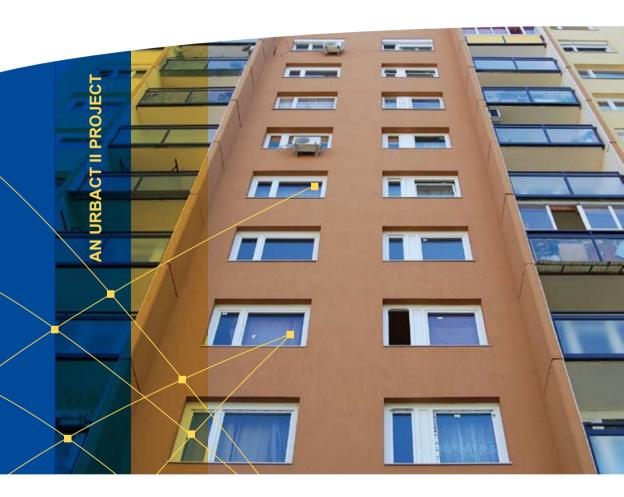


## **RE-Block REviving high-rise Blocks**

for cohesive and green neighbourhoods







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## Welcome of the Lead Partner's Legal Representative

As the Mayor of a District, which considers one-fifth of its population on one housing-estate, I am proud that our local government can participate, moreover be the Lead Partner of the RE-Block project.

The Partner local governments as well as urban planning, urban development bodies have already made number of attempts individually to find solutions for social



and infrastructural problems caused by the economic crisis that citizens of housing estates need to face

We hope that the RE-Block project, which has stepped into its implementation phase, could be the first successfully synthesising problem solving 'key' that demonstrates concrete results.

We have ideas and experiences to share in the frame of this transnational cooperation and to transform them

into action plans that aim to incorporate the requirements of *liveable built environment* and *social integration*.

Although the integrated social urban rehabilitation programme of the 'Havanna' housing estate has already started in 2007, further challenges need to be tackled by the city government. We have to promote community cohesion so that self-healing mechanisms shall start in addition to external medicine.

It is of key importance to make local residents interested too: we need to encourage everyone by well-designed programmes and by setting realistic goals to feel conscious about the physical and mental development of deprived living spaces. We have to create platforms, spaces, opportunities to develop a common language, which is acceptable and understandable to all of us.

As a member of the Budapest Urban Image Protection and Urban Development Council I can say that with the changes not only *the part*, but the value of *the whole* too is growing – the development of deprived neighbourhoods carries along the significant improvement of capital indicators as well.

RE-Block could be the project of responsible building. I hope that all 'Havanna' citizens shall enjoy the results of the long common work and the title 'RE-Block' will refer to no less than *belonging to a community*.

Attila Ughy, Mayor









### Ágnes Böhönyey Lead Expert about the RE-Block project

There are ten cities participating in the RE-Block project. All are located in widely diverse parts of Europe, yet the ten target housing estates share very similar problems. Despite great historical and cultural variation, all ten housing estates have evolved to a point where they all need to address multiple physical, social and economic issues. The Partners recognized that these is-

