

ASPECTS REGARDING THE SOCIAL TRANSITION AT EUROPEAN LEVEL

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Abstract

Europe is going through a period of social transition, influenced by macroeconomic factors of change, such as the digital and environmental transition, demographic changes and other global events. The smart transition is increasingly felt in cities and communities of different sizes, due to some influencing factors such as the speed of the energy transition, as well as the implementation of new forms of work and learning, largely supported by digital tools. The digital and environmental transition produces social consequences, with an impact on jobs, positively influencing the quality of work and requiring new skills, preparing the workforce for the future of the labour market. Social transformations have brought new challenges such as the demand for new qualifications, skills, labour shortages, digital gaps and a series of social manifestations: increasing inequalities, increasing social protection spending and new challenges regarding social cohesion. Through the advantages and disadvantages, they produce, transitions are perceived differently by individuals and lead to uncertainties in society, changes in behaviour and values.

The study addresses the social transformations taking place at European level, aspects relating the triple transition and the social dimension, policies developed at European Union, in the social plan, to mitigate the consequences of various disruptive factors, aiming at meeting the needs of citizens and developing an inclusive economy. The methodology used is the documentation from the economic specialized literature related to the topic addressed, the selection, interpretation and formulation of ideas, in the author's own conception

Keywords: social transition, European Union policies in social field, social transformations, triple transition, social impact.

1. Introduction

Cities profoundly shape the way people live their lives, influencing their behavior, consumption habits and opportunities. For many, urban living means access to diverse jobs, quality education, social mobility and better housing, all of which contribute to health and well-being. However, for others, city life brings challenges: high costs, social isolation, a sense of insecurity and a polluted or degraded environment¹.

The smart transition, whose presence is felt in cities and communities of different sizes, has experienced a significant increase in recent years, due to the speed of the energy transition, as well as the implementation of new forms of work and learning, largely supported by digital tools. Another influential factor has been the need to form a more inclusive society, with an emphasis on civic and social engagement. At the same time, some risks that the impact of the transition on the environments in which it operates, as well as on citizens, must also be taken into account, which implies finding and promoting practices that mitigate risks and lead to a responsible transition from a social point of view².

A prosperous, competitive economy has a positive impact on individuals and the business environment. A solid social environment, at European level, is a foundation for the formation of a prosperous society but also for the development of a fair, competitive economy, supported by a workforce capable of exploiting innovations, through qualifications oriented towards new changes as a result of the transition produced by new technologies and the environmental one³.

The importance of the topic lies in the fact that it addresses social transformations that are taking place at the European level as a result of the digital and environmental transition and other factors, aspects relating the triple transition, policies developed at European Union, in the social plan, to mitigate the consequences of various disruptive factors, aiming at meeting the needs of citizens and developing an inclusive economy.

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¹ European Environment Agency, 2013.

² European Parliament, 2023.

³ European Commission, Delivering a strong Social Europe.

The paper aims to highlight aspects related to the social impact that the digital and environmental transitions have at the European level, and concerns at European level for combating the unfavourable social consequences caused by the transition and other factors.

2. Aspects of social transformations at European level

Europe is going through a period of social transition, influenced by macroeconomic factors of change, such as the digital and environmental transition, demographic changes and other global events, for example, the COVID-19 pandemic. Social transformations have brought new challenges such as the demand for new qualifications, skills, labor shortages, digital gaps and a series of social manifestations: increasing inequalities, increasing social protection spending and new challenges regarding social cohesion⁴. Transformations are perceived as long-term system changes, through which social actors have gone, which refer to the whole of society. They are long-term processes that derive from natural, political, economic, technological, social and cultural fields. Through the advantages and disadvantages, they produce, transitions are perceived differently by individuals and lead to uncertainties in society, changes in behavior and values⁵. Despite the shocks to which it has been subjected in recent years, in the European Union, which have had unfavourable consequences for society, intensely affecting social life as a whole through the impact created on jobs, the economy, social assistance systems, accentuating barriers and inequalities, the European Union has maintained its resilience, following the initiatives of the Member States and the European Union as a whole⁶.

The term resilience has evolved from increasing the capacity to adapt to risks caused by economic crises, natural disasters, etc., to social resilience, focused on individuals, power relations and increasing the capacity of societies to cope with major crises⁷. The concept of resilience is increasingly oriented towards systemic aspects and addressing social vulnerabilities and inequalities⁸.

In the sense of the Partnership for Social Transformations and Resilience (STR), resilience is seen as the capacity of institutions and societies to cope with change, by using resources and developing strategies adapted to the transformations that society is undergoing. The Partnership for Social Transformations and Resilience (STR) aims to increase the capacity of society to adapt to the transformations caused by climate, technological and demographic changes and aims to achieve social cohesion, inclusion and equity through innovation and policies in areas such as modern social protection systems, adaptation to the future profile of the labour market, through the development of education and new skills and support for an equitable perception of environmental transitions as possible as⁹.

