

Next 2 Met | Interreg Europe  
Increasing attractiveness of Next2Met regions with soft digitalisation  
measures

**Action Plan**

Barcelona Provincial Council

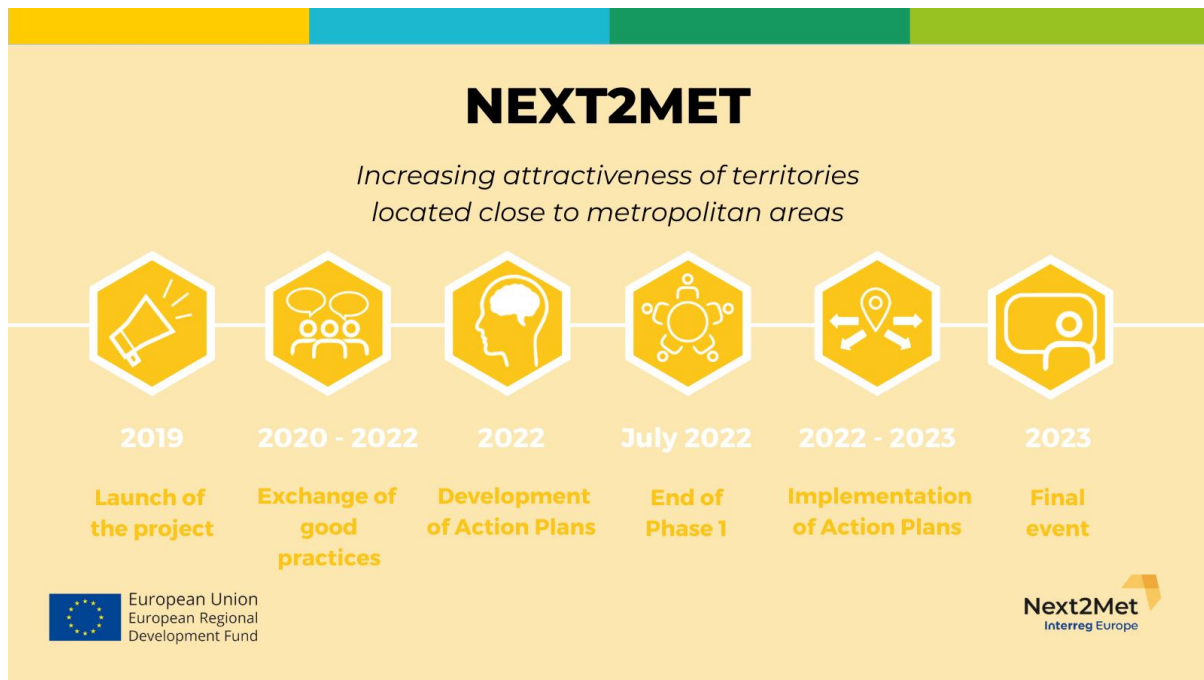
Spain

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## Project and Policy Context



**Next2Met** is an innovative interregional exchange project, co-financed by the Interreg Europe programme, which aims at increasing attractiveness - for knowledge, opportunities, and capital - of territories located close to metropolitan areas.

These areas are confronted with a lack of tools and critical mass of research, development, and innovation, and therefore struggle with keeping experienced small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as highly qualified people in the region.

In this context, Next2Met worked for the improvement of policy instruments through interregional learning processes in **6 different regions**, focusing on **soft digitalisation measures** applied to a variety of sectors such as health care, transport, tourism, and public administration, among others.

These actions, nurtured by the good practices exchange that took place between partners throughout the project's lifetime, are linked to a broader European policy context, which is constantly developing in response to major challenges and crises, as the COVID-19 pandemic.

By improving services and products with the use of technology and digitalisation measures, Next2Met contributes to the **digital and green transition**, helping the territories in reaching the Green Deal objectives. Furthermore, the project also addresses the following key goals identified in the European

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Commission's Communication [“Digital Compass: The European Way for the Digital Decade”](#), which sets out digital ambitions for the next decade:

- a digitally skilled population and highly skilled digital professionals;
- secure and sustainable digital infrastructures;
- digital transformation of businesses;
- digitalisation of public services.