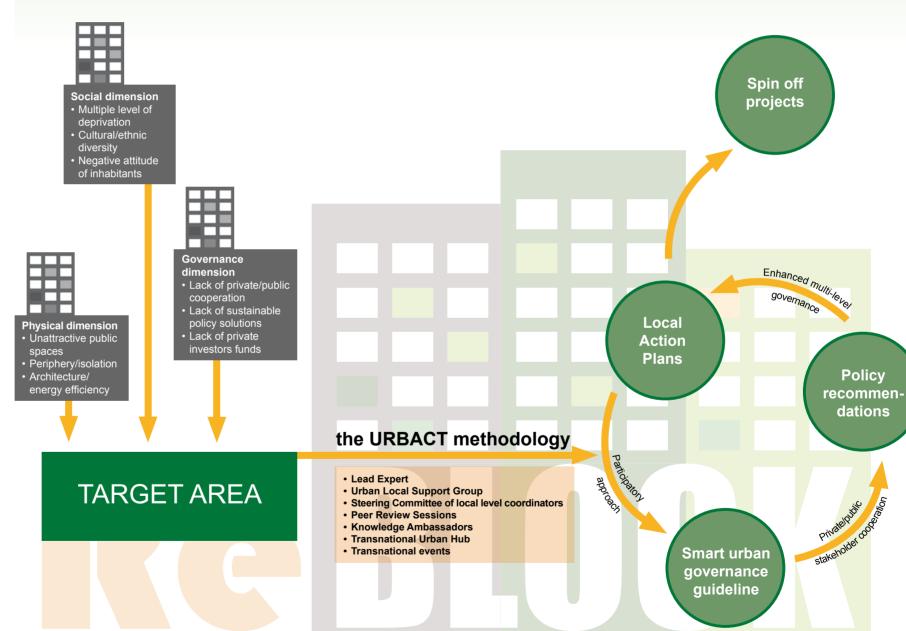


sues are strongly interlinked and need to be tackled in a comprehensive way to lead to sustainable solutions.

While the real nature of the issues varies from one housing estate to the other, the overall focus of the Re-Block project agreed by the Partners is to ensure

the sustainable rehabilitation of high-rise housing estates by the integrated development of their social and physical environment. Partner cities are aware that achieving this goal exceeds the financial capacity of each municipality, especially when they still suffer from the consequences of the economic crisis. Therefore, the Partners are going to look for new means of public-private cooperation to ensure lasting rehabilitation.

URBACT is a European exchange and learning programme promoting sustainable urban development by enabling cities to work together and to develop solutions to urban challenges. In the RE-Block project, a group of qualified experts in the relevant fields who are delegated by the Partners, the "Knowledge Ambassadors", will contribute to the knowledge transfer objective of the project. They will share their positive experiences with the partnership and participate in the development of the first draft of the Local Action Plans for the urban rehabilitation of the ten target areas.





## **INTERVIEWS WITH THE PROJECT PARTNERS**

### What kind of problems/difficulties do you have to face in your city (target area)?

The states of rainwater drainage system and district roads are major problems on district level, as well as the partial lack of public sewer supply. The infrastructural supply of the Havanna housing estate is adequate, however the technical conditions of the housing blocks and public buildings (community house, schools, kindergartens, nurseries, clinics, sports facilities, etc.) need intervention. The engineering systems are out of date, buildings are energetically extremely obsolete due to the state of the thermal insulation and the doors/windows, the result of which is high utility costs. As a consequence of that, a high number of condominiums have debt problems.

The rate of unemployed and people with low level education is relatively high at Havanna, furthermore, many residents are not aware of the responsibility that a private property entails. Additional problems arise from the lack of well working communities and disinterest. Residents do not bond to the housing estate; seldom participate at events organized by civil organisations or the local government. On the other hand, bottom-up initiatives cannot be

successful either; more active citizens, civil organisations and communities are needed. The lack of local jobs is partially caused by inadequate utilization of local development areas.

Urbanisation problems that are common at housing estates appear exponentially at the Havanna housing estate. Due to residents' density, communities cannot develop; it would be much easier in a resident-friendly environment.

What do you expect as result of RE-Block project? What do you expect to learn from the European-wide cooperation as a partner of the RE-Block project? What are the main benefits of the project?

We would like to provide a more liveable environment for residents at the Havanna housing estate; therefore we are hoping to receive a lot of useful information from the partner cities in this cooperation. We would like to study the best practices in connection with improving the physical state and environment of housing estate, as well as the social environment. We believe that we can learn lessons from everyone.

Apparently, social problems of our Eastern European partners are similar to ours; therefore we will try to find common answers to these social problems together. As to Western European partners, we can learn from their experiences in connection with improving built and natural environment of housing estates.

We are looking forward to gain knowledge on creating strong community cohesion and finding innovative solutions for funding problems. We believe that RE-Block project can teach us a more conceptual way of thinking that we could utilize for example in drafting better tenders for grant application and project implementation.

We intend to learn technical solutions from our partners that are resulting in actual energy-saving. In case of civil organizations, we would like to apply methods, which stimulate them to become independent. They should not only expect support from the local government, but also try to become self-sufficient and create real added value.

