smartup
Social Innovation Lab

"We are a non-profit social innovation lab that co-creates and implements solutions to complex public challenges."



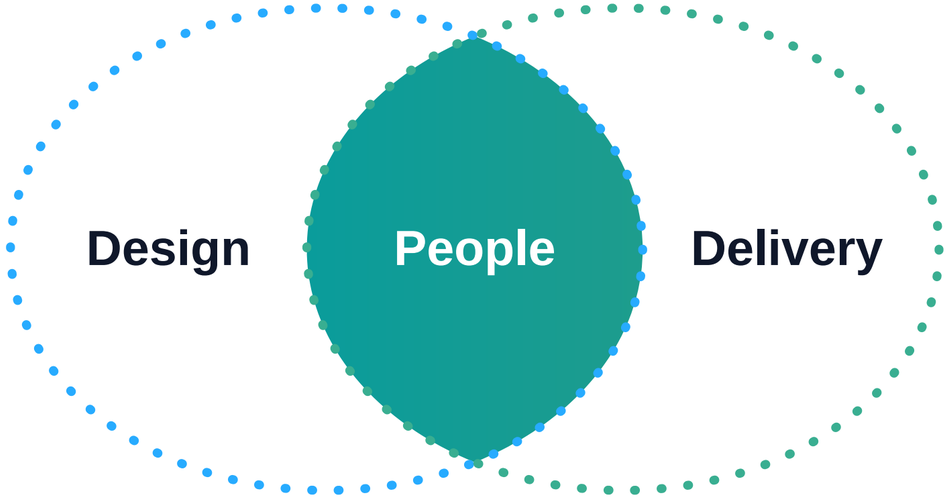
About us

SmartUp – Social Innovation Lab was founded in 2014 and has since built a **regional portfolio of projects and partnerships.** We collaborate with public institutions, private-sector companies, civil society organisations, and communities.

Our work is **human-centred,** combining **research, facilitation, co-creation, digital tools, and capacity building** to understand challenges, develop and test ideas, and support their implementation in practice. We **adapt our methods** to the needs of each project and the people and institutions involved.

We work across four programme areas: **Education, Youth, Climate Change, and Public Sector Innovation.**

Our Approach



Mission

We use custom-designed processes to understand complex challenges and co-create lasting solutions by connecting and collaborating with organizations, communities & individuals.

Vision

Our vision is to shape a sustainable, equitable, and prosperous region through innovation.

Our Programmes

To co-create an enabling environment where better teaching and learning experiences can evolve.

Education

To empower youth to become active changemakers and contribute to the development of their communities.

Youth

To transform the public sector into innovative and citizen-centred institutions.

Public Sector Innovation

To accelerate the transition to a climate-resilient society.

Climate Change

Our Services

Co-creation & innovation processes

Participatory workshops, design labs and tailored innovation processes.

Research, insights & strategy

Needs assessments, stakeholder research & analysis for better decisions.

Digital platforms & tools

Tools for learning, participation, collaboration, and public services.

Learning & capacity development

Training, mentoring and resources to strengthen institutional and community capabilities.

Pilots, implementation & scaling

Delivery, monitoring, learning & adaptation to move solutions into practice.

Services can be delivered individually or combined within wider programmes.

Impact at a glance



Mobilised 2,000+ educators to create 4,700+ video lessons, reaching 25,000+ teacher users and 30,000+ student users. The platform was transferred to the Bureau for Development of Education.



Across two national editions, SmartUp supported 20 youth-led solutions through mentoring and incubation, producing two global winning teams — AndroMeta in 2019 and eBionics in 2020.



Delivered 40 innovation activities, engaged 850+ citizens, supported the redesign and digitalisation of public services, and developed 16 public space concepts through citizen participation.



Led a five-city partnership, helped establish the Skopje Development Institute, and assessed roughly 60 municipal projects to create a prioritised impact investment portfolio for Skopje.

Our Latest Work



Promoting a Safe School Environment

We work with students and educators to support children's right to quality education by strengthening protection, participation, and equality in schools through capacity building and improved support mechanisms.



