

EMPOWER EUROPE

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MAYOR'S INPUT

Minutes from the city presentations on social progress, answering four questions:

1. What are the key problems you wanted to address in terms of social progress?
2. What did you try to do?
3. What have you achieved?
4. What are you intending to do?

BRATISLAVA, SLOVAKIA

Social issues in local politics in Bratislava were virtually inexistent during many years. Many people in outreach work gave up from the frustration that became unbearable from the nonexistent public response to the issues and moved abroad.

However, frustration finally led to mobilization, and current mayor Matus Vallo initiated the working groups PLAN B (B for Bratislava), consisting of experts in different fields related to social issues. This opening is perceived as the first time in history of the city that someone brought people together to find new solutions.

The working groups functioned for two years and resulted in the publication of a book that also became part of the political program of Matus Vallo, who was elected mayor in November 2018.

Suddenly there was a space for the solutions that many had been hoping for for many years. Many people from different NGO's started to work for the city instead, and the city founded the social unit, that hadn't existed before and now less than a year later has 20 people. The budget for social issues was increased with 100% this year, and experts on social policy were headhunted to work for the city in Bratislava.

In other areas of the city administration the story is similar, many people from the activist environment became part of the city office. The invitation to be a part of the mayor's team before the election was seen as a guarantee that the social issues would be part of the political program once elected.

There are many challenges ahead, but there is a political momentum and will to transform the city. A start was to increase the budget, make civil society partners and fund NGO's substantially. Several projects have initiated, such as a housing first pilot, a safer nightlife project and an elderly project.

The SPI is in line with the aims of the administration, the will to make things right, but also to do it in an evidence-based and sustainable way.

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The social issues were politically unpopular, and the current administration is trying to change the discourse. The city should lift together, to be a city for all, with inhabitants proud of the aim for being an inclusive city. The motto is *Bratislava - city for all*. It is about courage.

BILBAO, SPAIN

The focus of the presentation was inclusiveness – even the most progressive environments don't necessarily guarantee social inclusiveness. In Bilbao the clues for success are participation and agreement, as well as interinstitutional cooperation.

The city has developed a social policy pact with seven objectives. The objective #7, presented more in-depth in the presentation, is deployment of the social services portfolio, with the main aim to improve the quality of life of all inhabitants.

The social services portfolio consists in several programs in areas such as social services, older persons, gender equality, diversity and immigration, and housing. Out of 2500 people working at the local government, 825 work in social programs.

One of the main tools for social inclusion is the basic income provided by the Basque government. Another important measure is that all new housing development projects, half of them are required to be social housing.

The challenges ahead are related in part to immigration. It is a fairly new situation for the city to receive large number of immigrants from other countries, with differing cultures and languages. It is a challenge to find ways of having one society and not different societies in the same place. Up until now, the main inclusion tool in the Basque country has been employment. Will that be enough for the future. Are qualifications and training a sufficient tool?

However, it is also an opportunity. The city of Bilbao never talks about expenses in a social program, but rather *investment* in social progress. A city's progress is measured in regard to its last citizen, not to its first.

GDANSK, POLAND

The city's strategy for solving social problems dates from 2013. Such a long-term strategy might not be perceived as progressive; however, it consists in 7 points, nothing more, and these point out the activity directions. From these 7 points there are programs and actions that are ongoing and forthcoming that shape the day-by-day tasks in the city.

As an example, there is the new equal treatment model that consists in 179 recommendations, made together with representatives from different areas, for example civil society organizations. That is an example of how the city works, trying to invite and communicate that they are working on a specific issue and then try to find associates to help them solve it.

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Currently, there are over 30 programs and policies (such as no-plastic policy, equal treatment policy, etc.) When an organization applies for funding for a project, they have to show how it is connected to the policies, stemming from the social strategy. This means that the basic strategic principles are non-negotiable but tactically flexible in their implementation. The direction is to cooperate, the city is responsible for managing the social networks, but doesn't necessarily have to be actors. Rather, the city can be the enabler that puts the strategic directions and framework.

