

Sustainable cities for people, by people: transparency and participation

Access to information and participation in decision making are basic human rights.

When city authorities are designing a project or international investors are structuring an investment for a new metro line or the modernisation of district heating, their decisions will impact the lives of thousands or millions of people. Therefore, these people must understand the impacts. They must also be included in the planning. Residents have the unique ability to identify solutions that will work, and the right to shape the city they live in. Inclusion starts with transparency and participatory planning.

“ Will girls and women be safer in overcrowded rush hours or on late-night trips home? ”

“ Will construction works block small businesses, and if yes, for how long? ”

“ Will metro trains be more regular and cleaner? ”

“ Will the heating bills rise and will they be affordable for vulnerable households? ”

“ How will shop owners be compensated for the loss of business during construction? ”



To answer these questions together, authorities, investors and citizens need, first of all, accessible, clear and objective information. A two thousand page technical document that is locked up in a municipal expert's desk will surely not do. A tweet by the mayor when he cuts the ribbon will not do either.

Once people clearly understand the various potential impacts, **they should have a say in the city's and the banks' decisions.** Their opinions and concerns should be taken into consideration when the plans are finalised, the money is disbursed and the projects implemented.

The COVID-19 crisis has put additional strain on cities and municipal services.

Cities need to rethink the way mobility, water, sanitation and other services are organised. In view of physical distancing needs, cycling infrastructure can help relieve overcrowding, in addition to increasing the availability and frequency of public transport. How will the economics of water projects be changed by making more free water fountains in public places available? Are access to water and sanitation rights or paid services?

The COVID-19 crisis presents an opportunity to **#BuildBackBetter**. But in order to do so, cities need to listen to what citizens need and what they want their communities to look like. The billions and trillions of recovery investments can do miracles if channeled to address the needs of communities and the needs of cities to modernise towards safer, healthier, more sustainable and resource efficient models of living, working, caring, studying, moving, consuming and interacting.

Cities must provide citizens with **accessible** and **easy-to-understand** information about proposed projects and give them a platform to participate in decisions about how to spend recovery funds.

