

ACADEMY FOR PUBLIC POLICY

COMPENDIUM OF PUBLIC POLICY DOCUMENTS

- 4th Generation -



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About the Academy for Public Policy (APP)

Recognizing the significant electoral and political influence held by young people in developing democracies, the Swiss Electoral Support Programme (ESP) seeks to empower youth to effectively engage with political parties and policymakers, thus shaping policies in impactful ways. Through the Academy for Public Policy (APP), the ESP has collaborated with multiple political parties to enhance their abilities in devising electoral programs grounded in evidence, as well as simultaneously, fostering connections with local communities, including women, youth, and other vulnerable groups, through the implementation of innovative initiatives. Overall, four generations of diverse party youth were supported in the period between 2019 to 2025. Across the four cohorts, 90 young politicians participated in the Academy.

In September 2024, in partnership with Forum for Reasonable Policies (FRP) and Ohrid Institute, the ESP launched the fourth generation of the APP, which enrolled a new cohort of 28 young politicians from 13 political parties. Four interactive workshops were complemented by tailored guidance and mentoring in developing policy proposals and implementing innovative initiatives leading to electoral programs that respond to citizens priorities in local communities as well as an improved election outreach. Innovative initiatives represent a bottom-up approach to policymaking, enabling political parties to step outside traditional campaign rhetoric and instead offer evidence-based electoral programs that reflect the genuine needs of citizens at the local level. By gathering data directly from the field, through citizen outreach, surveys, public events, and collaboration with community stakeholders, APP members generated concrete proposals that political parties could integrate into their election platforms. 28 initiatives were developed and implemented ahead of the 2025 local elections, which helped young politicians identify practical solutions to pressing issues in their local communities. The majority of APP participants contributed policy inputs to support their political parties in developing citizen-centered electoral programs for the 2025 local elections.

Foreward

This Compendium of Public Policy Documents is an integral part of the Electoral Support Programme (ESP), which is a project of the Government of Switzerland implemented by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). The program's overall objective is to support democratic and credible election processes that facilitate political participation and social integration by enabling voters to freely select their representatives and hold them accountable¹. The project activities are channeled to support the overall objective by achieving three outcomes:

- ✓ **Outcome 1: Strengthened institutions conduct fair, transparent and efficient election processes.**
- ✓ **Outcome 2: Political parties present and apply citizen-oriented policies and election platforms.**
- ✓ **Outcome 3: Empowered citizens (especially youth and women) hold political parties and elected officials accountable.**

Among others, the project supports political parties in developing resources and capacities to adopt evidence-based programs with the aim of greater involvement of local communities, including women, youth, and other vulnerable groups. The evidence-based policy-making approach seeks to bring closer the views of citizens and policymakers and to reflect real needs in the planning process of the parties by providing in-depth analyses and relevant factual situations. In the political arena, evidence-based policymaking represents a drive to improve the quality and effectiveness of proposed policies and programs.

The public policy documents presented in this publication represent the culmination of the efforts of APP young political representatives to design evidence-based and value-driven policies. These documents reflect a rigorous process in which participants applied their newly acquired knowledge and skills in practical settings and through direct engagement with citizens. As part of innovative initiatives, the participants conducted research, held consultations with key stakeholders, and collaborated with affected communities to ensure that their proposals are both meaningful and grounded in real needs.

We continue to encourage political parties to integrate these public policy documents into

¹ For more information regarding the Electoral Support Programme, visit the project's official website: <https://electoralsupportprogramme.mk/en/>

their programmatic work, as they offer a valuable resource for shaping both current and future governance strategies. This also enables them to demonstrate the commitment to transparency, accountability, evidence-based decision-making, and the meaningful involvement of citizens in public affairs. This approach supports more effective, informed, and responsible policymaking processes that ultimately benefit the country and its citizens.

Moreover, public policy documents enhance the clarity and communication of party positions, helping parties articulate their ideas to both internal members and the broader public, thereby fostering a more informed and engaged electorate. They also serve as concrete instruments of accountability, providing a clear record of commitments and priorities against which voters can assess party performance once in office. In doing so, they contribute to a healthier and more effective democratic system—one grounded in policies that genuinely serve the public interest.

We extend our sincere gratitude to all participants for their hard work, dedication, and willingness to embrace new skills and pursue a more demanding approach to developing policy documents and electoral programs, an effort that reflects their genuine commitment to elevating the quality of political practice in our country.

The remainder of this publication presents the public policy documents themselves, including the methods used to involve local communities in identifying challenges, as well as the proposed solutions for addressing those challenges. For clarity and consistency, the documents are presented in alphabetical order of the municipalities where the innovative initiative was carried out.

Disclaimer: The Electoral Support Programme is a project of the Government of Switzerland implemented by IFES.

The content and opinions in this publication can in no way be considered to reflect the views of the Government of Switzerland and IFES.

Innovative Initiatives in the Municipality of Bitola

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SMART TRAFFIC FOR A SAFE FUTURE



Jane Velkoski
–SDSM–

Smart traffic for a safe future

1. Summary

Traffic safety in Bitola is a critical challenge for the city with about 70,000 inhabitants and 39,503 registered motor vehicles, which creates great pressure on infrastructure, public transport and parking. The dominance of private vehicles, low use of public transport, poor signage, insufficient lighting and lack of infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists lead to traffic chaos, a high risk of accidents and negative environmental consequences. The current approach is ineffective: interventions are fragmented, control mechanisms and punitive policies are insufficient, and institutional coordination and investments in modern technologies are limited.

The current situation is challenging. Data from the Ministry of Interior for 2024 show dozens of traffic accidents, most often caused by disregard for the rules, excessive speed and wrong changes of direction. The survey conducted with 926 citizens confirms that 78.4% consider the disregard for the rules as the main factor, 63% point to excessive speed, 47.6% to poorly maintained pedestrian crossings, and 36.1% to the lack of infrastructure for cyclists. The most vulnerable categories, such as children, are particularly exposed – 69.3% assess the safety around schools as unsatisfactory. In addition, over 70% of citizens expressed fear of stray dogs, which reduces mobility and the use of bicycles.

Several alternatives are being considered to solve the problems: improving signage and street lighting; regular maintenance of pedestrian crossings; introducing speed bumps; creating protected bicycle lanes; educational campaigns on traffic culture; technological solutions such as cameras and smart traffic lights. Each measure responds to the identified risks and is supported by the citizens.

The recommended strategy is multifaceted and focuses on the systematic organisation of critical intersections – Vasko Karangelevski Street 17 and 43, Partizanska Street 42 and 110, Pece Matichovski Street and Dimitar Ilievski Murato Street. The activities include mapping and analysis of vehicle and pedestrian flows, technical audit, improvement of LED lighting, thermoplastic marking, vertical signage with reflective elements, solar/LED pedestrian beacons, small construction interventions and short educational campaigns for citizens and schools.

The financial implications for the pilot project at six locations are compactly presented: preparation and technical audit – EUR 5,000; implementation – EUR 12,000; maintenance 1–3 years – EUR 18,000, i.e. a total of EUR 35,000. One should also take into account that replacing 100W HPS with 50W LED lamps would result in energy savings of EUR 1,500–2,000 per year.

This solution directly targets the biggest risks, provides visible results in the short term, improves the perception of safety, encourages pedestrian and bicycle movement, and creates a basis for long-term improvement of traffic infrastructure, energy efficiency and an integrated approach to safety in Bitola.

2. Problem – context and importance

Traffic safety is one of the biggest challenges for the Municipality of Bitola, which with its almost 70 thousand inhabitants and around 40 thousand registered motor vehicles is among the most densely motorised cities in the country. This figure means that almost every household owns at least one vehicle, which creates significant pressure on the traffic infrastructure, parking and public transport. Instead of public transport being the main alternative, its use remains at a low level, and the dominance of private vehicles leads to traffic jams, especially in the city centre and during rush hours. The lack of parking spaces (the current number of parking spaces in Bitola is 1,835) further increases the tension, and the environmental consequences of such vehicle density, such as air pollution and poor health of citizens, are already visible.

The problem is not limited to the comfort of everyday movement, but also seriously affects safety. Data from the Ministry of Interior for 2024 indicate dozens of traffic accidents, most often caused by disregard for the rules. Excessive speed was identified as the cause of at least 20 accidents, while on 15 occasions drivers failed to give way to pedestrians. Taking wrong direction and side of the street led to 18 accidents, and disregarding the right of way led to another 7 incidents. These figures illustrate the combination of human factors and systemic failures – insufficient education, lack of discipline and weak control – that make traffic unpredictable and risky.

The seriousness of the problem was also confirmed in the survey conducted with 926 citizens, which as part of the innovative initiative allowed the voice of the community to be heard directly. The results are clear: as many as 78.4% of respondents believe that disregard for the rules is the biggest risk factor, 63% point to excessive speed, and 47.6% to poorly maintained pedestrian crossings. The lack of infrastructure for cyclists was recognised by 36.1% of respondents, which indicates that it is precisely the most sustainable forms of mobility that are the least protected. The most alarming data is that 69.3% of respondents assess the zones around schools as unsafe, which means that children – the most vulnerable category – are exposed to risk every day.

The survey revealed another particular problem in Bitola – the problem with stray dogs. Over 70% of respondents expressed fear from attacks while cycling, which directly affects their motivation to use alternative and healthy forms of transport. This situation reduces general mobility and limits the use of bicycle lanes, even when they exist. In addition, citizens very clearly expressed their perception of traffic in general – 84.2% consider the current traffic chaos unacceptable and require urgent interventions.

The main reasons for these conditions are multifaceted. On the one hand, the infrastructure is outdated, poorly maintained and inadequate for the current number of vehicles. Pedestrian crossings are not regularly marked, signage is insufficient, and lighting at critical points is often problematic. On the other hand, institutional capacities are limited – controls by the traffic police are insufficient, the penal policy is not consistent, and often there is no coordination between the municipality and the competent institutions. The lack of investment in modern technological solutions such as smart traffic lights, surveillance cameras and automatic control systems keeps Bitola at the level of “traditional” traffic, which can hardly cope with the challenges of modern urban life.

The failures so far stem precisely from this combination of factors: insufficient investment in infrastructure, insufficient application of the law and lack of a strategic approach. Although there are initiatives and individual measures, they are often ad-hoc and do not lead to long-term change.

The consequences of these failures are already being felt. In addition to the increased number of traffic accidents, citizens live feeling unsafe and distrusting the institutions. Parents are concerned about the safety of their children, cyclists are losing motivation to use environmentally friendly transport, and pedestrians often feel unsafe even at marked crossings. Traffic chaos also affects the local economy, as congestion and chaos reduce the efficiency of the transport of goods and services. In the long run, this situation leads to environmental degradation, increased stress and a low quality of life.

It is clear that the traffic problem in Bitola is not just a matter of driver discipline or infrastructure make-up. It is a systemic challenge that requires an integrated approach – a combination of education, modern technology, improved infrastructure and stronger institutional control. Only in this way can the cycle of previous failures be broken and a traffic environment that will be safe, functional and adapted to the needs of all residents can be created.

3. Alternative solutions considered

To overcome the challenges of traffic safety in the Municipality of Bitola, several alternatives are being considered, resulting from a combination of institutional data and results from the citizens survey, conducted as part of the innovative initiative for direct community involvement. When considering the alternatives below, the systemic solutions expected by citizens were also taken into account, who, according to the survey support the improvement of signage and lighting the most (67.1%), followed by placing speed bumps (47.8%), regular maintenance of pedestrian crossings (57%), construction of protected bicycle lanes (40.3%) and educational campaigns for developing proper traffic culture (48.6%). The demand for greater oversight by means of cameras, higher fines and speed limits around the schools is also significant. From this, one can conclude that citizens not only identified problems, but also provided specific proposals for solutions, which could help in developing policies that are in line with the real needs and priorities of the population.

Alternative 1: Improved signage and street lighting

This alternative received the greatest support from respondents – 67.1% considered it crucial. Insufficient signage was indicated by 46.3% of citizens as a factor that increases the danger, and an additional 47.6% believe that pedestrian crossings are poorly maintained. In places such as the central city area, near schools or in neighbourhoods with high traffic density, signs are often faded or incomplete, and lighting is insufficient to ensure visibility in the evening hours. Citizens believe that by improving signage and lighting, traffic chaos could be significantly reduced, as the rules would become clearer and the safety of pedestrians and drivers would increase.

Alternative 2: Marking and regular maintenance of pedestrian crossings

57% of those surveyed support this measure, which directly affects one of the most vulnerable categories – the pedestrians. The number of accidents caused by disregard of pedestrians (15 cases in 2024) indicates that the current system does not provide sufficient protection. Pedestrian crossings, especially near schools, healthcare facilities and busy intersections, are often faded or not properly marked. Respondents in the survey expressed the view that clearly marked crossings, combined with appropriate vertical signage and lighting, would contribute to reducing risks and creating a greater culture of respect for pedestrians.

Alternative 3: Installing speed bumps

47.8% of those surveyed consider this measure as necessary. The data from the Ministry of Interior shows that speed was the cause of at least 20 accidents in 2024, and 63% of respondents indicated excessive speed as the main risk. Therefore, speed bumps are perceived as an effective solution for controlling drivers' behaviour. Citizens insist specially on having them installed around of schools and kindergartens, as well as in downtown, where pedestrian traffic is dense. Crn Most or the streets near Streliste were specifically mentioned by citizens as locations where the installation of physical barriers and speed bumps can prevent accidents and ensure greater safety.

Alternative 4: Constructing protected bicycle lanes

The lack of cycling infrastructure is identified as a problem by 36.1% of respondents, and 40.3% support the idea of introducing protected bike lanes. This is significant considering that 70.2% of citizens stated that they are afraid of stray dogs when cycling, which directly reduces their mobility. Protected lanes would provide not only physical safety, but also a sense of confidence among cyclists that they can move safely around the city. In addition, these lanes would encourage greater use of bicycles as an environmentally friendly and healthy mode of transport, which would indirectly contribute to reducing traffic congestion.

Alternative 5: Educational and preventive campaigns on traffic culture

48.6% of those surveyed single out this measure as necessary. According to them, without complementary education, no infrastructure measure will have a long-term effect. Failure to comply with the rules is the most common problem indicated by citizens (78.4%), so it is believed that targeted campaigns for drivers, students and pedestrians can contribute to changing behaviour and increasing awareness. These campaigns should include public actions, cooperation with schools, media campaigns and practical training, in order to gradually create a culture of responsible and disciplined participation in traffic.

Alternative 6: Technological solutions and enhanced control

The survey indicates that a large number of surveyed citizens proposed the introduction of modern technological solutions such as installing cameras for automatic traffic control and smart traffic lights and increasing the fines for those who do not respect the rules. These measures are perceived as necessary for constant monitoring of the situation and for efficient prevention of rules violations. In the eyes of citizens, technology is not just an additional tool, but the basis for establishing a system that will ensure order and discipline in the long run.

4. Selected solution and proposed future actions

The most effective and socially acceptable intervention to increase pedestrian safety is a systematic technical set up to ensure visibility and signage in the city, with a special focus on critical intersections identified by citizens and the police. The survey shows that citizens are most supportive of improving the street lighting and signage (67.1%), and almost half of them (47.6%) highlight the poor condition of pedestrian crossings as a significant risk. Data from the Ministry of Interior further confirms the need for interventions due to specific accidents caused by disregard for pedestrians and excessive speed. Therefore, directly targeting visibility and signage at these critical points is the most direct measure that immediately reduces the danger and improves the perception of safety.

Within the framework of the pilot project, **6 critical intersections in Bitola** have been identified:

1. 17 Vasko Karangelevski Str.(near a kindergarten),
2. 43 Vasko Karangelevski Str. (near a green market),
3. 110 Partizanska Str. (near the Bitola Clinical Hospital)
4. 42 Partizanska Str. (heavy traffic)
5. Pece Matichovski Street (Shirok Sokak - Pedestrian Zone)
6. Dimitar Ilievski Murato Street (High School).

These intersections are characterised by insufficient visibility, increased traffic intensity, damaged or non-existent signage, as well as infrastructure unsuitable for pedestrians and cyclists.

The programme would start with a preparation and technical audit, which would include mapping the locations, measuring the flow of vehicles and pedestrians, developing proposals for signage and lighting measures and introducing additional safety solutions where necessary (traffic lights, roundabouts, speed bumps and smart ramps that lower at high speed and feel like hitting a pothole on a road). Public consultations would be held with schools, parents and the local community to ensure that the interventions are in line with the needs of citizens.

The pilot implementation phase would include LED street lighting, thermoplastic marking, vertical signage with reflective elements and solar/LED pedestrian traffic lights. Small construction interventions would be made where necessary for foundations, cables and installation. A short information campaign would be carried out among citizens and in schools for each location, in order to increase safety awareness and encourage pedestrians and cyclists to use safe crossings.

The financial implications for the **6 critical locations** are shown in the table below:

Phase	Main activities	Total costs (EUR)
Phase 0–2: Preparation and technical audit	Mapping, traffic analysis, public consultations	5,000
Phase 1: Pilot implementation (6 locations)	LED lighting, thermoplastic marking, vertical signage, solar/LED pedestrian beacons, small construction interventions, information campaign	12,000
Phase 2: Maintenance (1-3 years)	Maintenance of lights, signs and thermoplastics, prompt interventions	18,000
Total pilot-project (6 locations)		35,000
Financial benefit: Energy saving	LED lights (12–16 lights) replacing 100W HPS with 50W LED	1,500–2,000 EUR/year

This intervention targets directly the greatest risks identified by citizens, enables quick and visible results in a small number of critical locations, improves the perception of safety, and is compatible with long-term urban infrastructure and energy efficiency improvements.

FAST, SIMPLE, 24/7: BILL PAYMENT SOLUTIONS IN BITOLA



Martin Ivanovski
–VMRO–DPMNE–

Fast, simple, 24/7: Bill payment solutions in Bitola

1. Summary

In the Municipality of Bitola, one of the daily challenges faced by residents is paying bills to the public enterprises “Vodovod”, “Komunalec” and “Niskogradba”. Although this obligation seems routine, the way the payment system is organised turns it into a complex and often frustrating procedure, which directly affects the quality of life of citizens. Public enterprises have a limited number of locations for personal payment at a counter - usually two to three within the city, which creates long queues on critical days of the month, especially for the elderly, people with disabilities and residents of peripheral settlements. Online payment systems remain underused due to low digital literacy, distrust of electronic platforms and weak promotion. The public survey showed that the majority of citizens would use new, accessible and fast solutions such as self-service bill payment kiosks.

Previous failures are manifested by overcrowded counters, insufficient use of digital tools, limited availability of services for vulnerable categories, and a fragmented billing system that complicates things further for its users.

Several possible solutions have been considered to solve the problem:

1. Improving and promoting existing online systems;
2. Introducing self-service terminals – bill payment kiosks;
3. Hybrid model – combining counters, online payment and bill payment kiosks;
4. Integrated payment system for all public enterprises.

The most acceptable alternative recommended is the introduction of **self-service terminals – bill payment kiosks**. Bill payment kiosks allow for 24/7 payment, accept cash and cards, are connected to all public enterprises and are adapted for people with limited digital skills. Placing at least three terminals in strategic locations will result in freeing of counters on critical days and equal availability for all categories of citizens.

The investment for the purchase and installation of three bill payment kiosks is estimated at around 25.000 – 29.000 EUR, depending on the specifications and maintenance conditions. Additional funds will be needed for a promotional campaign and ongoing technical support, but they are relatively small compared to the time and resources that will be saved by the public enterprises.

This solution is expected to significantly reduce queues and crowds at the counters, improve service for citizens, promote the digitalisation and transparency of public services, as well as provide a basis

for further development of an integrated billing system and a complete digital transformation of public services in Bitola.

2. Problem – context and importance

In the Municipality of Bitola, one of the daily challenges faced by residents is paying bills to the public enterprises. Although this obligation seems routine, the way the payment system is organised turns it into a complex and often frustrating procedure, which directly affects the quality of life of citizens. According to data obtained from interviews with the public enterprises “Komunalec” and “Niskogradba”, this is a service that covers almost all households and legal entities in the city - over 50,000 households and more than 4,000 legal entities. With such a volume, it is clear that the collection system is a massive process that must be easily accessible, efficient and flexible for different categories of users, but the current situation is the opposite.

Public enterprises have a limited number of locations for payment - usually two to three within the city, which need to serve tens of thousands of citizens. This inevitably results in long queues, especially during the periods when salaries and pensions are paid, between the 1st and the 5th and 12th and the 17th of the month. On those days, waiting rooms are overcrowded, and citizens often wait for hours, which is a waste of time and cause of additional stress. This situation particularly affects the elderly, people with disabilities, and residents of peripheral and rural settlements. For example, “Komunalec” states that around 20% of their users are from rural areas, where limited infrastructure and distances to payment points further complicate the situation.

Even though some companies offer online payment options, they remain underutilised. “Niskogradba” estimates that there are around 5,000 electronic transactions per month, which is a relatively small number compared to the total user base. The main reasons for this are the low digital literacy among older generations, distrust of electronic platforms, technical limitations, and poor promotion of such services. This has been confirmed by the survey of 167 respondents: although 87 people stated that they pay their bills via a mobile or online application, 44 still do it at the public enterprises’ offices, and 36 at a bank or a post office. In addition, the majority of citizens would use bill payment kiosks – as many as 141 respondents – if they were installed in more locations and without additional fees, which indicates a real need for alternative solutions.

In addition to infrastructure limitations, a significant problem is the absence of information. Many citizens do not know that online options exist or fear that they are unreliable. This is related to the general distrust in digital tools, but also to the lack of campaigns to educate and support citizens. Those with a lower level of digital literacy are most affected – pensioners, rural residents and people with lower incomes.

The combination of centralised payment at counters, low use of digital solutions and lack of information creates a system that is inflexible and does not meet the needs of different groups of citizens. The consequences are multiple. For the citizens, this situation means lost time, additional transport costs, increased stress and exclusion of vulnerable categories. For the public enterprises, this means dysfunctional use of resources, overcrowded counters on certain days and insufficient use of digital platforms. For the municipality, this means slow digitalisation, low modernisation and low trust in institutions.

Despite this situation, it is noticeable that there is potential for change. The survey shows that citizens want new solutions: bill payment kiosks at more locations, integrated bill payment systems for multiple companies, electronic invoices via email, 24/7 technical support and accessible digital services for those with less technological experience. At the same time, companies acknowledge that there is room for growth in online payments, especially among young people and legal entities, which already recognise the advantages of digital services. This points to a clear conclusion: Bitola has a serious starting point for transforming its bill payment system, but structured, inclusive and modern solutions are needed that will respond to the needs of all citizens, especially the most vulnerable ones.

3. Alternative solutions considered

To address the challenges and ensure a more efficient, accessible and inclusive bill collection system, it is necessary to consider multiple possible solutions. The data collected from the public survey and interviews with public enterprises indicate several alternatives that can be implemented in Bitola, each with its own specific advantages and potential for improving the process.

Alternative 1: Improving and promoting the existing online systems

Public enterprises already offer the possibility of online payments, but their use is limited and underdeveloped. According to data from the Public Enterprise “Niskogradba”, about one fifth of their users use electronic payments every month, although the enterprise has over 26,700 households and almost 1,800 legal entities in its database. The survey confirms this situation: about 52% of respondents pay bills via mobile or online applications, while 26% pay their bills at the offices of the public enterprises, and 22% at a bank or post office. The main obstacles to using online systems are distrust in the security of electronic tools, insufficient promotion and the technical complexity of the platforms.

This alternative envisages improving existing systems by developing more intuitive and simpler applications, ensuring 24/7 availability, clear instructions for use and enhanced security measures. Additionally, promotional campaigns and digital literacy training could increase trust and reduce digital inequality, especially among the elderly and residents of rural areas.

Alternative 2: Introducing self-service terminals (bill payment kiosks)

One of the most preferred options among citizens is the installation of bill payment kiosks at multiple locations in the city and its surroundings. As many as 84% of respondents in the survey stated that they would use such terminals, 12% were indecisive, and only 4% said that they would not use them. The motives for using them are diverse: 43% of citizens would pay at a bill payment kiosk if there was no commission, 31% if the process was faster than at a counter, 29% if the machine was easy to use, another 29% because of its availability at night, and 23% because of the ability to avoid queues.

Citizens also made specific suggestions for the functions of bill payment kiosks: they should be multifunctional and enable payments to all public enterprises in one place, accept both cash and cards, have simple instructions, and have technical support and security cameras. Most of the suggestions emphasise the need to install more such devices, including in rural settlements, to ensure equal access for all categories of citizens.

Alternative 3: Hybrid model – combining counters, online payment and bill payment kiosks

Given the different habits and preferences of citizens, it is possible to establish a hybrid model that would simultaneously offer traditional and modern payment methods. The interview with the director of “Komunalec” shows that personal payment at a counter remains the most common method, especially among the elderly and residents of rural areas, where collectors still collect payments from households to this very day. On the other hand, the younger population and legal entities are increasingly turning to digital services, due to their speed and convenience.

The hybrid model would mean retaining some of the counters for those who trust only in traditional methods, introducing bill payment kiosks for more flexible and faster payment, as well as simultaneously promoting online platforms for all those who want digital access. Such an approach would satisfy the needs of both conservative and technologically savvy categories of citizens.

Alternative 4: Integrated payment system for all public enterprises

One of the most common suggestions emerging from the survey is the creation of an integrated bill payment system. Over 93% of respondents stated that they would use a bill payment kiosk for all public enterprises, which clearly reflects the need to unify services. Currently, each enterprise has its own system, which means that citizens have to perform multiple transactions, often in different locations, with additional costs and lost time.

An integrated system could function as a single platform – available both online and with bill payment kiosks – and the citizens would be able to pay their bills of all public enterprises in one place. An additional benefit would be the sending of electronic invoices and confirmations by email, making the process more efficient and environmentally friendly. This model has the potential to eliminate fragmentation and create a simpler and more fully integrated user experience.

4. Selected solution and proposed future actions

The most acceptable alternative for improving the bill payment system in Bitola is the introduction of self-service terminals – bill payment kiosks. This solution is the most acceptable given that it directly responds to the expressed interest of citizens for a fast and accessible service. This solution also reduces waiting at the counters and allows accessibility at any time, which is especially important for citizens who cannot coordinate their time with the working hours of public enterprises.

In Bitola, more than 100,000 bills are generated annually by the public enterprises “Vodovod”, “Komunalec” and “Niskogradba”. Most of them are paid at a counter, which creates significant administrative pressure and crowds, especially in the first half of the month. The installation of bill payment kiosks would free the counters during these critical periods and balance the payment dynamics.

It is planned to install at least three bill payment kiosks at strategic locations: one in downtown, one at a densely populated residential area and one in a commercial zone with a high flow of people. Each kiosk will allow for cash and card payments, will operate 24/7 and will be connected to all public enterprises, allowing payment of all bills in one place. The terminals will have instructions in Macedonian and Albanian, as well as visual instructions for people with limited digital skills.

Activities:

- Conducting public procurement for the provision and installation of three bill payment kiosks with technical support.
- Selection of locations based on citizens flow, accessibility for people with disabilities and geographical coverage.
- Technical connection of the kiosks with the systems of “Vodovod”, “Komunalec” and “Niskogradba” for centralised payment.
- Training of maintenance and assistance staff, setting up a telephone line for technical support.
- Information campaign to promote the new service, with a special focus on the elderly and vulnerable categories.

Financial implications:

The investment for the purchase and installation of three bill payment kiosks is estimated at around 25,000 – 29,000 EUR, depending on the specifications and maintenance conditions. Additional funds will be needed for a promotional campaign and ongoing technical support, but they are relatively small compared to the time and resources that will be saved by the public enterprises.

Timeframe:

- Preparation of technical specifications and public procurement: 2 months
- Installing and testing of kiosks: 1 month
- Establishment of a technical support system and staff training: 1 month
- Launching and promotional campaign: 1 month.

The total implementation timeframe is around 5 months. This solution is expected to significantly reduce queues and crowds at counters, improve services for citizens by 24/7 availability, promote digitalisation and transparency of public enterprises, as well as optimise the costs of the operation. The introduction of bill payment kiosks will be the first step towards an integrated payment system, which in the future will enable a complete digital transformation of public services in Bitola.

**WE ARE RUNNING TO
BUILD A BETTER
TOMORROW!**



**Jovana Spasenoska
–VMRO–DPMNE–**

1. Summary

The city park in Bitola is a place where many citizens come every day to run, ride a bike or simply enjoy nature and recreation. However, despite its importance, the park has been facing a serious infrastructure problem for years - the absence of a modern running track. Athletes and recreationalists are forced to choose between running on hard concrete tracks, which creates a risk of injuries and chronic health problems, or on grass, which destroys the green surface and its appearance as well as the functionality of the park. This problem not only limits the quality of sports and recreation but also reduces its health benefits and motivation of citizens to lead an active lifestyle.

The current approach to solving the problem does not give results and also there has not been any formal request to the municipality in this regard. The existing concrete tracks do not meet the needs of users, and as a result, the grassy areas are destroyed, citizens are exposed to the risk of injuries, and the park is gradually losing its attractiveness as a public good. Existing solutions do not ensure long-term sustainability and do not stimulate youth and sports clubs to use the space in an optimal way.

Four possible alternatives were considered within the initiative. The first is to maintain the current situation, which is the easiest financially, but the most disadvantageous for citizens and nature. The second is to use the existing concrete tracks, which are cheap, but do not solve the problems with health and green spaces. The third alternative is to build a new track at another location, for example in a sports centre, which would be specialised for professional sports, but would be inaccessible and more expensive for the general public. The fourth, and the most optimal one, is to install a tartan track within the existing park, which would provide a safe, elastic and accessible surface for all users, protect the grassy areas and encourage a healthy lifestyle.

After considering all possible alternatives, the document recommends the last proposed solution. The track would be 800 meters long and 1.9 meters wide, with a modern tartan layer that provides comfort and safety for all generations. Financially, the project is justified, with a total estimated value of 13.5 million MKD, and the realistic timeframe of 4–6 months for its realisation allows citizens to use the track already next season. In addition, this solution protects nature, encourages sports activities, allows for the organisation of events and is a long-term investment in the health and well-being of citizens.

In other words, the making of a tartan track is not just an infrastructure project, but a strategic investment that brings the City Park back to the centre of active and healthy life in Bitola, allowing citizens to enjoy a safe, functional and environmentally sustainable public space.

2. Problem – context and importance

The City Park in Bitola is one of the most important public spaces for sports, recreation and daily rest for many citizens. Its central position, openness and natural setting make it a favourite place for outdoor activities – both for professional athletes, sports clubs and for the large number of recreational users who use the park as part of their healthy lifestyle. However, despite its significance, the park has had a serious infrastructural deficiency for years and that is the lack of a modern running track that meets the needs of its users.

The need to improve the conditions has long been recognised, but until recently there was no official formalised request to the Municipality – neither from sports clubs nor from civic associations. This gap is not the result of a lack of interest or will, but of a lack of initiative that would channel this broad interest into a concrete proposal supported by analysis and data. In practice, this means that athletes and recreational users face the same limitations and improvised solutions every day, without a real solution.

The survey conducted within the framework of the "Track for All" initiative confirms this reality. The survey included 70 respondents from different age groups and user profiles. Most of them are young people 18 to 29 (61.4%), which is a strong indicator that the new generations actively use the space for sports and recreation. Half of the respondents visit the park daily, and another 40% several times a week, which means that the park has a consistently high frequency of users. The most common activities are running and brisk walking (54.3% each), cycling (28.6%) and outdoor exercise (22.9%).

But the problem lies in the conditions for these activities. Since there is no suitable running track, all users are forced to choose between two unfavourable options: running on hard concrete tracks or running on grass. Concrete tracks, although practical at first glance, are too hard on joints, knees and muscles, especially with frequent use. Athletes who regularly train there, risk health problems and injuries. On the other hand, running on grass creates additional problems, i.e. the grass surface is destroyed, muddy and uneven parts appear, the greenery and natural appearance of the park are destroyed, and over time the quality of the space as a public park deteriorates.

The survey data confirm this situation: 65.7% of respondents stated that they have a real problem with the current condition of the tracks when running, and an additional 31.4% have some problem with it. The vast majority (97.1%) believe that there is a need to build a modern track, and the same number expect the Municipality of Bitola to immediately invest in such a project. What is particularly significant is that 78.6% stated that if there was a suitable track, they would exercise more. This means that the problem is not only about comfort and safety, but it also affects directly the motivation of citizens to practice a healthy lifestyle.

The park is also important for organised sport. Almost half of the respondents are members of a sports club or a group, and a significant number of clubs regularly or occasionally train there. Track and

field athletes, football players, handball players, volleyball players – they all use parts of the park for fitness training. However, without a modern sports surface, they are deprived of the conditions that exist in most European cities. For young athletes, this means that their development is happening under inadequate conditions, which directly affects the sports results and ambitions of the clubs.

These problems are not just a sporting or environmental issue – they have wider social and economic impact. The current approach is dysfunctional and harmful: citizens are exposed to the risk of injury, greenery is destroyed, and the park gradually loses its attractiveness as a public good. At the same time, the municipality is faced with increased costs for maintaining the grass areas and with increased pressure from the public to solve the problem.

It is obvious that there is an urgent need for a systemic and sustainable solution that will provide modern conditions for sports and recreation in the park, protect the greenery and respond to the growing demand from citizens and sports clubs. With such an approach, the City Park will be able to fulfil its role as an inclusive, safe and good quality public space that will contribute to the health, well-being and active lifestyle of all generations in Bitola.

3. Alternative solutions considered

After identifying the problem and the need to improve the infrastructure in the City Park, the logical question arises as to how this problem can be solved. Several possible solutions were considered, each with its own advantages and disadvantages.

Alternative 1: Keeping it as it is

This option means that the park will continue to be used without any interventions. It is the easiest option for the Municipality in terms of finances and administrative obligations, as it does not require investments or changes in the infrastructure. However, maintaining the current situation carries serious risks. According to the survey data, 97.1% of respondents believe that there is a need for a new track, and 65.7% say that the current conditions greatly interfere with their running. This approach would mean that the problem remains unresolved, the devastation of grass areas will go on as well as the risk of injuries to users and the gradual reduction of the attractiveness of the park as a public good. Even though it imposes the least financial burden, this alternative is the most socially and environmentally unfavourable.

Alternative 2: Reconstruction of the existing concrete tracks

The second option is to continue using the existing concrete tracks, possibly by reconstructing or expanding them. Financially, this option seems more economical than building a new running track, as it uses the existing infrastructure. However, from a health and safety perspective, it is problematic. Running on concrete creates a lot of pressure on the knees and joints, which over time can cause injuries and chronic problems. Additionally, the survey results show that 78.6% of respondents would

increase their physical activity only if there was a modern track, which means that concrete is not considered a satisfactory option. Although this alternative minimises the initial investment, it does not solve either the health or environmental challenges in the long run.

Alternative 3: Investment in a new running track at different location

The third alternative is to build of a new running track outside the City Park, for example within a stadium or sports centre. Several respondents mentioned this idea in the survey. This option would create conditions for professional sports, organising competitions and promoting track and field sports in Bitola. The advantage is that the track would be specialised and equipped according to sports standards. However, such a solution requires significantly greater financial investment, new infrastructure and additional space. In practice, this also means that the track would be used more by clubs and professionals, and less by ordinary citizens who use the park for daily recreation. From the perspective of inclusivity and accessibility, this alternative is limited and does not meet the needs of the wider community.

Alternative 4: Laying a tartan track in the existing park

The fourth alternative is the adaptation of part of the existing concrete track in the City Park with a modern tartan surface. The project envisages 800 meters long and 1.9 meters wide track. Such a solution has several advantages: it provides a resilient and safe running surface, protects grassy areas from destruction, is financially justified (13.5 million MKD – an affordable investment for the municipality) and is accessible to all citizens, regardless of age or level of physical activity. In addition, having such a track would allow organising of sports events, greater motivation among young people and more people coming to the park. According to the survey, 97.1% of citizens support such a solution and believe that it should be implemented as soon as possible. Although the funds needed to implement this alternative are higher than the others, the positive aspects still prevail, given that this alternative is an example of a balance between accessibility, safety and sustainability.

4. Selected solution and proposed future actions

After considering all possible alternatives, it is recommended **to have a tartan track within the existing City Park in Bitola**. This option emerges as the most logical, most sustainable and most widely supported – by both citizens and sports clubs. Such a solution satisfies multiple goals simultaneously: it provides safe and modern conditions for sports and recreation, protects greenery from further destruction, encourages a healthy lifestyle among young people and adults, and promotes the park into a true urban centre for an active community.

The survey conducted within the framework of the “Track for All” initiative showed that as many as 97.1% of respondents support the construction of such a tartan track, and 78.6% state that it would increase their physical activity. This indicates that the project has the potential not only to improve the

quality of recreation, but also to actively increase the rate of physical activity among the population, which is especially important at a time when public health policies promote active living as a prevention of diseases.

Additionally, the City Park is already a daily destination for numerous athletes and recreationalists: track and field athletes, football, handball and volleyball players, fitness enthusiasts and families who use it for brisk walking or running. For all of them, the tartan track would introduce a new quality in training and recreation – a surface that is elastic, safe and pleasant to use, regardless of age and fitness.

This alternative is also strongly justified from an environmental perspective. Having such a track means less destruction of grassy areas, which are currently used as “improvised” running tracks, resulting in muddy sections, uneven surface and erosion. Instead of the park degrading with each new season, a functional infrastructure will be created that will protect its natural environment and improve its aesthetics.

Finally, this recommendation is not only an infrastructural measure, but also a strategic investment in public health and social capital of the city. By installing a tartan track, Bitola will send a strong message that it is investing in the health, youth, and quality of life of its residents.

Specific activities

Timeframe

- Phase 1 (Preparation and documentation): 1–2 months
- Phase 2 (construction works and base layers): 2–3 months
- Phase 3 (Installing tartan layer and marking): 1 month.

Total timeframe: 4–6 months.

This timeframe allows the project to be completed within one calendar year, which means that citizens will be able to use the new tartan track as early as next season.

1. Development of project documentation:

- Location analysis, geodetic survey, conceptual design, main project and technical specification.
- Duration: 1–2 months.
- Costs: 250,000 MKD

2. Preparatory works:

- Marking out the route.

- Mechanical excavation and removal of the existing layer (1,600 m²).
 - Third category excavation and ground leveling.
 - Duration: 1 months.
 - Costs: approximately 724,800 MKD.
3. Laying a base layer:
- Planning and rolling of the bedding.
 - Procurement and placing crushed stone (320 m³).
 - Laying of asphalt BNHS 16-a with an average thickness of 6 cm (1,600 m²).
 - Duration: 1–2 months.
 - Costs: 2,464,000 MKD.
4. Installing a tartan layer:
- Procurement and installing of a modern elastic tartan layer (1,600 m²).
 - Running marks and signs.
 - Duration: 1 months.
 - Costs: 7,840,000 MKD.
5. Maintenance and management:
- Regular cleaning and maintenance of the track surface.
 - Repairing damages.
 - Organisation of sports events in cooperation with sports clubs and schools.
 - Annual operating costs: 150,000–200,000 MKD (approximate estimate)

Financial implications

The total estimated value of the project is 13,497,784 MKD (approximately 220,000 EUR). This investment covers the full implementation – from project documentation to the final installing of the tartan track. Although this is a significant amount, the project is financially justified because it brings long-term benefits: better health of citizens, reduced costs for maintaining grass areas, more people in the park and the opportunity for the development of sports tourism.

Innovative Initiatives in the Municipality of Bogovinje

01

Youth Center in the Municipality of Bogovinje

Benisa Arslani (DUI)

BOGOVINJE FOR THE YOUTH: FROM IDEA TO REALITY



Benisa Arslani
–DUI–

Bogovinje for the youth: From idea to reality

1. Summary

The Municipality of Bogovinje faces a clear and urgent challenge: the lack of safe, inclusive, and attractive youth spaces, which limits the personal, professional, and social development of young people. Youth in the area feel isolated and under-engaged, while existing opportunities for participation, practical education, and creative development are extremely limited. The current approach – mainly based on sporadic use of public buildings for ad-hoc activities – fails to provide a sustainable space tailored to the needs of the youth community and does not involve external partners for financial or technical support. As a result, previous initiatives have failed to create lasting impact: the lack of proper equipment, inflexible infrastructure, and absence of structured programs have led to low usage rates and minimal engagement among young people.

In an effort to address this problem, several alternatives were explored. Constructing a new facility from scratch would be too costly and time-consuming, making this option unfeasible in the short term. Expanding activities within existing spaces without significant technological and infrastructural investment would have minimal effect and would not ensure financial or programmatic sustainability. A temporary center or occasional activities in other venues cannot provide the stability and identity needed for the youth community.

After analyzing these options and conducting direct consultations with 33 young people from the municipality, the solution became clear: adapting an existing municipal building into a multifunctional Youth Center, combined with a public-private partnership model. This approach is not only financially and time-efficient but also directly responds to the needs of the community. The survey shows that 24% of young people would visit the center daily, 33% several times a week, and 42% would participate in specialized events, while over 80% believe it is essential for the space to be open, safe, and supported by the municipality and donors. In terms of activities, the main priorities include practical and vocational training, youth debates and forums, media and creative production, as well as psychological counseling and career guidance.

The center will be transformed into a modern and flexible space featuring training and cultural event halls, technological and media rooms, library, recreational and sports areas, a psychological counseling office, and digital infrastructure with free internet and multimedia equipment. The initial investment will amount to €35,500, while the annual operational costs are estimated at around €39,500, supported through a mix of municipal budget funds, local businesses, international grants, private partnerships, and symbolic youth contributions. The project will be implemented in three

phases over one year, ensuring a functional, sustainable, and highly meaningful space for youth and local development.

This project represents a strategic step toward the municipality's long-term vision of empowering young people by creating sustainable opportunities for social, cultural, and economic growth. It aligns with the Law on Youth Participation and reflects the concrete needs and aspirations of the youth of Bogovinje, providing them with a space where their voices have a direct impact on the community and where they can fully develop as individuals and active members of society.

2. Problem – context and importance

The Municipality of Bogovinje is an area rich in human, cultural, and natural resources. Its greatest potential lies in its youth – over 40% of the population is under the age of 30 – making it one of the youngest municipalities in the country. This represents a unique form of capital, a rare opportunity for communities: to transform the energy, creativity, and ideas of the younger generation into the driving force of long-term development. However, this vast potential remains untapped because young people lack the necessary space to express themselves, develop their skills, and participate actively in community life.

In the absence of a permanent and functional youth center, Bogovinje faces a significant gap in its social, educational, cultural, and sports life. The youth – despite their motivation and talent – lack access to structured training programs, innovative activities, and skill development opportunities that would prepare them for the modern labor market. Cultural and social events are infrequent, often held in temporary venues without proper equipment or conditions. Likewise, sports – essential for physical health, discipline, and teamwork – are limited by inadequate infrastructure. In addition, the youth of Bogovinje have no dedicated civic space where they can hold debates, discuss their ideas, and participate in local decision-making.

Beyond the practical and social need, the importance of establishing a youth center in Bogovinje also stems from the national legal framework. The Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, adopted in January 2020, clearly states that every municipality in North Macedonia must establish a Youth Council, prepare a Local Youth Strategy, appoint a Youth Officer, and maintain a functional Youth Center. The law also requires municipalities to allocate a specific budget for youth policies, ensuring that young people are not left on the periphery of local development. Implementing these provisions is not merely a matter of legal compliance – it is an essential step to guarantee that the youth of Bogovinje have the space and institutional support they rightfully deserve.

In practice, the lack of a youth center has created a situation where many young people are forced to spend their free time unproductively or travel to other towns in search of activities that are missing in their own community. This reality not only reduces social and educational inclusion but also drives

more young people toward emigration, as they see no opportunity to build their future at home. If this trend continues, Bogovinje risks losing an entire generation of great potential – leaving the community without the energy, creativity, and ideas needed for progress.

This situation has far-reaching consequences. Without spaces for meeting and collaboration, young people remain isolated and fragmented, weakening social cohesion. Without training and development programs, their skills remain limited, reducing their competitiveness in the job market. Without positive engagement alternatives, the risk of unproductive behaviors or social alienation increases. Most importantly, without platforms where their voices are heard, young people remain excluded from decision-making processes –creating a sense of detachment and lack of belonging.

Even when youth initiatives are organized, they are sporadic and fragmented – linked to temporary projects that end without lasting impact. Enthusiasm among young people quickly fades because there is no permanent mechanism to ensure continuity and quality of activities. Spaces used for such initiatives, like schools for extracurricular activities, communal halls, or open areas, have proven unsuitable, constrained by physical or weather conditions, and lacking logistics for multifunctional development. Consequently, the youth of Bogovinje remain without a place to call their own, without a center of social and cultural gravity, without a safe and welcoming space where they can feel supported, motivated, and empowered.

A survey conducted among young people in the municipality clearly highlights this gap. More than half said they would regularly visit a youth center, and a significant share even stated they would use it daily. They identified practical and professional training, youth debates and forums, psychological counseling, sports activities, and creative spaces for media and art as their top priorities. Moreover, young people envision the youth center not just as a venue for activities, but as an open, safe, and inclusive space accessible to all, with internet access and supported by the municipality and donors.

This comprehensive picture shows that the absence of a youth center is not merely an infrastructural issue but a serious obstacle to the social, cultural, and economic future of Bogovinje. The youth – being the largest and most dynamic segment of the population – if not engaged, risk turning from a source of energy and innovation into a lost potential, bringing stagnation and increasing emigration. Therefore, investing in the creation of a youth center is not just a step toward improving youth conditions but a strategic necessity for the municipality. Such a center would become a catalyst for local development, strengthen human capital, foster active participation and innovation, and, above all, create a shared vision for the community's future.

3. Alternative solutions considered

In the search for a sustainable solution for establishing a youth center in the municipality, several alternatives were considered, each differing in cost, duration, practicality, and long-term impact.

