

# Discussion Paper

## 11 AVENUES. 11 PROPOSALS

### URBANISATION

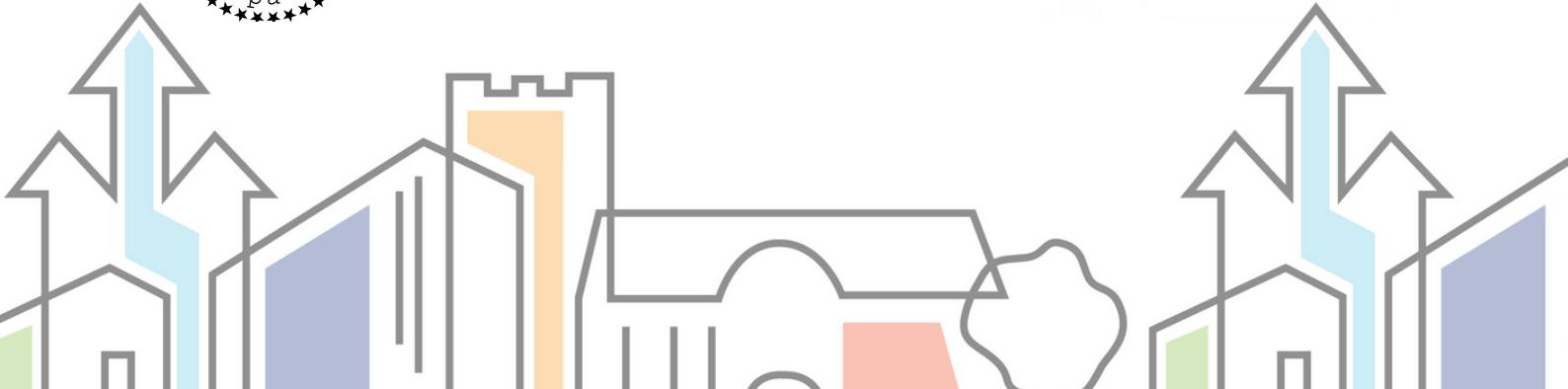
With the adoption of the EU Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021-2027 accompanied by a unique Recovery Plan conditions have been created to develop a more just, resilient and sustainable Europe. A robust and new cohesion policy is one of the cornerstones of this ambitious endeavour.

The 'Meet the Citizen 2.0' project of the European House covers 5 countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CZ, HU, HR, RO and SK); all of them are massive beneficiaries of the EU Cohesion Fund. Our 11 working papers indicate possible avenues how to use effectively these financial instruments in remote, less developed areas of these countries highlighting not only the importance of EU assistance in daily life of citizens but simultaneously contributing to reducing the still significant gap between the citizens and the EU institutions.

Each paper of ours offers not only a brief analyses of an important aspect of cohesion policy in Central and Eastern Europe but proposes also practical solutions for the involvement of citizens, their organisations and other stakeholders in practising partnership for making cohesion policy a success.



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Urbanisation in Europe is entering into a new era. Actions shall be taken in these turbulent times to sustain high living standards and to ensure equal access to education, health, social care and transport. In doing so, the social cohesion of urban communities can be strengthened in a more efficient way. Planners and decision-makers of city governances in Central Europe should deepen the already existing cooperation patterns with citizens and their organisations.

Europe is a Union of cities and towns where around 75% of the population of the EU are concentrated. Although there are general trends in urbanisation across Europe, such as population growth, emerging centres for technology, innovation hubs and businesses, the urban landscape in Central Europe has its own characteristics.

The Central European region involved in Interreg programmes covers an area of over 1 million square km with around 150 million people. The region has highly urbanised clusters, but the overall degree of urbanisation is below the EU average. Central Europe has 120 cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants. Despite this number, the population is evenly distributed across the urban and rural areas in the region. Around one third of the population lives in big cities, 37% in big territorial units (regions) and 30% in rural areas.

At the same time, it can be observed that Germany, where 23% of the population live in rural areas, is the most urbanised country in the region. In contrast, Austria, Slovakia and Slovenia are the most rural countries where the share of population of the rural areas varies from 37% to 45%. The characteristics of the region also highlight long-existing differences such as development in the industrialised areas including growth poles of capital city agglomerations like Vienna, Budapest, Berlin, Prague and Warsaw versus rural and peripheral areas.

The future prospects for development in the urban areas in Central Europe forecast a more dynamic and challenging environment. In the new era of urbanisation, the cities of the region need to be more human-centred, sustainable and responsive to challenges caused by climate change, digital transition and the socio-economic effects of global pandemics. These cross-cutting issues cannot be separated from each other which means that civil actors who intend to engage more in shaping urban policies, need to undergo a learning process. "Spatial planning with respect to green infrastructure", "smart urban mobility models", "zero-emission urban transport", "green urban mobility services and technologies", "green and smart cities". These are some of the key terms brought into important documents with which city planners are working and including in concrete proposals for urban governances.

