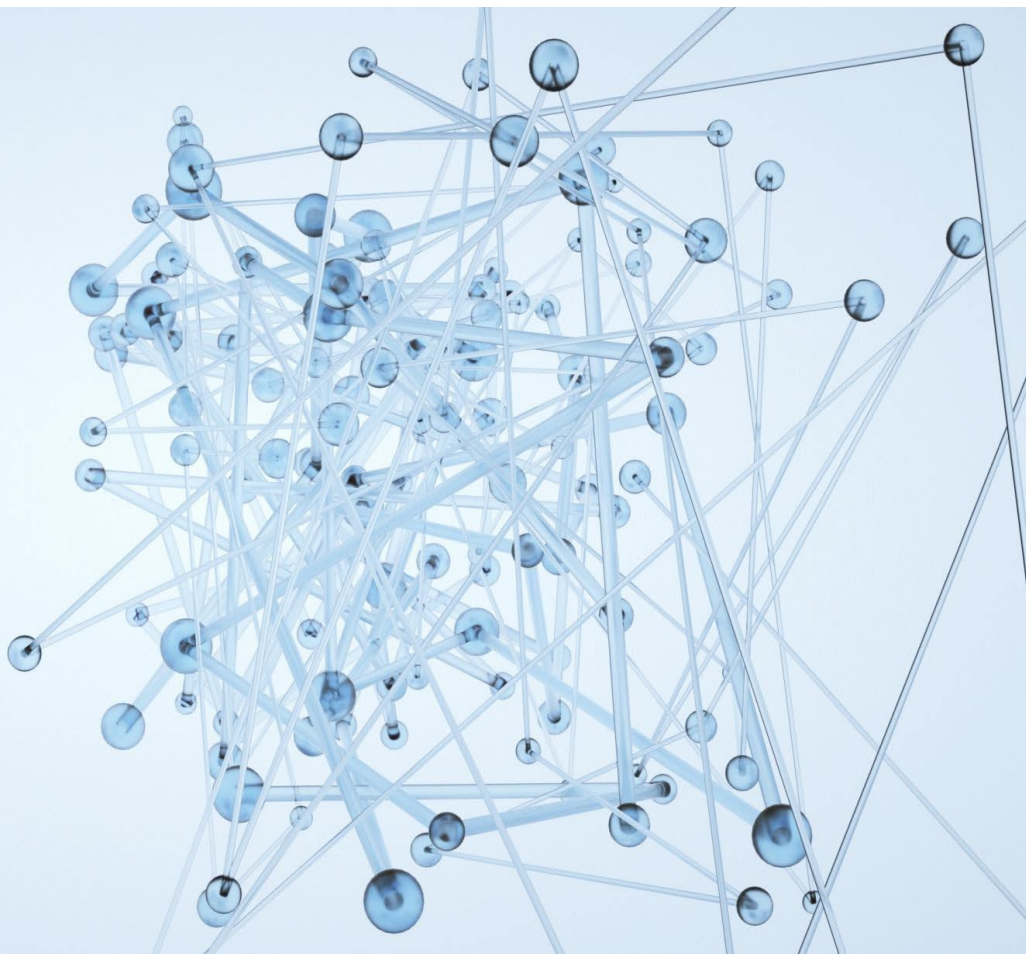
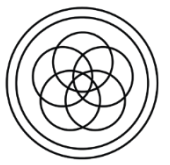


2024

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Sloboda



Social Research - Supporting Decarbonisation in Partizánske

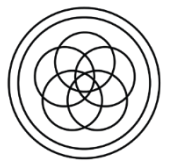


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Executive Summary

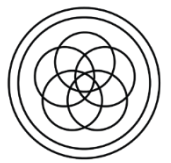
To support the transformation of the heating sector in the city of Partizánske, this report presents the key findings from an original empirical research on stakeholder views vis-a-vis the planned transformation. The research explored the perceptions and expectations of various municipal units and representatives, as well as representatives of the population and civil society in the city. The findings show that, in principle, all stakeholders are interested in the transformation plan, yet the city leadership awaits that it takes ownership of this process and participates in active planning and implementation. The participation of other stakeholders in this process is expected in various stages of the transformation process and depends on the role/expertise of particular stakeholders in delivering the heating service, consuming the service, or broader social roles in the development of the city. The following recommendations emerge from the presented study:

Recommendations on the internal capacities of the City of Partizánske for the planning of the transformation

- The city of Partizánske needs to identify the **missing capacities and competences not only in the city office, but also in the city companies** (such as the organization securing technical services of the city and the organization managing the city property). Therefore, we recommend executing a personnel and economic audit of the current capacities and structures and identify to what extent these organizations possess, or need to develop, a dedicated internal capacity to support the transformation project management. It is recommended that at the project planning and management phase, dedicated technical and management capacity in the broader field of energy technologies should be allocated within the city office. Cooperation with **certified external authorities** is recommended in the project planning phase. The involvement of other municipal stakeholders at this stage is confined to providing local knowledge in the form of feedback to the project, while their role further increases at the implementation phase (see below).
- Transformation of the heating sector is a financially intensive project and requires external financial resources. In addition to technical and management capacity, we recommend **strengthening financial management capacity** in the city office. Experience in managing large-scale projects, from planning through implementation and reporting/auditing, is essential that the city office can benefit from in the current transformation proposal, as well as in other related projects and external grants.

