The two scenario sessions targeting managers explored how international cooperation and EU projects can act as catalysts for internal transformation and cross-sectoral collaboration within local and regional authorities.



SESSION 1 – MAINSTREAMING PROJECT RESULTS IN LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

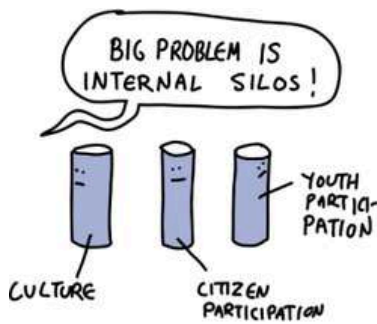
The first session focused on how to mainstream the results of EU projects into everyday organisational practice. Participants reflected on the barriers they often face in making project results visible and impactful beyond the project lifecycle,

such as internal silos, limited awareness among colleagues, or the lack of formal structures to sustain innovation. Through small group discussions, they identified concrete actions to support the uptake of results, including pilot activities, informal internal exchanges, and alignment with broader institutional goals. Each group concluded the session by committing to a specific action they could implement within their organisation to embed project results more effectively.

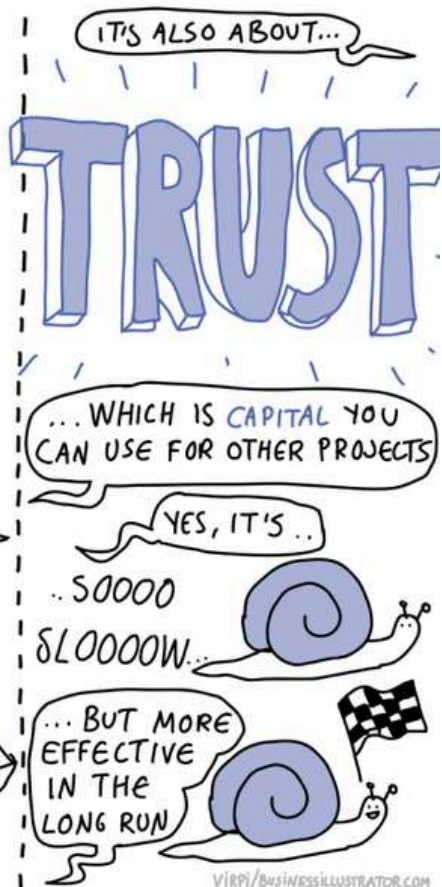
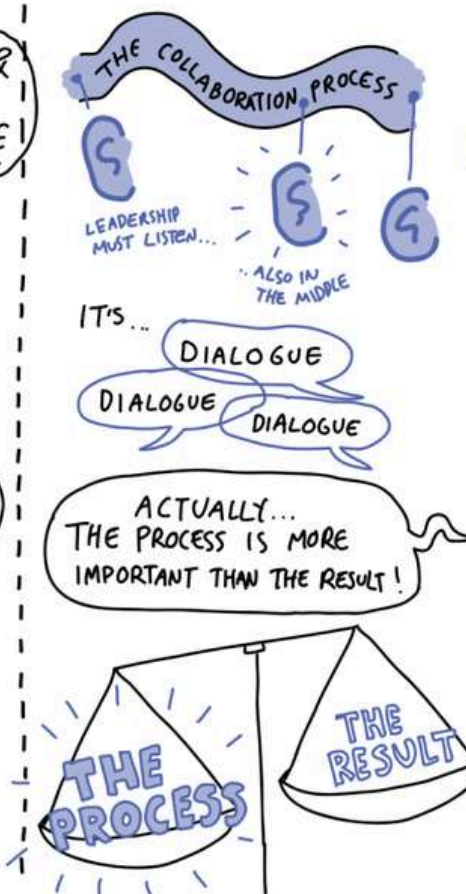
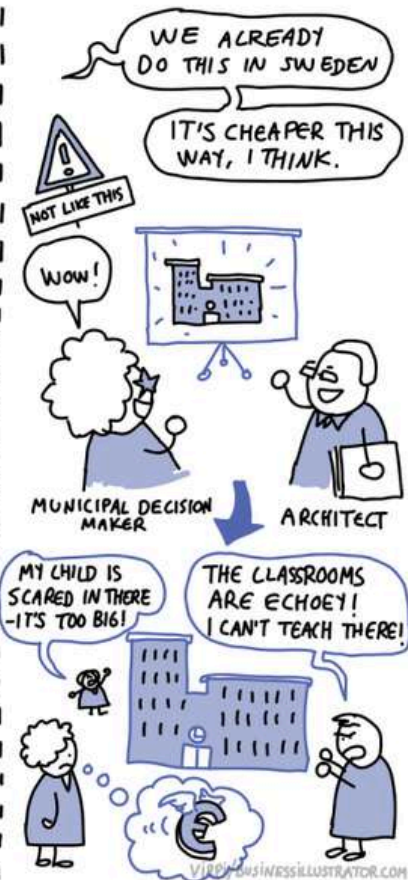
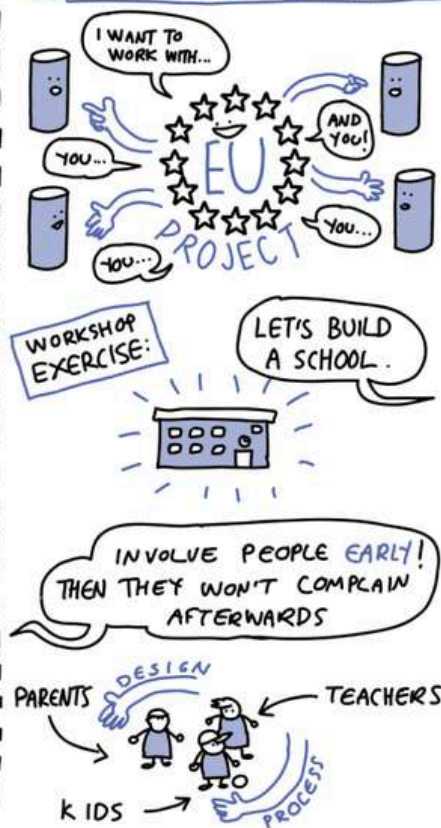
SESSION 2 - CROSS-SECTORAL COLLABORATION THROUGH EU COOPERATION

