

THE CITY OF PROXIMITIES: ENHANCING PROXIMITY SERVICES IN PERIPHERAL AREAS

CONCEPT NOTE

Version: February 2023

Priority “A Europe closer to citizens” (i - Sustainable integrated territorial development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security – Urban area)

1. BACKGROUND

Over the past few years, many European cities have experienced a growing trend toward localization and proximity, by testing new urban planning paradigms to make city centers more accessible, inclusive and sustainable for local residents. Besides the positive effects in the reduction of CO2 emissions, models such as the **“15-Minute City”** turned out to be an incentive to rethink the organization of urban spaces and give new centrality to people’s needs and ambitions.

The COVID crisis has emphasized the need to rethink the way people communicate, travel, consume and socialize on a daily basis, by focusing in particular on the most **peripheral areas**. Especially in medium-sized cities, where the 15-minute approach is tested on the “historic center” dimension, the peripheral areas are still far from reaching a people-center dimension where the most essential services can be found within a 15-minutes walking or cycling distance. The restrictions posed by the pandemics highlighted how the concept of “proximity” has become a tool to measure the citizens’ quality of life and, at the same time, made it evident the existence of an undeniable discrepancy between urban and peri-urban areas in terms of service proximity and sustainable mobility solutions.

At the same time, the COVID pandemic has made people rediscover the neighborhood dimension, especially the importance of **social connections** for the creation of strong, resilient communities. Through the enhancement of local services and the promotion people-centered solutions to mobility and public spaces regeneration, the project intends to develop innovative solution to rethink the role of peripheral areas as places of community regeneration and socio-economic innovation.

2. MAIN OBJECTIVES

The aim of the project is to improve the application of the **“City of Proximities”** paradigm to peripheral areas, by enhancing the role of services and of soft mobility measures in improving neighborhood resilience and restoring community bonds. The project will rely on the following leverages:

- Improving the role of proximity services in peripheral areas (e.g. shops, retailers, restaurants, economic activities), as multi-functional actors able to generate social, environmental and economic value for the community;

- improving the social dimension of soft mobility measures (walkability and cyclability) as tools to rebuild the social fabric in peripheral areas, rediscover local places and restore the centrality of people in public spaces;
- find sustainable solutions to improve the connections between central and peripheral areas to enable an equal access to basic services.

3. FORESEEN ACTIONS

- Creation of a Municipal Committee including several departments engaged on the project's topic (participation, urban planning, mobility, environmental services, economic activities..);
- Data collection and analysis about the quality of life in peripheral areas, with reference to the average distance from public and private spaces, multifunctionalities opportunities and mobility options;
- Creation of Local Stakeholder groups in each partner city, to engage local actors, citizens, start ups, research centers, private owners, cultural actors, social actors, trade associations and: map needs/challenges; good practices and support the improvement of local policies
- Exchange of experiences with the other partner cities, through the organization of dedicated study visits (one per partner) and exchange workshops on the topics of the project
- **TO BE DEFINED:** design and experimentation of Pilot actions in specific neighbourhoods in peripheral areas

4. PARTNERSHIP

Lead partner: Municipality of Reggio Emilia (Italy – Geographical area: South)

Advisory partner: Erasmus University of Rotterdam (Netherlands – Geographical area: West)

* At least one partner from **Geographical area North** is required: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden

* At least one partner from **Geographical area East** is required: Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia