

**Advancing innovative coGeneration Options for Revitalising local Areas** | Interreg Danube Transnational Programme, 2nd Call for Proposals – 1<sup>st</sup> Phase. Designed: Pietro Elisei - [pietro.elisei@urbasofia.eu](mailto:pietro.elisei@urbasofia.eu), Sabina Dimitriu - [sabina.dimitriu@urbasofia.eu](mailto:sabina.dimitriu@urbasofia.eu)



## **Advancing innovative coGeneration Options for Revitalising local Areas (AGORA)**

**Programme priority:** 1. Innovative and socially responsible Danube region

**Specific objective:** 1.2 Increase competences for business and social innovation

**Project promoter:** URBASOFIA SRL – BUCHAREST, ROMANIA

**Contact person:** DR. PIETRO ELISEI  
[pietro.elisei@urbasofia.eu](mailto:pietro.elisei@urbasofia.eu)  
(+40) 731 159 785

## Needs and challenges

Current schemes and tools for running effective and efficient multi-level governance are not yet properly operating in Europe, especially in the Danube macro-region. As stated in the Pact of Amsterdam, major societal challenges of this century (unemployment, poverty, demographic/economic shrinkage) are concentrated in high-density areas. The region is still tributary to historic complexities and transition challenges (especially in social and economic areas), as well as specificities related to culture, planning systems, local heritage and social structures. It is here that societal challenges such as aging and depopulation, environment related issues, widening skills and income gap and the digital divide have the strongest impact on quality of life and attractiveness. However, the region is now also facing the positive externalities of the (re)growth of the middle class: a structural change towards empowerment, critical for the uptake of new transformative socio-economic processes.

To date, most DTP countries have still not completed their transitional path to equitable, sustainable local social and economic development:

- the great potential of cross-linkages between local public administrations, enterprises, research bodies and civil society has been underused
- social services use tools, even innovative ones, which still respond to an outdated economic model
- the effect of empowerment and social innovation at local level is still very limited in repercussions on the broader local economic recovery or inclusive long term growth
- slow take-off of local innovative ideas and limited capitalization.

In order to roll out successful forms of social innovation, however without homogenizing contexts and needs, it is crucial to go beyond a single local solution and look at **the potential of transnational and structured transformative social innovation frameworks**. Processes supporting local revitalization and development need to act as catalysts, allowing institutionalization and hybridization of new concrete practices, actions and policies.

AGORA proposes an **innovative learning system** through which the civil society, local economy and research sector can better cooperate with local decision makers, in an inter-institutional dialogue with higher regional levels, in order to address their needs in three key areas (**public space, public policy, creative local economy**) and to scale social innovation through transnational learning and cooperation. The local governments, in contexts of multi-level governance schemes, will be supported through an inclusive, integrative and bottom-up approach to define the instruments for generating place-based quality of life.

AGORA addresses all identified challenges, in an integrated and transversal manner, while also mainstreaming Social and Organizational Innovation and thus enabling

the legal and financial framework to support the implementation, avoiding institutional and local actor fragmentation in the process.

## Objectives

**AGORA focuses on co-production of public policies and services for better and economically productive public spaces, embedded in the local social fabric, in order to create triple-A communities.**

The project will create and test, within a joint learning experience, an inter-institutional social and organizational innovation capacity building scheme for local regeneration, based on potentials, assets and social needs. It leverages on multi-actor planning processes (horizontal action), multi-level integration/coordination (vertical action) and strengthening the collaboration between the private and public development players, effectively bridging the inter-institutional divide through new forms of civic legitimacy and innovative re-programming of space.

The target of the project is to catalyze innovative communities in AGORA cities, embedded in the broader governance picture, with which to incubate and deploy solutions for public space reinvention and recovery aimed at service co-creation, urban and economic re-shaping of the territorial partners. AGORA bridges social economy, political, cultural and institutional capacity, leading partners to become triple-A communities through three objectives: Agoras, Agendas and Actions:

**1. Setting up scalable networked systems of local innovation** by a) experimenting with new decision-making institutions, formal and informal, b) building new inter-scalar connections involving both upper-scale institutions as well as local market and social economy sectors, and c) reincorporating communities and individuals as part of the solution. The local systems will be part of the network-level AGORA Social Innovation Community.