Resilience is seen as a process through which institutions, public services and societies develop their capacity to adapt to crises, uncertainties and risks¹⁰.

3. The triple transition and the social dimension

The digital and environmental transition, demographic changes and social and geopolitical crises have an impact on the quality of work, an aspect that requires attention from political decision-makers in policy-making¹¹. The European Union develops policies that respond to the needs of its citizens, by developing an economy based on inclusion and equity¹².

The digital and environmental transition produces consequences in social field, with an impact on jobs, positively influencing the quality of work and requiring new skills, preparing the workforce for the future of the labor market.

Modern technologies offer new qualification possibilities for individuals, who face difficulties related to technological change.¹³

⁴ European Partnership on Social Transformations and Resilience under Horizon Europe, 2025.

⁵ European Partnership on Social Transformations and Resilience under Horizon Europe, 2025.

⁶ European Commission, Delivering a Strong Social Europe.

⁷ Manca, Benczur and Giovannini, 2017, cited in European Partnership on Social Transformations and Resilience under Horizon Europe, 2025.

⁸ Suslovic B, Lett, 2023, cited in European Partnership on Social Transformations and Resilience under Horizon Europe, 2025.

⁹ European Partnership on Social Transformations and Resilience under Horizon Europe, 2025.

¹⁰ European Partnership on Social Transformations and Resilience under Horizon Europe, 2025.

¹¹ European Partnership on Social Transformations and Resilience under Horizon Europe, 2025.

¹² European Commission, Delivering a strong Social Europe.

¹³ International Labor Organization, 2020; European Partnership for Social Transformations and Resilience under Horizon Europe, 2025.

Developing initiatives regarding the inclusion in the technology sector by addressing the barriers faced by disadvantaged groups is an essential element to ensuring equitable access to education and skills development.¹⁴

According to surveys among employees, it can be observed that the introduction of digitalization can have both positive and negative social effects on jobs and employees: on the one hand, it can increase efficiency and facilitate work, and, on the other hand, other opinions consider that there is a risk of job losses¹⁵.

The digital transition can have a positive social impact for people with disabilities, for whom digital technologies can facilitate the performance of certain tasks, but at the same time there is a risk of a negative impact, of the emergence of the effect of discrimination¹⁶.

The green transition is important in creating jobs, developing new competences in green technologies, improving jobs that are at risk, in the manufacturing sector. Against the background of these structural changes, issues such as job loss, unemployment, social inequalities, the risk of marginalization and exclusion of disadvantaged groups, generated by the closure of some polluting industries (such as the closure of coal mines) remain important problems on the labour market¹⁷.

The green and digital transition, demographic changes and societal shocks present considerable challenges in terms of how the educational process and skills can prepare individuals, communities and societies for both short-term and long-term changes in employment and careers.

The challenges created by the digital and environmental transition, demographic changes and shocks influence the ability of the education system to prepare society for the future labour market entry¹⁸.

Education is an important factor in avoiding unemployment, access to education being conditioned by the socio-economic environment, a factor of educational outcomes. In general, education systems face a series of shortcomings in addressing inequalities regarding the possibilities of equitable access to education for all citizens. The uneven implementation of inclusive education policies, lack of resources, regional disparities are elements that influence the capacity of the education system to ensure impartial access for disadvantaged, marginalized categories. New long-term policies and strategies are needed to create access possibilities for marginalized groups¹⁹.

The digital and environmental transitions require new skills, in the workplace. For example, the environmental transition develops new areas, such as wind and solar energy, electric vehicles and heat pumps, and, consequently, new jobs²⁰.

A workforce qualified for new skills contributes to long-term sustainable development and increased competitiveness. Efforts are being made to combat labour shortages and skills shortcomings.²¹ In achieving the goals of climate neutrality, in addition to the development of new technologies and policy initiatives, a decisive aspect is also cohesion among citizens, through their involvement in decision-making processes and their empowerment. Transversal skills, such as environmental responsibility and initiatives towards sustainable development, are needed in all areas²².

Recent studies show that citizen participation in achieving environmental objectives is important, especially in regions where resources are insufficient²³.

Encouraging citizen participation in environmental initiatives and including them in the decision-making process leads them to support broad environmental policies and, respectively, the achievement of their objectives. Ensuring transparency in communication, citizen involvement in the decision-making process and actions at the local level can strengthen the sense of trust at the community level and actions towards sustainable development.²⁴

¹⁴ OECD, 2024; cited in European Partnership on Social Transformations and Resilience under Horizon Europe, 2025.

¹⁵ Lane, Williams and Broecke, 2023, cited in European Partnership on Social Transformations and Resilience under Horizon Europe, 2025.

¹⁶ European Partnership on Social Transformations and Resilience under Horizon Europe, 2025.

¹⁷ European Partnership on Social Transformations and Resilience under Horizon Europe, 2025.

¹⁸ European Partnership on Social Transformations and Resilience under Horizon Europe, 2025.

¹⁹ European Partnership on Social Transformations and Resilience under Horizon Europe, 2025.

