Traditional planning approaches that focus on car use instead of putting people’s needs at the core are still visible in a number European cities. The SEE Change Net is a think tank dedicated to the Balkan regions and reflects on the need to change the focus of transport planning in the region in its new publication ‘Putting Citizens at the Centre of Sustainable Urban Mobility Planning. Lessons Learnt in Southeast Europe’. Conclusions have been based on experiences gathered in Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Tirana (Albania) in the frame of a project financed by the Open Regional Fund for South-East Europe – Energy Efficiency (GIZ ORF-EE). Publication authors state that it pays off to invest time and effort into making people the core element of the planning and the actual process. Two key recommendations are:
public participation is only worth as much as its results are used. These need to be well integrated into to analysing challenges, objectives and defining measures of a SUMP. Participation must be a dialogue: stakeholder need to know what comes next and what happened to their work, since feedback is essential for building confidence.

There is an increasing urgency to improve listening to people and plan for their needs. About half of residents in the South Eastern region of Europe rate their road as unsafe with deficiencies in infrastructure, vehicles and driver behaviour. Air pollution is recognised as another major concern stressing the need to push sustainable mobility alternatives to help reduce air pollution.

“We can’t build sustainable cities without including citizens in the process,” Tirana Mayor Erion Veliaj stated. “I often say that the biggest infrastructure project to change in a city is not a boulevard, nor a big building. We know how to do those. It’s the 10 centimeters between our ears - one’s thinking and mentality - that is the toughest of infrastructures to transform.”

The publication is available in English, Albanian, and Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian.

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