**2. Co-designing Community Space Innovation Agendas** as instruments to rethink local potentials and open up new spaces, leveraging on endogenous social and economic capacity, for:

- a. Better community spaces as social catalysts**
- b. New and inclusive spaces for the creative local economy,**
- c. Supported by creative prototyping of public services**

**3. Generating new business models for maximizing social impact** (Participatory Open Collaboration Platforms, Urban Centers, Temporary Use partnerships and other PPPs) and co-creation pilots for new public spaces and services operationalizing the **Community Space Innovation Agendas**.

## **Methodology used to achieve the project objectives and innovative approach**

The ambition of AGORA is to test and deliver concrete cooperative renewal solutions for high-density areas in the Danube Region, and to generate a transnationally tested toolkit and methodology for developing successful transformative service and organizational innovation.

In order to achieve this, the project will start from a framework and stakeholder assessment and launch a multi-level and iterative process of involvement at local, regional and transnational level, through workshops, training of partners and international seminars, which will result in a networked system of innovation: a new, informal decision-making and support institution reincorporating communities and individuals as a creative part of the solutions to local quality of life problems, specifically pertaining to the quality of public space environment, collaborative and effective public services and support for creative local economies. Through this learning and capacity building process, the partners together with the AGORA community will co-design Community Space Innovation Agendas – strategies for improving place-based quality of life in the three key areas of intervention, together with instruments for performance monitoring. Lastly, AGORA will test, together with the community, the implementation of public service pilots designed in the Agendas, using amongst others participatory budgeting tools, or PPPPs. The results of the overall process and guidelines for collaborative local innovation design KPI will be incorporated in a policy paper for the Danube Area local and regional policymakers and a toolkit, as a glossy printout publication aimed at the community and stakeholders.

The project proposes a 360-degree approach to social innovation, opening up the public sector value chain to the citizens and working both with the latter (bottom-up) as well as at transnational level to bring organizational innovation in the local administration. The methodology relies on a constant feedback loop between the transnational and local partner levels, and enhances the capacity of both decision- and policy-makers as well as NGOs and business support organizations through training, workshops and seminars in which the high-expertise ASPs will transfer knowledge to participants.

AGORA is highly innovative not only in terms of methodology, but also outputs: participatory policy making and co-creation of public services have not yet been tested with concrete results at this scale, and the AGORA policy paper will be the first document addressing the profound paradigm change in decision making at local level in the very specific Danube Region area with concrete, transferable tools and results. On the long term, through capacity building and the embedding of innovative economies and engagement approaches proposed, AGORA has the potential of being one of the building blocks for structural change in multi-level governance.



## EUSDR Priority Areas to which AGORA is contributing

PA8 To support the competitiveness of enterprises, including cluster development

PA9 To invest in people and skills

PA10 To step up institutional capacity and cooperation

## Main Target Groups

Local Public Authorities	12
SMEs	96
Interest Groups including NGOs	96
Infrastructure and (public) Service Providers	60
General Public	6,000

We propose essentially a **circular and cumulative interaction** between the governance stakeholders in AGORA partners, in order to reshape the knowledge, skills and innovation local landscapes, through an **iterative process, starting from real citizen needs and involvement and yielding concrete outputs and results.**

## Main results and outputs

AGORA will lead to a better systemic understanding of the main barriers and instruments for **participatory and socially innovative local development** in the Danube Transnational region. It will **improve legal and policy frameworks** in project areas for **better, participatory renewal strategies for high-density areas** and it will set up a **framework for assessment, monitoring and benchmarking local innovation processes** which can be easily used and transferred.

