

**EUROPEAN  
PUBLIC SECTOR  
AWARD 2021**

**Building a Better Europe  
for Citizens**  
What Can We Learn from the  
Best Government Innovations  
by European Countries?



Menno Spaan  
Giulietta Marani  
**December 2021**



---

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Digital Public Administration</b>	<b>6</b>
Policy Context and EPSA 2021 Edition	
<b>What can we learn from the best government innovations by European countries?</b>	<b>7</b>
1. Introduction	7
2. Mission-driven innovation	8
3. Collaborative innovation	9
4. Collaboration between public organisations and market operators	10
5. Use of visualisations	10
6. Using incubators in Portugal and Latvia	11
7. Responsiveness	11
<b>To conclude</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Annex</b>	<b>14</b>
EPSA 2021 innovative category	

---

## EPSA 2021 PUBLICATIONS

General Report

Editors

**Christoph Klika**

**Veronica Menegatto**

Authors

**Michael Burnett**

**Christoph Klika**

**Veronica Menegatto**

The European Public Sector Award and Green Public Administration: Challenges and Opportunities for Implementing the Green Deal

**Christoph Klika**

Digitalisation and Engagement: Transparency, Inclusion, Privacy and Security in the Public Sector

**Giulietta Marani and Clara Cotroneo**

What Can We Learn from the Best Government Innovations by European Countries?

**Menno Spaan and Giulietta Marani**

No Innovation Without a Crisis?

**Menno Spaan**



European Institute of Public Administration  
Institut européen d'administration publique



EPSA 2021 is supported by  
the European Commission

EPSA 2021 is supported by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support (DG REFORM), through the Technical Support Instrument (TSI). The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and not necessarily those of EIPA. This EPSA Paper may not be reproduced in any form without the prior permission of the author.  
© 2021 EIPA, Maastricht

European Institute of Public Administration  
O.L. Vrouweplein 22 | P.O. Box 1229  
6201 BE Maastricht | The Netherlands

+31 43 32 96 222  
info@eipa.eu  
[www.eipa.eu](http://www.eipa.eu)

# EPSA 2021 AND INNOVATIVE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Christoph Klika

The eighth edition of the European Public Sector Award takes place in exceptional circumstances. Early in 2020, Europe was hit by the Covid-19 pandemic and since then, EU institutions and Member States have been grappling with the political, economic and social effects. Responding to the challenge of a cross-border public health crisis and recovering from the economic consequences has moved to the centre of attention for policymakers and citizens.

While Covid-19 has produced exceptional circumstances, it is nevertheless important to remember that societies are faced with continuing challenges which will outlast the current crisis. To address climate change, the excessive use of natural resources, the loss of biodiversity, social justice, equality and equal opportunities in the digital age – to name but a few – are continuing challenges for policymakers in the EU and in the Member States at all levels of government. These challenges are reflected in the current priorities of the EU and the three categories of EPSA 2021: Green, Digital and Innovative Public Administration.

The innovative category of EPSA 2021 links to various initiatives at the international level, in the EU and in the Member States. Although the EU does not have the competence to adopt legislation geared towards public sector innovation, several initiatives exist which aim foster innovation, support Member States and facilitate cooperation among administrative bodies. The report *Powering European Public Sector Innovation*, released by the Commission in 2013 in the midst of the recovery from the financial crisis, is a landmark document in this respect. The report is based on the premise that the role of the public sector is not only to facilitate social and economic innovation, but to innovate the delivery of public services to better respond to societal challenges. In light of

the exceptional circumstances of the EPSA 2021 edition, this premise is still relevant today. There is, furthermore, a strong link to the green and public administration, given that many innovations aim for sustainability, 'greening' and digitalisation.