## How can you contribute to the project? What kind of concrete good practices can you offer for the partnership?

Firstly, the Béla Kondor Community Centre is the primary cultural centre of the housing estate. We believe that its social supporting and community-building role could be considered as a good practice. The Centre organizes several cultural and educational programmes with a special focus on children, young people and people with disabilities. 25 civil, community and cultural organizations are located in the building, providing tangible support in everyday issues for local residents.

Secondly, the local government has wide experience in public meal service at the Havanna estate and in its neighbourhood. We are happy to share the lessons we learnt during the operation of this service, so that our partners can adopt successful models we developed in this field.

Furthermore, positive and negative results of energy efficiency projects can also be considered as good examples: (i) a relatively large extension of residential green area, (ii) resolved long-term parking problems and (iii) creating playgrounds for children and adults are all positive initiatives, perhaps good examples to follow.





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There are 1,400 housing units located at the Tossehof Estate. The high-rise buildings of up to 15 storeys were built in the early 1970s. The units are owned by 4 housing companies, 40 have private owners and 400 units are owner-occupied. Since the 1980s many middle-class families have moved away and Tossehof gradually lost its formerly good reputation. The majority of empty flats could only be filled with immigrants or families living on social welfare.

What do you expect as result of RE-Block project? What do you expect to learn from the European-wide cooperation as a partner of the RE-Block project? What are the main benefits of the project?

The close international cooperation and learning from good practices will provide us with

- further ideas how to improve the engagement of private owners;
- suggestions for communication campaigns making use of new media;
- recommendations on how to continue with all the projects activities and the implementation in general after funding and to sustain the achievements in the long term.

How can you contribute to the project? What kind of concrete good practices can you offer for the partnership?

We would like to share

- our practical experiences in applying integrated approach covering both the physical and social dimensions of regeneration;
- successful ways of involving managing authorities;
- our expertise in mainstreaming, i.e. how to apply the above mentioned integrated approach in urban regeneration and in city administration in general;
- our experiences and demonstrate to partners how the estate was re-invented by a partial demolition of problematic blocks

- and with the help of a branding process to improve the reputation of the estate;
- our selection of tools when communicating with tenants.

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The problems that we have to face are of economic and social nature, as follows:

- the lack of jobs, regular income and social assistance, as well as low level of (cultural) education:
- many citizens are not able to make ends meet without extra financial help;
- the physical degradation of the buildings, which are partially in the property of the City Hall and partially in the property of individuals;
- public safety issues;
- the rate of the elderly is constantly rising and the city does not have the financial assets to provide appropriate

living conditions and environment for them:

- non-conceptual investments, development activities without sustainability plans, due to (i) lack of technological innovation and business centres in the city that would ensure logistic support, (ii) shortage of qualified personnel in some sectors and (iii) poorly developed service sector that offers no incentives for investors;
- · the lack of public green areas.

What do you expect as result of RE-Block project? What do you expect to learn from the European-wide cooperation as a partner of the RE-Block project? What are the main benefits of the project?

Our main expectations are referring to solving social problems (Roma population) and managing public green areas, but we are looking forward to learn lessons on drafting the Local Action Plan, project implementation in general as well as how to establish partnerships between the different key actors of the public and private sectors.

# How can you contribute to the project? What kind of concrete good practices can you offer for the partnership?

During the implementation of some of our ongoing projects in the field, we made decisive steps forward, in elaborating provisions on sustainable housing, in the respective local context, considering both the social and the environmental perspectives. Some of the provisions aim at the improvement of the steering ability of local authorities within an urban policy, which is a field characterized by dynamic development in terms of economical, social, ecological and demographic challenges. This higher level of competence would be based on a broad involvement of different local "actors", using open methods of cooperation/ participation and a substantial responsiveness for needs of different social groups.

We have already made a Local Action Plan in the theme of social housing, so we are happy to share our experience in drafting strategic documents.

Furthermore, we developed a specific database to support actions on cohabitation of different cultures and ethnic groups as well as improved our housing standards by implementing initiatives for cooperative neighbourhoods and communities. We are at our partners' disposal in introducing lessons we learnt during these processes.

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The main problems are in relation with social disparities and lack of infrastructures. The different social groups are located in different neighbourhoods of the city. The two Roma groups are living at the opposite ends of the city. The origin of the people of the first group living in the Ifestos area is a controversial topic without a definite answer, however, a lot of them identify themselves as Muslims of Turkish origin. There are some Roma also living at the north west of the city just along the road to the University. The other group is living south-east and obviously under much poorer conditions than the people in Ifestos: there is no infrastructure in the area, it is a bidonville/shanty town. The target area is within walking distance from the city centre of Komotini to the East. It also includes the Roma area mentioned earlier.

### What do you expect as result of RE-Block project? What do you expect to learn from the European-wide cooperation as a partner of the RE-Block project? What are the main benefits of the project?

We expect to learn the most experienced cities' innovative ways and methods to proceed with the urban rehabilitation of our deprived areas, by engaging all stakeholders from the different sectors and come to the envisaged results with the maximum possible participation.

#### How can you contribute to the project? What kind of concrete good practices can you offer for the partnership?

We can contribute to the RE-Block project by sharing our experiences in connection with the proper and successful implementation of two projects: 1. Progress project "LEDOS" from



REMTH, which focused on social inclusion and transformation of a social group with low skills to an association with accession to the economic, entrepreneurial life; 2. URBAN II project "SURE" on complex socio-economic challenges, resulting in successful and effective interventions in the City of Komotini.

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Neu Olvenstedt is one of the newer parts of Magdeburg. The first developments of the area began in the 1980's. The residential high-rise blocks of Neu Olvenstedt were supposed to build a direct connection between the village of Olvenstedt with its characteristic detached housing architecture and the former district capital. Unfortunately this fusion never happened and the social gap between the old and new residents became even bigger. Towards the end of that decade the district evolved to one of the most modern one in the German Democratic Republic. Its population was about 32.000 until 1989.

Since the beginning of the 90's Neu Olvenstedt experiences a continuous urban shrinking process. The demand of living space decreased dramatically due to low fertility rates, the loss of employment opportunities, the business relocation and a growing population in retirement.

Furthermore the design and the floor plans of the high-rise blocks appear to be unsuitable for the modern living requirements of the younger people and families. Numerous citizens left Neu Olvenstedt and moved to the city-centre and the surrounding suburbs where they could buy cheaper

land for building private homes. Those who stayed were mostly from the middle or lower income groups. That is how social problems occurred in the area. Neu Olvenstedt suffers from a very slight social heterogeneity and shows the lowest socioeconomic standard of Magdeburg with almost 16,6 % (31.12.2011) unemployed people.

What do you expect as result of RE-Block project? What do you expect to learn from the European-wide cooperation as a partner of the RE-Block project? What are the main benefits of the project?

The idea of sustainable social, economic and environmental development is one of the main topics Magdeburg has been working on for the last 10 years. Our expectations from RE-Block are mainly based on sharing good experience between the participating project partners. We consider this project as a possibility to gather ideas and practices that were already successfully implemented by our partners. Furthermore we appreciate the possibility of exchanging unconventional solutions on certain problems connected particularly with the high-rise districts. Moreover we see this project as a unique chance for all participating cities and institutions to improve the standard of living and the quality of the urban environment.

## How can you contribute to the project? What kind of concrete good practices can you offer for the partnership?

The city of Magdeburg and the urban development department are working on the sustainable reduction of vacancy and the prevention of further shrinking effects for its disadvantaged city areas. Since 2002 Neu Olvenstedt is part of the governmental urban development program. In approximately 10 years more than 11.000 flats were demolished within the program. Even though so many residential units disappeared, the vacancy rate is still too high.

Although Neu Olvenstedt is the home of many socially unprivileged people due to the favourable flat-rents, the crime rates in the past years haven't been increasing significantly. Today, there are some fully renovated apartments at affordable rents in sustainable residential complexes, in the direct neighbourhood of the old high-rise blocks. Green areas and parks have been established. An excellent connection to the public transport and cycling paths make the district interesting for local university students and older people.

The position of the district management in Neu Olvenstedt was integrated successfully. Its main

goal is to bring together actors from the different areas of management, local government and organizations, the private sector and residents living in the target area. Our district manager integrates the various aspects of economic development, social competence and the urban development.