Community Mobility Co-operatives

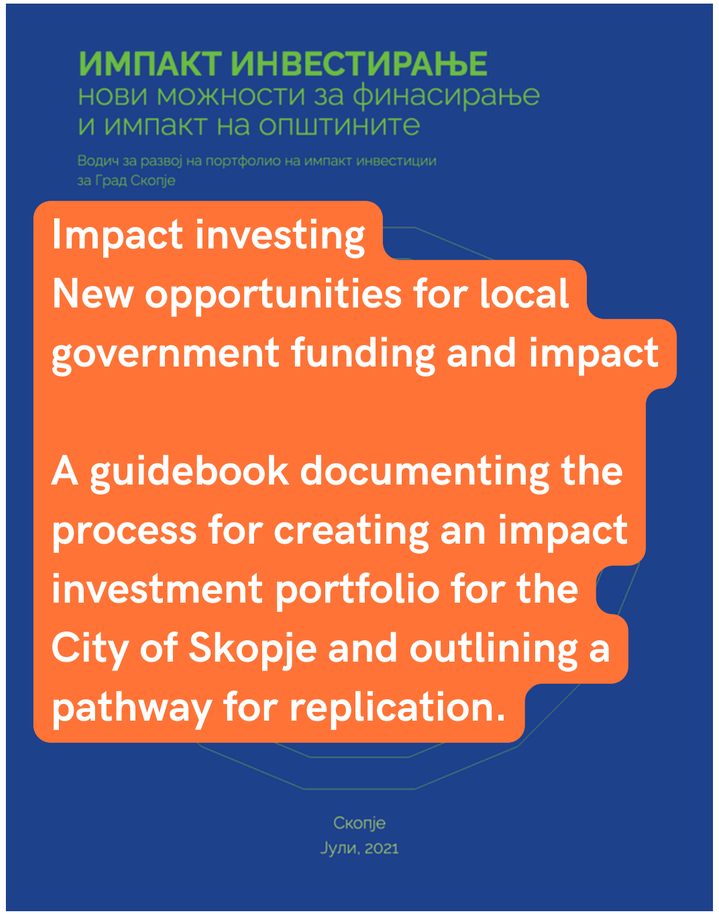
We are exploring how shared electric vehicle fleets and community-driven EV charging infrastructure can be supported and leveraged to advance community mobility in South East Europe.



Researching Mechanisms for the Operationalization of the National Development Strategy

We tested how strategic foresight can be leveraged to support North Macedonia’s long-term development goals, with a focus on co-creating policy pilots and institutional integration.

Handbooks & guides



Impact investing
New opportunities for local government funding and impact

A guidebook documenting the process for creating an impact investment portfolio for the City of Skopje and outlining a pathway for replication.

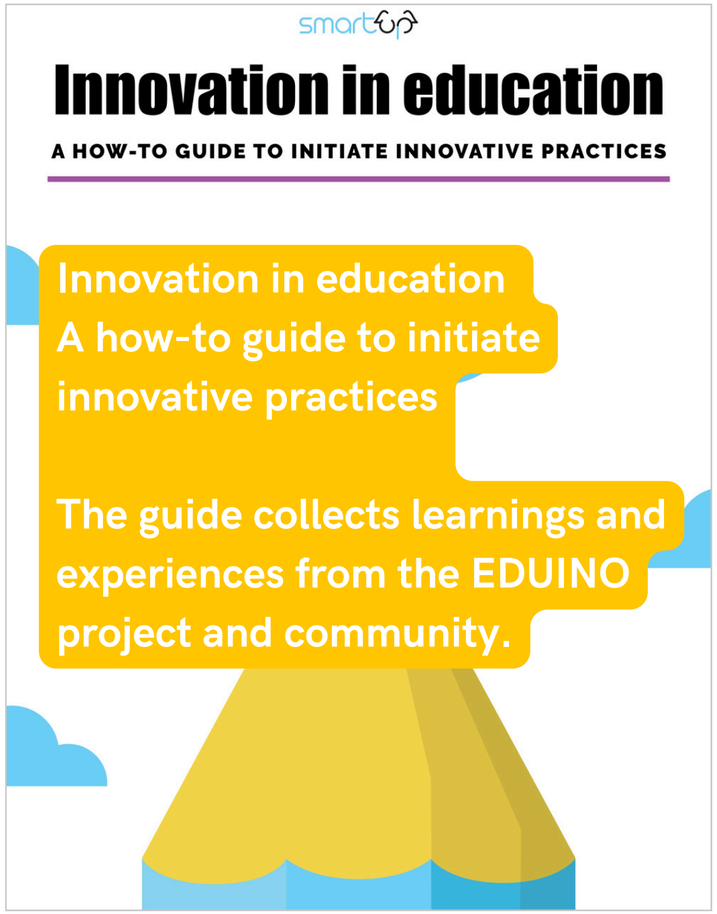
Learn more



Co-creating crowdfunding models - policy framework and models in North Macedonia

A handbook for local government and practitioners synthesising knowledge from the InnoFinRES project.