Digitalisation processes and investments have been accelerated by the COVID-19 crisis which brought about a complete shift of perspective and made clear the necessity to foster digital development in numerous sectors. New trends and the use of digital tools in people's daily lives as well as in businesses' operations have emerged in this period and served as useful material and sources of inspiration for the project. As a reaction to the changes brought by the COVID-19 pandemic on society and the way we live and work, the project has oriented its focus towards certain dimensions, already enclosed in its initial approach of “soft digitalisation”, such as 360° quality of life, multilocality and hybrid work, citizen participation and inclusion. The connection with citizens and their involvement in territorial development through bottom-up and participative initiatives has been further considered by the Next2Met project because of their relevance in the present context and at European policy level.

In fact, a human-centred perspective is at the core of the European Commission's vision for Europe's digital transformation by 2030. In this regard, on 26 January 2022, the Commission proposed an inter-institutional solemn [declaration](#) on digital rights and principles for the digital decade, which includes a specific point on citizens' participation in the democratic process at all levels and underlines the importance of citizens' control over their own data.

Indeed, the Next2Met project has been able to adapt to this new context and ultimately benefit from it, by fostering the exchange of good practices among its partner regions and beyond and further implementing digitalisation measures that improve people's lives and increase regional attraction.

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## I. General Information

Project	Next2Met- Increasing attractiveness of Next2Met regions with soft digitalisation measures
Partner organisation	Barcelona Provincial Council
Country	Spain
NUTS2 region	Cataluña

### Contact details

Name and surname	Ana Isabel Duch
Email address	duchta@diba.cat
Phone number	+34 93 4720602

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## II. Policy Context

The Action Plan aims to impact

- Investment for Growth and Jobs programme
- European Territorial Cooperation programme
- **Other regional development policy instrument/s**

Name of the policy instrument addressed

**Local Governments Network:  
Service Catalogue, Technologies  
and Digital innovation**

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### III. Details of the Actions Envisaged

## ACTION 1: Monitoring of the new selection criteria to offer resources to municipalities for digitalization and smart initiatives

### 1. Background

Barcelona Provincial Council (*Diputació de Barcelona*) is a local public authority that provides technical, economic and technological support to 311 municipalities of the province of Barcelona (Spain), fostering quality local services throughout the province.



The policy instrument that Barcelona Provincial Council uses to provide resources to local governments in the region is the **Local Governments Network: Service Catalogue, Technologies and Digital innovation** (hereinafter **Service Catalogue**). The objective of the Service Catalogue is to grant economic, technical and material resources to local governments. Resources should ensure social cohesion, stimulate local economic development, enhance employment and guarantee balanced, sustainable territorial development. To rebalance territorial asymmetries, it pays special attention to municipalities with less population, resources and infrastructures.

#### 1.1 RIS3 Strategy, Smart Region Strategy and Policy Instrument

The Government of Catalonia is the authority responsible to define the Smart Specialisation of Catalonia (RIS3CAT). The digital strategy of Barcelona Provincial

Council operates in coherence with the Catalan Digital Agenda and the RIS3CAT Strategy from the Government of Catalonia. Taking into account these strategies and with the vision to help municipalities to design and implement initiatives in the field of smart cities and digitalisation, the Barcelona Provincial Council defined in 2015 the **Smart Region project**.

The Smart Region project from Barcelona Provincial Council aims to facilitate the implementation of smart solutions in municipalities and to provide information and communication technology (ICT) services and common applications throughout the region. The Smart Region project has implemented different actions and initiatives in the field of digitalisation to contribute to an efficient management of services and resources; achieve economic and environmental savings; increase citizen participation and transparency; and improve the quality of life of people.

