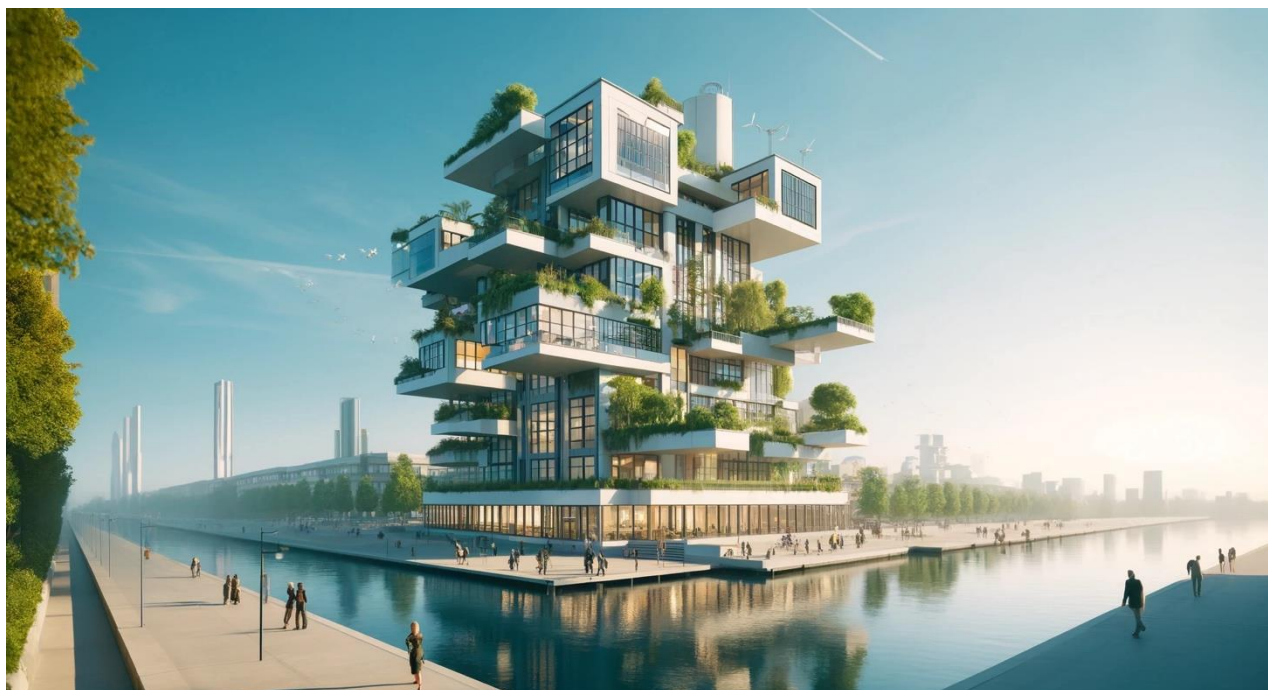


NEBA - “Supporting the integration of New European Bauhaus values and principles into the regional planning processes”

REGIONAL REPORT

STARA ZAGORA MUNICIPALITY (BULGARIA)



This Regional Report has been developed with the support of the Advisory Partner of the Interreg Europe programme project “Supporting the integration of New European Bauhaus values and principles into the regional planning processes (NEBA)”. The research group is led by Gabriella M. Racca, Full Professor of Administrative Law at University of Turin (Dept. of Management “Valter Cantino”) and composed by Prof. Silvia Ponzio, Dr. Mara Demichelis, Dr. Paola Colla, Dr. Matteo Pignatti.

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REGIONAL REPORT

Stara Zagora Municipality (Bulgaria)

Introduction

The NEBA staged approach is based on four steps of learning and exploration. The first step, “Understanding”, includes the development of Regional Reports aiming at identifying the current policy setup relevant to the NEBA project theme, as well as identifying challenges such as knowledge and experience gaps. This will help identify possible policy learning synergies among Project Partners and regions and provide areas of interest for good practice investigation.