Every alternative carries its own advantages and limitations, offering a range of options that vary from maintaining the existing model to constructing a modern facility or forming partnerships with the private sector.

Alternative 1: Use of existing public spaces

This option envisions the use of existing municipal facilities, such as school halls, libraries, or municipal offices, which would be adapted for youth activities. The main advantage is cost savings and the ability to implement it relatively quickly, given that the basic infrastructure is already in place. However, this approach often faces time and space limitations, as these facilities are used for other purposes as well. Furthermore, the lack of a distinct identity as a youth center may reduce young people's sense of belonging.

Alternative 2: Construction of a new facility

The construction of a new youth center is the most ambitious solution, as it would provide a modern space specifically tailored to the needs of young people. Such a center would create conditions for diverse activities, ensuring a stable venue and a clear local identity. On the other hand, this option requires a longer implementation period, significant financial investment, and continuous commitment to maintenance, which may make practical implementation challenging in the short term.

Alternative 3: Partnership with the private sector or NGOs

The third alternative is to establish a public–private partnership or collaboration with civil society organizations. This model allows for cost and resource sharing while also bringing additional expertise in managing the center. The main advantage lies in its flexibility and ability to secure new funding for activities. However, dependence on a private partner or non-governmental organization may create uncertainty regarding the continuity of the agreement or potential funding reductions, which could make the center less sustainable in the long term.

Alternative 4: Hybrid model

This alternative combines the use of existing spaces with elements of partnership, providing a more flexible and gradually developed approach. For example, part of the activities could take place in municipal premises, while other activities could be supported by the private or civil sector. This model is more financially feasible than constructing a new facility and offers greater stability than relying entirely on a private partner. However, the challenge lies in coordinating the stakeholders and ensuring a shared vision, without which the coherence and functionality of the youth center could be compromised.

4. Selected solution and proposed future actions

After analyzing the possible options and based on the results of the survey conducted with 33 young people from the Municipality of Bogovinje, the recommendation is for the Municipality to focus on adapting an existing municipal building into a multifunctional Youth Center, combined with a public-private partnership model. This solution is not only financially feasible and timely but also fully aligned with the needs and demands of young people.

The results of the survey confirm this recommendation. Over 57% of young respondents stated that they would regularly visit the center, while another 30% would use it occasionally. More specifically, regarding the frequency of use: 24% would visit the center daily, 33% several times a week, and 42% would attend specialized events. This demonstrates a high potential for utilization and strong engagement of the youth community. Moreover, more than 80% of young people consider it essential to create an open and safe space for everyone, supported by the municipality and donors. These findings indicate that investing in a youth center is not a “top-down” initiative but rather a concrete demand articulated by the youth community itself.

Even in the selection of priority activities, the youth expressed clear preferences: 63.6% requested practical and vocational training, 51.5% showed interest in youth debates and forums, while 36.4% highlighted interest in media and podcasts, as well as psychological counseling. These data show that the space should not only provide cultural and recreational activities but also programs directly linked to employability skills and psychosocial support. For this reason, the option of reconstructing the existing building, combined with partnerships to provide equipment and programs, is the most appropriate one: it offers a permanent center tailored to the community’s needs, without delays and the high costs of constructing a new facility from scratch

Primary goals

The project aims to achieve five main objectives:

1. Creating a permanent and youth-friendly space where young people can gather, study, socialize, and express their creativity.
2. Developing practical and professional skills through training in technology, leadership, entrepreneurship, and other areas that prepare young people for the labor market.
3. Promoting civic engagement through forums, debates, and activities that connect young people with local decision-making processes.
4. Promoting mental and physical well-being through psychological counseling, sports activities, and wellness programs.

5. Building bridges between youth and the private sector, providing opportunities for employment, self-employment, and professional internships.

Description of the Youth Center space

The existing facility, which will be adapted, will be transformed into a modern and multifunctional center. The center will include:

- A large hall for trainings, debates, and cultural events;
- A technology and media space with a podcast studio and equipment for digital production;
- A library and reading room;
- A recreational area for leisure and physical activities;
- An office for psychological counseling and career guidance;
- Digital infrastructure with free internet, multimedia equipment, and appropriate technology.

The center will be designed with flexibility in mind, allowing it to adapt to the diverse needs of the youth community.

Priority program

The program will be structured around seven main areas:

1. Training in life and professional skills focusing on technology, leadership, entrepreneurship, and creativity.
2. Sports and recreational activities, including tournaments, workouts, yoga, and outdoor activities.
3. Media and creative production, through podcasts, citizen journalism, and multimedia projects.
4. Library and literary clubs for public reading, author meetings, and creative competitions.
5. Film screenings and discussions on educational and social topics.
6. Youth debates and forums addressing local, national, and global issues.
7. Psychological counseling and career guidance, providing emotional support, stress management, and mediation with the labor market.

Financial implications

The initial investment is expected to amount to €35,500 for the purchase of furniture, technological equipment, lighting, and the creation of functional spaces. Annual operational costs are estimated at €39,500, covering staff salaries, utilities, maintenance, educational materials, promotion, and activity organization.

Funding sources will be combined as follows:

- €20,000 from the municipal budget,
- €5,000 from local businesses,
- €15,000 from international grants,
- €5,000 from partnerships with the private sector,
- up to €1,000 from symbolic contributions by the youth themselves.

Timeline for implementation

The project would be implemented in three phases:

- Preparatory phase (0–3 months): selection of the facility, development of a reconstruction plan, and mobilization of financial resources.
- Reconstruction and equipment phase (4–9 months): adaptation of the premises and procurement of the necessary equipment.
- Operationalization phase (10–12 months): staff training, creation of programs, and official opening of the center.

At this pace, the youth center in Bogovinje could become fully operational within one year, providing a sustainable model for youth inclusion and local development.

This project represents a strategic step toward the municipality's long-term vision of strengthening the position of young people by creating sustainable opportunities for social, cultural, and economic development. It is fully aligned with the Law on Youth Participation and reflects the specific aspirations and needs of the youth of Bogovinje, ensuring a center where their voice carries value and has a direct impact on the community.

Innovative Initiatives in the Municipality of Gostivar

01

**A City Without Waste, a City With
a Smile**

Milot Selimi (DUI)

CITY WITHOUT WASTE, CITY WITH A SMILE



Milot Selimi
–DUI–

City without waste, city with a smile

1. Summary

The center of Gostivar, as the city's economic, social, and cultural hub, faces a shortage of public waste bins, resulting in visible consequences: litter scattered across public areas, unsafe hygiene conditions, a disrupted urban appearance, and a negative impact on economic and tourist activity. The problem is not only infrastructural but also reflects insufficient attention to the planning and maintenance of existing bins, as well as limited institutional and civic engagement. Previously installed bins, which often obstructed pedestrian movement due to irregular maintenance, were removed, creating the current gap. A conducted survey shows that 97.5% of citizens consider the situation serious and support the installation of new bins, clearly indicating their willingness to embrace a practical and well-managed solution.

Several alternatives have been considered to address the issue. Continuing the current status quo would further worsen the problem and reduce public trust in institutions, while installing large or underground containers presents functional limitations and high costs. Smart bins, though innovative, are too expensive and require specialized maintenance, posing a risk of failure. The analysis shows that placing standard public bins at strategic locations in the city center is the most efficient alternative—financially viable, easy to manage, and aligned with citizens' expectations.

Accordingly, it is recommended to install 8–10 bins every 100–200 meters in the most frequented areas, such as near cafés, institutions, and bus stops. This option combines immediate improvements in hygiene and urban appearance with civic participation and educational activities through campaigns, clean-up actions, and cooperation with schools, youth organizations, and the business sector. The planned budget is approximately 4,350 euros, and implementation can be completed within 2–3 months, including mapping, public procurement, installation, an awareness campaign, and initial monitoring of the results. This approach enables an integrated, short-term, and sustainable solution, contributing to the transformation of urban culture and strengthening the connection between the community and local institutions.

2. Problem - context and importance

The center of Gostivar, as the economic, social, and cultural core of the city, today faces a serious urban challenge: a complete lack of public waste bins. In areas where businesses, administrative services, and commercial activities are concentrated, and where hundreds of residents and visitors from surrounding areas and the diaspora pass daily, the absence of any public point for small waste disposal is not merely a technical shortcoming but a genuine crisis of urban management. Within a

radius of about one kilometer from the main square, there is not a single bin—an unacceptable situation for a city of over 60,000 inhabitants with a growing flow of seasonal visitors.

This situation has numerous and visible consequences. Citizens are forced to throw waste on the ground, beside poles, in front of business entrances, or in public spaces. As a result, the city center is often covered with scattered litter, distorting its aesthetic image, lowering the quality of life, and creating unsafe hygiene conditions. From a health perspective, the scattered waste contributes to the spread of insects, attracts stray animals, and produces unpleasant odors, thereby increasing the risk of infections and diseases. For businesses, the unaesthetic appearance of the center has direct economic consequences, making it less attractive and deterring potential customers. For a city aspiring to develop into a modern and welcoming urban center, this situation seriously damages its reputation.

Experience so far shows that the problem lies not only in the lack of bins but also in the absence of proper planning and regular maintenance. Previously installed bins often obstructed pedestrian movement or access to business premises and, due to irregular emptying, became overfilled and a source of dirt. Consequently, they were removed and never replaced, creating the current gap.

The survey data collected (70.6% business respondents and 29.4% residents) clearly confirms the seriousness of the issue and its recognition as an urgent community challenge. As many as 97.5% of respondents agree that there is a serious waste problem in the main square and strongly support the installation of new bins. Additionally, 80.7% of respondents confirm that bins were effective in the past when properly maintained, indicating that citizens believe in this solution but expect systematic implementation and regular upkeep.

The survey data collected (70.6% business respondents and 29.4% residents) clearly confirms the seriousness of the issue and its recognition as an urgent community challenge. As many as 97.5% of respondents agree that there is a serious waste problem in the main square and strongly support the installation of new bins. Additionally, 80.7% of respondents confirm that bins were effective in the past when properly maintained, indicating that citizens believe in this solution but expect systematic implementation and regular upkeep.

However, the problem is not solely infrastructural. Many citizens point to a lack of institutional commitment from the Municipality and the Public Utility Company “Komunalec,” expressing frustration that “the institutions seem to have no interest in this issue,” which in turn weakens the community’s willingness to actively contribute to public cleanliness. This clearly shows that institutional credibility is as important as the physical placement of bins. Without a positive example and proactive institutional involvement, citizens are rarely motivated to take personal responsibility. In this sense, the lack of bins is merely a symptom of a deeper issue: the absence of a sustainable urban plan and a culture of civic education. Installing bins alone is not enough; citizens themselves demand a combined approach—improving infrastructure while promoting public awareness through

educational campaigns, clean-up actions, and partnerships between the municipality, businesses, and the community. Therefore, installing bins is not only a technical investment but also a step toward transforming urban culture and strengthening trust between citizens and local institutions.

In conclusion, the lack of bins in the center of Gostivar is not a minor issue but a problem with multiple implications—affecting aesthetics, health, the economy, and institutional credibility. It reflects the complexity of urban governance and civic culture, directly undermining the community's well-being and the city's reputation. Therefore, the intervention should not be treated as an optional measure but as an urgent necessity requiring an integrated, comprehensive, and sustainable solution.



The photo illustrates the current situation in the city center, clearly showing the consequences of the lack of public bins and inadequate maintenance of the urban environment.

3. Alternative solutions considered

To address the problem of the lack of bins in the center of Gostivar, several possible alternatives have been considered. Each has been evaluated based on functionality, cost, urban and social impact, and the feasibility of rapid implementation. This analysis shows that not every option is suitable, while some prove to be more appropriate for the local context.

The first alternative is to maintain the status quo, meaning not to install any new bins. This option requires no financial investment and may appear to be the simplest solution from an institutional standpoint. However, its advantages end there. In fact, this alternative is unacceptable, as it preserves and further deepens the existing problem. Poll data show that 97.5% of citizens consider the situation serious and demand the installation of new bins. If institutions choose not to act, the perception of

neglect will only grow, undermining their credibility and further rendering the city center unfit for urban life and economic development.

Another alternative is to place large containers in remote areas outside the city center. This option facilitates the work of the Public Utility Company “Komunalec,” as it reduces the number of collection points and allows for greater waste capacity. However, it fails to meet the real needs of pedestrians. A person walking along the square cannot be expected to carry waste to a large container located on the outskirts of the city. Moreover, concentrating waste at a few points creates additional problems: unpleasant odors, visual pollution, and the perception of the city center as a neglected space. Instead of solving the problem, this approach merely relocates it.

The third alternative involves the installation of underground containers. These systems are aesthetically pleasing, have large capacity, and prevent waste accumulation. They have been successfully implemented in some regional cities. However, they require substantial financial investment and a lengthy implementation period. The cost of one underground container is several times higher than that of standard bins, while Gostivar’s existing infrastructure (underground utilities, sewage, and other installations) poses technical challenges that could make implementation difficult or even impossible. For this reason, this option is not suitable in the short term, although it may be considered for long-term urban planning.

A more innovative alternative is the introduction of smart bins powered by solar energy and equipped with compression mechanisms to increase capacity. Their main advantages include significantly reducing emptying frequency, enabling real-time monitoring, and aligning with the vision of smart cities. However, this option is extremely expensive and requires specialized maintenance. In a municipality like Gostivar, where the budget is limited and the technical capacities of the public utility are modest, this alternative carries a high risk of practical failure. The cost of one such bin can reach several thousand euros, while the entire project of installing standard bins could be completed for only 4,000–5,000 euros.

The fifth alternative is the installation of standard public bins in strategic locations throughout the city center. Field analysis shows that adequate coverage of the square and main streets requires 8–10 bins placed every 100–200 meters, especially in problem areas such as cafés, food stores, entrances to institutions, and bus routes. The cost of this option is minimal—approximately 1,200 to 2,000 euros for the purchase of bins, and around 4,350 euros in total including installation and maintenance. The benefits, on the other hand, are substantial: improved cleanliness, reduced emergency cleaning costs, enhanced city reputation, and greater economic attractiveness of the area. In addition, this solution enjoys broad public support—97.5% of respondents favor this option, while 80.7% confirm that previous bins had a positive effect when properly maintained. This alternative is not merely a technical investment but part of a broader, integrated approach.

4. Selected solution and proposed future actions

Based on the analysis of alternatives and the clear expectations of citizens and businesses, it is recommended **to install standard public waste bins in the center of Gostivar and on the surrounding streets, spaced 100–200 meters apart**. This option is feasible, affordable, and enjoys broad public support, providing immediate benefits for hygiene and the city's urban image. The analysis of alternatives indicates that the installation of public bins is the most balanced solution, combining efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and citizen approval. Additionally, this approach fosters civic awareness and encourages cooperation among residents, businesses, and municipal institutions, contributing to a sustainable model of waste management.

The specific implementation activities are as follows:

1. **Placement planning:** Mapping the identification zone to the most suitable locations, taking into account the intensity of movement of citizens and proximity to businesses, in close cooperation with local businessmen and residents. This process will allow bins to be easily accessible and properly used by significantly improving the cleanliness of public areas.
2. **Procurement and installation:** Providing bins with adequate capacity and design for the everyday type of waste, placed in strategic locations that cover the entire square and the surrounding streets. This step ensures that the investment has maximum effect and avoids waste accumulation in certain places.
3. **Coordination with PUC "Komunalec":** Establish a detailed plan for emptying the bins 2–3 times a day and creating a clear mechanism for reporting any problems or obstacles. This step is also in line with citizens' expectations, as 68.1% of the respondents emphasized the need for direct dialogue with the municipality and PKP "Komunalec", whereby transparent and regular communication with the public is essential. Such coordination also ensures sustainable and continuous service in the long run.
4. **Awareness raising campaign:** Conduct a 4–6 week campaign through posters, banners and on social networks that promotes bin use and waste management education. This is not just an additional measure, but a demand emanating from the citizens themselves – 15.1% of the respondents highlighted the need for such campaigns, which indicates that the community is aware of the role of civic education in the success of the project. Such a campaign is expected to gradually change habits and reduce dirt in public spaces.
5. **Additional community activities:** Involve schools, youth groups, and local organizations in clean-up actions and educational activities, making the intervention comprehensive and long-term. This gives the community a sense of ownership of its environment and enhances civic participation, creating a model that can be applied to other neighborhoods.

6. **Monitoring and reporting:** Monthly checks on the condition of the bins and cleanliness of the public space, including measuring citizens' satisfaction through regular surveys. This allows timely identification of problems and adjustment of the service according to the real needs of the users.

Financial Implications:

The project has an estimated budget of approximately 4,350 euros, covering procurement, installation, maintenance, and administrative costs. For a municipality the size of Gostivar, this amount is minimal compared to the expected social and economic benefits, including improved urban reputation, increased citizen satisfaction, and the promotion of tourism and local engagement.

Timeframe for Realization:

The project can be implemented within 2–3 months following approval:

- **Month 1:** Mapping and procurement of bins.
- **Month 2:** Installation of bins and launch of the awareness campaign.
- **Month 3:** Initial monitoring and commencement of community activities.

This plan provides a comprehensive approach, combining practical solutions with civic participation and education—key elements for sustainable and effective waste management in the center of Gostivar.

Innovative Initiatives in the Municipality of Debar

01

**Space for All: Creating New
Parking Solutions in Debar**

Arberije Limani (DUI)

SPACE FOR ALL: CREATING NEW PARKING SOLUTIONS IN DEBAR



Arberije Limani
–DUI–

Space for all: Creating new parking solutions in Debar

1. Summary

The city of Debar, with a population of around 11,735 residents and 17 surrounding villages, is facing a serious and growing problem in the area of urban mobility: the lack of organized parking spaces. In the central areas, near healthcare institutions, markets, and schools, the density of vehicles exceeds the capacity of the existing infrastructure, forcing citizens to park on sidewalks, green areas, and places not intended for that purpose. This leads to traffic congestion, reduces the level of safety for pedestrians, and makes access to homes, businesses, and institutions more difficult. Drivers and passengers lose time and fuel, residents face difficulties accessing their buildings, businesses experience a decline in customers and logistical challenges, while the most vulnerable groups – such as the elderly and people with disabilities – face serious barriers to mobility.

To address this challenge, several options have been explored. Reorganizing existing parking spaces with clear signage and stricter regulations could provide temporary relief but is insufficient to fully meet the growing needs. Expanding public roads and spaces would offer greater capacity but requires significant investment and could negatively impact green areas and the quality of urban life. Encouraging the use of public transportation and bicycles is important for reducing the traffic load, but it requires a shift in citizens' habits and long-term investment, and it cannot replace the need for organized parking. A comprehensive and sustainable solution is the construction of multi-storey parking garages, along with the creation of new designated parking spaces and the introduction of penalties for illegal parking. This approach addresses the need for additional capacity, improves pedestrian access and safety, optimizes the use of existing spaces, and provides opportunities for revenue generation to ensure long-term maintenance and operation.

The construction of the garages will include identifying strategic locations, such as central areas near banks and restaurants, where 30–40 parking spaces could be provided, as well as the road near the Cultural Center, with 10–15 parking spaces, ensuring easy access to institutions and services. The construction will comply with modern standards for safety, energy efficiency, accessibility, and structural stability, including concrete and steel structures, technical equipment, automatic barriers, security cameras, and alarm systems. Long-term urban planning and public awareness campaigns will ensure efficient use and adherence to parking regulations. Financial analysis shows that the required initial investment for the construction of the garages amounts to 36.2 million denars. However, since the garages will generate revenue, a return on investment (through generated income) of 27.4% is expected within approximately 3.6 years, thereby ensuring long-term financial sustainability. The total implementation period, from preparation to initial operation, is expected to last between 16 and 20 months.

In this way, the construction of multi-storey garages, combined with planned measures for urban planning and citizen education, represents a sustainable and comprehensive solution to the parking problem in Debar, bringing improvements in mobility, safety, access to services, and the quality of urban life, while creating a more functional and comfortable city for all residents.

2. Problem – context and importance

According to the latest census from 2021, the Municipality of Debar, located in the southwestern part of the country, has a population of 15,412 residents. The city of Debar, as the administrative center of the municipality, has about 11,735 inhabitants. The municipality encompasses a total of 17 surrounding villages, making it an area with a widely distributed population and diverse transportation and parking needs. The city of Debar is facing a serious and growing problem in the area of urban mobility, caused by a critical shortage of organized parking spaces. The situation is particularly evident in central areas and around healthcare institutions, the marketplace, and educational facilities, where the density of vehicles significantly exceeds the capacity of the existing infrastructure.

This imbalance has led to frequent parking on sidewalks, green areas, and locations not intended for that purpose, causing traffic congestion, reducing pedestrian safety, and hindering access to homes, businesses, and institutions. The most affected are drivers and passengers, who spend time and fuel searching for a free parking space; residents, who are often blocked from entering their homes; local businesses, which face a decrease in customers and logistical difficulties; as well as vulnerable pedestrian groups (elderly people, parents with small children in strollers, and persons with disabilities), who are forced to walk on sidewalks crowded with vehicles.

The causes of this situation are multiple:

- **Lack of adequate urban planning over the years:** The city's development took place without a clear parking plan, which resulted in the use of public spaces for parking.
- **Lack of systematic assessments of parking capacities:** There is no detailed analysis of the city's parking needs, which has led to the construction of infrastructure without considering actual demands.
- **Rapid increase in the number of vehicles:** With the growing number of vehicles, the capacity of the existing infrastructure has been exceeded.
- **Lack of effective mechanisms for controlling and preventing illegal parking:** Without clear and enforceable measures, illegal parking has become a common occurrence.

Consequently, the current approaches – limited to improvisations and temporary measures – do not provide sustainable solutions.

The research conducted within the framework of the initiative *“Space for All: Creating New Parking Solutions in Debar”* produced the following results:

- **46%** of citizens spend more than 20 minutes looking for a free parking space.
- **92%** believe that the number of existing parking spaces is completely insufficient.
- **61.5%** support the construction of multi-storey garages, the creation of new designated parking spaces, and the enforcement of penalties against illegal parking.

These data show that citizens are not only aware of the problem but are also open to concrete and regulated solutions. Additionally, a significant portion of them support the introduction of penalties for illegal parking, particularly in the most critical areas, in order to reduce traffic chaos and increase safety. The parking situation in Debar represents an urgent and multifaceted problem, affecting mobility, safety, economic development, and the quality of urban life. Previous failures to address this

issue have created a reality in which improvisation is no longer sufficient. Therefore, there is an urgent need for planned, data-driven interventions focused on long-term and sustainable solutions, which will enable a more functional, safer, and more pleasant city to live in for all residents of Debar.

3. Alternative solutions considered

To address the parking and traffic problem in Debar, several different alternatives have been considered to find a sustainable solution in the medium and long term. **Reorganizing existing parking spaces** is seen as a possible initial measure, including the installation of clear signage, visual markers, and stricter vehicle parking regulations. This option has the advantage of rapid implementation and can bring temporary improvements in traffic flow and optimization of existing spaces. Research results show that more than half of the citizens face difficulties finding a parking space on a daily basis, and 46% spend more than 20 minutes searching for a free spot. This indicates that reorganizing existing spaces can alleviate the situation for some residents, but it is insufficient to meet the growing demand and does not address structural infrastructure limitations. In the long term, this will remain a limited measure.

Another alternative explored is the **expansion of public roads and spaces to create new parking areas**. This option could provide greater capacity, which would help address the concerns of 92% of citizens who believe that the number of existing spaces is insufficient. However, it requires significant financial investment and long implementation periods. Additionally, such expansion could negatively impact green areas and the quality of urban life, potentially causing tensions between the community and urban planners. Therefore, while this alternative may add short-term capacity, its long-term effect could be limited and potentially counterproductive.

The third alternative involves **promoting the use of public transportation and bicycles as an alternative to private cars**. This option aims to reduce the traffic load in the city center and decrease the demand for parking, thereby improving mobility and the quality of life for pedestrians, including the elderly and people with disabilities. However, this approach requires significant changes in citizens' habits, ongoing education, and investment in public transport and bicycle infrastructure. Its effectiveness in the short and medium term is limited, and therefore it can serve only as a complementary measure, rather than a standalone solution.

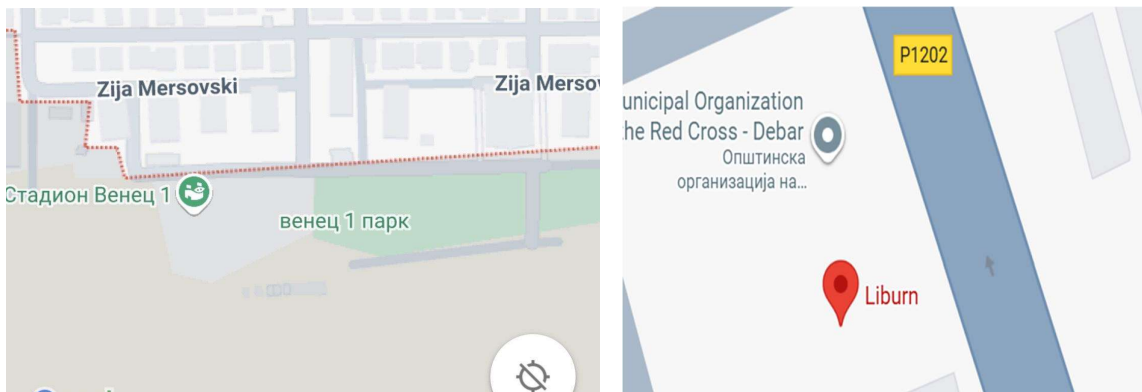
Another alternative considered is the **construction of multi-storey garages**, along with the creation of new designated parking spaces and the enforcement of penalties for illegal parking. This option aims to increase parking capacity and address the shortage of spaces in the busiest areas, given that 92% of citizens consider the current number of spaces insufficient, and 46% spend more than 20 minutes searching for a parking spot. Furthermore, 61.5% of respondents support the construction of multi-storey garages and the creation of designated spaces, indicating the community's readiness for structural and organized solutions. This option also addresses practical aspects, allowing for more

efficient use of existing space and improved vehicle management; economic aspects, through more efficient space utilization and the generation of revenue opportunities for maintenance; as well as social aspects, by improving access for both pedestrians and vehicles and contributing to a more organized and safer environment for the community.

4. Selected solution and proposed future actions

Based on the analysis of the current parking situation in Debar, the results of research, and expert assessments in urban planning and traffic management, one of the most functional and sustainable solutions is the construction of multi-storey garages, combined with an integrated urban plan and a public awareness campaign for citizens.

For the implementation of the project, activities are planned to be carried out in several clear and interrelated steps. Initially, a strategic location in the city center needs to be identified – one that provides easy access for citizens, businesses, and public institutions, while not negatively impacting the existing environment. Mapping analysis has identified desirable areas such as the centers near banks and restaurants (“Venec 1”), where transformed green spaces could provide **30–40 parking spaces**, and street P1202 near the Cultural Center and the “Liburn” restaurant, with a limited capacity of **10–15 parking spaces**. These locations offer direct access to institutions, services, and businesses, thereby improving mobility for both residents and visitors.



The second step involves the architectural and engineering design of the garages, adhering to modern standards for safety, energy efficiency, accessibility for people with disabilities, and structural sustainability. Construction includes concrete and steel structures, foundations, columns, scaffolding, facades, and technical equipment, as well as the installation of payment systems, automatic barriers, security cameras, alarms, and fire detection systems. Additionally, the project includes long-term urban planning, with the marking of new parking spaces, traffic regulation, and control of illegal parking.

An important component is a public awareness and education campaign, aimed at promoting the use of the new garages and ensuring compliance with parking rules. After construction, a monitoring and maintenance system will be established to ensure the continuous and safe operation of the garages.

Table 1 – Capacities of potential parking locations

Area	Capacity (Parking spaces)	Comment
Venec 1 (near banks and restaurants)	30-40	Accessible location, potential for integration of greenery and urban development
Street P1202 (near the Cultural Center and “Liburn” restaurant))	10–15	Limited capacity, suitable for supplementary use

Table 2 – Financial analysis of the multi-storey garage project

Categories	Planned amount (MKD)
Site Preparation	4.500.000
Construction	18.000.000
Facades and Exterior Elements	3.000.000
Interior Equipment	2.500.000
Parking Equipment	2.000.000
Electrical and Hydraulic Installations	1.800.000
Design and Supervision	1.200.000
Contingency Reserves	3.200.000
Total	36.200.000

The annual revenue is projected to **amount to 10,720,000 MKD**, providing a **return on investment of 27.4% per year** and a total payback period of approximately 3.6 years. Operations and maintenance are planned to ensure long-term financial sustainability and minimize the risk of unforeseen costs.

The project implementation timeline is planned as follows: the preparation and design phase will last 3–4 months, construction and equipment installation 12–14 months, and initial testing and operation 1–2 months, resulting in a total **duration of 16–20 months**.

Implementing this solution will provide a sustainable and efficient parking system, reduce urban traffic chaos, improve safety for pedestrians and road users, and contribute to the urban development of Debar, creating a more organized, safer, and more functional environment for residents, businesses, and visitors.

Innovative Initiatives in the Municipality of Demir Hisar

01

**Rural Action for a Clean Demir
Hisar**

Stefanija Kuzmanovska (SDSM)

RURAL ACTION FOR CLEAN DEMIR HISAR



Stefanija Kuzmanovska
–SDSM–

Rural action for clean Demir Hisar

1. Summary

The document addresses the issue of waste management in the rural settlements of the Municipality of Demir Hisar, where demographic decline and geographic dispersion hinder access to regular utilities. The existing system functions inefficiently due to inadequate infrastructure, limited capacity of PUC “Komunalec”, poor institutional coordination, low environmental awareness, and outdated strategic planning. Consequently, nearly 80% of residents frequently encounter illegal dumpsites, while around 70% report a lack of containers and waste collection points, leading to serious implications for public health, the environment, the local economy, and citizens’ trust in institutions.

The analysis outlines several potential solutions to improve the current situation:

- Expanding the services of PUC “Komunalec” through the procurement of specialized small vehicles, increasing the number of routes, adjusting collection schedules, and strengthening technical and human capacities;
- Establishing “mini communal centres” in larger rural neighborhoods, enabling local community participation in waste collection and sorting;;
- Developing public-private partnerships for waste selection and recycling to generate added value and enhance the overall efficiency of the system.

The main recommendation is the institutionalized expansion of the services of PUC “Komunalec,” ensuring a professional and long-term approach to providing equal access to waste management across all rural settlements. Active citizen participation in waste collection and sorting initiatives promotes responsible behavior and strengthens environmental awareness, aligning with EU circular economy principles and the National Waste Management Strategy 2024–2030. The implementation involves vehicle procurement, route optimization, staff training, continuous monitoring, and educational campaigns, aiming to establish a sustainable and efficient system that enhances hygiene, public health, and the economic potential of the municipality in the long term.

2. Problem - context and importance

The Municipality of Demir Hisar faces pronounced demographic challenges that directly impact the management of public utilities. The population is continuously declining, with a negative migration balance indicating that more people are leaving than settling in. Around 50% of residents are over the age of 50, reflecting a serious aging trend, while the younger population is shrinking and frequently migrating to larger urban centers or abroad. This demographic structure limits the availability of labor,

reduces local economic activity, and increases the demand for improved social and communal services, including waste management.

Under these conditions, waste management in rural areas has become one of the most urgent challenges for the local community. The municipality encompasses more than 40 rural settlements, many of which are located in mountainous areas with limited accessibility. What initially appears as a demographic and logistical issue is, in reality, an environmental and infrastructural crisis with long-term implications for public health, the environment, and local development.

Field analyses and surveys reveal alarming data: nearly 80% of residents frequently or occasionally notice illegal landfills in their villages, and about 70% believe that waste containers or collection points are lacking. Mapping conducted in 2024 identified 28 active illegal dumpsites—nine situated near waterways, posing a high risk of contaminating drinking and irrigation water sources, and six located in or near forested areas, threatening local ecosystems.

Residents of villages such as Babino, Sloeshtica, Zashle, and Brezovo — areas with an increasing number of weekend visitors and strong potential for rural tourism development — are particularly affected. Their feedback reflects growing frustration over the absence of waste containers and the high costs and impracticality of transporting waste to nearby settlements where collection points exist.

The main reasons for this situation are multifaceted:

- **Lack of infrastructure:** Some villages have no containers at all, while in others, the existing ones are often overcrowded or insufficient;
- **Limited capacities of PUC Komunalec:** The company operates with outdated vehicles and lacks regular access to remote settlements, especially during winter;
- **Insufficient institutional coordination:** The municipality has not yet established an effective coordination mechanism between local communities, municipal services, and the utility company;
- **Low environmental awareness:** A portion of the population still holds the belief that waste will simply “be carried away by the river” or can “just be burned,” making it difficult to apply modern waste management practices;
- **Insufficient strategic planning:** The previous Waste Management Plan (2013–2017) has long expired, while the new Local Waste Management Action Plan (2024–2025) is still in its early stages of implementation and has yet to yield visible results.

The consequences of inadequate waste management are already severe and evident in several areas:

- **Health risks:** Continuous danger of contamination of local water sources, increased risk of infectious diseases, and the spread of rodents and insects;

- **Ecological degradation:** Accumulation of plastic, organic waste, and construction debris in forest areas and waterways, causing soil degradation, water pollution, and a heightened risk of fires;
- **Social consequences:** Growing mistrust in institutions and a prevailing sense among residents that rural communities are systematically neglected;
- **Economic consequences:** Undermining the potential for rural and eco-tourism, as well as organic farming — key sectors for the municipality’s sustainable economic development.

The conclusion is that inadequate waste management in the rural settlements of the Municipality of Demir Hisar is a complex challenge that demands urgent, integrated and long-term action. Sustainable improvement can be achieved only through a combination of infrastructure development, strengthened capacities of PUC “Komunalec”, continuous educational and awareness campaigns, enhanced monitoring, and effective institutional coordination. Such an approach will prevent further negative effects on public health, the environment and the local economy, while ensuring equal access to essential services for all residents.

3. Alternative solutions considered

The analysis of the situation in the rural settlements of the Municipality of Demir Hisar, together with the results of surveys, SWOT² analysis, and field mapping, shows that waste management faces complex challenges. Existing services do not fully cover the terrain, particularly in remote neighborhoods, and residents experience infrequent collection and a lack of waste-sorting infrastructure. In this context, several possible options for improving the system can be considered, each with its own characteristics, advantages, and limitations.

Alternative 1: Expanding the services of PUC Komunalec

One of the most studied alternatives is the institutional strengthening of PUC "Komunalec". This approach is based on the premise that establishing a professional, long-term service is key to ensuring equal access to waste management across all rural settlements.

The expansion entails the purchase of specialized small vehicles to enable regular waste collection in the most remote and mountainous areas, as well as an increase in the number of routes and the establishment of a schedule adapted to the needs of the local population. Survey data show that 65% of residents require more frequent collection, while 75% consider the installation of additional containers a priority. This indicates that the community recognizes the need for an institutionalized service and that such an approach would enjoy long-term public support.

² SWOT analysis is a strategic planning method that identifies Strengths and Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats to facilitate better decision-making.

The expansion process also includes the enhancement of personnel and technical capacities within PUC, increasing efficiency and citizens' trust in the institution. The SWOT analysis identifies weaknesses such as limited administrative capacity and the risk of insufficient support during adaptation of new services. However, with strategic planning and staff training, these challenges can be overcome, making this alternative sustainable and effective in the long term.

Alternative 2: “Mini communal hubs” in local communities

The second alternative involves establishing local “mini-community centres” in larger rural neighbourhoods. This approach emphasizes community involvement and encourages citizens to actively participate in waste management. Under this model, local communities would be provided with infrastructure such as containers, bags, and sorting vessels, and residents would transport waste to central points or nearby rural sites with established facilities. Survey data show that 51% of residents are willing to participate in local cleanup actions, highlighting the potential to foster local accountability and a sense of ownership. However, previous initiatives indicate that 65% of the population has never been involved in environmental activities, underscoring the need for ongoing support, training, and motivation to ensure successful implementation.

This model has the advantage of requiring fewer financial resources and can be implemented in the short term, with direct involvement from the local population. It also allows for testing new practices for waste collection and transport on a smaller scale before expanding them across the municipality. Site mapping indicates that such mini-centres could serve the busiest collection points, ensuring accessibility for a larger portion of residents. However, limitations include the organizational capacity and willingness of the community, as well as the ability to handle larger volumes of waste, making this option most suitable for short-term or pilot phases.

It is particularly important to establish a communal centre in the village of Sopotnica, equipped with appropriate terrain vehicles to cover the “upper” villages in the Municipality of Demir Hisar.

Alternative 3: Public-private partnership for waste selection

The third alternative focuses on introducing a public-private partnership to improve waste separation and generate additional value through recycling. In this model, a private operator would provide containers for plastic, paper, and glass, handling their collection and transport to recycling facilities. PUC "Komunalec" would continue to manage the remaining mixed waste, ensuring continuity of public services. Surveys show that 40% of residents support the introduction of a waste separation system, indicating an existing interest that could be strengthened through educational campaigns and incentive programs. The SWOT analysis highlights that weaknesses such as low resource utilization and limited environmental awareness can be partially addressed through this model. Mapping indicates that the private operator can cover critical points with the highest concentration of recyclable waste, increasing system efficiency. However, this approach requires careful regulation, monitoring,

and continuous citizen engagement, as some residents may lack the habit or motivation to separate waste properly.

4. Selected solution and proposed future actions

The most appropriate solution for improving waste management in the Municipality of Demir Hisar is the **expansion of PUC "Komunalec" services**, establishing a professional, long-term system that ensures equal access to waste collection across all rural settlements. This approach addresses the need for institutionalized services while strengthening citizens' trust and administrative capacity.

The recommended activities for expanding PUC "Komunalec" are fully aligned with the National Waste Management Strategy 2024–2030, which emphasizes sustainable, long-term services in rural areas. In parallel, promoting active citizen participation through local clean-up campaigns and waste separation initiatives follows EU recommendations for a circular economy and sustainable resource management, fostering community responsibility and environmental awareness.

Based on the mapping of critical waste points, areas with high waste accumulation and zones currently underserved by PUC services were identified. The most critical include remote and mountainous settlements, as well as locations near major thoroughfares where frequent collection is essential to prevent environmental hazards. Expanding PUC services to cover these points will reduce waste dispersion and significantly improve hygiene across the municipality.

The SWOT analysis of the current system highlights key factors supporting the proposed alternative:

- **Strengths:** Existing presence of PUC "Komunalec" on the ground, available technical and human resources that can be upgraded, and citizens' trust in the institution.
- **Weaknesses:** Limited administrative and technical capacities of the PUC, insufficient frequency of collection in remote settlements, and inadequate infrastructure coverage.
- **Opportunities:** Potential to purchase specialized vehicles, increase the number of routes, implement a new schedule, and enhance staff through training and strategic planning..
- **Threats:** Risk of insufficient support from the municipality or central institutions, possible delays in adapting new services, and financial constraints.

Based on this analysis, the recommendations and specific implementation activities are as follows:

1. **Procurement of specialized small vehicles** to ensure regular waste collection, especially at the critical points identified through mapping.
2. **Increase the number of routes and establish a new schedule** covering the entire rural area, adapted to the real needs of the population.

3. **Improve personnel and technical capacities of PUC** through trainings for efficient waste management, logistics and vehicle maintenance.
4. **Regular analysis and monitoring of critical points** in order to identify additional intervention locations and optimize coverage.
5. **Educational campaigns to educate citizens** about new services and encourage participation in maintaining cleanliness.

Financial implications: Implementing this solution will require significant investment in vehicle procurement, infrastructure upgrades, and additional personnel. However, strengthening technical and human capacities will create a long-term, sustainable, and efficient service, ultimately reducing costs through more effective collection and fewer environmental damages.

Timeframe: The implementation is planned in phases: a short-term plan (6–12 months) for vehicle procurement and establishment of new routes; a medium-term plan (12–24 months) for staff training and logistics optimization; and long-term monitoring (2–5 years) to adapt and expand services according to population needs.

By carrying out these activities, the Municipality of Demir Hisar will establish a stable, professional, and citizen-supported waste management system that covers critical points and ensures long-term sustainability.

Innovative Initiatives in the Municipality of Demir Kapija

01

"GragjanIN" – Application for the Digital Transformation of Demir Kapija
Stefanija Sokolovikj (SDSM)

**"GRAGJANIN" – APPLICATION
FOR DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION
OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF
DEMIR KAPIJA**



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"GragjanIN" - Application for digital transformation of the Municipality of Demir Kapija

1. Summary

The Municipality of Demir Kapija, located in the southern part of the Republic of North Macedonia, faces considerable challenges in citizen communication and engagement. With a population of 3,777—many residing in rural and remote areas—the municipality currently relies on limited and inefficient two-way communication channels. Existing options, such as in-person visits, phone calls, and a frequently non-functional website, fail to ensure transparency, accessibility, and formal documentation. These shortcomings particularly affect young people, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. The lack of inclusive participation and accessible communication has led to low civic engagement and diminished trust in local institutions. Surveys and focus groups conducted as part of this initiative revealed strong interest in digital solutions: 72% of citizens indicated their willingness to use a mobile application to report issues, submit proposals, communicate directly with municipal services, and receive timely notifications.

The analysis of the alternatives confirmed that the "Citizenin" mobile app is the most suitable solution. It enables users to report problems with a description, photo, and GPS location; submit proposals; communicate directly with municipal services; and generate automatic and anonymous reports. The application is designed to accommodate varying levels of digital literacy, includes multilingual support, and integrates SMS functionality to ensure accessibility for residents in rural areas.

The project will be implemented in six phases: research and analysis, concept and prototype development, technical development, promotion and community engagement, training and technical support, and continuous monitoring and evaluation. The estimated budget amounts to 16,000–20,000 euros, with an implementation period of eight months.

The introduction of the "Citizenin" mobile app represents a strategic investment in modernizing local governance, enhancing transparency and accountability, and promoting active citizen participation—particularly among marginalized groups—thereby fostering a stronger and more engaged community.

2. Problem - context and importance

The Municipality of Demir Kapija is situated in the southern part of the Republic of North Macedonia, within the southeastern area of the Tikveš Valley, occupying a strategic position due to its connection with major roads and proximity to larger urban centers. The municipality encompasses 14 settlements and the central town of Demir Kapija, with a total population of 3,777 according to the

2021 Census—representing a decline of approximately 17% compared to 2002. Of this population, 3,076 are Macedonians, followed by smaller groups of Turks (376), Serbs (130), Roma (37), and others. Around half of the population consists of adults, and a significant proportion resides in remote rural villages. The distance of these settlements, ranging from 4 to 23 kilometers from the municipal center, poses an additional challenge to maintaining regular and effective communication with local self-government.

One of the key weaknesses of the municipality is the lack of efficient two-way communication with citizens, stemming from the absence of mechanisms for transparency, inclusion, and regular information exchange. In practice, communication takes place mainly through a municipal website—which often malfunctions and lacks essential information—social networks that are not regularly updated, e-services with unresolved technical issues, and printed announcements on a bulletin board. Citizens usually report problems by phone or in person at the municipal administration, which is inaccessible to many, particularly young people, the elderly, and persons with limited mobility. Only written reports are formally recorded, while oral and telephone contacts remain undocumented, resulting in institutional inefficiency and insufficient accountability. The existing communication model, relying primarily on telephone and personal contact, has proven limited and ineffective. More than 40% of surveyed citizens reported feeling excluded from decision-making processes, while current channels fail to ensure formal documentation and transparency. The analysis indicates the need to establish a structured mechanism for two-way communication, maintaining formal records of all reports and proposals, enabling active citizen participation in decision-making, and ensuring timely access to municipal information.

The interview conducted with the municipal inspector revealed that the municipality receives around 150 reports per year concerning issues such as street lighting, damage from weather events, waste, or stray dogs. Of these, 105 are submitted in writing, 25 by phone, and 20 in person. However, only written reports are officially recorded, meaning that many problems remain unresolved due to the lack of formal reporting channels. This systemic shortcoming fosters distrust among citizens and diminishes their active participation in local processes.

The insufficient participation of citizens in decision-making also represents a major problem. Although an online budget planning consultation is held once a year, it is poorly promoted, and many citizens are unaware of the opportunity to submit proposals. For more than a decade, no focus groups or formal meetings have been organized to allow citizens to express their opinions on decisions that affect them. As a result, citizens feel unheard, which leads to reduced civic engagement, distrust in institutions, and weak implementation of projects that fail to reflect the community's real needs.

Focus groups and surveys conducted within this initiative confirm a strong interest in digital tools that enable effective and transparent communication with the municipality. The survey included 225

citizens, equally divided by gender, with 72% from urban and 28% from rural areas. Results show that 63.4% had previous contact with the Municipality, mostly through in-person visits or phone calls, while digital channels are rarely used. More than two-thirds of respondents believe that existing communication channels are insufficient, and over 60% feel excluded from decision-making processes. Nevertheless, 72% expressed their willingness to use a mobile application that allows them to report issues, submit suggestions, and receive timely notifications.³

These findings clearly demonstrate the need for a modern, systematically regulated solution that will transform the communication process and enable active citizen participation in local decision-making. Engaging young people, women, persons with disabilities, and residents of rural areas is essential for building trust in institutions and reducing civic apathy and migration. Without such a systemic approach, traditional forms of communication will remain inadequate, negatively affecting the development and long-term sustainability of the local community.

3. Alternative solutions considered

In evaluating alternatives to improve communication between citizens and the Municipality of Demir Kapija, several criteria were considered, including accessibility, functionality, sustainability, inclusiveness, and administrative feasibility. Based on a survey of 225 citizens, a focus group discussion, interviews with representatives of the municipal administration and council, and consultations with an IT expert, two main alternatives were identified.

Alternative 1: Introducing a mobile app

The most desirable and supported solution is the development of a mobile application that enables:

- reporting problems with a description, photo, and location;
- submitting proposals and initiatives;
- direct communication with municipal services;
- automatic notifications of important information, public calls and decisions.