Learn more



Innovation in education
A how-to guide to initiate innovative practices

The guide collects learnings and experiences from the EDUINO project and community.

Learn more

Meet the team



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International partners & donors

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European Climate Initiative EUKI

eit Climate-KIC

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Pestalozzi Children's Foundation

unicef for every child

МАКЕДОНСКИ ЦЕНТАР ЗА ГРАѓАНСКО ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ

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Коалиција на младински организации
www.sega.org.mk

U.S. Embassy Macedonia

UKaid from the British people

UNDP

KORIMAKO

OSCE

ПРВА ДЕТСКА АМБАСАДА ВО СВЕТОТ МЕѓАШИ
МЕЃАШИ
РЕПУБЛИКА МАКЕДОНИЈА

P2R
PATHWAYS2RESILIENCE

Fundación hazloposible

USAID FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

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german cooperation
DEUTSCHE ZUSAMMENARBEIT

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giz Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

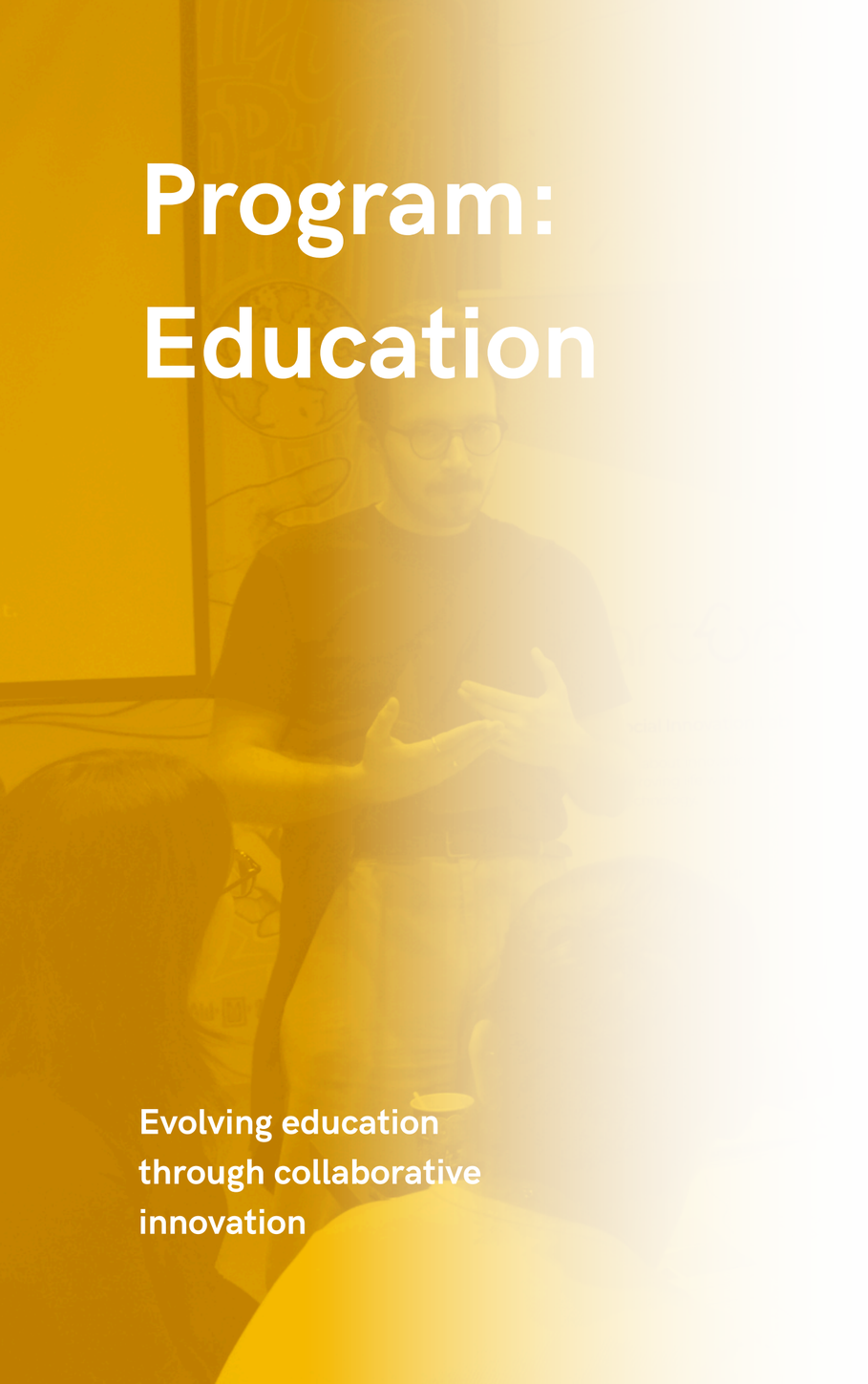
European Commission

Horizon 2020
European Union funding
for Research & Innovation



Education

Program: Education



Evolving education through collaborative innovation

Our goal is to help education systems, schools, and communities create more inclusive learning environments, strengthen teaching practice, and support meaningful participation and better education planning.

Objectives:

- **Stronger learning systems** that identify needs and plan improvements for inclusive, effective learning.
- **Supported educators** with the skills, tools and confidence to improve learning in practice.
- **Meaningful student participation,** with students and communities playing a stronger role in shaping education programmes, resources and learning environments.

Our Approach to Education

We work with teachers, students, parents, school leaders, and education partners to understand where learning environments need to change and what would help that change happen.

Our work combines research, co-design, digital tools, professional development, and community engagement so that programmes and tools are grounded in the needs of educators, schools, and education institutions.

Education: What we offer

Our Education Program offers a comprehensive suite of services tailored to support educational institutions, policymakers, and organizations in their pursuit of innovation and excellence.

Co-design and co-creation

We work with education stakeholders to define needs, test ideas, and shape solutions that fit local learning contexts and priorities.

Digital platforms and tools

We design and adapt digital platforms that support teaching, learning, collaboration, and data-informed decision-making.

Community building

We help build learning communities where educators and partners can share practice, exchange knowledge, and work through common challenges together.

Capacity-building initiatives

We deliver workshops, training programmes, and collaborative formats that strengthen the skills educators and institutions need to improve learning environments.

Education: Examples of Our Impact



Our commitment to educational development has resulted in a significant impact on learners, educators, parents and communities. Here are a few notable examples:

- **EmpowerED – Digital Self-Evaluation Form:** We developed a digital tool to streamline the creation of individual professional development plans for teachers in North Macedonia. By digitalising the self-evaluation process, we helped educators identify their development needs and create relevant, personalised professional growth plans.

- **Promoting a Safe School Environment:** In its 2nd 3-year phase, through this project we continue to strengthen legal measures that empower student participation and protect children, improve schools' ability to prevent and address violence, and promote inclusive teaching methods **supporting protection, participation, and equal opportunities**.

Education: Examples of Our Impact



- **EDUINO – Collectively Improving Education Through Co-Creation and Innovation.** SmartUp conceptualised, designed and led **EDUINO,** North Macedonia's national **digital education platform**, launched in 2020 to support learning during school closures. Working with educators and education institutions, SmartUp mobilised over 2,000 teachers to create more than 4,700 curriculum-aligned video lessons in Macedonian and Albanian and delivered over 50 professional development webinars.

- Beyond video lessons, EDUINO included an **Early Childhood Development platform** with 700+ crowdsourced educational games and play-based activities, a **2D Science Laboratory** with 15 interactive experiments, and national Gameathons involving 1000+ educators and parents. SmartUp also established the **EDUINO Ambassadors programme** to strengthen professional collaboration and peer learning. The platform, with 25,000 active educators, was subsequently transferred to the Bureau for Development of Education for continued operation.

Education: Examples of Our Impact

- **SafeCyberEDU - Cybersecurity Training for Teachers:** With this project, we equipped 500+ educators in North Macedonia with essential online safety skills through an **EduLab course**, engaged 2000+ educators through educational **webinars**, and supported **continued cybersecurity learning** with ongoing access to practical resources.

- **EduInclusion – Innovation for Every Child:** This project co-created educational tools to **support children with Special Educational Needs** (SEN), especially in communication, by involving students, educators, and parents in a participatory process of research, design, and prototyping to ensure relevance and usability.

- **From Ideas to Action Through eTwinning Projects and Design Thinking**: Through **interactive design thinking workshops**, we helped educators in North Macedonia identify educational challenges, develop collaborative solutions, and turn their ideas into concrete eTwinning projects, which they successfully launched on the platform.

Education: Examples of Our Impact



- **New Technologies as Entrepreneurship and Innovation Boosters - 3D Modeling and 3D Printing Workshops for High School Students (N.Macedonia) #2:** Equipped **32 high school students** with hands-on experience in 3D technologies, sparking interest in integrating 3D technology into schools. Participants learned modeling software and printed their own designs, gaining valuable skills.

- **#Inno4Edu - Setting Up an Enabling Environment for Improving Quality Teaching and Learning Through Co-Creation and Innovation (N.Macedonia):** A national educational portal that promotes collaborative creation of learning resources. It engaged teachers, parents, and children through interactive events and challenges. The platform supports **diverse learning tools** and socio-emotional development, with plans for long-term integration into national education.



Youth



Program: Youth

Cultivating changemakers through engagement & innovation

Our goal is to help young people become active changemakers with the skills, support, and space they need to shape their communities and influence decisions that affect them.

Objectives:

- **Meaningful participation** in programmes, services and decisions that affect young people.
- **Skills and confidence** built through active participation and practical experience.
- **Stronger support systems** that create relevant opportunities for young people.

Our Approach to Youth Development and Engagement

We design with young people, not for them.

That means involving them in defining problems, shaping solutions, and leading initiatives, while also creating the structure, mentorship, and institutional connections needed to turn ideas into action. We focus on participation that is meaningful and inclusive, and connected to opportunities for young people to develop ideas, build skills, and take action.

Youth: What we offer

We offer a comprehensive range of services to support organizations and communities in their efforts to engage and empower youth. Our services include:

Youth engagement processes

We design inclusive processes that help identify young people's priorities and shape engagement strategies around them.

Participation platforms and initiatives

We create and run platforms and initiatives that help young people participate, connect, and contribute ideas and solutions.

Youth capacity development

We deliver training, workshops, mentorship, and collaborative formats that strengthen the skills and confidence young people need to lead.

Innovation challenges and hackathons

We facilitate challenges and hackathons that bring young people together to work on real problems and develop practical solutions.

Youth: Examples of Our Impact



Our commitment to fostering positive change and empowering individuals is exemplified through impactful initiatives:

- **Youth Climate Action Fund: Sveti Nikole:** SmartUp served as the local partner to the Municipality of Sveti Nikole in implementing the Youth Climate Action Fund. The programme enabled young people aged 15–24 to develop local climate initiatives eligible for grants of US$1,000–5,000. SmartUp facilitated three co-creation workshops, guiding youth teams through identifying climate challenges, developing project ideas, defining activities and preparing budgets and applications.

- **Mediathon: Youth Voices for Social Change:** We supported **47 high school students and teachers** from Skopje to create impactful media content addressing modern social challenges. The initiative promoted media literacy, storytelling, and leadership skills while encouraging youth to tackle issues like bullying, social inclusion, and community well-being through media campaigns.

Youth: Examples of Our Impact



- **Generation Unlimited Youth Challenge** is a global initiative aiming to ensure young people's access to education, training, and employment by 2030. SmartUp delivered two national editions (2018/19 and 2019/20), guiding young people through workshops, co-creation sessions, and mentoring to develop **20 innovative solutions** addressing violence prevention and digital inclusion. Both editions produced global winners: **AndroMeta in 2019, with its SpeakOut** anti-bullying app, and **eBionics** in 2020, with its **Venus Arm prosthetic prototype**. Both teams received international recognition and funding to develop their solutions further.

- **Nasoci.me Career Guidance Platform**: We designed and launched this platform for the City of Skopje, providing secondary school students with accessible career guidance resources and educational videos featuring professionals from different fields.

Youth: Examples of Our Impact



- **Extended Mentorship and Incubation for Team AndroMeta – Global Winners of GenU Youth Challenge (N. Macedonia):** Following Team AndroMeta's global victory in 2019, SmartUp provided extended **mentorship and incubation to support the further development of SpeakOut,** a mobile app designed to help young people affected by bullying. We guided the team through product development, business planning, and communication, helping them make effective use of their global seed funding, refine their solution, and strengthen their entrepreneurial and pitching skills.

- **#MeetTheSkopjans/ #ZapoznajGiSkopjani:** Inspired by diverse cultures in Skopje, we launched the #MeetTheSkopjans initiative to collect and share the stories of over **100 local citizens**. Through storytelling, we engaged local institutions and promoted positive change in the community. By incorporating creative event organizing, branding, and merchandising, we helped strengthen the connection between Skopje's citizens and their city.



Public Sector Innovation

Program: Public Sector Innovation



Initiating Public Sector Innovation: Co-creating for a Better Future

Our goal is to help public institutions develop and deliver more responsive, accessible, and effective services and public policies through research, co-creation, prototyping, and practical support for implementation.

Objectives:

- **Stronger institutional capacity** to identify, test and implement practical responses to complex challenges.
- **Better public services** that are more accessible, responsive and effective.
- **Meaningful participation** of citizens and affected groups in shaping public solutions.

Our Approach to Public Sector Innovation

We work with public institutions, municipalities, communities, and experts to turn complex public challenges into practical solutions.

Our work usually starts with understanding the problem and the people affected by it, then moves through co-creation, testing, and support for implementation. The aim is not only to generate ideas, but to help institutions put better ways of working into practice and build ownership around them.

Public Sector Innovation: Our Range of Services

We offer a comprehensive range of services to support governments and public sector organizations in their pursuit of innovation. Our services include:

Facilitating participatory innovation processes

We design and facilitate processes that help institutions and stakeholders define challenges, generate ideas, and work through solutions together.

Redesign of public services and spaces

We help public institutions rethink services, processes, and public-facing spaces to improve accessibility, user experience, and how things work in practice.

Engagement of citizens and other stakeholders

We create participatory processes that bring citizens, community organisations, and expert stakeholders into the design and improvement of public solutions.

Service digitalization and data visualization

We use digital and data tools to help simplify processes, improve service delivery, and support more informed decision-making.

Public Sector Innovation: Examples of Our Impact



Our work in public sector innovation has made a significant impact on public institutions and communities. Specific examples of our impact include:

- **Researching Mechanisms for the Operationalization of the National Development Strategy**: SmartUp supported the implementation of North Macedonia's National Development Strategy 2024–2044 through **research, co-creation workshops and strategic foresight training** focused on migrant and refugee integration. The process trained **93 stakeholders and produced 15 proposed policy measures**, including at least three with proposed policy pilots. SmartUp also explored options for establishing a national foresight unit.

Public Sector Innovation: Examples of Our Impact



- **SkopjeLab:** Established in 2017 in partnership with the City of Skopje and UNDP, SkopjeLab was the **first public sector innovation lab** within a public institution in the Balkans. SmartUp designed and managed its programme until 2022, introducing participatory approaches to improving public services and urban spaces.
- SkopjeLab brought together city administration, citizens, businesses, and civil society to **redesign public services, co-create public spaces, and develop digital solutions** responding to the needs of Skopje's residents.
- **Notable achievements** include the redesign of bulky waste collection, NGO grant applications, and the Correct Address service; digital tools for the City Inspectorate; **16 public space concepts** developed through citizen participation; and the Velo Parking initiative.
- SmartUp also **facilitated urban sustainability initiatives** related to the **Green Cadastre, energy efficiency, and e-waste,** alongside **public space innovation workshops and practical training for city employees.** The lab developed the City's first innovation framework and strengthened its capacity to apply citizen-centred approaches to public services.

Public Sector Innovation: Examples of Our Impact



- **Public Sector Innovation Training for Local Government and MZ (Mjesne Zajednice-Local Communities) Representatives:** Delivered two innovation training programs for **66 local government and MZ representatives**, improving their innovation skills through practical exercises. The project also identified opportunities for ongoing support and professional development in public sector innovation.

- **Workshop on service development for national parks (N. Macedonia)**: SmartUp designed and facilitated a two-day workshop on the challenges and opportunities for sustainable development of national parks. The workshop brought together **37** participants from national parks, municipalities, public institutions, development agencies, businesses, and civil society. Using design thinking, participants explored development challenges and opportunities, generating ideas that were refined into three **project concepts** for further development.