²⁰ European Commission, Delivering a Strong Social Europe.

²¹ European Commission, Delivering a Strong Social Europe.

²² OECD, 2023, cited in European Partnership on Social Transformations and Resilience under Horizon Europe, 2025.

²³ Papafragkou, A., 2021, cited in European Partnership on Social Transformations and Resilience under Horizon Europe, 2025.

²⁴ Moser, Berzonsky, 2019, cited in European Partnership on Social Transformations and Resilience under Horizon Europe, 2025.

Digital technologies play a role in involving citizens in the environmental transition. Digital platforms that make it possible to monitor air quality or energy consumption contribute to the adoption of environmentally responsible solutions at the local level.²⁵

To address these challenges and support the environmental and digital transitions, 2023 has been designated the European Year of Skills. This initiative aims to increase the potential of the workforce and society by addressing skills shortages in the European Union, supporting individuals in their efforts to acquire the skills needed for good quality jobs, and supporting Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) and other companies in addressing skills gaps²⁶.

4. Directions of action at European level

The plan sets out directions of action, in the short and medium term, that the European Union, the Member States and the social partners should take in some areas²⁷.

Equal access to education and vocational training for citizens of the European Union, regardless of the environment in which they live (urban or rural, isolated areas). Guidance must meet the needs of enterprises, namely a skilled workforce for the digital and environmental transitions, and the population must have access to education, which will develop their skills and progress in life²⁸.

Creating employment opportunities for the young workforce The young workforce faces a number of difficulties in finding a job. Through funding programmes and other measures, the European Union supports young people in finding quality jobs. Among the initiatives, they include: The reinforced Youth Guarantee, as part of the support package for youth employment. Since 2013, through the Youth Guarantee programmes, approximately 50 million young people have taken up jobs, had access to internships and vocational training.²⁹

Improving working conditions for people working with new digital technologies. Increasing safety at work, by preventing work-related deaths.

Decent and safe living conditions, combating the marginalization of disadvantaged people, by creating more and better jobs.

Access for citizens and enterprises to financing from the European Union budget. The Next GenerationEU Programme and the Recovery and Resilience Mechanism are part of the European Union budget promoting smart, sustainable and inclusive growth by supporting the business environment, competitiveness and industrialization.

The EU budget supports initiatives for job creation and for the development and implementation of projects in areas such as: health, education, transport and energy infrastructure. It is estimated that, by 2027, 1.3 million jobs will be created in the Union through the European Union's cohesion policy programmes³⁰.

Adequate minimum wages in the EU. The Commission supports fair and decent wage policies for all workers in the EU. These are a guarantee of adequate working conditions and a decent standard of living for workers and their families, as well as in order to develop a fair and resilient economy and support inclusive growth.³¹

Improving working conditions for platform workers. Labour rights and social protection must be ensured for all employees across the European Union. In 2021, the Commission proposed a directive on good working conditions for those working with digital platforms. These initiatives contribute to the correct establishment of the employment status of those working through platforms, so that they are assured of their related employment rights. In the context of the digital transition, the European Union has ensured fairness, accountability and protection of workers' rights³²

Strengthening occupational safety and health. Ensuring safe working conditions that do not endanger the health of workers are concerns that have a high impact at European Union level. Through the Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2021-2028, the European Union adopted the Vision Zero initiative to eliminate the risks of death due to work.³³

²⁵ European Partnership on Social Transformations and Resilience under Horizon Europe, 2025.

²⁶ European Commission, Delivering a Strong Social Europe.

²⁷ European Commission, Delivering a strong Social Europe.

²⁸ European Commission, Delivering a Strong Social Europe.

²⁹ European Commission, Delivering a Strong Social Europe.

³⁰ European Commission, Delivering a Strong Social Europe.

³¹ European Commission, Delivering a Strong Social Europe.

³² European Commission, Delivering a Strong Social Europe.

³³ European Commission, Delivering a Strong Social Europe.

Improving access to opportunities for people with disabilities. The Strategy for the rights of people with disabilities for the period 2021-2030, adopted by the European Commission in 2022, aims at equal opportunities in the European Union. In this regard, an Employment Package for People with Disabilities was adopted, with a view to increasing equal opportunities and ensuring conditions for access to the labour market and participation in economic and social life, for people with disabilities³⁴.

5. European Union-level policies in the social field

The European Union develops policies aimed at meeting the needs of citizens, by developing an economy based on inclusion, fairness and new perspectives³⁵.

The European Pillar of Social Rights (European Pillar of Social Rights) proclaimed in 2017 by the European Parliament, the European Council and the European Commission at the Gothenburg Summit includes regulations for the development of a performing labour market and with fair social protection systems. European policies aim to build equal societies, high-standard working conditions and high-standard social protection³⁶.

In 2021, an Action Plan was developed to provide guidance in using the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights for the benefit of citizens. The actions are embodied in³⁷:

- job creation; increasing the employability of people aged 20-64;
- creating opportunities for individuals to develop their capacities and opportunities for success; increasing training capacity;
- reducing poverty, increasing equal opportunities to benefit from new opportunities;
- combating poverty and social exclusion; increasing social inclusion.