This report has been drafted by NEBA project staff from Stara Zagora Municipality, namely Georgi Simeonov, Plamena Koleva, and Maria Markova (Construction and Urban Development Directorate, Accounting Department, Directorate of European Programs and Protocol), and reviewed by the Advisory Partner, University of Torino (UNITO). Also, UNITO carried out the state-of-the-art analysis included in Section 5.

1. Internal (organisational) factors

1.1. Expertise of the organisation on NEB’s topics

Stara Zagora Municipality boasts **extensive expertise across various administrative directorates and units** including:

- **Regeneration and development** expertise is primarily housed within the Construction and Urban Development Directorate, supported by the chief architect’s competence and vision and the Architectural Expert Council, which comprises leading city architects in charge of approving all types of public and private investment projects.
- **Environmental** expertise is concentrated in the Environment, Green Spaces and Forests unit, under the authority of the Deputy Mayor for Urban Transport, Environment, Investments, and Green Deal.
- **Legal, cultural and social inclusion** expertise are also appropriately included within the administrative structure.

Experts from all the units mentioned above will not be directly involved in the project as staff. Only experienced representatives from the Construction and Urban Development Directorate, Accounting Department, Directorate of European Programs and Protocol will be directly involved in the implementation of NEBA project activities.

1.2. Level of organisational knowledge of the NEB initiative, its characteristics and related knowledge gaps

At this stage, there is a **relatively low level of awareness regarding the core principles of NEB**. The ideas and knowledge of NEB are **not well disseminated** among professionals, city administration, and even less so among local inhabitants. There is no doubt that the NEBA project can contribute to increasing understanding and awareness of NEB principles and objectives.

Currently, there are **overall gaps in knowledge in the field**, making it difficult to identify specific ones, as the general notion of NEB is not yet established in the professional and large public mindset. This will certainly take time. **Media can play a significant role in disseminating information** about NEB, **although this is not a topic of primary importance for most media outlets**, except those with a particular focus on the construction business.

1.3. Main sources of information on NEB's topic

Main institutional resources include the **Stara Zagora Master Plan and Geographic Information System** and adhere to the **standards** set by organizations like the Chamber of Architects in Bulgaria and the Chamber of Engineers in Investment Design. However, it is important to note that the **values and principles of NEB are not explicitly integrated into the regulations and plans**.

Currently, the **NEB concept is not incorporated into these municipal planning documents and is not consistently reflected in the terminology used by relevant professional organizations**. According to our stakeholders, the primary sources of information on this topic are **seminars on green architecture and related articles**.

1.4. Key challenges related to the integration of NEB values and principles into regional/urban planning

Local administration can sometimes be **quite conservative**, with decisions often depending on individuals' understanding and approach. It is important to note that **some municipal officers and decision-makers** may be **obstructive or reluctant to accept new ideas and innovations**, even when it is evident that these innovations will support the evolution of Stara Zagora's urban reality and align with the vision for a modern urban environment.

Regulations can also lag new developments and innovations in various sectors, posing a **potential obstacle** to the swift introduction of new ideas.

Additionally, **the city faces several key challenges**, including a **lack of social sensitivity** towards nature-based ways of living, the **negative impact of climate change** and, last but not least, **budget restrictions**.

2. External Factors

2.1. Integration of environmental sustainability, climate change adaptation, social sustainability and social inclusion in the Stara Zagora's policies and planning processes

Urban policies and planning processes require a **new concept for sustainability and climate change adaptation**, particularly in the context of extreme weather events such as storms, heavy rainfall, floods, forest fires, and heat waves, especially in urban areas. There is an **urgent need for the reuse, regeneration, and transformation of existing buildings** to ensure liveable conditions adapted to new temperatures and the **use of nature-based construction materials**. **Reducing energy consumption** and harmful emissions is critical for mitigating the impact of our lifestyle, which also affects air quality and rising temperatures.

There is a significant risk to freshwater resources in regions with moderate climates, where scientists expect a gradual decrease in rainfall and subsequent long periods of drought. **Adapting to climate change requires modifying the way of living in terms of urban mobility, energy consumption, real estate development, waste management, and changing working and living conditions to significantly reduce the impact on nature.**

Sustainable solutions for environmental protection have various dimensions and require measures to protect biodiversity, forests, green infrastructure, and water resources. Forests are crucial for air quality and the preservation of water resources.

