Climate Resilient Urban Development

in Southeast Europe (SEE)

Virtual Event, 8 - 19 June 2020

Concept paper

Institutional context & background

It is set our future is going to be urban. Estimates show that by 2030, at least 61 percent of the global population will live in cities, while by 2050 more than 68 percent of the world's inhabitants is projected to be living in urban areas.[1] This rapid increase in urbanisation indicates on a growing demand for urban spaces to accommodate the population growth. This will mostly affect the developing world particularly addressing the issues, such as proper planning and governance, urban infrastructure and health & environmental concerns. Therefore, urbanisation is a growing challenge for today's world, as unplanned and poorly managed approach to it can give rise to inequity, pollution and costly sprawling development patterns. Nevertheless, this paradigm shift in the dynamics of world population and global urban transition should not only be seen as a problem, but an eye-opener. Urbanisation presents significant opportunities too, with vast potential for emerging cities to act as powerful development hubs.

By the same token, it has been increasingly understood that rapid urbanization means greater vulnerability to climate risks. Many cities worldwide face significant challenges arising from natural hazards. This is evident in the increased number of urban disasters such as extreme weather events, storms, cyclones, flooding, fires, landslides and water shortages in many less-developed and developing countries. To deal with these challenges, it is of great importance to take into consideration the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDGs 11 and 13 directly refer to the resilience of cities and human settlements as well as the mitigation and adaptation of climate change and its effects. These two intertwined goals are further developed

[1] UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2018). <https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/population/2018-revision-of-world-urbanization-prospects.html> accessed on 24 April 2020.

through the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), the Paris Agreement on Climate Change (UNFCCC). These processes are also reflected in the urban context within the New Urban Agenda (UN-Habitat) shaping more sustainable and resilient urban development pathways at global levels by stating: "*We commit ourselves to supporting the medium- to long-term adaptation planning process, as well as city-level assessments of climate vulnerability and impact, to inform adaptation plans, policies, programmes and actions that build the resilience of urban inhabitants, including through the use of ecosystem-based adaptation.*"[2]

The Southeast European region (SEE) marks one of the world regions, whereas the climate resilient urban development becomes a central pillar of local sustainability policies. Most of the countries in the region continue to face challenges arising from its dual transition from a planned to a market economy and from a rural to an urban economy. This transition is often accompanied by an increased regional disparity coupled with environmental and climate change challenges. In response to that, some cities and municipalities in the region have joined the EU Covenant of Mayors committing themselves to take measures to implement EU climate and energy objectives in their local constituencies. Nevertheless, the signatory cities often struggle with accomplishing their pledges and promoting reduction of targeted national and subnational emission levels.

The core problem lies in the level of preparedness of local urban practitioners to develop locally adapted solutions for climate challenges. On the other hand, there are already cities with significant experience in developing successful possible options that can offer their knowledge and skills. In exchange with each other there is a high potential to learn from peers and develop jointly appropriate solutions for these challenges.

Objectives of the concept paper

This concept paper forms the part of the Connective Cities[3] first learning process to be initiated in Southeast Europe. The main aim of this paper is to undertake a region profiling and to uncover key general trends, challenges and opportunities in climate resilient sustainable development. This is to create the thematic concept prior to the virtual dialogue event taking place in the region in June 2020. The aim of the virtual event is to contribute to get to know good practices from municipalities in SEE region

[2] Para 80 of the New Urban Agenda.
[3] Connective Cities – The Community of Practice for Sustainable Urban Development, Project Number: 19.6253.9-001.02. The project is funded by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). More information <https://www.connective-cities.net/en/> accessed on 18 May 2020.

with different local conditions via applying innovative digital solutions in the era of global flue pandemic.

The virtual event, thus, supports transforming innovative ideas into digital solutions especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 outbreak, as this latter continues to impact heavily the lifestyle at all levels including the sustainable urban development workers and we need to adapt to more innovative and agile ways of working for future crises responses. Here, the interest is mainly in pragmatic solutions and approaches that can be applied or adapted to the different regional/local contexts. Furthermore, the event will offer a virtual platform to discuss the challenges around the theme of climate resilient urban development and support municipalities in developing new project ideas among peers that can be further implemented in the respective home communities or in the framework of existing or new thematic municipal partnerships.

This fits under the overarching objective of Connective Cities that is to promote the exchange of municipal expertise and to mediate between supply of and demand for practical experience by mobilising urban practitioners. The project further seeks to build a network of urban practitioners, which will provide a systematic access to practice-oriented solutions for sustainable urban development by facilitating change and providing mutual support.