In the recent Staff Working Document 'Supporting Public Administrations', the Commission gives an overview of the various EU support instruments to cope with current and future challenges. In the document, the Commission calls on all stakeholders to turn innovation into an integral part of public administration. This will require fundamental changes of organisational culture, new skill sets for public officials and citizen involvement. Given the complexity of current and future challenges, efficient, inclusive and effective public service delivery will be crucial to maintain public trust in governments' abilities to cope with these challenges. In total, 60 projects on innovative public administration were submitted to EPSA 2021 (out of 126). In addition to the winners, 11 Good Practice Certificates were awarded in the this category; one project received special recognition for responding to the Covid-19 crisis. The category includes a diverse range of projects. In many cases, administrative processes were subject to innovation (often including digitalisation and/or citizen participation), other cases offered innovative solutions for public service delivery. In either case, all projects highlight the creativity of public administrations at European and national level in addressing a variety of challenges related to the digital transformation.

In this report, Menno Spaan and Giulietta Marani present some of these cases in more detail. Based on several conceptual themes of innovation, the report discusses the conditions and potential constraints for successful *innovation*.

# WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE BEST GOVERNMENT INNOVATIONS BY EUROPEAN COUNTRIES?

Menno Spaan and Giuletta Marani

## 1. Introduction

Innovation is the successful introduction of something new – something that didn't exist in the sector before. Something truly different, which experts are not likely to consider merely as an improved version of something that already exists. It can be a new product, a new public service or a new internal process that is used to make a product or provide a service.

There are several reasons why innovation in the public sector is important. First of all, public organisations have the responsibility to provide solutions to problems in society, which is why they should put maximum effort into looking for new ways to address these problems. Working on new solutions also allows public organisations to respond quickly to incidents in society. Public organisations become attractive places to work if innovation is part of the job. With digital possibilities increasingly being used as business models for private companies and considerably impacting society, public organisations need to be in front to influence developments and to keep track of what is happening.

The innovations submitted for the 2021 Public Sector Award give us a view on what is happening in the field of innovation and renewal in Europe. As members of the selection committee, we were impressed with the diversity of the submitted innovations in approach and methods. In this paper, we will address the developments we see in Europe in terms of innovation and renewal. The excellent examples that were presented deserve to be shared, so we can learn from them.

Part of these examples are in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, showing the responsiveness of public organisations, but most are innovation and renewals we also see to a wider extent in our work field.

The focus of this paper will be on six themes: mission-driven innovation, collaborative innovation, cooperation between government and market, the use of visualisations, the practice of incubators and responsiveness in times of crisis. Looking at innovations that the selection committee gave a high score to and additionally drawing on related innovations that were submitted, we see that these areas constitute the frontline of innovations in Europe.

## 2. Mission-driven innovation

In her book *Mission Economy: A Moonshot Guide to Changing Capitalism*, Mariana Mazzucato describes how mission-driven or mission-oriented innovation is significant as a catalyst for innovation. Mission-oriented innovation is technological, social and organisational innovation that aims to achieve one or several societal challenges (missions) and create public value. We see a great deal of mission-driven innovation in the EU, based on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These missions and corresponding tasks are increasingly becoming too large for a single party to handle, therefore parties are adopting a joint approach to innovation. Cooperation between the private sector, government and the scientific community (triple helix) is becoming more common to accomplish these missions and to create value together, for both social issues – such as climate change or poverty – and technological developments. Citizens get a role in the realisation of policies, sometimes even in combination with the triple helix, thus leading to a quadruple helix.

Also, from the drive of public organisations themselves we see that innovation is brought about in a mission-driven way.