The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) is a component of cohesion policy and an EU instrument that supports investment in human resources, social cohesion and inclusion, at Union level, the development of the European Pillar of Social Rights. It supports policy initiatives in the areas of employment, social issues, education and skills development at European Union level and contributes to reducing social and economic disparities between Member States and regions.³⁸

European Union funding is available through various funding programmes including InvestEU which support sustainable investment, innovation and job creation, and support small businesses' access to investment.³⁹

Social protection systems, the foundation of the European social model, ensure protection for individuals (by providing social assistance, protection against accidents at work, unemployment benefits), in preventing and reducing poverty⁴⁰

Within the framework of the policy to combat poverty and create a more inclusive society, the following initiatives are distinguished⁴¹.

- Adequate minimum income to ensure active inclusion. The European Union is working (Recommendation adopted in 2023) to ensure decent living conditions for the whole of society. This means measures to prevent and eliminate poverty and social exclusion, ensuring adequate income for people facing disadvantages, ensuring conditions of access to essential services and integration into the labor market for those able to work.
- Access to housing and combating homelessness. In 2021, the European Platform for Combating Homelessness was launched, in order to ensure the exchange of experiences in efforts to reduce homelessness.
- Eradicating child poverty. Ensuring decent living conditions and eliminating the risk of poverty and social exclusion for all children in the European Union. To achieve this objective, the European Union has adopted the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the European Child Guarantee, initiatives aimed at: access of children at risk of poverty and social exclusion, to services such as early childhood education and care; ensuring at least one healthy meal every school day, healthcare.

³⁴ European Commission, Delivering a Strong Social Europe.

³⁵ European Commission, Delivering a strong Social Europe.

³⁶ European Commission, European Pillar of Social Rights.

³⁷ European Commission, Delivering a Strong Social Europe.

³⁸ European Commission, Delivering a Strong Social Europe).

³⁹ European Commission, Delivering a Strong Social Europe

⁴⁰ European Union, 2023, cited in European Partnership on Social Transformations and Resilience under Horizon Europe, 2025 .

⁴¹ European Commission, Delivering a strong Social Europe.

- European Union Fund provides support to disadvantaged Irish families. The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) supports vulnerable families in Ireland through the "School Stationery Kits" initiative. Through this initiative, school stationery kits were distributed to children receiving FEAD food aid, asylum seekers (as part of the International Refugee Protection Programme) and those benefiting from emergency accommodation for the homeless.

Transitions affect many vulnerable communities. There are societies that experienced industrial decline following the closure of polluting activities, such as the mining industry, which caused environmental damage and led to the evacuation of communities, producing social revolts at the local level⁴².

In the table below, there are some examples regarding the strategies employed by some European countries.

Table 1: Examples of good practices regarding social transition at European level and the social impact on residents

European Countries
BRISTOL It is an important city in England and one of the oldest ports. It has an area of 109.6 km²⁴³ and a population of 472,465 inhabitants (2021)⁴⁴. The strategy refers to the sustainable and inclusive development plan of the city of Bristol and the prospects for the year 2050. Among the long-term objectives, there is the sustainable and inclusive development of the city by reducing social inequalities, achieving the objective of carbon neutrality. The authorities have committed to smart urban development policies, through digital technologies, energy management, with the involvement of citizens in each area in the decision-making process regarding heat and energy consumption. The city uses solar and wind energy. In the inclusive development of the city of Bristol, numerous factors intervene through government policy at the national level, in the areas of: markets, trade, migration, conflicts, climate change and others. The problems that intervene in local development refer to: demographic aging, social inequalities and irrational consumption of resources. The approach of the "One City" Plan is a dynamic concept that develops through collective participation in finding the best methods of solving the problems facing the city and developing a resilient, functional and inclusive city. The vision for the development of Bristol, in the long term, until 2050, pursues a systemic approach to the city, through inter-connectivity, within dynamic, varied systems. The development of the city is carried out in a system of interdependent elements such as: connectivity, health and well-being, housing and communities, economy, environment, learning and skills, on the basis of which initiatives will be developed and implemented that address issues related to social shortcomings such as homelessness, crime and unemployment, social integration, economic inclusion. The aim is for Bristol to become a fair, healthy and sustainable city. Connectivity In the perspective of 2050, objectives are pursued related to the provision of digital services that connect the whole city, with consequences in the social sphere, to ensure access to employment, education and services for the whole population and efficient, sustainable and inclusive transport that facilitates the mobility of citizens throughout the city. City connectivity is anchored in modern urban life, ensured through an infrastructure that facilitates individuals' access to services and better communication, to learn from the experiences of others.

⁴² Bedoya, 2012; Bozzi, 2015; Padel & Das, 2010, cited in Atteridge, Strambo, Edt, Tom Gill, 2021.