In order to implement these smart actions and initiatives in the region, the Smart Region strategy offered local authorities in the region in 2019, at the beginning of Next2Met project, three lines of support for deploying smart city strategies and innovative projects (i.e. three resources in the Service Catalogue, which is Barcelona Provincial Council's Policy Instrument).

## 2. Action

### 2.1 Background

As mentioned, the Service Catalogue is Barcelona Provincial Council's Policy Instrument to offer resources to municipalities in the region of Barcelona. The Service Catalogue pays special attention to municipalities with less population, resources and infrastructures, in order to rebalance territorial asymmetries.

However, the amount of resources available and the attractiveness for knowledge, opportunities and capital that exists in the municipalities in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area and the municipalities in the rest of the region of Barcelona is still very uneven. The Barcelona Metropolitan area has many factors that are making it increasingly attractive: top strategic position in the Mediterranean, good quality of life, pool of talent, good transport infrastructure, well-developed key economic sectors (e.g. industry, ICT, trade, tourism, health...), a dynamic start-up and innovative ecosystem, etc. However, the non-metropolitan area of the Barcelona region does not have the same strength, and is still resulting in important territorial asymmetries.

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These territorial asymmetries are greater in regards to developing innovative projects and digitalization initiatives, which are usually clustered in the Barcelona metropolitan area. Therefore, **there is a key challenge to reduce digital territorial asymmetries in the region and to enhance the attractiveness of the non-metropolitan area to develop digital projects and smart initiatives beyond the Barcelona Metropolitan Area. These challenges were identified in the regional territorial analysis that was carried out at the beginning of the Next2met project and that was key to develop our Action Plan.**

### Lessons learned from Next2Met partners

The main goal of the Barcelona Provincial Council's participation in the Next2Met project was to use interregional learning and exchange of good practices from other partners to improve the management of its digitalisation resources. In other words, Barcelona Provincial Council aimed at improving the way the Service Catalogue is managed, thanks to a change in the strategic focus of the policy instrument (structural change).

**Activities carried out during Policy Learning Events #1 and #2, as well as during other Next2Met webinars with the rest of the partners, have highlighted the importance to adjust digitalisation resources to increase opportunities in the regions next to big metropolitan areas.** Experiences and good practices shared by the regions of **Lower Austria (Austria)** and **Päijät-Häme (Finland)** have been particularly inspiring on how to provide services that are more accessible and cost efficient by means of digitalisation. For instance, the Digitalisation Strategy of Lower Austria and its objective to strength the rural areas has been an important source of inspiration. With this vision, **it was decided to modify the three resources offered within the Smart Region Strategy for the Service Catalogue 2021 so as to provide a special focus to support small- and medium-sized municipalities in the non-metropolitan areas, with the final aim to support a sound development of local governments and to ensure balanced, sustainable territorial development.** It also aimed to strengthen capacity of priority sectors (RIS3) to enhance the attractiveness of the region beyond the Barcelona metropolitan area. The specific action that was carried out is described in section 2.2. *Action*.

In addition, discussions with other Next2Met partners on remote work and its importance to increase opportunities for people and business and to increase attractiveness of the territory have also influenced our policy change. In particular,

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exchanges with the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (Ireland) and its good practice on remote work and co-working spaces in rural areas (see [“Multi-fund development of digital hubs/co-working spaces in rural areas”](#)) have been a source of inspiration for the inclusion of a completely new economic resource in our policy instrument, the Service Catalogue 2021, called “a support to buy devices and software to facilitate remote work”. This will also be described more in detail in section 2.2. *Action*.

## 2.2 Action

### Policy change achieved

Based on the learnings from Next2Met exchanges, and with the main objective to adjust and improve digitalisation resources to increase opportunities in the region close to the Barcelona metropolitan area, **it was decided to modify the three resources offered within the Smart Region Strategy for the Service Catalogue 2021-2023.**

The main modification of our Policy Instrument was to lower the minimum population size of municipalities that can have access to these resources so now a greater number of smaller municipalities in the region of Barcelona have the opportunity to have access to more digitalisation resources to increase their opportunities for people, business and services, as well as to secure balanced territorial development and increase rural-urban innovation linkages. This improvement of our Policy Instrument can be defined as a “**Type 3: change in the strategic focus of the policy instrument (structural change)**”.