### Austria joins hands to improve climate

Austria is working on a climate mission in cooperation with the authorities, the scientific community, the private sector and citizens, both on a national and urban level. Austria has the ambition to achieve climate neutrality in 2040 and to become a European pioneer in terms of climate protection. This requires new approaches, particularly involving mobility. To this end, the country drew up a research and innovation (R&I) mobility strategy. The mission-oriented approach focuses on system solutions and identifies four mission areas that are considered crucial for climate neutrality. The mission areas 'Cities: Promoting climate-neutral urban mobility' and 'Regions: Mobilising and sustainably connecting rural areas' focus on the spatial dimension, with its social and economic relationships driving the need and demand for mobility. The mission areas 'Digitisation: Efficient and climate-friendly operation of infrastructure, mobility, and logistics services' and 'Technology: Developing environmentally friendly transport technologies' highlight two technology-based linchpins and address the potential offered by digitisation and other technological developments

in achieving a climate-neutral mobility system. With this R&I mobility strategy, Austria identified ways to avoid traffic and shift traffic to public transport and active mobility, by increasing energy efficiency and replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy sources. The R&I mobility strategy was created in an inclusive process, in which stakeholders from different mobility areas, as well as contiguous sectors and citizens, joined hands.

The project Klima-Informationssystem (KIS) Graz – climate innovation city Graz – is a demonstration of the urban approach. The project operates in the area of climate action and in addition, it contributes to achieving seven other SDGs. KIS Graz also engaged the authorities, the scientific community, the private sector and citizens. This project excels in involving citizens. The advisory body for climate protection and the municipal workgroup for climate protection were in continuous close contact with the advisory body for civic participation of the city of Graz and the municipal department of civic participation. This way, citizens could make a contribution via a climate conference and the Climate Culture Pavilion. Furthermore, in March and April, the people of Graz had the opportunity to submit project ideas up to €100,000 each. The younger generation was involved as well; in the summer, students developed sustainable business models, in a joint effort with the Green Tech Cluster and universities and supported by successful companies in Graz. This way, Austria offers an example of how to involve people in strategy formulation and approach when it comes to a theme such as climate.

### Identity as a leading principle in Vienna, Austria

Vienna is, for many people, associated with human rights. The United Nations is based in the city and The World Conference on Human Rights took place here, which led to The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, stipulating the fundamental role of cities and the region in promoting and protecting human rights. There is a reason for the city to take the lead in this respect; it is strongly committed to respect and protect human rights with a declaration that was passed by the municipal council. In 2015, the Human Rights Office of Vienna was founded to actively tackle this, focusing on the issue on all levels: in politics, in public organisations with measures to promote openness, diversity and political participation with equal opportunities in all sectors of life, but also internationally to increase awareness and Human Rights education. Identity as a leading principle for your mission – that is the pretext in Austria.



### **Bottom-up process in Wallonia, Belgium**

The Public Service of Wallonia comprises seven operational directorates with 136 local authorities. Involving all employees, they went through an intensive process asking, bottom-up, what this public body should look like in 2030. This sparked hundreds of proposals that were widely supported when employees voted for them. There were web pages, online sessions and phone consultations, so every effort was made to make the government of Wallonia transparent in 2030 by formulating the improvement targets this requires. The project shows that mission-driven innovation can also be organised this way, from the inside, focusing on an individual public organisation.

## **3. Collaborative innovation**

Authorities increasingly work together while focusing on the target group. Below are some examples.

### **Citizens are central in Turkey**

In the Nilüfer district of Turkey, a project unfolded where in close cooperation with all layers of the population, but particularly by looking at the future through the eyes of youngsters, a plan was developed for the period 2020–2024. This plan formulates objectives with respect to economic development, ecology, social development, urban and rural development, and corporate development. A total of 149 projects were defined, 25 key performance indicators were designated and a meticulous system of monitoring objectives was set up, involving the target group themselves. My city, my future comprised workshops for all layers of the population. The results were first shared with the public and later with city council members, who could also provide input. The project is a far-reaching case of civic participation with several methods that can be used by other public organisations.

### **The target group is the focus of new policy in Cyprus, Austria, Romania and Slovenia**

A great example of focusing on a target group in policymaking is the prison system of Cyprus. Where previously the accent was on retaliation, they radically changed the system by putting humane custody at its heart, providing opportunities to fight drug addiction and, by means of training opportunities, working on reintegration in society. This made Cyprus the country that went from the highest suicide rate in Europe to the lowest.