⁴³ "City of Bristol (Unitary District, City of Bristol, United Kingdom) - Population Statistics, Charts, Map and Location". 2023).

⁴⁴ Bristol, Wikipedia, https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bristol#cite_note-wdref-ce4e08a2f538945b2159040b7ea2bd95-2).

Connectivity supports productivity growth. These aspects are based on actions such as:

- - providing social housing, businesses and public spaces with very high-speed internet, using Wi-Fi technology.
- - increasing urban mobility through bus lane management, creating dedicated bike lanes, traffic congestion control and student education programs concerning ensuring safety while traveling.
- - providing high-quality urban communications infrastructure and services; all of these aspects of connectivity aim to build dynamic local neighborhoods and a thriving city center.

Economy In the long term, the aim is for the entire population of Bristol to contribute to the development of a sustainable, inclusive economy. which ensures: combating social challenges, such as unemployment and economic and social exclusion; increasing productivity; economic integration between neighborhoods.

Environment The objective is a sustainable development of the city, with a reduced carbon footprint, healthy food, the creation of a harmonious natural environment, with a rich fauna, in which the whole city can live healthily.

Health and Wellbeing The aspects are aimed at making the city of Bristol a space in which, by 2050, residents will live in a healthy environment both mentally and physically, in which inequalities are reduced; for children, the aim is for them to evolve in a harmonious, healthy development framework, throughout their lives.

Housing and Communities The aim is to create a safe environment, in which the entire population of the city of Bristol benefits from housing that meets their needs, in harmonious neighborhoods, which combine aspects related to connection, inclusion, safety, access to goods, better living conditions.

Learning and Skills In the long term, aspects related to creating favorable conditions for learning and skills training for all citizens are targeted, through: increasing school involvement, developing young people's skills, improved educational programs for young people, combining education with skills training and employment opportunities, support for children with special educational needs and children in foster home.

Visions for 2050 and social aspects

Economic growth and industrial development have had a high social impact by reducing unemployment, reducing income inequality and economic and social exclusion. In Bristol, economic growth is stimulated by ensuring connectivity, promoting modern technologies, innovative products, diversity and creativity. Reducing inequalities ensures increased productivity through integration and access of individuals to the workplace, promoting social inclusion.

Social challenges that stand in the way of achieving the economic vision in the perspective of 2050.

Social aspects that make it difficult for the city to develop, in accordance with the 2050 objectives.

- The presence of inequalities between neighborhoods in different areas of the city, inequalities related to disabilities, ethnicity and other elements that increase social effects.
- The lack of housing that has led to high prices and rents, which put many citizens in difficulty.
- Poor transport infrastructure in peripheral neighborhoods hinders access to education and healthy living conditions.

Social aspects have an impact on the economic future of the city's development and constitute threats for a part of the population that risks facing social and economic exclusion, due to the difficulty or lack of access to higher qualification programs at university level required by new jobs on the local labor market.

Environmental vision for 2050

Progress has been made in the transition to a healthy, non-polluting environment by equipping the city's housing with renewable energy. Wind energy is exploited by converting it

into renewable energy to ensure a non-polluting environment, with low carbon emissions and ensuring healthy living conditions.

Health and Wellbeing Vision 2050

Improvements in Bristol's infrastructure facilitate the provision of health and social care, with the health and well-being of citizens at the heart of the decision-making system:

- Increasing urban mobility by reshaping transport in the city leads to the elimination of social inequalities and increasing social inclusion by facilitating access to urban transport. This leads to the creation of a healthy urban environment, with easy access to health services, better living conditions
- Creating a healthy, non-polluting environment leads to a reduction in deaths caused by air pollution.
- Providing medical services through a digital system ensures permanent access of citizens to these and facilitates access to medical and social services by creating possibilities for choosing access methods.

Reducing the gap between life expectancy levels between the most disadvantaged and the richest areas of Bristol is achieved by providing personalized medicine services, which differ from the classic one through different methods of diagnosis and treatment.

Vision for 2050 - Homes and communities

Social aspects related to vulnerable groups are improved by increasing the possibilities of occupying housing, Bristol having the lowest rate of homeless people among all cities in the United Kingdom.

Citizens of the city of Bristol have harmonious and safe living conditions, by involving communities in community activities, cultural events, social isolation is reduced, by increasing collective participation and reducing antisocial behavior.

Despite many of the targets being met, Bristol faces a number of challenges on the way to achieving its 2050 vision for homes and communities.

- The serious threat of a terrorist attack;
- Hate crime has increased in recent times;
- The presence of drug markets in Bristol;
- The number of victims of online fraud has increased.

Vision 2050 - Learning and skills

The education system. Ensures equal opportunities for every child by eliminating segregation in schools, children with special educational needs or disabilities by 2030, the education system provides skills for every citizen, Bristol benefits from a business environment that is open to integration and learning opportunities, cultural studies have been introduced that reflect the diversity of Bristol's communities.

Social exclusion rates are reduced by creating opportunities for all school graduates to access education, skills development, and employment.