Recommendations on the structure and capacities of the City of Partizánske for the implementation of the transformation

- The capacities of the city of Partizánske need to identify the **capacity needs and competences at the city office and the municipal companies also for the project implementation phase**. This concerns the organization that secures technical services

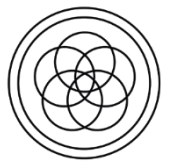


(TSM) of the city and the organization that manages the city property. TSM is ready to support the transformation at the implementation phase, while at the project phase, its role is limited to consultations of the advanced technical project. Therefore, the above-recommended personnel and economic audit should propose if a dedicated team or a department within the TSM could be established with responsibilities solely in the energy area. This would mean an internal splitting of the organisational structure of TSM, securing dedicated expertise instead of cross-thematic expertise (e.g. covering various services from heating to community services, waste management etc). The role of other municipal companies should be reevaluated for offering more support for the implementation of the heating transition, e.g. by an adjusted management of the service provision, including communication with the customers.

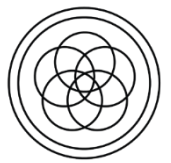
Recommendations regarding communication strategies vis-a-vis the population

- The city should be more proactive in communicating the plans for the transformation of the heating sector, the importance of the project, managing citizens' expectations, and addressing their concerns.
- The city should communicate clearly and regularly, using plain language, and transparently communicate the financial costs, funding sources, and expected benefits and costs associated with the transformation of the heating sector. This recommendation emerges from focus group discussions with citizens, which yielded a currently low awareness of the public on the city's plans in energy transition and changes in the heating system.
- Appropriate forms of broad communication are **public meetings, discussions, educational campaigns, presentations of examples of good practice** from other cities.
- The findings show that an appropriate form for a **more targeted communication is the regular gatherings of citizens with the representatives of the City Property Management (SMM)** (once a year), which could be used to raise awareness among the part of the population that are customers of the heating provided by TSM. These gatherings can be used for a more detailed explanation of the plans, consequences, reasons, and practical implications for the citizens. The extra capacity needed (e.g. a trained staff member who participates regularly in the gatherings (domové schôdze) can be secured directly by the Municipal Office, or by SMM.
- We recommend that a **communication strategy** be developed for the city's transformation of the heating sector, which will go beyond basic and general information for citizens. In this context, we recommend increasing professional capacities in the field of communication in the city office.

Recommendations regarding sharing best practices in energy transformation and networking across cities



- The city of Partizánske could initiate **a network of cities in the field of energy transformation** (e.g. "Energy Cities") to share know-how in the field of heating and energy in general.
- **Regular exchanges of staff in various areas, including technical expertise** (e.g. for TSM employees), but also in project management and the financial management of projects in energy transition, both in the country and abroad, are recommended.



Home

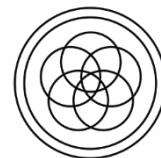
The Upper Nitra region, to which the town of Partizánske and its surroundings belong, is in a specific situation in terms of decarbonisation and equitable transformation of Slovakia. The transformation of the region, which is mainly caused by the end of brown coal mining and its energy use in the form of combustion in the Nováky power plant, has an impact not only on employment, but also on the overall socio-economic and demographic development of the entire region. This creates a demand for public policies that should target not only the environment but also the social transformation of the region. The design of the public policies themselves and their implementation should be based on cooperation and interaction with the population as well as with representatives of the sectors affected by the changes in question.

This approach of participatory public policy making is also applicable to the transformation of the heating sector, which is currently being pursued by the city of Partizánske. Partizánske has a specific position in the Upper Nitra region. Although the city is not directly affected by the decarbonisation of the region following the end of lignite mining, it is affected by the decline of industry in the city, which has led to a loss of population and the efforts of the city, companies and civil society to revitalise former industrial areas. At the same time, the city faces challenges in providing the same range of public services despite a declining population and trends to live in surrounding communities and commute to the city for work. Air quality in the city is also affected by its geographic location and nearby coal mining in the region. The main motivation for the transformation of the heating industry is, according to the Municipality, a response to these factors and the desire to build a modern, environmentally friendly city with quality living conditions for its inhabitants.

The planned transformation of the heating sector can have long-term benefits and impact on the daily life of the city's inhabitants, especially in the areas of ecology, air cleanliness and sustainability of energy production. Also relevant is the potential for economic benefits of the transformation of the heating sector in the form of greater independence from energy raw materials and thus greater cost predictability in terms of raw material prices. The population may not be aware of these benefits. This makes it all the more important to set up the actual heat transformation measures as well as to communicate them to the public and other relevant stakeholders.

This report provides an overview of the attitudes and perceptions of the upcoming transformation of the heating sector by individual actors in the city of Partizánske. These actors are not only representatives of the local government (officials, political leadership, female MPs), but also representatives of municipal companies (Technical Services of the City, City Property Management), civil society and citizens of the city.

The report is structured as follows. In the first part we briefly present the procedure for data acquisition and analysis. Then, we describe the current situation of the heating industry in Partizánske and the results of the research. In the last section we summarize the main findings and formulate recommendations for the city of Partizánske.



Research methodology

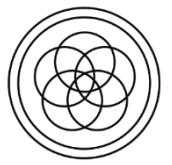
For the purpose of the research, we conducted a total of ten interviews. All interviews were conducted in the months of March to May 2024 in the city of Partizánske or online. In Table 1 we list the interviews with the individual actors/women. The basic interview script that was subsequently adapted for each interviewee is presented in Appendix 1. The interviews lasted from 30 to approximately 60 minutes.

Table 1: Interviews

Interview	Type of actor(s)	Form	Interview
R1	Clerk	Personal interview	28.03.2024
R2	Representative of the municipal enterprise City Property Management (housing cooperative)	Personal interview	28.03.2024
R3	Energy expert	Online interview	24.04.2024
R4	Member	Personal interview	25.04.2024
R5	Civil society representative	Personal interview	25.04.2024
R6	Housing association representative	Personal interview	25.04.2024
R7	TSM representatives	Personal interview	06.05.2024
R8	Clerk	Personal interview	14.05.2024
R9	Member	Personal interview	14.05.2024
R10	Clerk	Personal interview	14.05.2024
FG1	Interview with citizens - age: 18-39 years	Focus group	29.05.2024
FG2	Interview with citizens - age: 40-63 years	Focus group	29.05.2024

In addition to the interviews, we conducted two focus groups. The focus group scenario was based on the interview scenario and was adapted to increase the length and create space for interaction between the participant(s). The focus groups were conducted on 29 May 2024 in collaboration with Ipsos. Each focus group lasted approximately two hours. The participants/participants of the focus groups were residents of the city of Partizánske, who were divided into two groups. The first group consisted of residents aged between 18 and 39 years (FG1) and the second group consisted of residents aged between 40 and 63 years (FG2).

Prior to the research activity, each participant(s) in the interviews and focus groups was informed about the project, voluntary participation, anonymity of responses and the right to withdraw from the activity at any time. The research was approved by the Ethics Committee of FSEV UK.



Present of heating in Partizánske

According to data from the Technical Services of Partizánske s.r.o. (hereinafter referred to as TSM), heating in Partizánske is provided 75 percent by gas and 25 percent by wood chips (R6). According to data from 2024, the proportion of heating with wood chips is slightly higher (34 percent). However, gas is still used for heating to a greater extent (66 percent) than wood chips (Innovative Energy, 2024). Wood chips replaced lignite in 2008. In the past, the city has pushed for this solution at the expense of allowing local boiler plants to be built in apartment buildings¹ (R6).

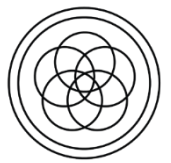
Heating is provided by the city's company Technical Services of the City (TSM). The transformation of the heating industry in Partizánske is not a complete novelty. The city has already undergone several stages of transformation and decentralization of the management of heating boiler rooms. The transformation was related to the decline of the industry that supplied steam for heating. According to information from the respondents (R7), the decentralisation of the heating system took place in 1993, the same year a gas boiler house was built in the Luhy housing estate. In 1994 a heat management centre was established and put under the management of TSM. In this decentralised heating system, changes were gradually introduced in the heating system in connection with the reduction of steam supply from industrial plants. In 2005, in addition to the housing estates, the city centre was also transformed as the steam supply was completely cut off. A partial re-centralisation of boiler plants took place in 2011 when some smaller boiler plants were closed and heating was again provided by a few central larger boiler plants. The last transformation took place in 2021 when the Luhy boiler house was modernised, which was created by the merger of three smaller boiler houses. This transformation did not mean a reversal in the way heating was provided, but a streamlining of the existing system with more efficient boilers, new control systems, replacement of pipework and refurbishment of the buildings (R7). As TSM evaluated this transformation as a success, it plans to proceed with similar steps in the Luhy 2 boiler house.

However, the current heat transformation plan is more comprehensive and strategic than the modernisation of specific boiler plants. It is happening in the context of a strategic move towards a carbon-free footprint in heating. Given the complexity of the transformation, not only are technical solutions and a project plan needed, but also an assessment of the social and societal impacts and readiness for such a large-scale change that will affect the whole city. The mapping of actors' attitudes towards this transformation based on empirical research is presented in the following section of this analysis.

Results

The results of the research are structured in four parts. First, we analyse the **attitudes and perceptions of the transformation of the heating sector by different groups of actors** in Partizánske. We then present the **main challenges in the context of the transformation of the heating sector**. An essential part of any public policy is the communication of public administration towards the different actors and affected groups. Therefore, in a separate section, we focus on **information**

¹ However, the city did not go along with this strategy (to connect apartment buildings to central heat) for the new city apartment buildings, which did not connect to a woodchip boiler plant, but built local boiler plants.



the public about the heat transformation project. Last but not least, we map the **perception of the district heating transformation in the context of possible positives, negatives and concerns of the different actors** in the city.

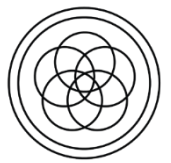
Attitudes and perceptions of the forthcoming transformation of the heating sector

The main patronage over the project of transformation of the heating industry is held by the head of the Partizánske municipal authority. This ensures a sufficient level of political support for the project. At the same time, there is also a project office under the office of the head of the authority. The **level of involvement of the head of the municipality in the project and her active leadership in the field of changes in the heating sector** is perceived positively by the different actors (R3, R4).