Raising awareness of climate change is progressing within the local community. Climate change is **appropriately prioritized** in the city's political agenda and capital investment policies, as well as in personal adaptation efforts through energy efficiency measures and emission reductions.

The Bulgarian Government has implemented **policies to support vulnerable groups**, including disabled people, the socially disadvantaged, and those living in energy poverty, in their steps towards climate adaptation. Therefore, **there is a need to encourage and deepen policies in each sector to address this global challenge.**

2.2. Integration of three core values of the NEB (i.e. sustainability, aesthetics, inclusion) in urban and regional development strategies

Although Stara Zagora Municipality has **not yet visibly adopted the basic NEB values**, sustainability, aesthetics, and social inclusion are strongly present in the Municipality planning processes, approval of technical project designs, and evaluation of future investments.

Currently, Stara Zagora Municipality **implements and addresses the core NEB values** in urban and regional development by:

- **Implementing energy-efficient renovations of residential and public buildings;**
- **Renovating common spaces, city parks, and green areas;**
- **Introducing urban transport with zero CO2 emissions through a new electric bus fleet.**

The basic principles of NEB still need time to be integrated into the mindset of urban developers, architects, and decision-makers, and to become a cornerstone of future urban planning and development. In this respect, **the NEBA project has the potential to raise awareness and deepen the knowledge of NEB not only among professionals in the sector but also among the general public.**

2.3. Integration of NEB's three key principles (combination of global and local dimensions, participation, transdisciplinarity) in urban and regional development strategies

Urban development often **requires active civil participation**, as many aspects of urban growth are subject to strong public interest and debate. Public participation in the approval process of public investments is mandated by **funding program requirements**, which call for public presentations and discussions to gather feedback from professionals and the local community on investment initiatives.

This **approach encourages active citizen engagement, fosters public participation in the approval process, and raises awareness within the local community**. Civil participation not only instils a sense of responsibility among citizens for the future development of their city but also helps decision-makers align with public expectations.

The integration of local and global dimensions is reflected in Stara Zagora's urban and social reality through the horizontal application of NEB principles, which are consistent across all long-term investments throughout the EU.

2.4. Guidelines and framework integrating NEB into Stara Zagora policy

The Municipality of Stara Zagora has developed a **framework to integrate NEB principles by adding specific selection criteria** to the general criteria set by the Ministry of Regional Development **for assessing project ideas expected to be funded through the Development of Regions Program**. These criteria aim to emphasize NEB values and principles in the assessment and approval process of investments in urban development, regeneration of deteriorated public areas, green infrastructure, transport communications, and other public investments.

This approach ensures the **incorporation of NEB principles in the implementation of projects financed by EU funds. NEB principles are embedded in Bulgarian national strategic development documents**, and the Municipality of Stara Zagora has intentionally included these principles and values in its investment planning process.

The specific selection criteria for project ideas by Stara Zagora Municipality have been set within Development of Regions Program:

1. Sectoral approach:
 - 1.1. Implementation of local low carbon emissions economics and transition to a circular economics.

- 1.2. Transition towards clean energy, reducing the energy and bad emissions consumption.
 - 1.3. Adaptation to climate change and transition to climate neutrality.
 - 1.4. The project ideas should include measures for cultural heritage development and/or creation of attractive, functional and publicly accessible spaces and comprehensive tourist products.
 - 1.5. Integration of the New European Bauhaus principles and values into the urban development.
2. Ensuring the territorial integration of the municipality by improving the communication and functional links between the central urban area and the peripheral areas of the city, as well as between the city and the villages.
 3. Improvement and protection of the environment in Stara Zagora Municipality through refurbishment and upgrading of the green infrastructure.

2.5. Potential funding opportunities

Public funding opportunities supporting NEB initiatives are **available through the Development of Regions Program**, managed by the Ministry of Regional Development of Bulgaria.

This program includes specific selection criteria, in addition to the general ones, that emphasize NEB values and principles during the assessment and approval of investments in urban development, regeneration of deteriorated public areas, green infrastructure, transport communications, and other public investments.