SEE Climate Resilient Urban Development – Challenges and Opportunities

SEE is comprised of two regions – the **Western Balkans (WB)** and the EU **Eastern Partnership countries (EaP)**.[4] Geographically three specific areas can be identified: the central part of the Western Balkans (mostly former Yugoslavia), the south-eastern part of the former Soviet Union (Moldova, Belarus and Ukraine) and the South Caucasus (Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan). While at first glance these blocks of countries look quite diverse – and indeed there is much variety, especially in political development and environmental conditions – several overarching and unifying themes shape the conditions and challenges for local governments in the region.

Even though the impacts of the changing climate are global, they are not equally distributed and are heavily dependent on local capacity to respond to these challenges. While everywhere in SEE average temperatures are rising and average precipitation is falling, local conditions result in specific climate-related stressors. For example, the Danube and Sava basins in Serbia or mountain regions in Georgia face higher risks of flooding and flash floods. In the Western Balkans, North Macedonia and Albania are particularly vulnerable to more frequent and more intense droughts and forest fires, in addition to water scarcity risks. Water security is also crucial for other sectors beyond agriculture, for example, electricity generation in Albania and Georgia, but also in other countries. The comprehensive challenges with DRR (Disaster Risk Reduction) are

[4] In total it comprises of 12 countries: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, Ukraine.

highlighted by the World Bank's vulnerability index (which combines exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity) – Albania, Armenia, Georgia are rated as "high risk", while Moldova, Serbia, Macedonia, Belarus and Ukraine are rated as "moderate."[5]

Looking at environmental pollution, waste and wastewater management and especially ambient air pollution (largely due to vehicle emissions) are pressing challenges. Seven of the 10 most-polluted cities in Europe according to share of PM2.5 in ambient air are in the WB.[6] Furthermore, the region is littered with environmental hotspots, largely the result of unsustainable land management practices, former mining operations, and concentrations of heavy industry in urban areas. As for the mitigation, per capital CO_2 emissions of the WB are roughly half of the EU. Each country has its unique story; however, looking at overall growth trends, most have significant increases in waste-related emissions and transport. All across SEE, there are substantial potentials to contribute to the global effort to mitigate the effects of climate change due to the countries' continued reliance on aging coal-fired power plants, the old and expanding vehicle fleets, the energy inefficient building stock, and the potential of forest sinks.

Main challenges facing to the region include climate change and environmental impacts, as all countries in SEE are suffering under the adverse effect of environmental stressors. Most do not have robust, resilient coping mechanism in place. Compared to Western Europe, the transformation towards sustainable development is lagging behind throughout, roughly 10 to 20 years. Other challenges reflect persistent and unpredictable instability, great diversity and disparity, limited capacity and global risk factors**.** The role of the municipalities is enormously high in translating the state policy into the local level and mitigating the risks. Speaking of challenges, coronavirus outbreak should certainly be mentioned in this context too, which is behaving like climate change and has caused an unprecedented health, economic and social crisis at local levels in SEE. Its sudden appearance in our society gave us no other option but to act to mitigate the coronavirus effects, rather than avoid them.[7] What is more, although scientific studies on the source of Covid-19 is still ongoing, there is some evidence that viruses that are transferred from animals to humans are often a result of unsustainable invasion of animal habitats. As we' learned from past pandemics,[8] such viruses were especially spread in the areas where great deforestation had happened shortly before. Therefore, a raise of awareness of the spread of our urban habitats into natural habitats is mandatory.

As for the opportunities in the region, there are growing popular pressures, as the inhabitants in these societies that have been transitioning to a higher level of development after the fall of communism are growing increasingly. While the countries

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[5] Climate Change in the West Balkans <https://www.preventionweb.net/publications/view/29353> Accessed on 24 April 2020.

[6] 2019 World Air Quality Report, Region & City PM2.5 Ranking.

[7] Sustainability for all, What Can We Learn from The Coronavirus Outbreak That Could Help Us Fight Climate Change? <https://www.activesustainability.com/climate-change/learn-coronavirus-outbreak-fight-climate-change/> accessed on 28 April 2020.

[8] E.g. Zika Virus <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/zika-virus> accessed on 18 May 2020.

of the region are not global leaders in sustainable development, they have started on the path to transition. Regional and national networks and vibrant donor landscape could also be mentioned in this context, as the region is benefitting from various bilateral and multilateral donor project focused on the local government action jointly with the municipalities.[9]

Thematic priorities

Echoing above, the challenges of environmental governance in SEE emanate from the specifics of urbanization and development under the old systems and the subsequent post-communist period. As noted, the main urban transformation happened during communism; however, very large urban areas continue to expand while some rural areas are rapidly depopulating. As urban areas expand, many outlining industrial parks and factories, such as pharmaceutical or chemical plants, came to be in the middle of sprawling residential districts. Dealing with environmental pollution and waste management in these larger urban conglomerations is especially challenging. The concentration of heavy industries in specific cities created local hotspots of environmental degradation, which were further strained by the economic collapse in these so-called monotowns. Deindustrialization resulted in entire sections of towns turning into brownfields, which need to be cleaned up and redesigned along the new realities, both a challenge and an opportunity.

