# NEWSLETTER

Word of the editor

Dear readers,

Welcome to the sixth edition of the HARMONMISSIONS Newsletter!

In this edition, we showcase an inspiring array of initiatives, events, and accomplishments from countries across the Danube Region that are advancing climate action through Horizon Europe's Missions 1 and 4. These efforts – centered on climate adaptation and achieving climate neutrality – serve as powerful examples of innovation and commitment in the face of environmental challenges.

As part of our continued focus on climate change adaptation in the Danube region, we bring you the latest updates from the HARMONMIS-SIONS project. We explore the Danube Region cities' journey toward climate neutrality: We highlight the role adaptation of urban infrastructure to new climate conditions plays in enhancing resilience, supporting biodiversity and promotion of circular, ecosystem-based water and nutrient management in cities. This edition also showcases a range of impactful projects driving meaningful change, such as the Horizon Europe-funded UP2030 project as well as Romania's Urboteca Fellowship initiative. UP2030 empowers cities to achieve climate neutrality through inclusive, neighborhood-level urban planning whereas Urboteca Fellowship fosters hands-on learning and co-creation between young professionals and local communities.

We are pleased to spotlight the upcoming Smart City Expo World Congress (#SCEWC25) in Barcelona on November 4-6. This major global event is aligned with EU Mission 4 and will gather over 25,000 participants to explore innovative solutions for climate-neutral, digitally transformed cities across key sectors like mobility, energy, governance, and inclusion.

Ukrainian Institute for International Politics
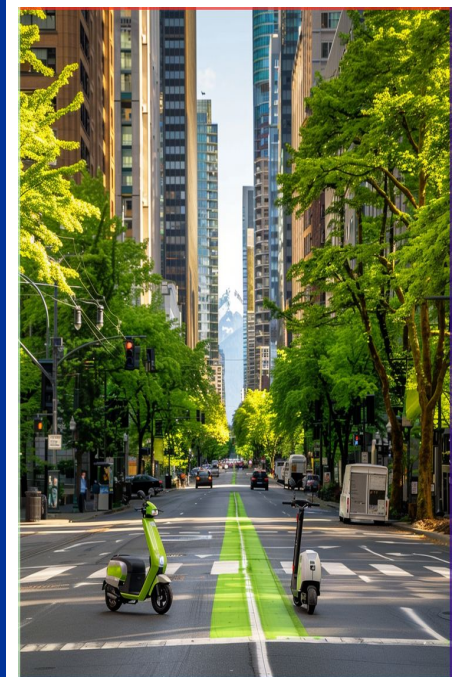
UPCOMING EVENTS

We are pleased to highlight the upcoming **Smart City Expo World Congress (#SCEWC25)(4 – 6 NOV 2025 | BARCELONA) –** the world's leading event for cities aiming to accelerate their transition toward climate neutrality and digital transformation. This international congress aligns closely with the goals of **EU Mission 4 – Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities**, offering a unique opportunity to explore innovative urban solutions and form new partnerships.

Focusing on topics ENABLING TECHNOLOGIES | ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT | MOBILITY | GOVERNANCE & ECONOMY | LIVING & INCLUSION | INFRASTRUCTURE & BUILDING | BLUE ECONOMY, the event will bring together city leaders, researchers, businesses, and civil society to exchange knowledge, showcase successful models, and discuss emerging trends in mobility, energy, governance, infrastructure, and citizen engagement.

With over 25,000 participants, more than 1,100 exhibitors and 600+ speakers expected, SCEWC25 will serve as an essential platform for advancing smart and sustainable urban development across Europe and beyond. Cities engaged in Mission 4 are especially encouraged to attend, present their progress, and connect with global frontrunners.

More information and registration:

https://www.smartcityexpo.com

Author: Martin Kováč, CVTI SR

Adaptation to climate change in the built environment

Adaptation to climate change offers a number of options for adaptation in a changing climate. One area of adaptation is dedicated to adapting to the new climatic conditions of the territory and increasing the resilience of the territory to weather extremes such as droughts, heat waves or torrential rains, storms and tornadoes. In the built-up area (roughly 5 to 12% of the country's land area), these weather extremes require building structures to be better designed and better adapted to withstand this climate variability. This applies not only to different types of buildings, but also to the surrounding transport infrastructure, amenities, public spaces, and water, sewerage, electricity and gas infrastructure. Guidelines for more resilient buildings are needed both for existing buildings (their future renovations and alterations) and for newly proposed buildings. Newly proposed buildings should already be designed so that they pose the least possible burden on the area in terms of increasing flood, drought and heatwave risks. The new building design should not only include a reduction in heat loss of the buildings and high quality architecture, but also a reduction in the drainage of rainwater from the area, the application of green roofs and walls as important elements of cooling and active shading and cooling by vegetation of the surfaces of the urban environment. These elements are also called blue and green infrastructure elements of cities and settlements. The rainwater that falls on each parcel is an asset of the land that needs to be used ecosystemically throughout the year. If this cannot be done directly on a given parcel or in a given building, it is a good idea to look for alternate or shared areas for multiple buildings in the neighborhood. The gradual adaptation of centralised systems for the disposal of rainwater and municipal wastewater to decentralised systems for the ecosystem and beneficial use of rainwater in the urban environment is crucial for the future of cities. Recent experience suggests that developers have coped best with urban wastewater treatment and rainwater harvesting when they have been unable to connect to centralised public sewerage systems. In the design of new residential, office and logistics centres, planners and architects have thus creatively reinterpreted circular bio-economy systems that allow for rainwater harvesting, cooling of building surfaces and public spaces with vegetation (which promotes the renewal of green water), and have created environments with water features as well as urban wastewater treatment systems that promote nutrient recycling, maintenance of biodiversity and ecological connectivity of the area, as well as a strong "sponge city" effect. There are also examples from the media of several buildings whose facades, as well as interiors, are known for their multi-level layers and structures of vegetation and greenery. This is an inspiration for a new approach, creating a new environment that is connected from the outset with greenery, water bodies and elements, as well as the closed recycling of nutrients in the site.

Source: ChatGPT (OpenAI, 2025)

Source: ChatGPT (OpenAI, 2025)

Author: Alina Bahna, UEFISCDI

The City Built Together: How Genuine Participation Shapes Sustainable Transition

Across Europe, cities are stepping up their efforts toward climate neutrality, guided by the **EU Mission on Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities** (Mission 4). Although commonly known as the "100 Climate-Neutral Cities Mission," the initiative actually includes **112 cities**—100 from EU member states and 12 from countries associated with Horizon Europe. These cities, including **three from Romania**, have committed to reaching climate neutrality by 2030 and to becoming innovation hubs that inspire and support others on the same path.

In Romania, the transition toward climate neutrality is supported by a growing ecosystem of **national and international initiatives** that emphasize collaboration, experimentation, and long-term capacity building. These programs help cities not only respond to environmental challenges, but also redesign their systems with people and equity at the center.

One of the key drivers of this transformation is the M100 platform, which coordinates Romania's efforts in line with the EU's "100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030" initiative. With support from Norwegian and Icelandic partners, the platform has selected **10 Romanian cities** to receive tailored support—including access to expert knowledge, workshops, webinars, one-on-one technical assistance, and ready-to-use resources such as templates and guides. These tools are helping cities develop climate neutrality action plans, investment strategies, and governance frameworks that promote both environmental and social sustainability. Participation in this program is designed to enable long-term positive change—supporting local authorities in reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 2035, while also strengthening community engagement and resilience.

Alongside national platforms like M100, **European research and innovation projects** further support cities in testing inclusive, place-based approaches. One such initiative is the DivAirCity project, part of the EU Horizon 2020 framework, which places **social inclusion** at the heart of climate action. With Bucharest as one of its pilot cities, DivAirCity collaborates with underrepresented communities to co-create solutions for cleaner air and more inclusive public spaces, using a "Living Labs for everyone" model that blends citizen science, culture, and technology.

Together, these frameworks provide essential context for a broader shift that cities must make—not only toward green infrastructure, but toward **genuinely inclusive processes**. A city cannot become sustainable if it is shaped through one-sided decisions. Real change begins when people are treated as equal participants in urban life, not as bystanders in a space that should, first and foremost, belong to them.

Community involvement is no longer a side concern or a formality. It is a basic requirement for any form of transition—whether related to climate, technology, or society. Cities need open processes that bring together a wide range of people—residents, local governments, professionals, civic groups, artists, and educators. Through this, they build more than solutions. They build trust and shared direction.

For participation to mean something, the approach must shift. Feedback should not be requested only after the plans are already complete. A true participatory process begins from the start—before there is a concept or drawing—at a stage where people ask questions, weigh priorities, and each voice is heard and considered.

This approach requires those with technical authority to relinquish full control. When decisions come from above, and the public is only invited to agree, the outcome is not democratic. It's staged. That's when frustration grows. People feel unheard. Projects fail to connect with those they are meant to serve.

What helps is a clear structure, flexibility, and people who understand how to work with others in shared spaces. One example is the **Urboteca Fellowship**, a Romanian program based in Bucharest that creates a space for young professionals to work directly with local communities.