Often, these investments aim for immediate economic benefits by saving funds and energy, supporting environmental protection, and simultaneously incorporating NEB values and principles. This approach reflects Stara Zagora's commitment to integrating NEB principles in the selection and evaluation of capital investment ideas, financed by public or EU funds.

The Development of Regions Program is available [here](#).

2.6. Management of Local Innovation Processes for Regional and Local Development in Stara Zagora

Local innovation processes and approaches can be incorporated by **adopting best practices, examples, and experiences from foreign partners**. This can be achieved by establishing partnerships and fostering discussions with professional organizations to integrate NEB initiatives into the regional planning process.

These processes and approaches can be implemented by setting innovative criteria during tender procedures for selecting contractors or during architectural design competitions. An example of such an approach is the green public tenders carried out by the Municipality of Stara Zagora. One notable public tender involved the installation of a hot water solar system on the southern facade of the city swimming pool.

2.7. Experiences of social and territorial inclusion, based on citizens' participation and co-creation in Stara Zagora

2.7.1. Renovation of Ayazmoto Park

The renovation of Ayazmoto Park in Stara Zagora serves as a prime example of social and territorial inclusion. This beloved leisure area underwent significant improvements aimed at revitalizing a key historical and natural landmark. The project focused on making the park more accessible and attractive to all residents by installing new walking paths, playgrounds, and sports facilities. Additionally, various activities and events were introduced to engage diverse community groups, fostering social cohesion and creating a welcoming environment for people of all ages and backgrounds.

2.7.2. Zoo within Ayazmoto Park

Situated within the lush greenery of Ayazmoto Park, the Zoo, one of the first built outside Bulgaria's capital, underwent extensive renovations two years ago. The zoo now offers an enhanced experience for both residents and visitors, promoting nature and wildlife appreciation. Educational programs teach children to respect animals, while visitors enjoy refurbished animal enclosures and pathways. The zoo's primary focus has shifted towards education, wildlife conservation, and biodiversity regeneration, ensuring a respectful existence for the animals in captivity.

2.7.3. Summer Theatre within Ayazmoto Park

The Summer Theatre, located within Ayazmoto Park, is a cultural landmark of Stara Zagora that was extensively refurbished in 2022 and officially reopened in September 2023. This revitalized public space blends elegantly with the surrounding nature, inviting citizens of all generations to enjoy a wide range of cultural events. The theatre now serves as a vibrant hub for positive community engagement and cultural enrichment.

2.7.4. Creation of Artileriysky Park

The transformation of former military barracks in the western part of Stara Zagora into Artileriysky Park is another excellent example of social and territorial inclusion. This inviting green space features sports facilities, playgrounds, cycling paths, water features, relaxation zones for the elderly, and areas for cultural and art activities. The park's design caters to the needs of people of all ages and backgrounds, preserving the area as an open, nature-based space for sports, art, and recreational activities amidst a densely populated neighbourhood.

2.7.5. Stantsionna Gradina Park

Located near Stara Zagora Railway Station, Stantsionna Gradina Park underwent fundamental renovation and revitalization. Once a neglected area, it now serves as an inviting gateway for visitors and a leisure and

sports hub for residents. The park features stylish gardens, fountains, and shaded green areas, enhancing the town's appeal and providing a welcoming space for all.

2.7.6. Recreational Space in Zheleznik Neighborhood

A notable project that embodies the values and principles of the New European Bauhaus (NEB) is the regeneration of recreational space in the Zheleznik neighborhood. Previously an old concrete area that accumulated heat during summer, it has been transformed into an aesthetically pleasing green and leisure space. The area now features numerous benches, newly planted trees, and greenery providing shade, along with children's playgrounds made from nature-based materials, primarily wood. This project emphasizes the connection between lifestyle and nature. Additionally, the space utilizes natural energy resources, such as solar energy for charging mobile devices and rainwater collection for irrigation.

2.7.7. International Youth Centre

The International Youth Centre is a recently refurbished building that now hosts a youth activities institution. This project exemplifies the regeneration and reuse of an old building, breathing new life and functionality into it. The centre supports informal education for young people, complementing formal education. In line with the Green Deal, the building also features a rooftop solar photovoltaic system with battery storage. The Stara Zagora International Youth Centre is the first in Bulgaria to receive the Quality Label Award from the Council of Europe.