Along with the district management, the urban development department encourages the work of the Local Community Groups in Neu Olvenstedt. The group members meet regularly and organize public events for the residents. The urban development department considers local community groups as the most direct forum to be informed about the wishes and expectations of the citizens for urban changes in their district.

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Currently, unemployment is the main problem with an estimated rate of 65%, and youth unemployment reaching 80% in the Palma Palmilla area. This causes various knockon effects, with a rise in conflicts between the different cultures and nationalities that live in the area, due to growing resentment over the availability of jobs and subsidies. Another problem in the area is the state of the housing. There are problems with both the

regulation and ownership of property, and a need for improvements in the overall quality of the housing.

What do you expect as result of RE-Block project? What do you expect to learn from the European-wide cooperation as a partner of the RE-Block project? What are the main benefits of the project?

 to adapt and improve the current action plan that was developed through the HOGAR project  to learn from other cities how to tackle concrete issues such as ways to finance ideas and proposals and how to better implicate citizens in the decision making process.

The RE-Block project will be extremely beneficial as a dedicated transnational team will be focussing on issues that affect the most deprived areas of our cities, and those that need our help most. The process of mutual learning and exchange will be positive for both the cities involved, as well as for other cities in Europe that face similar problems.





How can you contribute to the project? What kind of concrete good practices can you offer for the partnership?

Malaga has a wealth of experience in working on urban sustainability issues and on projects that focus on the transformation of deprived areas of the city. More specifically, Malaga has been developing and implementing a participative methodology, based on democratic participation and active citizenship, within the HOGAR project since 2005.

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The neighbourhood Tor Sapienza is situated in the District VII of Rome. It is a complex but rather heterogeneous area: there are large industrial zones with abandoned industrial plots, a consolidated residential area built at the beginning of the 20th century and organised along a main street with shops and restaurants, coffees, all the necessary services and facilities available. The target area is a housing estate of high-rise blocks (Viale Giorgo Morandi) with neglected public green areas and an informal settlement of

primarily Roma people close to the neighbourhood. The area presents relevant phenomena of social exclusion and multiple deprivations:

- Rundown public spaces: amenities, services and facilities are not well organised
- Youth unemployment achieves high percentage (more than 35%)
- Neighbourhood is isolated from main urban fabric/consolidated urban areas with proper services
- Immigrants' families illegally occupying abandoned spaces (transforming them in provisional housing)

• No relevant local economies are promoted in the neighbourhood

What do you expect as result of RE-Block project? What do you expect to learn from the European-wide cooperation as a partner of the RE-Block project? What are the main benefits of the project?

The City of Rome has relevant experiences in terms of urban regeneration and renewal. Many policies have been launched in the recent years even in this area, however outputs and outcomes did not always meet the expectations of planners/policy makers. We expect to learn innovative or simply different approaches to multiple deprivation phenomena in high-rise/high density block areas. We expect to encounter relevant experience in terms of urban integrated approaches and effective/efficient models of multi-level governance in ABIs (area based initiatives).

## How can you contribute to the project? What kind of concrete good practices can you offer for the partnership?

We can offer the lessons learned from previous policies implemented in the area, not necessarily the best practices, but real ones, perhaps even mistakes, but still, good achievements. We can provide other examples in Rome that were more successful that the ones in Tor Sapienza. We are happy to share the experiences we gain from the current projects being implemented in the area, especially the ones that focus on the reinforcement of local social/cultural and economic networks: a number of associations working on these issues will be involved in our ULSG.

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Over the last 50 years, economic drift, changes in employment patterns and shifts in skills requirements have incurred detrimental impacts and change in many of the social housing areas of Salford. The community within the two tower blocks of the Islington Estate is characterised by a range of social problems including: low levels of education; low household incomes (20% of households receive social benefit and 48% housing benefit); and increased risk of fuel poverty. There is an ageing community in these high-rise blocks, as families with small children are not placed there, while antisocial behaviour can also be a problem with some young and inexperienced tenants. Furthermore, the community is at risk of being isolated from nearby regeneration developments.