Austria, too, demonstrates how national and regional collaborations work by putting activities for youngsters in the social domain under one roof with activities for finding employment. Youngsters here have one point of contact for help in both areas.

In the Orsova Day Care Centre for Children with Disabilities in Romania, children suffering from developmental disabilities (e.g. autism spectrum disorder) could no longer have therapy due to Covid. The therapy focuses on early education for integration in school and in society. The centre completely transformed its approach and supported the parents in the Covid period when their children were at home, and they found it difficult dealing with the situation. Daily routines were broken, restrictions on going out caused stress. The family became part of the medical team. They performed tasks with their children, the results of which were watched by the medical team through video analysis, and they were helped via feedback forms and individual coaching. This yielded far-reaching insights into how parents can play a role by coaching and guiding them.

A wonderful way of connecting policy areas and putting youngsters centre stage is a project in Ljubljana, Slovenia. From the profits made by working on more sustainable public buildings that cost less energy, 10% is spent on programmes for youngsters where they learn about dealing with fossil fuels and ecology. This includes awareness of the use of natural resources, attention to sustainable development in schools, but also attention to natural sciences and the promotion of technical professions. The programmes are applied in kindergarten and at all levels of primary education where teachers are trained to use methods with practical components and lots of experiments.

### Cooperation between public organisations in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, the Zicht op ondermijning (Within sight of undermining) project shows how to accomplish extensive cooperation between authorities. A dashboard was developed bringing together all information from different public organisations to gain insight into undermining activities. Twenty public organisations signed an agreement committing themselves to tackling subversive crime by using data analyses and learning from them. Property, fraud and drugs were the key subjects for which data were collected and combined. The Central Bureau of Statistics made them available on a platform created by executive organisations of the national government. The dashboard was used by the local authorities, police, banks, and regional and national centres of expertise. Beside the organisations mentioned, various ministries, tax authorities and the National Prosecutors Office are involved.

## 4. Collaboration between public organisations and 4. market operators

Another form of cooperation involves the restructuring of the relationship between public organisations and market operators. Below are some good examples to implement this process.

### Innovative cooperation between market and government in Belgium and Ireland

In tendering procedures we often think of heavily regulated standard procedures that are time-consuming for private, tendering parties. The Belgian federal government assigned a group of employees to exploit the possibilities in the market more broadly by using tendering procedures in a different way. This is done to prevent only large companies that have the time and capacity to bid for tendering procedures being used, thus addressing a larger part of the market. A small group of employees act as a catalyst for this process because they support colleagues from government organisations in a dedicated way, using a method that is easy to participate in by companies. In the process, insight is given into the results of the exploratory routes on a platform, so others can in turn learn from it and use it. The selection of initiatives takes place, for example, on the basis of criteria directed at innovation. This approach is a good example of an innovative collaboration between government and market.

E-Denderry shows cities how they can benefit from technological solutions via a new partnership between the market and the county. County Offaly in Ireland set up a collaboration with an international telecom provider. They developed a demonstration space to show this provider's Internet of Things (IoT) vision and the possibility of IoT, LoRaWan and smart town technology functionalities in the context of a rural town. The demonstration space shows how a town can improve urban management and build better services for civilians via sensors and monitoring equipment. This approach triggered direct contact with the town and different sections of the county. Moreover, the project helped elevate County Offaly to a 'national smart space'. The project shows how a different type of cooperation between the market and the authorities can help a county.

## 5. Use of visualisations

The complexity of innovations often begs clarification and collective signification. It is essential to ensure these parties understand the context and data, and can contribute to the content as this creates a sense of ownership. We see an increasing use of visualisations to create a clear picture and a common language: pictures, 3D images, but also physical, tangible places, like the above-mentioned e-Denderry project.