The survey confirmed that citizens consider this tool practical and necessary: 73.3% would use it to report problems, 53.8% for suggestions, 52% for event monitoring, and 50.2% for direct communication. Officials support it as a way to reduce administrative burdens, and IT experts consider it technically feasible and sustainable. This solution is particularly important for transparency and trust – reports will be recorded and monitored, the need for physical presence will be reduced, and anonymous reporting will strengthen citizens' confidence. In the long term, although it involves higher initial costs, the mobile application is more economically efficient, as it increases productivity and reduces repetitive administrative tasks. To ensure inclusivity, the app must be simple to use,

³ Poll conducted by the Demir Kapija initiative team, 2025.

available in multiple languages, tailored for seniors, people with disabilities, and citizens with low digital literacy, with an integrated SMS option for those with limited internet access.

In addition to citizens, the municipal administration recognizes significant benefits from digitalization. According to interviews, officials support the mobile application as a solution that will reduce administrative burdens, enable faster processing of applications, and increase institutional efficiency. Furthermore, an interview with a councilor from the Municipal Council highlighted that introducing such a digital tool will enhance transparency and accountability, strengthen trust between citizens and the municipality, and foster more active civic participation, particularly among young people.

Alternative 2: Update and expansion of the municipality's website

Another considered option was the expansion of the existing website to include new functionalities such as online application forms, proposal submission, and access to information. This approach has lower initial costs and could provide some improvement in digital communication. However, it has several limitations. Primarily, it is not sufficiently practical for mobile users, given that over 70% of citizens rely on mobile phones as their main communication channel. Additionally, past experience with the municipality's website shows low usage due to outdated information, technical issues, and limited awareness among citizens. Consequently, while technically feasible, this option would not fully meet expectations for inclusiveness, transparency, and usability.

The results of all analyzed sources – survey, focus group, interviews, and expert assessments – confirm that a mobile application is the most appropriate solution for the Municipality of Demir Kapija. It provides a modern, practical, and economically justified tool to improve two-way communication, enhance citizen participation, and increase municipal accountability. Furthermore, experiences from other municipalities and European practices demonstrate the effectiveness of this approach. Therefore, implementing a mobile application should be viewed not only as a technical upgrade but also as a strategic investment in digital transformation and in building trust between citizens and local government.

4. Selected solution and proposed future actions

Based on the analysis of existing communication mechanisms, the implementation of the mobile application "Citizenin" is recommended as the most appropriate and supported alternative. This innovative, sustainable, and functional tool will enhance communication and citizen participation. Support for the application is evident both quantitatively and qualitatively: 72% of surveyed citizens expressed willingness to use it, all focus group participants endorsed it, and municipal officials and the council view it as a means to reduce administrative burden. Additionally, an IT expert confirmed its technical and financial feasibility, with reasonable development and maintenance costs.

The application will enable:

- reporting problems with description, photo, and location;
- submitting proposals and initiatives for local projects;
- direct communication with municipal services;
- automatic notifications of public calls, decisions, and events;
- anonymous reporting of violations, addressing the low trust in inspection services.

This solution will establish a system that not only increases efficiency and transparency but also enables the active inclusion of groups that have so far been marginalized in the processes – young people, women, people with disabilities, and rural residents. The design of the application should provide a simple interface, multilingual availability, adjustments to meet the needs of persons with disabilities, as well as SMS integration for citizens with limited Internet access, enhancing its inclusiveness.

For this mobile application to function fully, the following steps are required:

1. Research and needs analysis

To ensure that the application meets the real needs of citizens and administration, it is necessary to:

- Deepen existing surveys and focus groups with additional categories of citizens (women, youth, people with disabilities, residents of remote villages);
- Conduct interviews with administrative officers to better understand current procedures and administrative restrictions;
- Identify the most common types of reports (such as street lighting, waste, disaster damage) to ensure appropriate categories in the application;
- Define the technical requirements and standards for integration into the existing municipal systems and archives.

2. Concept and prototype development

This phase aims to visually display the solution and ensure citizen involvement from the outset:

- Design the initial application architecture and define its modules;
- Develop a visual prototype to be presented to the public for collecting opinions and proposals;
- Test the prototype with different groups of citizens, with a special focus on the elderly and rural residents, to ensure simplicity and accessibility.

3. Development of the mobile application

The technical development phase is key to ensure functionality, reliability and inclusiveness:

- Program and develop the application for Android and iOS, along with a web panel for the administration;;
- Integrate modules: reports with description, photo, and GPS location, proposals and initiatives, automated notifications, direct communication, and anonymous reporting;
- Ensure personal data protection and compliance with GDPR;
- Adapt the interface for different levels of digital literacy and ensure multilingual availability;
- Develop additional SMS integration for citizens with limited Internet access.

4. Promotion and Community Engagement

The success of the application depends on how informed and motivated citizens are to use it:

- Organize a public event to promote the application;
- Conduct an information campaign through local media, social networks, bulletin boards and direct visits to rural settlements;
- Include youth organizations, civic associations and schools as promoters and trainers;
- Provide materials (videos, brochures, instructions) with simple instructions on using the application.

5. Training and technical support

To ensure efficient functioning, it is necessary to strengthen the capacities of the administration:

- Conduct trainings for administrative staff on the use of the web panel, managing applications and responding to the citizens;
- Establish a system for continuous technical support and maintenance;
- Provide a contact point (phone or email) for citizens who have difficulty using the application.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Continuous monitoring will enable timely improvements and increase effectiveness:

- Establish indicators to measure usage (number of reports, number of proposals, response time, percentage of resolved cases);
- Regularly collect feedback from citizens through surveys and interviews;

- Prepare reports for the Municipal Council and the public, with recommendations for system improvement;
- Involve civil society organizations in monitoring as a mechanism for independent verification and strengthening of trust.

Budget and timeframe

The estimated budget for implementation is **16,000–20,000** euros, with additional costs for regular maintenance and promotion. Financial sustainability can be ensured through grants from international organizations, donor funds for digital transformation, and local development programs.

The proposed implementation timeframe is **8 months**, divided into stages: research and consultation, prototyping, application development, promotion and training, and active use and evaluation.

The "Citizenin" mobile application is not only a technical advancement but also a strategic investment in the democratization of local governance. It will provide effective record-keeping of reports, transparency, accountability, and increased citizen participation in decision-making processes. With this initiative, the Municipality of Demir Kapija will set a new standard for modern and inclusive local governance, reducing apathy and distrust and fostering a more active and stronger community.

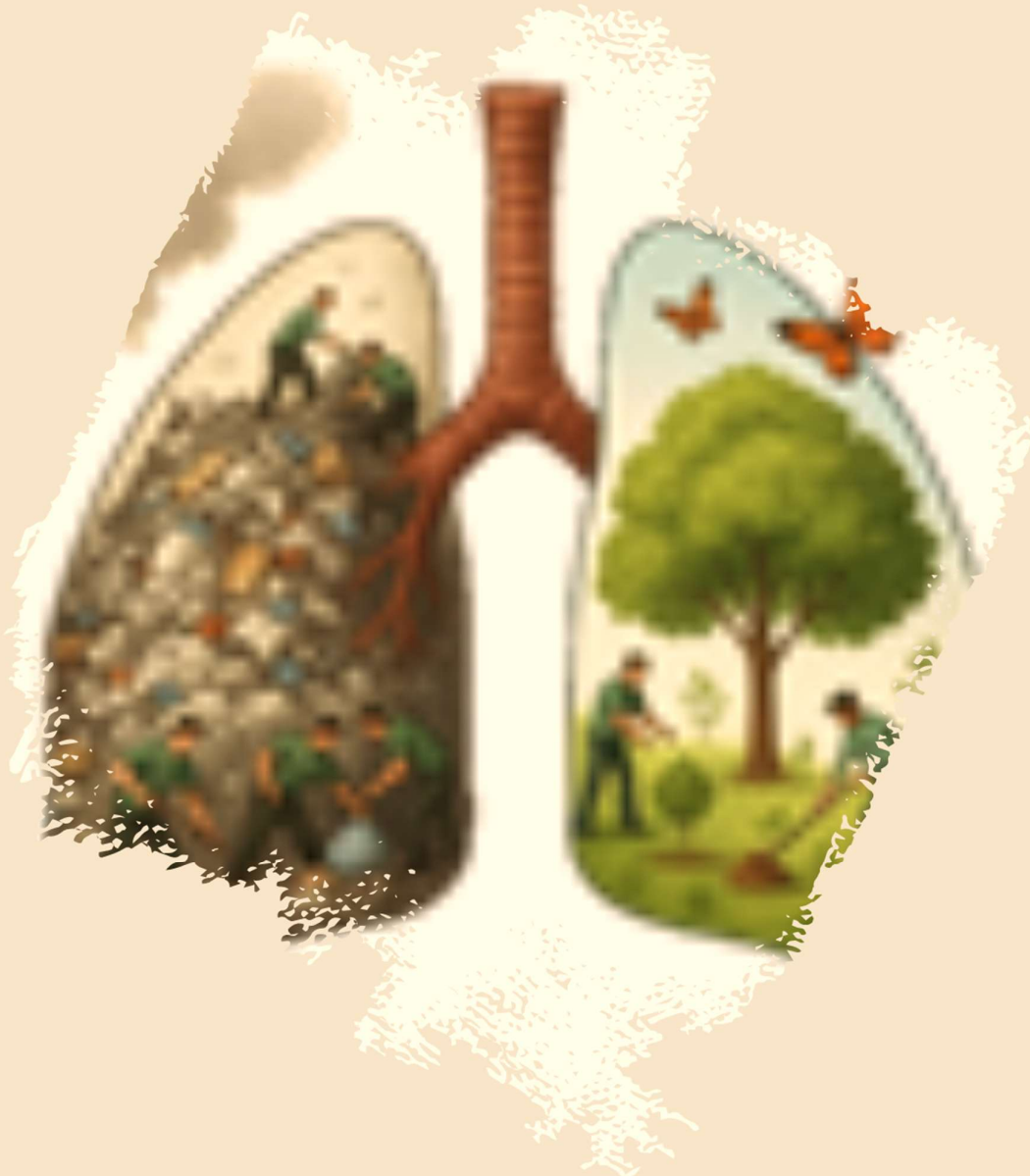
Innovative Initiatives in the Municipalities of Gjorche Petrov and Saraj

01

**Lifting the Shadow over Gjorche
Petrov and Saraj**

Darja Mustafaoglu (Levica)

LIFTING THE SHADOW OVER GJORCHE PETROV



Darja Mustafaoglu
–Levica–

Lifting the shadow over Gjorche Petrov

1. Summary

The municipalities of Gjorche Petrov and Saraj face a serious and long-term problem with illegal dumping and waste burning, which directly affects the environment, citizens' health, and the quality of public spaces. Uncontrolled accumulation of waste and its burning occur primarily in marginalized, low-traffic, and hard-to-reach locations, such as riverbeds, peripheral roads, and unsecured green areas, where oversight is minimal or completely absent. Air pollution spreads across municipalities, creating a “shared crisis,” while citizens experience it as a direct threat to their health—with symptoms such as coughing, eye and throat irritation, and worsening of chronic respiratory diseases and asthma. Surveys indicate that over 90% of the population consider this the main source of pollution, while 95% rate the institutional response as insufficient.

The current approach to addressing the problem has proven inadequate. Increasing the number of inspectors and municipal wardens, while necessary, is limited by shortages of human and logistical resources and does not address the recurrence of violations. Infrastructure measures – such as adding more containers and waste sorting centers – have limited effect due to physical accessibility and socio-economic factors, while educational campaigns only yield long-term results. Legal and regulatory measures remain declarative without a functional mechanism for timely identification and sanctioning of offenders. Cleanup actions, volunteer initiatives, and video monitoring are limited by the need for constant human involvement and technical capacity, and their impact is short-term.

In the context of these challenges, analysis of alternatives indicates the need for an integrated system combining monitoring, infrastructure solutions, education, and, most importantly, active citizen participation. Traditional approaches, although necessary, do not ensure long-term sustainability, which is why a digital platform for reporting illegal dumping and waste burning emerges as the optimal solution. The platform allows rapid and anonymous reporting, automatic forwarding of information to the competent inspection authorities, statistical analysis, and prioritization of interventions. This creates a system that rationally uses the municipalities' limited resources, ensures financial sustainability through the potential collection of fines, and promotes long-term cultural change in citizens' awareness of waste management.

The recommended measure combines the digital platform with an increase in inspection and municipal personnel, infrastructure interventions, and educational campaigns. Financially, the platform's implementation is sustainable – the first-year budget is estimated at €920–1,500, while from the second year, annual maintenance and technical support costs are projected at €300–500. The

platform can be developed and tested within 2–3 months, enabling a rapid launch of the reporting and intervention system.

With this integrated approach, the expected outcomes include:

- Timely and effective institutional response;
- Increased trust and active citizen participation;
- Reduction in illegal dumping sites and waste burning;
- Long-term cultural change in waste management and heightened environmental awareness.

The main focus of this document is to establish a functional, transparent, and sustainable system that integrates civic engagement with institutional responsibility, delivering concrete, measurable, and effective results in tackling illegal dumping and waste burning.

2. Problem – context and importance

Uncontrolled creation and burning of illegal dumpsites in the municipalities of Gjorche Petrov and Saraj represent a longstanding and deeply rooted environmental and public health challenge for the local population. The problem does not arise in isolation; it has been reproducing over the years, creating a state of systemic crisis that affects all aspects of daily life. Air pollution, degradation of public spaces, threats to health, and a sense of helplessness among citizens have become constant elements of the urban experience, while simultaneously eroding trust in the ability of institutions to respond effectively.

Illegal dumps primarily appear in marginalized and low-traffic locations, where maintenance and oversight are minimal or completely absent. Riverbeds, peripheral roads, unsecured green areas, and areas around containers that are not regularly emptied have become natural hotspots for waste disposal. These spaces are perceived by the public as “free” and “unimportant,” which further reinforces the practice of unregulated dumping. Instead of being reintegrated into the urban or natural fabric through planned rehabilitation and maintenance, these locations are left unattended, becoming permanent sources of pollution and visual chaos in the environment.

Particularly concerning is the situation along the Vardar River corridor, which connects the two municipalities. Polluted air from waste burning in Saraj is directly transmitted to urban areas of Gjorche Petrov, creating a “shared crisis” that disregards administrative boundaries. In this way, the problem takes on an inter-municipal dimension and becomes difficult to manage, as actions taken in one municipality only partially reduce air pollution and do not address the root cause of illegal dumpsites.

Citizens describe their experience with the problem as alarming. Surveys conducted to prepare this document show that nearly all residents observe illegal dumps in their vicinity, and more than 60%

witness frequent waste burning. Over 90% of respondents consider this one of the main sources of air pollution, confirming the local population's clear perception of the severity of the problem. Citizens' negative experiences are further reinforced by direct health impacts they experience daily. Coughing, breathing difficulties, eye and throat irritation, headaches, and fatigue are nearly universal symptoms, while some residents report worsening of chronic respiratory diseases, the onset of asthma, and even cases of cancer. More than half of the respondents confirm that they have sought or should have sought medical attention due to pollution-related health problems. These data illustrate the direct and tangible connection between pollution and the deterioration of citizens' health.

In addition to health consequences, citizens experience a sense of institutional abandonment. About 95% believe that the municipalities are doing too little or nothing at all to solve the problem, and half of respondents have never reported pollution – most often because they do not know how or where to do so, or because they do not trust that reporting will elicit a response. Even those who have reported incidents indicate that institutions either did not respond or responded with significant delays. This creates feelings of apathy and skepticism, undermining citizens' trust in the system and increasing their disengagement from institutional processes.

Institutional weaknesses are also evident in the limited resources and capacities. In the Municipality of Saraj, there is only one environmental inspector and no municipal wardens, while Gjorche Petrov has one inspector and four wardens – a number far below what is needed for the territory and population they cover. Regulations exist, but without institutional capacity and political will to enforce them, they remain declarative and ineffective. Another problem is the lack of transparent and easily accessible channels for reporting issues: contact information is often unavailable or outdated, phone numbers are inaccessible, and in some cases completely absent. These administrative barriers discourage the public and hinder timely intervention by institutions.

The lack of systematic air quality monitoring reduces the ability to accurately assess the problem. Gjorche Petrov has only one air monitoring station, while Saraj has none. This means that the municipalities do not have a complete and realistic picture of pollution stemming from illegal dumps, further complicating the ability to implement appropriate measures and interventions. Without accurate data, the problem remains undefined and difficult to manage, and citizens cannot visualize their reports in the context of the overall pollution picture.

Despite institutional weaknesses, citizens show a clear willingness to act, but only if conditions for a functional accountability system are created. They recognize that illegal dumps and their burning represent a multidimensional problem: environmental, health-related, social, and institutional. It deteriorates air quality, degrades public spaces, affects daily life, and diminishes citizens' trust in institutions. The testimonies and experiences of the population illustrate the seriousness and complexity of the problem, as well as the need for a full understanding of its nature and scope.

3. Alternative solutions considered

Tackling the issue of illegal dumpsites and waste burning in the municipalities of Gjorche Petrov and Saraj requires a systemic and integrated approach, as the problem is multidimensional—environmental, health-related, social, and institutional. Past practices and experiences reveal serious limitations that reduce their effectiveness and highlight the need for a combination of different measures.

Increasing inspection and municipal staff is one of the traditional measures. The idea is that by increasing the number of environmental inspectors and municipal wardens, direct supervision and sanctioning of offenders can be ensured. Surveys indicate that over 95% of citizens believe that institutions are not doing enough, illustrating the need for more active control. While this measure is necessary, simply increasing staff is insufficient. Limited human and logistical resources, the size of the territory, and the lack of motivation to work in this field reduce the effectiveness of the measure. Without additional systemic mechanisms, inspectors and wardens face repeated violations, and the impact remains short-term.

Infrastructure solutions represent a second layer of intervention. Installing additional containers, waste sorting centers, and improving the collection system are important for long-term control and reducing accumulated waste. Data shows that more than 60% of citizens witness waste burning and frequent disposal of unnecessary materials, indicating the need for better infrastructure. However, these investments are limited by municipal budgets, responsibilities towards urban utilities, and physical access to hard-to-reach locations. Containers alone do not change citizen habits, especially when waste burning is motivated by socio-economic factors such as lack of knowledge about waste sorting or the absence of alternative legal disposal sites.

Educational campaigns and public awareness are crucial for long-term cultural change in waste management. They can increase environmental awareness, motivate citizens for volunteer activities, and help reduce unregulated waste disposal. However, surveys show that the problem is acute – almost all respondents confirm that air pollution negatively affects their health, with symptoms such as coughing, eye and throat irritation, and worsening of chronic diseases. In these circumstances, informational campaigns alone are insufficient to timely reduce health risks.

Legal measures and stricter regulations provide a formal framework for sanctions. Even with high fines, if institutions cannot promptly identify and penalize offenders, the effect is minimal. More than half of citizens reported that although they want to report violations, they do not, due to distrust that the institutions will respond. This illustrates the gap between formal laws and their practical application, weakening the effectiveness of regulations as a standalone solution.

Combined cleaning campaigns and volunteer initiatives have a positive short-term effect. They increase the visibility of the problem, raise citizen awareness, and encourage cooperation. However, these actions are limited because they require continuous human and organizational engagement, and waste often reappears in the same locations due to the systemic nature of the problem and the lack of mechanisms for timely sanctioning of offenders.

Video surveillance and monitoring allow potential detection of violations, especially at critical points. However, practical, technical, and legal limitations, along with the need for continuous data processing, restrict the effectiveness of this approach. While it provides excellent visibility, video surveillance alone cannot address the root cause of illegal dumpsites.

The digital platform for reporting illegal dumpsites and waste burning enables fast, simple, and anonymous reporting of violations by citizens, with information immediately forwarded to the relevant services and inspection authorities. The platform allows statistical analysis, identification of critical locations, and prioritization of interventions, enabling rational use of municipalities' limited resources. According to surveys, 75% of citizens would use such an online platform, especially if it ensures that institutional response is guaranteed. Financially, the platform is more efficient than other options – the implementation requires relatively few resources and a short time, while revenues from fines can cover the system's maintenance costs.

Additionally, the platform has a long-term impact on citizen awareness. The ability to track reports and review interventions increases citizen accountability, reduces illegal dumping and burning, and creates the foundation for cultural change. Compared to other alternatives, the digital platform does not replace traditional measures but complements them, creating a system that is functional, transparent, financially sustainable, and directly connected to civic activity.

4. Selected solution and proposed future actions

After a detailed analysis of the problem of illegal dumpsites and waste burning in the municipalities of Gjorche Petrov and Saraj, as well as of all considered possible solutions, the recommendation is to implement a **digital platform for reporting illegal dumpsites and waste burning** as the central solution. This should be supported in parallel by an increase in inspection and municipal staff, infrastructure investments, and educational activities. This integrated approach enables timely and effective response, financial sustainability, and long-term cultural change in citizens' attitude toward waste management.

Specific activities:

1. Defining the functionalities of the platform

- Forms for reporting illegal dumpsites and waste burning, with the option for anonymous reporting.

- Database for tracking reports, statistical analysis, and prioritization of interventions.
- Marking critical locations on a map, integrated with Google Maps.

2. Engaging a contractor for website design and development

- Basic website of 5–7 pages, including contact forms, gallery, and forum.
- Mockup version already prepared: <https://prijavizagaduvac.my.canva.site/>
- The platform will be simple to use and accessible to all citizens without technical knowledge.

3. Ensuring technical requirements

- Registration of a .mk domain (€10–15 per year).
- SSL certificate for secure communication (€0–30).
- Annual hosting (€60–120) with a local provider.

4. Training of team/administrators

- Team to review and process reports, forward them to inspection services, and maintain records of interventions (5 people x €500 = €2,500 per year).
- Continuous updates and technical maintenance (€200–350 per year), including security measures and backups.

5. Parallel institutional activities

- Increasing the number of inspectors and municipal wardens for better territorial coverage. Currently, Saraj has only one inspector, while Gjorche Petrov has five staff (1 inspector + 4 wardens), which is insufficient for 22,000 residents.
- Infrastructure measures: placement of additional containers, improvement of the collection system, and creation of waste sorting centers.
- Educational campaigns to raise environmental awareness among citizens and motivate proper waste management.

6. Promotion of the platform to citizens through informational campaigns on social media, local media, and community initiatives.

Financial implications:

Element	Estimate price (€)	Notes
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Design and development	600 – 900	Basic website with forms, gallery, forum, Google Maps
Domain	10 – 15	.mk domain
SSL certificate	0 – 30	Free or paid
Yearly hosting	60 – 120	Shared hosting or VPS
Yearly maintenance	200 – 350	Technical corrections, updates, back-up
Plugins / Add-ons	50 – 80	Premium theme or module
Total investment for the first year	920 – 1.500	Development + First-Year Maintenance
From the second year on	300 – 500	Ongoing Maintenance and Technical Support

Additionally, costs for infrastructure (containers, waste sorting centers) and increasing the inspection staff will depend on the municipalities' budgetary capacities. However, the platform provides a financially sustainable solution, as revenues from fines can partially cover its operation.

Timeframe:

- Preparation and requirements definition: 2 weeks.
- Website design and development: 1–2 months.
- Testing and deployment: 2 weeks.
- Total time to launch: 2–3 months.

Expected results:

- Fast and anonymous reporting of violations.
- Timely response by inspection services.
- Increased citizen trust in institutions and active participation in environmental protection.
- Long-term cultural change and reduction in the number of illegal dumpsites.

Through these activities, the digital platform is positioned as the **central solution**, integrating traditional measures (control, infrastructure, education) and creating a functional, transparent, and sustainable system for managing illegal dumping and waste burning.

Innovative Initiatives in the Municipality of Kichevo

01

**"Ray of Hope" - Day Rehabilitation Center
for Children with Autism Spectrum**

Rrezelinda Dauti (Alliance for the
Albanians/VLEN)

IT'S TIME FOR A SPECIALIZED AUTISM CENTER IN KICHEVO



Rrezelinda Dauti
–Alliance for the Albanians/VLEN–

It's time for a specialized autism center in Kichevo

1. Summary

The document highlights the lack of a specialized center for children with autism spectrum disorder in the Municipality of Kičevo, which has 39,669 inhabitants, approximately 16% of whom are children aged 0–14. Existing services for children with disabilities currently offer only basic support and fail to provide the personalized interventions required for autism. This situation has direct consequences: limited early intervention for children, a heavy emotional and financial burden on families—particularly mothers—and the deepening of social inequalities within the community. For public institutions, it results in non-compliance with national and international standards regarding the rights of children with disabilities.

The current approach is inadequate for several key reasons: the absence of specialized centers, long distances and high travel costs to other facilities, high private therapy expenses, and a shortage of trained professionals. Only 51% of children have a confirmed diagnosis, while 49% remain on hold or undiagnosed, delaying treatment and exacerbating the problem.

To date, failures have arisen from fragmented and non-integrated support, insufficient public services, and the lack of a central hub to provide equal, inclusive, and sustainable access.

Three alternatives have been explored:

- **Integration of services in existing day-care centers**, which is failing due to a lack of professional spaces and facilities, as well as the exclusion of most rural households.
- **Providing services through the private sector**, which is financially inaccessible to most families and does not offer comprehensive support.
- **The opening of a new specialist centre for autism**, which over 87% of parents consider “very important” and “urgent”. This option is the only one that provides modern European standards, integrated therapeutic and educational services, psychosocial support for families and campaigns to reduce stigmatization.

In this regard, it is recommended **to establish a new daily specialized center for autism in Kičevo**. This institution would represent not only an investment in social and health services but also a political and moral commitment, ensuring children’s rights, alleviating the burden on families, and fostering a more inclusive and equitable community.

2. Problem - context and importance

In the Municipality of Kičevo, which had 39,669 inhabitants according to the 2021 census, about 16% of the population are children aged 0–14. The population is distributed between urban and rural areas, with approximately 58% living in the city and 42% in the villages. This demographic profile is particularly relevant when considering access to social and educational services for children with disabilities. Field data indicate that 60% of the surveyed families live in rural areas and lack access to even minimal services, facing significant obstacles in the treatment and development of their children.

Currently, Kičevo does not have a specialized day-care center for children with autism spectrum disorders. Existing centers for children with disabilities provide only basic services, such as psychological therapies and socialization activities, and are unable to deliver focused and personalized interventions required for autism. This gap has direct consequences: for children, the absence of early and tailored interventions limits the development of social, communication, and educational skills; for families, the primary burden often falls on mothers, restricting their participation in the labor market and social life; for the community, it deepens inequalities and limits opportunities for inclusive integration; and for public institutions, it threatens compliance with national and international standards on the rights of children with disabilities.

Poll data show that over 80% of parents consider the establishment of the center an urgent priority and very important for the development of their children. Speech therapy, occupational therapy, and psychological support are identified as the most essential services, and many parents report financial difficulties and lack of information as the main obstacles to accessing treatment. These findings demonstrate that the creation of a specialized center is not only a social requirement but also an urgent and concrete need for the community.

The SWOT analysis⁴ conducted for the purposes of this document further confirms this need, positioning the opening of the center as a strategic priority. Strong community support, innovative design, and alignment with national and international policies, combined with opportunities from donors, high social demand, and long-term impact, make this initiative a strategic investment in the future of both children and the community. While weaknesses and risks are real, they can be managed through coordinated institutional engagement, the establishment of a sustainable financial model, and the development of professional capacities.

3. Alternative solutions considered

In the search for a solution to the lack of specialized services for children with autism spectrum disorders in Kičevo, several alternatives have been considered. The assessment was based on

⁴ SWOT analysis is a strategic planning method that identifies Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats, enabling more informed and effective decision-making.

professional standards, field data, and a SWOT analysis conducted within the innovative initiative "A Ray of Hope." The analysis is guided by three key criteria: accessibility, quality, and sustainability.

Alternative 1: Integration of autism services into existing day centers. This option would involve using already functional centers for children with disabilities and adding new elements to address autism. At first glance, it may appear to be a quick solution, but parents and caregivers do not consider it sufficient. Sixty percent of respondents living in rural areas report that they do not have access to even minimal services, making it practically impossible for them to benefit from the existing urban center. Furthermore, these centers are not designed to meet the specific needs of children with autism and lack adapted spaces such as multi-sensory rooms or individual therapy facilities. Current staff often do not have full training in behavioral or speech therapy, which risks leaving interventions superficial. In interviews, parents emphasized that this option would not substantially improve living conditions, as their children would continue to lack personalized support.

Alternative 2: Providing services through the private sector

Relying on private professionals is an option currently used by some households, but it comes with significant limitations. Research shows that high costs are the main barrier, as most parents cannot afford regular private therapies. In addition, private services rarely provide an integrated approach: they typically focus on a single element, such as speech therapy, while comprehensive psychosocial, educational, and family support is lacking. This model is considered inadequate and inequitable, as only a small number of families benefit, leaving the majority without support. Currently, only 51% of children have a confirmed diagnosis, while the rest are pending or undiagnosed—a situation that private services do not address, exposing these children to potentially harmful delays in intervention. In this context, the private sector is seen more as a complementary support than a sustainable alternative.

Alternative 3: Opening a new specialized center for children with autism

From the analysis of alternatives and parents' perceptions, this option emerges as the best and most sustainable solution. Over 80% of families surveyed consider the opening of the center to be "urgent and very important" for the development of their children, reflecting broad community consensus. Parents have expressed clear expectations: speech therapy, occupational therapy, and psychological support are the most essential services, while counseling for parents and socialization activities are seen as crucial for supporting the entire family. The new center would provide a space designed according to modern European standards, including multisensory environments, individual therapy rooms, play and socialization areas, and safe conditions.

This option also provides both structural and long-term benefits. As highlighted in the SWOT analysis, the main strengths are strong community support, alignment with state and international policies, and high social demand, while opportunities include collaboration with donors and

professional capacity building. Weaknesses and risks, such as the need for sustainable funding and the persistent shortage of specialists, would be addressed through institutional engagement and continuous training. Beyond services for children, the center would also support families—particularly mothers, who are the primary caregivers in 68% of cases—enabling them to increase their participation in social and economic life.

4. Selected solution and proposed future actions

After a thorough analysis of the considered alternatives, the data collected from parents, caregivers, and professionals, and in line with best international practices, **it is recommended to establish a new specialized day care center for children with autism spectrum disorders in the Municipality of Kicevo.**

This recommendation is not merely a proposal but a clearly demonstrated and well-founded necessity. Of the 75 parents surveyed, over 87% rated the opening of the center as “very important,” while more than 80% emphasized that it is an urgent priority. Only 2% considered it “moderately or slightly important,” indicating an almost complete social consensus. Furthermore, 60% of surveyed households live in rural areas without access to even the most basic services, while 40% of those living in the city report a lack of specialized support. These findings clearly demonstrate that other alternatives—such as using existing facilities or relying on private services—fail to address the issue effectively.

The situation becomes even more critical considering that only 51% of children have a confirmed diagnosis, implying significant delays in early interventions—crucial for the development of children with autism. A specialized center would not only provide therapy but also assist in the diagnostic process and offer guidance for parents.

Interviews with local professionals and institutional representatives highlight the shortage of trained specialists as one of the main weaknesses in the current system. The new center would directly address this gap by building professional capacities and providing training in line with European standards. Its establishment would ensure personalized and integrated interventions, improve the quality of life of children and their families, reduce stigmatization, and promote social inclusion. Moreover, the Autism Task Force would support local and national institutions in fulfilling obligations under the State Strategy on the Rights of the Child, the National Plan for Equality of Persons with Disabilities, and international instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In this way, the establishment of a specialized day care center for children with autism spectrum disorders in Kichevo is a strategic priority that will provide quality services, social equality and fulfillment of the highest human rights standards, reflecting state and local responsibility to children and their families.

Program aspect

The new centre will not only be a structure, but will encompass **a comprehensive programme built on three main pillars:**

1. Therapeutic and educational services:

- Speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy and behavioral therapy were identified as the most essential services by 61% of parents for speech therapy, 54% for occupational therapy and 48% for psychological support.
- Multisensory rooms and spaces adapted for individual and group therapy.
- Individual educational support, according to the needs of each child.

2. Family support:

- Psychosocial counseling and training for parents, with a focus on strengthening the position of mothers, who according to data bear the main caregiving responsibility (68%).
- Guidance throughout the diagnostic process and information on available rights and services.
- Programs for involving families in social and community activities.

3. Social integration and awareness:

- Public awareness campaigns about autism aimed at reducing stigmatization.
- Partnerships with schools and NGOs to facilitate the integration of children into education and community life.
- Promotion of a culture of inclusiveness and social equity.

Strategic activities

- **Creating an institutional and strategic framework** – drafting the establishment plan, defining the institutional model and involving key stakeholders (municipalities, ministries, donors).
- **Providing funds and resources** – ensuring a combination of municipal, state and donor funding, as well as public-private partnerships.
- **Professional capacity building** – engaged on multidisciplinary staff (10–12 professionals in the first phase), training and certification according to European standards.

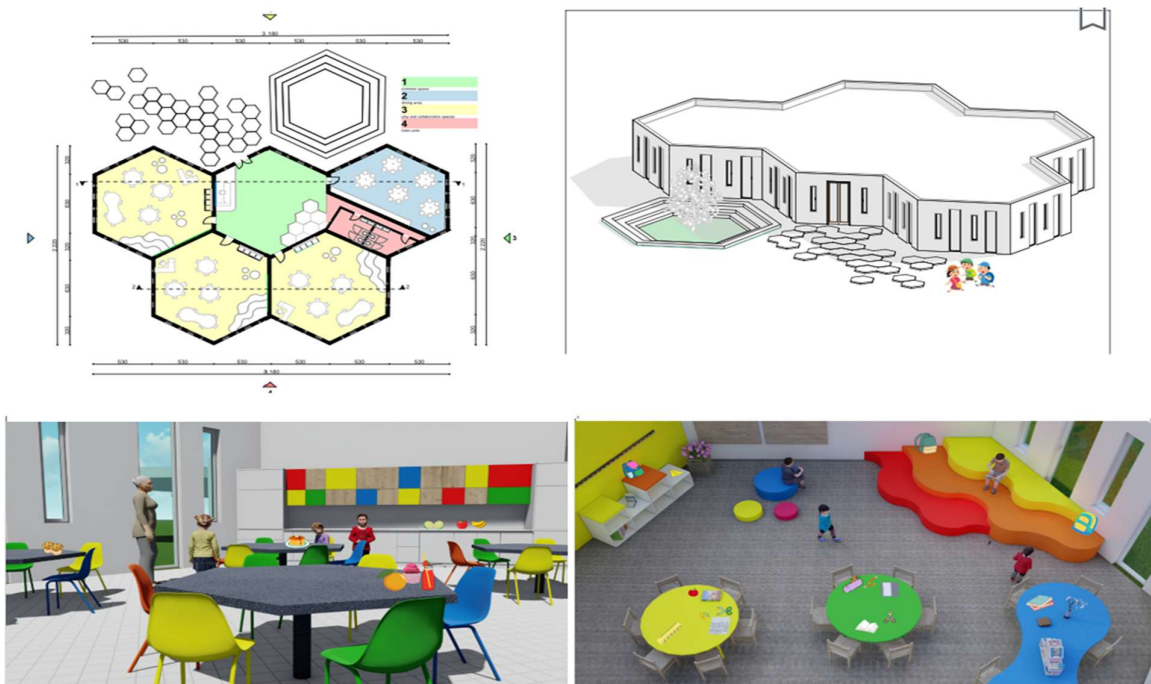
- **Development of inclusive services** – providing a basic therapeutic, educational and social package.
- **Social awareness and inclusion** – campaigns and partnerships for gradual and inclusive integration of children.

Technical description and visual solution

"A ray of hope" is a project dedicated to creating a functional, safe and stimulating environment for children with autism spectrum disorders. The main objective of the project is to provide an inclusive space that supports development, education and socialization through sensitive and functional design.

The project consists of three separate classrooms, designed with good acoustic insulation and naturally controlled lighting, to avoid excessive visual or sound stimulation. Each class offers flexibility for different individual and group teaching methods. The shared play area, conceived as the social core of the facility, will serve for free interaction, physical activities and relaxation. The kitchen and dining room will promote autonomy and hands-on learning through food preparation and consumption. The area is clearly divided into a functional (kitchen) and social part (dining tables).

The hexagonal shape of the object is not chosen by chance - it is inspired by the natural structures of the bee nests, known for harmony, efficiency and interaction between the parts. This form, like the honeycomb, represents cooperation, resilience and collective care - core values for a space built for children with autism. In this context, each classroom, play area or social environment functions as a 'cell' within a coordinated system that provides a safe and warm structure where each child has their own space for advancement while being part of a supportive community.



Financial implications:

The initial investment for the establishment of the center is significant, including construction or reconstruction of the facility and procurement of specialized equipment. Operating costs will include professional staff salaries, maintenance and therapeutic materials. Funding sources will be combined: municipal and state budgets, EU funds, support to international organizations and public-private partnerships. This model not only guarantees sustainability, but also reduces the financial burden on families, who currently spend a lot of money on private therapy or on trips to other urban centers.

This investment should not be seen as a cost, but **as a social policy with a long-term impact:** reducing inequalities, increasing the development potential of children and building a more just and inclusive community.

Timeframe for realization:

- **0–6 months:** Strategic planning, provision of financial resources, selection of location.
- **6–18 months:** Construction/reconstruction, equipping of the center, recruitment and training of personnel.
- **18–24 months:** Start of pilot services for a limited number of children and families.
- **After 24 months:** Full development of the program, monitoring and evaluation, in order to replicate the model in other municipalities.

The opening of a specialized autism center in Kicevo is not an ordinary project, but a **signaling of public responsibility**. Any delay means loss of developmental opportunities for the child, increased burden on families and deeper inequalities for the community. Local and state institutions have the opportunity to show that caring for children with autism is a real priority, not just a political slogan.

Innovative Initiatives in the Municipality of Kochani

01

City Without Chaos

Ivona Todorova (VMRO-DPMNE)

A CITY WITHOUT CHAOS: SMART SOLUTIONS FOR THE PARKING PROBLEM IN KOCHANI



Ivona Todorova
–VMRO–DPMNE–

A city without chaos: Smart solutions for the parking problem in Kočani

1. Summary

The parking problem in Kočani has long surpassed the realm of everyday inconvenience and has become a serious urban and social concern. In the central city areas – around the town square, the market, the medical center, schools, and the bus station – residents face a chronic shortage of parking spaces. According to the 2021 Census, the Municipality has 31,602 residents, of whom 24,600 live in the city itself, which covers only 18.6 km². Already in 2017, more than 7,000 motor vehicles were registered, a number that has since grown even further. This rising motorization, combined with limited public space, creates acute traffic chaos.

The current approach has proven ineffective. New residential buildings are being constructed without adequate parking, public transport does not provide a realistic alternative, and there are no multi-story garages to absorb the pressure. Enforcement and fines are rare, creating the impression that anything goes. The result is impassable sidewalks, vehicles parked on lawns and in front of institutions, compromised pedestrian safety, and a negative image of the city for visitors.

Several alternatives have been considered over time. These include expanding existing parking lots, building multi-story garages, installing modular parking structures, implementing digital parking management solutions, and introducing stricter fines. Each offers a partial solution, but both citizens and experts most strongly support the construction of multi-story garages as a systemic solution. Surveys show that the majority of residents are willing to pay monthly subscriptions for a secure parking spot, while modular structures and digital solutions are seen as complementary measures that can provide quick and efficient relief.

The recommended solution is the establishment of an integrated system based on multi-story garages at strategic locations, supplemented by modular parking units and a digital parking management platform, along with the organization of public spaces for pedestrians and green zones. This model will not only provide sufficient capacity but will also improve safety, aesthetics, and quality of life in the city. Additionally, the project aligns with European “green city” policies and sustainable urban development, increasing the potential to attract international donor funding.

With the implementation of this strategy, it is expected that Kočani could build the first multi-story garage and several modular structures within 2 to 3 years, and within 5 years completely transform the parking situation, positioning itself as an example of a modern, sustainable, and functional city.

2. Problem – context and importance

In Kočani, the parking problem has long ceased to be merely a matter of convenience – it has become a daily concern and a source of frustration for a large number of citizens. It is most acutely felt in the central city areas, around the town square, the city market, the shopping center, the medical center, the bus station, schools, and the new residential blocks, where daily traffic congestion creates chaotic scenes. Residents report that during working hours it is almost impossible to find a free spot, resulting in cars being parked on sidewalks, lawns, and even in front of institutional entrances and private homes. Residents of the city center, who logically expect to be able to park near their own buildings, often feel discriminated against and pressured by vehicles belonging to people coming from surrounding neighborhoods who use the city daily for work or services.

According to the 2021 Population Census, the Municipality of Kočani has 31,602 residents and over 12,000 households, most of whom live in the city itself, with about 24,600 inhabitants. With an area of only 18.6 km², the city has a high population density, and the growing number of vehicles adds further pressure – as early as 2017, more than 7,000 motor vehicles were registered, including over 5,700 cars, a figure that has increased even further today. This combination of a compact urban core, rising motorization, and limited public space explains the acute nature of the parking problem in Kočani.

This shortage of parking spaces is not a new phenomenon but the result of years of uncoordinated urban and traffic planning. New residential buildings have been constructed without adequately planned parking spaces, public transport has failed to become a true alternative to private cars, and the number of vehicles continues to grow year by year. The urban planning sector has already indicated that the situation is complex and requires a systematic approach, but so far, a clear strategy has been lacking. The absence of multi-story garages, which could absorb part of the pressure, further exacerbates the situation.

Illegal parking has become a daily occurrence, with direct consequences for safety. Sidewalks, which should serve pedestrians, are impassable, forcing children, mothers with strollers, and elderly people onto the streets. Green areas, instead of being spaces for recreation and beauty, are often turned into muddy parking lots. Participants in public meetings testify that they witness daily scenes of people taking risks by walking in the streets because sidewalks are occupied by cars. On the other hand, weak enforcement and rare fines create a sense that everything is permitted, encouraging more violations.

The situation worsens during peak hours – after work, during school activities or weekend markets, and especially during summer holidays when the city sees an increased influx of visitors. Evening outings present a particular challenge – every corner becomes an improvised parking spot, motorcycles and cars are left wherever space can be found, which residents describe as an “unprecedented chaos.”

The consequences of this situation are far-reaching. Pedestrian safety is directly threatened, and citizens' daily lives are filled with stress, frustration, and conflict. People waste valuable time circling the city in search of parking, which leads to chronic anxiety and reduced productivity. Businesses in the city center lose customers because people avoid coming, knowing they will face parking difficulties. Public spaces, which should be organized, safe, and accessible to all, are usurped by vehicles, giving the city a negative image among visitors and tourists.

It is increasingly clear that the parking problem is not just a technical issue of the number of available spaces, but a social issue that directly affects the quality of life in Kočani. It reflects the broader state of urban development – from insufficient planning and poor institutional coordination to the absence of a culture of respect for public space. For citizens, the daily chaos with parking has become an obstacle to the normal functioning of the city, and for the local community, it signals that it is high time for systematic and long-term solutions.

3. Alternative solutions considered

Considering the seriousness of the parking problem in Kočani, several possible solutions have been examined and proposed over time. Some of these emerged as attempts at short-term relief, while others resulted from surveys, public meetings, and consultations with experts within the framework of the “City Without Chaos” initiative. These alternatives represent a range of different approaches – from infrastructure projects and digital tools to organizational measures and strict regulation – all aimed at creating a more orderly, safer, and better-functioning city.

Alternative 1: Multi-story parking garages at strategic locations

The most frequently mentioned option, both by citizens and experts, is the construction of multi-story parking garages. In a survey conducted with over 150 respondents, the majority proposed exactly this solution, with some explicitly stating that they “would pay a monthly fee if they knew they had a guaranteed parking space.” According to the analysis, multi-story garages bring multiple benefits: they provide substantial capacity for cars, motorcycles, and electric scooters; can include chargers for electric vehicles; and offer additional functionalities such as car washes and small service stations. Commercial spaces for rent can also be integrated, further increasing the economic justification of the investment. An advantage is that part of the space can be offered on a subscription model to residents in the city center, ensuring them a guaranteed parking spot, which directly reduces conflicts between residents and visitors.

Alternative 2: Small modular garages and reserved official parking lots

Prefabricated garages are seen as a faster and more economical solution, as they require smaller investments and a shorter construction period. According to conclusions from a meeting with the Urban Planning Sector, such solutions could be implemented at institutions with high daily traffic,

such as healthcare facilities, schools, or municipal offices. Installing smaller, prefabricated parking lots would reduce pressure on surrounding streets and provide accessibility precisely where it is most needed. Additionally, some citizens suggest dedicated institutional parking – reserved spaces for vehicles of public institutions and services –which would prevent their constant parking in residential areas and improve local mobility.

Additional aspects of alternatives 1 and 2: Public space improvement

One of the biggest problems today is that sidewalks and parks are occupied by vehicles, leaving pedestrians without safe space to move. At a public meeting, citizens openly spoke about parents with strollers, people with disabilities, children, and elderly individuals who are forced to walk on the streets every day because the sidewalks are impassable. The proposed solution is to free up these areas and transform them into green zones, pedestrian pathways, and bicycle lanes. By building multi-story or prefabricated garages, cars will be directed to organized parking spaces, returning public spaces to the citizens. This will also improve the aesthetics and quality of life in the city, which is especially important for young families and older residents who want to move safely around the city.

Additional aspects of alternatives 1 and 2: Digitalization and smart planning

Modern technologies enable a new approach to parking management. One of the proposed measures is a mobile application that would allow electronic payments, reservation of parking spaces, and real-time information about their availability. According to participants in the meetings, "we need a smart system, not just concrete." Such digital tools can also be used to analyze traffic flows, helping to determine the most suitable locations for new garages and parking lots. Modular solutions are also being considered – garages that can be expanded over time as demand grows. An additional element is sustainability: solar panels could be installed on the roofs to generate electricity, making these structures energy-efficient and cheaper to maintain.

