GREENER CITIES, GREENER EUROPE

How the Urban Agenda for the EU Partnerships can bring sustainability closer to citizens

7 October 2019
Permanent Representation of the Netherlands to the European Union
Kortenberglaan 4-10, Brussels, Belgium

Organised by the European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN) EGTC on behalf of the Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations
PROGRAMME

09:30 –10:00  Registration and welcome
10:00 –10:10  Welcome and opening by host
 Permanent Representation of the Netherlands to the European Union
10:10 –10:20  Opening speech
 Hans Tijl, Dutch Urban Envoy, Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations
10:20 –10:30  Programme explanation by the conference moderator
 Mart Grisel, Director EUKN EGTC
10:30 –11:00  Keynote speech
 Prof. Derk Loorbach, Director of Dutch Research Institute for Transitions (DRIFT), Rotterdam (NL)
11:00 –11:30  Coffee break
11:30 –13:00  Division in working groups
 Working group 1
 Climate Adaptation and Energy Transition
 Working group 2
 Air Quality and Urban Mobility
 Working group 3
 Circular Economy and Public Procurement
13:00 –13:45  Lunch
13:45 –14:15  Reporting of working groups
14:15 –14:30  Keynote speech
 Jan Olbrycht, Member of the European Parliament
14:30 –16:00  Political panel discussion, followed by Q&A
 Mario Guarente, Mayor of Potenza (IT)
 Tine Heyse, President Climate Alliance and Alderman of Ghent (BE)
 Fatma Koşer Kaya, Vice Mayor of Amersfoort (NL)
 Pia Laurila, European Commission
 Jouni Nissinen, President European Environmental Bureau
 Jan Olbrycht, Member of the European Parliament
 Vera Tax, Member of the European Parliament
16:00 –16:30  Keynote listeners’ reflection
 Victor Everhardt, Deputy Mayor of Utrecht (NL)
 Hans Tijl, Dutch Urban Envoy, Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations
16:30  Closure
PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Location: Permanent Representation of the Netherlands to the European Union, Kortenberglaan 4-10, Brussels, Belgium

Metro: Schuman

Notes: The EUKN Conference is an official side event of the European Week of Regions and Cities 2019. The opening reception of #EURegionsWeek will take place at the SQUARE - Brussels Convention Centre, Room Agora Village (Mont des Arts, 1000, Brussels) as of 19:00 on 7 October 2019 (participation required prior registration via the European Week of Regions and Cities website).
BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The Conference “Greener Cities, Greener Europe: how the Urban Agenda for the EU Partnerships can bring sustainability closer to citizens” is organised by the European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN) EGTC on behalf of the Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. It will explore two of the guiding topics of the 2019 European Week of Regions and Cities – a greener Europe and a Europe closer to citizens – through the acquis of the “green” Partnerships of the Urban Agenda for the EU. The Conference is an official side event to the #EURegionsWeek.

Three main issues will be discussed:
1. What is the role of cities and citizens in implementing sustainability policies?
2. How can the “green” Partnerships of the Urban Agenda for the EU contribute to bringing sustainability closer to citizens?
3. How can key political stakeholders support the implementation of the Actions proposed by the Partnerships?

These questions will be addressed from different perspectives and by different stakeholders. Opened with two keynotes shedding light on academic as well as on political aspects, the Conference will conclude with a political panel debate, during which Members of the European Parliament, mayors, aldermen and senior experts will discuss how the actions proposed by the Urban Agenda for the EU Partnerships can be taken on board by politicians and decision-makers.

The overall aim is to gain a better understanding of the key dilemmas in defining and delivering sustainability policies at different levels of government together with civil society actors. Knowing that sustainability has several dimensions and notwithstanding the need for a holistic approach, the focus of the Conference is mostly environmental sustainability in the sense of maintaining natural capital and counteracting environmental degradation.