### Use of space images in Hungary

Dashboards and visualisations quickly provide partners insight into context and situation. Hungary makes smart use of this. Hungary uses continuous access to space images via the Hungarian Earth Observation Information System to give partners insight into negative environmental transformations. Changes in the environment can be observed in real time – this way, partners can intervene or advise more quickly. Because processing remote sensing data is not suitable for everyone, the system generates around 50 different monitoring products for airspace, forestry, agricultural and disaster management processes. This way, partners receive timely, reliable and relevant information about the environment.

### Visualisations for personal use in Poland

Other countries use visualisations to notify citizens, for personal use or as information. The Polish Geoportal integrates different data sources and makes official space data easily accessible to all citizens in one place online, in most cases free of charge. Data can be represented as three-dimensional visualisations. This way, Poland offers its citizens reliable, comprehensible and official information on the situation of land parcels and buildings. When for example someone plans to buy land for building in a very uneven or mountainous area, the National Geoportal provides insight into where substantial groundwork may be necessary. Furthermore, data can be used for the innovation of companies in the private sector and for research.

### Open and reusable data in Spain

The web portal in Castilla y León in Spain is a good local example of the use of open and reusable data to provide transparency on the daily Covid-19 pandemic circumstances. All health information on the impact of the pandemic is provided, using data minimisation where needed to protect the privacy of citizens. Users can see indicators, tables, graphs and maps that show the information in a way that is clear and understandable to any citizen. The portal also offers dashboards on home delivery, take-away services, unemployment, legal situations and emergency contracting. The web portal provides a final download section that allows downloading the data of the visualisations – 33 datasets – in different formats. This offers citizens of Castilla y León, researchers and professionals reliable and timely information at an uncertain time.

## 6. Using incubators in Portugal and Latvia

'Culture eats strategy for breakfast' is a well-known statement by Peter Drucker. Surely this is applicable to innovation, but on the basis of our findings we want to change it to 'Daily work eats innovation for breakfast'. Too little time, too little concern and inadequate capacity are all given as examples of reasons not to develop good ideas any further. So, it may be helpful to extricate a feasible idea from the noise of the primary process. A place to create distance from your own organisation and political context or a party that facilitates innovation and cooperation eases this process. We see a growth in the number of this type of intermediaries and incubators, and here are some good examples that are worth sharing.

### Experimentation and innovation laboratory in Portugal and Latvia

The Experimentation Laboratory for the Public Administration in Portugal (LabX) provides such a place, where people can work on innovation away from their own organisation. Public organisations, research centres, private organisations or organisations from the social sector can all submit their projects here. In an atmosphere of creativity, experiments are carried out to work on new and updated public services. The exchange of knowledge plays a key role. Projects comprise, for example, the deployment of artificial intelligence for applying the virtual assistant by the Tax and Customs Authority, the search for alternative digital applications like gaming to involve youngsters in policymaking, and the modernisation of portals for government organisations. As a standard, LabX makes experimenting part of the responsibilities of the authorities.

A similar role is played by the Innovation Laboratory in Latvia. Using principles such as design thinking and iterative thinking, they develop new products and services.

## 7. Responsiveness

Finally, we see that some authorities have been highly responsive during the Covid period, as a quick response to the situation was essential.

### Slovenia, Austria and Greece reacting to the crisis

During the Covid pandemic, the city council of the Slovenian city of Ljubljana (population 293,000) immediately responded to the problem that hospital staff could not use public transport. They deployed the electric vehicles that are normally used for older and disabled people in an ecological zone of the city centre, at the same time using them to distribute meals to vulnerable people. This helped 1,400 employees in the health sector. More than 30,000 meals were delivered by 525 vehicles. The city promptly built on the principle of demand-responsive transport they had already initiated in other areas.