TSM is a municipal company owned by the city of Partizánske. **The city is in charge of energy production and distribution.** The city owns all the distribution systems and technology. This can be an advantage for the city in terms of strategic decisions in the heating sector also in the context of the upcoming transformation (R3, R4). On the other hand, **it also creates pressure to ensure sufficient financing of the district heating sector** (R1). These resources can come from the municipal budget, whose possibilities are limited, or through **external financial sources, for which the city needs professional capacities in the office.** TSM's position on the transformation of the heating sector is cautious, **TSM itself argues that it is the executive unit in the production and supply of heat, but the patronage, responsibility and project planning, of such a large-scale transformation towards a carbon-free footprint, must be on the side of the Municipal Authority, the Mayor and the Members of Parliament. TSM is supportive of the transformation but prefers incremental changes** (e.g. boiler upgrades) that do not compromise the stable and predictable provision of heat to households (R1, R3, R7). The main source of TSM's caution towards the proposed technical solutions is mainly in the context of the functionality of the solutions, which may also stem from a lack of information and a lack of trust in the proponents of these solutions. More information, e.g. in the form of field trips to places where heat transformation has already been successfully implemented, may be an appropriate strategy to involve TSM more in the process and in discussions on technological solutions for transformation (R3). At the same time, TSM points to interaction with other cities, but also to the fact that each city is specific and therefore, in their view, the possibility of drawing inspiration from transformation processes in other cities is limited (R7).

Civil society, for example by NGOs, is not yet involved in the project of transformation of the heating sector to a significant extent. The mayor actively communicates and cooperates with selected organisations and associations, which he also supports financially. However, according to several respondents/participants this approach is selective (R5).

The public in the city has limited information about the project of transformation of heating in Partizánske. Unless the citizen actively seeks information, attends the council meetings, reads the minutes, he/she has very limited information about the transformation of the heating system (R4). According to another respondent, residents registered an attempt to assess the geothermal borehole as



possible source of heating, but the closure of this well and the reasons for its non-use were only limited information from city management (R5, FG1, FG2).

Challenges of the transformation of the heating sector

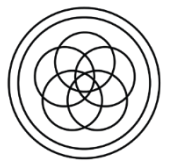
The subject of activity TSM² in addition to the production and distribution of heat is also, for example, the operation of car parks, the operation and maintenance of public lighting, waste management, maintenance of local roads, sports ground management, maintenance of greenery or maintenance of sewers. Although the basic competence of the TSM staff is considered sufficient (R6), **the wide range of tasks is also a problem that limits the specialisation of the staff and the field of district heating** and also to other areas such as the development of sports and sports grounds (R3, R4). *"They really have a lot on their plate to cover every topic"* (R4). Deciding on the appropriate technology in the context of heat transformation is a complex and multi-criteria decision, with many parameters and constraints to consider (R3). Many energy documents and proposals are available to the city, but the most relevant and feasible proposal needs to be selected (R3). This puts **pressure on internal capacities and their competences in the field of energy**. There is significant room for capacity strengthening in TSM in the positions of Chief Energy Officer (strategic decision making, priority setting) and Data Energy Officer (automation, data collection and analysis) (R3).

The transformation of the heating sector requires large financial investments that the city cannot cover from its own resources. Several respondents point out that the **volume and amount of EU-fund calls is currently significant in Upper Nitra and it is necessary to take advantage of this opportunity** (R3, R4). *"There never has been and never will be more resources."* (R4). The above puts **pressure on the project department of the City of Partizánske**, but also on the aforementioned expertise in the field of energy. In the current structure of the municipal authority, the projects department under the office of the head has two female employees. Respondents consider the competence of the department to be relatively high, but if the city wants to obtain significant external funding, it needs to strengthen in this area (R3, R4). *"It is imperative that [the city, n.d.] raise money and at the same time not make mistakes"* (R3). In addition, we can also talk about the lack of professional preparedness of the staff/Queens for the changes related to the introduction of the new heating system, where new staff will need to be hired or existing staff will need to be given room for specialisation if the projects are implemented (R8).

An inherent risk of large projects is the **lack of continuity in public policies in the context of the political cycle and changes in political leadership and direction of the city**. The current mayor is serving his fourth consecutive term in office and was unopposed in the 2022 election. The political situation in the city is thus relatively stable.

Another challenge in the transformation of the heating sector, not only in Partizánske, is the **sharing of experience and know-how between cities**. According to one of the respondents, district heating is also unique in that cities do not compete in the provision of this service and thus can openly share experiences and know-how (R3). However, there is no such platform today. However, TSM representatives have a different view.

² According to the Annual Report 2021, TSM has approximately 120 employees/quotas and a turnover of approximately EUR 6.5 million (for an idea, the current expenditures of the City of Partizánske are at the level of approximately EUR 22 million).



Although in principle they welcome cooperation and inspiration from other cities, they consider each city to be specific and see the opportunity to learn from each other as limited (R7).

Another challenge identified by TSM representatives in interviews is **dual accountability**. On the one hand, there is **the continuing responsibility to provide a quality public service in the form of heating** (R1, R7), as well as the **responsibility and strategic management of the heating process itself** (R7). According to TSM, the responsible vehicle for the transformation should be the city, which does not currently have sufficient capacity and activities in place for this purpose. The transformation is only at the idea stage, which needs to be implemented gradually (R7). The city should start by building project capacities, securing funding, cooperation with an external certified authority, and only when a concrete project is "on the table" will it be able to express itself and involve TSM as a relevant actor (R7).