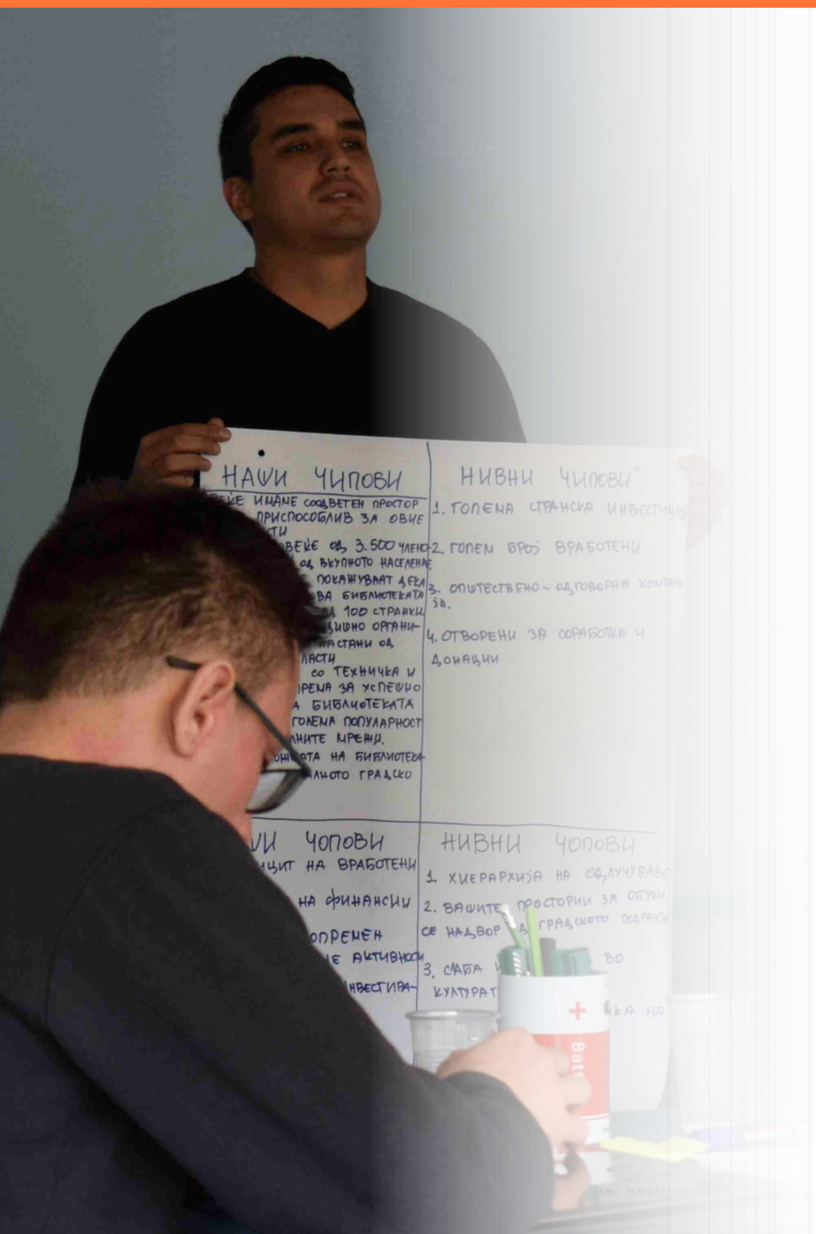
Public Sector Innovation: Examples of Our Impact



- **Public Sector Innovation Training in Bosnia and Herzegovina:** In 2022, we developed and implemented a training program on public sector innovation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The training consisted of a comprehensive curriculum on public sector innovation, including introductory training and a policy lab for **50 public sector representatives**.

- **Open Government Partnership (OGP) for the City of Skopje:** In collaboration with the City of Skopje, SmartUp implemented the "Open Government Partnership (OGP)" initiative as part of the "Resilient Skopje" project. The project focused on **improving sustainability, innovation, and climate resilience** by establishing a framework for open data management, developing tools for data collection, and engaging stakeholders in these processes.

Public Sector Innovation: Examples of Our Impact



- **"Inclusive and Successful digital transformation for all - DIGITAL ALL" (N.Macedonia):** The DIGIT-ALL project, implemented by SmartUp as a subgrantee, aimed to accelerate Skopje's transition to a digital city by establishing a **fully functional e-government support center**. This center was designed to help citizens of Skopje navigate digital city services, including subsidy applications, grants, and more.

- **Impact Investment Portfolio for Local Governments (within Future Cities of SEE Project) (N. Macedonia):** Through the Future Cities of South East Europe project, SmartUp developed an impact investment portfolio for the City of Skopje and a guide to impact investing for local governments, in collaboration with Elson Solutions and with support from Bankers Without Boundaries.