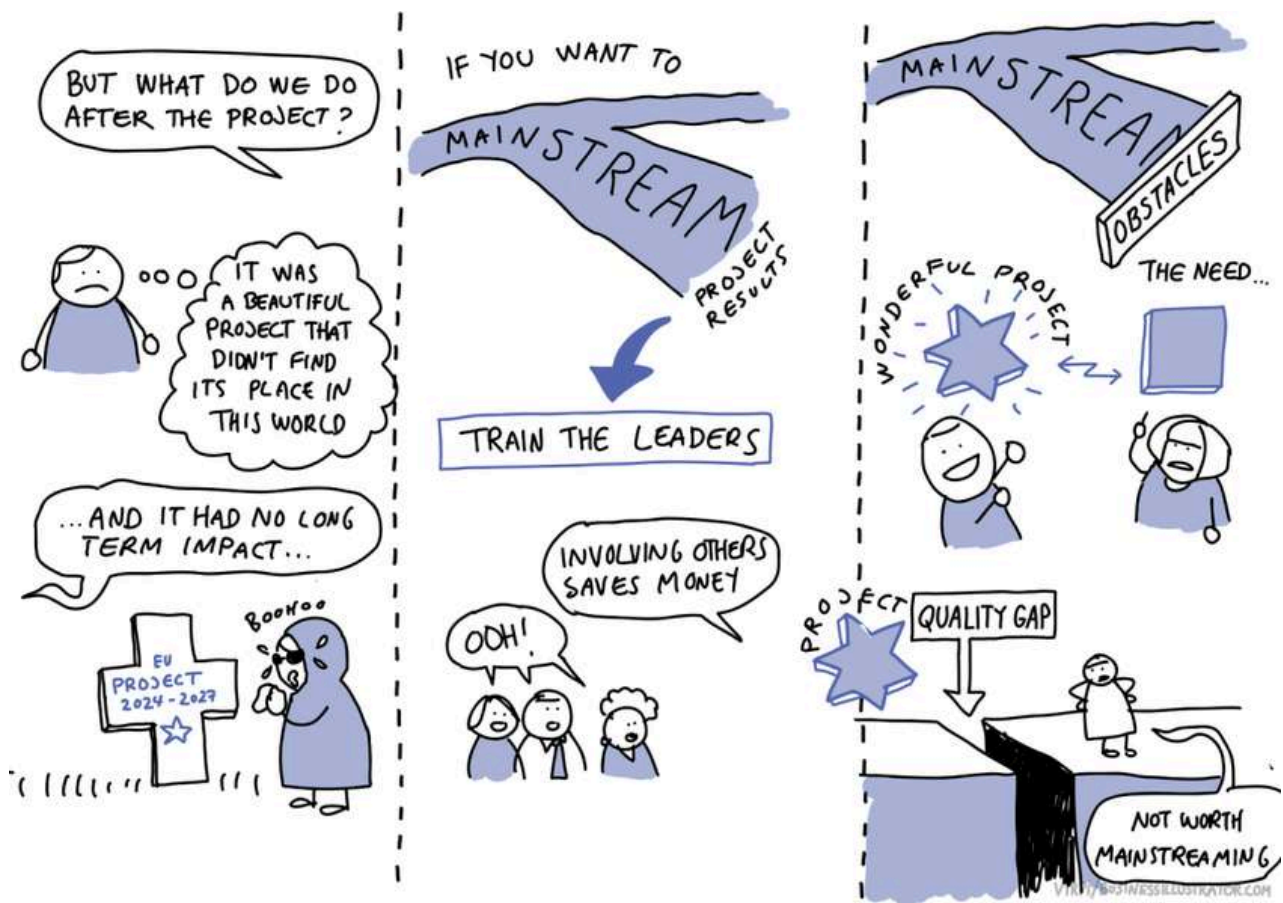
The second session addressed how EU cooperation can support cross-sectoral learning and collaboration. Participants reflected on how international projects could create entry points for working across departments, for example on topics like inclusion, climate action, or youth. During the session they explored how to turn international experiences into internal dialogue, helping to foster a culture of collaboration and shared ownership. The discussion emphasised the importance of leadership support, structured routines, and internal communication tools to enable these exchanges to happen more consistently.

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EU-PROJECTS AS DRIVERS FOR CROSS-SECTORAL COLLABORATION





Political representatives

The two scenario sessions targeting political representatives focused on how elected officials can play a more strategic role in international cooperation, while also improving how the European dimension is communicated and embedded at the local level.

SESSION 1 - HOW TO COMMUNICATE EUROPE AND INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES TO CITIZENS

This session focused on strategies to help political representatives effectively communicate the relevance and value of EU and international cooperation to local citizens. Participants explored key barriers, including widespread perceptions of distance between Europe and everyday life, and identified target groups who may feel disconnected, such as youth and newcomers. Group discussions centred on how to shape compelling narratives, choose appropriate outreach tools, and build lasting communication strategies embedded within broader political objectives. The session concluded with a collective reflection on actionable steps and commitments to strengthen EU visibility in local contexts.