2.7.8. Stara Zagora Museum of History

The Stara Zagora Museum of History is a prime example of integrating historical and cultural heritage with contemporary aesthetics, design, and functionality. The museum building, designed in the shape of an hourglass, symbolizes the passage of time and the evolution of the population and events. The first floor houses one of Stara Zagora's most precious legacies from the Roman Empire: the authentic remains of the central street of the ancient town, Augusta Trayana, dating back to the 2nd century BC.

These regenerated spaces, based on co-creation mechanisms, provide opportunities for a wide range of cultural and social events, promoting inclusiveness within the city.

3. NEBA Project stakeholders

Stara Zagora Municipality has carefully selected the members of the NEBA project stakeholder group, whose experience, expertise, and fields of activity will bring value to our common goal of integrating NEB initiatives.

The **following stakeholders are directly involved in NEBA project activities:**

- Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Stara Zagora
- Regional Economic Development Agency Stara Zagora (SZ REDA)

- “Lipa” Club, local NGO
- “Green Balkans” – Stara Zagora, a local NGO with wide popularity in Bulgaria and abroad, passionately involved in environmental and biodiversity protection and regeneration initiatives and projects
- Regional Inspectorate of Environment and Water Stara Zagora (RIEW - Stara Zagora)
- Regional Board of the Chamber of Architects in Bulgaria, Stara Zagora
- Regional Board of the Alliance of Architects in Bulgaria, Stara Zagora

4. Other references and suggestions: policies examples and the overarching goal for NEB in the Stara Zagora

The overarching goal of the city should be the implementation of overall change of the city ecosystem and all the sectors of the public, social and economic life to reduce impact on and adapt to climate change. Adapting to climate change requires modifying the way of living in terms of urban mobility, energy consumption, real estate development, waste management and changing of working and living conditions to smoothly experience the violent manifestations of the climate change. Bulgaria is particularly affected by continuous hot waves and forest fires, resulting in long periods of drought and heavy losses of water resources.

Our suggestion would be mostly focused on **development of prevention policies in the most affected sectors** and **new approach for reasonable consumption of natural resources**, in particular – water resources.

Other suggestion would be **raising awareness and social sensitivity in the rapidly changing living ecosystem**. Improvement of Civil protection policy and alert systems in case of extreme weather events represent short-term sustainable reactions. Long-term solutions refer to considerable innovative modifications in the construction sector, urban development, industrial infrastructure, green spaces and sustainable forest management.

These suggestions incarnate at least two (2) basic NEB values, namely inclusiveness and sustainability.