Coordination between educational programs and the business environment is sought, by focusing on new skills, such as skills in the use of digital technologies, media, and the integration of the business environment into school networks.

Facilitating access to the educational process by creating educational infrastructure that meets the needs of the individual, ensuring educational support programs to increase literacy and numeracy in adults.

Smart urban development policies have been implemented through digital strategies. Looking ahead to 2050, the objective is to connect the entire city to digital services, with consequences in the social sphere, with the involvement of citizens in the decision-making process. The development of the city is carried out in a system of interdependent elements, namely: connectivity, economy, health and well-being, housing, economy and others. On this basis, initiatives are developed that address problems in the social area, which meet the needs of individuals: favorable living conditions, learning, health, increased urban mobility.

BARCELONA

The second largest city in Spain, in the same time, being, the capital of the community of Catalonia. It is an important port on the Mediterranean Sea. It has an area of 102.15 km² ⁴⁵ and a population of 1,686,208 inhabitants (June 2024) ⁴⁶

There is a significant wealth inequality between the two groups of districts, but also a distinction between the levels of education.

Objectives of the strategy:

- Creating a coherent framework, appropriate to the interventions for each area.
- Involving socio-economic actors from the respective locations and creating public-private - socio-community networks and synergies.
- Ensuring in the territories, the necessary resources to carry out the designed actions.
- Carrying out new actions in the form of services or programs, such as:
 - o Information and counseling services with reference to Labour Rights, such as information services on employment, promotion on a quality labor market;
 - o Training programs to increase the employment capacity of groups with social difficulties;
 - o Programs on revitalization or creation of spaces for local development: for searching for a new job, providing professional guidance services or defending workers' rights.

Among the new measures, the emphasis is on economic development and the launch of five-year development plans, with the aim of ensuring sustainable economic activity, with an emphasis on the activity of districts with a lower level of development, that would reduce the discrepancy in relation to the more advanced areas of the region, as well as new social actions to improve the quality of life, services for defending labor rights and skills training programs to increase the employment capacity of vulnerable groups, a program for revitalizing vacant spaces of the municipality and making them available for local trade and other economic activities.

It is also worth mentioning a series of measures undertaken by local authorities that have made efforts to improve the quality of life of residents, in the long term. through various measures.

Sustainable mobility, ensured by the introduction of hybrid buses and interactive bus stops.

- Investments in new technologies, in order to increase the attractiveness of green spaces for residents.
- Equipping the city with intelligent systems, such as: implementing a platform through which experiences and good practices can be shared, solutions for smart urban development.
- Creating an attractive environment for citizens, smart solutions to the problems they face, better living conditions.

HAMBURG

It is a port city, one of the 16 federal states of Germany. It has an area of 755 km² ⁴⁷ and a population of 1,910 thousand inhabitants (2023) ⁴⁸

The Digital Strategy of the city of Hamburg is oriented towards individuals, the aim being to give Hamburg the image of a modern city with good living conditions, by introducing digital technologies in the provision of services, in order to facilitate the daily activities of citizens, so that the entire population benefits from the use of digital technologies. The aim is to: create better living conditions, increase the quality of life, by improving living conditions, making public services more efficient, reducing traffic congestion, individual educational programs.

⁴⁵ Annual population census 2021-2024, INE

⁴⁶ <http://www.idescat.cat/pub/?id=aec&n=925&t=2016>. (Barcelona, Wikipedia, https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barcelona#cite_note-wdref-2f54ebd7d246869440c310c653a72527-2).

⁴⁷ "Alle politisch selbständigen Gemeinden mit ausgewählten Merkmalen am 31.12.2018 (4. Quartal)". Statistisches Bundesamt, 2019.;

⁴⁸ Hamburg, Wikipedia, https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamburg#cite_note-wdref-5c6a527b973086c1315a2e8cac98d2e2-1.

Digitalization projects are in the interest of individuals, focusing on efficiency, social benefits and sustainability. Digital transformation goes beyond the borders of cities or states, by addressing issues related to federal digitalization.

Through e-government, the social impact is given by making administrative services more efficient, a faster and more secure access, in order to increase the quality of life, by introducing digital technologies, in the interest of individuals.

The implementation of digital technologies meets the needs of individuals and the business environment. Capitalizing on innovation and introducing new technologies requires responsibility.

Social impact is created by familiarizing citizens, the business environment, educational and research institutions and public authorities with the use of digitalization, as efficient as possible, through the development of educational programs.

The digitalization strategy is oriented, with priority to individuals (in the interest of citizens) considering digitalization as a social mission. Digital transformation is inclusive and oriented towards satisfying citizens, meets their interests, stimulating their active involvement. It includes two strategic priority objectives:

It is based on inclusion and access of all individuals to digital services and information regardless of qualification, acquired skills; discrimination of any kind is eliminated, promoting the principle of inclusion and equality access to digital infrastructure and public services.

The implementation of digital technologies meets the needs of individuals and the business environment. Capitalizing on innovation and introducing new technologies requires responsibility.