Central government policies place increasing emphasis on capitalising on community assets (including local housing providers and welfare networks) to help address multiple deprivations. Some of the policy drift and changes in Government funding has directly impacted upon social housing tenants (and their perceived quality of life sustainability) and the representation of families suffering poverty can be remote from the mainstream of public awareness.

What do you expect as result of RE-Block project? What do you expect to learn from the European-wide cooperation as a partner of the RE-Block project? What are the main benefits of the project?

Salford hopes to achieve the following outcomes through the RE-Block project:

- · Improved knowledge and understanding of a range of issues / concepts, which can then be applied to improve social integration, develop more sustainable communities and improve governance, including:
  - o A better understanding of what drives people to get and stay involved;
- o EU participation knowledge and good practice:

- o Vehicles for co-operative learning and knowledge sharing that will better include end user experiences and expertise in the planning and delivery of sustainable solutions in the areas of improving social cohesion and eco-efficiency retrofits.
- · A better understanding of how regeneration processes in neighbourhoods can impact upon existing communities and how social integration between new and existing communities can take place. Enhanced and improving routes to cooperation and collaboration through active sharing; engaging citizens in life-wide learning and active research for local impact.
- · Partners to participate in the concept of Tower Twinning: a mechanism and evolving methodology for exchanging citizen experience and wisdom as a means of actively empowering and activating local and affordable solutions to issues of immediate concern to residents and tenants.

### How can you contribute to the project? What kind of concrete good practices can you offer for the partnership?

- a) Refurbishment best practice (with 13 blocks being refurbished within the City), including:
- University/Research experience in retrofit solutions and individual behaviour analysis in relation to heating and energy consumption;
- · Qualitative research methods aimed at and used for: improving inclusive consultation; better understanding impact indicators; and deepening awareness of the end user experience, including virtual modelling;
- Energy management and efficiency research expertise areas of social enterprise innovation across all areas of the City.
- b) Digital Hyper-local and community media expertise and links to regional initiatives of similar value:
  - · Community reporting and local media generation;
  - · The Timeline project; a research project with University partners making use of Story Circle and Story Sphere methods of co-production in local heritage and oral history programmes:



- The Virtual Urban Laboratory data interface research environment and its use in visualising and creating interactive environments for managing social data;
- · The Framework for Innovation and Research at MediaCitvUK and specific examples of practice in creating hyper and super local outputs through community reporting and citizen engagement.
- c) Open mutual learning exchange with Tenants and Residents Associations creative and cultural programme and citizen led experiences including research and practice experience as well as project case examples.

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### What kind of challenges do you face in your city (target area)?

The target area for the local action plan is Fornhöjden, more or less a satellite housing district area to the North East of Södertälje City. It was built in the early 1970s in the national construction program of 1 million flats. There is a great need for updating the standards of the old 70s blocks of flats, concerning renewals of exteriors and interiors, energy savings et cetera, but also to close the gap between the satellite district and the urban centre of the city – to put urbanism at the forefront. The renovation is a major challenge in terms of planning and necessary investments.

From being a very homogenous city in the late 1960s, the City of Södertälje, in 40 years time, has turned into a very diverse settlement for a

number of peoples carrying a variety of backgrounds, cultures, beliefs and values. This is due, mostly to the continuous refugee immigration from the Middle East. The majority of residents/citizens with a foreign background are settled in four of the suburban districts of the city. one of them being our target area: Fornhöjden. There is a great need for closing the gaps between peoples and creating both territorial and social cohesion to counteract the evil spirals of disorder and disparity.

What do you expect as result of RE-Block project? What do you expect to learn and what benefits to get from the European-wide cooperation as a partner of the RE-Block project?

A safe and pleasant neighbourhood creates good conditions for a healthy and thriving

population. The focus will be on how to create the sustainable physical regeneration of housing and environment as well as the closer connection to the "city bowl", how to create social cohesion by the physical formula, as one of the keys to success. RE-block will hopefully prove to be a platform of European dialogues, experiences, exchanges of knowhow and a multitude of good practices to duplicate.