Sustainability and its urban dimension

Over the past decades, the theme of sustainable development has gained a central role in European policies and is now one of the main objectives of the EU. Notably, in the framework of the post-2020 Cohesion Policy, the European Commission aims to improve the effectiveness of its investments to reach the EU’s climate and environmental goals, among other things. Many of the recent mission letters sent to the Commissioners-designate by President-elect Ursula von der Leyen show the high salience of Europe’s sustainable transition and of the goal of climate neutrality by 2050.

Equally, cities have become increasingly involved in EU policy-making in a variety of ways. They are at the heart of several initiatives and organisations providing their insights and co-shaping European and national policies. Additionally, the perceived linkage between cities and sustainable development has become stronger: urban areas are considered places where sustainable transitions take place and where innovative solutions are born. The pathways towards sustainability are diverse and complex, but the urban dimension plays a great role in most of them. Policy coherence for sustainable development still represents a tremendous challenge and requires an integrated approach. This is why the EUKN Conference will address the topic of sustainable transitions by looking at the experience of the Urban Agenda for the EU, an initiative established to foster a shared approach towards urban challenges through experimental governance and a greater focus on cities (more on page 5).
**KEYNOTE SPEAKERS**

**Derk Loorbach**  
Director, Dutch Research Institute for Transitions (DRIFT)  
Professor of Socio-economic Transitions, Erasmus University Rotterdam

Derk Loorbach was amongst the first researchers to develop the concept and approach of transition management. In 2004 he started, together with Jan Rotmans, the Dutch Research Institute for Transitions (DRIFT) at the Erasmus University Rotterdam where he received his PhD in June 2007. He became director of DRIFT in 2010 and helped developing it into a world-leading pioneering interdisciplinary institute that combines cutting-edge research with close cooperation with policy and business to further sustainable development in practice.

Derk Loorbach will present a sustainability transitions research perspective upon the role of cities in accelerating and guiding sustainability transitions. His main argument is that cities and their governance need to develop more transformative governance capacities to support emerging alternatives, adapt existing conditions and phase out unsustainable technologies and practices. This implies a fundamental change in how urban policy works: not through identifying solutions and implementing these, but by anchoring radical long-term sustainability principles and creating space and support for emergence. This approach of transition governance will be illustrated with examples from different cities that are moving towards zero emission shared mobility, nature based solutions, zero energy housing and sustainable food systems.

**Jan Olbrycht**  
Member of the European Parliament

Jan Olbrycht holds a PhD in Sociology. He is a regional policy and urban development expert and involved in many European local and regional government organisations. Member of the European Parliament since 2004, Jan Olbrycht is currently Vice Chairman of the EPP Group, member of the Parliamentary Committee on Budgets (standing rapporteur on the Multiannual Financial Framework) and substitute member of the Regional Development Committee. He is also president of the European Parliament’s URBAN Intergroup (2009-2019).

Jan Olbrycht's keynote speech will discuss how urban policies and sustainability challenges interact and how this translates into ambitions that the new European Parliament can and should effectuate in collaboration with other institutions and partners. He will also look back on the experiences with the Urban Agenda for the EU and share his thoughts on its future, as well as on the post-2020 Cohesion Policy and its urban dimension.
THE URBAN AGENDA FOR THE EU AND ITS “GREEN” PARTNERSHIPS

In May 2016, during the Dutch Presidency of the Council of the EU, the Pact of Amsterdam was adopted by the Ministers responsible for Urban Matters, establishing the Urban Agenda for the EU. The Pact recognises the relevance of effective urban policy and the potential role of cities in shaping and implementing policies.

The Urban Agenda for the EU promotes an innovative multi-level working method that brings together urban, national and European levels to strengthen urban governance and facilitate urban experimentation. The application of this working method is tested in the (currently) 14 thematic Partnerships, which deal with 14 priority themes, each essential to ensure the sustainable development of urban areas. Partners in those Partnerships – EU Member and Partner States, cities, European programmes and networks, including civil society organisations – first identify existing barriers and consequently define concrete actions needed to overcome them. These actions are subsumed in Partnerships’ Action Plans and grouped under the three categories of Better Regulation, Better Funding and Better Knowledge.