Climate Change



Program: Climate Change

Combating Climate Change: Collaboration as a key to Thriving Futures

Our goal is to help communities, institutions, and partners move climate action from ambition to practical, locally grounded responses that strengthen resilience, adaptation, and long-term change.

Objectives:

- **Strengthen the capacity of public institutions and municipalities** to turn climate priorities into practical action.
- **Enable communities and affected groups** to play a meaningful role in shaping local climate solutions.
- **Develop climate approaches that support local ownership,** practical implementation and long-term use.

Our Approach

We work where climate ambition meets implementation.

Our approach brings together community engagement, institutional capacity, and practical financing or delivery models so climate responses are rooted in local realities and can move into action. We focus on work that is evidence-based, participatory, and realistic enough to be sustained over time.

Climate Change: Our Range of Services

Our Climate Change and Environment Program offers a comprehensive suite of services tailored to support organizations, communities, and individuals in their quest for environmental sustainability. We provide:

Project Development and Implementation

We help partners move from concept to delivery, turning climate ideas into workable projects and programmes.

Capacity Building

We strengthen the knowledge and skills that institutions, communities, and organisations need to plan and act on climate priorities.

Research and Analysis

We provide research and analysis that help partners understand challenges, identify opportunities, and make stronger climate decisions.

Networking and Collaboration

We connect institutions, communities, experts, and practitioners so climate work can benefit from shared knowledge and coordinated action.

Climate Change: Examples of Our Impact



Our commitment to environmental stewardship is evident in the numerous projects we have undertaken, each contributing to a more sustainable future.

Here are a few notable examples:

- **Community Mobility Co-operatives**: This initiative focuses on **transforming the local transport systems** by promoting shared electric vehicle (EV) fleets and community-led EV charging infrastructure in Southeast Europe.

- **Future Cities of South East Europe**: From 2019 to 2022, SmartUp was part of this project co-financed by the EU under the EIT Climate-KIC initiative. The mission was to accelerate the zero-carbon transformation of **15+ city neighbourhoods** in at least **five cities in South East Europe**, making them some of the best places in Europe to live, work, and visit.

Climate Change: Examples of Our Impact



- **Pathways2Resilience – Building Climate Resilience:** SmartUp contributes to climate adaptation planning through several initiatives under the Pathways2Resilience programme.
  - **Kumanovo:** Our work with the municipality combines stakeholder engagement, participatory planning and capacity building, focusing on flooding, stormwater management and water scarcity.
  - **Southern Serbia:** Consultations across Toplica, Nišava and Pirot focus on identifying priorities for addressing floods, droughts and heatwaves.
  - **Sarajevo:** Together with Korimako and local partners, we support the development of a climate resilience strategy addressing the Miljacka River, existing plans and institutional responsibilities.
  - **Sveti Nikole (completed):** We guided the municipality through climate resilience planning and supported the development of its Climate Resilience Strategy, Action Plan and Investment Plan.
  - **Cetinje (completed):** Our role focused on capacity building and consultation, supporting the local team as it developed its climate resilience planning documents.

Climate Change: Examples of Our Impact



- **#SkopjeseZagreva Interactive Visualizations Project**: Household heating was identified as the biggest contributor to air pollution in the Skopje Valley, according to a study conducted by UNDP, the City of Skopje, and the Ministry of Environment. The findings were presented in a clear, visual format, **providing valuable data** to support better decision-making for cleaner, more sustainable urban living.

- **Co-designing household-waste solutions:** The project brought together **35 stakeholders** from multiple sectors to collaborate on waste management solutions through workshops. It resulted in the development of five prototype waste management solutions, focusing on the efficient selection and disposal of household waste.

- **Kanta.mk - GARB (Interactive Eco Mobile Application)**: The "Kanta.mk" (GARB) mobile app's goal was to improve waste management in Skopje by crowdsourcing data on waste disposal and illegal dumping. Developed by SmartUp, the app encouraged citizens to report waste issues, helping city authorities make informed decisions and **improve waste management efforts.**

Our belief

> If you want to be incrementally better, be competitive.
> If you want to be exponentially better, **be cooperative**.

We see problems as **opportunities**, and we believe that individuals and communities are the best agents of **sustainable development**.

Partner with us

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