At the moment, there is a change in communication underway. The idea is to no longer say "We are from Gdansk" but rather try to communicate that "*Gdansk is connecting us*". It is the idea of a temporary citizenship, coming from the model of integration of immigrants. It doesn't matter whether you are from Gdansk, it is the different activities that connect us. You can come for business, sports, studies, and you will be connected.

GRONINGEN, NETHERLANDS

Groningen is a city in the north of the Netherlands, a bit isolated from the west part which is the center for the national economy. It is a city of students and talent, with 60.000 students out of 230.000 inhabitants and the economic engine as well as the medical centre of the region.

The city has an instrument for measuring social progress and happiness in the city, that has been used for the last 25 years. It combines facts, such as income, employment, demographics, with "feelings", such as appreciation of the environment, loneliness, personal appreciation of the quality of life, expectations, etc. The information is presented on neighbourhood level in the form of a compass which makes it possible to zoom in the city geographically and on specific indicators.

The instrument is developed in collaboration with local research institutes and the national statistics bureau and aims at pinpointing not only if for example the housing is adequate but also what happens inside those houses. What do people actually feel? Do they want to move, or do they want to stay?

Social inclusion is at the center of the urban planning vision of Groningen, and work is done together with social welfare and housing companies, focusing on areas that score orange or red in the compass. Currently climate change is also an issue to look at specifically within this framework, with questions such as; How close are the public parks? Where can you sit in the shade if you are old? Is there non-commercial seating in the city center or do you have to buy an expensive coffee to sit in the shade?

LEUVEN, BELGIUM

Leuven is the most important university city of Belgium, with 100.000 inhabitants and 55.000 students, a city that also services 500.000 people in the metropolitan area.

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The city has a strong economy with low unemployment, and the university is a part of the city's DNA. The most pressing issues when it comes to challenges are equal opportunity, housing costs, mobility and climate change. It is a challenge to make sure that Leuven doesn't become an elitist city. It is the most expensive city in terms of housing cost in Belgium. There is social housing for the most disadvantaged, but what about the middle group?

The key solution to the social challenges is a new kind of governance model, based on the idea that in order to solve complex issues, there is a need for structural collaboration. The city council has transferred power to a new structure called Leuven 2030 which in its board of directors has equal representation (20% each) from citizens and civil society organizations; companies, professional organizations and healthcare institutions; knowledge and educational institutions; the city of Leuven and its autonomous agencies; and semi-public institutions. This platform aligns leadership around the shared ambition of intensive structural collaboration.

Participation is an important part of the governance model. In the beginning of the mandate in January 2019 all citizens were invited to participate with ideas, and each idea got an answer, and the ideas that were feasible went directly into the budget. Part of the budget is also destined for citizens, where people can get funding for carrying out neighbourhood projects, for example improving public space.

The municipality also carries out equal opportunity projects such as a buddy project focusing on volunteers coaching deprived children with the aim of improving school results, sense of belonging and self esteem. It is important to transmit a belief that the city invests in all its inhabitants, that generates a sense of belonging to the community. A positive impact of this is that Leuven had no ISIS-travellers among its inhabitants.

In the redesigned mobility plan, the municipality removed cars from the city center, and designated parking spaces underground. After 2 years, cycling went up with 20% and the use of public transportation has also seen an increase. More people are now coming to the center.

LJUBLJANA, SLOVENIA

The change towards a more socially progressive city started in 2006 when the current mayor took office. The city has focused on developing green areas - currently 75% of the city's surface is green area and the aim is to create even more green surfaces in the city. In 2016, Ljubljana became the Green Capital of Europe.

Water management is also important as part of the green aims of the administration. The city has very clean and pure water and if treated right it will be good for at least the next 400 years. The green city center has a pedestrian area, and incentives for sustainable traffic, such as bike-sharing system, etc.