SESSION 2 – THE ROLE OF POLITICAL REPRESENTATIVES IN EUROPEAN ACTIVITIES AND PROJECTS

In this session, participants analysed how political leaders can contribute more strategically throughout all stages of international projects—not only during formal approvals or visibility moments. Discussions revolved around four key phases: project initiation and design, implementation, dissemination, and follow-up. Each table explored how political representatives can bring vision and legitimacy to the project cycle, foster internal collaboration with technical teams, and ensure that project outcomes feed into long-term policy goals. The session closed with participants identifying one concrete action to enhance their role in supporting meaningful and impactful European cooperation.

📄 Each session has a dedicated summary report available for download. Participants are invited to consult the documents to revisit key takeaways and continue the dialogue within their organisations.

CLICK [CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD THE REPORT](#)



WE SHOULD CREATE AMBITIOUS PROPOSALS



AND SHOW THAT WE'RE PART OF ALL THESE NETWORKS



MOST ITALIAN MUNICIPALITIES HAVE EU-OFFICES



BUT NOTE: SAME SIZE MUNICIPALITY IN ITALY VS IN SWEDEN

2000 MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES VS 140 EMPLOYEES

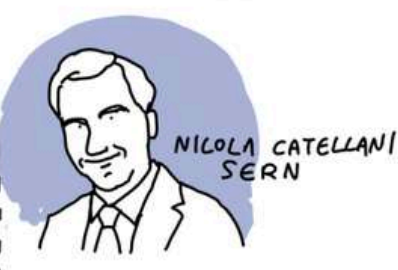


THERE'S ALSO SKEPTICISM FOR INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS..

VERY NICE - IN THEORY. BUT WHAT'S THE BENEFIT?

EU PROJECT? I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR THE REPORTING.

MAYBE WE CAN INVITE NICOLA TO EXPLAIN (THE BENEFITS)?



VIRPI/BUSINESSILLUSTRATOR.COM

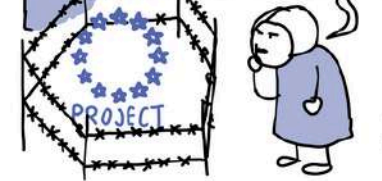
WE INFORM THE CITY COUNCIL ABOUT EUROPEAN PROJECTS ONCE A YEAR

ONLY ONCE A YEAR?

IT'S IMPORTANT EVERYBODY KNOWS ABOUT THE PROJECT - NOT JUST THE PARTICIPANTS

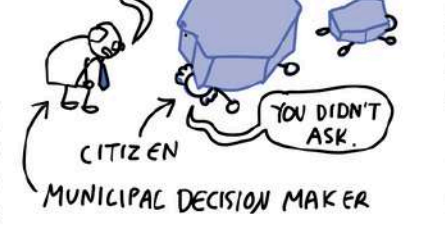
THIS PROJECT IS AMAZING!

SHH! THIS PROJECT IS THE BEST KEPT SECRET IN THE MUNICIPALITY!



WE SHOULD INVITE CITIZENS TO GET INVOLVED IN DEFINING THE CHALLENGES IN THE AREA

OH GOSH, WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME ABOUT THIS PROBLEM?



COMPANIES HAVE THEIR NETWORKS WITH THE POLITICIANS.

BUT NOT CITIZENS..

AND WE SHOULD REPRESENT THEM!

WE HAVE CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT IN EMERGENCY RESPONSE .. FOREST FIRES ETC

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Thematic sessions

The second day of the General Assembly opened with three Thematic Sessions tackling critical challenges for local communities, each designed to provide a mix of expert insight, practical cases from Sweden and Italy, and small group reflections.

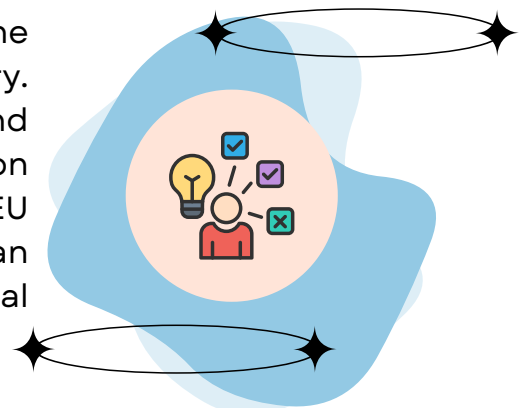
Upskilling and reskilling educational staff

One session focused specifically on education and the evolving role of teachers in the 21st century. Moderated by **Fredrik Bruhn** (Municipality of Luleå and member of the SERN Executive Board), the session began with a policy overview by [Amy Burnett](#) ✨ (EU Commission – DG EAC), framing the European approach to teacher training and professional development.

Two case studies followed:

- [Louise Stridsman](#) ✨ (Municipality of Luleå) presented Sweden's approach to upskilling and supporting school staff to meet new challenges.
- [Simone Mazza](#) ✨ (IC Guatelli, Collecchio) offered an Italian perspective with the presentation Empowering teachers for the 21st century: beyond content delivery, which encouraged participants to reflect on the evolving expectations placed on educators in increasingly diverse and digital learning environments.

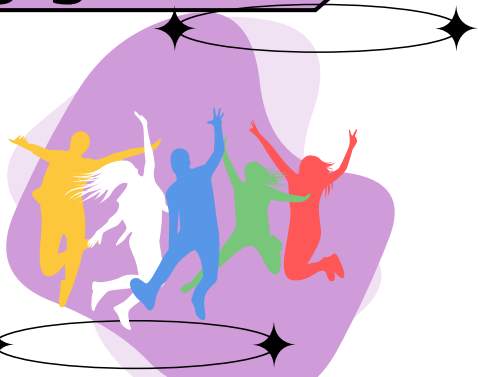
After the presentations, participants engaged in small group discussions to reflect on the insights shared and explore how these could be applied in their own contexts. The conversation focused on the challenges they face locally in supporting teachers, and how cooperation within the SERN Network could help address those challenges through shared experiences, peer learning, and collaborative strategies.



