



# THE FUTURE OF WORK

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## Introduction

We, young green-minded activists from Eastern European cities recognise that some parts of our cities are becoming more inclusive, whilst others are becoming more exclusive. Although this can be perceived as a partial progress, there are still areas left to improve to achieve the systemic change.

Everyone deserves to feel welcomed, safe, and seen in our cities. Despite this, we see that often-times, the most vulnerable groups in our cities don't have equal access to the public spaces and services. These shameful conditions are a result of far reaching systems of oppressions, but they can also be mitigated with affirmative and structural action. In this manifesto, we, as youth of Eastern European cities outline the frameworks sustaining this exclusion of citizens but also the way forward to create more inclusive and just cities.

## Intersectional Perspective

Patriarchal capitalism and different types of oppression, such as systematic issues maintain the many inequalities in our society. In order to understand and combat these harmful narratives we need to understand their far-reaching influence. The only way we can do this is by adopting an inter-sectional approach, which takes into account different factors that shape our lives, like gender, race, class, ethnicity etc. All people belong to more than one of these groups and in order to approach their issues and needs we must take into account all their identities and perspectives. We as young greens see that this approach of looking from different points of view could help promote empathy,

solidarity and equality in the society. It is visible that in the process of urban planning and design we have a strong presence of so-called "neutral users".

This term refers mostly to cis-gender, heterosexual white men with privilege in society. However, women, LGBT+ people, people of colour, people with disabilities, migrants, youth, older people, people living in poverty, sex workers, homeless people, are often faced with restricted access to the public spaces and services.

The communities that are not in the scope of neutral users are less supported legally, through administration, healthcare, social services, education etc. These forms of hidden oppression against groups in society create a loop of discrimination and violence. Non privileged groups often remain in the blind spot of the society which causes social exclusion and multiple discriminations. For instance, non-binary and transgender people have difficulties accessing public services that require their identification, especially when their documents are not recognized by the government.

As we want to be the initiators of positive changes and promote them to wider masses, we believe we need to take the introspective look. We must start engaging with different groups and understand their issues and never take the approach that something is "not our problem" or that we remain apolitical. We demand that city institutions take on active, up-to date and science based approach to administrative and legal matters without any kind of discrimination when addressing issues and needs of all communities. We call upon the creators of educational programmes to enable equal access and opportunities to educational content and procedures to all members of society, and do not deprive them of it because of their gender, race, class, ethnicity and any other identity. In addition, educational programmes should encompass diverse representation and inclusive materials.

We demand of urbanism and development departments of cities to create projects that would benefit all citizens instead of only privileged ones, and looking at the intersectional perspective of social, cultural and environmental factors when planning new urban projects; re-think and improve the existing infrastructure in the same manner.

Finally, we demand of media resources / media platform of many kinds (TV, printed newspapers and magazines, online news platforms etc) to end biased reporting when talking about non-privileged communities. We demand social media platforms react to hate speech that further spreads stereotypes, discrimination and hate towards these communities. Additionally, we demand of media users to not ignore certain groups and help raise visibility and representation of them so their voices could be heard, and stand actively against online hate and bullying, using all legal ways to fight it.

## **Inclusive Governance**

We, young people in Eastern and Central European cities see our municipal governments as mainly led by the same group of people. The centres of power in our cities are for most part ruled by able-bodied cisgender heterosexual men, who tend to exploit the power at their disposal to secure their privileges on the expense of rights of people who don't fit the mainstream norms of the society, as well as on the expenses of the poor.

The privileged groups of people create and maintain internal connections as a way of making executive decisions without transparency and responsibility. This kind of decision-making creates an ideal field for abusing positions of power, in most cases at the cost of environment and individual rights.

Even though the government officials are elected by the public, they do not include the interests of all segments of society. They use several mechanisms of exclusion, such as use of illegitimate experts and pressures on the media, to name a few. This kind of exclusive governance works to create social status and wealth for the governing few, and not making a constructive change in society, or caring for the general well-being. This has led to a state where different groups of people are marginalized and oppressed in different manners, and there is a lack of understanding of the work of us, the activists who want to create a truly more inclusive society. These problems disenfranchise young people and cause feelings of apathy and apolitical views.

We see a truly inclusive democracy as that in which every inhabitant's voice and capacities to be considered and encouraged when making a decision about their city. In order to make governance practices in our cities more inclusive, we must push for structural reform in several areas. Firstly, strengthening the NGO sector, creating connections and becoming allies with people in positions of power, educating them where possible.

Furthermore, educating and informing the general public (especially young people) as much as possible through media, street actions, books, social media and other similar tools. A large progress would be made if some of the topics we want to educate about could find their way in the curriculum of educational institutions. Educating ourselves means empowering ourselves to take ownership of our urban spaces.

Finally, participatory budgeting can help alleviate and address social exclusion by helping activists and other disenfranchised groups causes to be represented in city's strategies when developing urban and social policies. Organizing public forums, research, surveys etc. to gauge people's opinions and engagement into policy making.

Therefore to ensure a truly inclusive governing in a system clearly designed to constrain us we have to advocate policies made by people who are discriminated and oppressed and to employ affirmative action for these under-represented groups.