Furthermore, many cities are struggling to address incidents of adverse weather events (e.g., the recent floods in Tbilisi and Skopje) and do not have a robust DRR system in place. Also, the shift in Western Europe towards liveable cities, human-scale development and low-carbon transport systems, which intensified at the start of the 21st century, is only now taking off in a meaningful way in the region, with unequal application across countries and cities.

The consequences of climate change and the corona pandemic affect women more than men. Women are more likely to belong to the low-income groups, particularly single mothers, pensioners, but also to workers in the low-wage sector, such as in the textile industry, catering or tourism. They are therefore more vulnerable to economic hardships triggered by natural disasters and pandemics. As it is more likely for low-income groups to use public transportation, women rely on them more than men for urban mobility. With that women are helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions on one hand and are more exposed to the health risks of air pollution on the other hand.

Women make up the majority of health care workers in nursing homes or hospitals, they are also more likely to care for elderly or sick family members. Their role as caretakers comes with increased risks on their own health but also provides a

[9] For more information, see Connective Cities report Stakeholder Mapping and Engagement Strategies for Connective Cities South East Europe, submitted on 08 April 2020.

considerable positive contribution to several aspects, given the right tools and knowledge.

Historically, cities were mainly planned by men predominantly for the needs of men. An integrated gender perspective in any planning process can offer a better and a more inclusive opportunity to solve the challenges of climate change and disease control. A more socially inclusive and gender sensitive urban planning approach will lead to healthier and climate friendly cities.

In order to narrow down the concept and cluster the ongoing discussions under the specific workstreams of the proposed virtual event under **"Climate Resilient Urban Development,"** three following thematic priorities should be identified:

1. **Actions towards reducing climate change impacts that include adaptation and mitigation** – strengthening institutional capacities, building socio-economic and ecological resilience, facilitating information, monitoring, reporting and knowledge management systems (i.e. UNFCCC/EU commitments, MRV set-up etc);
2. **Effective risk management and green pandemic recovery integrated into the urban development process** – COVID-19 impact on municipal vulnerability and enhancing disaster risk reduction (DRR). Effective health protection and disease control embedded into the urban planning. How to mainstream green urban recovery in the aftermath of global flue pandemic?
3. **Mainstreaming an awareness of climate change processes into urban development planning** - addressing the specific regulatory frameworks in order to support urban planners and practitioners to re-think their approaches and to incorporate climate mitigation and adaptation measures into their everyday business.

Participants selection and future outlook

Against this backdrop, urban practitioners from **Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, Ukraine** are highly encouraged to participate in the virtual event taking place in June 2020. The term "urban practitioners" encompasses a broad category of actors active on the local level: officials from institutions (e.g. municipalities and/or their associations, national-level entities), representatives from urban networks that share the project's objectives, and member of the private sector and civil society that work in the thematic areas. The members of academia from the field of urbanism, spatial planning, geography, climate change and energy are also highly encouraged to participate.

Prospective participants are expected to provide a **good practice example** they implemented or are currently implementing fitting the thematic focus of the event to enrich the knowledge exchange. A short project idea addressing challenges or relevant current issues in the represented municipalities/cities, as per described above, will be conceptualized through the different elements of the virtual event. Urban project idea will be incubated within 2 weeks of **digital experience** where you can expect to listen to inspiring keynote presentations from leading European scientists and share insights with your peers in carefully curated Peer2Peer collaboration and exchange formats. During this asynchronous and synchronous workshop, you will learn how to collaborate digitally and get acquainted with some tools, methods and the overall mindset Design Thinking that helps you to be more innovative by merging the user's perspective with what is feasible from a technological perspective viable from an organizational perspective.

The participation of **municipal delegations of two experts** respectively working in the environmental, planning as well as relevant energy & climate departments (dependent on their internal structure) to present their project cooperation. One of the participants may also represent other relevant urban actors from civil society, private sector or academia. Successful participation in the virtual event will also be awarded with the GIZ issued certificate. The specific criteria for participation cover:

- Practical perspective and first-hand experience in municipal strategies and projects in climate change mitigation and adaptation;
- Willingness to present the good local practice example;
- Readiness to engage in a virtual exchange during the event and improve the digital literacy.

E-meet preparation and production of the virtual event materials (e.g. podcasts, videos, interviews…) will be supported by Connective Cities – as well as the embedment of the content into the online platform coupled with instructing the participants with online tool management. Selected project ideas developed as part of this event will have the chance to be further supported by Connective Cities through a follow-up activity such as an expert mission or a local project workshop, study tour and through advice on options for project financing.