Youth participation and civic engagement

One of the Thematic Sessions focused on a key issue for many municipalities: how to meaningfully involve young people in civic life.

The session was introduced by [Emanuela Allegri](#) ✨ (Municipality of Parma), who underlined the importance of creating long-term, trust-based relationships between institutions and younger generations. It featured two local experiences:



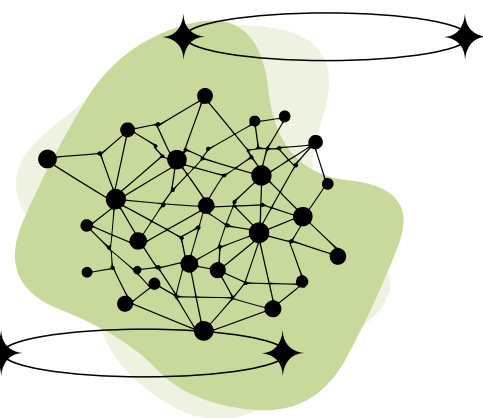
- [Saba Giovannacci](#) ✨ (Municipality of Parma) presented *A Piazza for Europe*, an initiative developed in the framework of Parma's candidacy for European Youth Capital 2027 while [Gabriele Agnetti](#) ✨ (Municipality of Parma) introduced the Youth Impact Evaluation Tool, designed to assess and amplify the impact of youth policies at local level.
- [Elisabeth Asp](#) ✨ (Municipality of Linköping) then shared how young people in Linköping are actively involved in shaping and evaluating public policies.

Moderated by Linnea Jägestedt (Municipality of Linköping and SERN Executive Board member), the session closed with small-group discussions on how to make youth participation more structured and effective across different local contexts.



Innovation and inclusion in peripheral areas

The third Thematic Session explored how to connect rural and peripheral areas to innovation, infrastructure, and opportunity, a key challenge in ensuring territorial cohesion across Europe. Prof. [Gianluigi Ferrari](#) ✨ (University of Parma) opened the session by emphasising the need for integrated digital and physical networks to promote inclusion, resilience, and smart development in less connected territories.

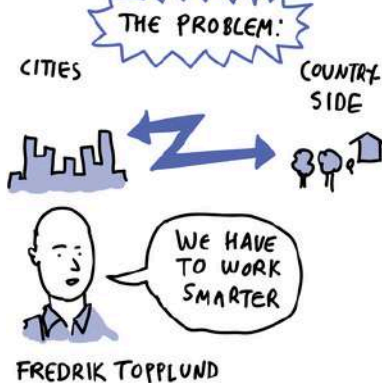
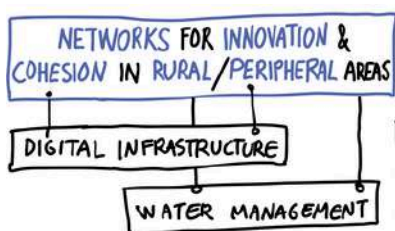


Two case studies were presented:

- [Kleidis Tafaruci](#) ✨ (EmiliAmbiente) and Prof. Ferrari presented a concrete example of how AI technologies are being applied to optimise water network management in the Parma area.
- [Cesare Osti](#) ✨ (Lepida ScpA) outlined the regional strategies of Emilia-Romagna aimed at ensuring broad, inclusive access to digital infrastructure and services.

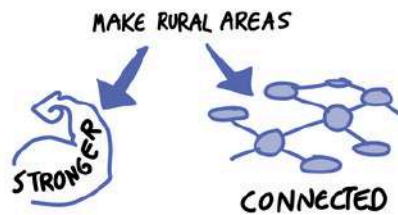
Moderated by **Fredrik Topplund** (Municipality of Motala and SERN Executive Board member), the session concluded with a discussion among the participants.





