

## Urban Highlight

UPDATES FROM THE URBAN DEVELOPMENT TECHNICAL FACILITY:

### Costa Rica Moves Toward Smart Cantons: Innovation and Cooperation to Address Urban Challenges

On October 21<sup>st</sup>, the Urban Development Technical Facility (UDTF) participated in the **1<sup>st</sup> National Congress of Smart Cantons**, organized by the Institute for Municipal Development and Advisory (IFAM) and the Chamber of Infocommunication and Technology (INFOCOM). This event brought together more than 200 municipal representatives to reflect on how digitalization and innovation can drive more sustainable and inclusive urban development.

As Coordinator of the **Smart Cities Track**, Alis Daniela Torres, Head of Green Digital Transformation in ICLEI Europe, presented the European vision of smart cities, showcasing examples of how technologies such as **smart lighting, data-driven air quality management**, and **digital twins for urban resilience** are helping European cities tackle environmental challenges.

In addition, the **City of Madrid** joined virtually, with José Luis Cifuentes, representing the Valdemingómez Technological Park, sharing Madrid's experience in waste management. This topic is particularly relevant for Costa Rican cantons, which face the challenge of improving efficiency in waste handling under the national regulatory framework. The presentation demonstrated how innovation and digital tools can optimize processes and reduce environmental impacts.

During the Congress, the UDTF took the opportunity to engage with several cities and identify their main challenges and opportunities for future collaboration. Discussions revealed that **interest goes beyond technology**: municipalities are seeking integrated solutions that combine innovation with sustainability, governance, and financing. Key areas mentioned include **waste management, sustainable mobility, natural resource protection, smart water management, and data-driven urban planning**.

This event was made possible thanks to the leadership of IFAM, which acts as a technical advisory body for local governments, providing training, technical assistance, and financing mechanisms, and INFOCOM, which promotes technological innovation and fosters dialogue between the public and private sectors.

During the mission, the UDTF engaged in an exchange with the European Union Delegation in Costa Rica, which promotes strategic initiatives such as the Electric Train project (TIBI), the Testbeds 5G program with Nokia and Ericsson for applications in urban sustainability and environmental monitoring, and the Regulatory Sandboxes in collaboration with the ITU to remove regulatory barriers and accelerate digital and artificial intelligence solutions in public services.

Costa Rica is positioning itself as a **regional leader in sustainability and responsible technology adoption**. The recent National Artificial Intelligence Strategy 2024–2027 reflects the country's commitment to integrating smart technologies into urban development. While the concept of "smart cities" is still emerging, the inclusive approach of smart cantons enables municipalities of all sizes to participate in this transformation.