The themes of the Partnerships are highly interconnected. In order to support an integrated policy approach, the Pact of Amsterdam defines 11 cross-cutting issues that require attention. In the Conference, the cross-cutting issue “Effective urban governance, including citizens participation and new models of governance” will play a prominent role. This choice is justified by the increasing relevance of participatory approaches both in policy-making and in relation to sustainability. Once again, the framework for the new Cohesion Policy is a proof of that.

One of the five main policy objectives driving EU investments in 2021-2027 will be a Europe closer to citizens, which implies inter alia financial support to locally led development strategies and sustainable urban development.

The Conference organisers have chosen to put a focus on the experience and the acquis of the most straightforwardly “green” Partnerships, namely: Air Quality, Circular Economy, Climate Adaptation, Energy Transition, Innovative and Responsible Public Procurement, Sustainable Use of Land and Nature-based Solutions, and Urban Mobility. This gathering is special in the sense that there are few forums in which the Partnerships can exchange and present their activities to a common audience. By focusing on the Partnerships with clearly environmental priority themes, their joint mission can be fostered and means, tools, and approaches can be compared.

The Partnerships will be represented by their Coordinators or Action Leaders, who will portray how they experienced and adapted the multi-level working method. To do so, they will illustrate the implementation process of a single Action. Starting from the concrete experiences of the Partnerships, the Conference audience is invited to discuss in particular the role of citizens’ involvement in the design and implementation of innovative policies within a multi-level setting.

On the following pages, the most straightforwardly “green” Partnerships are presented, drawing from elements and quotes of their respective Action Plans, which are all available for download on the FUTURIUM website (https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/urban-agenda/action-plans). This overview provides a starting point and will be broadened in the follow-up reporting of the Conference.
Air Quality

“Currently there are many cities that have difficulty complying with the air quality standards as set by the EU, rendering their environment unhealthy for EU citizens.”
Air Quality Action Plan, p. 31

Member States: The Netherlands (Coordinator), Croatia, Czech Republic, Poland;
Urban and Regional Authorities: Constanța, Duisburg (representing the Consortium Clean Air Ruhr Area), Greater London Authority, Helsinki/HSY (Helsinki Region Environmental Services Authority), Milan, Utrecht;
Stakeholders: EUROCITIES, HEAL;
Observer: URBACT;
European Commission: DG REGIO (Coordinator), DG AGRI, DG ENVI, DG GROW, DG JRC, DG RTD.

Urban air quality has been subject to controversial public debates throughout the past years – for good reasons. As the Air Quality Action Plan points out: “Air quality is […] one of the major determining factors for the quality of [the] living environment in cities.”2 In the “findings on air quality and knowledge”3, the Air Quality Partnership mentions two bottlenecks specifically related to citizens’ engagement:
– Lack of knowledge on how to promote public awareness and participation;
– Lack of knowledge among citizens about the fundamental role of local policies on traffic regulation measures and potential role in reduction of citizen exposure with health benefits on specific local and toxic pollutants regulated (NO2, benzene) and not regulated (PAH, BC, PN).

The Air Quality Partnership has strong thematic intersections with the Urban Mobility Partnership. This is why the two will be combined in one working group session.

Circular Economy

“Cities play an essential role in the development of a circular economy; they act as enablers of potential measures by which they can influence both consumers and businesses.”
Circular Economy Action Plan, p. 4

Member States: Finland, Greece, Poland, Slovenia;
Urban and Regional Authorities: Oslo (Coordinator), Flanders Region, The Hague, Kaunas, Porto, Prato;
Stakeholders: ACR+, CEMR, EIB, EUROCITIES, URBACT;
European Commission: DG REGIO, DG CLIMA, DG ENV, DG GROW, DG RTD.