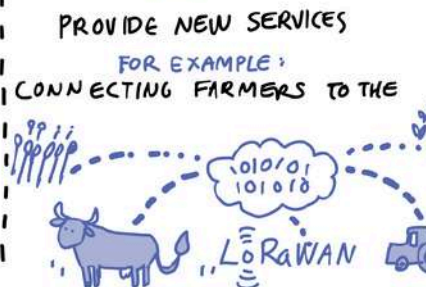
EU RECOGNISES THE PROBLEM

TERRITORIAL AGENDA 2020

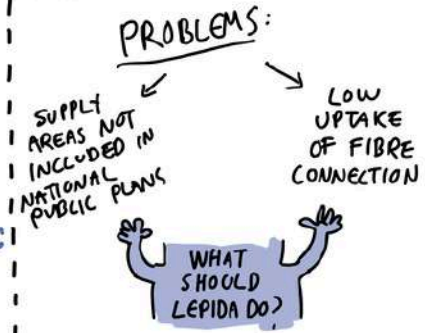


CONNECTIVITY

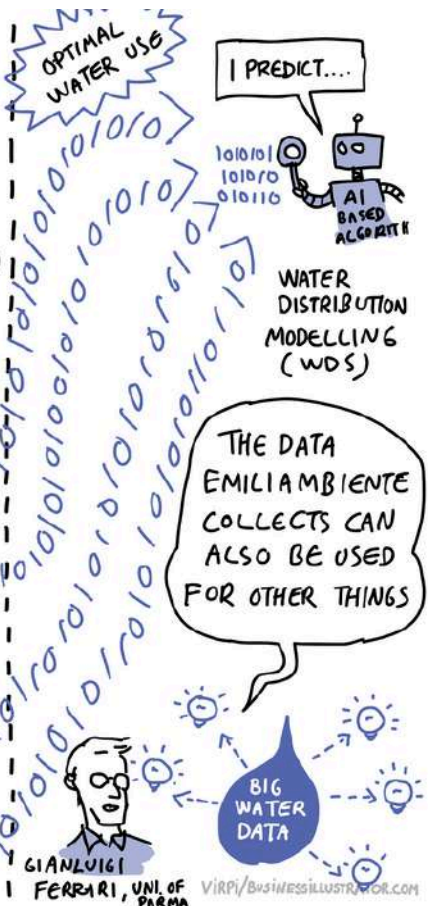
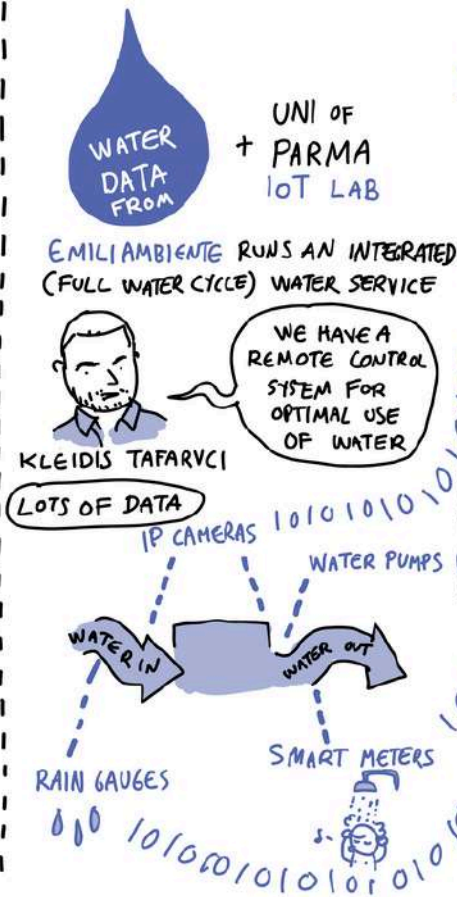
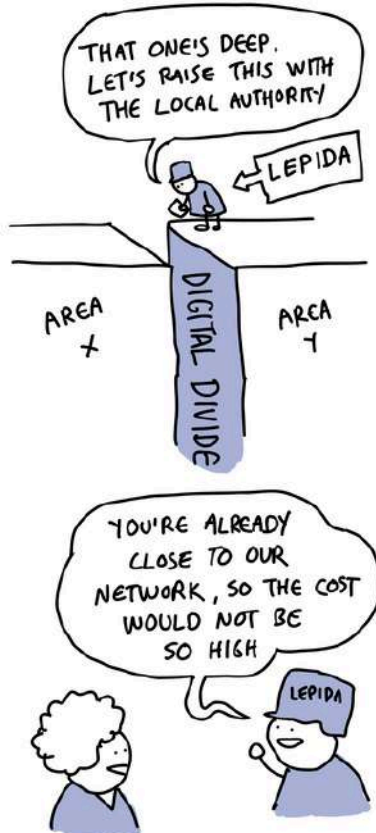
IS KEY TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT & INNOVATION



- PUBLICLY OWNED
- LEPIDA SUPPORTS DIGITALISATION OF PUBLIC BODIES
- CESARE OSTI
- PROVIDE STABLE FIBER NETWORK
 - RADIO NETWORK (MOUNTAIN AREAS)
 - PUBLIC REGIONAL WIFI
 - CONNECTING SCHOOLS
 - IOT NETWORK (LoRaWAN)
 - 4 REGIONAL DATA CENTRES



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Project showcase

One of the key moments of the General Assembly was the Project Showcase, where members shared concrete experiences and innovative initiatives developed across the Network. Over the three days, more than ten projects were presented, covering a wide range of themes: from education and social services to sustainability, digitalisation, and public procurement.

The session offered inspiration for participants, who were able to discover transferable practices, explore emerging priorities, and identify opportunities for future collaboration.



STEAMWORKS PROJECT ✨

Laura Avanzi (SERN) and Mara Petrini (Ravenna Municipality) presented STEAMworks, an Erasmus+ project that promotes early STEAM education for very young children through play-based exploration of physical phenomena. The project encourages the use of natural and recycled materials, supports inclusive pedagogy, and strengthens both professional reflection and family engagement. It aims to equip ECEC staff with tools and strategies to nurture scientific curiosity and language development in children aged 1 to 6.



SOCIAL SERVICES AND DIGITALISATION – LEARNING MOBILITIES ✨

Domenico Sgromo (ASP Parma) and Laura Avanzi (SERN) shared how learning mobilities have supported innovation in elderly care and social services. Through Erasmus+ projects, ASP Parma has worked to modernise care practices, improve digital tools, and enhance staff competences by learning from European peers.



UST PROJECT – UPSKILLING MUNICIPAL STAFF ON SUSTAINABLE TOURISM ✨

Ginevra Roli (SERN), Johan Cavallini (SveDest), and Melissa Boccaccini (Municipality of Scandiano) presented the UST project, which focuses on equipping municipal staff with tools and strategies to support sustainable tourism. The project promotes a community-based approach that balances environmental, cultural, and economic sustainability. Scandiano highlighted its local events, trail development, and restoration of historical sites as practical applications of these principles.



TERRITORIAL COLLABORATIVE WELFARE AND HOUSING POLICIES ✨

Ilaria Di Cerbo and Andrea Minari (Parma Municipality) shared Parma's integrated strategy for tackling housing issues, through structural investments, digital tools, and the creation of a new Housing Center connecting public and private actors.



SCHOOLS, BUSINESSES, COMMUNITIES: EMILIAMBIENTE FOR A WATER CULTURE ✨

Ilaria Gandolfi and Deborah Fabbri (EmiliAmbiente) presented education and awareness-raising actions to promote sustainable water use in schools, connecting environmental education to community engagement.