5. State of the Art Analysis

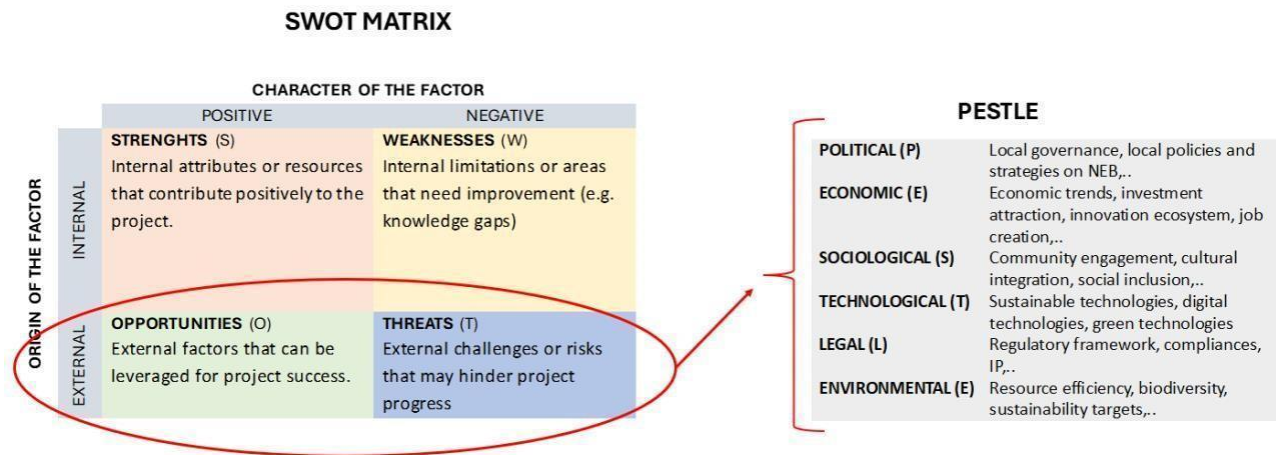
5.1. Methodology

This section focuses on analysing the regional situation at the Stara Zagora Municipality level. The analysis follows the Methodology for Regional Situation Analysis and is based on the SWOT Analysis Framework applied to the findings presented in sections 2-4 of this report.

The SWOT analysis examines the interrelations between the internal and external environments of Stara Zagora Municipality concerning NEB's topic area, identifying:

- Strengths (S): Internal attributes or resources that may contribute positively to the project.
- Weaknesses (W): Internal limitations or areas that need improvement (e.g., knowledge gaps).
- Opportunities (O): External factors that can be leveraged for project success.
- Threats (T): External challenges or risks that may hinder project progress.

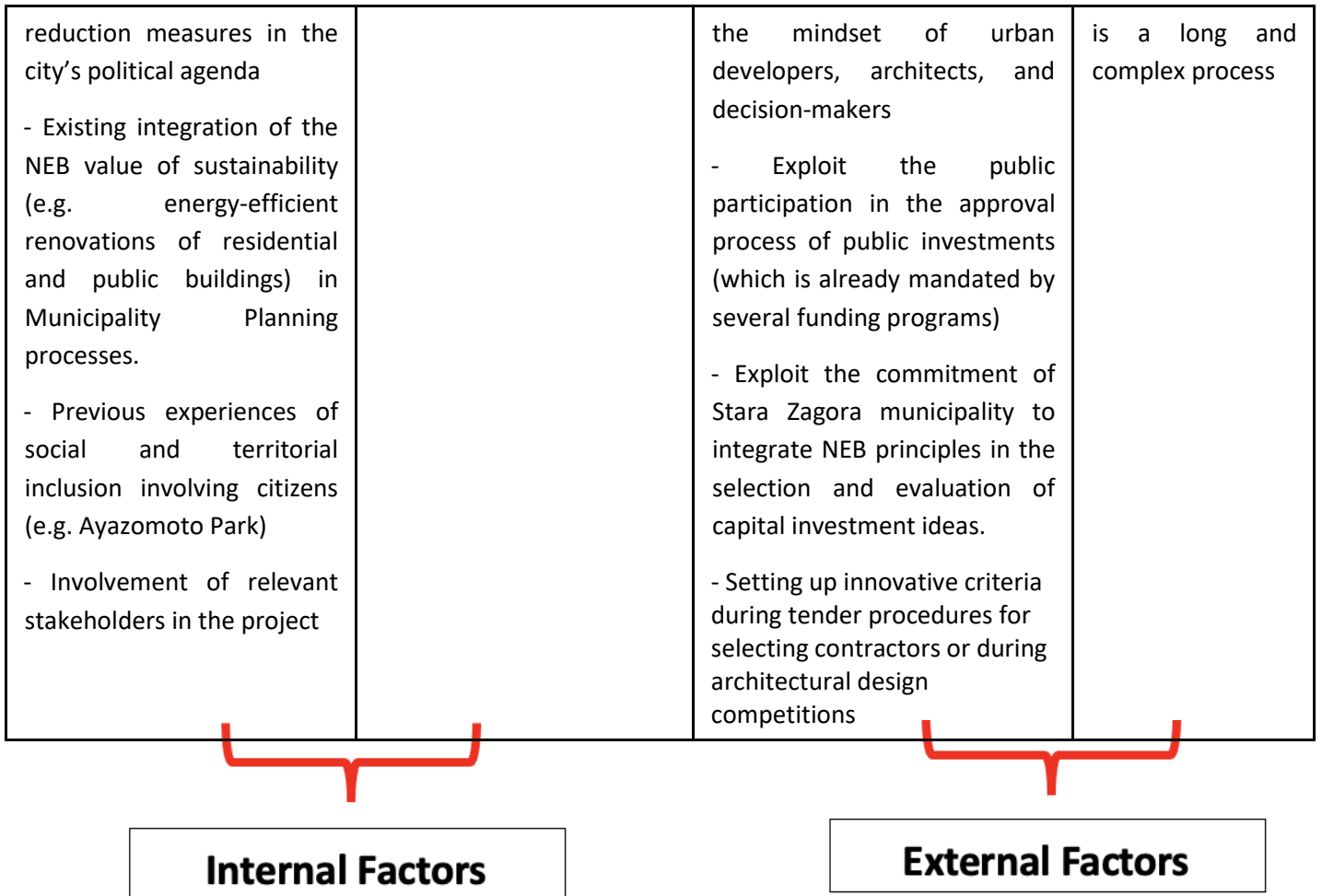
PESTLE factors related to political, economic, sociological, technological, legal and environmental aspects are covered, when available, within the opportunities and threats part of the matrix.