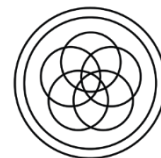
Box 1: Transforming the heating sector

The aim of the project of transformation of heating in Partizánske is to map the current state, identify opportunities and develop a plan that the city can use in the transition to a low-carbon heat economy. The aim is to use fossil fuels as little as possible in the future. In addition to solar energy, energy from geothermal boreholes, for example, can be used as a substitute for these energy sources. The transformation of the city's heating sector can be seen as a long-term process, which will be financially demanding and the city will have to obtain financial resources, for example from European funds. However, the result may be a positive impact on the environment, for example in the form of cleaner air in Partizánske and its surroundings, a more environmentally friendly way of energy production and an improvement in the living conditions and health of the city's inhabitants. In addition, similar new and innovative projects can also form the basis for larger regional or national environmental change plans in the field of district heating.

Public awareness

The main information channels of the city can be considered to be the city newspapers (Tempo³), city television (MTP) and radio and Facebook. The main municipal profile on Facebook is the personal profile of the Mayor Jozef Bojik. Several respondents stated that the city's content is almost exclusively communicated through this personal profile of the mayor and through the person of the mayor (R5, R4). Given also the nature of communication through the personal profile of the mayor, communication is focused on presenting achievements and less on more challenging and complex issues such as waste separation (R5). The City has a media communications department within the Mayor's office, which has one staff member.

³ Transparency International Slovakia (2022) evaluated the public nature of the city's newspapers in 2021. According to this assessment, the Tempo newspaper belongs to a group of periodicals that show signs of over-promoting the mayor's achievements and with limited space for political opposition.



Another relevant communication channel is the **meetings with the citizens of the city**, which take place approximately twice a year. It is these meetings with citizens that are considered to be a good format that allows for more active participation of citizens and also a space to provide feedback to the management (R5). Regular meetings are organised by the Mayor in the different districts of the city, where in the forum citizens have the opportunity to communicate the problems and challenges of each locality with the representation of the city. Such active participation, according to the respondents/participants, was also ensured in the case of the reconstruction of Moyzesova Street, where discussions and a questionnaire survey of public opinion on the problems and priorities of the people living on the street and possible solutions related to the reconstruction of the street were organized within the framework of the initiative *I am also creating Partizánske* (FG1, FG2)⁴. Based on the discussion with the citizens of the city, we can argue that such or similar communication and interaction activities would also be considered beneficial by the citizens to obtain information about the transformation of the heating system and to discuss the impacts of the project on their life and neighbourhood (FG1, FG2). Another suitable format would be presentations and lectures on upcoming projects (R5). According to one respondent, if citizens have more information about the project or measure and the complexity of the problem, they complain less (R4). **An example of good practice⁵ in terms of communication** is the composting project (R4), which was preceded by a survey of residents' opinions, lectures on proper composting and distribution of the composting bin to the lecture participants⁶.

Housing associations (R2) could also be a relevant mediator of the city's communication towards residents. The city's property management, as a municipal enterprise, provides heat to a part of the city's residential buildings and organises approximately once a year⁷ **house meetings for the residents** (R2). It is these meetings that could be a suitable platform for direct and direct communication with the residents, where the objectives, steps and impacts of the new heating method would be explained to them and where there would be room for questions from the residents. Such meetings also have the potential to increase residents' confidence in the City's actions as they receive more accurate information on how the transformation will affect them. Should the City decide to use this method of communication, training of staff to attend the house meetings would be necessary.

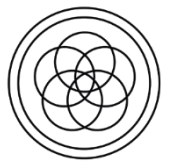
Perceived positives and negatives of the transformation

⁴ For more information see for example: <https://novinytempo.sk/vysledky-co-priniesol-prieskum-o-moyzesova-street-in-partizanske/>

⁵ A positive example of citizen participation was also the waste sorting project in the Štrkovec district (R5). The project consisted of collecting data on residents' attitudes, which was then used to design a solution. For more information, see for example: <https://novinytempo.sk/partizanske-spustilo-new-project-collecting-waste-at-strkovci-first-week-pointed-to-problems/>

⁶ For more information, see for example: https://www.partizanske.sk/?program=51&module_action_0_id_ci=474981

⁷ Although there is a house meeting approximately once a year in the apartment building, the property management does hold house meetings approximately once a month.

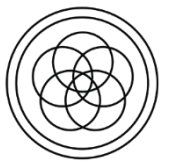


There is a **consensus** among all actors/communities surveyed in Partizánske **that the transformation of the heating sector is an opportunity for the city to improve its environment**. Differences in perception of the transformation occur rather in the transformation process itself, the responsibility for its implementation, the way in which heating should be provided, and (financial) concerns about the impacts on the inhabitants.

The transformation of the heating industry in Partizánske can bring several key advantages and disadvantages that affect the perspectives of the city's residents. For example, citizens defined the main advantages as the transition from coal and other fossil fuels to renewable energy sources (RES), which can **improve air quality** and thus have a positive impact on the environment and the health of the residents. This change could increase the prestige of the city and its surroundings as an environmentally progressive region. **Efficient use of local energy sources can lead to lower energy costs in the long term, according to the respondents/participants**. This could contribute to stabilising energy prices and in the long term to reducing them. Another important aspect of the transformation of the district heating sector could also be the **promotion of regional economic development**, as the transformation of the district heating sector can create new jobs, attract new residents and entrepreneurs - investors, which could contribute to the overall development of the city. In terms of RES use, the city could become a "trendsetter" in the field of green heating, which could also increase its prestige in terms of regional know-how (FG1, FG2). Residents could be proud of their city and its innovative approach. **At the same time, geothermal energy can be perceived as "something free from the earth"**, which can create space for positive communication of the introduction of green energy in the city (R3).