Firstly, the material resource called [“Technological platform for urban management”](#), a data management platform to improve urban management, was offered to municipalities with a population of more than 10,000 inhabitants in 2020, while from 2021 onwards municipalities of more than 2,500 inhabitants can have access to it.

Secondly, the minimum population requirement from municipalities to have access to the economic resource [“Acquisition of devices that can be integrated into the technological platform for urban management”](#) was also lowered, from municipalities with a population of more than 10,000 inhabitants in 2020 to municipalities with between 2,501 and 75,000 inhabitants in 2021.

And last but not least, the conditions needed to access the technical resource called [“Development of smart city strategies”](#) have also changed: from municipalities of

more than 5,000 inhabitants in 2020 to smaller municipalities and county councils of more than 2,500 inhabitants in 2021. The numbers of municipalities that now have access to these resources and that didn't have before the policy change are depicted in the subsection "Territorial impact" below.

In addition, a completely new economic resource was added to the Service Catalogue 2021: [a support to buy devices and software to facilitate remote work](#) (e.g. laptops, software, webcams, etc.) directed at smaller municipalities in the region (with a population below 20,000 inhabitants). This resource aimed at contributing to improve the endowment of equipment for teleworking and to achieve the maximum possible territorial coverage. This resource is, in great part, a result of the current COVID-19 situation and the need for more resources to facilitate remote work. However, discussions carried out in this regard during Next2Met exchanges with other partners on how to improve delivery of resources to facilitate remote work and to increase work and economic opportunities in next-to-metropolitan areas have also played a key role in offering this new resource for smaller municipalities in the region. This resource was only available in 2021.

**This policy change was already reported and approved in reporting period 3 (01/08/2020 to 31/01/2021).**

### Territorial impact

The Policy Change achieved is an important improvement in order to **better manage digitalisation resources**. Now a greater number of smaller municipalities in the region of Barcelona will have the opportunity to have access to more digitalisation resources to **increase their opportunities for people, business and services**, as well as to **secure balanced territorial development and increase rural-urban innovation linkages**.

For instance, from 2020 to 2021, the number of municipalities in the region of Barcelona that might have access to the Smart Region Platform (the material resource) **has increased by 105%** by lowering the population needed to have access to it. Similarly, we find **an increase of 31%** of municipalities from 2020 to 2021 that now can access the technical resource "Development of smart city strategies".

The beneficiaries of this policy change will be both the city councils themselves (directly) and the people living in smaller municipalities through better services offered by city councils (indirectly).

### Monitoring of policy change achieved

From January 2022 (already during Phase 1) to July 2023 (end of Phase 2), the policy change achieved described above will be monitored yearly. More specifically the monitoring will be as follows:

- During January-July 2022 the indicators described in section 7 will be collected and analysed for the Service Catalogue 2021. In January-February we will be able to analyse some of the indicators, in particular the ones that refers to technical and material resources. For the indicators that refers to the economic resources will be analysed from February to July 2022, as the economic justification takes a bit longer.
- In autumn 2022, internal meetings within the department in charge of the three abovementioned resources will take place in order to decide if changes in the requirements and conditions of the three main resources of the Smart Region Strategy will need to be implemented for the Service Catalogue 2023. If necessary, changes will be applied.
- In January-May 2023 the indicators described in section 7 will be collected and analysed for the Service Catalogue 2022.

### 3. Players involved

Barcelona Provincial Council directly manages our policy instrument. The resources described above are managed by the **Directorate of Technological Services and Corporative Systems of Barcelona Provincial Council**. Therefore, meetings within the team were carried out to make sure we introduced the lessons learned from Mext2met and to introduce the changes / modifications in the economic, technical and material resources we manage within our organisation in the Service Catalogue 2021-2023.

