



Connected



Resilient

VirtuALL supports an active ageing in rural areas of the central region of Portugal



SUMMARY

VirtuALL is a social innovation project that since 2019 has been encouraging elderly people in rural areas in Portugal to become active, learning how to use digital technologies and taking part in joint social activities. The project has also provided capacity building to formal and informal caregivers to use the project tools in order to promote a healthy and active ageing. Almost 2,000 people have already benefited from the project in six municipalities of the central region of Portugal and 20 other municipalities in the region will replicate the model in a LEADER interterritorial cooperation project from 2023.



CONTEXT

The Local Action Group (LAG) AD ELO carried out a diagnosis of rural areas in the central region of Portugal that showed an **increasing ageing population with low or no digital literacy and little physical activity** or participation in joint leisure activities, especially for those in more remote villages living alone at home. The VirtuALL project was proposed to answer these needs, focusing on the opportunities provided by social innovation and the latest innovation technology to improve the quality of life of this population segment. VirtuALL is being **implemented simultaneously in six municipalities** (Cantanhede, Figueira da Foz, Mealhada, Mira, Montemor-o-Velho and Penacova) in central Portugal, with the development of different tools and activities, designed for the elderly population still living in their own homes, promoting their cognitive, physical and social activity.

OBJECTIVES

VirtuALL aims to adjust social and technological tools that were previously used in the context of academic research to the needs of the elderly population living in rural areas in Portugal and, with these, improve people's quality of life by promoting a more active and healthy ageing. This social innovation project also wants to boost social participation of this target group while improving their digital literacy so they can be more independent in using certain tools that can be a big generational barrier for most elderly people.

Themes: Digital technologies, social inclusion, health and care. **Rural revitalisation**

Country: Portugal

Organisations: AD ELO - Bairrada and Mondego Local Development Association, a LEADER Local Action Group

Start & end date: 04/19 - Ongoing

Budget: First project (2019-2024): 471,782.20 €, Scale-up to other rural areas: 222,377.24 €

Funding sources: First project Portugal Social Innovation Programme, project number POISE-03-4639-FSE-000299. Co-funded by European Social Fund (ESF), national and local funding (six municipalities) during the period 2019-2022 and funded by the six municipalities for 2023-2024. Adaptation phase to other rural areas supported by the Portuguese LEADER cooperation measure. Co-funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), national and local private funding

Website: VirtuALL

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ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

VirtuALL is developed through a coordinated strategy that involves the LAG AD ELO as the project promoter and the different local municipalities, senior universities, private companies and social and solidarity organisations as “social investors”, a particular “function” in the Social Innovation Programme in Portugal. These actors contribute to the project in different ways such as making spaces available to host activities, sharing knowledge to develop tools, and engaging other stakeholders and beneficiaries. The activities started in 2019 in the six municipalities and can be divided into two phases. The **first phase involved more than 1,000 elderly people**, who were given the opportunity to tackle cognitive and physical challenges, individually and in groups, using technology tools, including augmented reality, virtual reality and games adjusted to this audience by professionals in 2D and 3D.

The **second phase**, targeted at formal and informal **caregivers** for the elderly, consisted of several capacity building activities, **divided into 50 different actions, in which more than 700 people** participated and learnt how to use the tools. Activities took place in spaces belonging to the municipalities and that, as far as possible, were easy to reach. Given that many participants live in remote areas, the project carried out decentralised activities to reach them. Weak or no access to an internet connection was another barrier addressed by the project.



RESULTS

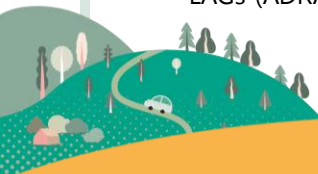
The project has created an ecosystem of social innovation where different technological tools are adapted to promote the socialisation, cognitive development and digital independence of the oldest in these rural societies. Tools such as physiosensing (balance and pressure assessment platform with 2D and 3D games), PEPE - Portable Exergame for Elderly (an augmented reality game platform), Oculus Quest 2 (virtual reality equipment) and tablets were some of the equipment used in the activities.

Despite its innovative approach, the project has a simple, **flexible and adaptive way of working**, which guarantees the motivation of the elderly while promoting their physical, mental, cognitive and social health, offering the possibility of replication in other areas. Besides the investment in equipment, the project used a significant part of the funding to involve qualified experts in the development of the tools and activities and to create local synergies among different actors. External evaluation of the project has shown very positive feedback for both the individual and the community development and has been the reason to scale up this project to other territories with similar needs.



SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

The commitment of public and private organisations, bringing together different expertise and access to funding, have been key to provide the senior population in these six rural areas with a quality and engaging experience able to tackle social and digital challenges through a non-conventional approach. Particularly important are the efforts to overcome financial constraints, such as the need to find sources for co-funding of the grants obtained, which was achieved thanks to the mobilisation of investors by the LAG and the municipalities. Since 2023, steps are being taken to expand and **adapt VirtuALL to another 20 municipalities** with the participation of three other LAGs (ADRACES, LEADER OESTE and ADIBER) through a LEADER cooperation project.



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