Additional aspects of alternatives 1 and 2: Implementation of a penalty policy

The issue of sanctions and penalties inevitably arises. Today, the lack of systematic control means that illegal parking is practically without consequences, which encourages its spread. One of the proposed measures is the introduction of stricter penalties – from fines, to installing physical barriers on sidewalks, and even vehicle confiscation in extreme cases. However, citizens clearly indicate that such measures can only be justified and accepted if sufficient available parking spaces are provided beforehand. Otherwise, the penalty policy would appear unfair and could provoke even greater dissatisfaction. Therefore, restrictive measures must be implemented alongside the provision of real alternatives to establish a balance between fairness and order.

4. Selected solution and proposed future actions

Of all the options considered, it is clear that the construction of multi-story parking garages is the solution most strongly supported by citizens and the one that can most directly address the growing parking problem in Kočani. In a survey conducted with over 150 respondents, the majority indicated that a multi-story garage represents “a solid foundation for raising citizens’ awareness and culture regarding responsible participation in traffic.” At public meetings, citizens explicitly stated that they would be willing to pay a monthly subscription if they had a guaranteed parking space, as it would reduce their stress and the time spent searching for parking on a daily basis. This is a crucial signal – people are ready not only to support the measure but also to actively participate in its functioning.

Multi-story garages stand out because they provide the highest capacity and offer a systemic solution to the chaos in central urban areas. What makes this alternative even more attractive is the potential for multi-purpose use. According to the analysis, garages could include commercial spaces for lease, car washes, repair services, and even facilities for courier services or insurance companies. This would generate additional revenue to help maintain the facility and reduce dependence on the municipal budget. Another element is the possibility of installing solar panels on the roofs, which would increase energy efficiency and reduce operating costs.

An additional advantage of this model is that it fully aligns with the European agenda for “green cities” and sustainable urban development. The construction of multi-story garages would not only bring order to traffic but also contribute to reducing pollution and carbon emissions, as drivers would no longer spend time and fuel circling in search of free spaces. By freeing sidewalks and parks, the number of green areas would increase, and installing solar panels on the garages would provide a renewable energy source and energy efficiency. In this way, Kočani could position itself as a city moving in step with European sustainability and smart city policies, further opening opportunities for funding from European funds and international donors.

Citizens also emphasize the importance of location. They request that garages be placed at accessible points – near major roads and the central urban area – but also with access to institutions and public-interest facilities. This approach ensures that the new capacity will actually be used, rather than drivers continuing to seek improvised solutions.

From a financial perspective, this is the most expensive but also the most sustainable measure. It is estimated that a single multi-story garage costs between 2 and 3 million euros, depending on capacity and equipment. However, by introducing monthly subscriptions for residents and businesses, as well as generating revenue from leasing commercial spaces, the investment could gradually pay off. An additional opportunity is public-private partnerships, which could share the financial burden between the municipality and private investors.

Specific activities

- Preparation of a traffic study to select the most suitable locations (6 months).
- Opening a public consultation and citizen survey to choose the location (3 months).
- Securing financial resources through the municipal budget, state funds, and public-private partnerships (up to 12 months).
- Start of construction of the first multi-story garage within 18 months, with full completion expected in approximately 2 years.
- Establishment of a **subscription model** for residents and businesses already during the initial phase.

Timeframe

The construction of the first multi-story garage can be completed within 2 to 3 years. Within 5 years, with the construction of at least two multi-story garages and the parallel digitalization of the system, Kočani can completely transform its parking situation.

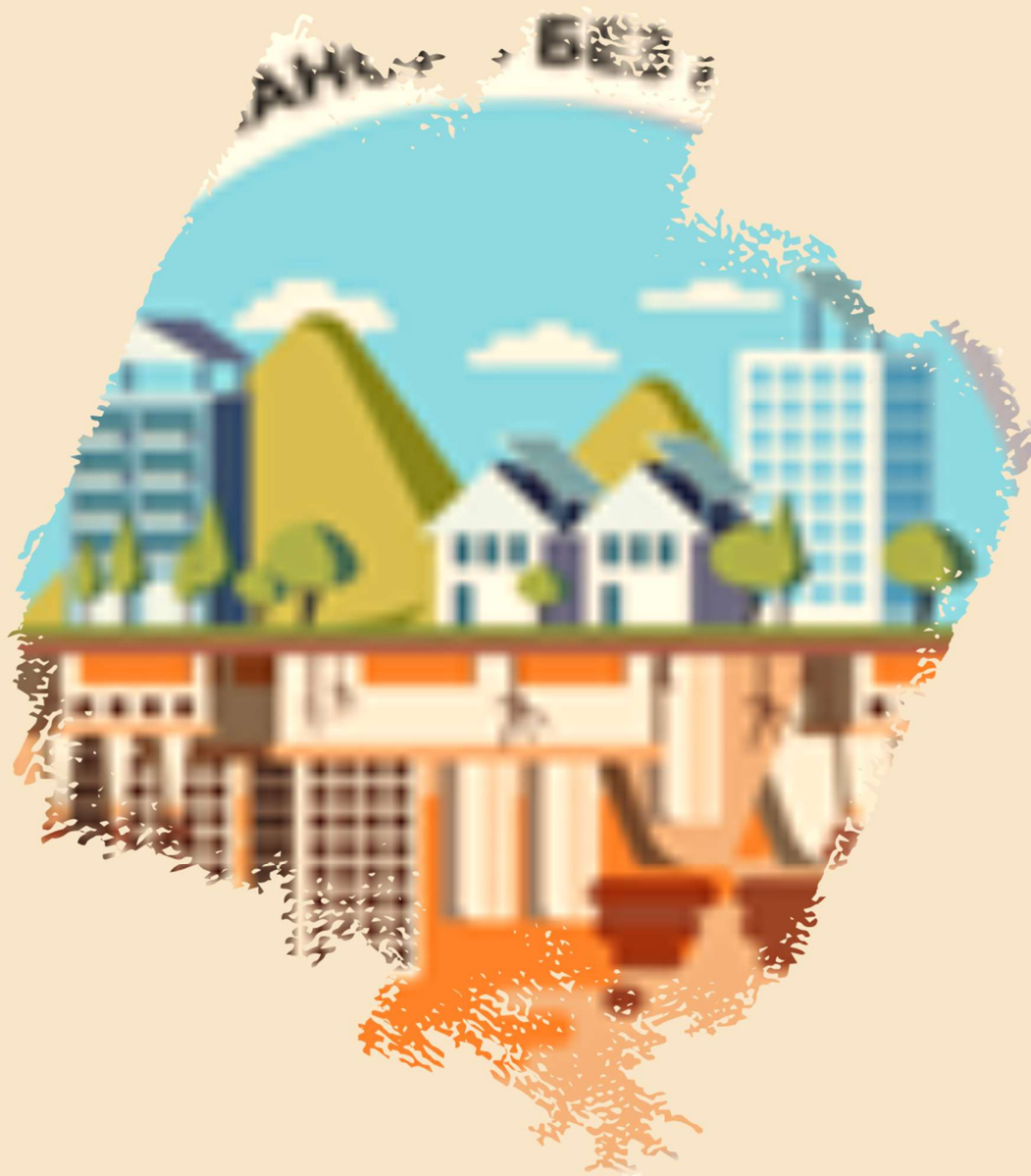
Innovative Initiatives in the Municipality of Kumanovo

01 Kumanovo Without Floods
Dragana Kocevaska (SDSM)

02 Eco-Inspection for Kumanovo
Goran Maksimovski (DOM)

03 Summer Cinema in Kumanovo
Mila Petrushevska (ZNAM)

KUMANOVO WITHOUT FLOODS – IT'S TIME FOR A STORMWATER DRAINAGE SYSTEM!



Dragana Kocevska
–SDSM–

Kumanovo without floods – It's time for a stormwater drainage system!

1. Summary

Kumanovo, with around 98,000 residents, has been facing a chronic problem with its stormwater drainage system for years. After every heavy rainfall, streets, boulevards, and yards are flooded – particularly along “Oktomvriska revolucija” Boulevard and in the neighborhoods of Sredorek and Serava. The outdated and incomplete pipeline system, partially connected to the sewage network and poorly maintained, poses risks to citizens’ property, safety, and health.

The current approach, based on short-term and partial interventions, is not functional. Continuous cleaning and repairs at critical points do not provide long-term stability, and the problem repeats every year.

Identified shortcomings so far include:

- Installation of old and undersized pipelines;
- Fragmented interventions without a systematic plan;
- Insufficient maintenance and improper use by residents;
- Poor integration of new developments into the stormwater network.

Considered potential solutions:

1. Short-term measures – cleaning and repairing the existing network;
2. Partial interventions – addressing the most critical locations;
3. Comprehensive reconstruction – expansion and modernization of the entire network;
4. Integrated green solutions – combining new collectors with sustainable infrastructure measures.

A comprehensive reconstruction and expansion of the stormwater drainage network is recommended, incorporating monitoring systems, GIS tools, and public education. Implementation should be carried out in phases, prioritizing the most critical areas first.

Financial aspect: The initial phase (key streets and boulevards) is estimated at 40–60 million denars, while the full reconstruction and modernization of the network would cost 120–150 million denars. The investment is economically justified, as each flood causes damages worth 70–100 million denars. Funding will be secured through a combination of municipal budgets, national funds, and international programs.

With such a systematic approach, Kumanovo will reduce flood risks, strengthen resilience to climate change, and significantly improve the quality of life for its citizens.

2. Problem - context and importance

Kumanovo, the largest municipality in the country by population, with around 98,000 inhabitants according to the 2021 census, has been facing the same persistent and burning issue for years – the lack of a functional stormwater drainage system. This problem, which in modern urban environments is considered a basic necessity long solved, has in Kumanovo turned into a chronic challenge that disrupts citizens' daily lives, endangers their safety, and creates a sense of neglect and regression.

Every resident of Kumanovo has at least once witnessed flooded streets, intersections, or yards after heavy rainfall. During torrential rains, entire parts of the city turn into lakes, with water remaining for hours or even days. Damaged vehicles, flooded ground floors, blocked traffic, and the inability to walk through the city center – this is the everyday reality on rainy days. The main target of flooding is the boulevard “Oktomvriska revolucija”, one of Kumanovo's key arteries. Although this boulevard has a stormwater drainage system, its capacity is far too small to handle the enormous amount of water flowing down from the hilly parts of the city. Thus, even with the slightest rain, the main boulevard turns into a “reservoir” for rainwater.

History is full of examples confirming this situation. In 2016, 2018, and 2023, Kumanovo was hit by three major floods, after which entire neighborhoods were left blocked. The residents of Sredorek, the central urban area, and parts around Serava are the most affected – their streets Nikola Tesla, Dr. Ribar, and Gjorče Petrov regularly become critical points. There, either there is no stormwater drainage at all, or the existing pipelines are so outdated that they cannot handle the water flow.

The situation is further worsened by the fact that in some places the stormwater and sewage systems are interconnected. This means that every overflow from a manhole is not just a flood but also a potential pollution event, carrying all the risks for public health and the environment.

When asked why the problem keeps recurring, the answer lies in several long-standing causes. First, the infrastructure is old – much of it built decades ago, without considering climate change and today's urbanization. Second, municipal interventions are usually short-term and fragmented – only the most critical point is repaired at the moment, without a systemic approach. Third, regular maintenance is weak: drains are often clogged with trash and leaves, and citizens, consciously or out of habit, further contribute to the blockage. Fourth, the city is expanding — new buildings and facilities are being constructed, but not always connected to the stormwater network, so rainwater ends up directly on the streets.

The “Oktomvriska revolucija” boulevard is an illustrative example of how complex the problem is. On one hand, drainage exists but is too small. On the other, the entire terrain of surrounding streets,

such as Ivo Lola Ribar and Gjorče Petrov, channels water directly toward this boulevard. The most critical stretch, about 1.2 kilometers long, extends from the junction with Ivo Lola Ribar Street to the roundabout at the “Treta makedonska udarna brigada” boulevard. This area, with almost identical elevation (318 meters above sea level), prevents natural drainage, so the water remains “trapped” on the asphalt.

This is not merely a technical issue. It is a question of quality of life and urban culture. For citizens, rain in Kumanovo is not a natural occurrence but a threat. They know that every outing after rainfall means wading through muddy puddles, risking their vehicles, facing traffic chaos, or dealing with a flooded yard. This problem creates the impression that the city has been left to its fate – as if it doesn’t belong to the 21st century.

Kumanovo has over 75,000 residents in its urban area, and thousands of them pass daily along the “Oktomvriska revolucija” boulevard. This boulevard is the city’s economic and social artery – hosting shops, institutions, and hospitality businesses. When this boulevard is under water, the whole city is under water – literally and metaphorically.

Each flood leaves marks, not only on asphalt and the walls of ground-floor buildings but also on citizens’ trust. For years they have been hearing political promises about solving the issue, yet solutions always remain partial or unrealized. Every storm serves as a reminder that Kumanovo lacks an adequate stormwater drainage system, and that the problem will keep repeating until it is approached systematically and strategically.

3. Alternative solutions considered

The problem with the stormwater drainage system in Kumanovo is not only a technical and infrastructural challenge – it directly affects the citizens of the largest municipality. The solution to this problem is not simple. There are several possible approaches, each with its own advantages and limitations.

Alternative 1: Short-term measures – Maintenance and repair of the existing network

The first alternative seems simple: regular cleaning of drains, unclogging of manholes, inspection of the existing network with special cameras, and repair of leaking or blocked pipes. Such interventions have already been tried in Kumanovo. For example, after the floods in 2018, the municipality organized an action to clean the critical manholes along the “Oktomvriska revolucija” boulevard. The effect was noticeable – the next rainfall did not cause as much congestion as before.

This approach is quick and inexpensive, and it can immediately bring some relief to the citizens. However, it also has major weaknesses. When the rains are torrential, as they have increasingly become in recent years, the capacity of the old pipelines is far too small. No matter how much the

manholes are cleaned, the water simply has nowhere to go. The experience is like trying to pour a river into a small pipe, no matter how clean it is, it cannot take in all the water.

Alternative 2: Partial interventions – Focusing on the most critical points

The second alternative goes a step further and suggests that instead of “patching up” the entire network, attention should be directed toward a few of the most frequent hotspots. These are most often Nikola Tesla Street in the Sredorek neighborhood, Gjorče Petrov Street near the “Tuš” market, and Dr. Ribar Street near Serava, as well as the entire stretch of the “Oktomvriska revolucija” boulevard, about 1.2 kilometers long.

Analyses show that the biggest floods occur precisely at these points. The reasons vary: on some streets, there is no drainage system at all; on others, pipes exist but their diameter is so small that after just five minutes of heavy rain, the water starts flowing back and spilling out through the manholes. On the “Oktomvriska revolucija” boulevard, for instance, from the junction with Ivo Lola Ribar Street all the way to the roundabout at the “Treta makedonska udarna brigada” boulevard, the terrain is almost perfectly level – around 318 meters above sea level. This means the water has no natural slope to drain away, so it stagnates, and when runoff from the surrounding hills arrives, the boulevard quickly ends up underwater.

Interventions at these critical points would reduce the city’s heaviest burden. Citizens would immediately notice an improvement – at least the center of Kumanovo and its most frequented boulevard would be protected. However, this solution is only partial. Flooding in other neighborhoods, where there is no network or where it is severely outdated, would continue.

Alternative 3: Comprehensive reconstruction and expansion of the entire network

The third alternative is the most ambitious and involves a complete reconstruction and construction of a stormwater drainage system throughout Kumanovo. This would mean installing new collectors where none currently exist – such as in the Sredorek neighborhood or on Moša Pijade Street – widening existing pipes to a larger diameter of 400 to 600 millimeters, building new manholes and drains, and even introducing modern solutions such as retention tanks and permeable surfaces that allow water to be absorbed rather than stagnate on the asphalt.

This approach would also mean fully separating stormwater from the sewage system – something that is currently mixed in several areas of Kumanovo. This would reduce the risk of pollution to the Kumanovka River. Such a solution would be long-term and protect the entire municipality, but it also requires the greatest level of organization, time, and resources.

Alternative 4: Integrated and innovative “Green Solutions”

The final alternative goes beyond the traditional engineering approach. It views the city as a living organism and seeks to address the issue through a combination of conventional infrastructure interventions and new sustainable solutions.

In this scenario, alongside the construction of new collectors, measures such as green roofs on public buildings, drainage gardens near parks and schools, permeable pavements on parking lots and sidewalks, and even bio-drainage channels with natural vegetation are considered. These measures reduce the amount of water that reaches the drainage system, thereby easing its load. At the same time, they create a more attractive and healthier urban environment.

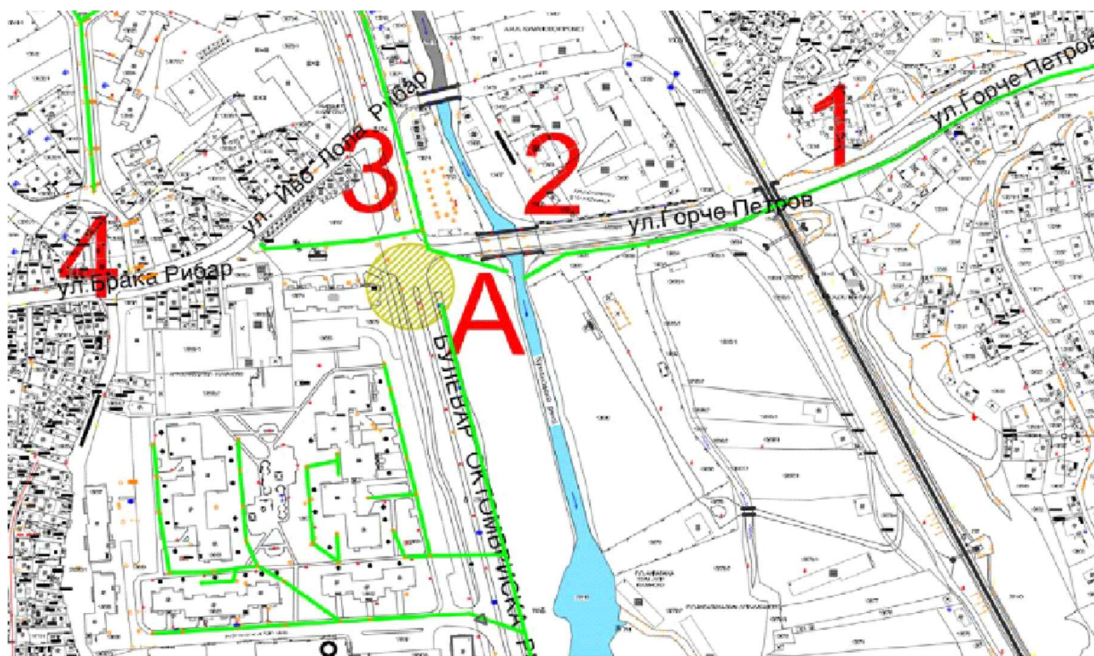
Examples from other European cities show that this approach can reduce pressure on the network by up to 30%. Although this is still a new concept for Kumanovo, the local initiative “*Kumanovo Without Floods*” has already discussed such solutions with experts.

4. Selected solution and proposed future actions

The alternatives before Kumanovo vary – from temporary and partial measures to comprehensive and long-term solutions. But they all share a common goal: to provide a city where rain is no longer a threat, but a natural occurrence that the infrastructure can handle.

After considering all possible alternatives, it is recommended that the flooding problem be addressed through a comprehensive reconstruction and expansion of the stormwater network. Short-term actions bring only temporary relief, and partial interventions at a few hotspots mitigate the problem locally. However, they do not guarantee the city’s stability in the long run.

Therefore, the recommended solution is the third alternative – a systematic approach that will overcome decades of “patchwork” practices and create a modern, functional stormwater drainage system. This choice is based on lower financial requirements compared to the fourth alternative, which demands higher funding, longer implementation time, and more complex infrastructural interventions.



Слика 1. Почеток на разгледувано подрачје на поплавување

Key components of the proposed solution

1. **Technical audit of the existing network** – identify the points with the greatest vulnerability and insufficient capacity.
2. **Development of a master plan** – for the construction of new stormwater collectors and reconstruction of existing ones, in line with climate change and urban development trends.
3. **Phased implementation of investments** – starting with the most critical points: the city center, “Oktomvriska revolucija” boulevard, and the Sredorek and Serava neighborhoods.
4. **Applying for funding from state and international programs** – IPA, GREEN, and EU climate adaptation funds, as a supplement to the municipal budget.
5. **Raising public awareness and citizen training** – prevent drain blockages and increase responsibility toward public infrastructure.
6. **Introduction of monitoring systems and GIS tools** – for continuous tracking of water flow and regular maintenance of the network.

Financial implications

According to engineering estimates and detailed analyses, implementing the systemic solution will require:

- **Initial critical segment:** 40–60 million denars for Gjorče Petrov, Ivo Lola Ribar, and Moša Pijade streets, along with the replacement of drains on “Okтомvriska revolucija” boulevard.
- **Entire master plan:** 120–150 million denars for the construction of new collectors, reconstruction of existing ones, monitoring systems, and integration of green infrastructure solutions.

Key aspects of the financial implications:

- **Preventive value:** Each flood in the past 10 years caused infrastructure and private property damage of 70–100 million denars per event. With this investment, the city minimizes potential losses.
- **Phased implementation:** Investments are distributed over four phases, allowing gradual spending and adjustments according to available funds.
- **Sources of funding:**
 - Municipal budget for critical segments and ongoing maintenance.
 - State funds for infrastructure interventions and climate adaptation.
 - International programs for green solutions, monitoring, and citizen education.

In conclusion, the financial aspect demonstrates the economic justification of the investment –every denar spent on modernizing the stormwater drainage system saves multiple times in long-term costs and flood-related risks.

Timeline

- **Phase 1 (0–6 months):** Technical audit and development of the master plan.
- **Phase 2 (6–12 months):** Reconstruction of the most critical stretch – “Okтомvriska revolucija” boulevard – and replacement of drains.
- **Phase 3 (12–24 months):** Construction of new collectors on Nikola Tesla, Ivo Lola Ribar, and Moša Pijade streets.
- **Phase 4 (24–36 months):** Integration of green solutions, establishment of a monitoring system, and citizen education.

With this schedule, the majority of the problem can be addressed within one year, while the complete reconstruction and modernization can be completed within three years.

Solving the stormwater drainage problem in Kumanovo requires genuine political will, vision, and dedication. With a systematic and focused solution, the city will not only reduce flooding but also improve the quality of life for its citizens and increase its resilience to climate change. This is not just a technical investment – it is an investment in the safety, dignity, and European future of Kumanovo.

**GREEN GUARD FOR
KUMANOVO: INTEGRATED
OVERSIGHT FOR A CLEAN AND
SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT**



Goran Maksimovski
–DOM–

Green guard for Kumanovo: Integrated oversight for a clean and sustainable environment

1. Summary

This public policy document focuses on the complex environmental challenges in Kumanovo, an urban-industrial center in North Macedonia, where issues such as air pollution, illegal dumping, water contamination, lack of green spaces, and traffic noise pose serious threats to public health and sustainable development. The current approach, relying on reactive inspections by the Municipal Inspectorate and the State Environmental Inspectorate (SEI), has proven ineffective due to limited resources, weak inter-institutional coordination, low transparency, and insufficient citizen engagement. The failures are evident: according to a survey conducted as part of the initiative, 68% of citizens perceive environmental problems as serious, and 55% do not know which institution is responsible for inspections, resulting in only 14% of cases being reported and minimal response.

Possible solutions considered include: (1) Strengthening existing institutional capacities by increasing the number of inspectors and technical equipment; (2) Introducing digital platforms for citizen reporting and monitoring; (3) Establishing an integrated “Green Guard” – a hybrid model combining volunteers, technology, and partnerships. The recommended solution is the integrated Green Guard model, which combines proactive oversight, public transparency, and citizen mobilization. This model directly addresses the survey gaps (with a high engagement potential of 77% of citizens) and is projected to reduce recurring environmental “hotspots” by 30% within the first 6–12 months, based on proposed indicators.

2. Problem – context and importance

Kumanovo, as a rapidly growing urban-industrial center in the northeastern part of the country, faces typical “Balkan” environmental challenges, exacerbated by its location near the watersheds of the Kumanovska, Lipkovska, and Pčinja rivers, as well as corridor transport routes. Local issues include winter air pollution from household heating (wood/coal), traffic bottlenecks, illegal dumps on the periphery, and flood risks. These problems align with the national picture, where air quality is among the most critical issues and waste management remains a chronic challenge.

In the local context, these problems directly affect the health and quality of life of approximately 100,000 residents. According to a survey conducted as part of the innovative initiative, 55% of citizens identify waste and illegal dumps as the biggest problem, 36% point to river pollution and lack of green spaces, 27% highlight air pollution, and a smaller share mention noise. This perception is

backed by data: monitoring stations of the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning (MoESP) show winter peaks in particulate matter (PM), while research maps hundreds of illegal dumps across the region. The impact on the local community is significant – pollution contributes to respiratory diseases, economic losses from floods, and reduced attractiveness for investment, hindering sustainable development.

The main causes of these problems are: (1) Limited institutional capacity – The Municipal Inspectorate has a small number of inspectors, weak technical equipment, and a reactive approach; (2) Poor coordination – Overlaps between the Municipal Inspectorate, the State Environmental Inspectorate (SEI), and other entities (e.g., public enterprise “Čistota i zelenilo”) lead to delayed responses; (3) Low citizen engagement and transparency – 55% of respondents do not know which institution is responsible, and 86% have never reported an issue due to insufficient feedback; (4) Insufficient resources – Budgetary constraints and lack of modern tools such as drones or IoT systems.⁵

These factors have resulted in persistent illegal dumps (despite the collection of 7,172 kg of waste over the past two years), unresolved flood risks (despite existing projects), and limited transition to clean energy (only partial replacement of boiler plants). The impacts are broad: health risks (elevated PM levels), economic costs (from floods and waste), social dissatisfaction (only 5% satisfied with inspections), and missed opportunities for sustainable development, making the problem urgent to address.

3. Alternative solutions considered

To address the environmental challenges in Kumanovo, three main alternatives were considered, based on the analysis data, survey results, and proposed solutions within the innovative initiative. The evaluation principles include: (1) Effectiveness – how quickly and measurably the proposed solution reduces the problems (using KPIs such as a 30% reduction in “black spots”); (2) Feasibility – compatibility with existing resources and budget; (3) Engagement – the level of citizen mobilization (based on the 77% willingness reported in the survey); (4) Sustainability – long-term effects and integration with national strategies (such as the 2024 Environmental Protection Program); (5) Transparency – public accountability through reports and maps.

Alternative 1: Strengthening existing institutional capacity

This includes increasing the number of inspectors (through budget allocations), investing in equipment (mobile laboratories, drones), and improved coordination with the SEPA (monthly meetings).

⁵ Networks composed of devices, sensors, and applications connected to the Internet that exchange data with each other without the need for direct human intervention.

Arguments: It directly addresses the lack of resources (a problem highlighted in the survey), with the potential for rapid responses to reports ($\geq 85\%$ response within seven days). However, this solution is costly and does not increase citizen engagement, which remains a key gap.

Alternative 2: Introduction of digital platforms for citizen reporting and monitoring

This solution involves an online reporting application (with a unique ID), a public map of “hotspots,” and real-time alerts.

Arguments: It increases transparency (requested by 68% of respondents) and awareness (addresses the 55% of respondents who were unaware), with low costs through partnerships with donors or EU funds. The main drawback of this proposal is its dependence on digital literacy and the fact that it does not provide on-the-ground action without human resources.

Alternative 3: Integrated “Green guard” – hybrid model

This solution combines enhanced inspector controls, digital tools, volunteers/citizen observers, and partnerships (with public enterprises such as “Čistota i zelenilo”, etc.). It includes risk-based planning, thematic actions (winter/spring campaigns), public bulletins, and micro-grants for eco-initiatives.

Arguments: This is the best option due to its comprehensiveness – effective (cases resolved within ≤ 30 days), feasible (builds on existing projects like “Clean Air”), inclusive (leverages 77% citizen willingness), and sustainable (integrates with Interreg-IPA greening initiatives). Compared to other options, this solution is superior because it combines resources and mobilization, with the potential for 100% weekly updates and a reduction of recurring problems – as tested through the survey and proposed solutions. The survey shows that citizens demand field reports (68%) and sanctions (36%), which this model directly provides, whereas other alternatives are partial. Solutions tested in the initiative (such as hotspot maps and subsidies) confirm that the integrated approach is more effective than isolated measures.

4. Selected solution and proposed future actions

For the implementation of the recommended “Green Guard” solution, the following action plan is proposed, structured by phases, with responsible entities, a timeline, and success indicators. This solution would be carried out in collaboration with the Municipality of Kumanovo, the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning (MoESP), the State Environmental Inspectorate (SEI), and international partners, with a budget drawn from local funds, EU programs, and grants.

Phase 1: Preparation (0–3 months)

- **Formation of a coordination team:** The Municipality of Kumanovo will appoint a team of five members (inspectors, IT expert, citizen representative). Activity: Development of the “Green Guard” statute and definition of responsibilities.

- Development of a digital platform: Partnership with local IT companies for a reporting application (with ID, photo/video capabilities). Indicator: Platform launched, $\geq 50\%$ citizen coverage trained.
- Capacity building: Provision of equipment (drones, mobile measuring devices) through grants and own contributions. Responsible: Public Enterprise “Čistota i zelenilo.”

Phase 2: Implementation (3–12 months)

- Proactive monitoring: Conduct thematic campaigns (winter emission checks, spring cleanup of illegal dumps). **Activity:** Risk matrix for prioritization, with volunteers for monitoring.
 - Citizen mobilization: Campaigns in schools and social media for education; micro-grants (up to €500) for local initiatives (greening, waste separation). Indicator: $\geq 77\%$ participation from surveyed groups, 30% reduction in “black spots.”
- Transparency: Weekly bulletins and a public map of violations/sanctions (anonymized). Responsible: Municipal Inspectorate, in coordination with the State Environmental Inspectorate (SEI).

Phase 3: Evaluation and sustainability (12–24 months)

- Monitoring based on key indicators: Average case closure time ≤ 30 days; satisfaction survey ≥ 15 percentage points increase. Activity: Annual report to the Municipal Council.
- Integration with projects: Linkage with "Green Urban Area in Kumanovo" and subsidies for gasification. Responsible: Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MoESP).
- Financing: Budget allocation (20% of the 2025 Environmental Protection Program), plus EU funds for IoT irrigation and solar systems.

These activities will provide measurable improvements, increased trust, and a replicable model for other municipalities, with a focus on prevention rather than reaction.

The implementation of the “*Green Guard*” initiative requires a combination of local and external financial sources. Estimated costs for the first two years are approximately **€250,000–300,000**, allocated as follows:

- ~40% from the local budget (environmental and municipal services programs),
- ~35% from international grants,
- ~25% from other sources (public enterprises, private sector via public-private partnerships).

Major costs include equipment (drones, measurement devices, digital platform – around €120,000), human resources (new inspectors, IT support – around €80,000), and micro-grants for citizen

initiatives (€50,000). This framework is indicative, with a detailed financial analysis planned in Phase 1.

Within five years, Kumanovo can become a model “green urban municipality,” with significantly reduced illegal dumping, stabilized PM particle levels, and increased citizen trust in local institutions. This model is transferable to other municipalities, positioning Kumanovo as a leader in innovative environmental solutions.

STAR STUDDED FRAME – SUMMER YOUTH CINEMA IN KUMANOVO



Mila Petrushevska
–ZNAM–

Star studded frame – Summer youth cinema in Kumanovo

1. Summary

Kumanovo, as the second largest city in our country, is faced with a serious cultural deficit that is felt most strongly by the young population. Although the city has a rich cultural tradition, there is almost no contemporary and attractive content for young people. Surveys confirm that the majority of young people watch films at home (85%), while only a small part (12%) go to cinema, and less than 3% have ever been to an open-air cinema. Particularly alarming is the fact that as many as 80% travel to another city to watch a film – which creates a cultural drain and weakens the connection of young people with their own community.

The current approach fails to engage the young audience. Institutional cultural events are limited, formal and with low attendance, and previous attempts to organise film screenings in closed or ad-hoc spaces have failed due to outdated technology, limited space, insufficient promotion and inconsistency of the programme. Instead of creating interest, these formats further reduce the motivation of young people to participate in the cultural life of the city.

Several alternatives for a solution were considered in the analysis process. The first is to continue with traditional indoor screenings – a practical option, but unattractive for young people. The second is a mobile cinema that travels to different neighbourhoods – interesting from an inclusivity perspective, but difficult to sustain due to logistical and technical limitations. The third alternative is an open-air summer cinema, at a fixed location, with a regular programme and modern equipment. This option is supported the most by both young people and the wider community: over 95% believe that it will enrich cultural life, and more than 90% that it will encourage socialising. Additionally, over 70% want the concept to include music, food and interactive activities, which makes this alternative most in line with their interests.

The implementation of the project requires moderate financial resources – around **7,370 EUR**, mainly for technical equipment, preparing the space and promotion. The funds can be allocated by combining funds from the municipal budget, national funds and local partners, which makes the project financially sustainable and realistic.

Therefore, the main recommendation is to establish an open-air summer cinema in Kumanovo. This solution combines accessibility, continuity and a contemporary cultural experience, offering a unique space for young people to socialise, enjoy culture and build the community spirit. The summer cinema is not only a cultural event, but also a strategic investment in the future of the city – with the potential to become a new symbol of urban and youth life in Kumanovo.

2. Problem – context and importance

Kumanovo, as the second largest city in our country, is an important cultural and urban centre that has developed a rich tradition of art, education and public life throughout history. However, despite its size and cultural background, the city today faces a serious lack of contemporary cultural and entertainment content for the young population.

The problem is multifaceted. On the one hand, the institutional cultural offer is limited to formal events organised by local institutions, which fail to attract a young audience. The events that are organised are most often with a traditional concept, with a small number of visitors, without interactivity and without space for free and dynamic socialising. On the other hand, there is a lack of alternative cultural spaces and models that would suit the interests and habits of young people today.

The survey conducted in Kumanovo for the purpose of preparing this document confirms this. According to a survey with 200 respondents, the majority of young people watch films only at home – as many as 85% of those surveyed stated that they watch films at home. Only around 12% of young people go to the cinema, and less than 3% have ever been to an open-air cinema. This data reflects the reality that Kumanovo, unlike other large cities, does not have a cinema hall with modern technology nor cultural events that would bring the cinema experience closer to young people.

What is even more important, as many as 80% of respondents stated that they travel to another city to watch a film. This data speaks of a cultural drain – young people from Kumanovo are forced to seek entertainment and cultural experiences outside their city. This is not only a matter of culture, but also of identity and community: if young people feel culturally neglected, they develop less connection with their city and participate less in local public life.

The survey also showed that there is a strong desire and openness for such initiatives. Over 75% of young people would visit the open-air summer cinema in Kumanovo, and the rest said that it would depend on the programme. Not a single respondent gave a negative answer. This fact indicates that the cultural offer is not a problem due to a lack of interest, but solely due to an infrastructural and organisational vacuum.

This situation is not an isolated case only in Kumanovo. According to the report of the Agency for Youth and Sports (2022), young people in North Macedonia continuously face insufficiently accessible cultural and sports content in their local communities. More than 60% of young people at the national level believe that cultural life is not adapted to their needs. In the “Youth Trends Report 2023” of the National Youth Council of North Macedonia, as many as 67% of young people stated that they “do not have enough attractive places for socialising and culture in their city”. Kumanovo is no exception – on the contrary, as the second largest city in the country, its situation is even more evident and paradoxical.

In addition, the survey revealed that young people want cultural content that is interactive and contemporary. Over 70% of those surveyed would like the cinema to be accompanied by additional activities, such as live music, food and drinks or thematic events. This indicates that young people are not only looking for a film experience, but also a cultural space for socialising, sharing and creativity.

This challenge is in line with the findings of the National Youth Strategy 2023–2027, which emphasises the need for contemporary cultural and social content for young people at the local level as a priority.

The cultural deficit in Kumanovo also has broader social consequences. The lack of accessible and attractive content leads to passiveness among young people, reduced socialisation, and an increasing dependence on private and digital forms of entertainment (such as TV and online platforms). This limits their ability to actively participate in the community and creates an impression of cultural isolation.

The survey clearly confirms that young people view such a project as a solution to these problems. More than 95% of respondents believe that the open-air cinema would contribute to a more diverse cultural life, and over 90% believe that it would help young people socialise and go out more in the city. In other words, the problem is not in the interest, but in the fact that Kumanovo has not created the conditions to offer young people cultural alternatives that are modern, accessible, and in line with their needs.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the main problem consists of:

- Lack of modern cultural spaces and events for the youth in Kumanovo.
- Cultural outflow – young people have to travel to other cities to have an experience that their city should provide them.
- Dissociation of institutions with the young population, which results in cultural programmes that do not correspond to their interests.
- Social passiveness and isolation caused by the absence of good quality cultural and entertainment content.

3. Alternative solutions considered

In the process of identifying possible solutions for improving the cultural offer for young people in Kumanovo, several alternatives for solutions were considered. Each of them has potential, but also limitations that make it different in terms of attractiveness and applicability.

Alternative 1: To continue with traditional indoor screenings

The first alternative is to continue organising indoor screenings, using existing infrastructure such as the Cultural Centre, school halls and smaller improvised cinemas. This approach has a practical

advantage – it does not require new spaces and can be implemented with lower costs and minimal logistical preparation. In addition, the institutions are already familiar with this concept and there is already some kind of a tradition in the city.

However, the survey data show that young people perceive this option as less attractive. As many as 85% of respondents stated that they watch films at home, and only 12% go to the cinema, which indicates that the existing indoor spaces fail to stimulate their interest. The main reason is that these spaces are perceived as formal, inflexible and not attractive enough. An additional problem is that young people naturally seek outdoor activities in the summer, and indoor halls cannot provide that atmosphere. Also, the technology at the existing venues tends to be outdated, resulting in poor quality screenings, which only impacts the interest. In other words, this alternative offers convenience but is limited in its scope and does not meet the expectations of young people.

Alternative 2: Mobile cinema – a traveling projector and screen to different neighbourhoods

The second alternative envisages the establishment of a mobile cinema that would travel to different settlements and neighbourhoods around Kumanovo, literally bringing culture to the citizens. Such a model would have a significant inclusive character, as it would enable young people from different parts of the city – including peripheral neighbourhoods – to be directly involved in cultural activities. This would create a sense of cultural accessibility and community spirit, with the possibility of local involvement in the organisation of events.

Although it sounds attractive, the mobile model faces a number of practical obstacles. The technical equipment would have to be constantly moved, which brings additional risks of damage and frequent technical problems. The logistics for transportation, setting up and security are complex and require significant resources. In addition, the inconsistency of the location makes it difficult to create a stable audience. The survey confirms that young people want consistency – over 75% of respondents would visit the cinema at least once a month or more often, but only if there is a programme. That is why, although a mobile cinema can offer inclusivity and diversity, it is difficult to create a long-term habit among young people and a stable cultural identity in the city.

Alternative 3: Open air summer cinema – centralised, with a regular programme

The third alternative is the establishment of an open-air cinema at a fixed location, with modern equipment and a regular programme during the summer months. This model is based on the idea of creating a recognisable and accessible cultural space, which will serve the youth and the wider community.

The results of the survey strongly support this concept. Over 95% of respondents believe that the open-air cinema will contribute to a more diverse cultural life in Kumanovo, and more than 90% believe that it will encourage greater socialising and friendship among young people. In addition,

young people do not want a cinema that only plays films, but a complete experience: over 70% of them are looking for additional activities (live music, food, drinks), and around 71% prefer a relaxed atmosphere with deck chairs, blankets and beanbags. These data confirm the desire of young people to have a space that offers a multifaceted cultural and social experience.

It is particularly significant that young people already recognise potential locations for such a cinema. The Memorial Ossuary (54%) and the park in Sokolana (37%) received the greatest support as public spaces for something like that, indicating that they want the cinema to be integrated into recognisable and accessible parts of the city. Thus, the open-air summer cinema would not only be a cultural project, but also part of the urban revitalisation of Kumanovo.

4. Selected solution and proposed future actions

The three alternatives present the full range of possibilities – from using the existing infrastructure, through mobile and decentralised models, to creating a modern and central open-air cultural space. Each has its own advantages, but also limitations that need to be considered in the decision-making process in order to choose the best solution for young people in Kumanovo.

Based on the results of the surveys, analyses and previous experiences, the most appropriate and most supported by citizens is the establishing of an open-air summer cinema, at a fixed location, with a regular programme. Unlike traditional indoor screenings, which young people perceive as unattractive and outdated, and mobile cinemas that cannot provide continuity and a stable audience, this option unites three key elements: consistency, accessibility and a modern experience.

The survey showed that over 95% of young people believe that the open-air summer cinema will enrich the cultural life, and more than 90% that it will increase socialisation in the city. Additionally, over 70% want it to be accompanied by music, food and interactive activities, which is only possible with a fixed outdoor location model. This concept best aligns with their interests for an informal and relaxed atmosphere – something that other alternatives cannot offer.

That is why the open-air cinema is not just another option, but the only solution that is simultaneously widely supported by the community, practical to implement and capable of creating a new cultural tradition in Kumanovo.

Specific activities

1. Selection of a location – the Memorial Ossuary and the park in Sokolana are usually proposed.
2. Preparation of the space – cleaning, horticultural landscaping, placing deck chairs, beanbags and ambient lighting.

3. Procurement of technical equipment – projector, screen, sound system, computer, mixer and additional equipment.
4. Developing a programme – weekly screenings with different genres and accompanying activities (live music, food stands, workshops).
5. Promotion and engagement of young people – active campaign on social networks, in local media and in schools.
6. Networking and partnerships – cooperation with the Municipality of Kumanovo, the Ministry of Culture, public enterprises and private sponsors.

The establishment of an open-air summer cinema not only responds to local needs but is also in line with European trends for the development of public cultural spaces, as well as with national goals for youth participation and culture.

Financial implications

No.	Cost description	Quantity/Price	Total (MKD)
1	Benches without backrests (40 x 40 pieces 3.000)		120,000
2	Chairs (20 x 2.500)	20 pieces	50,000
3	Bar counter	1	45,000
4	Screen	2x2 m	10,000
5	Projector	1	40,000
6	Computer	1	30,000
7	Sound system with a mixer	A set	105,000
8	Ambiance lightning	A set	6,000
9	Other equipment	porters,cables, speakers	18,000
10	Preparation of the space	Cleaning, horticulture	30,000

Total: 504,000 MKD ≈ 7,370 EUR

Sources of funding:

- Municipality of Kumanovo (main source)
- Ministry of Culture
- Public enterprises
- NGOs
- Private companies and individual donors

Timeframe

- Short-term activities (0–6 months): location selection, preparing the space, equipment procurement, promotion.
- Mid-term activities (6–12 months): opening and realisation of the first season (June–September), measuring attendance and collecting feedback.
- Long-term activities (1–3 years): institutionalising the open-air summer cinema as an annual event, expanding the programme with festivals, cultural weekends and regional collaborations.

Innovative Initiatives in the Municipality of Lipkovo

01

**Lighting up Lipkovo: Sustainable
Solutions for the Lack of Street
Lighting**

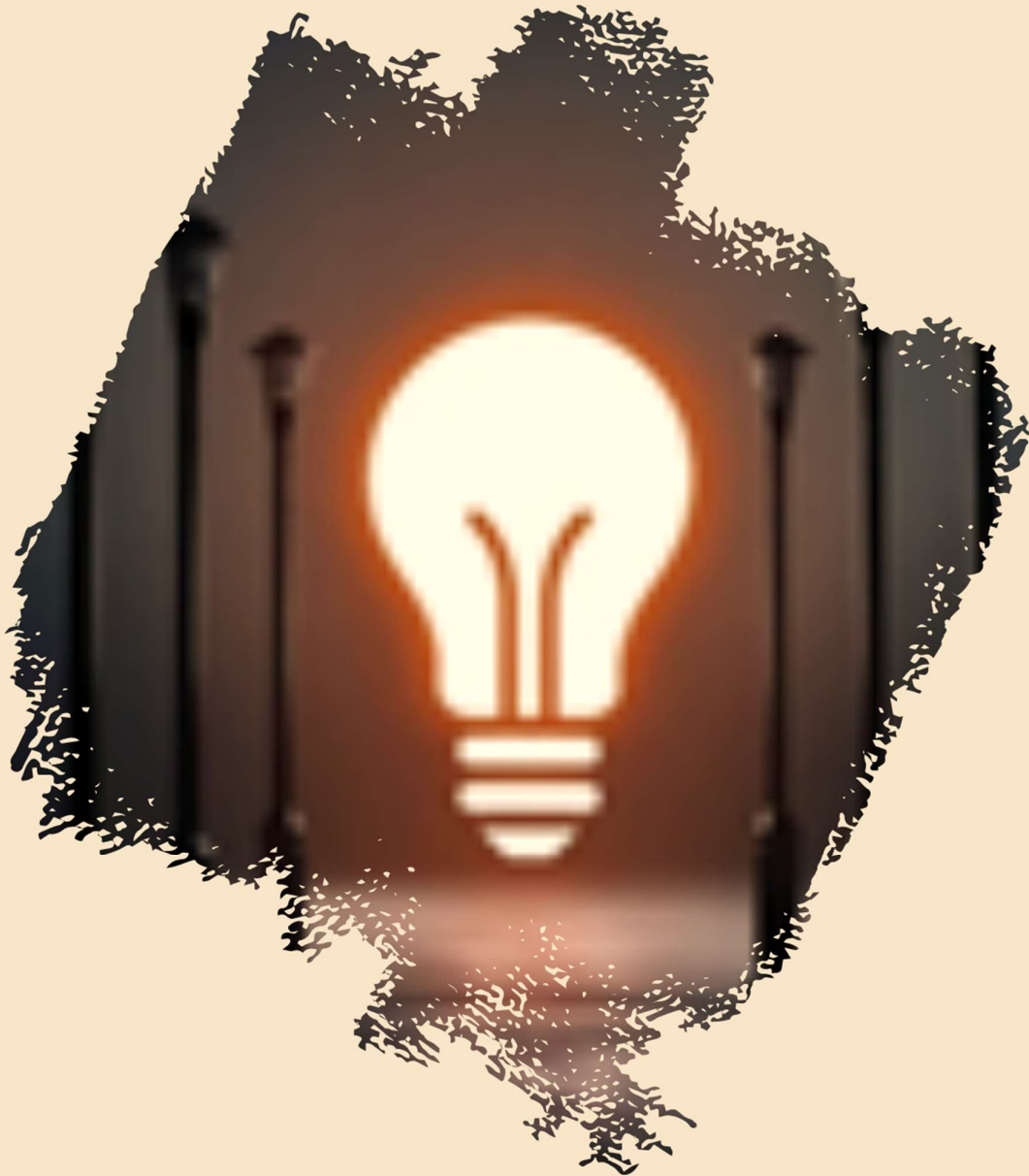
Ibrahim Ajvazi (DUI)

02

For a Cleaner Lipkovo

**Iljaz Ajvazi (Alliance for the
Albanians/VLEN)**

PUBLIC LIGHTING FOR IMPROVED QUALITY OF LIFE IN LIPKOVO



Ibrahim Ajvazi
–DUI–

Public lighting for improved quality of life in Lipkovo

1. Summary

The municipality of Lipkovo, with over 27,000 residents spread across 22 rural and semi-urban settlements, has long faced a shortage of public lighting. Many streets, sidewalks, and central areas remain unlit or poorly lit, particularly secondary and connecting roads between villages. This situation directly affects the safety of residents, who often have to move around in darkness, and simultaneously impacts the social, economic, and cultural life of the municipality. In Lipkovo, the administrative center, as well as in larger settlements such as Slupčane and Matejče, the lack of lighting limits business hours and reduces the use of public spaces. In more remote villages like Ropalce, Lojane, or Vaksince, where access to the electrical grid is difficult, the problem becomes even more pronounced, making everyday life less safe.