After 2021, meetings took place within the team in the Directorate of Technological Services and Corporative Systems of Barcelona Provincial Council in order to review if changes in the requirements and conditions for the three abovementioned resources needed to be changed. No further changes were introduced for the Service Catalogue 2022 and it will be reviewed internally again at the end of 2022 to see if changes need to be implemented for year 2023.

In addition, during **meetings with key stakeholders**, in particular with **municipalities** in the region, it was raised the attention of the importance of smaller municipalities to have greater access to resources for digitalisation and the development of innovative projects.

#### 4. Timeframe

The timeframe for the implementation and monitoring of Action 1 will be as follows:

##### **Next2Met Phase 1 (01/08/2019-31/07/2022):**

- **October-December 2020:** Modifications to the resources in the Service Catalogue were made.
- **January 2021:** New Service Catalogue 2021-2023 with modified and new resources were offered to municipalities in the region of Barcelona
- **October-December 2021:** Changes were introduced for Service Catalogue 2022: the above-mentioned new resource “a support to buy devices and software to facilitate remote work” will no longer be offered in the Service Catalogue 2022-2023, while the other three resources will remain as modified at the end of 2020.
- **January-July 2022:** Monitoring of Action 1 for the Service Catalogue 2021, by analysing indicators described in section 7. In January-February 2022 we will be able to analyse some of the indicators, in particular the ones that refers to technical and material resources, and some preliminary numbers for the economic resources. For the indicators that refer to the economic resources, they will be analysed from January to July 2022, as the economic justification takes a bit longer.

##### **Next2Met Phase 2 (01/08/2022-31/07/2023):**

- **October-December 2022:** Meetings within the organization will take place in order to decide if changes in the requirements and conditions of the three main resources of the Smart Region Strategy will need to be implemented for the Service Catalogue 2023.
- **January-July 2023:** Monitoring of Action 1 for the Service Catalogue 2022.

## 5. Costs

**No costs are expected.** The implementation and monitoring of the action described does not require additional financing, since it is managed by the Directorate of Technological Services and Corporative Systems of Barcelona Provincial Council.

## 6. Funding sources

**No additional funding is needed.** Barcelona Provincial Council directly funds and manages the policy instrument.

## 7. Monitoring and indicators

The process of implementing the action and its results will be monitored by the Directorate of Technological Services and Corporative Systems of Barcelona Provincial Council. Since our policy change was already reported and approved in reporting period 3, **the main action of our Action Plan is to monitor the policy change**, which is already described above in section 2.2. *Action*.

Regarding the **indicators**, the main performance indicator to monitor as defined in the Application Form is: **“Number of services from the Services Catalogue requested”**. However, it has been considered that it would be interesting to analyse not only the general number of the services requested from the Services Catalogue for each year of analysis, i.e. 2021 and 2022, but also the number of municipalities that now have access to these digitalisation resources *that, without the policy change, would not have had access*.

With this aim, we have included in the report for policy change in reporting period 5 a new performance indicator called **“Number of services from the Services Catalogue requested that, without the policy change, could not have been requested”** which we believe depicts very **valuable information on the territorial impact of the policy change**.

Therefore, the main indicators would be as follow:

### Phase 1:

- Number of services from the Services Catalogue 2021 requested (for each of

the three resources from the Smart Region Strategy)

- Number of services from the Services Catalogue 2021 requested that, without the policy change, *could not have been requested* (for each of the three resources from the Smart Region Strategy)
- Number of municipalities that received the economic support “a support to buy devices and software to facilitate remote work” in 2021 (in reporting period 6)

**Phase 2:**

- Number of services from the Services Catalogue 2022 requested (for each of the three resources from the Smart Region Strategy)
- Number of services from the Services Catalogue 2022 requested that, without the policy change, *could not have been requested* (for each of the three resources from the Smart Region Strategy)

<b>Date</b>	
<b>Signature</b>	
<b>Stamp of the organisation (if available)</b>	