Focusing on areas with major societal challenges in the areas of public space quality, insufficient public services or an obsolete/lacking creative business support system, AGORA will test an **innovative methodology** for silo breaking, social and governance innovation as well as bridging the socio-economic divides and increasing employability and quality of life of citizens through **local cooperative public service development**. The learning bridge between public, private and civil society sectors as well as the multilevel institutional cooperation model proposed (the Social Innovation Community) will focus on mutual learning, knowledge and pilot transfer, e-learning and increasing citizen entrepreneurship, employability and skills. Last but not least, the actions envisioned will transform AGORA territorial partners in triple A-level cities through Agora, Agendas and Actions.

## WORKPLAN STRUCTURE

**WP 0. Project preparation** (standard WP – 17,500 EUR)

**WP 1. Project management** (30 months, all partners)

**WP 2. Communication activities** (30 months, all partners)

**WP 3. Systemic assessment**

*This WP will establish a framework of assessment for place-based quality of life, from the perspective of 1) actors, 2) networks, 3) systems of innovation and 4) subsequent tools. The objective is to identify and benchmark the main ingredients for soft models of local innovative development, including design principles for new public services for local regeneration and socially innovative policies encouraging their development.*

- Activity 3.1.** Governance Framework Analysis
  - **Study report on the governance framework in AGORA partners** (1 global report, all territorial partners contribute to their respective chapter)
- Activity 3.2.** Baseline social and economic local development
  - **Study report on state of art of social and economic local development** (1 global report, all territorial partners contribute to their respective chapter)
- Activity 3.3.** Stakeholder analysis
  - **Stakeholder analysis report for AGORA territorial partners** (1 global report, all territorial partners contribute to their respective chapter)
- Activity 3.4.** Social Innovation Communities benchmarks
  - **Social Innovation Communities toolkit** (first version, best practices and desk analysis, will be updated as a Capitalization output with the results of the AGORA piloting and co-development process)

**WP 4. AGORA Local Communities**

*Social Innovation Communities (AGORAs) will be set up, one for each territorial partner, comprising of public administrations (multi-level), public institutions as agencies for social and economic capital, economy players and investors, and the civil society. The aim is setting up networked systems of local innovation (AGORAs)*

by a) experimenting with new decision-making institutions, formal and informal, b) building new inter-scalar connections involving both upper-scale institutions as well as local market and social economy sectors, and c) reincorporating communities and individuals as part of the solution. The local systems will be part of the AGORA Social Innovation Community.

- Activity 4.1.** Multilevel governance workshops
- **1 Workshop for each partner – validation of Activity 3 report findings and crystallization of working groups**
  - **Report on multilevel governance workshops** (1 global report, all territorial partners contribute to their respective chapter)

- Activity 4.2.** Social Innovation Communities Platform
- **Online SIC Platform** (easy to access, free and public platform for discussion and joint mapping / designing of pilot areas in local partners – see [STATUS GeoBlogs](#))

## **WP 5. Community Space Innovation Agendas**

*One Community Space Innovation Agenda (ILIA) will be co-designed for each territorial partner, area-based and developed concomitantly with the maturation process of the AGORAs, which will identify the long-term development / renewal principles and actions, area-based, for:*

1. *Enhancing the quality of the public space (inside and outside, recreational or commercial, privately or publicly owned) as social, contemporary, sustainable space;*
2. *Supporting the development of local innovative / creative economies by valorizing unused local assets and community spaces;*
3. *Co-delivering new, needed public services to support innovation for local social and economic development.*

*ILIAs will be instruments to rethink local potentials and open up new spaces, leveraging on endogenous social and economic capacity.*

- Activity 5.1.** Setting up the Methodology
- Transversal expertise partners will develop a common framework for the Agendas: final methodological approach for workshops, terms of reference and ToC for the Agenda, etc. The scope will be defining an incremental multi-step approach rather than traditional administrative-led operationalizations, which can be used throughout the AGORA cities and can be easily replicated further.