Past measures have not delivered sustainable results. Interventions were sporadic, partial, and lacked strategic planning. Old and energy-intensive technologies were used without a long-term monitoring and maintenance system. Additionally, due to limited funds, the municipality has not been able to implement uniform lighting across all villages, leaving many areas uncovered. These shortcomings have led to clear consequences: low perceived safety among residents, restrictions on social and cultural life, hindered local tourism development, and reduced economic activity during evening hours.

To address this challenge, several alternatives were explored. One option is to install LED lighting only in priority areas, such as schools, health centers, and main roads, which would provide immediate but partial improvement. Another alternative is the use of solar-powered lighting in remote villages, where extending the electrical grid is difficult and costly. Additionally, involving the community and small businesses in co-financing was considered, leveraging residents' willingness to contribute. However, the most sustainable and comprehensive alternative is the design and implementation of an **Integrated Municipal Public Lighting Plan**. This plan envisions a strategic approach for the entire municipality, using modern technologies such as LED lights and smart sensors, gradually including all villages according to priority, and integrating solar-powered lighting for remote areas.

The main recommendation of this document is precisely the integrated plan, which relies not only on statistical data but also on community consultations. Through focus groups and pilot initiatives, residents identified critically dark areas and expressed their willingness to contribute to the project's implementation. This makes the plan not only technically sustainable but also socially acceptable and supported. In this way, public lighting will be transformed from a persistent problem into a

development opportunity, ensuring safety, social vitality, and economic growth for all residents of the municipality of Lipkovo.

2. Problem -- context and importance

The Municipality of Lipkovo, located in the north-eastern part of the country, is primarily rural, encompassing 22 settlements and home to over 27,000 residents. The geographic distribution of the villages, hilly terrain, and numerous road connections make the municipality a lively and dynamic area during the day, but infrastructure challenges remain evident. Residents are mainly engaged in agriculture, livestock, and traditional activities, while the municipality has potential for tourism and cultural development thanks to its natural resources and historical heritage. However, one challenge affecting all residents, without exception, is the lack of public lighting.

Lighting is a crucial element of modern life. It is not only linked to comfort but also to safety, economic development, and social vitality. In Lipkovo, despite partial interventions over the years, a significant portion of streets and public spaces remain unlit or poorly lit. This situation is most noticeable on secondary and connecting roads between villages, where the lack of lighting creates difficulties for pedestrians and vehicular traffic.

In the municipal center, the village of Lipkovo, the problem is present on main roads as well. Although the village serves as the administrative hub where residents come for services, many streets and areas around the municipal center remain dark in the evening. The village square, which could serve as a meeting place or venue for various activities, is limited in use due to insufficient lighting.

In larger settlements such as Slupčane and Matejče, known for their commercial and social activity, the lack of lighting has a direct impact on the economy. Small businesses close earlier because customers avoid moving around after sunset. Cultural centers, schools, and sports facilities are underutilized in the evening hours, depriving youth of healthy activities and reducing community vibrancy.

In other villages, such as Orizari, Otlja, or Vištica, the lack of lighting is primarily a safety concern. Access roads and main sections remain dark, increasing the risk of accidents. Residents often note that during winter, when days are short, children must go to school under difficult conditions, while older adults are reluctant to go out in the evening.

In remote and hilly villages such as Ropalce, Lojane, or Vaksince, the challenge is even greater. Due to the distance from the center and the difficulty of extending the electrical network, many main roads and public areas have never been fully lit. In these locations, the lack of light is a serious barrier to mobility and social life.

Overall, the effects of this situation are evident, as people feel less safe. Women, children, and the elderly are particularly affected by this insecurity, as they are more exposed to risks when traveling

along dark roads. Additionally, the lack of public lighting limits social and cultural life: gatherings, events, and other activities often occur only during the day, depriving residents of opportunities available throughout the entire day.

The economic impact is also significant. Rural municipalities like Lipkovo rely heavily on local commercial activities and small businesses. When public lighting is lacking, these activities are restricted, as customers avoid going out at night. This leads to lower economic turnover and fewer revenue-generating opportunities.

Furthermore, the lack of lighting limits the municipality's tourism potential. Lipkovo has notable natural and cultural assets – from hilly landscapes and Lake Lipkovo to monasteries and historically significant mosques. However, the lack of lighting makes their use in the evening difficult, missing opportunities for local tourism development.

It is important to note that this situation is not due to a lack of willingness to improve conditions, but rather a combination of factors: the geographic distribution of villages, the use of outdated lighting technologies, insufficient municipal budget resources, and occasional interventions that failed to create a sustainable system.

However, there is a positive side. Residents of Lipkovo have indicated their willingness to contribute to addressing this challenge. A pilot initiative conducted in several settlements identified “areas of critical darkness,” where many families expressed readiness to help financially or through volunteer work if the municipality provides the necessary modern equipment. This solidarity clearly shows that public lighting is seen as a priority and a shared need affecting all residents.

Therefore, the challenge of public lighting in the Municipality of Lipkovo is more than a technical issue. It is closely linked to the safety of residents, the development of social life, economic growth opportunities, and the municipality's vision for the future. Addressing this challenge at the municipal level creates conditions for every resident – whether living in the center or in a remote village – to feel safe, move freely, and be part of a more active and developed community.

3. Alternative solutions considered

To address the challenge of insufficient public lighting, several different alternatives were considered, each differing in terms of costs, feasibility, and long-term impact..

Alternative 1: LED lighting in priority areas

The first option is to start by installing LED lights at the most critical points – schools, health centers, main roads, and local markets. This will immediately provide lighting where people move the most and where the risk is greatest. Such an investment could be funded through projects supported by the central government or international organizations, introducing modern and efficient equipment.

Although this approach does not solve the municipality's entire problem, it is expected to create a noticeable and tangible improvement in the daily lives of residents.

Alternative 2: Integrated municipal public lighting plan

A more comprehensive approach is to prepare a dedicated public lighting plan for the entire municipality. This plan would define investment phases, starting with the most critical areas and gradually covering all villages. The plan would use long-lasting, energy-efficient LED technology, while less-trafficked streets could be equipped with sensor lights that turn on only when movement is detected. Involving residents in identifying “critical dark areas” ensures transparency and makes the project feel like a shared effort. This is a long-term vision that not only brings light but also creates a sustainable management model for the municipality.

Alternative 3: Solar-powered lighting for remote villages

In villages farther from the center, such as Ropalce, Lojane, or Vaksince, where extending the electrical grid is difficult and expensive, solar-powered lighting is an appropriate solution. Solar-powered poles operate independently of the electrical grid and function even in areas lacking infrastructure. This solution would eliminate the darkness problem in the most isolated villages, reduce municipal maintenance costs, and be environmentally friendly.

Alternative 4: Collaboration with the local community and businesses

Another option is to engage residents and small businesses to contribute to public lighting projects. In some settlements, families have already shown willingness to help financially or through volunteer work. If the municipality provides equipment and technical support, while residents contribute labor or partial funding, the project can develop much faster. This model strengthens the sense of solidarity and collective ownership: lighting is no longer seen solely as the municipality's responsibility but as a common good maintained and supported by everyone.

4. Selected solution and proposed future actions

Based on the analysis of the current situation, statistical data, and discussions held with the residents of the municipality, the recommended approach is the implementation of an Integrated Municipal Public Lighting Plan. This plan represents the most sustainable and comprehensive solution for Lipkovo Municipality, which has over 27,000 residents spread across 22 settlements, with an average of five members per household. In such conditions – where more than 60% of secondary roads lack functional lighting and residents in 11 villages report frequent incidents and thefts in the dark – the need for an integrated approach becomes essential.

During focus groups organized in five villages as part of a pilot initiative, residents clearly identified “critical dark areas,” such as roads leading to schools and health centers. They also expressed

willingness to contribute financially or through volunteer work if the municipality provides the necessary equipment. This demonstrates that public lighting is not seen solely as a municipal service, but as a fundamental and shared community need that requires a comprehensive solution.

This plan would provide the most appropriate combination of elements:

- **Energy efficiency and durability** – LED lights and smart sensors reduce costs and maintenance requirements.
- **Inclusive expansion** – Covers all villages, initially focusing on the most critical areas such as Lipkovo, Slupčane, Matejče, and Orizare, gradually including the most remote settlements.
- **Community involvement** – Residents’ willingness to contribute makes the project financially more sustainable and fosters a sense of collective ownership.
- **Impact on safety and economy** – Reduces the risk of incidents, extends business operating hours, revitalizes social life, and opens opportunities for cultural and nature-based tourism.

Specific activities

1. Plan preparation (0–6 months):

- Identification of critical areas through digital mapping and focus groups with residents.
- Consultations with schools, health centers, and businesses to determine the most urgent needs.

2. First implementation phase (6–18 months):

- Installation of LED lighting in the main municipal centers and placement of sensors on less frequented roads.
- Use of existing poles to reduce costs.

3. Second phase (18–36 months):

- Expansion of lighting to more remote villages using autonomous solar systems (e.g., in Ropalce, Lojane, Vaksince).
- Installation of decorative and tourist lighting in cultural and natural areas (squares, Matejče Monastery, Lipkovo Lake).

4. Community engagement mechanisms:

- Consultative forums in each village to set priorities.
- Co-financing scheme with residents and businesses.
- Formation of small local teams for maintenance.

Financial implications

According to the analysis, the approximate cost to cover 11 priority villages is around 8.3 million MKD (135,000 EUR).

- 70% of the lighting will be provided by solar panels, equipped with motion sensors to save energy.
- 30% will use cost-effective LED bulbs, utilizing the existing poles.

This model significantly reduces energy and maintenance costs, ensuring that the initial investment results in long-term savings.

Timeline

- 0–6 months: Preparation of the plan and consultations with residents.
- 6–18 months: Installation of lighting in the most critical centers (Lipkovo, Slupčane, Matejče, Orizari, Nikuštak).
- 18–36 months: Expansion to more remote villages and installation of tourist/decorative lighting.
- Within 3 years: The municipality achieves full coverage with modern and sustainable lighting.

The Integrated Municipal Public Lighting Plan is the most appropriate solution as it addresses the issue at the municipal level, based on concrete data, in direct consultation with residents, and with the support of modern technologies that provide savings and durability. This is not just an investment in infrastructure, but an investment in safety, social vitality, and economic development for over 27,000 residents of Lipkovo.

**CLEANLINESS IS A
RESPONSIBILITY – FOR A
WASTE-FREE LIPKOVO**



Iljaz Ajvazi

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Cleanliness is a responsibility – for a waste-free Lipkovo

1. Summary

This document reviews the state of public cleanliness in the Municipality of Lipkovo, a municipality that consists of 22 settlements with over 22,000 inhabitants. The legal and institutional responsibility for maintaining public cleanliness lies with the Municipality and the Public Utility Company “Pisha”. However, the current situation is unsatisfactory and cause of concern. Streets and sidewalks are covered with garbage, the bins and waste containers are insufficient or not emptied regularly, and public areas often turn into illegal dumping sites.

The current approach is not working, as it is based on high costs without concrete results. Namely even though the Public Utility Company “Pisha” in 2024 generated revenues in the amount of over 21 million MKD, more than 13 million were spent on salaries and temporary employment contracts and in a way that lacks transparency and efficiency. According to surveys, 61.1% of residents believe that PUC “Pisha” is most responsible for the situation, while 46.3% of residents describe the municipality as “very polluted”. The majority of respondents (85%) believe that the level of civic awareness is unsatisfactory, which deepens the problem.

The key challenges identified relate to four areas:

- lack of a system and teams of cleaners for regular cleaning,
- insufficient and unplanned infrastructure,
- inefficient financial management and lack of transparency,
- absence of sustainable awareness raising campaigns aimed at the citizens.

The following measures were considered as possible solutions:

- placing additional bins and waste containers,
- strengthening the capacities of the Public Utility Company (PUC) "Pisha" and more transparency in the company's operation,
- conducting public awareness campaigns,
- organising community actions with the active involvement of youth and the diaspora,
- involving local businesses in the public spaces "management" model.

However, none of these measures, if implemented alone, are sufficient. Merely increasing the number of waste containers without regular maintenance will not yield results; awareness raising campaigns without institutional support will be just that, campaigns, while community actions are unsustainable without coordination by the Municipality.

The recommended solution is a combined (integrated) approach that connects the following measures:

- investments in infrastructure (placing additional bins and waste containers in the most polluted areas),
- strengthening the capacities and transparency of PUC "Pisha" by organising cleaning teams and public reporting,
- sustainable civic awareness campaigns,
- periodic actions called "Clean Lipkovo" in the community with the participation of the diaspora,
- involvement of local businesses in the maintenance of public spaces.

This combination of measures simultaneously encompasses infrastructure, management and raising civic awareness, thus creating the basis for a sustainable strategy for promoting public cleanliness. By doing so, the Municipality of Lipkovo can transform this deeply rooted problem into an opportunity for development, improving the quality of life of citizens, protecting public health and improving its reputation among visitors and the diaspora.

2. Problem – context and importance

The Municipality of Lipkovo, which consists of 22 settlements with over 22 thousand inhabitants, has a legal and ethical obligation to ensure the maintenance of public cleanliness. According to the Law on Local Self-Government, this is one of the basic competencies of the municipality, which includes the taking care of streets, sidewalks, squares and other public areas. The main task of PUC "Pisha" is to fulfil these obligations, established specifically to provide cleaning and maintenance services. However, the situation on the ground is not good and it is a cause for concern: streets covered in garbage, insufficient or uncleaned bins and waste containers, as well as public areas that often turn into small landfills.

A survey conducted within the framework of the youth initiative "For a Cleaner Lipkovo" in 2025 identified a number of structural problems and perceptions of citizens that confirm the thesis that public cleanliness is not an institutional priority. Of the 54 respondents from all villages, almost half (46.3%) assessed the municipality as "very polluted", while only a symbolic 1.9% considered the municipality relatively clean. The streets and sidewalks (48.1%), as well as the area around waste containers (31.5%), are considered the most polluted, which indicates not only insufficient infrastructure, but also poor management of it.

According to the perception of citizens, residents are the main contributors to pollution (64.7%), followed by passers-by (19.6%). This perception is closely related to the lack of civic awareness: over 85% of respondents consider the level of public awareness about waste disposal to be unsatisfactory.

On the other hand, 66.7% state that there are bins and waste containers, but in insufficient numbers to meet daily needs. In most cases, even those few bins are placed at the initiative of residents or expatriate associations, but are not cleaned regularly, forcing citizens to empty them themselves.

The problem extends beyond the infrastructure itself. On the one hand, PUC “Pisha” has a relatively large budget – over 21 million MKD in 2024, of which more than 5 million are subsidies from the Municipality. However, the analysis of the expenditure structure shows that a bulk of the funds (around 13 million MKD) are for salaries and temporary employment contracts, but there is no transparency regarding the number of employees, their duties and the effectiveness of the services provided. In addition, requests for access to public information often go unanswered, which reinforces the impression of no accountability. As a result, 61.1% of citizens consider the PUC “Pisha” to be the main “culprit” for the state of public cleanliness, while only 35.2% consider that it is equally responsible along with the residents and local communities.

In addition to statistical data, the situation in the field is even more alarming. Illegal dumping sites near rivers and streams, overflowing waste containers that are not emptied for days, dirty streets and neglected public areas, create a reality that seriously affects the quality of life of residents. This pollution is not only an aesthetic problem, but it also poses a risk to public health because of the spread of insects and diseases, unattractiveness of the municipality for visitors and expatriates and undermining of citizens’ trust in local institutions.

Another important aspect is the social and cultural dimension. Although 42.6% of respondents stated that they had participated in clean-up actions in the last six months, such initiatives are rare and not organised properly. However, the potential for improvement is obvious: 64.8% of residents expressed their willingness to participate in future actions. This latent enthusiasm indicates that, if a sustainable system of cooperation is established between the Municipality, PUC “Pisha” and the community (especially young people and expatriates), a new shared culture for the protection of the public areas can be promoted.

In this context, the current challenges are related to four main dimensions:

1. **System for cleaning** – absence of teams of cleaners for public areas and precise schedules for cleaning.
2. **Infrastructure** – insufficient number of bins and waste containers, often placed without proper planning and not having them emptied regularly.
3. **Transparency and finances** – non-transparent resource management by PUC “Pisha” and no reporting and communication with citizens.
4. **Civic awareness** – poor education and lack of sustainable awareness-raising campaigns.

These interrelated problems create a negative spiral: poor infrastructure and inefficient services reinforce the impression among citizens that public cleanliness is not an institutional priority, which reduces their willingness to comply with the rules. On the other hand, the lack of awareness and mass pollution further complicate the work of the municipality and the public company, which is why the existing capacities prove to be insufficient.

In conclusion, the state of public cleanliness in the Municipality of Lipkovo is unsatisfactory and has multiple consequences: it endangers public health, damages the image of the municipality, creates frustration among residents and visitors, and strengthens the feeling of distrust in the institutions. In addressing this situation, the solution should not be solely technical – an integrated approach is needed that combines investments in infrastructure, increased transparency and accountability of the PUC “Pisha”, as well as the involvement of the community in creating a new civic culture of cleanliness and care for the environment. Only through such a comprehensive approach can the Municipality of Lipkovo transform the current problem into an opportunity for development and better image.

3. Alternative solutions considered

Given the current state of public cleanliness in the Municipality of Lipkovo, the analyses and field data indicate that the problem is complex and requires a multifaceted approach. A single measure is not enough to bring about sustainable change; a combination of adequate infrastructure, institutional strengthening, civic awareness and joint community engagement is needed. The following are the key possible solutions that should be considered by decision-makers.

One of the simplest alternatives is **to strengthen the waste management infrastructure**. Placing a larger number of bins and waste containers in areas where there is greater frequency of people – such as main streets, sidewalks, squares and near schools - which stands out as an urgent measure. This is also evident from the responses of citizens, where 22.2% indicate a complete absence, and 66.7% believe that there are bins and waste containers but not enough. If this measure is implemented properly, there should be significantly less pollution on streets and sidewalks, which according to 48.1% of citizens are the most polluted public areas. However, the simple increase of the number of waste containers will not help without organising a system for regular emptying of waste containers.

Another significant alternative is **strengthening the capacities of the Public Utility Company "Pisha"**. This company, according to 61.1% of citizens, is perceived as the main entity responsible for maintaining public cleanliness. Improvement can be achieved by forming teams for cleaning public areas, increasing the number of employees, establishing regular schedules for emptying bins and waste containers, as well as by increased financial transparency. In 2024, the company had over 21 million MKD in revenue, of which more than 5 million MKD were subsidies from the Municipality, while most of the expenses (around 13 million) were for salaries and work contracts.

Therefore, the strengthening of PUC "Pisha" must inevitably be linked to managerial reforms and greater accountability to the public.

A third alternative, equally important, is **carrying out of continuous awareness-raising campaigns**. Lack of awareness stands out as one of the main causes of pollution, as 85% of citizens believe that current awareness is insufficient. Campaigns can be carried out at multiple levels: in schools, involving the imams in the mosques, placing posters and billboards with clear messages, as well as by utilising the social networks to reach out to the young population. These measures will contribute to the creation of a new civic culture that perceives cleanliness as a shared, rather than exclusively institutional responsibility. The weakness of this alternative is that, without practical support from appropriate infrastructure and institutions, there is a risk that it will remain at a symbolic level.

A fourth alternative is the **engagement of the community and diaspora in cleaning actions**. The data indicate significant potential for mobilisation: 42.6% of citizens have participated in cleaning actions in the past six months, while 64.8% expressed their willingness to get involved in the future. This voluntary engagement has a dual effect – on the one hand, it improves the condition of public spaces, and on the other hand, it strengthens collective awareness and a sense of shared responsibility for the environment. However, this approach risks to become uncertain and short-lived if it is not institutionally coordinated and supported.

The fifth alternative with long-term potential includes **involvement of local businesses in a public spaces “management” model**. This measure implies that each business will take care of the space in their surrounding in exchange for fiscal incentives or public promotion by the Municipality. Businesses have a direct interest in maintaining cleanliness because a polluted environment damages their image and repels customers. This model creates a sustainable mechanism and reduces the financial burden on the Municipality but requires clear agreements and willingness on the part of the businesses.

4. Selected solution and proposed future actions

Taking into account all potential options for a solution, the **combined approach** has been identified as the most appropriate and comprehensive measure. None of the listed alternatives, implemented independently, is sufficient to solve the problem. Increasing the number of containers does not guarantee cleanliness without regular cleaning teams, and awareness-raising campaigns alone do not produce results without institutional support. Therefore, the combined approach – which integrates investments in infrastructure, strengthening the capacities of PUC “Pisha”, continued education of citizens, active involvement of the community and diaspora, as well as participation of local businesses – represents the most realistic and effective alternative for sustainable improvement of public cleanliness in the Municipality of Lipkovo. The combined approach connects the three key pillars:

1. Improving the waste management infrastructure,
2. Strengthening the capacities and transparency of PUC “Pisha”,
3. Engaging the community, diaspora and local businesses.

This option is the most adequate one because it reflects the direct needs of citizens and ensures long-term sustainability. The data clearly shows that the problems do not stem from a single factor. If 66.7% of residents state that there are bins and waste containers, but not enough, and 22.2% report there are none, it indicates shortcomings in the infrastructure. On the other hand, 61.1% of citizens see PUC “Pisha” as responsible for cleanliness, while 85% believe that civic awareness is insufficient. Only a solution that simultaneously addresses all these aspects can bring visible results.

Priority activities

First, an intervention in the **public cleanliness infrastructure** is needed. New bins and waste containers need to be installed on streets and sidewalks, which according to 48.1% of citizens are the most polluted areas. This measure should not be based only on their physical deployment but must be accompanied by a system for their regular emptying by PUC “Pisha”. Visible improvement of public areas will also represent a clear signal to citizens that the institutions are actively addressing their needs.

Secondly, it is necessary **to strengthen PUC “Pisha”**. This reinforces citizens’ impression of inefficiency. Therefore, teams of cleaners should be formed for cleaning public areas, with a clear schedule for cleaning and emptying bins. At the same time, transparency should be increased by publishing financial and operational reports every three months, which would make the company accountable to the public.

Thirdly, **increasing civic awareness** should become an integral part of sustainable municipal policy. Only 14.8% of residents believe that citizens are conscientious enough not to litter. Therefore, it is necessary to organise at least two awareness-raising campaigns every year, in spring and autumn, involving schools, mosques, social networks and public spaces. These campaigns will contribute to changing everyday habits and creating a new collective culture for environmental protection.

The engagement of the **community and the diaspora** is also a key element. Organising periodic “Clean Lipkovo” actions in each season, involving young people, the non-governmental sector and expatriates, will strengthen the sense of collective responsibility and cooperation.

Finally, it is recommended **to involve local businesses** in the public spaces “management” model. This model enables each business to take care of the space in their surrounding in exchange for fiscal incentives or public promotion by the Municipality. This will ensure financial sustainability and reduce the burden on public institutions, making economic actors active participants in solving the problem.

Financial implications

- **Infrastructure (100 bins + 50 new waste containers) ~ 1.5 million MKD;**
- **Two mobile teams of cleaners (salaries, funds, fuel) ~ 3 million MKD /year**
- **Awareness raising campaigns (twice a year) ~ 300,000 MKD /year**
- **“Clean Lipkovo” - actions in the community ~ 200,000 MKD /year**
- **Transparency and communication with the public ~ 100,000 MKD /year**

Total annual needs: ~ 5.1 million MKD

This amount is reasonable considering that in 2024 alone, PUC "Pisha" received over 5 million MKD in subsidies from the Municipality.

Implementation timeframe

- **Short-term (0–12 months):** Placing bins and waste containers in the most polluted areas; setting up teams of cleaners; initiation of transparent reporting by PUC "Pisha"; first campaign for awareness-raising and action in the community.
- **Mid-term (1–3 years):** Expansion of the infrastructure according to needs; institutionalisation of semi-annual campaigns; inclusion of the diaspora in financing; structured cooperation with businesses for public space "management".
- **Long-term (3–5 years):** Transformation of PUC "Pisha" into a transparent and efficient enterprise; developing a sustainable culture of cleanliness in the community; significant reduction of pollution levels and improvement of the municipality reputation.

In conclusion, it is recommended for the Municipality of Lipkovo to get involved in a resolute manner in this integrated approach, which aims not only at temporary improvement, but also at sustainable transformation of the public environment. Only in this way can the quality of life of citizens be improved, public health be protected, and the image of the municipality as a clean and dignified space for its residents, visitors, and the diaspora be improved.

Innovative Initiatives in the Municipality of Ohrid

01 **Safe and Happy Playgrounds** Stefan Zdravevski (VMRO-DPMNE)

SAFE AND HAPPY PLAYGROUNDS



Stefan Zdravevski
–VMRO–DPMNE–

Safe and happy playgrounds

1. Summary

Children in public kindergartens in the Municipality of Ohrid face unsafe and inadequate yard spaces on a daily basis. Instead of an environment for carefree play and learning, yards are filled with cracked concrete surfaces, holes in lawns, and outdated equipment that increase the risk of injury. A survey found that 78.6% of parents believe the yards are unsafe, and as many as 92.9% demand their urgent reconstruction. Additionally, more than half of respondents noted that playgrounds are not accessible to children with disabilities, which exacerbates inequality and limits the right of all children to equal play.

The current approach to this problem has proven to be dysfunctional. To date, the municipality has invested unsystematically and without comprehensive analysis. The result is clear: infrastructure is outdated, safety standards are not met, and past investments were insufficient and lacked long-term impact. The absence of a strategic approach has created a situation in which educators are forced to caution children rather than allow them to play freely, while parents are increasingly losing trust in institutions.

The document considers several alternatives to improve the situation:

- Reconstruction and modernization of yard areas, including rubber safety pads and rehabilitation of pathways.
- New and inclusive equipment that is safe and suitable for children of different ages and abilities.
- Improved accessibility through ramps, customized walkways, and inclusive play structures.
- Installation of shading and horticultural arrangements to provide protection in summer months and create a pleasant environment.
- Involvement of parents and the community in the process, thereby increasing the sustainability of solutions.

After careful analysis of the data, the most urgent and widely supported measure is the reconstruction and modernization of the yard areas. Parents consider this intervention crucial (with over 90% support), and expert estimates indicate that an investment of approximately €30,000 for all five kindergartens would achieve the greatest immediate impact: reducing the risk of injuries by more than 60%, enabling safe daily use of the yards, and creating a foundation for further improvements.

This document clearly demonstrates that the issue of playgrounds is not merely an infrastructure problem, but a matter of rights and equality for the youngest children. Addressing this issue means investing in the health, safety, and future of children in Ohrid.

2. Problem - context and importance

In most kindergartens in the Municipality of Ohrid, the conditions of outdoor spaces are far from adequate for safe and quality play. Instead of modern and secure playgrounds that support development, children encounter damaged concrete paths, outdated equipment, and grassy areas scattered with pebbles and holes on a daily basis. These conditions restrict movement and increase the risk of injury, forcing educators to remain constantly vigilant. Such a situation highlights the need for a systematic approach to improving infrastructure for early childhood development.

A survey conducted among parents, educators, and municipal employees clearly confirms this situation. More than three-quarters of parents surveyed rated the kindergartens' backyards as unsafe or risky, and over 90% expressed concern about outdated and damaged equipment, uneven and hard surfaces, and the lack of shade, which is essential for protecting children on warm summer days. Children, who should play and learn through movement daily, in most cases either rarely use the yard areas or are restricted in their movement due to fear of injury. Serious deficiencies were further revealed: 78.6% of respondents believe the yards are unsafe or risky, and 92.9% demand their immediate reconstruction. Field analysis confirmed that the infrastructure is outdated, equipment is damaged, and accessibility for children with disabilities is almost non-existent. Additionally, 28.5% of respondents directly stated that the play surfaces are dangerous, and another 67.9% believe they are only partially appropriate. In other words, almost all parents perceive the surfaces as a source of danger rather than as a space for play.

Additionally, playgrounds are not designed for all children. Half of the parents surveyed emphasized that yard spaces are inaccessible for children with disabilities. The lack of ramps, customized pathways, and inclusive equipment excludes these children from playing alongside their peers. This means that in exactly the spaces where a sense of equality and unity should be fostered, barriers and divisions are instead reinforced.

The situation of each kindergarten in Ohrid has its own specifics, but the common picture is clear: the infrastructure is outdated, safety standards are not respected, and the equipment is inadequate for the developmental needs of today's children.

In the kindergarten "Jasna Risteska," for example, the yard is full of bumps, damaged paths, and outdated equipment. The lack of rubber mats increases the risk of serious injuries, and children with disabilities have almost no access to the space. "Biljana" faces even bigger problems: a broken fence, numerous holes, concrete surfaces, and completely inadequate play conditions. In "Rosica" and "Lychnida," the situation is somewhat better, but serious shortcomings remain—above all, the lack of

shade and modern equipment, as well as surfaces that do not provide protection in case of a fall. "Razvigorce" meanwhile, has a damaged fence and a lack of modern equipment, again raising concerns about the safety of children.

The problem is not only physical, but also developmental. Playgrounds should be places where children learn through movement, develop their motor skills, foster creativity, and experience the joy of playing together. In their current state, however, they are spaces that limit both children and educators. Instead of serving as safe outdoor classrooms, they become areas where fear of injury outweighs the desire to play.

Parents clearly recognize this—almost all respondents (92.9%) in the aforementioned survey requested urgent reconstruction of yard spaces, procurement of new and safe equipment, and improvement of horticultural arrangements. Interestingly, as many as 75% indicated they would actively support initiatives to improve the playgrounds, showing a strong shared will for change.

This situation is not only the result of insufficient funding, but also of the lack of a systematic approach. To date, the Municipality of Ohrid has not conducted a comprehensive, technically supported analysis of the condition of yard spaces. Consequently, past investments have been unsystematic and inadequate, resulting in playgrounds that fail to meet the needs of today's children.

In this context, the problem of playgrounds is not only a local issue, but also a matter of children's right to grow up in a safe, inclusive, and stimulating environment. Without play, there is no healthy childhood, and without a healthy childhood, there is no healthy society.

If this situation continues, the risks are multifaceted: an increased number of injuries, limited physical and social development of children, exclusion of children with disabilities, and reduced trust of parents in public institutions. Conversely, if the municipality acknowledges the problem and addresses it systematically, the outcomes will be long-term—safer and happier children, satisfied parents, motivated educators, and a positive image of local self-government as a genuine guardian of the future of the youngest.

3. Alternative solutions considered

Playgrounds in kindergartens are the spaces where children spend their most carefree moments—running, learning, making friends, and developing their creativity. For this to be possible, however, these spaces must be safe, accessible, and stimulating.

To address these challenges, several alternatives are considered that offer possible solutions. Each alternative contributes individually to the solution, but if implemented together, they would provide a complete response. Accordingly, the proposed alternatives are evaluated in terms of their feasibility, potential positive effects, and the time frame required for implementation.

Alternative 1: Yard reconstruction and modernization

One of the most common problems cited by parents is the inadequate condition of the mats. According to the survey, 28.5% reported that surfaces are dangerous, and 67.9% stated they are only partially appropriate. This indicates that almost all parents are aware of the risk of falls and injuries. Field analysis confirmed this: in the kindergarten "Biljana," the surfaces are full of holes and broken concrete, and in "Jasna Risteska," uneven surfaces make running risky.

Reconstruction with rubber safety pads, which can reduce the risk of serious injuries by more than 60%, is one of the most important measures. Additionally, remediation of paths and lawns will create spaces where children can play and develop their motor skills without fear.

Alternative 2: Procurement and installation of new, safe and inclusive props

Play is a key part of a child's development, but it cannot take place with broken, outdated, or unsafe equipment. According to the survey, 57.1% of parents believe the equipment is completely outdated and unsafe, while 35.8% say it is partially damaged. This means that only one in ten children has access to appropriate play equipment. Analysis showed that in most kindergartens, toys do not meet modern standards, and in "Razvigorce" and "Lychnida," there is a lack of diversity and functionality. The purchase of new, safe, and inclusive equipment will allow children of different ages and abilities to participate in play, stimulating their creativity and social development.

Alternative 3: Improving accessibility and inclusiveness

The right to play is equal for all children, but the current situation in Ohrid does not guarantee it. Only 7.1% of parents surveyed stated that yards are fully accessible for children with disabilities, while 50% categorically responded that they are not. In practice, this means that many children are excluded from everyday shared play. Analysis highlighted that ramps, customized pathways, and inclusive equipment are almost non-existent. Improving accessibility by constructing ramps, adapting equipment, and creating an inclusive environment will allow all children—without exception—to play together, fostering their self-esteem and sense of belonging.

Alternative 4: Shading and Horticultural Improvements

Another significant problem highlighted by parents is the lack of shade. Thirty-nine point nine percent (39.9%) reported that there is no shade in the yards at all, and 56.5% stated that there is only partial shade. This makes play almost impossible during the summer months, when temperatures are high and children are at risk of sunstroke.

The analysis recommends installing shading through textile or wooden structures and planting additional trees. Such measures will create not only a safe, but also a pleasant environment for play. Additionally, the horticultural improvements will enhance the visual appearance and improve air quality.

Alternative 5: Parent-Community Involvement

Changes in public infrastructure are most successful when citizens are involved in the process. The survey shows that 60.7% of parents want to participate in planning improvements, and 75% would actively support initiatives to enhance playgrounds.

This alternative is based on the principle of participatory engagement—parents and the community are not only users, but also partners in solving problems. Their involvement can include donations, volunteering, providing practical ideas, and fostering a stronger sense of ownership. When a community is actively part of change, it is more likely to be long-term and sustainable.

4. Selected solution and proposed future actions

After a detailed analysis of all options considered, it is recommended that the first and most urgent measure be the reconstruction and modernization of yard areas in all public kindergartens in the Municipality of Ohrid.

Reconstruction does not merely mean "patching" the old. It must establish a new standard of safety by installing rubber safety mats that, according to international standards, reduce the risk of serious injuries by over 60%. Instead of children approaching play with fear, we will create an environment where jumping, running, and occasional falls are part of healthy play, not a cause for emergency medical intervention.

The children's playground is designed as a natural and safe environment set on a grassy backdrop, composed of three surfaces with a rubberized base, interconnected by wooden slices and passages of wooden logs that add warmth and a natural feel to the space. Various playground elements are included, such as a carousel and a slide on the soft surface, as well as two wooden log installations that can serve both for play and seating. On one side, there is a gazebo that provides shade and allows for outdoor activities or teaching, with children seated on the logs and the educator standing under the gazebo. Part of the space is intentionally left open—a red surface designed for free play and creative use. The playground has an amorphous, irregular shape without sharp angles, creating a sense of freedom and a natural flow of movement, while the greenery and gazebo offer shade, visual balance, and a pleasant, porous boundary that separates the playground from its surroundings.

Financial implications:

Intervention type	Price per kindergarten (€)	5 kindergartens total (€)
Rubber safety pads	3,500 – 4,000	18,000 – 20,000

Remediation and levelling	2,000 – 2,500	10,000 – 12,500
Horticultural arrangement	included in the renovation	included
Total investment	~6,000	~ 30,000

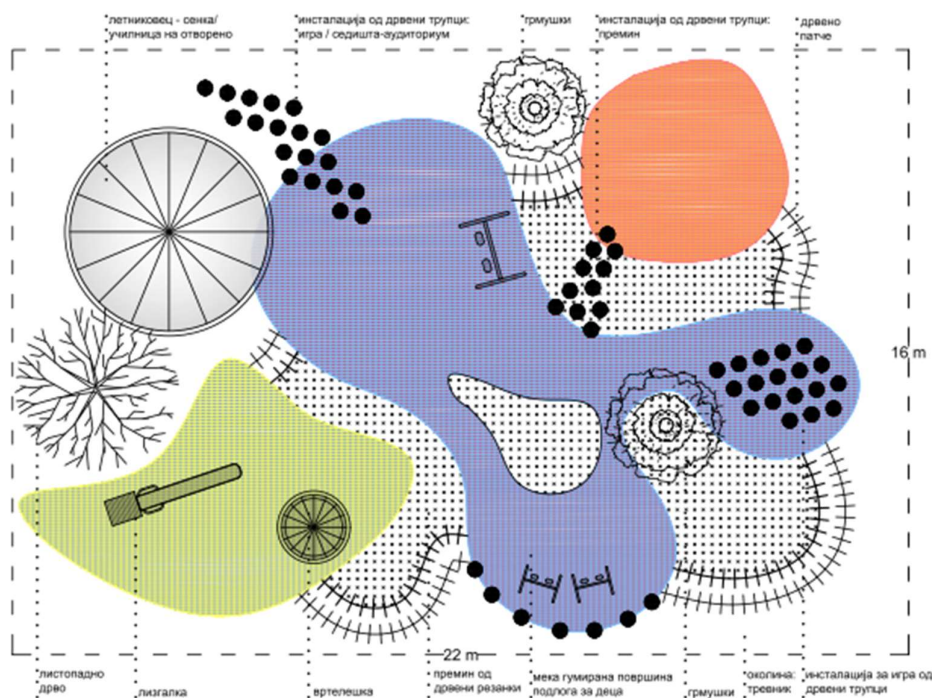


Figure 1: Idea for an imaginary playground in a kindergarten yard

The time frame is also clear. In the first six months, immediate measures must be taken—removing damaged surfaces and installing rubber mats on the most critical areas. Then, during the period from six to twelve months, the complete reconstruction, modernization, and arrangement of the yard spaces can be carried out. In just one year, children in Ohrid would have the spaces they deserve—safe, modern, and inspiring.

This investment is not merely a cost, but an investment in the future. With €30,000, the municipality will not only enhance the safety and health of its youngest residents, but also demonstrate that it listens to parents, supports educators, and builds the foundation for a safer and happier society.

Innovative Initiatives in the City of Skopje

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SAFE AND ACCESSIBLE TRAILS AT VODNO: SOLAR LIGHTING FOR EVERYONE



Nikola Belimov
–ZNAM–

Safe and accessible trails at Vodno: Solar lighting for everyone

1. Summary

Vodno has long been recognized as the “lungs” of Skopje, with trails used daily by thousands of citizens for walking, running, cycling, and enjoying nature. However, in the evening, the paths are almost completely empty due to the lack of lighting. This issue reduces the safety and accessibility of the mountain, particularly for girls and women, the elderly, and people with disabilities, who rarely feel safe going out at night. As a result, citizens are deprived of opportunities for evening physical activity, the potential for eco-tourism development is lost, and a sense of insecurity and exclusion is created.

The current infrastructure is inadequate. Existing facilities are minimal—only a few information boards and a single point with basic equipment—and provide neither reliability nor all-day accessibility. Previous attempts to introduce lighting have faced constraints including limited funding, risk of vandalism, environmental concerns, and administrative procedures, often resulting in stalled or partial solutions.

In analyzing the problem, several alternatives were considered for lighting the path from Sredno Vodno to the Millennium Cross, aiming to balance visitor safety, environmental protection, and financial sustainability. Among the options considered are the following:

- **Classic mains-connected electric lights:** Provide constant illumination but require extensive construction, incur high electricity costs, and can disrupt the natural environment.
- **Autonomous solar-powered lights:** Use renewable energy and have minimal impact on nature, but face limitations during winter and carry risks of theft or vandalism.
- **Solar lights with motion sensors:** Activate only when people are present or natural light is insufficient, prolonging battery life, reducing light pollution, and minimizing electricity costs.
- **Low pathway lamps:** Illuminate only the immediate path surface, with minimal impact on nature, but do not provide adequate visibility on critical sections
- **Hybrid model focusing on critical sections:** Lights only the most hazardous points, offering financial efficiency, but leaves parts of the trail unlit.

After a detailed analysis, **the recommended solution is to install solar lights with motion sensors** along the entire route from Sredno Vodno to the Millennium Cross. This approach balances visitor safety with environmental and financial sustainability. Implementation activities include technical analysis and planning, selection and procurement of high-quality lamps with motion sensors, expert

installation and testing, establishment of a system for regular maintenance and monitoring, and engagement with the local community for support and volunteer cooperation.

The financial investment for the complete system is approximately 147,000 euros, with annual maintenance costs of about 7,500 euros. In the long term, this ensures continuous safe lighting without significant additional expense. The project is suitable for co-financing, with at least 60% of funds potentially coming from public or private sources, ensuring sustainability and minimizing the financial burden on any single institution.

The implementation timeframe is as follows: 2–3 months for preparation and planning, 3–4 months for installation and testing, followed by continuous monitoring and maintenance. With this solution, the trail will become significantly safer and more accessible for all citizen groups. Vodno will be transformed into a public space usable at night, with minimal impact on nature, enhancing health, well-being, and the potential for eco-tourism in Skopje.

2. Problem - context and importance

Vodno has long been recognized as the “lungs” of Skopje. Every day, a large number of people use its trails for walking, hiking, cycling, or simply relaxing in nature. As the closest green oasis to the city, it is one of the most popular recreational areas. However, by evening, Vodno becomes almost completely empty. The reason is simple—there is insufficient lighting.

The lack of lighting creates a serious problem: visitors perceive the area as unsafe. While many would like to walk or run after work or in the evening, this rarely happens. Instead of Vodno being active throughout the day, much of its potential is lost due to darkness.

The problem is particularly acute on the trail from Sredno Vodno to the Millennium Cross. This trail is over 6 km long and includes sections with steep inclines and narrow curves. Completing the hike takes at least an hour and a half, which discourages many from attempting it in the late afternoon or evening. Limited visibility is not only inconvenient but also dangerous, increasing the risk of stumbling, falling, or getting lost.

The consequences are multi-layered. First, citizens’ opportunities for health and physical activity are restricted. At a time when exercise is crucial for well-being, the trails could provide far more opportunities if accessible in the evening. Second, the potential for eco-tourism is missed. Skopje could offer unique evening walks through the forested park with views of city lights, but this opportunity remains untapped. Third, the lack of lighting fosters a sense of insecurity and exclusion. In particular, girls and women, the elderly, and people with disabilities rarely venture to Vodno at night due to safety concerns.

The problem is further complicated by the fact that Vodno is a protected forest park. The area, spanning almost 4,500 hectares, is home to numerous plant and animal species. Uncontrolled lighting

could disrupt this ecological balance. Light pollution, for instance, affects birds and nocturnal animals, altering their natural rhythms. Therefore, while the need for lighting is clear, the solution must be carefully designed. Studies recommend the use of “eco-lamps”—lamps with a warm, yellowish light rather than harsh white light, directed downwards to avoid scattering into the environment, and equipped with systems that dim or turn off when no one is present.

In addition to environmental considerations, there are technical challenges. Currently, the trails have only a few information boards and limited infrastructure, with no existing lighting network. Installing lamps requires investment and careful planning. Solar poles with motion sensors, which activate only when a person passes by, are being considered, but their installation also necessitates protection against theft and vandalism. Past experiences in other parts of the country have shown that such systems can be vulnerable, so this must be taken into account.

The financial aspect is also significant. Analyses conducted for this document estimate that installing lighting would cost approximately 150,000 euros, with annual maintenance expenses of at least 7,000 euros. This is an important consideration, as lighting alone does not generate revenue despite the potential increase in visitors. Co-financing from the state, the city, or external donors is therefore required to ensure sustainability.

There are additional risks that slow the resolution of this problem. For instance, administrative procedures for projects of this kind often take months. Moreover, without proper coordination between the city, public enterprises, and the institutions managing the forest park, progress can stall or result in half-measures.

All of this demonstrates that the issue of lighting at Vodno is not merely a question of “no lights.” It is a complex combination of security, health, social, environmental, and financial challenges. Without a solution, Vodno remains an underutilized resource. Rather than being a space accessible to all citizens at any time of day, it becomes dark and unsafe after sunset.

In other words, darkness does not just take away the chance for an evening walk—it diminishes the full value that Vodno can offer to Skopje.

3. Alternative solutions considered

The lighting problem at Vodno is complex and cannot be addressed with a simple approach. Previous analyses have considered several alternatives, each attempting in different ways to provide safety and accessibility for visitors while protecting the natural environment and remaining financially sustainable.