Social impact is created by familiarizing citizens, the business environment, educational and research institutions and public authorities with the most efficient use of digitalization, through the development of educational programs.

The digitalization strategy is oriented, with priority to individuals (for the benefit of citizens) considering digitalization as a social mission. Digital transformation is inclusive and oriented towards satisfying citizens, meets their interests, stimulating their active involvement. It includes two strategic priority objectives:

It is based on inclusion and access of all individuals to digital services and information regardless of qualification, acquired skills; discrimination of any kind is eliminated, promoting the principle of inclusion and equality of digital infrastructure and public services.

The Hamburg City Strategy is committed to ensure transparency in the communication of information and stimulates democratic participation and social cohesion, through direct addressing. Citizens and civil society organizations are encouraged to get involved in the future development of the city, through various digital participation tools, with an emphasis on social development.

A number of areas in which digitalization is implemented show how the use of these technologies intervenes in people's lives, respectively, the social impact it exerts, the quality of life such as: solutions for intelligent transport and service management, digital services in education, social assistance platform, digital services for companies. The Digital Strategy of the City of Hamburg is developed to meet the needs of the city and its citizens. It aims at the long-term development of the city, aiming to give the image of a digital city, better living conditions, for the entire community: citizens, businesses, employees in the public and private sectors, research and education institutions, civil society organizations, tourists.

For the city of Hamburg, the notion of a smart city is not new, as the city has previous experiences, through the strategies of 2015 and 2020. The strategy complements them, being a Work Agenda for public authorities. The initiatives provided for in the strategy have a social impact, being for the benefit of individuals oriented towards efficiency, social benefits, sustainability. Digitalization is not limited only to the city of Hamburg, but goes beyond the level of cities or states, tackling aspects related to federal digitalization.

STAVANGER

It is the fourth largest city in Norway. It has an area of 71.35 km²⁴⁹ and a population of 148,628 inhabitants (2023). It is an industrial, academic and cultural center.⁵⁰

In 2015, the implementation of the smart city concept began, when the strategic document - Roadmap - was designed regarding the manifestation of smart city activity in this municipality.

In 2017, the Smart City Office (SC OFFICE) was created, for which, professionals (with interdisciplinary experiences) were hired; their role was to implement the measures in the Roadmap. Stavanger became the first urban municipality in Norway which has its own office (SC OFFICE) dedicated to the implementation of the concept.

The creation of the strategic document – Roadmap - for the Municipality of Stavanger, as well as the decision to establish an office - SC OFFICE - by the municipality can signify tools for implementing smart city concepts, as well as solving complex situations and achieving the objectives of a smart city.

The implementation of the smart city concept was monitored, for the period 2018-2020, the qualitative analysis of the documents followed the semi-annual reports of the SC OFFICE, as well as some interviews with competent personnel.

According to the semi-annual report of the Stavanger Municipality (2019), it results that in its activity, the SC Office takes an interest in co-creation and citizen involvement, paying increased attention to citizens' opinions.

The study showed that the establishment of the SC Office did not lead to substantive changes within the organization, and the ideas regarding the smart city, as an innovative way of working, did not take shape in the Municipality of Stavanger.

After the first years of operation, changes occurred, new working methods emerged; new skills were developed, new working principles and techniques and smart city projects were adapted to local conditions.

The challenges and experiences of the city hall regarding the transition to smart cities are useful to be applied both in the Municipality of Stavanger and in other cities and communities.

From autumn 2023, the SC Office will no longer operate as an independent unit, but will be integrated into the Innovation and Digitalization Department.

The model considered for the city of Stavanger expresses the concept of a Nordic smart city model that is based on Nordic social values, namely: inclusion, cooperation, co-creation, citizen participation, which ensures an increase in the quality of life of individuals

Source: *Bristol One City Plan 2025, A Plan for Bristol, Bristol One City*, <https://www.bristolonecity.com>; *City of Bristol (Unitary District, City of Bristol, United Kingdom) - Population Statistics, Charts, Map and Location. 2023*;

Bristol, Wikipedia, https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bristol#cite_note-wdref-ce4e08a2f538945b2159040b7ea2bd95-2; *Annual population census 2021-2024, INE*; <http://www.idescat.cat/pub/?id=aec&n=925&t=2016>; *Barcelona*, Wikipedia, https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barcelona#cite_note-wdref-2f54ebd7d246869440c310c653a72527-2; *Statistics*; *Barcelona Activa Local Economic Development Strategy Working for a More Local Economy Executive Summary Boostinno Innovation Action Plan*, <https://urbact.eu>; *Hamburg Digital Strategy, Hamburg, Management Summary, Hamburg Digital Strategy, Digitale Stadt Hamburg*, <https://digital.hamburg.de>; „Alle politisch selbständigen Gemeinden mit ausgewählten Merkmalen am 31.12.2018 (4. Quartal)“. Statistisches Bundesamt, 2019. *Hamburg*, Wikipedia, https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamburg#cite_note-wdref-5c6a527b973086c1315a2e8cac98d2e2-1; Undheim S. and Sageidet Barbara M., PART III The Lived Smart City Pag. 131, Chapter 10 Implementation of the smart city concept in Stavanger Municipality – from a global idea to local practice pag.131-133, DOI: 10.4324/9781003498650-14, in *A Nordic Smart Sustainable City. Lessons from Theory and Practice*, Edited by Barbara Maria Sageidet, Daniela Müller-Eie and Kristiane M.F. Lindland Routledge Studies in Sustainable Development Taylor & Francis Taylor & Francis Group <http://taylorandfrancis.com> Routledge Studies in Sustainable Development, NORDIC EDGE, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, First published 2025 by Routledge, ISBN: 978-1-032-81211-3, ISBN: 978-1-032-81212-0, ISBN: 978-1-003-49865-0,