CRIME PREVENTION IN A LOCAL PERSPECTIVE AND THE CIVIC PLEDGE OF VÄNERSBORG ✨

Anders Fridén (Vänersborg Municipality) described a participatory approach to crime prevention, highlighting how Vänersborg engages the community through civic pledges and structured dialogue with citizens.



INTERNATIONALISATION AND INCLUSION AT SCHOOL ✨

Martin Eriksson Roth and Per Eriksson (Platengymnasiet, Motala Municipality) reflected on how European cooperation contributes to inclusive education, with practical examples of project work that engages students with diverse backgrounds.



INTEC PROJECT – DEVELOPING AN INNOVATIVE IN-SERVICE TRAINING MODEL FOR ECEC STAFF ✨

Federica Gravina (SERN Secretariat), Tecla Moretti, e Maddalena Cocco (University of Milano-Bicocca) presented a project designing a flexible, modular training model for early childhood educators. Co-developed with practitioners from four countries, the model focuses on diversity, emotional wellbeing, and multilingualism, promoting inclusive and reflective professional development.



THE URBAN AGENDA PARTNERSHIP ON INNOVATIVE AND RESPONSIBLE PUBLIC PROCUREMENT ✨

Valentina Schippers (City of Haarlem) presented the work of the Urban Agenda Partnership, which brings together European cities and stakeholders to promote strategic, innovative, and responsible public procurement. The initiative aims to turn procurement into a tool for sustainability, social impact, and innovation at local level.



CIRGREEN PROJECT – CIRCULAR ECONOMY FOR GREEN AND SUSTAINABLE PUBLIC PROCUREMENT ✨

Barbara Usberti (Province of Parma) and Suvi Holm (EcoFellows Ltd.) presented CIRGREEN, a project supporting local authorities in adopting circular procurement strategies and helping SMEs align with sustainable market demands.



LEAF – LEARNING AND ENGAGING FOR ACTION ON BIODIVERSITY ✨

Isak Johansson (City of Trollhättan) and Valentina Ruberto (Association of Companies of Parma) presented the LEAF project, which aims to promote biodiversity in industrial areas by increasing awareness among SMEs and supporting them in integrating biodiversity into their business practices.



EXPLORING MOTIVATORS & DRIVERS FOR STUDENT PARTICIPATION AND SUSTAINABILITY ✨

Malin Regnstrand (Linköping Municipality) shared experiences from an Erasmus+ project that investigates what drives student participation in sustainability, focusing on motivation, engagement, and school-based action.



CLICK ON THE PROJECT TITLE TO
DOWNLOAD THE PRESENTATION

Equal4Green Seminar



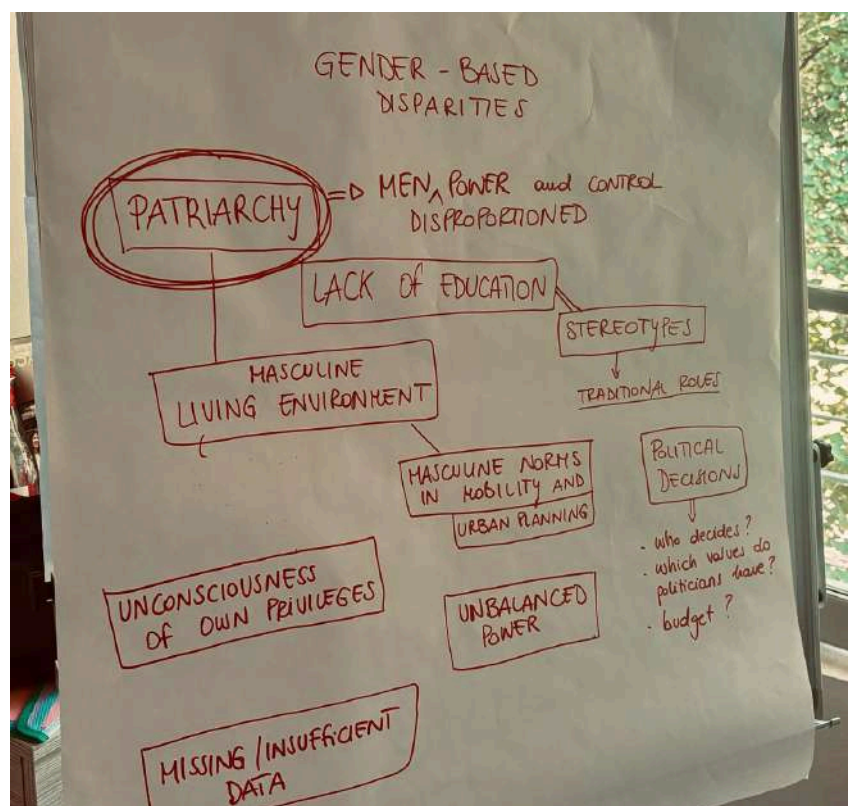
The second transnational event of the Equal4Green, “**Gender equality and sustainability for a shared future**” project took place during the second day of the SERN General Assembly, focusing on the intersection between gender equality, urban mobility, and city planning.

The seminar explored the challenges and needs of public authorities when designing inclusive policies in the context of the green and digital transitions. It built upon the outcomes of the first event held in Cavriago (Italy) in November 2024, expanding the reflection to how data and mapping tools can support more equitable and informed decision-making.

Key contributions included:

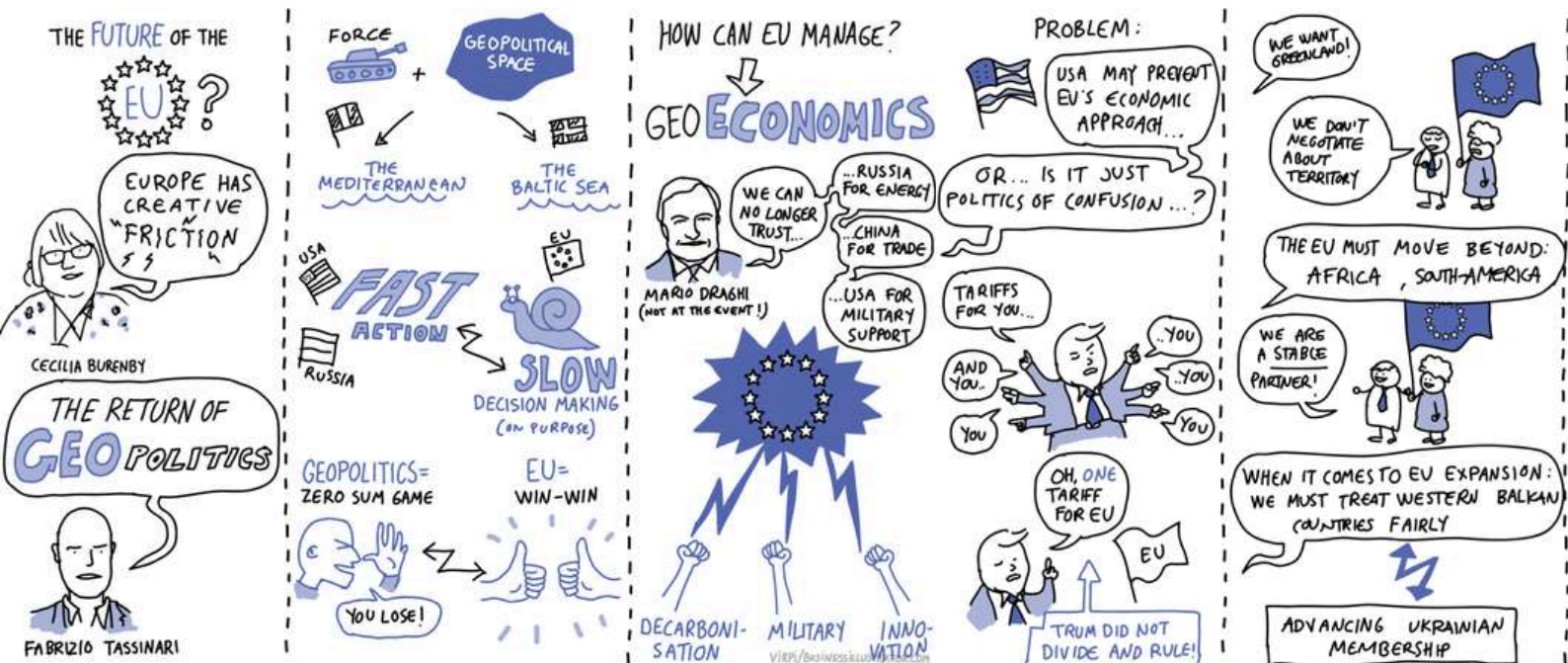
- **Lena Levin** (Swedish National Road and Transport Research Institute – VTI), who presented best practices from the Nordic countries on Gender Smart Mobility
- **Florencia Andreola** (Sex and the City Association), who introduced the Gender Atlas and its application in the planning of public services in the City of Parma

Following the expert presentations, participants took part in transnational working groups, applying the Project Cycle Management (PCM) methodology to co-design project ideas aimed at advancing gender-responsive planning at local level.



Europe in challenging times

Perspectives from politics, academia, and business



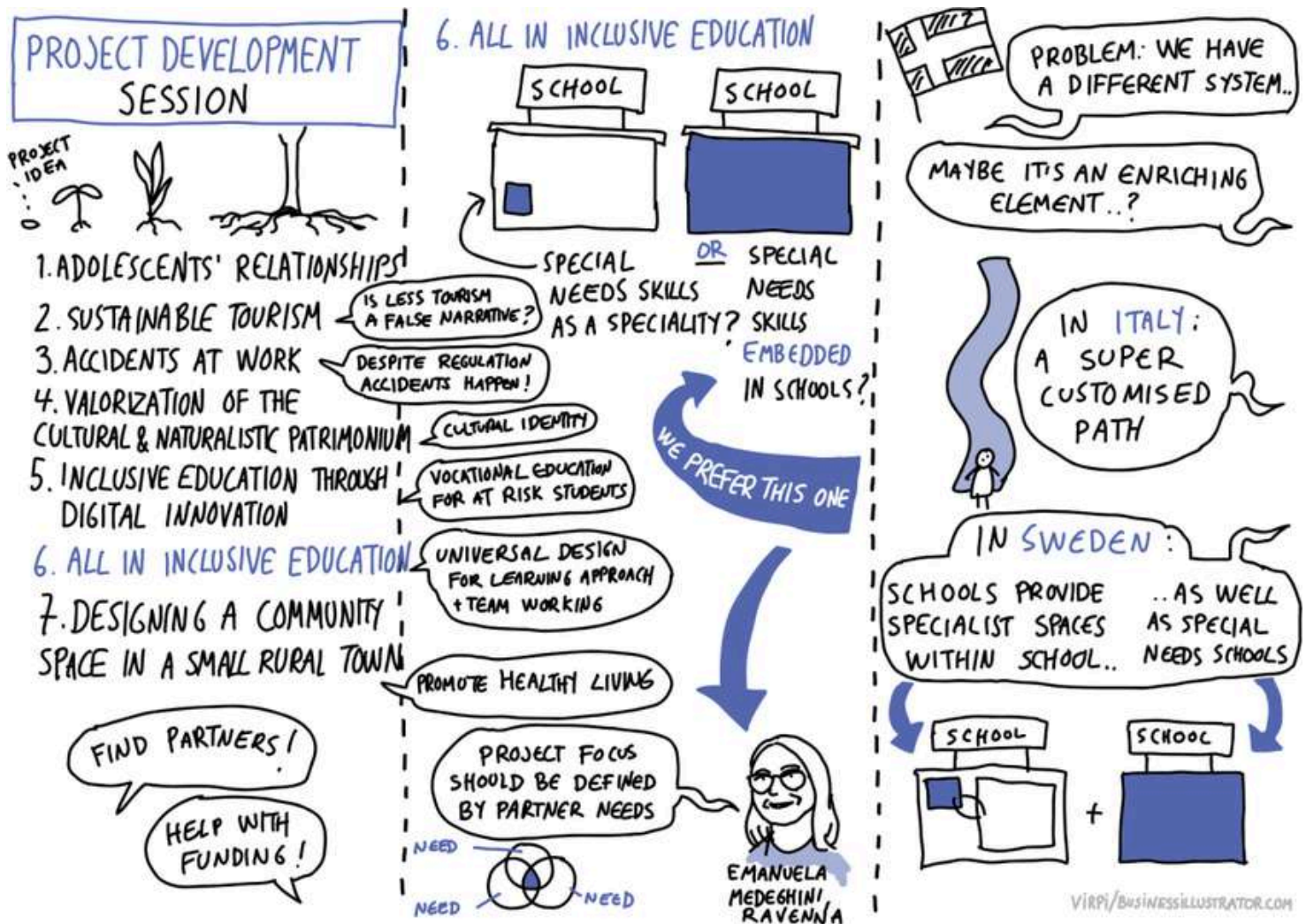
During the session Europe in Challenging Times, SERN members were invited to reflect on the future of the European Union in a context marked by uncertainty, polarisation, and global transformations.

Through three complementary perspectives, political, academic, and entrepreneurial, the session offered a multifaceted analysis of the current moment and the road ahead:

- **Stefano Bonaccini**, Member of the European Parliament, addressed the political and institutional challenges facing the EU, highlighting the need for unity, responsibility, and long-term commitment to democratic values.
- **Fabrizio Tassinari**, Executive Director at the School of Transnational Governance – European University Institute, provided a geopolitical overview of Europe's evolving role in a multipolar world, emphasising the strategic need for a more cohesive and assertive European project.
- **Alberto Figna**, President of Augiaro & Figna and CEO of ALMA, brought the voice of European businesses, describing how entrepreneurial actors are navigating today's complexity while staying anchored to shared European values.



Project development session



Peer-to-peer learning

Another new feature of this year's General Assembly was the Peer-to-Peer session, designed to foster direct and informal exchange among members. It provided a space to reflect on internal practices and share concrete experiences from across the Network.

Daniel Stendahl (Municipality of Linköping) spoke about the strategic role of contact persons in engaging colleagues and embedding international cooperation in daily municipal work. Joakim Hellgren (Municipality of Luleå) illustrated Luleå's journey from participating in projects to becoming an Erasmus+ accredited organisation and leading its an Erasmus+ cooperation project.

The session concluded with open discussion among participants, who shared insights, challenges, and lessons learned from their local contexts.

SERN General Assembly

As part of the General Assembly 2025, SERN members elected the new Executive Board and Board of Auditors for the 2025–2027 mandate.

The newly elected Executive Board met immediately after the General Assembly and appointed:

- Saba Giovannacci (Province of Parma) as President
- Cecilia Burenby (Municipality of Mjölby) as Vice President



Chair
SABA GIOVANNACCI
Province of Parma



Vice Chair
CECILIA BURENBY
Municipality of Mjölby



CENTURIO FRIGNANI
AICCRE Emilia-Romagna



DOMENICO CAMPANALE
Municipality of Bertinoro



LENA GOLDKUHL
Municipality of Boden



MARTINA ZECCHETTI
Municipality of Caviglioglio



MIRKO BOSCHETTI
Municipality of Cervia



KAROLA SVENSSON
Municipality of Falköping



LINNEA JÄGESTEDT
Municipality of Linköping



FREDRIK BRUHN
Municipality of Luleå



GIADA SEVERI
Municipality of Meldola



FREDRIK TOPPLUND
Municipality of Motala



EVA-BRITT SJÖBERG
Municipality of Norrköping



JONAS GUNNARSSON
Municipality of Piteå



ANNAGIULIA RANDI
Municipality of Ravenna



LORENA LANZONI
Municipality of Scandiano



JOHAN OLOFSSON
SveDest



SARA TONINI
Municipality of Sissa
Trecasali



**ANGELICA LUNDGREN
BIELENSKI**
City of Trollhättan



BENNY AUGUSTSSON
Municipality of Vänersborg



DANIELA TEBASI
Union of Municipalities Terre
d'Argine



NORBERTO VIGNALI
Union of Municipalities
Pedemontana Parmense

Members also elected the new Board of Auditors for the 2025–2027 period. Maria Ribbstedt (Cooperation Skaraborg) was appointed as President.



MARIA RIBBSTEDT
Cooperation Skaraborg
Chair



MARCO GIORGI
Emilianambiente S.p.A.



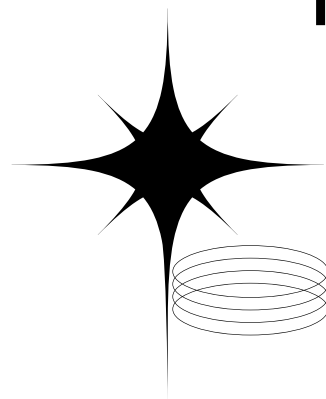
MIKAEL ARVERMARK
Kunskapsförbundet Väst



FRANCESCO MARIANI
Union of Municipalities Valli Taro e
Ceno



Italy and Sweden building Europe together



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