In its Action Plan, the Circular Economy Partnership makes clear that it “has not elaborated an overall plan for introducing the circular economy at a city level, but has rather focused on specific actions and recommendations that would fit into already existing plans for most cities”.4 It sets out a vision of the circular transition in which, among other things:
– Cities are provided with concrete tools on how to use economic incentives to improve waste management;
– Urban resource centres are social and economic hubs for residents and enterprises to meet and collaborate on circular initiatives;
– Underused buildings and spaces are considered a resource;
– Circular city indicators help the city measure its performance.5

Hereby, the Action Plan refers to the need for multi-level governance, local-level involvement, and the big potentials of urban experimentation and innovation.
Climate Adaptation

“Better regulation is especially important to address urban adaptation to climate change, which is a broad, multi-sectoral and multi-level responsibility where impacts are felt locally, while decisions are being taken on all governance levels.”
Climate Adaptation Action Plan, p. 18

Energy Transition

“A smart integrated energy system is crucial not only for tackling climate change, but also for the future prosperity and liveability of European cities.”
Energy Transition Action Plan, p. 13
Public procurement may not be a "green" theme at first glance. However, as the Partnership clarifies in its Action Plan, social, economic and environmental sustainability is a key driver of the efforts to change existing procurement approaches towards truly innovative and responsible public procurement. In addition, green procurement and, more specifically, circular procurement form the basis of the Partnership's actions. The Partnership holds that "[f]or public authorities to act as lead customers, they must define long term needs, develop an innovation policy and a procurement strategy."13

The Action Plan sets out "[s]everal bottlenecks regarding knowledge, which hinder the use of circular procurement"14, such as lacking knowledge on procedures, circular solutions, good practices, and a lack of training and education regarding this theme.

A particularly intimate linkage is asserted between procurement and circular economy. In fact, the Public Procurement Partnership took over the Circular Procurement Action from the Partnership on Circular Economy in 2017.15

Sustainable Use of Land and Nature-based Solutions

Public buyers in Europe have a significant role to play in societal transformation, and cities are important public buyers.”
Public Procurement Action Plan, p. 7

“Finding the balance between compactness and achieving high standards of quality of life in a healthy urban environment is a major challenge.”

Member States: Italy, the Netherlands;
Urban and Regional Authorities: Haarlem (Coordinator), Gabrovo, Lanvik, Nantes, Munich, Preston, Tunn, Vantaa;
Stakeholders: CEEP, CEMR, EUROCITIES, ICLEI, UIA;
Observer: URBACT;
European Commission: DG REGIO, DG CNECT, DG GROW.

Member States: Poland (Coordinator), Cyprus, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovenia;
Urban and Regional Authorities: Bologna (Coordinator), Antwerp, Cork, Métropole Européenne de Lille, Stavanger, Verband Region Stuttgart, Zagreb;
Stakeholders: EEA, EIB, EUKN, EUROCITIES, ICLEI, INCASÖL, ISOCARP;
Observer: URBACT;
European Commission: DG REGIO, DG ENV, DG JRC, DG RTD.

Hereby, the guiding ideal is the "[l]iveable [c]ompactness city model [that] recognises that land is a non-renewable and scarce resource. At the same time, the Partnership calls for "increasing the presence of green spaces and infrastructures and promoting the use of NBS for improving the living conditions within an urban area"17.

A key demand addressed to Member States is to develop "spatial development policies which aim to reduce land take, bring an end to soil sealing, and mitigate urban sprawl"18. In its Action Plan, the Partnership recognises the value of green public procurement19 as well as interlinkages with the Circular Economy Partnership regarding the re-use of buildings20.
Urban Mobility

“Motorised traffic in particular can have a negative impact on the health of local residents, while individual mobility behaviour, especially the active modes, can offer a wide range of cross benefits.”
Urban Mobility Action Plan, p. 4

Member States: Czech Republic (Coordinator), Cyprus, Finland, Romania, Slovenia;
Urban and Regional Authorities: Karlsruhe (Coordinator), Bari, Bielefeld, Burgas, Gdynia, Malmo, Nijmegen, Skåne Region, Torres Vedras, Wallonia Region;
Stakeholders: CEMR, EIB, EUROCITIES, European Cyclists Federation, POLIS, UITP, Walk21;
Observer: URBACT;
European Commission: DG REGIO, DG ENV, DG MOVE.