⁴⁹ Norwegian Mapping Authority (20 December 2019). "Arealstatistikk for Norge 2020" (in Norwegian bokmål). Norwegian Mapping Authority. Wikidata Q87265903;

⁵⁰ Stavanger, Wikipedia, https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stavanger#cite_note-wdref-16819ab798429cfc1fd5b8b92784e60e-2;

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6. Conclusions

The triple transition (social, environmental and digital) offers the possibility of perceiving connections that are formed between the three types of transitions, between them, there being interaction and mutual reinforcement. Through the social transition, the implementation of social policies is ensured that offer society the opportunity to benefit from the results obtained through the green and digital transitions, in turn exerting an impact on the other two forms of transition⁵¹. The costs of the transition to a green and digital economy can put pressure on low- and middle-income households, vulnerable to these changes, which limits their possibilities to participate in the environmental transition⁵².

Citizen inclusion is not only an auxiliary component of the climate transition, but also a fundamental pillar. In the context of empowering citizens towards the environment, their participation, knowledge and capacities are usually left behind, as they are not included in decision-making processes⁵³.

These shortcomings can discourage citizens' participation in achieving environmental policy objectives and diminish the long-term positive effects of local policies.⁵⁴

Transition planning must take into account the needs of different groups, and through strategies have the ability to reduce inequalities and vulnerabilities⁵⁵.

In developing strategies that support the affected areas, it is necessary to support the public and private sectors, through specific measures. Local governments need support in combating the effects of the decline of local industries⁵⁶, in order to reduce, as much as possible, the impact of the industrial recession on basic services and society, under the conditions in which public revenues are decreasing. For example, providing assistance in developing scenarios and planning medium and long-term debt. The measures taken help maintain welfare and investor confidence for the development of new economic activities⁵⁷.

Support for workers can create better conditions for retraining, employment in new jobs, in the context of new changes generated by digital and environmental transitions. This aid also supports individuals and families, by alleviating the effects of job loss⁵⁸.

Actors can support governments in the transition process, to adapt policies and strategies at the local level. Strategy planning must take into account the local context to avoid inequalities, marginalization of those facing extreme poverty⁵⁹.

Below, some remarks are made regarding the strategies employed by some European countries, mentioned in the text.

Bristol. The development of the city is conceived in a system of interdependent elements: connectivity, health and well-being, housing, economy, environment, learning and skills. These elements are the basis of initiatives that relate to social issues. The actions are designed with a view to 2050.

Barcelona. It can be seen that some measures have been taken to equip the city with intelligent systems and have created the quality of life of its inhabitants. The new actions programmed for a 5-year perspective are aimed at developing the economy and eliminating discrepancies between regions, measures to create the quality of social life.

⁵¹OECD (2023), Towards a Triple Transition. Strategies for Transformational European Development Action, https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/towards-a-triple-transition_094322ba-en.html;; <https://doi.org/10.1787/094322ba-en>.

⁵² European Commission, 2022, cited in European Partnership on Social Transformations and Resilience under Horizon Europe, 2025.

⁵³ European Environment Agency, 2020.

⁵⁴ European Partnership on Social Transformations and Resilience under Horizon Europe, 2025.

⁵⁵ Atteridge, Strambo, Edt, Gill, 2021.

⁵⁶ Harrahill & Douglas, 2019; Strambo, Aung, et al., 2019 cited in Atteridge, Strambo, Edt, Tom Gill, 2021.

⁵⁷ Atteridge, Strambo, Edt, Gill, 2021.

⁵⁸ Atteridge, Strambo, Edt, Gill, 2021.

⁵⁹ Atteridge, Strambo, Edt, Gill, 2021.

Hamburg. Good initiatives in the strategy have a social impact, being for the benefit of individuals oriented towards efficiency, social benefits, sustainability. Digitalization is not limited only to the city of Hamburg, but goes beyond the city or state level, addressing issues related to federal digitalization.

Stavenger. Attempts to implement new technologies have not led to the expected results. The experiences gained regarding the transition to smart cities are useful to be applied both in the Municipality of Stavenger and in other cities and communities.

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