Alternative 1: Classic mains-connected electric lamps

The first alternative is the installation of classic electric lights connected directly to the power grid. This traditional solution provides constant and reliable illumination with stable light intensity. Such a

system would ensure maximum safety and visibility along the entire trail, regardless of weather conditions or season. However, this alternative presents significant challenges. Its implementation would require extensive construction work, including trenching for cables, additional outlets, and potentially new substations. This not only substantially increases project costs but can also disrupt the natural environment. Furthermore, ongoing electricity consumption would incur operating costs, which are considerable over the long term.

Alternative 2: Autonomous Solar-Powered Lights

The second alternative is the installation of solar lights powered by energy from the sun and stored in batteries. During the day, they collect energy, and at night they provide illumination. This model is far more suitable for natural areas such as Vodno because it does not require excavation or connection to the electrical network. According to analyses, the cost of equipping the entire route from Sredno Vodno to the Millennium Cross would be about 147,000 euros, with annual maintenance costs of approximately 7,500 euros. Such a solution is sustainable if at least 60 percent of the total investment is co-financed. The advantages of this alternative include the use of renewable energy, no electricity costs, and minimal impact on nature. However, there are challenges, such as shorter daylight hours in winter, which can cause batteries to deplete faster, as well as the risk of vandalism or theft.

Alternative 3: Solar lights with motion sensors

The third alternative builds on the previous one by equipping solar lights with motion sensors. They turn on only when people are nearby or when natural light levels are too low. This saves energy and prolongs battery life, making the option more efficient. Research indicates that such systems can extend battery life by 30 to 40 percent. An additional advantage is the reduction of light pollution, since the lights are not constantly on, which benefits the local wildlife. However, this alternative requires the installation of high-quality sensors that reliably detect movement and light levels, which increases the initial cost.

Alternative 4: Low pathway lamps

The fourth alternative involves installing low beacons along the path itself. They are positioned at a height of up to one meter and illuminate only the immediate surface, without scattering light into the surrounding area. This provides visitors with a sense of security and orientation while minimizing the impact on the forest environment. Such lamps are widely used in parks and hiking trails around the world because they are economical and environmentally friendly. The main advantage is that they produce minimal light pollution, but their drawback is that they provide weaker illumination and are not suitable for sections with steep slopes or hazardous curves.

Alternative 5: Hybrid model with focus on critical sections

The fifth alternative is a hybrid approach that provides lighting only for the most critical parts of the trail. These include areas with the highest risk, such as tight corners, steep slopes, intersections, and viewpoints. Analyses indicate that about 40 percent of the path can be considered critical, and illuminating these sections would significantly improve safety. This model is more financially feasible, as it reduces overall costs and minimizes the impact on the natural environment. However, while the critical sections would be safe, the remainder of the trail would remain dark, which may still pose a challenge for some visitors.

4. Selected solution and proposed future actions

After a detailed analysis of all considered options, it is recommended to implement the third alternative—the installation of solar lights equipped with motion sensors along the path from Sredno Vodno to the Millennium Cross. This solution balances visitor safety, environmental protection, and financial sustainability.

The sensors ensure that the lamps turn on only when people are present or when natural light is insufficient, extending battery life by 30–40 percent and significantly reducing light pollution. The use of solar energy eliminates dependence on the power grid and lowers electricity operating costs, which is particularly important in a protected forest park.



Figure 1: The proposed state

Implementation activities:

1. Detailed technical analysis and planning – Identify optimal locations for the lamps, with particular attention to critical sections such as steep slopes, tight corners, and intersections.
2. Selection and procurement of solar lights with sensors – Choose models with proven durability and high-quality sensors that are resistant to vandalism and extreme weather conditions.

3. Installation and testing – Professionally install the lamps, including protective measures against theft and damage, and test the sensors to ensure proper functionality.
4. Maintenance and monitoring – Establish a regular schedule for inspecting, cleaning, and replacing batteries or lamps as needed.
5. Communication and involvement of the local community – Inform citizens about the project, encourage volunteer support, and utilize innovative platforms to report issues or provide suggestions.

Financial implications – detailed explanation:

- **Initial Investment:** Approximately 147,000 euros for the entire system from Sredno Vodno to the Millennium Cross, covering the purchase of lamps, sensors, solar panels, batteries, and installation.
- **Annual maintenance costs:** Around 7,500 euros, including regular cleaning, battery replacements every 3–4 years, repairs, and technical inspections.
- **Explanation:** The investment is justified because solar lights with sensors extend the system’s lifespan, reduce electricity operating costs, and minimize environmental impact. In the long term, the project ensures continuous safe lighting without significant additional costs.
- **Financial resilience:** The project is suitable for co-financing, with at least 60% of the investment potentially coming from public or private sources (state, city, donors), ensuring sustainability and minimizing the financial burden on any single institution.

Implementation timeframe:

- Phase 1 – Preparation and planning: 2–3 months (analyses, technical projects, procurement of equipment).
- Phase 2 – Installation and testing: 3–4 months (installation of lamps, testing of sensors, safety measures).
- Phase 3 – Monitoring and maintenance: continuous after completion of installation, with regular system inspection intervals.

With this solution, the trail will become significantly safer and more accessible for all groups of citizens, especially for girls and women, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. Vodno will be transformed into a fully utilized public space that can also be used at night, with minimal impact on nature. This will enhance the health and well-being of citizens, create opportunities for eco-tourism, and restore the full value of Vodno as the green lungs of Skopje.

**SKOPJE ON THE MOVE –
SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF
PUBLIC TRANSPORT IN SKOPJE**



Filip Janevski
–Voice for Macedonia–

Skopje on the move - Solving the problem of public transport in Skopje

1. Summary

The city of Skopje, as the largest urban center in the country with over half a million inhabitants, is facing a serious and systemic crisis in public transport. Although an organized system exists through JSP – Skopje and private carriers, its functionality has been steadily declining. Over the past three years, the number of passengers has remained almost unchanged, while the number of incidents has tripled, city subsidies have nearly doubled, and the quality of service has continued to deteriorate. Citizens appear to be paying more for poorer transportation, with rising dissatisfaction, compromised safety, and record-low trust in public institutions. The 2022 strike that left the city without public transport for the first time in its history, along with repeated work stoppages by private carriers, demonstrates that the current model is not only dysfunctional but also unstable.

This situation directly reduces urban mobility and increases traffic congestion, pollution, and the population's economic inactivity. A survey conducted for the purposes of this initiative revealed that none of the respondents gave the highest rating for regularity, cleanliness, or line availability—clear indicators of service quality. Focus groups further emphasized the perception that public transport is not a service of choice but one of necessity, lacking predictability, dignity, and trust.

To break this cycle, four alternatives have been examined. The Prague model demonstrates that integrating all vehicles into a unified system with a single ticketing scheme and a digital application enables greater efficiency and predictability. The example of Copenhagen shows that investment in bicycle corridors and intelligent traffic lights can redirect urban mobility toward environmentally friendly and rapid modes of transport. The case of Oslo, meanwhile, illustrates that fleet electrification and the creation of “mobility hubs” significantly reduce pollution and operational costs. In contrast, maintaining the current model requires minimal initial investment but further deepens inefficiencies and raises the cost of future reforms.

Based on this analysis, a combined solution is recommended, incorporating short-, medium-, and long-term measures such as optimizing routes, digitalizing fare collection and information systems, gradually developing bicycle infrastructure and introducing a city train, as well as investing in electrification and fleet renewal, complemented by enhanced safety and hygiene measures. Through these interventions, public transport can be transformed from a problematic system into a cornerstone of urban mobility—one that citizens would choose as their primary mode of transportation, not merely out of necessity.

2. Problem – context and importance

The City of Skopje is located in the northern part of the country and serves as both its largest urban center and its capital. According to the 2021 census, more than half a million citizens reside in the city. Due to its administrative, political, economic, and cultural significance, the City of Skopje has an organized public transport system operated by the Public Transport Enterprise (JSP) – Skopje, established in 1948. JSP serves the territory of all nine municipalities within the City of Skopje—Centar, Karpoš, Kisela Voda, Aerodrom, Gjorče Petrov, Čair, Butel, Gazi Baba, and Saraj—and several of its lines also extend to settlements in neighboring municipalities such as Ilinden, Sopishte, Petrovec, Čučer Sandevo, Studeničani, Aračinovo, and Zelenikovo, which functionally gravitate toward the metropolitan area of Skopje. In addition to JSP – Skopje buses, public transport also includes private carriers integrated into the ticketing system, for which they receive compensation per kilometer. Over the past few years, beginning in 2021, public transport in Skopje has been facing a worsening crisis. The situation can be summarized as follows⁶: in 2021, the JSP – Skopje bus fleet had an average age of 10.67 years, transported 23,135,530 passengers, and recorded 198 incidents. That same year, the City of Skopje allocated subsidies amounting to 340,000,000 denars to support the enterprise’s operations. By 2024, the average age of the bus fleet had increased to 12.98 years, the number of passengers reached 24,900,000, and incidents rose to 596. The City of Skopje’s subsidies for operational difficulties reached a record 645,000,000 denars. Within just three years, the number of passengers remained almost unchanged, while the number of incidents tripled—indicating a serious decline in safety—while citizens are effectively paying nearly twice as much, through subsidies, for a lower-quality service.

In October 2022, the city was left without public transport due to a strike over unpaid salaries for employees of JSP – Skopje. Since the end of 2022, private carriers have also suspended operations on several occasions because of unpaid debts, sometimes after prolonged periods of several months. An additional problem lies in the bus routes, many of which are several decades old and no longer reflect the actual distribution of the population or the city’s current infrastructure. As a result, peripheral municipalities—those located farther from the city center, as well as neighboring municipalities—are insufficiently connected to the rest of the city, making the system irregular, unpredictable, and inefficient. Another contributing factor to the crisis is the poor state of digital services, which are slow, frequently nonfunctional, and fail to provide accurate real-time information to users. This unfavorable situation in public transport reduces mobility, limits access to services, and undermines trust in institutions. It also contributes to increased traffic congestion and pollution, as well as decreased economic activity among the population.

⁶ The data were sourced from the operational performance reports of JSP Skopje, which can be accessed at the following link: <http://www.jsp.com.mk/dokumenti.aspx?kat=2>

The negative perception is shared by the majority of citizens who, in a survey conducted for the purposes of this initiative on a representative sample of 263 respondents (0.05% of the population of the City of Skopje), gave negative ratings for all aspects of public transport, including regularity, safety, cleanliness, affordability of fares, and availability of bus lines. A majority of citizens—51%—rated the cleanliness of public transport as 1 (completely unsatisfactory), while an additional 30.8% rated it as 2 (partially unsatisfactory). Only 13.3% of respondents gave a rating of 3 (good), and just 4.9% rated it as 4 (partially satisfactory). No respondent considered the cleanliness of public transport to be completely satisfactory. For the regularity of public transport, 33.6% of respondents gave a rating of 1 (completely unsatisfactory), 37.1% gave a rating of 2 (partially unsatisfactory), 23.1% gave a rating of 3 (good), and only 6.3% gave a rating of 4 (partially satisfactory), while no respondent rated regularity as completely satisfactory. A total of 60.9% of citizens rated public transport as completely or partially unsafe, while only 14.7% considered it partially or completely safe. Regarding fare affordability, 28% of respondents considered the prices completely or partially unaffordable, while the majority—35.7%—gave a rating of 3 (good); 18.2% rated it as 4 (partially affordable) or 5 (fully affordable). Furthermore, 57.4% of citizens stated that public transport lines are completely or partially inaccessible, while only 36.4% believe that the lines are partially or fully accessible to all. When asked about the biggest problem in public transport, 65.7% of respondents selected “all of the above,” an option encompassing delays, limited line availability, overcrowding, lack of cleanliness, and defective buses.

Aspect of Public Transport	Grade 1 (completely unsatisfactory)	Grade 2 (partially unsatisfactory)	Grade 3 (good)	Grade 4 (partially satisfactory)	Grade 5 (fully satisfactory)
Cleanliness of Public Transport	51	30.8%	13.3%	4.9%	0%
Regularity of public transport	33.6%	37.1%	23.1%	6.3%	0%
Public Transportation Safety	60.9% fully/partially unsafe		14.7% partially/completely safe		0%
Pricing Accessibility	28% fully/partially inaccessible		35.7%	18.2%	18.2%
Availability of Lines	(57.4% fully/partially unavailable)		(36.4% partially/fully available)		0%

The majority of participants in the focus groups conducted for the purposes of this initiative expressed negative opinions regarding all aspects of public transport. Similar to the survey findings, participants in both focus groups shared their ideas and proposals for improving public transport, including the

procurement of new air-conditioned eco-buses, the introduction of new lines, an increase in drivers' salaries, stronger control and sanctions against vandalism on buses, higher hygiene standards in vehicles, the development of a new application for JSP – Skopje, and the introduction of a new type of public transport in addition to buses.

3. Alternative solutions considered

Solving the public transport crisis in Skopje requires a systemic approach that encompasses infrastructure, management, financing, and citizens' habits within a long-term strategy for sustainable urban mobility. The analysis of successful European practices shows that effective models are founded on integration, ecological transition, and intelligent traffic management.

Alternative 1: Prague - Integration of public transport and unified ticketing system

Prague serves as an example of a highly coordinated model integrating various modes of transport—metro, trams, buses, suburban trains, and ferries—within a single ticketing and time system. This model allows:

- Simple use of different modes of transport without the need for separate tickets.
- Increased efficiency through a digital application for trip planning and contactless payment.
- Greater user trust, as the system is predictable, fast, and cost-effective.

For Skopje, the introduction of an integrated system connecting JSP with private carriers, taxi services, and potential cycling stations could be applicable. A digital application (mobile and web-based) would enable a complete “Mobility as a Service” (MaaS) platform—a system in which citizens purchase mobility rather than individual transport services.

Alternative 2: Copenhagen - The bicycle as a pillar of urban mobility

Copenhagen is a global example of the transformation of transport culture. Over 40% of residents use a bicycle on a daily basis, thanks to:

- Special "bicycle corridors", which are physically separate and safe.
- Smart traffic lights that recognize cyclists and prioritize their movement.
- Integration with public transport, allowing bicycles to be carried on trains or buses.

For Skopje, planning major “bicycle corridors” that connect the city center with peripheral municipalities (Karpoš–Center–Aerodrom and Gjorče Petrov–Center–Gazi Baba), introducing intelligent traffic lights for cyclists and pedestrians at the busiest intersections, and promoting a public bicycle rental system—potentially through a public-private partnership integrated into the public transport application—could be implemented.

Alternative 3: Oslo - Electrification and “mobility hubs”

Oslo is an example of a green transition in urban transport. The entire bus fleet is electrified, resulting in:

- Drastic reduction of carbon dioxide and noise emissions;
- Lower and more stable maintenance costs;
- Improved public perception of air quality and public transport.

In addition to the electric fleet, “mobility hubs” are integrated centers where citizens can switch between modes of transport (train, bus, electric bicycle) and combine mobility according to their needs.

For Skopje, a gradual electrification of the bus fleet could be implemented, starting with the most polluted lines through the city center, along with the establishment of “mobility hubs” at the Transport Center, Gjorče Petrov, and Aerodrom, offering electric bicycles, bicycle charging stations, and public transport information.

Alternative 4: Maintaining the current state of affairs

Maintaining the current system without introducing major structural changes can be perceived as the easiest and least risky option in the short term, as it does not require high initial investment, institutional restructuring, or significant political decisions. This approach avoids conflict with existing transport operators, maintains the current level of administrative control, and does not require changing user habits. At the same time, with minimal interventions such as periodic fleet maintenance and continued subsidies, public transport can continue to operate at a level that provides only the basic service.

However, maintaining the current situation has long-term negative consequences. The system remains financially inefficient, with low public transport participation in overall mobility and a continuous outflow of users to private cars, further burdening traffic and exacerbating pollution. The perception of public transport as a “socially minimal service”—rather than as modern mobility infrastructure—will persist, reducing public pressure for improvement and perpetuating a cycle of low expectations and low results. Over time, this scenario increases the cost of future reforms, as the longer the system remains dysfunctional, the greater the infrastructure and institutional deficits become.

4. Selected solution and proposed future actions

Based on the data from the analysis, the identification of problems, and the considered possible solutions, it is proposed to implement measures in the short, medium, and long term. In the short term, it is necessary to reorganize public transport, which involves adjusting and harmonizing timetables with the actual needs of citizens and the city’s conditions, reducing waiting times to less than five minutes, and ensuring that schedules are regular and fully adhered to; full digitalization of the fare

system and public transport services with a new company website and application; and modernization of the electronic display system at bus stations to provide accurate and timely real-time information to users. Furthermore, to enhance safety on public transport, frequent inspections by the company and the sanctioning of any type of vandalism on buses are required. To improve cleanliness, a system of regular and thorough cleaning of buses, both inside and out, should be established.

In the medium term, it is necessary to reorganize JSP – Skopje to reduce unproductive costs and improve the company's overall functioning, and to introduce a city train⁷ by utilizing the existing railway infrastructure in the city, which will enable fast and efficient passenger transport and reduce traffic congestion. In this context, and to promote alternative modes of transport, it is also essential to develop bicycle infrastructure to better connect all parts of the city with safe cycling paths, as well as to provide subsidies for citizens who wish to purchase a bicycle, thereby encouraging its use. Furthermore, improving accessibility for persons with disabilities across all types of public transport is crucial to facilitate mobility for this group of citizens and to enhance their economic participation.

In the long term, over the next five years, it is necessary to completely renew the fleets of JSP – Skopje as well as private carriers with new air-conditioned eco-buses, which will improve the quality of service and reduce the company's financial costs associated with frequent repairs of the already obsolete buses.

Specific activities

Proposed measure	Deadline for implementation	Financial framework
Reorganizing and harmonizing timetables	3 months	MKD 1 million
Digitalization of the fare system and services with a new website and application	3 months	MKD 3 million
Improvement and expansion of cycling infrastructure	24 months	MKD 150 million
Introduction of a city train	36 months	
Renewal of the JSP – Skopje fleet	48 months	

⁷ A city train is a form of public transport that operates on railway infrastructure within the city and its suburban areas, providing fast and efficient connections between different parts of the city.

These above-mentioned solutions will significantly improve public transport, restore trust among citizens, and expand the range of available transport modes in the capital. Additionally, by combining these measures, the city can gradually move closer to European standards for sustainable urban mobility and reestablish public transport as the first choice for citizens, rather than a last resort.

FOCUS ON THE YOUTH



Darko Nikolovski
–SDSM–

Focus on the youth

1. Summary

Youth participation in the City of Skopje is low and mostly symbolic, even though the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies was adopted in 2020, providing specific mechanisms for involving young people, such as youth councils, youth strategies, youth officers, and minimum funding from municipal budgets. Data from a 2025 survey clearly indicate that these mechanisms are not consistently applied: the number of active youth councils in the country decreased from 34 in 2023 to 28 in 2024, the number of youth strategies from 18 to 10, and in many municipalities, youth councils exist only on paper. In Skopje, more than half of young people have never participated in preparing programs or budgets for youth, over 60 percent stated they have no direct contact with institutions, and fewer than 20 percent feel included in decision-making processes. This situation creates apathy and distrust, and some young people openly state that they see the only solution as leaving the city or the country.

Three possible directions for improvement were considered: consistent application of the law, creation of inclusive and non-partisan youth policies, and the introduction of new channels for digital communication with institutions. After analyzing the possible solutions, the recommendation is a combined approach that merges the first and third options, i.e., stabilizing the institutional mechanisms provided by law and enhancing them through modern digital tools that enable young people to participate actively, transparently, and directly. This approach is the most appropriate because it addresses both the need for institutional stability and the way young people communicate and engage in public life today.

Planned activities include establishing a city youth council with at least 30 young people selected through a public call, opening a youth office with one officer and two youth workers under 30, developing the digital platform “Youth for Skopje” through which young people will propose initiatives and vote on priorities, introducing a youth budget amounting to 0.1 percent of the city budget (around 160,000 euros), and implementing an information and motivation campaign through influencers and youth organizations. Approximately 240,000 euros will be required to implement all activities in the first year, representing only 0.15 percent of the total city budget of about 160 million euros.

The timeline is clearly defined: in the first six months of 2026, the youth council will be formed, the youth office will be opened, and the awareness campaign will begin; by the end of the same year, the digital platform will be launched, and the first youth budget allocation will take place; during 2027, success will be measured through the number of active youth, implemented initiatives, and

satisfaction levels. The key goal is for at least 30 percent of young people in Skopje to feel that they can genuinely influence decisions, representing a twofold increase compared to the current level.

With this approach, the City of Skopje will demonstrate that youth participation is not merely a formality but a real mechanism for improving quality of life, strengthening trust in institutions, and retaining young people in the city.

2. Problem – context and importance

Youth participation within the local government of the City of Skopje remains low, fragmented, and mostly symbolic. Although the legal framework in North Macedonia formally guarantees youth involvement through mechanisms such as local youth councils, youth strategies, and consultative bodies, their practical implementation in the city is weakly supported, inconsistent, or entirely absent. As a result, a large number of young people in Skopje remain unaware of their rights, the available tools for participation, and the ways in which they can actively influence decisions that affect them.

Five years after the adoption of the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, young people in Skopje still face limited opportunities for influence. Although the law was passed in January 2020 through an inclusive and transparent process – with active participation from youth organizations, party youth wings, and representatives of the international community – its implementation today appears more like a formal obligation than a practical reality. The law provides clear mechanisms: a national advisory body, local youth councils, youth strategies, and youth officers. On paper, these tools should provide a space for young people to be heard, represented, and able to initiate change. In practice, however, these mechanisms either do not function or are reduced to mere formality.

Data from research conducted as part of an innovative initiative for preparing this document, carried out in Skopje in August 2025, confirms this picture. In qualitative focus groups, young people highlighted the non-functioning of local youth councils, which often exist only on paper. In the Gazi Baba Municipality, for example, the youth council has never become operational. Participants noted that local authorities lack genuine interest in creating space for youth, and even when young people are present in offices, this rarely results in concrete solutions.

This gap between institutional framework and reality is further reflected in the numbers: in 2023, there were 34 established local youth councils, but by 2024 their number had fallen to 28. A similar backward trend is observed in local youth strategies – from 18 in 2023 to only 10 in 2024. Although the law mandates the allocation of at least 0.1% of municipal budgets for youth, many municipalities do not allocate such funds at all, or they remain unused.

Instead of active involvement, young people in Skopje most often feel marginalized. In the survey, a significant portion stated that they are unaware of existing youth policies or who is supposed to

represent their interests. More than half of respondents have never participated in preparing a youth program or budget, and the majority feel that their role in local processes is minimal or nonexistent.

These findings align with personal testimonies from the focus groups. Young people from different neighborhoods describe a reality in which institutions are distant, contact with city authorities is rare, and accountability to youth is symbolic. “Our local youth council has never functioned,” said a 24-year-old participant from the civil sector. “There are young people, but no solutions.” This perception reinforces the sense that young people are not taken seriously, and that their energy and ideas remain untapped.

At the same time, the problems that young people experience in everyday life in Skopje highlight the need for their active participation. From urban congestion and overcrowding, to litter and neglected parks, to the collapse of public transport – young people are directly affected by the decisions of city authorities. Yet when these decisions are made without them, the gap between expectations and reality deepens.

Even positive steps at the national level, such as transforming the Agency for Youth and Sports into the Ministry of Social Policy, Demography, and Youth, or establishing a Research Division for Youth Interests, remain distant from the needs of Skopje’s youth. Without local implementation, even the best initiatives remain at the level of institutional promises.

All of this contributes to a growing sense of apathy and distrust. Some young people in the study openly stated that they cannot imagine European standards of governance in their environment because, as they say, “society does not function.” Others cite corruption and nepotism as major barriers that demotivate them from investing energy in their own community.

The conclusion is clear: the legal framework exists, but its implementation is insufficient. The local authorities in the City of Skopje do not provide adequate conditions for youth participation and do not create genuinely functional mechanisms. As a result, young people feel excluded from processes, their needs remain unmet, and their potential remains untapped. This context not only reduces young people’s trust in institutions but also increases their willingness to leave the city or country in search of better opportunities.

3. Alternative solutions considered

Youth participation in the City of Skopje, despite the existing legal framework, remains at a low level. Research conducted in 2025 confirms that young people rarely feel represented and that the mechanisms provided by the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies exist only on paper. Some municipalities do not have active youth councils, budget allocations for youth are minimal or unused, and many young people do not even know who is supposed to represent their interests. To

overcome this situation, concrete and well-designed interventions are needed. Below are three possible solutions to improve the situation.

Alternative 1: Strengthening the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies through consistent implementation in Skopje

One of the key problems with youth participation in the City of Skopje is that the mechanisms provided by the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies remain merely formalities.

The solution is the consistent implementation of the law at the local level, making the City of Skopje an example for other municipalities. This means establishing a functional youth council with a real role in policy-making, appointing a youth officer who is not a political appointee but a professional trusted by young people, and opening a youth office that serves as a genuine service – a place where young people can receive information, support, and opportunities. Research data confirm the need for such a solution: young people feel excluded, and inactive mechanisms only deepen the gap between institutions and this population.

Alternative 2: Creating inclusive and non-partisan youth policies

The second major problem identified by young people is the politicization and nepotism in youth processes. In focus groups, they clearly emphasized that young people rarely occupy leadership positions because political parties control access and leave little room for independent initiatives. Even when local youth councils exist, they often function only on paper due to such partisan influences. This undermines young people's trust in institutions and demotivates them from getting involved.

The solution in this case is to create inclusive and non-partisan youth policies, built “by youth for youth.” This means selecting and appointing youth officers and advisors based on competence rather than political affiliation. Local youth strategies should be developed through public consultations, surveys, and focus groups with young people from diverse municipalities and social backgrounds to reflect real needs. Research data confirm this: young people perceive corruption and nepotism as major obstacles, and most participants stated that their municipalities lack a functional youth council due to authorities' disinterest. Furthermore, the analysis provides clear recommendations – nepotism must be eradicated, and non-partisan personnel should occupy key positions. Only in this way can trust be built and space created for genuine youth participation.

Alternative 3: Improving communication and digital engagement of youth

The third key problem is the way young people communicate with institutions. Two-thirds of the research participants stated that they have never had direct contact with city authorities, and many believe that institutions use outdated methods that do not meet modern needs. Even when young

people try to reach out via social media, the feedback often consists of empty promises without follow-through. This creates feelings of distrust and alienation.

The solution is to establish modern and efficient channels for communication and participation. The city can develop digital platforms where young people can propose initiatives, vote on priorities, and track how decisions are implemented. The official city website should be transformed into an interactive tool for dialogue, and social media should become a space for transparent information sharing and rapid feedback. Analysis data confirm that young people see the digital space as the main opportunity for representation: they believe that influencers and social networks can serve as a bridge between them and institutions. If city authorities adopt this model, they will shorten the distance with young people and build a new level of trust.

4. Selected solution and proposed future actions

After reviewing the possible solutions, a combined approach is recommended that integrates the first and third proposed solutions: consistent implementation of the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, along with the establishment of modern digital channels for youth engagement. With these three alternatives, Skopje has the opportunity to overcome the current situation of symbolic youth participation. The first leverages the existing legal framework and requires consistency, the second targets the core issue – eliminating political influence and nepotism, while the third adapts communication to the realities of young people.

This approach allows institutional mechanisms to become functional and open, providing young people with access to tools that align with their habits and expectations.

This choice is supported by data from research conducted in Skopje: over 60% of young people reported having no direct contact with institutions, and more than 50% did not know who represents their interests. At the same time, most participants consider digital platforms and social networks to be the most effective communication channels. Therefore, only a combination of institutional stability and modern tools can restore the interest and trust of young people.

Specific activities

1. Establishment of a Functional City Youth Council

- Formation of a council with at least 30 young representatives selected through an open public call, not along party lines.
- The council will have the right to participate in creating the youth budget and an obligation to hold quarterly public sessions.
- Goal: Reduce the percentage of young people who have never participated in the preparation of a program or budget (currently over 50%).

2. Opening a Youth Office with Three Employees

- One youth officer and two youth workers under 30 years old.
- The office will provide support for youth initiatives, advice, and information.
- Goal: Reduce the number of young people who are uninformed about their rights (currently at least 40% according to the survey).

3. Development of the “Youth for Skopje” Digital Platform

- A platform for submitting proposals, voting on ideas, and monitoring the implementation of initiatives.
- Integration with the City of Skopje’s social media and obligation to publicly publish the status of each initiative.
- Goal: **Provide** youth access to the decision-making process (at least 10,000 registered young users in the first year).

4. Introduction of a Youth Budget

- 0.1% of the City of Skopje’s budget to be directly placed under the decision-making of young people through the youth council and platform.
- Goal: **Provide** real power to young people, not just symbolic participation.

5. Information and Motivation Campaign

- Use of influencers, student organizations, and sports clubs to inform young people about new opportunities.
- Goal: Increase the percentage of young people who feel included in decision-making (currently under 20%).

Financial implications

- Youth Office: salaries for three employees (an average of €700 per month) = approximately €25,000 per year.
- Digital platform: development and maintenance (around €40,000 in the first year; continued maintenance €10,000 annually)..
- Information campaign: €15,000 per year for marketing and collaboration with influencers.
- Youth budget: considering that the City of Skopje’s 2025 budget amounts to around €160 million, 0.1% equals €160,000.

Total: approximately €240,000 in the first year (including the development of the platform), which

represents only 0.15% of the city's annual budget. This is a minimal investment with a high return in the form of trust, engagement, and retention of young people in the city.

Timeframe

- First 6 months (2026): Establishment of the City Youth Council, hiring of a youth officer and youth workers, and launching the awareness campaign.
- By the end of 2026: Launch of the digital platform and the first allocation of the youth budget.
- 2027: Monitoring results – number of active young people, number of initiatives implemented, and level of satisfaction. The goal is that by the end of 2027, at least 30% of young people in Skopje feel they can influence decisions, which would be double the current level (below 15%).

With this approach, the City of Skopje will demonstrate that youth participation is not just a formality, but a real mechanism for improving the quality of life. The financial investment, compared to the city's large budget, is justified, and the timeline is realistic and feasible.

Innovative Initiatives in the Municipality of Tetovo

01

Youth Center in Tetovo

Lorina Karemani (Alliance for the Albanians/VLEN)

YOUTH CENTRE TETOVO: FROM NONE TO A FUNCTIONAL YOUTH ECOSYSTEM!



Lorina Karemani

–Alliance for the Albanians/VLEN–

Youth centre Tetovo: From none to a functional youth ecosystem!

1. Summary

Tetovo faces a critical shortage when it comes to youth spaces that are safe, inclusive and attractive, which hinders the personal, professional and social development of young people and increases the risk of them leaving the city. The 2020 Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policy established the legal basis for opening youth centres and establishing youth councils, with the aim of actively involving young people in public life. However, implementation is lacking – many municipalities have not established their own youth councils yet, youth centres often remain only on paper, local strategies (if any) are not implemented, promised funds are not provided. In the five years since the law came into force, only eight municipalities out of a total of 81 have opened youth centres, and only three of them meet the approved standards.

Tetovo's demographic situation deepens the challenge: out of 63,176 residents, 15,656 are young people aged 15 to 29, representing over a fifth of the population. The population decline and the emigration of young people have limited the most valuable human capital, jeopardising the potential for social and economic development of the city. Young people currently do not have easy access to structured and inclusive activities; information about existing opportunities is often lacking, while current spaces do not meet their needs. Local surveys show clearly this shortcoming: 44% of young people believe that there are no functional youth spaces, 46% do not participate in activities due to a lack of information, and 66% say that they would visit a youth centre several times a week if one existed.

In this context, the opening of a multifunctional Youth Centre is considered the most sustainable and effective solution. Such a centre is not just a physical space; it is a “youth life laboratory” where young people can develop practical skills, engage in cultural and sports activities, engage in debates and receive mental health support and career counselling. Programmes would be organised on a weekly, monthly and annual bases, ensuring continuity and full inclusion. For example, weekly activities would include IT and foreign languages courses, a debate club, art workshops and recreational sessions, while monthly and annual programmes would offer professional panels, art exhibitions, innovation hackathons, job fairs and cultural events that encourage active participation.

The innovative aspect of the Youth Centre will also be reflected in the way this centre will be managed. Young people will be involved in decision-making through their membership in the Youth Council and the Supervisory Board, becoming co-managers of the space, not just beneficiaries. This ensures that activities are tailored to the real needs of young people and encourages a sense of ownership and belonging. The financing of the centre will be a combination of the municipal budget,

international funds and its own resources from symbolic activities or sponsorships, guaranteeing long-term sustainability and transparency.

Investing in the Youth Centre “Tetovo” is a strategic step to stop migration, strengthen the position of young people and strengthen their connection with local institutions. Through continuous activities, protected spaces and inclusive programmes, this centre will create an engaged youth community, increase civic participation and contribute to the personal, professional and social development of young people, ensuring a more sustainable future for Tetovo.

2. Problem – context and importance

The Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policy, adopted in January 2020, is a cornerstone in the efforts made to put young people at the centre of social development. Its adoption was welcomed as a historic step towards democratising the decision-making process and creating institutional mechanisms that guarantee the active inclusion of the younger generation in public life. The law clearly stipulates that as youth are considered young people at the age between 15 and 29, giving this group a political and legal identity and laying the foundations for local youth councils, as spaces of participatory democracy, as well as for youth centres, as direct bridges between the municipalities and the young people. The council is expected to develop local strategies aligned with the national vision and provide funds dedicated to youth policies, creating a comprehensive legal architecture that aims to be long-term and transformative.

However, the reality of the implementation of this law is very unclear. Many municipalities have not established their own youth councils, youth centres often remain only on paper, local strategies are neglected, while promised funds are not provided. The state structure envisaged for coordination remains underdeveloped, leaving the process fragmented and without sustainable support. In this context, youth centres, which the law envisions as youth life laboratories and as spaces where young people get information, development programmes and social and professional support, remain the weakest link in this vision. The law requires each municipality to establish a youth centre within five years of its entry into force, but five years later only eight municipalities in the country have opened youth centres, and of these only three manage to meet the standards approved by the Agency for Youth and Sports (now the Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth).⁸

According to the 2021 census, Tetovo has a population of 63,176, of which 15,656 are young people aged 15 to 29, representing 20.8% of the total population.⁹ Compared to 2002, when Tetovo had over 86,000 inhabitants, the city has lost more than 23,000 people, mainly due to emigration. However,

⁸ Agency for Youth and Sports, Report on the Implementation of the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies, 2024. (Агенција за млади и спорт, Извештај за спроведување на Законот за младинско учество и младински политики, 2024.)

⁹ State Statistical Office, "Population Census Results", 2021" (Државен завод за статистика, „Резултати од пописот на населението, 2021“), <https://www.stat.gov.mk>.

despite this demographic contraction and painful reality, the number of young people justifies the existence and functioning of a youth centre and, considering that Tetovo is a city with two universities, the need for more such centres is evident.

At the national level, North Macedonia is one of the countries in the Western Balkans region most affected by youth emigration. Data from the State Statistical Office show that the country's population has decreased significantly over the past two decades, as a result of the mass migration of young people to EU countries and beyond.¹⁰ This trend is closely linked to the lack of good quality opportunities for education, employment and social participation at the local level. Tetovo, as one of the largest urban centres in the country, has not been circumvented by this phenomenon, on the contrary, it is one of the most affected regions.

One of the most important needs of young people in Tetovo is the opening of standardised youth spaces, which would offer regular, inclusive and sustainable programmes. Currently, the youth activities that take place are scattered and disorganised, with no clear annual calendar, so many young people are often not informed about the existing opportunities. This indicates an unused space, where investing in a youth centre would enable the creation of a permanent platform for the personal, professional and social development of the younger generation.

The youth centre will strengthen the participation of young people in decision-making processes at the local level, turning their potential into a driver of positive changes for the community. Given that migration remains a major challenge for the city and the country, providing quality opportunities within Tetovo would increase the motivation of young people to contribute to their city and strengthen their connection to local institutions.

Furthermore, a survey conducted at the local level shows that 66% of young people would visit a youth centre several times a week, if such a centre existed. The analysis conducted through surveys and focus groups clearly showed that young people want a place where activities are regular and continuous, where they feel protected and where every community feels included. The average rating of the regular activities programme is 3.98 out of 5, indicating that this is a top priority for young people. Safety is also very important, with an average of 3.96, highlighting the need for a protected and safe environment. Openness to all communities received a rating of 3.92, highlighting the importance of the centre being inclusive and providing opportunities for all. Access to public transport, with an average of 3.62, also remains a key factor for access and inclusion of young people.

The high interest and clear priorities are also reflected in the future youth engagement: 66% of young people stated that they would visit the centre several times a week, showing a high potential for active

¹⁰ State Statistical Office, "Demographic Data, 2002–2021" (Државен завод за статистика, „Демографски податоци, 2002–2021“), <https://www.stat.gov.mk>

participation. Only 14% made specific suggestions for a location, leaving the decision to the experts and authorities, provided that accessibility and public transport are taken into account.

The results of the analysis show some critical needs and priorities of young people: lack of space and information are the main obstacles for young people in Tetovo; educational activities such as IT courses, foreign languages and art, as well as psychological counselling are particularly sought after. Cultural, sports and entertainment events are considered essential mechanisms for socialisation. Inclusiveness is a clear requirement: the centre should be open to all communities and genders. This shows that a strong communication strategy, sustainable partnerships with institutions and activity programmes will influence the personal, social and professional development of young people, as well as the strengthening of the community.

These results are a clear message and a concrete opportunity to build policies that correspond directly to the demands of the younger generation. Therefore, the opening of a youth centre in Tetovo should be viewed as a strategic and necessary investment to stop the migration trend, restore the trust of young people and ensure that the next generation will stay and contribute to the development of our city.

3. Alternative solutions considered

Given the described situation, the discussion should not focus on whether the city needs a youth centre, but on what it should look like, how it would function, and how it could contribute to reducing migration and empowering of young people. Considering the challenges described above, several possible alternatives were considered:

Alternative 1: To leave things as they are

One option would be to leave things as they are, with scattered and random activities, no dedicated space and low budget costs. This model seems economical at first glance, but it will result in growing social consequences, worsening the current situation and increasing the demotivation of young people. The lack of structure and continuity will stop the development of professional and social skills and will strengthen the idea of youth migration out of the city.

Alternative 2: A mini centre with limited activities

Another option is to create a mini centre, a small space for some monthly courses, such as language courses or basic IT skills. This model can partially meet the demands of young people and can offer limited opportunities for personal development, but it does not ensure long-term impact and does not create a sustainable youth community. The lack of diversity of activities and ongoing support makes this model inadequate to address the many needs of the younger generation.

Alternative 3: Multifunctional youth centre

The most comprehensive and sustainable solution is the establishment of a multifunctional youth centre. This space will offer IT and multimedia laboratories, art studios, podcast and music studios, sports and recreation spaces, a small library, a debate hall, as well as a mental health and career counselling centre. The centre will not be just a physical space, but a living programme with weekly, monthly and annual activities, guaranteeing continuity and diversity.

A key element that distinguishes this option is the management: The centre will have an open model, where the young people, through the Youth Council and the Supervisory Council, will participate in the decision-making. They will not only be beneficiaries, but also co-managers of the space. The financing of the centre will be a combination of a number of sources: the municipal budget, international funds and its own resources from symbolic activities or sponsorships, guaranteeing long-term sustainability and transparency.

The multifunctional youth centre will not be just a building, but a new ecosystem for the young people of Tetovo. It provides safety, access, inclusion, and sustainable programmes that give meaning to civic participation. It is a necessary investment in the future of Tetovo, to preserve the energy and creativity of the younger generation, and to ensure that the city does not lose its greatest strength – its youth.

4. Selected solution and proposed future actions

The third option – a multifunctional youth centre – is recommended as it represents the most complete, comprehensive and long-term solution to the needs of young people. Unlike other options that offer fragmented or limited approaches, this centre will create a vibrant ecosystem that combines IT and multimedia labs, cultural, artistic and sports activities, mental health centres and career counselling, as well as a unique management model by involving the young people in decision-making process. This option directly responds to the needs of young people, based on evidence-based data collected in focus groups and surveys with young people: 16% of young people seek employment and career counselling, 14% language and IT skills courses, 14% mental health counselling, 12% cultural and musical activities and 10% sports and recreation. 44% of young people state that there are no functional youth spaces, while 46% do not participate in activities due to lack of information. However, 66% said they would visit the centre several times a week if it existed, indicating a high potential use and direct impact.

Based on the specific data concerning their interests, this centre guarantees high participation, skills development and community empowerment, transforming young people from passive beneficiaries into active actors and co-managers of the space. This makes the third option one of the most significant and necessary investments for the future of Tetovo.

Recommendations and activities

The youth centre should be developed on a sustainable basis, integrating the following elements:

- **Programme activities:** A combination of educational courses, vocational training, cultural and sports activities. The activities should be regular and include all communities, encouraging active participation.
- **Communication and information:** Developing online platforms, social networks and promotional activities to raise awareness among young people.
- **Partnerships and funding:** Collaborating with schools, universities, businesses and local organisations for funding and space. This will ensure that the centre has stable financial and institutional support.
- **Access and transport:** Ensuring easy access via public transport for all young people, guaranteeing inclusive participation.
- **Active participation of young people:** Their involvement in decision-making and planning through youth forums and public consultations.

The youth centre would offer a combination of weekly, monthly and annual activities covering practical skills, culture and psychosocial well-being. The special programme includes:

- **Debate Club** – weekly meetings with mentors to develop rhetorical and argumentation skills.
- **Local League** – monthly events with schools and universities for collaboration and practice.
- **Debate Academy** – seasonal programmes on rhetoric, fact-checking and professional debate.
- **Local Policy Debates** – civic engagement and post-debate reporting for transparency and civic engagement.

The principles of the programme would be: steady pace, a combination of practical employability skills, culture (identity and creativity) and psychosocial well-being.

For example, the weekly schedule would be as follows:

- Monday: IT Basic Skills (17:00–19:00), YOGA/Stretching (19:15–20:00)
- Tuesday: English B1 (17:00–18:30), Debate Club (18:45–20:15)
- Wednesday: Graphic Design (17:00–19:00), Movie Night and Discussion (19:15–21:00)
- Thursday: Programming (Python/JS) (17:00–19:00), Live Music/Open Mic (19:30–21:00)
- Friday: Career Workshop (Short CV/Interview) (17:00–18:30), Team Games (18:45–20:00)
- Saturday: Art Workshop (11:00–13:00), Tournament in ping-pong/chess (16:00–18:00)
- Sunday: Open space and community exhibition (15:00–19:00)

For example, the monthly schedule would be as follows:

- Week 1: Multicultural photography exhibition; Seminar “Youth Mental Health”.
- Week 2: Hack-evening (4-hour mini-hackathon); Acoustic concert.
- Week 3: “Careers in IT/Design”: panel with local employers; Internship Fair.

- Week 4: Short film festival; Public debate on the local youth policy.

For example, the annual calendar would look like this:

Month	Fixed activities	Flexible activities
January	Members' meeting, technology workshop	Fairs and Youth Ideas
February	Leadership Coaching	Discussion with the Mayor
March	Art Workshop	Photo Exhibition
April	Activism Week	Eco-marathon
May	Youth Theatre Plays	Business Mentor Session
June	Local Music festival	Movies Night in Nature
July	Summer Camp	Green Skills Workshop
August	Sports Activities	Mountain Hiking
September	Back to the activities after the summer	Innovation Hackathon
October	Human Rights Training	Youth Work Fair
November	Youth Day Campaign	Visual Art Exhibition
December	End of the Year Party	Gala Dinner for the volunteers

Recommendations for the autumn season: Special focus should be placed on activities that encourage youth participation after the summer holidays, such as innovation hackathons, youth work fairs and human rights trainings. This will ensure continuity of engagement, skills development and the creation of an active and involved youth community.

Costs for investing in the interior and equipment of the youth centre:

Component	Total amount (€)
Furniture: work/conference tables, ergonomic chairs, couch, reception tables, shelves/cabinets	2,300 – 4,800
Technology and equipment: TV screen, projector, white board, flip chart	1,000 – 1,700
Decor and ambiance: curtains, paintings, decorative plants, guitar	1,200 – 2,200
Lighting and accessories: pendant lights, LED lighting, water dispenser/refrigerator	600 – 1,400
Construction and preparatory work: painting walls, parquet/laminate flooring, furniture assembly and electrical work	3,000 – 4,500

This cost analysis is done based on local market prices and ensures that the investment is sustainable and affordable for the municipality. Each component represents a strategic investment in increasing youth participation, developing capacities and creating a safe, inclusive and inspiring space.

A creative solution for the Youth Centre



The Youth Centre "Tetovo" would not be just a building, but a strategic space that aims to build a empowered, inclusive and engaged youth community. With a clear plan, continuous activities, safe and inclusive spaces and sustainable financial support, this centre will become the main driver of youth living in Tetovo. The expected high youth participation and a clear understanding of their priorities show that investing in this centre is a necessary step to stop the exodus of youth, strengthen social capital and create a better future for the city and its youth.

Innovative Initiatives in the Municipality of Centar

01

My Space: Mental Health of High School Students

Sofia Dashtevska (VMRO-DPMNE)

02

Light Up the Game: Safe and Accessible Sports Areas and Playgrounds in the Municipality of Centar

Aleksandar Kochev (VMRO-DPMNE)

A HEALTHY MIND, A BRIGHT FUTURE: AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH



Sofia Dashtevska
–VMRO–DPMNE–

A healthy mind, a bright future: An innovative approach to youth mental health

1. Summary

This document addresses the mental health of high school students in Skopje, a significant but insufficiently addressed issue. The high school years are a period of intense physical, emotional, and social change, during which young people experience anxiety, depression, stress, and exposure to violence. The current system rarely offers reliable, accessible, or trustworthy support, and stigma, along with distrust in institutions, prevents students from seeking help. Existing initiatives have reached only a limited number of schools and have not led to systemic change, resulting in increasing anxiety and depression, reduced motivation, and a higher risk to long-term social and economic stability.