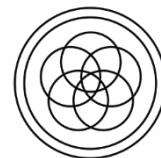
Some actors are sceptical about the heat transformation project. **One of the main obstacles can be considered to be the city's recent large-scale investment in the construction of a woodchip boiler plant to replace coal-fired heat generation**. Another source of scepticism towards the heat transformation is the yield of the geothermal borehole. This borehole was sealed also because of its low yield and the financial difficulty of using it for heating (R6). However, solar collectors for water heating may be one solution in the context of the transformation of the heating sector, but this is not much discussed in the context of the transformation (R6).

Due to the lack of information, it is difficult for the inhabitants of Partizánske to clearly define the possible disadvantages of the transformation. As **possible negatives or rather challenges they defined, for example, the financial and time complexity of the project**. Residents are concerned that the city may be left without energy during the implementation of the project and that the costs could be passed on to citizens, for example in the form of increases in city taxes and fees, or even increases in household heat bills. There are also concerns about potential risks associated with the project, such as financial and technical problems, potential accidents or inefficient use of geothermal wells. In this context, a detailed examination of the risks and the development of a thorough plan is necessary and essential. Related to this point, citizens suggested that **the City present to residents the planned changes and potential impacts of the transformation of the heating industry**. The above may increase residents' support for the project. Issues such as the location of the facilities, their appearance, and overall impact on the City's infrastructure are critical to public acceptance of the project



(FG1, FG2). The implementation of the transformation of the district heating system would naturally also be associated with various constraints in the construction phase of the reconstruction (the so-called city excavation). Recently, in 2021 and 2022, a more significant reconstruction and modernization of the distribution systems of the Luhy II housing estate was underway, for which TSM drew a loan.

A more comprehensive solution to the sustainability of electricity sources can also be seen as an opportunity within the framework of the heat transformation project. According to representatives of housing associations, the installation of photovoltaics for apartment buildings is being considered and there have even been memoranda signed (R6). However, the problem remains the technical solution, tenancy and ownership relations and also the economic return on investment (R6).



Recommendations

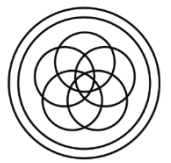
The individual recommendations vary in complexity and difficulty to prepare and implement in practice. Some recommendations are simpler and less costly in terms of financial resources and human capacities (e.g. raising awareness on the topic of heat transformation). Other recommendations are considerably more complex, costly and require specific skills and competences (e.g. raising external financial resources, building internal expertise in the energy sector, or creating a platform for cooperation between cities). We therefore recommend further analysis of the proposed measures, including the preparation of an implementation plan

Based on our findings, the residents of Partizánske have very limited knowledge and information about the district heating transformation project. The transformation of the heating sector is associated not only with a number of concerns (e.g. stability of heat supply, price, excavation of the city), but also with expectations (e.g. cleaner air, energy independence). The city should be **more proactive in communicating the basic plans for the heat transformation, the importance of the project, managing citizens' expectations and addressing their concerns**. Embracing and supporting the district heating transformation requires clear and regular communication about financial costs, funding sources, and expected benefits.

Based on our findings, it would be useful to ensure **clear and regular communication using plain language and transparent information** on the financial costs, sources of funding and expected benefits and costs associated with the transformation of the heating sector. **The aim of such communication should be to help the citizens of the city to embrace and actively support the transformation itself**. It is important to engage the public through public meetings, discussions and educational campaigns, highlighting the long-term savings, improved quality of life, higher levels of environmental protection and support for the local economy. **The City could use its own existing and existing communication resources and channels** for this activity. Practical measures such as providing guarantees, developing financial plans, gradual project implementation and presenting successful examples from other cities or countries can increase citizens' confidence. In addition, the promotion of green initiatives and the involvement of citizens in community activities will strengthen the sense of ownership and support for the project.

The city of Partizánske needs to **identify the missing capacities and competences** not only in the municipal office but also in the municipal companies. Therefore, we recommend to **carry out a personnel and economic audit**. This audit will provide data and information necessary not only to optimize the municipal office, expand missing or insufficiently covered competences and capacities, but also to consider the transformation of TSM s.r.o., which would allow for greater specialization in the field of energy and diversification of expertise in this area.

According to INEKO's assessment, the city is in good financial condition with low debt, surplus budgets and a reserve fund of over EUR 2 million. This creates the prerequisite and room for **investment in capacity building in the municipal office and in the TSM**. The transformation of the heating sector is a costly project and requires external financial resources. We therefore recommend capacity building in the municipal office, in particular in the area of



project management. At the same time, in this context, it is essential to increase capacity and expertise in the field of energy technologies (not only heating). Collaboration of staff/kin who can write the project application and manage external financial resources with experts in the energy sector will enable the heat transformation project to proceed.

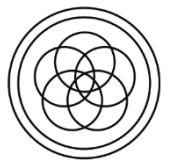
According to our findings, there is minimal cooperation between cities in the energy sector. **The city of Partizánske could be the initiator of such a network⁸** (e.g. "Energy Cities") of **cities in order to share know-how in the field of heating and energy in general**. In this area, we recommend to use the already existing network of actors from the field of local authorities, for example within ZMOS. Within this network, however, experts and companies active in the energy sector should also be invited, as they are the main actors with knowledge and know-how.