This fellowship does not offer ready-made solutions. Instead, it supports learning through practice. Participants from various fields—architecture, urban planning, sociology, arts, anthropology—collaborate with local partners: cultural venues, civic groups, institutions. Together, they focus on underused spaces, looking at how these might become more meaningful for nearby residents.

Each local partner brings forward a situation, a question, or a challenge—not a strict task, but an open context. Participants do fieldwork, talk to people, map what they learn. Their goal is not to fix things for others, but to learn how to work alongside them. They examine tensions, uncover unspoken needs, and take a close look at what already exists. This helps them reflect on their role and the way they approach problems.

The process depends on people from different backgrounds working together, and on making space for slower, uncertain progress. Instead of quick answers, the focus is on listening and trying to understand. It's not about finishing a flawless project. It's about creating room for people to connect with a place—see it, care for it, and shape it.

Cities that aim for sustainability need this kind of work. It is practical. It leads to outcomes that last because they are rooted in shared effort and awareness. When people are involved from the beginning, when different perspectives are respected, what gets built is more grounded and more accepted.

This way of thinking should begin early. It should be part of what young people learn—in school, in university, in everyday life. Without this, public involvement stays abstract. Young people should grow up knowing what it means to live in a city, to care about shared space, to have a role in how things are shaped.

Better cities—greener, fairer, easier to live in—depend on a shift like this. From closed planning to shared creation. From asking for feedback to working side by side. From a single voice leading, to many voices thinking together.

This shift takes time. But it starts each time someone chooses to ask before they decide. Each time a student understands that planning cities means working with people, not just lines on paper. Each time a neighborhood starts to tell its own story. And each time a city stops deciding alone what tomorrow should look like.

This article includes ideas shared by architect and urban planner Vera Marin in a conversation for the "Dialoguri M100" podcast, part of the national M100 Hub platform focused on ecological transition in Romanian cities.

Project full title: Urban Planning and Design Ready for 2030
Project acronym: UP2030

Project Overview

Duration: 1 January 2023 - 31 December 2025
EU contribution: € 11 081 846,00
Funding programme: Horizon Europe
Consortium: 47 partners from 14 countries
Coordinator: Fraunhofer Gesellschaft Zur Forderung Der Angewandten Forschung Ev
Beneficiaries: Zagreb, Thessaloniki, Rotterdam, Rio de Janeiro, Münster, Milan, Lisbon, Istanbul, Granollers, Budapest, Belfast
Project website: https://up2030-he.eu/

Project Description

Operating within the framework of Horizon Mission 4: Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities, UP2030 addresses cities as pivotal to generating a widespread and meaningful climate transformation. By employing a holistic, strategy-based and inclusive approach, the project develops methods to upskill urban areas. Focusing initially on generating change on a neighbourhood level, the ultimate goal of UP2030 is to replicate the subsequent results and achieve a city-wide upscale and transformation. UP2030 encompasses 8 European cities, 2 cities from an associate country, and 1 knowledge-transfer city from the Global South.

Project Objective

UP2030 is a vision-driven project that strives to empower cities across Europe and beyond in achieving their climate neutrality ambitions. The project leverages urban planning and design for the purpose of driving widespread socio-technical change and making urban spaces liveable, innovative and carbon-neutral. The goals and activities of this project are founded on the cornerstone of inclusive participation; its impact is maximized through the inclusion of citizens as agents of change, and the involvement of stakeholders and local authorities in innovation, governance and financial facilitation.

Pathways for Transition

Every pilot city participating in UP2030 contributes to the European Union's fight for climate neutrality through the development of innovative prototypes for tackling environmental degradation and the social issues connected to it. These initiatives include, among other efforts, modular urban farms, climate adaptation strategies, and plans for low-carbon districts. The actions undertaken by the participating cities are simultaneously region-specific and globally replicable, representing a contextualisation of good practices that can be adapted and applied throughout the European Union and beyond.

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Specific Activities and Ambitions

As each participating city localises climate solutions to address region-specific challenges, UP2030 encompasses a variety of goals and objectives. In Belfast, it includes a holistic combination of tree planting, green infrastructure and co-design with young people, focused on the city's first net-zero business district. Zagreb, on the other hand, seeks to redefine urban agriculture by closing the loop from school farming to food production, consumption, waste, and composting, back to school farming. Each of the remaining 9 cities has likewise set an ambitious goal for one of its neighbourhoods - a climate-related challenge to overcome within the lifespan of the project.

Instruments for Climate Neutrality

UP2030 is pursuing the ambitious goal of furthering and establishing climate neutrality through a vast number of different tools, among which are:

- An air quality monitoring and forecasting tool
- A citizen mapping platform
- A parametric urban design workflow
- A web platform for participatory urban planning