

Varaždin Takes the Wheel: Pioneering Responsible Innovation in Urban Mobility



Photo credit: SURAAA

A city-sized testbed for the governance of autonomous mobility

On 22-23 October 2025, the Croatian city of Varaždin hosted the first Demonstration Days of the GINEVRA project, marking a major milestone in Central Europe's efforts to shape the future of autonomous mobility. Over two days, the city transformed its airfield into a real-life test environment, where citizens, students, public institutions, and professionals experienced firsthand how responsible innovation can be governed on the ground.

Funded by the Interreg Central Europe Programme, GINEVRA helps cities develop and test governance tools to responsibly manage technological transformations - such as autonomous vehicles - while keeping citizens at the heart of decision-making.

From policy to practice

Organised by the City of Varaždin, together with GINEVRA partners, the Demonstration Days brought together a variety of community groups and local stakeholders to test the autonomous shuttle developed within the project.

Before the official opening, emergency services tested the vehicle on 21 October, ensuring that safety protocols were in place for all participants. The following days were structured around thematic sessions:

- **Day 1 (22 October):** Public authorities, students, elderly citizens, and people with special needs
- **Day 2 (23 October):** Academic institutions, professional associations, businesses, and emergency service representatives

Each group experienced a test drive and was invited to share feedback using the GINEVRA app, a digital tool designed to capture citizens' perceptions, comfort levels, and trust in autonomous technologies. This participatory approach turns the demos into both a technological experiment and a social dialogue on innovation governance.

Innovation with inclusion

While the self-driving shuttle captured attention, the true focus of Varaždin's Demo Days was **inclusion**. The city demonstrated how innovation can be tested in a way that is accessible, transparent, and beneficial to all segments of society - from schoolchildren learning about future mobility, to elderly residents exploring accessibility solutions.

This approach mirrors the essence of GINEVRA: that innovation must be co-designed, citizen-oriented, and ethically guided. By engaging multiple user groups, Varaždin proved that responsible governance is not only about regulating technology, but also about building trust and understanding citizens' perspectives.

In the national spotlight

The event attracted nationwide media coverage, with reports featured on Croatia's three national television channels (HRT, NOVA TV, and RTL), as well as local broadcaster VTV and numerous online media outlets.

Highlights include:

- [City of Varaždin Official News](#) : announcing the local initiative and its European relevance
- [eVaraždin](#) : featuring video coverage from the demonstration site
- [Mnovine.hr](#) : highlighting the public participation aspect and community engagement
- [Financije.hr](#) : focusing on the economic and technological dimensions of the project
- [Zimo Dnevnik](#) : presenting the innovation and technology narrative to national audiences
- [Regionalni.com](#) : offering photos and testimonials from participants at the airfield
- [Varaždinske Vijesti](#) : documenting the live demonstration and reactions from local citizens

 Watch the HRT national report here: [YouTube Video](#)

Leading by example

The Varaždin Demonstration Days marked the first real-world milestone of GINEVRA, setting a precedent for the project's next pilots in Cesena (Italy) and Bad Schönborn (Germany). Insights collected from participants will contribute to a transnational strategy for governing technological innovation across Central Europe.

As Mayor Neven Bosilj noted, “Varaždin has shown that even smaller cities can play a big role in shaping the future of mobility. We are proud to be part of a European initiative that not only tests technology but also builds trust, inclusion, and awareness among citizens.”

About GINEVRA

GINEVRA - Governance Innovation for Emerging Technologies in Responsible Automotive Mobility - is an Interreg Central Europe project supporting cities in governing transformative innovations such as autonomous vehicles. The project develops governance guidelines and citizen engagement tools tested in pilot actions across Europe, contributing to a transnational strategy for responsible innovation.

Discover how GINEVRA helps cities across Central Europe govern innovation responsibly:

👉 www.interreg-central.eu/projects/ginevra