Currently, the main patronage over the project of transformation of the heating sector is held by the head of the city of Partizánske. This provides a sufficient degree of political support and leadership. On the other hand, TSM has taken only a limited degree of ownership and leadership in the area and initiative in the project. **By strengthening the city's professional capacities in the energy sector and allowing for a greater degree of diversification of expertise within TSM, there should be room for a greater degree of ownership of the topic of heat transformation by the Partizánske city's energy engineer/manager.**

We recommend that **a communication strategy be developed for the city's transformation of the heating sector**, which will go beyond basic and general information for citizens. This communication strategy should include targeted communication to the different actors in the city (public - heat consumers, civil society) with an introduction of the project, technology, timeframes, objectives, possible benefits for the city and benefits for the citizens. In this context, **we recommend to consider expanding the professional capacities in the field of communication** in the municipal office.

Wider and more open cooperation with all representatives of civil society is strategically important in promoting complex and costly public policies, which also entail phases of constraints or temporary reductions in the quality of services (e.g. transport) during implementation.

⁸ An example is the Energy cities network, which brings together not only city representatives but also experts in the field of energy: <https://energy-cities.eu/hubs/>



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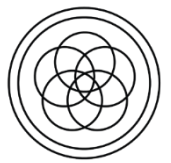
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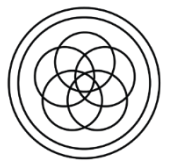


Annex 1: Basic interview scenario

**Social Research - Supporting decarbonisation with a focus on transformation
heating of the city of Partizánske
Questions - interview**

Note: the interview script was adapted for each respondent

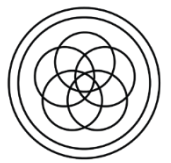
1. Could you please briefly introduce yourself? What is your experience in the local local government, and in the thematic areas on which you professionally focus?
2. Each city has specific needs, problems and challenges for the future. Which challenges can you identify for the city of Partizánske? Which problems do you think the city should address as a priority?
3. Which areas or topics do you consider the most important in the city's priorities? Why yes/no?
4. There is a lot of talk about green transformation, ecology and urban adaptation to climate change. How do you perceive these challenges in Partizánske? Are they the subject of planning and discussions in the city?
5. Do you know of any measures in this area that have already been introduced or are planned?
6. Now we would like to talk about heating in Partizánske. The city is preparing the transformation of the heating system. Could you briefly tell us how you perceive this project?
 - Who initiated the project and when?
 - Do you have any information on what stage this project is at and what specific tasks it will entail for various city authorities?
7. How do you think the mayor and the city leadership are supporting the transformation of the heating sector? Reached since the last election has there been any change in this attitude of the city?
8. How would you assess the attitude of local authorities or organisations (e.g. technical services) to this project? Do they support it? Why yes, why no?
9. In your opinion, what are the main barriers to the implementation of the new heating policy in the city?
10. How can these barriers be removed, and who should be involved? How can the leadership cities and municipal organisations to better support the transformation of the heating sector?
11. Do you perceive the influence of the central government on the transformation of the heating sector in Partizánske? For example, has the city received any grants, or is it applying for any, for this project? Does the city consult with government officials or other organisations about this transformation?
12. Do you know which city department/department is responsible for this project (at worries)?
 - How do you perceive the current capacity of the Authority to implement this project?



- Which local government department(s) do you think could provide support and assistance in the implementation of the transformation
 - Which local government department(s) are already providing real support and assistance and in what form?
 - What type of skills, competencies, knowledge should the officials involved have in order for the city to successfully implement this project? How does the city support the development of these competencies?
13. The city's technical services are an important player. Do you have information on how they perceive this project?
- What are their main concerns or challenges in implementing this transformation?
 - Are TSMs involved in the project preparation process and the whole transformation process of the heating industry?
 - If they are not, how could they be involved in the transformation process and at which stage (preparation, implementation, communication with customers, marketing)?
14. In your opinion, do TSMs have the personnel, professional and financial capacity to transform the heating sector? In what ways should they be strengthened in order to successfully implement the transformation?
- In your opinion, do TSMs need workers with different skills and competencies than they currently have to support the transformation of the heating sector? Can you identify these new needs?
 - Is there a need for action towards individuals, e.g. better motivation of male/female employees to achieve the transformation of the heating sector? What activities could these be (e.g. training, information workshops)?
15. How do you think the public perceives the project of transformation of the heating sector? (e.g. prices for heat but also other factors)
- Has there been a survey of city residents' attitudes towards the transformation of the heating sector? If so how and when? Are the results available?
 - How do you think the city should inform residents about the transformation of the heating sector?
 - How do you think the city should involve residents in the transformation process?
16. What other organisations is the city working with to implement the project and how do you rate this cooperation?
17. Who would you recommend for further conversations on this topic (e.g. from the city, MPs, NGOs, civic associations, ...)?

Thank you for your time and information provided in this interview.