The Partnership describes the complexity of its highly interlinked theme and the need for integrated solutions aptly: “Using a wide range of interconnected measures and strategies, the challenge is to deal with the increased demand for mobility whilst developing a resilient mobility system, which can meet future challenges.” A key point of attention is “fostering new urban mobility paradigms and patterns [as well as] link[ing] successfully political vision, strategic planning, and the needs and expectations of citizens and businesses.”

In its Action Plan, the Urban Mobility Partnership recognises the strong links with the Partnerships on Sustainable Use of Land and on Air Quality and states:

- "Urban planning and mobility development must be seen as two sides of the same coin as transport and mobility are variables dependent on settlement structures and land use.
- The strong connection between mobility and environmental quality must be seized as a way of contributing effectively to reaching the agreed limit values for, inter alia: climate, air quality and noise."
POLITICAL PANEL DISCUSSION

In the afternoon, the Conference will focus on the political aspects of the process started since the adoption of the Pact of Amsterdam in May 2016, which installed the Urban Agenda for the EU. The panel is composed of two members of the European Parliament, three (deputy) mayors, a representative of the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy of the European Commission, and the President of the European Environmental Bureau. The debate will cover three areas, namely:

- How to move from actions proposed by the Urban Agenda Partnerships to actual implementation of these actions?
- How to involve citizens in the transformation of the EU towards a climate-neutral continent, as suggested by the new President of the European Commission?
- How to continue the process of the Urban Agenda for the EU in the next programming period?

The panel discussion is conceived of as a vivid debate, fuelled by an interaction between the panellists, the moderator and the audience. The debate will include questions prepared by the moderator Mr Mart Grisel, but not exclusively: the three working groups will also prepare questions, and during the day the audience will be invited to suggest additional questions via an online tool.

Local level

Mario Guarente  
Mayor of Potenza (IT)

Tine Heyse  
President Climate Alliance and Alderman of Ghent (BE)

Fatma Koşer Kaya  
Vice Mayor of Amersfoort (NL)

“ The panel is composed of policy-makers representing different levels and organisations. What can they do to facilitate the implementation of actions leading to a greener Europe and one closer to the citizens?”

Task for the Working Groups

European level

Pia Laurila  
European Commission

Jan Olbrycht  
Member of the European Parliament

Vera Tax  
Member of the European Parliament

Stakeholders

Jouni Nissinen  
President European Environmental Bureau
The Conference will close with a special format: Keynote Listeners will reflect upon the presentations and discussions heard during the Conference from their viewpoint. Hereby, they are asked to share the main messages they are taking away with them, and how they intend to use them in their daily work.

Victor Everhardt, Alderman for Public Health, Work and Income, Youth and Youthcare, Station Area, Legal Affairs, Leidsche Rijn and Northeast District and First Deputy Mayor, will share his thoughts and reflections on the Conference contents from the perspective of a growing Dutch city with high sustainability ambitions: Utrecht.

Hans Tijl, the Dutch Urban Envoy, will fulfil a dual role. After having given the opening speech in the morning, he will also close the day with reflections on the Conference topic “Greener Cities, Greener Europe: how the Urban Agenda Partnerships can bring sustainability closer to citizens”.

2. Air Quality Action Plan, p. 30
3. Air Quality Action Plan, p. 46
4. Circular Economy Action Plan, p. 6
5. Circular Economy Action Plan, p. 10
6. Climate Adaptation Action Plan, p. 6
7. Climate Adaptation Action Plan, p. 22
10. Energy Transition Action Plan, p. 15
11. Energy Transition Action Plan, p. 33
12. Energy Transition Action Plan, p. 33-34
13. Innovative and Responsible Procurement Action Plan, p. 6
15. Innovative and Responsible Procurement Action Plan, p. 42
20. Sustainable Use of Land and Nature-based Solutions Action Plan, p. 27
21. Urban Mobility Action Plan, p. 4
22. Urban Mobility Action Plan, p. 13
23. Urban Mobility Action Plan, p. 4