In Austria, another possibility to support vulnerable people in the Covid period was used by promoting the use of the smartphone by creating instruction videos and distributing them to, for instance, senior citizens' organisations. This facilitated access to government information, social contact and placing orders on the internet for a group of people who are digitally less competent.

The city council of Serres (population 201,000) in Greece clearly demonstrates what the possible responses are to the impact caused by Covid. Organising digital meetings with inhabitants to stay in touch, giving out tests to measure infection rates, launching a mental health helpline, distributing medicine and food packages and providing face masks and other sanitary material are all cases in point.

The response to the crisis can also be more reflective. This happens in Greece, where the Centre of International and European Economic Law set up a website for the continuous monitoring of fundamental rights, the protection of personal data, calls for tender and state aid. Authorities took emergency measures that inevitably infringe on the fundamental rights of citizens in unprecedented times. As this has a huge impact, it is crucial to respect the rule of law in the process. The centre provides insight by comprehensively publishing the latest legislation and bibliography, at an EU and national level, in the relevant areas.

## To conclude

The frontrunners in Europe are a rich sample of the opportunities for innovation by public organisations and within public organisations. Cooperation across borders is crucial in this respect. Putting the target group centre stage in policymaking is a key entry point, as well as the increased use of digital means to disclose information and visualise the effects of a policy. The practice of incubators leads to innovations being carried through instead of being consumed in the day-to-day, here and now. And, finally, a Covid crisis shows us how responsive authorities can be. The described examples offer great entry points to shape innovation and renewal. However, if you decide to try this, be ware that because innovation and renewal ideas are not always suitable for copying. Please use the entry points as an inspiration – but refine them in your own context!

---

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The EU cooperates closely with the OECD, for instance, through the Observatory of Public Sector Innovation (OPSI). See: <https://www.oecd-opsi.org/>

<sup>2</sup> Powering European Public Sector Innovation: Towards A New Architecture. Report of the Expert Group on Public Sector Innovation. European Commission, Brussels, n.d.

[https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/system/files/ged/42-public\\_sector\\_innovation\\_-\\_towards\\_a\\_new\\_architecture.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/system/files/ged/42-public_sector_innovation_-_towards_a_new_architecture.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Commission Staff Working Document, Supporting Public Administration in EU Member States to Deliver Reforms and Prepare for the Future, Brussels, 29.4.2021, SWD(2021) 101 final.

[https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/detail?ref=SWD\(2021\)101&lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/documents-register/detail?ref=SWD(2021)101&lang=en)

---

## Annex: EPSA 2021 innovative category

### EPSA 2021 Award Winner

LabX – experimentation laboratory for the public administration	Portugal	AMA – Administrative Modernisation Agency
---	----------	---

### EPSA 2021 Second Place Award

Government buys innovation	Belgium	NIDO
----------------------------	---------	------

### EPSA 2021 Award Nominee

At a distance, but close to you	Romania	6th District General Directorate for Social Care and Child Protection
Innovative administration in Cyprus prisons	Cyprus	Cyprus Prisons Department
My city, my future!	Turkey	Nilüfer Municipality

### Special recognition for responding to the Covid-19 crisis

At a distance, but close to you	Romania	6th District General Directorate for Social Care and Child Protection
---------------------------------	---------	---

EPSA 2021 Good Practice Certificate

The innovation laboratory	Latvia	The State Chancellery
U25 – together for young people in Vienna	Austria	City of Vienna, Municipal Department for Social Welfare, Social and Public Health Law
Human rights go local Vienna, the city of human rights	Austria	Vienna City Administration
Blueprint for artificial intelligence adoption	Belgium	Flanders Investment & Trade
Stay home – the Municipality of Serres stays at work for you	Greece	Municipality of Serres
Chivalry in Ljubljana: assisting citizens and improving their quality of life	Slovenia	The City of Ljubljana
Raising children’s awareness of sustainable development	Slovenia	The City of Ljubljana
The public policy planning and evaluation area	Spain	Andalusian Institute of Public Administration