5.2. SWOT Analysis



Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
- Expertise across various Municipality Directorates (especially in urban regeneration) - Existing standards (engineering/architecture) - Public awareness of society on climate change topics - Integration of energy efficiency and emission	- Low level of awareness on NEB's core principles at multiple levels (incl. city administrators) - Lack of incorporation of NEB concepts in municipal planning documents (especially the NEB value of aesthetics)	- Exploit cross-learning opportunities within the NEBA project consortium to increase the understanding and awareness of NEB principles and objectives - Involve media outlets in raising awareness of NEB - Integrate via dissemination activities NEB's principles into	- Resistance to change in local administration - Lack of awareness on NEB of professionals and civil society - Adapting existing regulations to NEB



5.3. Conclusions

5.3.1. Main findings

At this stage, Stara Zagora Municipality has a **relatively low level of awareness and knowledge gaps regarding the core principles and values of NEB**, as they are not well disseminated among professionals, city administration, local inhabitants, and media.

While the Stara Zagora Master Plan and Geographic Information System adhere to sustainability standards set by organizations such as the Chamber of Architects in Bulgaria and the Chamber of Engineers in Investment Design, **the values and principles of NEB are not explicitly integrated into the regulations and plans.**

The **key challenges** in integrating NEB values and principles into regional and urban planning are related to **the conservative behaviour of the local administration and the strict regulations on new development.**

From a sociological perspective, **the lack of social sensitivity towards a nature-based way of living** should be considered, as it negatively impacts efforts to address climate change and economic sustainability due to budget restrictions.

The **current policies** of Stara Zagora on urban planning processes focus on **environmental sustainability in the face of climate change challenges** (resilience and reuse). Raising awareness of climate change is progressing, with climate change appropriately prioritized in the city's political agenda and capital investment policies.

Moreover, the Bulgarian Government has implemented **policies to support vulnerable groups**, including disabled people, the socially disadvantaged, and those living in energy poverty, in their steps towards climate adaptation.

Stara Zagora Municipality has **not yet visibly adopted the basic NEB values**, but it has developed a **framework to integrate NEB principles by adding specific selection criteria to the general criteria set by the Ministry of Regional Development for assessing project ideas** expected to be funded through the Development of Regions Program. Examples include the renovation of Ayazmoto Park, its Zoo and Summer Theatre, and Artileriysky Park, focusing on urban regeneration, social and territorial inclusion. Other examples are Stantsionna Gradina Park, Recreational Space in Zheleznik Neighborhood, International Youth Centre, and the Stara Zagora Museum of History, which exemplify aesthetic value.

5.3.2. Possible learning synergies within NEBA consortium

At this stage of the project, Stara Zagora Municipality can exchange and develop learning synergies within the NEBA consortium. For example, for citizen involvement initiatives, it would be useful to organize events and dialogues with the NGOs and people, to make them aware of the NEB perspective, as in the City of Torino with the NEB Manifesto creation (*see City of Torino – Regional Report*). For more information on areas of interest for good practice investigation please refer to the State of the art analysis at Consortium level. In addition, further areas of interest for good practice investigation may be identified during the planned thematic workshops.