In terms of social inclusion there is a public housing program building new areas. The city co-finances various programs and activities run by NGO's. There are open tenders to support

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NGO's to help maintain the city's program. The LGBT organization has a space in the city hall, running its own coffee shop there.

At the moment the biggest challenge the administration is facing in order to advance its policies is collaboration with the government. The city moves at a faster pace than the government and they would need their support.

MARIEHAMN, FINLAND

Mariehamn is located on the islands of Åland in the middle of the Baltic sea. Nature and water are very important health factors for its population. Sarcastically, the people in Åland sometimes say that they live off three things – taxfree and alcohol sales, snacks and the gaming industry.

The revenues, however, go to culture and sports, and these industries create jobs. There is very low unemployment, good services, people taking part in cultural life, people moving to Åland, and good labour market opportunities. Åland islands were also first in Finland to get ISO certification.

The challenges are political participation and sustainable transport. Åland has its own parliament and legislation, and on the islands with a total of 30 000 inhabitants there are 16 municipalities. Of the inhabitants, 34% come from elsewhere, and the participation is very low. It is easy to get in contact with decision makers as they are very close to where the people are, but the difficulty is that a small group ends up taking the majority of the decisions.

When making development plans, such as the new city center, the city tries to include all inhabitants. They collaborate with schools, where children get to walk around and express their opinions, and with shop owners, NGO's etc. It is important to listen to the big silent mass that is not screaming the loudest.

In terms of the city centre, the aim is to make transport more sustainable and remove cars from the city centre. However, it is politically difficult, as the islands have a very strong car culture, with as many cars as inhabitants. An easy solution would be to introduce parking fees (today parking is free), but the politicians must be brave enough.

UMEÅ, SWEDEN

Umeå is a growing city, going towards 200 000 inhabitants. It is not only the goal but an absolute necessity to get there in a sustainable way. This is a challenge, to change policies and ways of doing things. The challenge is to keep Umeå being a city where we create conditions for wellbeing, for all our inhabitants.

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In this, the city works in a holistic way with sustainability, understanding the city and implementing social sustainability into their processes, not least into the urban planning. An integrated approach is crucial in a city in growth and that means the comprehensive plan is important.

We have worked with social innovation, gender based urban planning and put sustainability high on the agenda in the city. Created new forms of collaboration between the private and public sector to be able to challenge existing norms and traditions when it comes to planning and building new neighbourhoods.

Engaged citizens. Long-term effort on education and popular education, together with our universities, but also with civil society and other actors. A sustainable city can only be built together with the residents. All planning is following an open, democratic and equal process. Public spaces are developed so that everyone- girls, boys, women and men can spend time there with equal rights. Start planning with children, youth and individuals with disabilities when building the city - that leads to a city for all.

We have worked with gender equality since the 1970´ s in the city administration and since 1989 had a committee on gender equality. Gender equality is a long-term commitment in Umeå, and we can see the results, where gender-based city planning is one of our flagships when it comes to sustainability

The city of Umeå invests most of all Swedish cities, about twice the average per capita, on culture.

Strategic planning to complement existing neighbourhoods with new types of housing and increase investments in the exciting areas (renovating houses etc.). With high density in new areas it is possible to support it with sustainable services, sharing solutions and that new areas can benefit and contribute to existing areas.

To build a city with high density, a public transport system with high quality and service is a key-factor. Umeå is building for a sustainable transport system, with growth in public transport corridors and conversion of transport through-ways.

Investments in public spaces and parks: In a dense city, public space is important to support an attractive and healthy environmental for our inhabitants, visitors and businesses. It supports recreation, safety and a sustainable lifestyle.

Umeå has remained truthful to its values of community, inclusiveness, creativity and gender equality and has managed to have a holistic approach to sustainability by trying to understand the complexity and the diversities in our city, through collaboration and exchange and our challenge is to keep evolving our work.