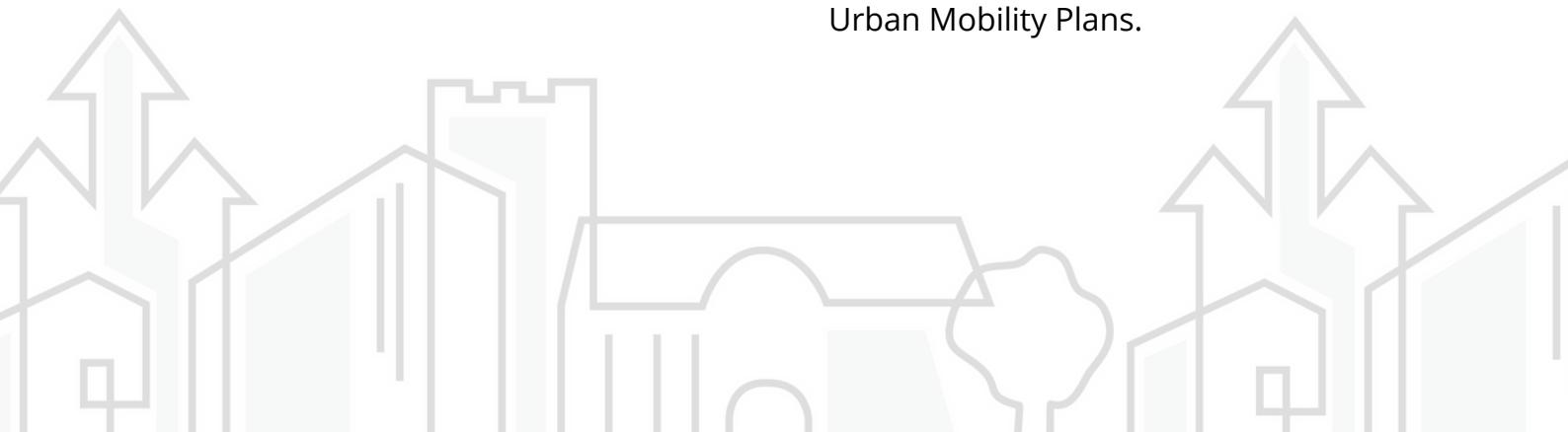
What do these terms mean exactly? What are the social aspects behind the terms? Do all civil actors, who want to shape urban policies, know the exact meaning of those terms? Can they use basic documents on urban development strategies in order to prepare their own contribution? Those documents also provide an additional knowledge basis for making a relevant and high-quality civil contribution to urban development in the Central European region.

In answering the above questions, the so-called integrated approach and spatial planning must be mentioned; they are tools for elaborating actions in urban policy matters. Civil actors in Central Europe must learn how to use these tools that help them to be professionally better prepared to cooperate with urban policymakers and city planners and involved in the implementation of new urban initiatives. Documents on urban development mentioned above contain some issues considered as fields of civil contribution in urban policy domains:

- to ensure access for elderly and disabled people to urban public transport;
- to start educational campaigns on greener urban mobility services;
- to launch partnerships for reducing urban-rural disparities in access to education and training.

As regards partnerships, dialogue and other forms of cooperation, the consultation mechanism has proved to be an efficient tool for civil actors to shape urban policies. There are many good practices in Central Europe which show how consultations between representatives of local communities and the urban governance have been successfully carried out e.g., on transport issues and environmental protection. Consultations shall involve more citizens in the future not only on large-scale constructions but also on smaller-scale projects. A consultation mechanism that includes well-prepared civil organisations promoting the real needs of citizens in a professional way can lead to significant changes in urban development plans and measures. In this way, urban policies can be brought closer to the citizens.

Successful civil contributions need stable funding as well. Civil actions must be linked more to the EU Funds available within the 2021-2027 financial framework. The Union is encouraging applicants to combine simultaneously different EU funding sources (e.g., European Social Fund, Interreg, Erasmus) in preparing their projects. The Union also suggests that future project owners should mobilise best practices, innovative approaches and technologies through existing networks and initiatives such as CIVITAS or the European Platform on Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans.



## Follow-up, proposals

The growth of urbanisation in Central Europe stresses the importance of existing partnerships, consultation mechanism and the creation of new forms of cooperation with citizens and their organisations. Proven tools for promoting civil interests should be combined with a learning process on how to make a more professional contribution to shaping urban policies such as education, training and health.

Therefore, it is highly recommended to disseminate best practices and to organize training courses for key stakeholders in the civil sphere on the practical use of an integrated approach and of spatial planning. In this way, greater involvement of civil actors can be better achieved in order to make cities more human-centred, sustainable and resilient to unexpected turbulences and external shocks.

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