- Activity 5.2.** State of Art Screening: Problems, Gaps and Opportunities;
- Within this activity, each territorial partner will develop jointly together with its Social Innovation Community a comprehensive assessment of the local area selected for piloting, focusing on understanding the most relevant and pressing

issues, service gaps, problems pertaining to public space and its functions, but also opportunities for joint renewal.

- **1 workshop per partner**
- **Report on barriers and opportunities**

### **Activity 5.3.** Co-generation of solutions

Starting from the problems and gaps identified in Activity 5.2, each local stakeholder group will further develop jointly a set of feasible, committed solutions. The final report will be reimagining the process of urban renewal through inclusive and collective action and shaping the vision and objectives, but also first ideas of flagship projects, in consistence with the regional RIS3 objectives and together with the Regional Levels.

- **1 workshop with the Social Innovation Community per partner**
- **Report – vision on solutions for AGORA cities**

### **Activity 5.4.** Final Community Space Innovation Agendas

Through a third working meeting, the SIC will commit the final strategic path and operationalize the Agendas through Operational Action Plans. This meeting will consider also re-allocating responsibilities within the wider AGORA circle for managing, monitoring, updating and refreshing the ILIA.

- **1 workshop with the Social Innovation Community per partner**
- **Integrated Local Innovation Agenda – 1 per partner**

## **WP 6. Public service co-creation**

**Activity 6.1.** Definition and selection of collaborative public service pilots. Within this activity, all territorial partners will select from their finalized Community Space Innovation Agendas, 2 key areas / services for piloting.

- **Public presentation of final Agendas and selection of key pilots**
- **Report on outcomes**

### **Activity 6.2.** Co-creation of public service strategies.

This activity foresees the development of business plans for the selected pilot services, including innovative funding and technical implementation (social micro-credit schemes, participatory funding, PPPs, implementation through technology festivals or hackathons, or through Science Shops – R&D institutes part of the AGORA, etc.).

### **Activity 6.3.** Public service pilot testing



Needs refining with the AGORA territorial Partners. Depends on preferred focus and the business plan ideas for funding and implementation

- **Rollout of prototype: testing within the local administration the pilot services (min. 6 months)**

**Activity 6.4.** Results and feedback assessment  
Presentation conference, refining (iterative process), lessons learned.

- **Report on outcomes**

## **WP 7. Transfer & capitalization**

**Activity 7.1.** Capitalization and transfer strategy (including Long-term AGORA Social-Innovation Community platform expansion strategy)

**Activity 7.2.** International training seminars and training materials

**Activity 7.3.** Pilot transfer cross-fertilization workshops

**Activity 7.4.** Policy paper for social innovation in the DTP area

**Activity 7.5.** AGORA Toolkit for cities and stakeholders

## **Indicators**

- Number of strategies for improving the institutional and infrastructural framework conditions for research and innovation developed and/or implemented: **1 per territorial partner**
- Number of enterprises cooperating with research institutions: min. 3 per TP
- Number of tools for improving the institutional and infrastructural framework conditions for research and innovation developed and/or implemented:
  - 1 database
  - 1 innovation platform
  - 1 governance model / framework (under `concepts`)
  - 1 set of guidelines for fostering local innovation through co-developing public services
- Number of pilot actions for improving the institutional and infrastructural framework conditions for research and innovation developed and/or implemented: **1-2 per territorial partner**
- No. of documented learning interactions in finalised operations:
  - local training workshops 1 x partner (decision makers)
  - e-learning platform
  - pilot transfer cross-fertilization workshops (3 total) -> participatory policy papers.



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AGORA brings together diverse players at multiple levels promoting development at territorial and urban scale, both public and private, as well as representatives of civil society. AGORA creates a participatory framework, consisting of several tools, promoting an open dialogue and pursuing sustainable and integrated territorial development.

This framework (a proper AGORA) is distilling those positive energies that can create synergies, design Agendas, implement Actions and local public service innovations for economic, social and cultural growth, where urban areas take the role of development engines. Triple-A urban areas becoming reference centralities for the development of surrounding territories.

**Estimated duration:** 30 months

**Estimated total budget:** 2.900.000 EUR