The analysis of the problem and possible solutions identified several potential alternatives: digital platforms for anonymous support; strengthening schools with additional psychologists and regular training; peer education programs; integration of mental health into the curriculum; and greater involvement of families and the local community. Each alternative addresses a specific aspect of the problem, but none provides a complete and sustainable solution on its own.

Recommended solution: a combined approach that integrates a digital platform for anonymous support with strengthened school vocational services and local activities. The platform ensures accessible and confidential assistance, while school psychologists provide continuous and professional care. Public campaigns, workshops, and family engagement help break down stigma and connect institutional support with the daily lives of young people.

The activity for the implementation of the recommended solution is planned to be carried out in three phases: in the first (2025/2026), it will be piloted in 3–5 schools, including platform development, engagement of psychologists, teacher training, and the "Let's Talk Openly" campaign (€60,000–70,000); in the second (2026/2027), the project will be expanded to all schools in Skopje by upgrading the platform, including all school psychologists and additional resources, regular trainings, and local activities (€70,000–90,000 per year); while the third phase (2027–2030) envisions national integration with continuous activities and gradual incorporation into teaching, with costs for Skopje of €20,000–30,000 per year. This model is modern, practical, and sustainable: it monitors the reality of young people, ensures stability and continuity, begins with a pilot phase for testing and gradual expansion, and builds trust among students, psychologists, parents, and institutions. Skopje thus establishes a system that effectively enhances the psychological well-being of its youth.

2. Problem - context and importance

The mental health of young people is one of the most important, yet also the most neglected, aspects of their development. The high school period is a time of intense change—physical, emotional, and social—during which young people shape their personality and identity. Unfortunately, in this sensitive phase, they face serious psychological challenges, while the system rarely provides adequate support.

In the City of Skopje, there are 21 high schools—5 gymnasiums and 16 vocational schools—which educate a significant portion of the country’s young population. In the 2024/2025 school year alone, the number of students in regular secondary schools nationwide reached 67,143, many of whom are concentrated in Skopje. Although the number of students is gradually decreasing, the pressure on their mental well-being is increasing. Research by UNICEF and WHO confirms that young people are increasingly exposed to anxiety, depression, stress, and violence, yet rarely seek help—mostly due to stigma and distrust in institutions.

A survey conducted in 2025 among high school students nationwide provides a clear picture of the problem: almost 95% of students report stigma and fear when seeking psychological help. Although 72.7% stated that there is a psychologist in their school, half believe that the support is insufficient, and 88.6% have at some point felt the need for psychological help but did not seek it. This is an alarming fact—young people need support, but the system does not provide a reliable, accessible, and trustworthy channel to obtain it.

The causes of this situation are multifaceted. Although schools employ psychologists and pedagogues, their numbers are insufficient, and they are frequently burdened with administrative duties instead of providing direct support to students. Moreover, some lack specialized training to deal with contemporary challenges such as cyberbullying, crisis intervention, and post-traumatic reactions. At the same time, students are often discouraged from seeking help. Psychologists involved in the educational process report that the main challenge in their daily work is the reluctance of young people to open up about their problems, driven by stigma and fear of being judged.

The broader life context further complicates the situation. The main sources of stress are school commitments and exams (22.7%), relationships with friends (20.5%), and self-criticism (15.9%). Additionally, social networks play a dual role: they provide connection and support, but they also create unrealistic standards, increase anxiety, and enable cyberbullying. It is therefore not surprising that students often withdraw and cope with problems through passive mechanisms such as listening to music or sleeping, rather than through healthy activities like sports or talking with family.

The current approach to tackling this challenge is limited and fragmented. Previous initiatives—such as peer-to-peer education programs or limited teacher training—have reached only a small number of schools and have not resulted in systemic change. For example, during the Covid crisis, only 25

teachers and psychologists were trained, a symbolic number in relation to the needs of the entire high school population.

The consequences of this situation are already visible: increasing anxiety and depression, reduced motivation to learn, more peer conflicts, and heightened violence. As experts emphasize, these shortcomings not only affect academic success but also have long-term implications for the social integration and economic stability of young people. Students leaving school with unresolved psychological problems face greater risks for their future, and society as a whole bears the consequences.

However, there are also positive signs. Awareness among young people of the importance of mental health is high—93% believe it is just as important as physical health. Many recognize the need for formal education on this topic, and 84% would use digital support tools, particularly if they are anonymous and accessible. This opens the possibility for innovative solutions that combine traditional forms of support with digital services.

In the local context, this issue is of utmost importance for Skopje. The majority of high school students in Macedonia study here, meaning that the problem is most pronounced and visible in the capital. The lack of systemic support is not merely an individual problem for students—it directly affects the social climate, families, and the educational system. Young people who feel they have no one to turn to are at risk of isolation, reduced productivity, and serious developmental difficulties.

3. Alternative solutions considered

When addressing the mental health of young people, particularly high school students in Skopje, the question increasingly arises: what solutions can overcome feelings of shame and distrust while providing reliable and accessible support? Based on analyses, surveys, and discussions with professional staff, several clear alternatives emerge. Each of these contributes to the solution on its own, but when applied together, they could form a comprehensive approach. Given this, the proposed alternatives are evaluated from the perspective of their feasibility, potential positive impact, and the time required for implementation.

For many young people, the first and most logical place to look for answers is the Internet. It is therefore not surprising that 84.1% of high school students surveyed would use digital tools to support mental health. Most emphasize the need for an anonymous online conversation with an expert (50%), as well as the ability to take self-assessment tests, receive brief advice and information, or simply have a space where they can "pour out" their thoughts without being judged.

This approach suits new generations who grow up with mobile phones in hand and experience digital communication as natural. Data shows that students would use such platforms most often during times

of stress or anxiety (56.8%), when they need someone to listen but do not want face-to-face interaction (47.7%), or when they want to learn how to cope with challenges (45.5%).

Moreover, digital solutions address the biggest obstacle—stigma. Almost 95% of young people acknowledge that shame is a major reason they do not seek psychological help. This makes anonymity a key requirement. Of course, challenges remain in ensuring security and confidentiality, as well as providing content created by experts. Nevertheless, this highlights the potential for a national digital platform, which could also serve the wider community in addition to students.

Alternative 2: Strengthening institutional support in schools

Although most high school students are aware that their school has a psychologist (73.1%), many feel that the support is insufficient. Only 4.5% reported being satisfied with the services they receive. This clearly indicates that the issue is not merely the formal presence of a psychologist, but also their availability, capacity, and visibility.

Psychologists and pedagogues in schools are often overwhelmed by administrative tasks, which limits the time they can spend directly with students. Many also lack regular training on modern challenges—such as cyberbullying, crisis interventions, and managing panic attacks or depressive states. Implementing this alternative would require hiring more professionals, while also reducing bureaucratic obligations so that they can fully focus on supporting young people.

Additionally, schools should work to make psychological services more open and visible. Some students are not even certain whether their school has a psychologist. Institutional support must therefore become an integral part of everyday life, rather than a "secret cabinet" accessible to only a few students. This approach not only ensures long-term stability, but also builds trust and helps normalize conversations about mental health.

Alternative 3: Peer education and mentoring

High school students often feel most understood when talking to their peers. This is a natural part of adolescent development—a need for validation and support from people facing similar challenges. Not surprisingly, 25% of respondents indicated that they would prefer support from other students.

Peer education programs can take the form of clubs, student support teams, or digital groups where young people are trained to recognize stress and provide initial psychological assistance. Previous initiatives have shown that such programs are highly effective in breaking isolation and encouraging students to seek further professional support.

This option has another important advantage: it fosters a culture of solidarity and acceptance within schools. When students learn that their peers are experiencing similar problems, the feeling of "I am the only one" diminishes. Of course, peer support must be supervised and properly trained, as it

cannot fully replace professional services. However, as a complementary layer, it has enormous potential to positively change the school atmosphere.

Alternative 4: Integration of mental health into the curriculum

More than 63% of students surveyed expressed a desire for a mental health subject or program in their school. This clearly indicates that young people do not want mental health to be treated as an “accessory” or a sporadic workshop, but as a systemic part of their education.

Integration into teaching could include classes on stress management, concentration and self-esteem techniques, and anxiety management, as well as discussions on topics such as peer violence, addictions, and the safe use of social networks. Such content not only normalizes the subject, but also makes it an integral part of the regular educational culture.

This alternative also has a preventive function. Rather than waiting until young people reach a crisis point, they learn to recognize and address problems earlier. In this way, schools become places where mental health is not taboo, but an accepted and valued topic—on par with mathematics or physical education.

Alternative 5: Family and community involvement

Although school is the center of student life, the family remains a key factor in their psychological stability. However, data shows that only 9.1% of students talk to their parents when they feel unwell. This is a serious signal that parents are either not sufficiently involved, or young people do not perceive them as a safe source of support.

Psychologists confirm that the problem often deepens precisely because of the lack of family support. Reduced motivation to learn, high numbers of backlogs, and increased conflicts are frequently linked to family factors. Therefore, the alternative of greater family involvement includes parental education, family workshops, and improved coordination between schools and parents.

At the same time, the community can provide additional resources—from sports and cultural activities to volunteer programs that foster a sense of belonging and positive experiences. Such initiatives can serve as a bridge between school and everyday life, offering young people support outside formal institutions.

4. Selected solution and proposed future actions

The issue of mental health among young people in Skopje requires solutions that are modern, practical, and sustainable. The most appropriate approach is **a combination of a digital platform for anonymous support and the strengthening of school vocational services**. The digital platform enables students to seek help in a safe and accessible environment, precisely when they need it most, encouraging them to speak out without fear of stigma.

However, technology alone is not sufficient—strong institutional support is also essential. Dedicated psychologists and pedagogues in schools, supported through training, reduced administrative burdens, and additional staff, can provide continuous, professional, and personalized care. Public campaigns and local activities further connect institutional support with the daily lives of young people, breaking down stigma and actively involving families and the community.

This model is compelling because it monitors the lifestyles and habits of young people, providing them with a digital channel that is easily accessible, trustworthy and tailored to their needs. At the same time, it guarantees the stability and sustainability of support through school psychologists and pedagogues, who are given the conditions and tools to work professionally and continuously with students. Financially, it is reasonable because it starts with a pilot phase that allows for testing, adaptation and gradual expansion, rather than large and risky investments from the outset. This approach builds trust among all stakeholders – students receive a sense of security and support, psychologists can perform their work more efficiently, parents are involved and informed, and institutions show that mental health is a real priority. Thus, Skopje creates a system that is modern, practical and sustainable, combining innovative digital tools with strong, local school services.

Despite the recommended alternative, we nevertheless emphasize that all previously presented alternatives do not exclude each other, but rather complement one another. Each addresses a different aspect of the problem: the need for anonymity, institutional weaknesses, peer influence, systemic prevention, and the role of the family. Together, they form a “palette of possibilities” from which the city and institutions can select or combine measures to strengthen the psychological well-being of young people.

Activities and timeframe

The activities for implementation of the proposed solution are divided into the following phases

Phase 1: Pilot (2025/2026 school year) – in 3–5 high schools

- Development of a basic version of the digital platform.
- Engaging 3–5 psychologists who will work partly through the platform and partly in schools.
- Training 10–15 psychologists and teachers to use the tool and work with students.
- “Let's talk openly” campaign in Skopje.

Financial implications: around €60,000-70,000 per school year.

Phase 2: Enlargement (2026–2027) – all secondary schools in Skopje

- Upgrading the platform with new functionalities.
- Inclusion of all school psychologists (about 50 people) in the program.

- Hiring additional 10–15 psychologists at the city level.
- Organizing regular trainings (2–3 per year) and local activities in all schools.

Financial implications: about €70,000-90,000 per year.

Phase 3: Long-term integration (2027-2030)

- To make the platform national, with support from the Ministry of Education and international donors (UNICEF, EU funds).
- The City of Skopje should continue with regular local trainings, activities and maintenance of services.
- Gradual integration of mental health into the curriculum.

Financial implications for Skopje: about €20,000-30,000 per year (basic local maintenance, while the national platform is financed centrally).

The mental health of high school students must be treated as a priority in both educational and public health policy. Its neglect has led to the current shortcomings, which are already visible in declining motivation, increasing anxiety, and weakened social cohesion in schools. Unless systemic support is strengthened—by increasing the number of psychologists, integrating mental health into the curriculum, creating anonymous and digital channels for help, and improving coordination with families—the consequences will continue to deepen.

This problem is not just a statistic—it is a reality that young people experience daily in Skopje schools. It is a story about their fear, their struggle with stress, and their quiet need for support, which the system still fails to recognize.

**LIGHT UP THE GAME – INITIATIVE
FOR LIGHTING AND RENOVATION
OF SPORTS FIELDS IN THE
MUNICIPALITY OF CENTAR**



**Aleksandar Kochev
–VMRO–DPMNE–**

Light up the game – Initiative for lighting and renovation of sports fields in the Municipality of Centar

1. Summary

The sports fields and public playgrounds in the Municipality of Centar are among the few free spaces available to all citizens, with particular importance for young people who develop healthy habits, a sporting spirit, and social connections there. However, their current condition is far from satisfactory. The mapping of 15 sports locations demonstrated that almost all face serious problems – non-functional or insufficient lighting, damaged surfaces, outdated or unsafe fences and equipment. Additionally, a survey among residents confirmed the severity of the issue: 82% of citizens do not use the fields at night due to darkness, and 88% believe that better lighting and reconstruction would increase their use.

The current approach to solving the situation is reactive, based on ad-hoc repairs and short-term interventions that address only part of the problems without lasting results. The lack of systematic maintenance and clear accountability has led to the accumulation of issues, making the fields increasingly unsafe and less functional. The failures so far are visible: non-working floodlights, surfaces that pose a risk of injury, collapsing fences, and fields that remain in darkness precisely when they are needed the most.

To overcome this situation, several possible solutions were considered: transferring responsibility to schools and the community, continuing ad-hoc repairs, public-private partnerships, phased improvements, and combined management models. Each of these options has its own advantages but also serious limitations – lack of resources, restricted access, or uneven maintenance.

Based on the results of the analysis and citizens' opinions, the recommended solution is an **integrated systemic approach led by the Municipality**. This model envisions a complete reconstruction of the fields through modernization of lighting with energy-efficient LED solutions, repair of surfaces, fixing or replacement of fences and equipment, introduction of a regular maintenance plan, and increased safety through video surveillance.

The financial analysis showed that this approach is feasible: the total implementation cost is estimated at around **€95,930**, distributed across several categories – primarily for modernization of lighting (€40,000–45,000), followed by reconstruction of surfaces and fences (around €9,360), replacement of equipment (€1,840), safety and aesthetic measures (€560), and urban furniture and video surveillance (€8,000). Additionally, annual costs of about €3,000 are projected for regular maintenance. The investment will be implemented in phases over a period of three years, with clear priorities and activities.

This approach not only provides a solution to the current problems but also establishes a lasting system for modern, safe, and accessible sports facilities that will increase the usability of the fields, contribute to a better quality of life, and promote healthy habits and community spirit within the Municipality of Centar.

2. Problem – context and importance

The sports fields and public playgrounds in the Municipality of Centar are among the few free spaces that allow citizens to engage in sports, recreation, and social activities. They play a key role in

building healthy habits among young people and in promoting an active lifestyle throughout the community. However, their current condition is far from what is expected of an urban center in the capital city. Instead of being hubs of physical activity and social interaction, the fields are increasingly becoming symbols of neglect, inaccessibility, and insecurity.

Mapping conducted across 15 sports locations in Centar showed that nearly all of them suffer from serious deficiencies. The biggest and most common issue is insufficient or non-functional lighting. Some fields have floodlights that don't work; others have lighting that fails to provide adequate visibility; and some have no lighting at all. This means that the fields are practically unusable during evening hours – precisely when young people and working citizens have the most time for sports and recreation, especially during the summer months when temperatures are more favorable for outdoor activities. Poor visibility not only limits activity time but also reduces safety, increasing the risk of injuries and creating a sense of insecurity.

In addition to lighting, the infrastructure of the fields is in poor condition. The surfaces of many playgrounds are damaged and require reconstruction and proper marking. Fences are outdated or broken, and sports equipment – such as basketball hoops, boards, and goals – is often dysfunctional or unsafe to use. At some sites, makeshift or broken structures can be seen, posing a risk to anyone trying to play there. Instead of motivating young people to engage in physical activity, these conditions discourage them, which directly contradicts the need to promote healthy habits and an active lifestyle.

The seriousness of the problem is confirmed by a survey conducted among citizens. According to the results, 82% of respondents said they do not use the sports fields in the evening due to poor lighting, and as many as 88% believe that better and adequate lighting would increase their use. A large number of citizens also expressed a sense of insecurity, not only because of the darkness but also due to the risk of injury from damaged surfaces and equipment. Although the fields represent an important space for free physical activity, their condition directly limits accessibility and creates a sense of exclusion among residents.

The root causes of this situation lie in several factors. Insufficient investments in modernization have led to much of the infrastructure becoming outdated. Instead of a systematic approach, ad-hoc repairs have been applied – short-term interventions that solve part of the problem but offer no lasting results. The lack of regular maintenance has allowed issues to accumulate to the point of complete dysfunctionality. Additionally, weak coordination between schools, the municipality, and citizens has resulted in many fields being left without a clearly responsible body to take care of them.

Together, these factors mean that the sports fields in the Municipality of Centar are not fulfilling their essential purpose. Instead of driving active and healthy living, they have become spaces that citizens avoid – especially at night. The consequences of this are multi-layered: reduced physical activity among young people, diminished social interaction within the community, increased risk of injuries, and the gradual loss of the few remaining public spaces available for sports and recreation. Thus, the issue of lighting and infrastructure is not merely a matter of technical shortcomings but one that directly affects citizens' quality of life and health.

Given these challenges, it is necessary to explore possible solutions that would ensure a lasting improvement in the condition of the sports fields

3. Alternative solutions considered

In addressing the issue of non-functional lighting and outdated infrastructure at the sports fields in the Municipality of Centar, several different approaches can be considered. Each alternative carries its

own advantages and limitations, and their success depends largely on how responsibility is distributed among the municipality, schools, and the local community.

Alternative 1: Responsibility taken by schools and the community

In this scenario, schools and local communities would be responsible for managing and maintaining the sports fields. This model has the potential to increase residents' sense of ownership and ensure more direct care for each facility. However, past experience shows that schools lack the necessary resources for systematic infrastructure management. For example, the sports field near the "Kiro Gligorov" Primary School has no lighting at all, and the equipment is damaged. At "Dimitar Miladinov" Primary School, there are floodlights, but they are not functional, and a large part of the fence and surface is damaged. These examples confirm that transferring responsibility to schools and local communities would lead to uneven maintenance – some fields might be better maintained, while others would remain completely neglected.

Alternative 2: Continuation of ad-hoc repairs

This alternative represents a continuation of the current practice – intervening only when problems become too significant to ignore. For instance, a damaged fence might be repaired or a basketball hoop replaced once it becomes completely unusable, but without a comprehensive plan covering all fields. Mapping has shown that nearly all 15 locations require rehabilitation, ranging from non-functional floodlights in "Kapištec" to insufficient lighting at the fields in "London Maalo" and "Zeleno Pazarče." Continuing with such partial and reactive repairs would mean that the overall condition would never truly improve. The survey confirms that citizens recognize this issue: 88% of respondents believe that better lighting and a systematic approach would increase the use of the fields, indicating that this model lacks public support.

Alternative 3: Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)

This model is already partially present in Centar, where some school sports fields have been given under concession. The advantage is that private operators can invest in infrastructure and provide professional management. However, the downside is a serious restriction of access. According to the survey, most citizens use the fields precisely because they are free and open to everyone. With commercialization, a barrier is created – time slots become inaccessible to the majority of young people and families, and the prices further limit usage. In this way, public sports fields lose their essential function – to be spaces accessible to all.

Alternative 4: Integrated systemic approach led by the Municipality

This alternative envisions the municipality taking full responsibility for the reconstruction and regular maintenance of all sports fields. According to the mapping, each of the 15 locations faces serious issues –

most commonly insufficient or non-functional lighting, damaged surfaces, and outdated equipment. The integrated approach would involve replacing floodlights with energy-efficient solutions, repairing and modernizing the surfaces, refurbishing basketball hoops and goals, and introducing a system for regular inspections. Additional measures could include installing video surveillance to reduce vandalism and organizing sports events to strengthen the social function of the fields. This approach aligns with the clear demands of citizens: 82% stated that they currently do not use the fields at night due to a lack of lighting, and 88% believe that better illumination would increase their use.

Alternative 5: Phased improvement

The phased improvement approach envisions addressing the problems gradually, through clearly defined stages. The first interventions would target the most critical issues – for example, damaged fences and basketball hoops that pose a direct safety risk, such as those at “Dimitar Miladinov” Primary School and “Goce Delchev” Primary School. This would be followed by the reconstruction of playing surfaces and improvement of lighting, and finally by additional interventions such as aesthetic upgrades, horizontal markings, and measures to reduce vandalism. This approach would allow citizens to witness continuous progress, with each phase increasing the usability of the sports fields.

Alternative 6: Combined model

The combined model merges institutional responsibility with civic participation. The Municipality would take the leading role in the reconstruction and modernization, while schools and local communities would be involved in day-to-day maintenance and damage prevention. For example, schools could provide minimal regular cleaning and inspections, and local communities could organize volunteer actions to help preserve the sports fields. This model aligns with the survey results – citizens expressed willingness to participate but expect the Municipality to carry the main burden of modernization. The combined approach avoids fully shifting responsibilities while fostering a sense of shared accountability.

4. Selected solution and proposed future actions

Based on the results of the mapping, the survey, and the situation analysis, it is recommended that the Municipality of Centar adopt the **integrated systemic approach** as the most appropriate solution for the improvement and modernization of sports fields. This model not only addresses the current issues but also establishes a lasting system that ensures safe, modern, and accessible sports facilities for all citizens.

Specific activities

1. Modernization of the lighting

- Repair or complete replacement of damaged surfaces on all sports fields.
- Providing appropriate markings on the fields to ensure safe and proper play.
- Use of weather-resistant materials with a long service life.

2. Reconstruction of the infrastructure

- Repair of damaged surfaces and application of proper horizontal markings.
- Repair or replacement of damaged fences at courts such as at “Dimitar Miladinov” and “Kole Nedelkovski” schools.
- Replacement of outdated and unsafe equipment, including hoops, backboards, and goals.).

3. Increasing safety and orderliness

- Installation of video surveillance at critical locations to prevent vandalism.
- Placement of additional urban equipment: benches, trash bins, and protective nets.

4. Regular maintenance system

- Establishment of a plan for regular inspections, controls, and preventive maintenance.

- Formation of a coordinating body composed of the municipality, schools, and local communities for oversight and coordination.

5. Inclusion of the community and promotion

- Organization of sports activities and events to encourage the use of the fields.
- Campaign to promote shared care and responsibility for public spaces.

Time frame

- Phase 1 (0–12 months): Urgent remediation of the most critical issues – fences, hoops, and installation of basic lighting at the most-used fields (PS “Goce Delchev,” PS “Dimitar Miladinov”).
- Phase 2 (12–24 months): Reconstruction of surfaces, horizontal marking, and installation of additional lighting.
- Phase 3 (24–36 months): Installation of video surveillance, urban equipment, and aesthetic improvements.
- Phase 4 (continuous): Establishment of a regular maintenance system and community engagement activities.

Financial implications

The total estimated cost for implementing the integrated systemic approach is approximately € 95,930. This amount covers all planned interventions as well as potential unforeseen repairs.

Table 1. Financial breakdown of costs

Category	Estimated cost (€)	Covered activities
Lighting (LED/Solar)	40.000 – 45.000	Replacement and installation of new floodlights, timers/sensors
Infrastructure (playing surfaces, fences, markings)	9.360	Reconstruction of playing surfaces, markings, and repair/replacement of fences
Sports equipment (hoops, goals, backboards, nets)	1.840	Repair and replacement of outdated equipment
Safety and aesthetics	560	Graffiti removal, horizontal markings
Urban equipment and video surveillance	8.000	Benches, trash bins, cameras, and anti-vandal measures
Phase 1 – Urgent repair and maintenance of existing equipment	15.000	Basic lighting, fences, and hoops

Phase 2 – Reconstruction of existing surfaces and lighting	12.000	Surfaces, additional lighting
Phase 3 – Aesthetics improvement and safety enhancement	8.000	Urban furniture, anti-vandal measures
Regular maintenance (annual)	~3.000	Inspections, minor repairs, prevention

The total estimated investment is feasible within the municipal budget, and regular maintenance will help reduce long-term costs. With this strategy, the Municipality of Centar will provide modern and safe sports fields, whose usage – especially during evening hours – will increase, directly impacting residents’ quality of life, fostering healthy habits, and strengthening the sense of community.

Innovative Initiatives in the Municipality of Chair

01

Installing Trash Bins in the Municipality of Chair

Kanita Bakiji (Alternativa/VLEN)

02

Guide to the Old Bazaar – Skopje: Discover Its History, Crafts, and Culture

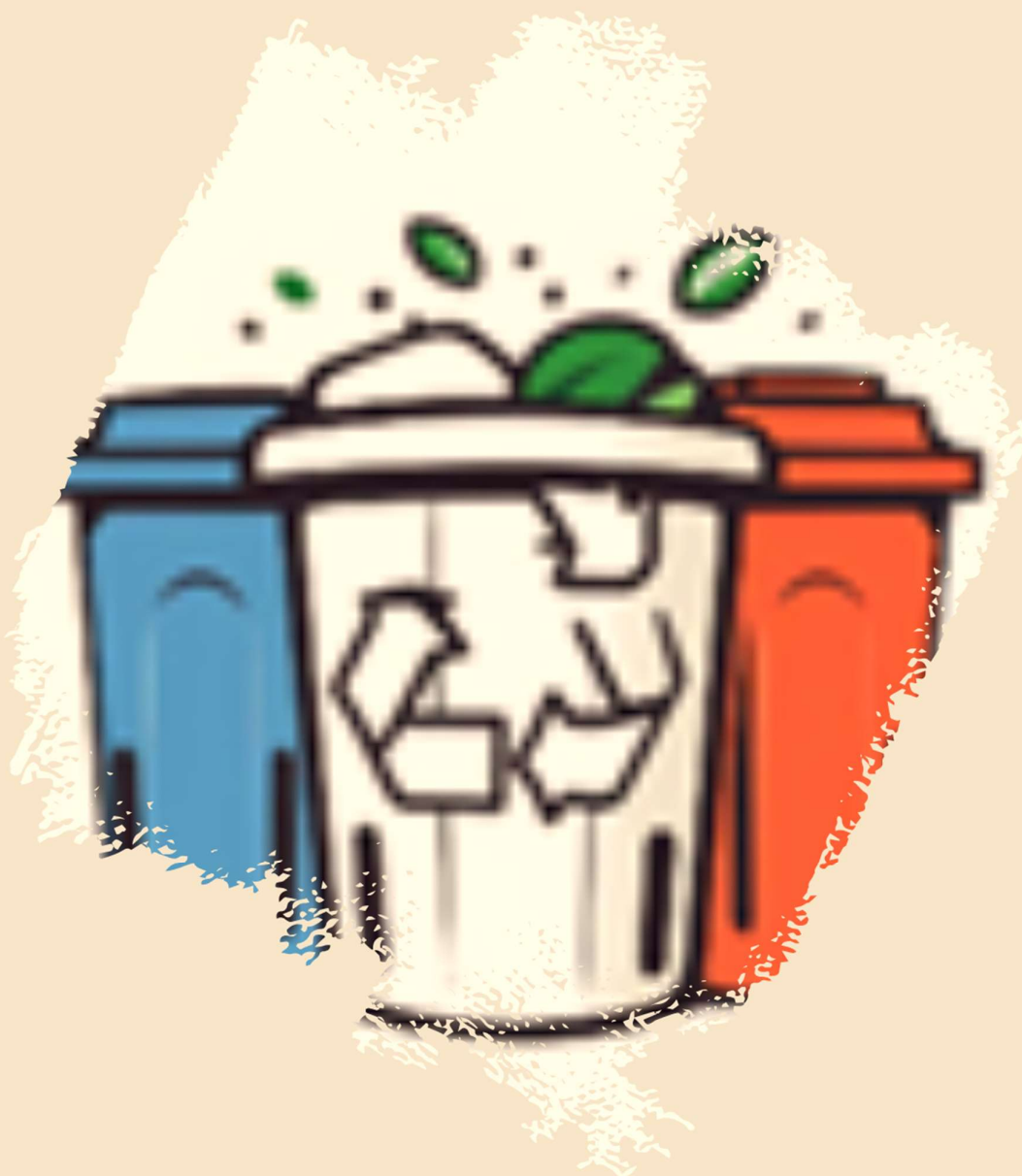
Arbnor Maliqi (Democratic Movement/VLEN)

03

Multicultural Youth Center in the Municipality of Chair

Kemaldzan Musli (Movement for National Unity of Turks in Macedonia)

CLEAN CHAIR FOR THE FUTURE GENERATIONS



Kanita Bakiji
–Alternativa/VLEN–

Clean Chair for the future generations

1. Summary

Public cleanliness is one of the key elements for the good quality of life in any community, with a direct impact on health and well-being of citizens and the image of the city. The Municipality of Chair, with over 60 thousand inhabitants and intensive use of public spaces, faces a problem due to the insufficient number of trash bins and their inadequate maintenance. Schools, parks, green markets and bus stops have been identified as the most problematic zones, where the accumulation of waste or the inadequate distribution of bins forces many citizens to throw their garbage outside of the bins, thus increasing the pollution and the risk to public health. Analyses and surveys conducted with the community show that 40% of citizens believe that there are not enough bins in their neighbourhoods, while the combination of insufficient infrastructure and low civic awareness further worsens the situation. The consultation process with residents and business owners, through visual exercises by using a map, enabled the identification of the most critical zones and created a sense of shared ownership, demonstrating the community's willingness to actively contribute to solving the problem.

Based on the data obtained, three main alternatives were identified: 1) placing simple and practical bins in strategic locations; 2) improving the existing infrastructure through regular maintenance and reorganisation; 3) placing separate recycling bins and raising awareness among citizens. After consideration, the alternative of strategically placing public bins for recyclable and general waste with regular maintenance and educational campaigns is recommended. This solution is practical, acceptable to citizens and supported by concrete data: 85% of respondents expressed willingness to use strategically placed bins, and 78% believe that civic education is key to changing behaviour. Placing them near schools, green markets and places with lots of traffic ensures easy access for all age groups, combined with infrastructure interventions and active community involvement.

The implementation of this alternative includes placing 250 bins at critical locations around the municipality, regular maintenance by the utility company, organising awareness raising campaigns and placing information boards next to the bins to encourage their use and maintaining cleanliness. The total proposed budget is 3,050,000 MKD, which includes the procurement of the bins, their maintenance and educational campaigns. The timeframe envisages the placing of bins within three months, continuous maintenance throughout the year and awareness raising campaigns within six months, with periodic activities to ensure a sustainable effect. This solution not only solves the obvious problem of not having enough bins, but also creates a new culture of civic responsibility, raising awareness, improving cleanliness and strengthening cooperation in the community. By doing this, the Municipality of Chair aims to build a sustainable model for waste management and care for the urban environment, making the city cleaner, safer and more attractive for residents and visitors.

2. Problem – context and importance

Public cleanliness is one of the most fundamental elements that affects the quality of life in any community. It does not only refer to the aesthetic appearance of public spaces but also has a direct impact on the health of citizens, emotional well-being, social development and the overall image of the city. For the Municipality of Chair, this issue bears special significance due to its urban location, high population density and intensive use of public spaces.

Chair is one of the most densely populated municipalities in Skopje, with over 60,000 residents sharing a limited territory. In addition, the municipality is characterised by a large number of settlements, educational institutions, green markets and shopping centres, which are visited by thousands of citizens daily. This reality imposes high pressure on the existing infrastructure for maintaining hygiene. In practice, one can easily notice the lack of trash bins or their inadequate distribution. There are parts of the municipality with no bins at all, while in others their number is insufficient, or they are improperly distributed or overflowed with litter. This situation causes many residents and visitors to have no practical opportunity to take care of environmental hygiene, which often leads to dumping waste on the ground or in improvised sites.

The results of the survey conducted among the community in Chair clearly reflect this reality. Only a small percentage of residents rate public cleanliness as satisfactory, while the majority consider it problematic, with a direct impact on daily life. Around 40% of citizens believe that there are not enough trash bins in their neighbourhoods. Parks, schools, green markets and bus stations – areas with a high frequency of people and activities – have been identified as the most critical locations. As for the factors contributing to the lack of hygiene, around 30% link it to a lack of civic awareness, while other respondents see it as a result of insufficient infrastructure, waste dumping by businesses or absence of regular cleaning. A significant proportion also indicates that the absence of punitive measures reinforces the perception that environmental pollution is acceptable.

These data are not just statistics but reflect the daily experience of residents. For example, in schools and parks – spaces where children spend most of their time – the lack or overflow of bins creates a direct risk to their health. Children very often play next to scattered waste, which increases exposure to bacteria and infections. At the same time, this situation also has an impact on their awareness, younger generations get used to considering a polluted environment as normal. A similar impact is observed in the municipal green markets, where the accumulated organic and plastic waste spoils not only the appearance, but also the image of Chair as a well organised and attractive environment for business.

A positive result of the consultations was the willingness of the community to contribute to a solution. By performing a visual exercise on a map, citizens and business owners suggested optimal locations for bins, without hindering the movement of pedestrians or business activities. This process not only

helped to identify critical areas but also created a sense of shared responsibility that is seen as an active part of the solution. This aspect is crucial, since maintaining public cleanliness does not only depend on infrastructure investments, but also on developing a culture of civic responsibility.

The financial and technical analyses conducted for this project show that the challenge is not only related to the placement of new bins, but also to their regular maintenance and planned use. Overflowing bins, lack of proper cleaning and unplanned distribution are problems that significantly increase the level of pollution. For example, the large distance between existing bins on some streets makes their use difficult, which encourages the population to throw waste on the ground. When the weather is hot, this situation is further aggravated, creating unpleasant odours and increasing the risk of respiratory infections and bacterial diseases.

In this context, it is clear that the issue of public cleanliness in Chair is not just a logistical detail, but an essential need for sustainable urban development. A clean city contributes to a sense of safety, improves the well-being and respect for common spaces, and at the same time makes the municipality more attractive to visitors and investments. On the other hand, a dirty environment leaves an impression of neglect and weakens the confidence of citizens that everyday problems are being solved efficiently.

Therefore, the placing and maintenance of trash bins should be seen as a key element of local policies, not only for improving the appearance of the city, but also for protecting public health, educating future generations and building a new civic culture of caring for the environment. This problem, clearly identified from the field data and the opinions of the residents themselves, represents a common challenge that requires a planned, comprehensive and sustainable approach.

3. Alternative solutions considered

The process of identifying the problem of public cleanliness in the Municipality of Chair is not based only on the technical and financial analyses, but also on active citizen involvement through innovative methods.

Based on the data and active citizen involvement, three main alternatives were identified to solve the problem of the lack of bins and to improve waste management.

Alternative 1: Placing simple and practical bins on strategic locations

This alternative represents a concrete and financially acceptable measure for the Municipality. It suggests placement of small, durable and easy-to-maintain trash bins in public spaces that citizens have identified as the most critical - in addition to schools, parks, green markets and bus stations. The use of resistant materials, such as galvanised metal or solid plastic, ensures longevity and reduces the cost of replacement.

This measure is closely linked to the results of the survey, where the majority of citizens indicated the lack of bins as one of the main causes of littering. With this intervention, the Municipality will not only overcome an everyday problem but will also send a clear signal to citizens that their opinion matters in the decision-making process.

Alternative 2: Improving the existing infrastructure by maintaining it and reorganisation

A second alternative is to strengthen the existing system by cleaning bins more frequently, repairing or replacing damaged ones, and reorganising their distribution based on the needs. Data shows that citizens often notice bins that are overflowed or placed in impractical locations. Improving maintenance and organised distribution would bring about significant change without the need for large investments.

Involving citizens in the selection of the most appropriate locations is key to this approach. The map created during the consultation process would serve as a guide for optimised bin placement, taking into account pedestrian traffic, business entrances, and the most visited areas. In this way, the alternative is not only practical but also based on real community data.

Alternative 3: Placing separate recycling bins and civic education

A more innovative alternative is to place separate bins for recyclable waste, such as plastic, paper and metal, in selected locations such as schools, parks and green markets. This approach not only contributes to reducing pollution and better waste management, but also educates citizens, especially young people, about the importance of recycling and sustainable practices.

The proposal is also supported by the results of the consultation process: many citizens, especially the participants involved in the mapping, expressed particular concern about the right location and use of the bins. This shows the willingness of the community to support more advanced initiatives that go beyond simply placing the bins. By implementing this alternative, the Municipality of Chair can create a more sustainable culture of environmental care and serve as a model for other municipalities.

4. Selected solution and proposed future actions

After reviewing the proposed alternatives for waste management and the placement of public bins, the proposed measure for strategic placement of public bins for recyclables and general waste accompanied by regular maintenance and educational campaigns for citizens is recommended.

The citizens who were involved in the consultation process within the innovative initiative assessed this measure as the most practical and easiest to implement. According to the results of the surveys and the implemented activities:

- 85% of citizens expressed their willingness to use the bins placed at strategic locations;

- 78% of those surveyed consider the educational campaign to be a key element in changing behaviours and encouraging collective responsibility towards the environment;
- The placement of bins near schools, green markets and places visited by many people is assessed as practical and accessible to all, making the solution inclusive for all age groups and categories of citizens.

In addition to the direct benefits in regard to public cleanliness, this alternative also encourages active participation of the community. The involvement of schools and local organisations in educational campaigns not only strengthens awareness of maintaining cleanliness but also creates a new culture of respect for the environment, which can influence the future behaviours of citizens.

Specific activities for implementing the alternatives:

1. **Strategic placement of 250 bins in critical areas of the municipality of Chair** (main sidewalks, near schools and green markets), in order to ensure easy access and regular use.
2. **Ensuring regular maintaining and cleaning by the utility company**, with a frequency of at least three times a week, to prevent bins from overflowing and to maintain environmental cleanliness.
3. **Organising awareness raising campaigns and cleaning actions in cooperation with schools, local organisations and youth groups**, including annual activities aimed at changing behaviour and increasing civic responsibility.
4. **Placing notice boards and information signs near the bins**, in order to encourage their use, reinforce the messages of the educational campaigns and create a visual environment that encourages cleanliness.

Financial implications:

- Procurement and placing of 250 bins: 1,250,000 MKD.
- Regular maintaining and cleaning (12 months): 1,500,000 MKD.
- Awareness raising campaigns and signage: 300,000 MKD for materials, promotion and outreach activities.
- Total budget: 3,050,000 MKD.

Timeframe for implementation:

- Placing bins: within three months since the policy adoption.
- Maintaining and cleaning: continuous activity throughout the year.

- Educational campaigns and placing signs: within six months, with periodic annual activities to ensure a sustainable effect.

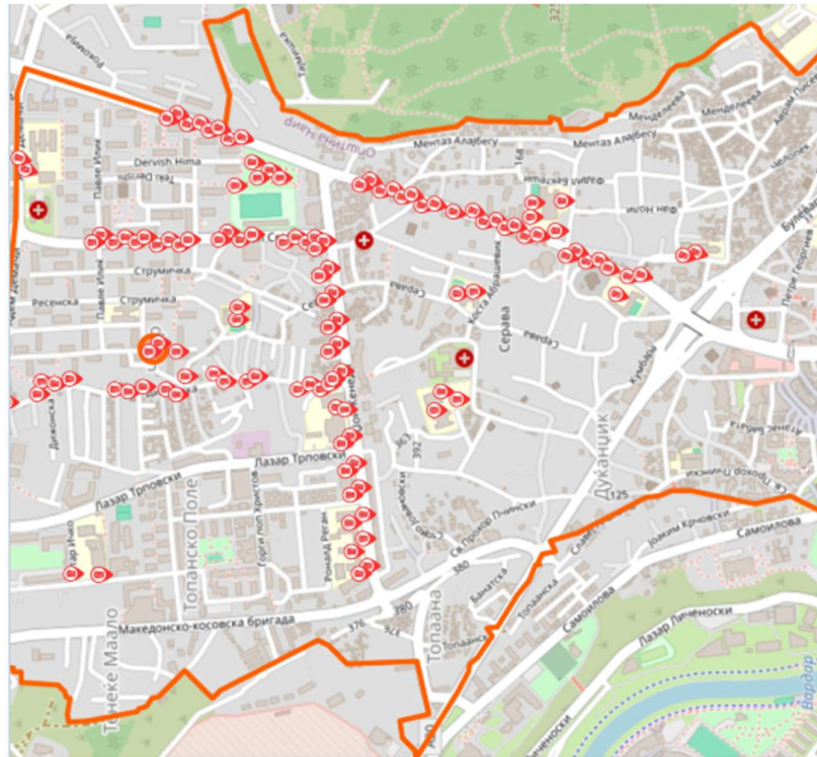


Figure 1: Mapping critical locations for placing bins in the Municipality of Chair

This package of measures guarantees a sustainable and comprehensive approach, acceptable to citizens, as a combination of accessibility, regular maintenance and behaviour change through education. By implementing this alternative, the city will significantly improve public cleanliness, civic awareness and community cooperation, creating a sustainable model for waste management and care for the urban environment.

**GUIDE THROUGH THE OLD
SKOPJE BAZAAR: DISCOVER ITS
HISTORY, CRAFTS, AND CULTURE**



Arbnor Maliqi
–Democratic Movement/VLEN–

Guide through the Old Skopje Bazaar: Discover its history, crafts, and culture

1. Summary

The Old Skopje Bazaar is one of the most valuable historical, cultural, and economic cores of the city, with surface area of 11 hectares, and adjacent zones extending over 23 hectares. Throughout the centuries, it has served as a commercial, artisanal, and social center, and it still remains a cherished space among the citizens today. In a survey conducted for the purposes of this document, 100% of respondents stated that they had visited the Bazaar at least once, 86.9% visit it regularly, while 78.9% consider it “very important” for the cultural identity. Visitors particularly value its architecture and history (67.7%), atmosphere (66.9%), and gastronomic offer (56.9%).

However, the Bazaar faces serious challenges that threaten its vitality and future. The biggest issue is its “digital invisibility,” meaning it lacks modern applications, maps, and promotional tools, which limits what visitors can experience. The infrastructure is damaged, signage is missing, urban interventions are often unsustainable, and the site is not accessible to all. Additionally, divided jurisdiction and fragmented management between the two municipalities (Cair and Centar), along with the involvement of multiple institutions, pose further challenges to developing a unified and coherent vision for the Old Skopje Bazaar. Another key challenge is the limited interest and engagement of young people in traditional crafts, which endangers their long-term survival. This trend is further deepened by the aging of existing craftsmen and the lack of systemic support for transferring artisanal skills to new generations.

In response to these challenges, five main measures have been identified: (1) development of an inclusive digital platform (a mobile application and multilingual website), (2) coordinated promotion through social media, (3) improvement of infrastructure and establishment of modern signage, (4) community engagement and youth involvement in preserving and promoting craftsmanship, and (5) creation of an institutional co-management model among municipalities, businesses, and cultural institutions.

Based on the analysis conducted within the framework of this initiative, it is recommended to develop an inclusive digital platform that directly addresses the lack of visibility and the need for modernization. This platform will provide interactive maps, profiles of craftsmen and businesses, historical information, and event calendars, making the Bazaar more accessible to both local and international visitors. In addition to increased visibility, the platform will support craftsmen and serve as an integrated promotional tool.

The implementation of this recommendation would require approximately €40,000–€60,000 for the first year (technical development, multimedia content, and promotion), as well as €8,000–€10,000 annually for maintenance. The implementation period is one year: three months for planning and forming a working group, six months for technical development and content collection, and three months for testing and launch. Funding can be secured from municipal budgets, the Ministry of Culture, the Tourism Agency, EU programs, UNESCO, as well as public-private partnerships with local businesses and travel agencies.

The aim of this policy is to preserve the authenticity of the Bazaar while adapting it to today's digital and urban reality. If implemented with the involvement of relevant stakeholders and a long-term vision, the Old Skopje Bazaar will become not only the cultural heart of Skopje but also a modern, visible, and sustainable destination at the regional and international level.

2. Problem – context and importance

The Old Skopje Bazaar is one of the most valuable cultural, historical, and economic cores of the City of Skopje. Located on the territories of the municipalities of Cair and Centar, the Bazaar covers an area of about 11 hectares, surrounded by adjacent zones that include additional 23 hectares¹¹. The area stretches from the Stone Bridge to Bit Pazar and represents a unique urban entity with great symbolism and cultural significance. For centuries, the Bazaar has been a meeting point of cultures, religions, and traditions — a space where trade, craftsmanship, and social life intertwine. Its narrow cobblestone streets, mosques, churches, inns, and hammams, along with artisan shops of long-standing tradition, form a picturesque heritage that shapes the identity of Skopje and its inhabitants.

Research conducted within the initiative confirms that the Old Bazaar remains well recognized and significant to the citizens. All respondents stated that they had visited it at least once, while nearly 87% visit it regularly. For most, it is very important to the city's cultural and collective identity. Visitors appreciate the combination of historical architecture, traditional crafts, gastronomy, and lively atmosphere. However, despite this strong connection with the local population, the Bazaar faces serious challenges that put its sustainability and future at risk.

The greatest challenge is its “invisibility” in the digital era. Although it represents a tourist attraction, many people struggle to navigate the labyrinth of streets or to find information about shops, artisans, and cultural events. The lack of applications, digital maps, and modern promotional tools means that many visitors stop only in a limited part of the area — usually around Kursumli An or some popular restaurants — and leave without truly experiencing the diversity the Bazaar offers. Small business owners and artisans unanimously emphasize that they feel “invisible” because there is no shared platform through which their products and services can be made visible to the wider public.