## **Truly Public Infrastructure**

The same way urban environment shapes citizens, citizens shape the environment. Currently our cities are built with able-bodied gender-conforming cis-gender heterosexual men in mind. The patriarchal structures make our cities neither safe nor accessible for all. As a result of the non-participatory policy and patriarchal social paradigm, today we have cities that are not available for most of the people who live there, which creates the continuation of the exclusive process.

Lack of inclusion in the process of how change in cities comes about further creates exclusion in the newly created or "improved" spaces. Across all Eastern Europe and some Central Europe, we see many groups being excluded from spaces that are 'public' only in name – people with disabilities, gender non-conforming people, people of diverse ethnicities, homeless people, elderly people, parents of small children, even women and girls.

Any member of our community might become disabled. We noticed a lack of comprehension from the urban planners who are providing paths and other urban infrastructure. Often, these facilities and practices are doomed to be harmful and even dangerous for some members of the society. The lack of knowledge among the city bureaucrats is obvious and should be considered first and foremost.

We see cities inaccessible and unsafe for many unprivileged groups – unfit side-walks, unsafe and unpassable crossings, poorly lit, closed spaces, little to no accessible public services, inaccessible public bathrooms, inaccessible public transportation. Women, gender non-conforming and transgender people often feel unsafe due to unlit public places, unfit public services, and having to go to public restrooms that are not designed for them or feel exclusionary for gender non-conforming or transgender people.

Along with inaccessibility for people with disabilities often comes inaccessibility for people with small children – no elevators, steep ramps or no ramps at all, unpassable obstacles for those pushing a stroller. People with low mobility are often not provided with benches across the city. They may be forced to walk long distances, in order to get to a store, with no chance to rest. Furthermore, many buildings do not have elevators and public transportation close by. Homeless people are often pushed out of public spaces when the infrastructure prohibits them having safe and comfortable places to stay the night and rest.

Fast traffic and too much car traffic in some places creates not just unsafe, but also unhealthy environment to be in. Inclusion also does not stop at accessible transportation – public transportation is often financially inaccessible, too, and greener alternatives are not accessible for all, leaving personal cars as the only solution for many people.

As youth of Eastern Europe we state an urgency of bringing inclusion into all liveable spaces of to create a better democratic space for rising the level of civil involvement. The best way we, as young green activists, see here is the grass-roots process of education and active mandatory involvement of vulnerable groups of people in the process of implementing affirmative policy.

Development of internal community projects aiming rise of the level of social empathy is a need that should be brought to life with a direct support of the local authorities, implementing direct channels of communication with the public and activists, such as open door policy and including groups that are traditionally excluded from the process (such as LGBT+, Roma people, people with physical or mental disabilities, youth, women, ethnic groups, etc.)

We call for all further improvements and changes in our cities to be created primarily with oppressed people in mind. That would create better public places for everyone in the city, because if the city is good for people with disabilities, women, trans people, gender non-conforming people, and other often excluded people, it will be good for all other groups.

## **Focusing Beyond Profit**

We believe that capitalism as an economic and social system produces exclusivity and social injustice in society and continuously exploits public goods for private profit. Capitalism is intertwined with patriarchy and it perpetuates unsafe spaces for women and queer people, as well as on the expanses of the poor. The surplus capital is often invested and reinvested into urban development projects without much care for the urban landscape and the needs of the citizens and it is solely focused on profit.

Corruption and cronyism are widespread in Eastern Europe and this deeply affects how our cities governed incompetently in favour of political, criminal and corporate elites and it lowers the level of citizens in general. Because of the lack of active citizenship, grassroots strategies, participation in decision making and public discussions the democratic process is eroded which makes cities not people oriented.

Emergence of neoliberal capitalism after the 1990s in Eastern Europe as a lasting tendency of privatizing public goods that mainly result in exclusion. Some countries were or still are heavily affected by political conflicts which serve as a tool of manipulation, so that the subject of urban issues is totally underestimated and de-prioritised.

Centralization is one of the leading problems that countries in our region share. Fluctuation of population migration, especially younger generations who seek opportunities and jobs, at the same time trying to escape the injustices of the regimes they grew up in, lead to a scenario in which rural areas are neglected and underdeveloped.

At the same time capital cities are getting bigger due to influx of people and therefore face the problem of more pollution and often lack enough of green areas. Businesses, capital and trade also thrive in bigger cities creating a concentrated wealthiest layer that leads to deepening of the class/gender gap and make an environmental impact. Our main aim is to address these issues and create quality solutions that lead to creating human oriented cities which are based on the principle of inclusion. Future infrastructure or reconstruction must be implemented in a way that they they do not contribute to the climate change. We are oriented towards making public spaces safe, accessible and adjusted for the needs of locals and vulnerable or marginalized groups who face discrimination on daily basis.

We demand that municipal decision makers abandon profit driven development in favour of prioritising human oriented development in areas such as infrastructure, regions, local initiatives, etc. and securing adequate, affordable, accessible housing for everyone is a recipe we advocate in terms of creating progress for Eastern Europe.

As a society we have to take on the responsibility to inform and make the public and authorities more aware of these issues and provide a corrective framework or creative solutions that benefits future urban planning of city spaces incorporating a strong sense of solidarity.

With all this in our minds, our hands, and our hearts we want to issue a call to solidarity with these different groups and to invite other activists and stakeholders to join our efforts for creating truly inclusive cities!