### How can you contribute to the project? What are good practices you can offer for the partnership?

After some years of intensive and coordinated work, the Comprehensive Plan of Södertälje City was recently approved as the document for the vision of the City's future. With one eye on past times and the other eye on the times to come, the plan is a sort of guideline to the City's story IRL. Alongside this storytelling formula, in the last few years the City of Södertälje has taken the initiative to create four public private joint companies dealing with construction, skills training, labour distribution. It is a fairly unique "company construction", linking private and public sectors together. Another practice, from an ongoing EU project, is the use of varieties of Dialogue Platforms as means to facilitate integration with third country nationals.

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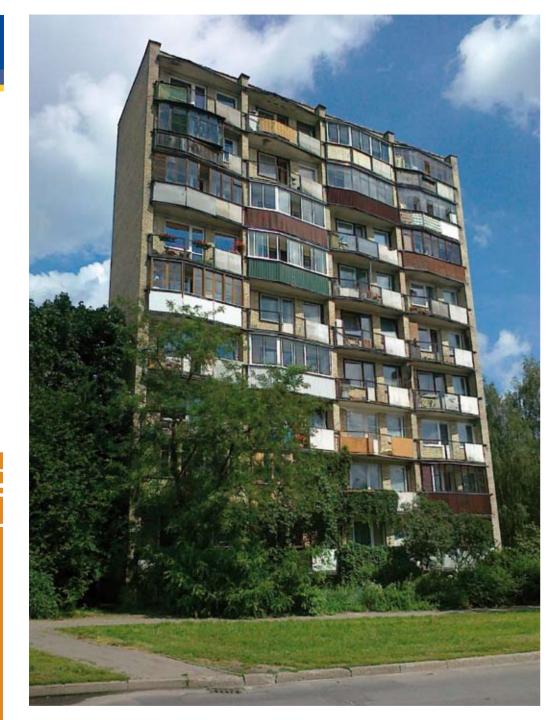
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### What kind of challenges do you face in your city (target area)?

City of Vilnius has determined the following strategic objectives till 2015: targeted increase of investment in the city centre; conversion of former industrial sites; completion of on-going projects. City Master Plan 2007-2015 set up the priority of the comprehensive renovation of housing in the districts built in the Soviet times, as well as the renewal of the territory and its infrastructure. Government of Lithuania is carrying the respon-

sibility for the renovation of the buildings - the JESSICA financial instrument is the main tool for the implementation of this goal. However the surrounding infrastructure - green spaces, parking lots, premises for the social needs - remains the responsibility of the Municipality.

The challenge is to improve the environment without State funding. Residential districts are to be upgraded upon development of comprehensive renovation projects for a district or its parts, providing the renewal of its surrounding area, the system of green spaces within/between the blocks and re-think principles of parking lot locations. Overall target is to find the most effective solution to increase thermal resistance of block housing, to improve the quality of life in these areas in terms of developing public spaces, children's playgrounds, sport facilities, security measures and arranging additional parking facilities.

What do you expect as result of RE-Block project? What do you expect to learn and what benefits to get from the European-wide cooperation as a partner of the RE-Block project?

With the help of all partners in the network we could find answers to the following questions



related to the target area (with particular focus on the physical and overarching governance dimension):

- · How to create political and administrative background - to find sustainable policy solutions and capacities; tools and experienced workforce to develop effective policies.
- · What is the most effective complex solution for the multi-dwelling housing renovation and infrastructure improvement (with the limited financial support from the city and from the government).
- · How to develop new methods, to create PPP cooperation and special financial incentives for investors, as of today there is a lack of functioning schemes to attract private investors in to urban rehabilitation programmes.
- · How to solve parking problems and find green spaces at the same time.

How can you contribute to the project? What are good practices you can offer for the partnership?

The target area Zirmunai is active in implementing various initiatives for the community:

- · The Program "Safe neighbourhood" is a cooperation with the local police, of which headquarters has been recently established here. This initiative generated active startup of small businesses in the area.
- · Frequent surveys with inhabitants about the most relevant issues or/and problems (parking, security, lack of public places and sport facilities, etc.). Result analysis and problem solutions.
- · PPP examples (construction and renovation of sports facilities in cooperation with private business).

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