¹¹ The boundaries of the Old Skopje Bazaar and the so-called contact zones of the Bazaar are defined in the Law on the Declaration of the Old Skopje Bazaar as Cultural Heritage of Exceptional Importance, adopted by the Assembly in October 2008

The problem of digital invisibility is closely linked to urban and infrastructural challenges. Many streets are paved with damaged cobblestones, with insufficient lighting and unevenly distributed urban furniture. The area is not fully accessible for people with limited mobility, people with disabilities, and/or tourists visiting for the first time who lack local knowledge. The absence of clear symbols, visual or audio guidance, and on-site informational signage further limits the visitor experience. Urban development in the surrounding areas has led to an increase of more than 25% in built-up surfaces over recent decades, resulting in the Bazaar being surrounded by larger buildings that often disrupt the harmony of the space and its historical atmosphere.

Another challenge lies in the complex management of the Bazaar, as it falls under the jurisdiction of two municipalities as well as several cultural heritage institutions. This often results in partial interventions, insufficient coordination, and differing priorities instead of an integrated approach. Local stakeholders warn that without a shared vision and development strategy, the Bazaar risks becoming trapped between the need for modernization and the preservation of its authentic character.

A further serious challenge is the gradual disappearance of craftsmen. Many of the masters working in the Bazaar are older, and younger people rarely see a perspective in continuing the craft tradition. The reasons are numerous — from the lack of economic benefit and modern promotion to the perception of the Bazaar as a space disconnected from the digital life of younger generations. As one craftsman included in the research put it: “Today’s youth live on their phones. If we’re not there, in an app, for them we don’t exist.” The disinterest of young people increases the risk that, with the departure of older generations, invaluable skills that form part of the cultural heritage will be lost.

In general, the problem does not lie in the lack of attractiveness or value of the Old Bazaar—it remains unique and highly appreciated by both locals and tourists—but in the fact that the modern conditions of digital and urban society are leaving it behind. The lack of modern promotion, fragmented management, degraded infrastructure, and the avoidance of craftsmanship by younger generations together pose a shared risk of gradually losing the economic vitality, cultural authenticity, and future of this urban complex of exceptional significance. In this way, there is a risk that the Old Bazaar will come to be perceived merely as a relic of the past, instead of remaining the vibrant cultural and economic heart of the City of Skopje.

3. Alternative solutions considered

The results of the research and discussions with the Bazaar’s craftsmen show that, although this space is of great importance to the citizens—with 78.9% considering it very important for cultural identity—there are significant gaps in promotion, management, and adaptation to modern times. To address these challenges and make the Bazaar more visible, functional, and attractive, several possible solutions have been identified. If all the considered solutions were implemented in an integrated manner, the challenges facing the Bazaar would be completely or largely overcome. However, given

the limited resources, the alternatives listed below are analyzed from the perspective of their feasibility, potential short-term positive effects, and the timeframe for their implementation.

Alternative 1: Development of an inclusive digital platform

The first possible alternative is the development of a mobile application or online platform that can serve as a modern “gateway” to the Bazaar. The research shows that visitors often perceive the atmosphere and architecture as the main attractions but lack sufficient information and guidance for orientation. A well-structured application would include interactive maps, detailed descriptions of each shop and craftsman, information about cultural events, and even interactive features such as virtual tours or personalized recommendations. In addition to assisting tourists, this platform would increase the visibility of local businesses and enable craftsmen to promote their products beyond the physical boundaries of the Bazaar. During meetings with them, most stated that they feel “invisible” without a digital tool; this alternative would directly address that gap.

Alternative 2: Promotion through digital media and social networks

A more affordable yet equally effective option is to develop a joint strategy for social media presence. Currently, businesses use platforms such as Facebook or Instagram sporadically, often without professional content or a coordinated approach. Considering that 66.9% of visitors see the atmosphere and social interaction as the most attractive elements of the Bazaar, social networks are an ideal channel to convey that atmosphere. Videos of craftsmen at work, images from traditional events, or short stories about cultural heritage could go viral and attract more visitors. The official social media channels of the Bazaar could be managed by a small specialized team or a group of young digital marketing students, creating a modern and appealing image that speaks the language of younger generations and foreign tourists.

Alternative 3: Improving infrastructure and signage

Craftsmen have expressed concern that tourists often reach only Kursumli An and leave without exploring further. The main reason is the lack of clear orientation and signage. Improving the damaged cobblestones, installing multilingual information boards, creating directional signs for the narrow streets, and using QR codes that link to digital information would make the Bazaar more accessible and visitor-friendly. This alternative does not require large technological investments but would have a direct effect on the perception of the Bazaar as an attractive, well-maintained, safe, and functional space.

Alternative 4: Engaging the community and younger generations

Another challenge is the risk of traditional crafts disappearing due to the aging of craftsmen and the lack of interest among young people. To address this issue, mentorship programs could be created where current masters share their knowledge with students. Events such as “open days,” where

schools visit workshops or internship and scholarship programs for young people, could stimulate interest in craftsmanship. Additionally, by involving young people as creators of digital content for the Bazaar's social media channels, this alternative would connect with their modern habits and create a bridge between tradition and technology. Considering that 47.7% of visitors particularly value the role of craftsmanship, this measure is essential for the long-term preservation of the Bazaar's identity.

Alternative 5: Creating an institutional co-management model

Another ongoing challenge is the fragmentation of management, as the Bazaar is divided between two municipalities and several institutions responsible for cultural heritage. This situation often leads to partial interventions and the absence of a common strategy. The proposal is to establish a joint management board or council that would include representatives from the municipalities, businesses, craftsmen, and cultural institutions. This body would ensure coherence in decision-making and project implementation, addressing the concerns of 20% of respondents who stated they are unsure whether enough is being done to preserve and promote the Bazaar. Such a model would lay the foundation for long-term planning and better coordination between public and private stakeholders.

4. Selected solution and proposed future actions

Despite the strong emotional connection that citizens have with the Bazaar, over 13% of research participants believe that not enough is being done for its preservation and improvement, while around 20% are uncertain about the seriousness of current efforts. This gap between the perceived importance and the lack of sufficient promotion clearly highlights the need for new approaches and measures.

Within this initiative, it is recommended to develop an inclusive digital platform (mobile application and website) that would serve as a modern guide and strategic instrument for promoting the Bazaar. The platform will be multilingual (Albanian, Macedonian, English, and Turkish), adapting to the diverse profiles of local and foreign visitors. Through it, visitors will be able to access interactive maps, profiles of craftsmen and businesses, information on the history of monuments, and calendars of cultural events.

A key element will be to feature the Bazaar's most attractive aspects — according to the research, these are its architecture and history (67.7%), its unique atmosphere (66.9%), and its traditional gastronomic offerings (56.9%). These are precisely the elements that the digital platform can transform into accessible and appealing content for the public through professional photographs, videos, descriptions, and virtual tours. Additionally, since 47.7% of respondents consider craftsmanship to be a core value of the Bazaar, including individual profiles of craftsmen and their products on the platform would be a way to ensure visibility and economic support for this endangered part of cultural heritage. Moreover, a joint platform managed by an institutional structure would provide a unified and coordinated image of the Bazaar, avoiding the previously fragmented approach.

Fiscal implications

Category	Description	Estimated amount (€)
Technical Development	Mobile application + website	25.000 – 40.000
Multimedia Content + Translations	Photos, videos, interviews, multilingual materials	10.000 – 15.000
Initial Promotion	Online campaign, launch event, promotional materials	5.000 – 7.000
Annual Maintenance	Platform hosting, technical updates, content management	8.000 – 10,000
Total for the first year		40.000 – 60.000

Implementation timeline

Phase	Description of activities	Time frame
Phase 1	Establishment of a working group, concept development, selection of company	3 months
Phase 2	Technical development of the platform, content collection	6 months
Phase 3	User testing, final upgrades, official launch	3 months
Phase 4	Maintenance and feature expansion	after the first 12 months

The implementation of this measure requires broad institutional and financial mobilization. In addition to the municipal budgets of Cair and Centar, which should allocate funds specifically for the promotion of the Bazaar, support can also be provided by the Ministry of Culture, the Tourism Agency, and public investments in urban infrastructure. Another source includes international donors—cultural heritage programs of the European Union, UNESCO, as well as bilateral funds from embassies and development agencies. Public-private partnerships can also play an important role: local businesses, artisan associations, and travel agencies that directly benefit from increased visibility of the Bazaar. Their involvement in decision-making and platform management will ensure that this policy is sustainable, inclusive, and accepted by all relevant stakeholders.

This measure has been developed through the collection of necessary data and the inclusion of voices from the community itself. The digital platform is not merely a technological tool but a means to keep the Bazaar's heritage present and accessible, support the local economy, and transform this historic space into a modern destination that combines the past with the present and the future.

**CHAIR FOR THE YOUTH:
CONCEPT FOR A
MULTICULTURAL YOUTH CENTRE**



**Kemaldzan Musli
–Movement for National Unity
of Turks in Macedonia–**

Chair for the youth: Concept for a multicultural youth centre

1. Summary

The Municipality of Chair is one of the most densely populated municipalities in Skopje, with 64,773 inhabitants according to the 2021 Census. It stands out for its young age structure – young people make up a significant part of the population and represent a key resource for future development. However, just like at the national level, a trend of drop in the youth population is observed here: the number of young people ages 15–29 in the country dropped from 480,828 people in 2002 (24% of the population) to 326,733 people in 2021 (18%). Taking into account this decline, the need to focus on local policies that will offer young people opportunities for development and staying in the community is even more pressing.

Despite the young and multicultural structure of Chair, the municipality has not had a functional youth centre for years. Young people at the moment have no safe and constantly available space for learning, creative activities and socialising. Existing public spaces are not designed for them and are often limited in layout and offer no sense of ownership. The consequences are serious: limited access to non-formal education, reduced civic engagement, insufficient intercultural interaction, and the risk of social isolation, especially among young people from vulnerable communities.

The survey of young people in Chair confirms this impression. 73% of them believe that there is definitely a need for a youth centre, and 67% say that they would use it regularly. The biggest obstacles they identify are a lack of space and resources (41%), low motivation (21%) and poor promotion of existing activities (20%). As for content, young people want cultural and artistic events (33%), educational workshops (22%), sports and recreation (19%), career programmes (16%) and mental health support (10%). In addition, they are looking for creative spaces (52%), an event hall (48%), learning spaces (42%) and spaces for sports (38%).

Three alternatives for a solution of this problem were considered:

1. Adaptation of existing spaces – lower costs and making it available soon, but with limited accessibility and no sense of ownership by the youth.
2. Mobile “pop-up” programme - wider scope and flexibility, but with high logistical costs and weak identity.
3. Specialised multicultural youth centre – a stable, safe and multifunctional space, which allows constant accessibility and intercultural cooperation, and which most directly meets needs of the youth.

Based on the data and youth feedback, the recommendation is to establish a multicultural youth centre in Chair. The implementation envisages a participatory design process (surveys, focus groups, public meetings), infrastructure set up and equipping (€33,465), making teams and developing a programme (€40,800 per year), as well as launching a public campaign and pilot programmes. The total costs for the first two years are estimated at around €115,065, which can be covered a combination of municipal funds, donors, private partners and a symbolic youth membership fee.

With a clear timeframe (short-term – 0–6 months of consultation and planning, mid-term – 6–18 months of adaptation and launch, long-term – stable operation), the youth centre can become a symbol of the new youth policy in Chair. It will offer a space for education, creativity and networking, encourage intercultural cohesion and create a sense of ownership among young people – restoring their energy and potential as a driver of local development.

2. Problem – context and importance

The Municipality of Chair, according to the 2021 Census, has 64,773 inhabitants, making it one of the most densely populated urban municipalities in Skopje. The territory is small, but the population density is exceptionally high, which creates a dynamic, but at the same time burdened urban environment. Chair also stands out for its young age structure – young people represent a significant part of the local community, with the potential to be a driver of cultural, economic and social development. However, national demographic trends show a decline in the young population: the number of young people aged 15–29 declined from 480,828 people in 2002 (24% of the population) to 326,733 people in 2021 (18% of the population). This trend highlights the importance of local initiatives that will help keep the young people in their communities and ensure their engagement and development.

Although Chair is a multicultural and dynamic municipality with a relatively young population, a clear shortcoming has been felt for years: it lacks a functional youth centre. This shortcoming is not just a matter of space or infrastructure, but a fundamental barrier to creating a safe, accessible and inclusive environment in which young people can learn, create and connect. Existing public spaces are not designed with and for young people, they are often not constantly accessible, and their safety and inclusiveness are questionable.

The consequences of this situation are multifaceted. The lack of appropriate spaces for learning and creativity limits opportunities for informal education and the development of practical skills. Limited access to creative and educational programmes reduces young people's interest in civic engagement, and many talents remain invisible. This situation hits young people from vulnerable socio-economic backgrounds, who lack alternative resources and are left with even fewer opportunities for personal development, the hardest.

The data from the survey with the young people in Chair confirm this impression. 73% of respondents stated that there is definitely a need for a youth centre, while 67% said that they would use it regularly. The majority of young people (41%) emphasised the absence of space and resources as the main obstacle to their participation in activities, 21% indicated a lack of motivation, and 20% weak promotion and communication. In terms of desired content, 33% want cultural and artistic events, 22% educational workshops, 19% sports and recreational activities, while 16% are looking for career and skills development programmes. In addition, 10% emphasise the need for mental health support. These results clearly indicate that young people view such a centre as more than a building – they see it as a space that will meet their educational, creative and social needs.

The absence of a youth centre does not only affect individual development, but also the community as a whole. In an ethnically diverse municipality, a youth centre could be a place of dialogue, cooperation, and mutual understanding. Instead, young people remain separate living in parallel environments, with rare opportunities for intercultural interaction. Periodic and short-term events that are occasionally organised do not create a lasting infrastructure for connection, and their impact quickly fades.

As a result, some young people turn to unproductive or risky environments, and many feel demotivated and alienated from local processes. Instead of being drivers of change, they face limitations that reduce their role in the community. In this way, Chair loses part of the most important resource it has – young people, their energy, ideas, and creative potential.

3. Alternative solutions considered

In considering possible solutions for the absence of a youth centre in Chair, three main alternatives emerge: adapting some existing premises, establishing a mobile “pop-up” programme, and opening a multicultural youth centre. Each of them brings its own advantages and limitations, depending on criteria such as inclusivity, accessibility, continuity, sustainability, costs per beneficiary, safety, ownership by the youth, and the possibility for partnerships.

Alternative 1: Adaptation of existing premises

The first alternative is to use and adapt existing premises – schools, sports halls or cultural centres. This approach has the advantage because of a lower initial cost and having the space available to young people sooner. With small interventions, such as providing furniture and technological equipment, the premises can become functional.

However, the limitations are significant. These premises have a primary function – education or cultural events – which means that youth activities will be secondary. The schedule would be conditioned by other programmes, which reduces continuity and predictability. The survey with young people in Chair shows that stability is crucial: 73% believe that a youth centre is needed as a

permanent and defined space, and 67% stated that they would use it regularly if it were available. The lack of continuity and identity can reduce the feeling among young people that the space is truly “their” place.

Alternative 2: Mobile “pop-up” programme

The second alternative is a mobile or “pop-up” programme that goes around to different locations in the municipality. This model has the advantage of allowing for a wider radius of coverage, bringing activities closer to young people living in different neighbourhoods. Additionally, “pop-up” activities can be used as a test of interests and needs, which helps in planning future programmes.

However, the logistical challenges are great. Each new location requires transportation of equipment, adaptation and promotion. This approach often brings unpredictability and insufficient identity of the space. The survey data emphasises the need for continuity: 41% of young people indicated the lack of space as the biggest problem, and 20% weak promotion and communication. Such limitations reduce the possibility of a mobile programme to provide lasting motivation and a sense of ownership among young people.

Alternative 3: Specialised multicultural youth centre

The third alternative is to open a specialised multicultural youth centre – a space that will be entirely dedicated to youth activities. This option responds directly to the desires expressed by young people: 33% want cultural and artistic events, 22% educational workshops, 19% sports and recreational activities, while 16% are looking for career and skills development programmes and 10% mental health support. In addition, 52% want creative spaces, 48% a hall for organising events, 42% rooms for studying, and 38% space for sports activities.

Such a centre provides continuity, safety, and a clear identity, creating a stable and recognisable spot for the young people of Chair. It would be a multifunctional space that unites culture, education, sports, and creativity under one roof. In a multiethnic community, such a centre offers an added value: it becomes a place for intercultural interaction, social cohesion, and mutual respect. The main challenge remains the need for greater initial investment and establishing management capacity, but the result is stable infrastructure, and long-term sustainability that responds to the needs of young people.

4. Selected solution and proposed future actions

Based on the analysis of the problem and the alternative solutions considered, it is recommended to establish a specialised multicultural youth centre in Chair. This option largely meets the youth needs identified in the survey.

In other words, young people are not looking for improvised or mobile solutions, but for stable, safe and modern infrastructure that will be a symbol of youth energy and will serve as a catalyst for intercultural interaction and social cohesion.

Specific activities

Timeframe

- Short-term (0–6 months): consultations with young people, location selection, concept definition.
- Mid-term (6–18 months): adaptation of the space, procurement of equipment, forming a team.

Long-term (18+ months): fully operational with annual programmes, regular funding and expansion of activities.

1. Participatory design process (0–3 months):
 - Online surveys and focus groups to define the contents.
 - Workshops with young people for creative imagining of the centre (“design thinking”).
 - Public meetings with the municipality and civil society organisations to validate the concept proposal.
2. Infrastructure preparation (3–9 months):
 - Location selection (municipal or converted public building).
 - Architectural adaptation for multifunctional premises (learning, culture, sports, counselling).
 - Ensuring accessibility for people with disabilities, modern lighting and security system.
3. Furnishing and equipping (9–12 months):
 - Procurement of furniture (tables, chairs, shelves) – €5,775.
 - ICT equipment (computers, laptops, tablets) – €13,120.
 - Projectors, screens and audio systems for cultural activities – €8,300.
 - Equipment for workshops, brainstorming corner and intellectual games – €4,670.
 - Lighting and decor – €1,600.
 - Total: € 33,465 initial investment.
4. Forming a team and programme framework (12–15 months):

- Hiring a coordinator, technical staff, trainers and administrator (€25,500 per year).
 - Creating an annual programme framework with three types of activities:
 - educational (IT workshops, language courses, STEM clubs);
 - cultural (festivals, exhibitions, e-sports tournaments, film screenings);
 - social (mentoring, debates, sports events, mental health programmes).
5. Opening and promotion (15–18 months):
- Local media and online campaign.
 - Open event for young people, parents and institutions.
 - Pilot phase with 3-month programme test operation.

Financial implications

- Initial investment: €33,465 (infrastructure and equipment).
- Annual operating costs: €40,800 (staff, bills, maintenance, programmes, promotion).
- Total funds needed for the first two years: around €115,065.
- Sources of funding:
 - Municipal budget (€22,000 per year).
 - International donors and grants (€16,000).
 - Local companies and partnerships (€6,000–10,000).
 - Symbolic membership fee and self-sustaining activities (€1,200).

This financial framework provides stability and predictability, with a clear division between public and private sources, and creates space for innovative youth-owned programmes.

Conclusion

A specialised multicultural youth centre is the most fitting solution for Chair. It provides a stable, inclusive and safe space that directly addresses the priorities that young people themselves have expressed: the need for space, creativity, education and socialising. With a clear financial plan and timeframe, the centre can become a key spot for youth development, intercultural dialogue and long-term social cohesion in the municipality.

Innovative Initiatives in the Municipality of Shtip

01

Eco-Oasis for Shtip

Stefan Mihailov (Party of the
Vlachs from Macedonia)

ECO-OASIS FOR SHTIP: PUBLIC POLICY ON HEALTH, NATURE AND COMMUNITY



Stefan Mihailov

–Party of the Vlachs from Macedonia–

Eco-Oasis for Shtip: Public policy on health, nature and community

1. Summary

This document addresses the inadequate arrangement and facilities of the footpath along the Bregalnica River in Stip, which extends for approximately 10 kilometers. The trail is one of the city's most important public spaces, frequented daily by residents for walking, sports, socializing, and recreation. In its current state, however, it does not live up to its potential, lacking benches, lighting, shade, and other amenities that would make it safer and more attractive.

Surveys conducted as part of the "Eco-Oasis for Stip" initiative, involving 120 respondents, revealed that 80% of citizens use the trail regularly. At the same time, 68% reported a lack of benches, 62% noted insufficient shade, 55% cited inadequate lighting, and only 25% felt safe using the trail in the evening. These findings indicate that the issue is not merely aesthetic but also has direct implications for health, social cohesion, and local economic development.

The document considered three possible alternatives to address the problem:

1. Minimal intervention – basic maintenance, including minor repairs and the installation of a few garbage bins. This approach is quick and inexpensive but does not provide long-term solutions
2. Functional improvement – installation of benches, planters, additional bins, and basic lighting. It increases comfort and usability but lacks innovative features and long-term appeal.
3. Comprehensive modernization – integration of green and technological elements, such as benches with solar chargers, smart LED lighting, an automatic irrigation system, new greenery, and information boards. Although the most expensive option, it offers a lasting transformation, enhances trail usage, and supports tourism and local economic development.

The recommendation is to implement the third alternative—comprehensive modernization with innovative solutions. The total budget is estimated at €369,600, covering the planting of 2,000 trees and 4,000 bushes, installation of 500 benches, 1,000 solar lights, an irrigation system, and information boards. The project can be carried out within four months, divided into four phases: preparation, planting, infrastructure, and technological systems.

The implications of the project extend beyond the local context—it aligns with national strategies for environmental and tourism development, as well as European agendas for sustainable cities and green infrastructure. The involvement of all stakeholders—the Municipality, public enterprises, the civil sector, sports clubs, the private sector, and citizens—ensures effective implementation and long-term sustainability of the solution.

By executing this initiative, the footpath along the Bregalnica River will become a modern, safe and multifunctional public space, enhancing the well-being of citizens and strengthening the image of Stip as a city committed to green, sustainable, and modern urban development.

2. Problem - context and importance

The hiking trail along the Bregalnica River in Stip, stretching approximately 10 kilometers, is one of the city's most important public spaces. It is used daily by residents for walking, sports, socializing, and recreation. However, in its current state, the trail does not reflect its full potential. Despite being functionally usable, it suffers from inadequate maintenance, insufficient amenities, and a lack of proper arrangement, which reduces its attractiveness and limits its use, especially in the evenings.

Research conducted within the initiative "Eco-Oasis for Stip" demonstrates strong public support and a clear need for comprehensive revitalization. A survey of 120 respondents revealed that 80% of citizens use the quay almost daily or several times a week, primarily for walking (75%), running and exercise (48%), and resting or sitting (55%). This underscores the trail's important role in the daily lives of the local population.

However, satisfaction with the trail is limited due to multiple issues. The most frequently mentioned problems are: lack of benches (68%), poor lighting (55%), neglect and litter (47%), and insufficient green areas and shade (62%). Additionally, only 25% of respondents reported feeling completely safe using the trail in the evening, while 35% explicitly stated that they felt unsafe. These factors directly affect the use of the space and limit opportunities for recreation at different times of the day.

The lack of investment and a systematic approach to the development of the trail is one of the main reasons for the current situation. In recent years, only minimal interventions have been made, such as installing a few benches and trash bins, which are insufficient to meet the needs of the community. Tree planting was sporadic and lacked ongoing maintenance, resulting in some greenery drying out. The absence of modern solutions—such as solar lighting, benches with chargers, or interactive content—makes the trail less appealing to young people and tourists.

This situation has several negative consequences. First, trail usage is reduced, especially in the evening, when the lack of lighting and sense of safety are most pronounced. Second, citizens are losing confidence in public investments due to the limited effectiveness of previous measures. Third, the municipality misses opportunities to develop local tourism and sports activities that could bring economic and social benefits. Fourth, the quality of life and recreational habits of residents are declining, which is particularly significant in an urban context where public spaces play a crucial role in health and social cohesion.

In addition, the survey indicates that citizens expect a systematic approach to future improvements. The most requested elements are green areas and seedlings (78%), better lighting (72%), a children's

playground (65%), additional benches for seating (60%), as well as pedestrian (55%) and bicycle paths (45%). This data clearly demonstrates that the trail should be transformed into a modern and multifunctional public space that meets the needs of different age and social groups.

The problem with the current condition of the footpath along the Bregalnica River is not only aesthetic or functional. It is also an issue of sustainable urban development, citizens' health, the environment, and the local economy. Without modern infrastructure, safety, and attractive amenities, the trail remains an underutilized resource. Conversely, with appropriate investments in green areas, urban equipment, and sustainable energy solutions, it can become a driver of healthy habits, a tourist attraction, and a symbol of Stip's modern and eco-conscious identity.

It can be concluded that the insufficient arrangement of the pedestrian path along the Bregalnica River is a complex issue encompassing physical infrastructure, environmental sustainability, social inclusion, and economic development. Addressing this problem will not only provide improved conditions for recreation and socialization but will also strengthen community trust in public policies and create new opportunities for the city's development.

3. Alternative solutions considered

In the process of planning the arrangement of the footpath along the Bregalnica River, several possible approaches for its improvement were identified. The trail is a space of great importance for the local community, but limited resources and the diverse needs of citizens require careful consideration of different solutions. Each alternative offers its own benefits and challenges, which are important to understand in order to identify the interventions that can most effectively contribute to the long-term development of the space.

Alternative 1: Minimal intervention – basic maintenance

In the process of planning the arrangement of the footpath along the Bregalnica River, several possible approaches for its improvement were identified. The trail is a space of great importance for the local community, but limited resources and the diverse needs of citizens require careful consideration of different solutions. Each alternative offers its own benefits and challenges, which are important to understand in order to identify the interventions that can most effectively contribute to the long-term development of the space.

Alternative 2: Functional improvement – moderate intervention

The second option involves installing new benches, planting seedlings for natural shade, adding waste bins, and providing basic lighting. This solution aims to increase the comfort and functionality of the space, giving citizens more opportunities for rest, recreation, and evening use of the trail. Some of the most common requests from citizens would be addressed – according to the survey, 70% of respondents indicated that shade and benches are most needed, and 55% emphasized the importance

of nighttime lighting. This approach would make the trail more practical and enjoyable for daily use. However, it remains limited because it does not introduce innovative solutions that could make the trail more attractive to young people and tourists. Without modern features such as solar chargers or smart lighting, the space would receive a functional upgrade but not a long-term transformation.

Alternative 3: Comprehensive modernization with innovative solutions

The third option is the most comprehensive and envisages a complete transformation of the trail through a combination of green and technological elements. It includes the installation of benches with integrated solar chargers, smart LED lighting with motion sensors, information boards with maps and educational content, a system for automatic irrigation of greenery and the creation of additional content such as children's and sports zones. Such interventions provide a space that responds to the most common survey remarks – lack of shade, benches and lighting – and at the same time create a modern and safe recreational area accessible to all ages. This solution also supports the ecological component through the use of renewable energy and seedlings adapted to the local climate, which improves the microclimate and biodiversity. Although it requires greater initial investment and more serious maintenance, the benefits are long-term: increased utilization of the trail, new opportunities for cultural and sports activities, as well as the potential for the development of eco-tourism and a positive image of the city.

4. Selected solution and proposed future actions

Based on survey data, project analysis, and identified community needs, the recommendation is to implement **comprehensive modernization with innovative solutions**. This alternative best addresses citizens' priorities – shade, seating, lighting, and green areas – and provides a lasting transformation, turning the trail into a modern, safe, and sustainable public space.

The survey clearly showed strong demand for change: 78% of respondents highlighted the need for green areas, 72% for better lighting, 68% for additional benches, and 65% for a children's playground. Furthermore, only 25% reported feeling safe at night, emphasizing the urgency of investing in lighting and security. These findings indicate that minimal or limited interventions would be insufficient to meet the community's real needs.

Specific activities

The proposed solution provides for:

- Planting **2,000 ornamental trees** and **4,000 flowering shrubs** along the 10 km trail.
- Installation of **300 benches with solar chargers** and **200 standard benches**.
- Installation of **1,000 solar-powered lights** with motion sensors for full illumination.

- Establishment of **an automatic irrigation system** that will enable sustainability of the greenery.
- Installation of **information boards** and development of additional content for cultural and sports activities.

Financial implications

The total budget for arranging the track is estimated at **369,600 euros**.

Category	Quantity	Price per unit (€)	Total (€)	Note
Ornamental trees	2,000	22	44,000	Every 5 m, one tree (both sides)
Flowering shrubs	4,000	7	28	Placed among the trees
Ground/Humus Fertilizer	& -	-	5.000	Bulk Purchase
Benches with solar chargers	300	420	126.000	Every ~33 m one bench
Plain benches	200	100	20,000	Holiday allowance
Solar lights (LED)	1.000	30	30,000	Autonomous, with sensors
Irrigation system	1	-	50,000	Main system with pumps and branching
Workforce	-	-	25,000	Mass planting and installation
Transport & Logistics	-	-	8,000	Materials and seedlings
Reserves (10%)	-	-	33,600	Contingencies
Total	-	-	369,600	

Although this investment is larger compared to alternative solutions, its benefits far outweigh the costs: improved aesthetics and safety, increased utilization of the trail, new opportunities for tourism and local economy, improving the health of citizens and strengthening the positive image of Stip.

Timeframe

The project can be implemented within **four months**, divided into the following phases:

Phase	Activities	Timeframe
Stage 1: Preparation	Design, clearing of the terrain, procurement of materials and seedlings	1 Month
Phase 2 – Planting	Planting 2,000 trees and 4,000 shrubs, placing humus and fertilizer	1 Month
Phase 3 – Infrastructure	Installation of 300 benches with solar chargers, 200 ordinary benches and 1,000 solar lights	1 Month
Phase 4 – Technology systems and final works	Installing an irrigation system, installing information boards, editing additional content	1 Month
Total duration	Complete all activities	4 months

The successful implementation of the project depends on the coordinated involvement of multiple stakeholders. The Municipality of Stip plays a central role as the initiative's lead, providing part of the budget and coordinating with public enterprises. Public enterprises will contribute to maintenance, greenery, and lighting. Local NGOs and sports clubs, already active through clean-up and recreational events, will be essential for volunteer support, education, and promotion of the trail. The private sector can participate through sponsorships, such as funding benches or lights with branded contributions, providing additional resources and enhancing project sustainability. Finally, citizens are key actors—not only as beneficiaries but also as co-owners of the space, whose engagement and trust are vital for the long-term preservation and success of the trail.

With the implementation of this modernization, the pedestrian path along the Bregalnica River will transform into a modern public space that ensures comfort, safety, and appeal for all age groups. The investment will deliver long-term economic, environmental, and social benefits, strengthen social cohesion, and showcase Stip as a city committed to sustainable urban development and an improved quality of life for its citizens.

Conclusion

The proposed intervention for the footpath along the Bregalnica River goes beyond a local urban improvement, aligning fully with national and European sustainable development policies. At the national level, it supports environmental and local economic strategies, particularly in green infrastructure, biodiversity protection, and promotion of healthy lifestyles. At the European level, the project corresponds with the European Green Deal and the Sustainable Cities Agenda, emphasizing green public spaces, reduced carbon footprint, and renewable energy use. Furthermore, it advances national sports and tourism policies by enabling sports activities and eco-tourism, thereby boosting the city's economic vitality. This underscores the project's significance not only for Stip's citizens but also for broader European integration and the achievement of global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Innovative Initiatives in the Municipality of Shuto Orizari

01

Right to Transportation for Shuto Orizari

Richard Sali (Central Democratic Union - CDU)

**RIGHT TO TRANSPORT FOR
THE MUNICIPALITY OF
SHUTO ORIZARI**



Richard Sali

–Central Democratic Union (CDU)–

Right to transport for the Municipality of Shuto Orizari

1. Summary

The initiative “*Right to Transport for Shuto Orizari*” aims to provide accessible, regular, and safe public transport for the residents of this municipality, one of the most marginalized urban communities in Skopje. Surveys and analyses confirmed that the existing system does not meet the real needs of citizens: as many as 73% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction, mainly due to irregular lines, an insufficient number of vehicles, and poor connectivity with central city areas. The municipality has approximately 25,000 residents, more than half of whom are under the age of 35, with a high unemployment rate exceeding 50% of the active population. Around 40% of households do not own a car, making their mobility fully dependent on public transport. This situation disproportionately affects women, students, the elderly, and persons with disabilities, for whom public transport is essential for access to education, employment, and public services.

At present, Shuto Orizari is connected to the city via bus lines 19 and 20, operated by the Public Transport Company (JSP) Skopje. Although these lines provide basic connectivity to other parts of the city, their frequency is insufficient, buses are often overcrowded and delayed, and some populated areas remain poorly served. Over 70% of respondents emphasize the need for improved regularity and frequency, while more than 60% support the introduction of minibus services to enhance mobility.

Based on the conducted analyses, three possible solutions were considered: introducing an additional minibus on existing lines, establishing a new direct bus line Shuto Orizari–Center, and implementing a combined public-private partnership model. After a detailed comparison of economic feasibility, social benefit, and operational aspects, the most appropriate solution is the introduction of an additional minibus on the existing line. This option requires the least initial investment, provides a return on investment in less than a year, and allows flexible, fast, and sustainable service improvement without significant additional infrastructure. The minibus will reduce waiting times, increase regularity, and provide better coverage of the peripheral parts of the municipality, thereby improving access to basic urban services and enhancing the quality of life for residents.

The implementation of this alternative is planned in three consecutive phases: preparatory (December 2025 – February 2026), implementation (March – June 2026), and evaluation (July – September 2026). In the first phase, the technical and tender documentation will be finalized and the route will be defined; in the second phase, the procurement, branding, and piloting of the service will be carried out; and in the third phase, the results will be analyzed and a plan for the permanent introduction or expansion of the system will be prepared. With this approach, the municipality will obtain real data on the demand and efficiency of the minibus model, which will serve as a basis for the possible establishment of a new line or a combined system with a private operator.

The Right to Transport for Shuto Orizari project has the potential to become an example of successful and inclusive urban intervention that directly contributes to greater social equity, economic activity and sustainable local development. The introduction of minibus transport is the first concrete step towards creating a functional, accessible and reliable public transport system that connects the inhabitants of Shuto Orizari with the rest of the city and integrates this community into the wider urban fabric of Skopje.

2. Problem – context and importance

The municipality of Shuto Orizari is characterized by pronounced social and economic challenges, with public transport playing a key role in residents' daily lives. According to the latest census (State Statistical Office, 2021), the municipality has 24,764 inhabitants, with a predominantly young population, more than 50% of whom are under 35. Shuto Orizari is the only municipality in Europe with a Roma majority, making it unique in its cultural and ethnic composition, but also vulnerable in terms of access to public services and economic opportunities. Unemployment in the municipality is high; according to the Employment Agency (2023), the unemployment rate exceeds 50% of the active population, significantly higher than the national average of approximately 14%. A considerable proportion of households live under conditions of social vulnerability and unstable incomes. About 40%¹² of residents do not own a personal car, making their mobility directly dependent on public transport. Access to workplaces, educational institutions, health centers, and administrative services in central Skopje is severely limited, further deepening social isolation.

Currently, public transport in Shuto Orizari is provided by two bus lines—numbers 19 and 20—operated by JSP Skopje. Line 19 connects Shuto Orizari with the settlements of Chair and Center, while line 20 links it with the northern and eastern parts of the city, including Butel and Radišani. Although both lines provide basic connectivity to central areas, their frequency is insufficient, particularly during peak periods. Buses are often late, overcrowded, and unable to meet growing demand, while some parts of the municipality remain poorly served. The lack of proper synchronization between the two lines results in an inefficient system that does not ensure adequate accessibility or safety for residents.

This situation is particularly challenging for women, persons with disabilities, the elderly, and students, who rely on public transport for their daily activities. Women, often responsible for family care, make multiple trips throughout the day, and irregular transport limits their access to services and employment. For persons with disabilities, the main issue is the lack of accessible vehicles and infrastructure, while pupils and students face difficulties reaching schools and universities on time.

¹² UNDP (2022), *Local Development Report for Shuto Orizari*; World Bank (2020), *Social Exclusion and Mobility Barriers in Skopje Urban Areas*

The results of the survey conducted within the initiative show that 74% of respondents consider the lines to be irregular, 68% believe the number of vehicles is insufficient, and 71% emphasize the need for better connectivity with central parts of the city. At the same time, more than 60% of respondents support the introduction of organized vans or minibuses as a means to improve mobility.

These findings underscore the urgency of intervention. The community seeks a solution that will increase accessibility, reduce travel times, and ensure the regularity and safety of public transport. This intervention has broader significance—improving transport will contribute to the economic activation of the population, enhanced gender equality, and better integration of Shuto Orizari into the urban fabric of the City of Skopje.

In this context, public transport is not merely an infrastructure issue but a matter of social justice, inclusion, and equal access to opportunities. Therefore, investing in efficient, affordable, and safe transportation is a key measure for improving residents' quality of life and creating a more sustainable and equitable urban environment in Shuto Orizari.

3. Alternative solutions considered

Within the framework of the analysis, three alternatives were considered, each offering potential opportunities for improving public transport in the Municipality of Shuto Orizari.

Alternative 1: Introduction of an additional minibus

This option involves introducing a minibus on one of the existing bus lines (no. 19 or no. 20), with a capacity of 18 to 22 passengers. The aim is to increase service frequency, especially during peak periods, when demand on public transport is highest. The minibus is scheduled to operate every 15 minutes during peak periods from 06:00 to 22:00.

The initial investment for this alternative is estimated at approximately MKD 3.2 million for the purchase of one minibus, with annual operating costs of about MKD 2.6 million. Expected ticket revenues are MKD 8.7 million per year. Based on these indicators, the investment would be recovered in less than a year, yielding a return of 193%.

Positive aspects: This alternative provides fast and flexible service improvement without significant additional infrastructure. The minibus can respond to current citizen needs, reduce waiting times, and offer a more comfortable service. With lower fuel and maintenance costs, this model is economically sustainable and practical for testing demand. Additionally, minibuses can access narrower streets or populated areas where standard buses cannot operate, improving coverage.

Negative aspects: The main disadvantage is limited capacity. The minibus can become crowded during high-demand periods. If passenger numbers continue to rise, additional vehicles will be required, increasing operational complexity and costs. Furthermore, this solution does not introduce a

new route or direct connection to the center of Skopje, meaning it does not fully resolve accessibility issues to business, administrative, and health services.

Alternative 2: Establishment of a new bus line Shuto Orizari – Centar

The second option envisages establishing a new bus line that directly connects the Municipality of Shuto Orizari with the center of Skopje. This line would use buses with a capacity of 70 to 80 passengers, with departures every 20 minutes and operating hours from 05:30 to 23:00. The initial investment for this alternative is 8.4 million denars, with annual operating costs of MKD 4.7 million and expected revenues of MKD 17.5 million per year, yielding a return on investment of 153%.

Positive aspects: This alternative provides a direct connection between Shuto Orizari and the main urban areas, significantly improving access to employment, education, and health services. Greater bus capacity allows for more efficient transport of passengers and better economies of scale. According to data from JSP Skopje, the introduction of new direct lines to central areas significantly increases ridership, especially if frequency and regularity are maintained. Additionally, this solution allows for better integration into the city's public transport system and creates conditions for implementing modern digital tools for bus monitoring.

Negative aspects: This option requires a higher initial investment and entails higher operating costs, which could strain the budgets of JSP Skopje and, by extension, the City of Skopje. Infrastructure improvements—such as new stations, signaling, and potentially dedicated bus lanes—are also needed for effective operation. Furthermore, in the first years of operation, uneven use of capacity is possible, which would reduce economic efficiency until demand stabilizes.

Alternative 3: Hybrid model - improving existing minibuses lines and establishing a public-private partnership

The third alternative is a combined or hybrid approach that integrates elements of the previous two solutions. This model envisages a gradual improvement of the existing bus lines 19 and 20 by introducing minibuses to cover underserved areas and increasing frequency during peak periods, in parallel with the preparation of a new direct line to the city center, implemented through a public-private partnership (PPP).

Positive aspects: This model involves introducing minibuses to improve coverage and access, while the private partner invests in vehicles and infrastructure for the new line. This reduces financial pressure on the local budget and provides greater flexibility. The PPP model leverages the expertise, efficiency, and standards of the private sector, while the municipality retains its supervisory and regulatory role. According to practices in other European cities (such as Sofia and Zagreb), such partnerships contribute to higher service quality and increased transparency in public transport management.

Negative aspects: This approach requires more complex coordination and a legal framework for establishing the partnership. Careful definition of liabilities, risk sharing, and oversight mechanisms is needed to avoid unequal conditions between the public and private partners. The initial phase of establishing the contract may be longer due to administrative procedures, and service quality depends on the efficiency of the monitoring system implemented by the municipality.

4. Selected solution and proposed future actions

Based on the conducted analyses, consultations, and comparative financial calculations, the first alternative—introducing an additional minibus on the existing line—emerges as the most desirable, feasible, and rational option for the Municipality of Shuto Orizari. It is a solution that allows for quick and measurable intervention with minimal risk, while simultaneously creating a foundation for systematic improvement of public transport in the longer term.

This approach is particularly appropriate because it aligns with actual demand, the infrastructure capacity of the municipality, and the constraints of a limited budget. Instead of relying on complex and expensive infrastructure, the minibus model provides an immediate, noticeable improvement in service quality—regularity, frequency, and accessibility—which is crucial for fostering citizens’ trust in public transport.

In addition, this solution is the most socially inclusive, as it ensures greater coverage of neighborhoods where vulnerable groups reside—women, students, the elderly, and persons with disabilities—who are largely dependent on public transport. Introducing the minibus will reduce waiting times, improve connectivity to existing lines, and provide safer travel conditions.

From an operational perspective, minibuses are easy to integrate into the existing system of JSP Skopje, do not require substantial additional capacity, and can function with current drivers and maintenance services. They allow operational flexibility, as frequency can be adjusted according to actual daily demand. This is especially important in the small and compact territory of Shuto Orizari, where transport efficiency and speed take precedence over volume.

Economically, this option offers the fastest return on investment and creates room for reinvestment in maintenance, digitalization, and infrastructure improvements (stations, access paths, and transport monitoring systems). At the same time, the model is scalable—if demand grows, it can be easily expanded with additional vehicles without major capital investments.

With this gradual and practical approach, the municipality will not only enhance the quality of life for its citizens but also collect valuable data on public transport usage. This data will serve as the basis for future phases, such as the potential introduction of a new line or a public-private partnership. Consequently, the first alternative is not only the fastest and most feasible option but also the most

strategically sound, combining financial sustainability, social inclusion, and efficient management of public transport.

Subsequent actions to implement Alternative 1

The implementation of this alternative is envisaged to take place in three consecutive phases, with clearly defined activities, responsible institutions and a timeframe.

I. Preparatory phase (December 2025 – February 2026)

This phase aims to set the institutional and technical basis for the introduction of the minibus. It will implement the following activities:

- Finalization of the technical documentation and definition of the minibus route based on the analysis of demand and passenger frequency on lines 19 and 20.
- Development of a safety and accessibility plan for persons with disabilities, in cooperation with relevant associations.
- Public information and the launch of a campaign to promote the new service under the slogan "Minibus for all – Shuto Orizari on the move".

II. Implementation phase (March – June 2026)

At this stage, the actual implementation of the minibus service and testing of the system under regular traffic conditions will be carried out. Activities include:

- Signing a contract with the operator and procurement of one to two minibuses with a capacity of 18–22 passengers.
- Installing a GPS tracking system and digital passenger records in the minibus.
- Establish a timetable and coordinate with existing bus routes to avoid overlaps.
- Launching a three-month pilot period (April – June 2026) with monitoring of passenger numbers, trip duration, and user satisfaction.

III. Evaluation and extended phase (July – September 2026)

The focus of this phase is to assess the effectiveness of the introduced system and prepare a long-term model for its continuation or expansion.

- Systematic analysis of pilot phase data (frequency, revenue, citizen satisfaction, and coverage of settlements).
- Preparation of a report with recommendations for improvement by JSP Skopje to the Council of the City of Skopje, followed by a decision on the permanent introduction of the minibus line.
- Assessment of the possibility of introducing a second minibus line or gradually transitioning to a combined model with the participation of a private operator.

- Development of a long-term sustainability plan, including a budget projection, potential donor sources, and a proposal for a digital application to track timetables and bookings.

With this three-phase implementation, the Municipality of Shuto Orizari will be able to quickly improve the quality of public transport while simultaneously creating a structural foundation for its sustainable expansion in the coming years. The first alternative, with its efficiency, adaptability, and minimal risk, can serve as a model of good practice for other municipalities facing similar challenges.

The project "Right to Transport for Shuto Orizari" has the potential to become an example of successfully addressing one of the community's most important urban issues. The introduction of minibus transport in the first phase will enable rapid improvements in the daily lives of residents, particularly vulnerable groups, while laying the groundwork for a long-term model of sustainable urban mobility.

Through continuous cooperation between local government, JSP Skopje, citizens, and donors, a modern and efficient transport system can be established that promotes social inclusion, economic activity, and broader development of the municipality. Investment in public transport is not merely an infrastructure measure but also a significant step toward creating equal opportunities and enhancing quality of life in Shuto Orizari. With proper planning, regular maintenance, and performance monitoring, this initiative can serve as a model for other urban communities in the country.

Annex 1: List of abbreviations

APP – Academy for Public Policy

DOM – Democratic Renewal of Macedonia

DUI – Democratic Union for Integration

ESP – Electoral Support Programme

FRP – Forum for Reasonable Policies

IFES – International Foundation for Electoral Systems

SDSM – Social Democratic Union of Macedonia

VMRO-DPMNE – Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization - Democratic Party for
Macedonian National Unity

ZNAM – I KNOW Movement for our Macedonia