Contact the research team: Pavol Bors (pavol.bors@fses.uniba.sk)
Marta Kahancová (marta.kahancova@fses.uniba.sk) Matúš
Sloboda (matus.sloboda@fses.uniba.sk)



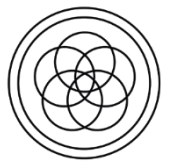
Annex 2: Coding tree of interviews and focus groups

Main themes/priorities of the city (also excluding heating)

- Who is the main implementer/initiator of the project-transformation
 - o City (Mayor/President)
 - o Municipal Office
 - o TSM
 - o Other organisations
- The position of the transformation of the heating sector in the context of the city's priorities

Transformation of the city's heating system (from the city's position)

- City readiness (yes/no)
 - o Yes
 - Definition of key players/actors
 - Opinions of individual institutions-organisations of the city
 - Support for transformation - level of support
 - Priorities of individual institutions-organisations of the city
 - Support for transformation
 - Organisational structures needed for project implementation
 - Opportunities for cooperation between the different actors
 - o No
 - Reasons for unpreparedness
 - o Critical attitude/ scepticism towards current plans
 - o Barriers/challenges related to the transformation of the heating sector
 - Key barriers/challenges
 - Financial calls
 - Infrastructure problems
 - Lack of information (implementation and benefits of transformation)
 - Barriers/challenges in relation to cooperation between actors (not only the city + municipal organisations)
 - Ideas/ideas on removing barriers
- Negative impacts of the transformation (on the city/residents)
 - Financial impacts
 - Infrastructure problems
- Positive impacts
 - Environmental protection
 - Economic-social rise
 - Making the city's energy system more efficient
- Relevant departments of the City and the Municipal Authority
 - Diversification of competences in the context of heating
- Staff, professional, financial capacity of institutions/departments



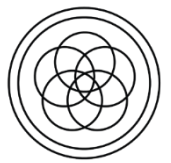
- Employment of workers with specific skills
 - Lack of collaborators

Public and public communication

- Common channels of communication
 - Level of success/availability of information (to be supplemented with findings from Focus Groups)
 - Communication topics
 - General communication of events-projects implemented in the city
 - Specific to the district heating transformation project
- Project communication
 - Survey of residents' attitudes
 - Other
- Communication of the transformation of the heating sector
 - Ongoing? (yes/no)
 - If so, can it be considered relevant for the population
 - If not, what should it include - at what stage of the project should it be communicated to residents
- Involving residents in the process
 - When and how residents should be involved in the process
 - Only communicate with them the project
 - Use of municipal bodies (TSM, SBD, SMM, MSU, etc.) - as communication resources
 - Active participation of residents
- Residents' priorities in the context of district heating
 - Heating as a priority
 - Positives associated with the transformation
 - The level of support for the city from residents

Cooperation with actors outside the city/region (local authorities, state, NGOs, foreign partners, etc.)

- Ongoing?
 - Yes
 - No
- Cooperation between the city and civil society



Annex 3: Template for addressing

respondents/respondents Dear X,

My name is Pavol Bors, I am a researcher at the Institute of Public Policy, Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences, Comenius University in Bratislava (FSEV FSEV UK). On behalf of the research team, I would like to request an interview as part of an ongoing research project.

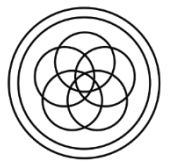
The research focuses on mapping attitudes towards the current heating system in the city of Partizánske. Specifically, we are interested in the attitudes of city officials, city organizations, and city residents, as well as the readiness of these actors to implement innovations in the heating system.

We have selected you as a respondent who could provide us with important information in the above research project.

On May X, we are planning a round of personal interviews directly in Partizánske. Please confirm if you would be available for a personal meeting on that day from XX:XX.

We will be happy to accommodate your time, the interview will last a maximum of 1 hour. Please confirm your attendance by email or phone, or by indicating your time preference for the interview, by the middle of this week. I would then send you the interview questions and other supporting documents.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me by email at pavol.bors@fses.uniba.sk, or by phone at +XXX XXX XXX XXX XXX.



Annex 4: Model informed consent

INFORMED CONSENT

Social Research - Supporting decarbonisation with a focus on the transformation of the heating sector of the city of Partizánske

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the social research *Promoting decarbonisation with a focus on the transformation of the heating sector*. The research is part of a wider international project "**Ambitious and inclusive clean energy plans for repowering the just transition regions**" (RePower the Regions: Ambitious and inclusive clean energy plans for repowering the just transition regions - acronym: LIFE22-CET-RePower the Regions, project number: 101120862). The project is funded by the European Union. On behalf of CEPA - Friends of the Earth, the Institute of Public Policy of the Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences of the University of Bratislava is conducting interviews with selected respondents. The research maps the attitudes and involvement of social actors in the transformation of the heating system of the city of Partizánske. The result of the research is a summary study of 10 pages.

All answers given in this interview will be confidential and will be used anonymously in the report, without mentioning your name. General information will be presented in the analysis as findings based on the interview provided by your organisation. If you do not even wish to provide the name of your organization, we will only indicate the type of institution (governmental, public, non-governmental, etc.). Your participation in this interview is voluntary. If you do not wish to provide answers to all questions, please bring this to the attention of the researcher during the interview.

Please indicate with a cross the selected Yes/No answer in points 1-3.

1. *I have been informed that my participation in the interview is voluntary.*

Yes No

2. *I have been informed that my answers will be anonymous and presented as the opinion of the organisation where I work or which I represent.*

Yes No

3. *I agree that my answers will be recorded during the interview.*

Yes No

Date:Location :

Name of respondent:

Name of respondent organisation:

Signature of the respondent: