State of Play on urban development – EU Urban Agenda

1. Introduction to the EU Urban Agenda

At recent DG Meetings (Riga and Milan) Member States, the European Commission, and urban programmes and networks jointly agreed that there is a need to synthesise and update the shared understanding of urban development in Europe as expressed in several policy documents. In discussions on the EU Urban Agenda, all parties were convinced that urban and regional development would benefit from a shared conceptual framework (“State of Play”), partnerships between key urban actors, including cities, and a clear thematic focus. At the same meeting, it became evident that there was no need to develop a new vision on urban development; a shared vision can be extracted from the key political documents that have played an important part in urban development in Europe, such as informal ministerial conclusions (Leipzig, Toledo, Marseille, Poznan and Riga), the Territorial Agenda of the EU 2020, and the Cities of Tomorrow report.

The current State of Play outlines the current consensus on the conceptual framework. This consensus can change a result of changing political developments and new policies in the field of urban development and territorial cohesion. This is why the State of Play is a dynamic document that can be updated when needed. At the same time, it functions as the framework for concrete actions as envisaged in the EU Urban Agenda (the “Partnerships”) closely linked to the 12 priority themes that have been agreed at the Ministerial Meeting on urban development under the Luxembourg Presidency.

The EU Urban Agenda is a joint effort of European Commission, Member States and European cities networks to strengthen the urban dimension of EU policies by involving policy actors at all governmental levels. This involvement is based upon full respect of the key principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, and takes into account the need for flexibility in acknowledging the wide diversity of local situations.

It is important to emphasise that the EU Urban agenda is not a new policy programme; its aim is to improve existing programmes and structures by enhancing the efficiency of regulation, funding and knowledge exchange. Its aim is not lead to new regulation but to better regulation, better funding mechanisms and better forms of knowledge exchange that affect cities. Given this ambition, a more focused, coordinated and action-oriented cooperation between European Commission, Member States and cities on policies impacting urban development is needed. This cooperation takes place within the thematic partnerships that will be established under the umbrella of the EU Urban Agenda.

These thematic partnerships do not come out of thin air. The successive Presidencies of the Council of the EU have contributed to the process of intergovernmental cooperation on urban development by highlighting certain societal challenges and offering room for discussion. The various informal ministerial declarations initiated a political discussion on integrated urban development and the need to actively implement urban policy agendas on a European level (EP 2014). The decision to establish an urban agenda based on concrete issues goes back to the DG Meeting in Vilnius, under the Lithuanian Presidency of the second half of 2013. Presidencies have always emphasised specific aspects of urban development and territorial cohesion. Lithuania has proposed to focus on intra-EU migration (2013),
Greece highlighted the issue of urban poverty (first half of 2014), while the Presidency Trio of Italy, Latvia and Luxembourg has put small and medium-sized cities and urban areas on the political agenda (second half of 2014 - end of 2015).

At the DG Meeting in Milan on 25 September 2014 the Directors-General agreed to develop a synthesising and updated conceptual framework document based on existing policy documents. This document should state the shared understanding of the basic principles on urban development within the different national territorial contexts as expressed in several EU documents. In addition, the document should provide a common basis for cooperation at European level, and collaboration between Member States, cities networks and the European Commission. This is precisely what the present “State of Play” document on urban development in Europe aims to provide. It is the first building block of the EU Urban Agenda.

**Cooperation between European Commission and Member States**

The EU Urban Agenda is based on a close cooperation between the European Commission, Member States, cities, regions and other key stakeholders involved in urban development including European networks (e.g. URBACT, EUROCITIES, CEMR and EUKN) and institutions (e.g. Committee of the Regions, EIB). Since 1990, the European Commission has supported the sustainable development of cities in Europe. From 1989, it started to implement urban activities, sometimes at pilot project level. The two URBAN Community Initiatives (URBAN, 1994-1999, and URBAN II, 2000-2006) developed method of integrated urban development in implementing tailored programmes for disadvantaged urban areas. This initiative paved the way for the first URBACT programme (2002-2007) to promote exchanges between cities within thematic networks. In the 2007-2013 period, the specific urban Community Initiatives ceased to exist as such but were from that point on mainstreamed in EU sectoral policies and funding. Member States were asked to develop a National Strategic Reference Framework and concrete Operational Programmes. During the same period, URBACT II became the Commission’s key instrument for European exchange and learning promoting sustainable urban development. Urban issues also gained importance in EU funded research through the Framework Programmes: FP6 (2000-2006), FP7 (2007-2013) and Horizon 2020 (2014-2020). Since 2010 urban research was further promoted as a result of a new instrument: the Joint Programming Initiative (JPI) Urban Europe, a joint initiative of national research funding organisations and the European Commission.

The increasing attention for urban issues at EU level is reflected in the addition of the urban component to the name of the Commission’s DG for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) coordinating all issues related to urban and territorial development in 2012. DG REGIO has put mechanisms in place to implement the coordination across DGs of the Commission on urban issues, for instance by an interservice group led by DG REGIO. Within the European Parliament coordination on urban issues takes place within the Urban Intergroup. This informal group, previously named “URBAN-Housing” (2005-2009), is a cross-parties and cross-committees grouping of over 70 MEPs.

An increasing number of sectoral EU policies explicitly target urban areas, and cities play a key role in implementing EU policies. Cities and city stakeholders have become more directly involved in EU policymaking. A recent example is the Urban Development Network (UDN), set out in the ERDF regulation for Cohesion Policy 2014-2020. Earlier established networks and organisations such as the Council of
European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), EUROCITIES, and of course the Committee of the Regions (CoR) are generally regarded as key stakeholders representing local and/or regional authorities.

Local and regional authorities will also be involved in the implementation of the Investment Plan of the Juncker Commission, which aims to boost the European economy over the next three years. It is expected that the urban dimension in Social Cohesion policy will be strengthened in the 2014-2020 programming period.

**A joint conceptual framework**

There is a renewed debate on an urban agenda to ensure better policy coordination and a stronger focus on urban issues at EU level. The Commission launched an EU-wide consultation mid 2014 after the successful CITIES Conference on 17 and 18 February 2014. Members States, urban organisations and networks have sent in over 200 position papers. Some organisations, like the Committee of the Regions (CoR), EUROCITIES, and CEMR, have published their policy briefs and position papers. The public consultation resulted in a Commission Staff Working Paper, published by DG REGIO, synthesising “the results of the public consultation on the key features of an EU Urban Agenda” (EC 2015), which was presented at the 2nd Cities Forum in June 2015. The Staff Working Paper shows a broad support among urban stakeholders for the development of an EU Urban Agenda. Political support for the development of the EU Urban Agenda was provided by the Declaration of Ministers on the EU Urban Agenda during the informal meeting of the EU ministers responsible for territorial cohesion and urban matters in Riga on 10 June 2015. This political paved the way for the next steps, including the development of an agreed thematic focus, which was one of the results of the informal ministerial meeting in Luxembourg, on 27 November 2015.

By the end of 2015, the debate on the EU Urban Agenda has already gained its own momentum. For instance, JPI Urban Europe has developed a framework for a common Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA) that will provide a basis for linking urban research projects to the thematic partnerships within the EU Urban Agenda, and to the Structural Funds and the European Innovation Partnership on Smart Cities and Communities.

In addition to the urban agenda at EU-level, the UN is redefining its global urban strategy, linked to one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) addressing the role of cities in sustainable development. The “New Urban Agenda” of the UN will be adopted at the at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (HABITAT III), which will take place from 17-21 October 2016 in Quito, Ecuador. The UN has asked Member States across the globe to contribute to the global debate on sustainable urban development. The EU input will build on the EU’s reflection on an the EU Urban Agenda (EC 2014). Moreover, the Paris agreement at the COP21 within the UN Framework Convention on Climate change “was reached against the backdrop of a remarkable groundswell of climate action by cities and regions, business and civil society”.1 It goes without saying that cities will play a key role in promoting the COP21 Paris agreement to realise a transition to a low carbon, resilient and sustainable future. There is also a clear linkage between COP21 and Habitat III, since the UN conference in Quito will be the first United Nations global summit after the adoption of the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Agenda, and it will offer an opportunity to discuss the important challenge of how cities

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1 UN Climate Change Newsroom: http://newsroom.unfccc.int/unfccc-newsroom/finale-cop21/
can shape the implementation of new global development goals and climate change goals. Rising inequality, sharing prosperity, urban poverty and unplanned urbanization are key topics within the Habitat III global urban agenda.

The UN has coined 2016 an “urban year”. One thing seems to be evident: there is a clear unique momentum to address urban issues at the European and global strategic agendas.

2. Outline of the EU Urban Agenda

The EU Urban Agenda is intended to give direction to intergovernmental cooperation and to enhance partnerships between Member States, local and regional authorities, and the Commission. The necessity to improve the adaptation of EU policies to urban realities and to involve cities in EU policies is now supported by Member States (Riga Declaration June 2015), the European Parliament (Westphal report on the urban dimension of EU Policies, adopted September 2015) and European institutions and organisations (CoR, CEMR, and EUROCITIES). The Commission actively supported the development process by its public consultation on the EU Urban Agenda, its Staff Working Document summarising the results of the consultation, the 2nd Cities Forum and the Thematic Workshops organised by DG REGIO. The EU Urban Agenda is a priority for the 2016 Dutch EU Presidency, envisaging an agreement among Member States on the main elements and asking the Commission to follow up with concrete actions. The present State of Play document constitutes the first step in the development of the EU Urban Agenda. It is based on an analysis of key documents and Presidency conclusions, as well as on reports on the implementation of the agreed on actions. It investigates which elements of a conceptual framework are already agreed upon in key policy documents, and provides an outline of this synthesised framework. Departing from this analysis, next steps to update and complement this conceptual framework are presented. Many of these next steps are currently already being developed by the Dutch EU Presidency.

The DGs of the EU Member States responsible for urban development recognise the essential role of European cities and urban regions in delivering policy objectives set at EU and national levels. At the same time, they agree to promote better coordination in urban issues. Along these lines, the EU Urban Agenda should include three core elements:

1. A shared **conceptual framework** based upon previous statements of informal ministerial meetings on urban development (the “State of Play”),
2. A working method based upon **partnerships**, and
3. A thematic focus or a **list of priority themes** that will include a rolling agenda tackling concrete urban challenges.

The partnerships and the priority themes will be described in separate documents.
3. The conceptual framework

An on-going intergovernmental process has led “to an explicit European consensus on the objectives and principles of urban development, the ‘Acquis Urbain’” (EC 2011). There is an explicit agreement at European level on the character of the European city of the future and the principles on which an ideal European city should be based (EC 2011, 2014). These principles can be found in the objectives of the Treaty, in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and in the European Social Model. There is also a consensus among the ministers responsible for urban development, spatial planning and territorial development on more specific principles and objectives of integrated urban development in European cities and balanced territorial development, as well as how these objectives should be attained.

This section presents the elements of the agreed conceptual framework: the central values and principles on urban development. First, the general ideals or principles are outlined. Next, the more specific principles or objectives of integrated urban and territorial development are summarised as well as the actions to implement them.

3.1 General principles or ideals of urban development

In terms of general principles, objectives, and ideals, there is an explicit agreement at European level on the character of the European city of the future and the principles on which an ideal European city should be based. Important challenges, objectives and strategies to address these challenges and the underlying principles are expressed in various EU documents. The Commission Report “Cities of Tomorrow” (EC 2011) synthesised the general principles or ideals of the European sustainable urban development model.

A starting point is the common understanding of Europe as a polycentric urbanised continent with urban regions of all sizes. Urban Europe includes different urban systems, ranging from two global cities (London and Paris) to a series of functionally connected polycentric metropolitan areas and a wide variety of small- and medium-sized urban regions. Irrespective of their size, there are some shared European ideals or principles on the development of cities, as summarised in the Cities of Tomorrow report (EC 2011; see also EC 2014).

According to the report, European cities should be:

– places of advanced social progress with a high degree of social cohesion, socially-balanced housing as well as social, health care and “education for all” services;
– platforms for democracy and citizen participation, cultural dialogue and diversity;
– places of green, ecological or environmental regeneration;
– places of attraction and engines of economic growth or development, with a high-quality built environment and public spaces improving the quality of life.

A conceptual framework on European cities cannot be seen independent of the larger territorial and spatial context in which urban development takes place. The shared ideals and principles on urban territorial and spatial development are summarised in the Cities of Tomorrow (EC 2011) report as well.
The report concluded that European urban territorial development should:

- reflect a sustainable development of Europe based on balanced economic development;
- strive towards a balanced territorial organisation within a polycentric urban structure;
- contain strong regional centres that provide good accessibility to services of general economic interest;
- be characterised by a compact settlement structure with limited urban sprawl; and,
- enjoy a high level of protection and quality of environment around cities.

Another common understanding concerns the importance of the principle of good governance for urban and territorial development, based on the cooperation of the respective governmental layers and the involvement of key stakeholders including private sector, civil society organisations and NGOs. Good governance implies horizontal and vertical coordination as cities have to work with other governance levels and reinforce their cooperation and networking with other municipalities and other urban stakeholders.

3.2 Specific urban and territorial development principles and objectives.

The above-mentioned shared ideals and general principles constitute a departing point for discussions and policymaking. A series of informal ministerial meetings on urban and territorial development have shaped more specific common European objectives, strategies and principles for sustainable urban development, giving specific focus and interpretation to the above-mentioned ideals. The European urban development policy is – inevitably – work in progress. Important documents in the process of defining these common objectives and principles are:

2. Marseille Statement, November 2008
3. Toledo Declaration, June 2010
4. Poznan Conclusions, November 2011
5. Territorial Agenda of the EU 2020, 2011
8. Riga Declaration, June 2015

This next sections outline the shared principles and objectives, based on an analysis of the key documents. An overview will be given of the central concepts and principles, (concrete) action programmes, and related actors as well as their roles. Furthermore, the implementation of agreed actions will be explored, based on available studies and evaluations. The analysis ends with an assessment of the question to what extent the key fields of action and actors addressing urban development challenges have been receiving attention or are missing in the reference texts and what conclusions can be drawn with regard to the implementation of agreed actions.
The Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities 2007

The Leipzig Charter, as it is commonly referred to, is one of first landmarks in the process of developing an EU urban agenda. It builds on three earlier key urban policy documents: the Lille Action Programme (2000), the Rotterdam Urban Acquis (2004) and the Bristol Accord (2005). The Lille Action Programme had initiated the political discussion on integrated urban development on a European level by linking urban and spatial development policies to European structural policy. The Rotterdam Urban Acquis reiterated the Lille principles emphasising the importance of good governance, empowerment of local stakeholders and knowledge exchange. The Bristol Accord defined the characteristics of sustainable city planning while emphasising the importance of capacity building. These documents stimulated political discussion and attention for sustainable urban development in Europe. In 2007, the official Cohesion policy paper included some urban agenda issues for the first time (EP 2014), and mainstreamed the focus on urban issues in the EU Structural funds programme 2007-2013. It marked the end of the two URBAN programme. On 27 May 2007, at the informal ministerial meeting under the German Presidency, the Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities was adopted. It presents two key principles for policy makers to advance the sustainable development of European cities:

1. Making greater use of integrated urban development policy approaches, and
2. Paying special attention to deprived urban neighbourhoods within the context of the city as a whole.

The Leipzig Charter specifies these two principles of sustainable urban development in various recommendations, including: creating and conserving high quality public spaces, modernising infrastructure, developing an active policy for education and training in favour of children and young adults and strengthening the local economy in deprived neighbourhoods. Subsequently, these recommendations were linked to actions and responsibilities. However, a concrete action programme was missing. The main actors addressed to advance and implement the Leipzig Charter were the ministers responsible for urban development and/or territorial cohesion. The EU Member States were to initiate a political debate on the implementation of the Leipzig Charter on national, regional and local level. In addition, they were requested to promote the establishment of balanced territorial organisations, to create conditions in order to strengthen the coordination at local and city-regional level, and to promote the coordination at national level between national departments.

During the German Presidency the Territorial Agenda 2007 was also adopted, presenting priorities for territorial development and cohesion in the EU, including strengthening polycentric development, innovation through networking of cities, and new forms of partnerships between rural and urban areas.

The Leipzig Charter embodied a milestone in the history of urban in Europe, and it still has a considerable influence on the European discourse and policy agendas of urban policymaking. There are several reasons that explain its success in terms of political influence and longevity. Recent (German) studies (see BMVBS 2012; Evans 2011; Eltges 2009) have identified the following success factors:
– the Leipzig Charter came at the right moment and managed to tap successfully into the mainstream of emerging European urban policy, endorsing prevailing ideas and a widespread felt urgency to improve coordination and integration of urban policies;
– it brought together policy debates and communities around territorial cohesion and urban development and has been incorporated into the broader Territorial Agenda as part of the debate on territorial cohesion;
– it was built on previous declarations like the Bristol Accord or the Rotterdam Urban Acquis but had a stronger focus;
– a wide variety of stakeholders at national at European level, including cities, were involved in the formulation and implementation process. The content of the Leipzig Charter became one of the basic pillars of the URBACT II programme; this strengthened its application to national and local contexts. As part of the URBACT II programme, the ideas on sustainable urban development were applied, tested and disseminated systematically across Europe;
– the Leipzig Charter remained an influential document, because it has always been supported after the six months-period of the German presidency. The Reference framework for the sustainable city (RFSC), adopted during the informal ministerial conference under the French Presidency, was explicitly building upon the legacy of the preceding German Presidency.

Although the Leipzig Charter itself lacked a concrete action programme, the combined efforts of the German and the French Presidencies and the incorporation of its basic ideas in the URBACT II programme contributed to its lasting impact. The German report “5 Years after the Leipzig Charter” (BMVBS 2012) concludes that the Leipzig Charter gave an impetus to integrated urban (district) development approaches in European Member States. This impetus varies between Member States, depending on national specificities. For instance, the integrated approach of urban development gained resonance in especially new Member States, where massive changes were fertile ground for new ideas. In old Member States, the focus was more on problems of disadvantaged neighbourhoods. This underlines that EU approaches should leave enough room for flexibility to apply the objectives and strategies within national and local contexts. Nevertheless, it remains difficult to substantiate the exact impact of the Leipzig Charter, precisely because it aligned with already prevailing ideas on urban development.

The Declaration of Marseille 2008

The Declaration of Marseille, drafted after the meeting of EU urban development ministers on 25 November 2008, continued the efforts of the German Presidency but at the same time put a special emphasis on climate change within the framework of the “sustainable and inclusive city”. It presented sustainable development as an opportunity for European cities, not only to face climate change and energy challenges but also to innovate, create jobs and foster social cohesion. In addition, the Declaration drew attention to role of that specific EU programmes (Urban Audit, ESPON, and URBACT) and networks (EUKN) could play to promote and aid sustainable development and social cohesion practices throughout Europe. The declaration itself included general recommendations for national, regional and local authorities. It did not present an action plan or a time line to achieve the promoted goals and objectives, except the concrete actions to “construct tools for the operational application of the Leipzig Charter and make these tools available to the relevant stakeholders” in the Appendix to
the final statement. This resulted in the long-term project to develop and test a Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities (RFSC) as a tool for implementing sustainable urban development.

**The Toledo Declaration 2010**

The Toledo Declaration, adopted on 21 June 2010, linked the commitments and principles established during previous ministerial meetings with the Europe 2020 objectives. The Toledo Declaration went beyond the previous declarations. It stated that in addition to the principles of integrated urban development it would be “advisable to establish an in-depth common understanding of the integrated approach in urban development” as a condition that would help to fully develop, implement and put into practice the agreed on principles.

In Toledo the Ministers agreed in particular:

- To promote smarter, more sustainable and socially inclusive urban development, and the strategic potential of the approach of integrated urban regeneration to achieve this, both at European level and at national level.
- To foster a common understanding of the integrated approach, including: exploring the possibility of developing a minimum common set of indicators translating this shared understanding of the integrated approach.

Moreover, the Ministers emphasised the need to consolidate and shape a joint working programme on the “European urban agenda” in the future, by strengthen intergovernmental coordination between successive Presidencies and cooperation with the European Commission and other EU institutions and organisations. As a preliminary outline of a joint work programme, the Ministers undertook to encourage and support a series of joint actions. The progress of these actions was reported in the 1st and 2nd Progress Report on the Follow up of the Toledo Declaration and other common actions (EU 2010b, 2011b).

Joint actions of the Ministers related to:

1. supporting the continuation of the Marseille process and the implementation of the European reference framework for sustainable cities (RFSC);
2. calling upon the European Commission to strengthen the urban dimension of cohesion policy;
3. supporting a greater coherence between territorial and urban issues and agendas and fostering the urban dimension in the context of territorial cohesion;
4. continuing to promote research, comparative studies and statistics, exchange of best practices and dissemination of knowledge on urban topics, and strengthening coordination of them all;
5. promoting sustainable urban development and integrated approaches by re-enforcing and developing instruments to implement the Leipzig Charter at all levels.

The Toledo Declaration thus provided for concrete steps in consolidating and shaping a joint working programme: an EU Urban Agenda *avant la lettre*. It linked this process to the Europe 2020 objectives and to the major challenges cities are facing of overcoming the global financial, economic and social
crisis. Under the Hungarian Presidency two other challenges were elaborated in more detail: climate change and demographic changes.

The Toledo declaration contained a quite detailed programme, but its impact is difficult to assess, except for reporting in two progress reports until one year after its adoption. The joint actions of the work programme were mainly directed at actors at the EU-level and the Commission. Aside from support for the implementation of the Leipzig Charter on all levels and the development of the Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities, the Toledo declaration missed a concrete action programme. Cities and other urban actors were less involved and it was not fully integrated in EU instruments and programmes such as URBACT. The most probable reason is that, after 2010, all efforts on EU-level were directed at fighting the effects of the economic crisis, leaving little room for additional efforts for sustainable urban development.

The Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020, 2011

The Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020 (TA2020) is a policy framework elaborated by the EU Member States’ ministers responsible for spatial planning and territorial development. It was a revised and updated document – adapted to the Europe 2020 strategy – replacing the Territorial Agenda of 2007. This document aims at supporting territorial cohesion and “provides strategic orientations for territorial development” to foster the integration of the territorial dimension at all levels of governance to ensure the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy.

The document presents new approaches to territorial development by promoting a place-based approach to policymaking and implementation, as proposed by the Barca report (2009). In line with previous EU documents addressing territorial cohesion, the TA 2020 insists on the importance of:

- Networking, cooperation and integration between EU regions;
- Integrating territorial cohesion and balanced territorial development into the EU Cohesion Policy;
- Multi-level, vertical and horizontal coordination between all policy and decision-makers.

The TA2020 adopts a general approach encompassing a discussion of challenges and potentials for territorial development: increased exposure to globalisation, challenges of EU integration; territorially diverse demographic and social challenges; climate change and environmental risks; energy challenges; and loss of biodiversity. Next, it states six territorial development priorities for the EU:

1. promote polycentric and balanced territorial development,
2. encourage integrated development in cities, rural and specific regions,
3. strengthen territorial integration in cross-border and transnational functional regions,
4. ensure global competitiveness of the regions based on strong local economies,
5. improve territorial connectivity for individuals, communities and enterprises, and
6. manage and connect ecological, landscape and cultural values of regions.
These priorities are presented more as policy guidelines for territorial development for future policies rather than as an action-plan. They are of relevance for development of cities and urban areas as well, but at a slightly higher (territorial) scale. Thus, the Territorial and Urban agenda complement each other.

The last section of the Territorial Agenda, on “making EU territorial cohesion a reality”, mainly asks future EU Presidencies and other EU bodies, Member States, regions and cities to support the implementation of the proposed actions. This advice was adopted by the subsequent Polish Presidency in 2011 that prepared a Roadmap towards promoting and enhancing an integrated, territorial approach, based on the Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020 (EU 2011c). This Roadmap, agreed by the Ministerial Conference during this Presidency, in Poznan, proposed concrete actions for enhancing integrated territorial approach at different levels of governance. They mainly included communication, research, coordination and dissemination activities. It was advised that National Territorial Cohesion Contact Points could act as a coordinator of the implementation of the Roadmap. However, after 2011, no progress reports or other further actions were published. A lasting effect of the TA2020 is the incorporation of its core ideas in INTERREG and ESPON programs. For instance, in 2014 ESPON published a Territorial Monitoring Report, on ‘Progress towards the Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020’ (ESPON 2014).

Every Presidency chooses its own topic to be discussed during the NTCCP meeting, highlighting the place-based approach (Polish Presidency), blue growth (Greek Presidency), inner areas (Italian Presidency), small and medium-sized urban areas (Latvian Presidency), and cross-border polycentric metropolitan areas (Luxembourg Presidency). Furthermore, one of the intended actions of the Luxembourg Presidency is to present a state of the art of the implementation of Territorial Cohesion objective and to support the development of a European Territorial Visioning process leading to the development of a territorial Perspective for 2050.

Polish Presidency Conclusions on the territorial dimension of EU policies and the future of the Cohesion Policy (2011)

In 2011 the ministers responsible for EU Cohesion Policy (Regional policy), territorial and urban development discussed solutions to strengthen the territorial and urban dimension of cohesion policy. The ministers concluded that there was a need for improved coordination between cohesion policy, development of rural areas and fisheries. Suggestions were given to improve mechanisms of ex-ante conditionality and performance framework. The ministers have given support to strengthen systems of evaluation, monitoring and benchmarking. Furthermore, the ministers acknowledged the conclusions of the meeting of the DGs on the role of an integrated and territorial approach to the specific role of cities in development. The Polish Presidency also focused on strengthening the territorial component of the EU 2020 strategy, especially by continuation the process of implementing the Territorial Agenda 2020 (Roadmap towards promoting and enhancing an integrated, territorial approach based on the Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020).
The Cities of Tomorrow Report 2011

The “Cities of Tomorrow” report published by DG REGIO analyses urban development challenges faced by European cities. The report offers an outline of the shared vision on the European city of tomorrow, and an analysis of main challenges for the European model of sustainable urban development as well as opportunities and action strategies to respond to these threats. It underlines that new forms of governance are essential to respond to these urban challenges. In its final chapter, the report insists on the importance of an integrated approach to urban development and governance where government structures are not only adapted to respond to challenges but also ready to play different roles in a multi-scalar governance system.

Although the Cities of Tomorrow report was not strictly speaking a policy report, its synthesis and analysis of the European sustainable urban development model was influential. It is the point of departure for both the European Commission and the Member States to work towards an EU Urban Agenda. The public consultation on the EU Urban Agenda of the Commission showed a consensus of urban stakeholders on the model expressed in the Cities of Tomorrow report as a good basis for building an EU Urban Agenda (EC 2015).


In its Staff Working Document “Results of the public consultation on the key features of an EU Urban Agenda”, the Commission summarises and assesses the main messages emerging from the public consultation on an EU Urban Agenda, launched July 2014 with the Commission Communication on The urban dimension of EU policies, key features of an EU Urban Agenda (EC 2014). The main message emerging from the consultation is that Europe can and should support cities to address common challenges and that, in turn, cities can contribute to achieve the priorities of the Union. An EU Urban Agenda does not require new regulation, but it should be a framework to improve and coordinate existing initiatives, collect and monitor data on impact, and address bottlenecks.

On the basis of an assessment of the results of the public consultation, the Commission proposes three main avenues to move forward:

1. concerted action on selected priorities;
2. improved policy coherence and coordination of instruments, and
3. development and better use of the knowledge base.

The main focus in the EU Urban Agenda should be on those elements where EU level action can be justified and has a real added value in full respect of subsidiarity. The EU Urban Agenda should be result-oriented and focus on a limited number of priority areas: smart cities, green cities and inclusive cities. The local level should be responsible for implementing urban policies, the national level should facilitate this process, and the EU level should define guidelines, monitor, and enable information flow and provide knowledge to all European cities.

As next steps towards a fully operational EU Urban Agenda, the Commission suggested continuing the dialogue and cooperation with stakeholders and Member States, and improving coordination of existing instruments and initiatives, with a view of: (1) identifying critical urban related issues (within the
three identified areas) for which EU action is needed; (2) mapping the urban related Commission initiatives in the three areas with a view to identify gaps, overlaps and synergies; (3) identifying the main actors, networks and platforms with a view to streamline cooperation and exchange of good practice.

On 2 June 2015, the European Commission organised the 2nd European Cities Forum to present its new Staff Working Document and to discuss on how to advance the EU Urban Agenda. The forum also saw the official launch of the Urban Innovative Actions, an EU initiative to support innovative approaches to tackle future urban challenges in cities across Europe.

**The Riga Declaration, June 2015**

The declaration of Ministers towards the EU Urban Agenda was adopted during an Informal Meeting of EU Ministers responsible for Cohesion policy and Territorial Cohesion and Urban Matters organised by the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, on 10 June 2015 in Riga. The Ministers provided political support for the development of the EU Urban Agenda in full respect of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. European Ministers recalled that cities and towns play a significant role in territorial development of the EU, also in achieving the EU 2020 objectives, but are facing different challenges which require purposeful and coordinated action at all governance levels. The Ministers recognised the need to work towards the EU Urban Agenda. The Declaration identifies the key elements and principles that should be taken into account in developing the EU Urban Agenda during the incoming Presidencies. It also defines recommended actions to be taken at different governance levels. In addition, the Declaration emphasizes the role of small and medium-sized urban areas that should be taken into account when developing and implementing the EU Urban Agenda. The topic of small and medium sized urban areas was the priority of Presidency Trio of Italy, Latvia and Luxembourg. The focus on these smaller urban areas was their specific contribution to the debate regarding EU Urban Agenda. After the Riga Declaration it was generally acknowledge that small and medium-sized urban areas should be an integral part of the EU Urban Agenda as one of its cross-cutting themes.

The Declaration also set a framework for the future EU Urban Agenda, paving the way to ensure continuity in the development of the EU Urban Agenda during the next Presidencies, to identify the most important milestones for creating the Urban Agenda, and to prepare a political agreement during the Dutch Presidency on the operational aspects of the EU Urban Agenda. The Declaration invites the Commission to give high priority to the EU Urban Agenda and to take concrete and immediate steps to improve horizontal coordination of EU policies and instruments with an urban impact. Furthermore, the Commission is asked to enhance impact assessments of EU initiatives and legislation with an urban impact and to strengthen the knowledge base and to improve the quality of data on urban development issues at EU level. The Commission is also invited to initiate and facilitate concerted actions in a limited number of cross-sectorial priority issues to be identified and selected in close cooperation among Member States, the Commission and other concerned stakeholders.

The EU Urban Agenda not only received full political support from the Member States but, also from the European Parliament (the Westphal Report, EP 2015), the Committee of the Regions (CoR 2014), the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC 2015) and cities (for example, through opinions of EUROCITIES and CEMR).
4. Synthesis and evaluation of the conceptual framework in progress

The analysis of the EU documents shows that it is possible to speak – at a relatively high level of abstraction – of a shared understanding of urban development in Europe (EC 2011; 2014). The Territorial Agenda also refers to shared principles expressed in several policy documents related to the characteristics of the European urban model and principles of integrated development in urban and rural regions. This shared framework in progress is evaluated in this section.

The main elements of the shared understanding can be summarised as following:

- The need for an integrated approach to sustainable urban development. Following the logic of the “integrated approach” urban development should include a balanced approach by focusing on all major aspects of urban development: economic, social, demographic, environmental, climate and territorial issues. Governmental (good governance and innovation) issues constitute a horizontal dimension across all areas. An integrated approach requires coherence and coordination across all sub-sectors of government and between all levels of governance.
- A commitment to combat social exclusion and economic deprivation within cities and urban areas. A focus on deprived neighbourhoods and – more in general – on balanced urban and territorial development.
- Supporting coherence between urban and territorial issues and agendas and fostering the urban dimension in the context of territorial cohesion. Keeping and developing well-balanced, polycentric urban structures and strengthening the links to the surrounding territory. The Leipzig Charter was incorporated into the Territorial Agenda and thus became part of the theme of balanced territorial development and was linked to the EU Cohesion policy. A place-based approach to policy making will contribute to territorial cohesion. The evolving EU Urban Agenda and Territorial Agenda complement each other, as was underlined in the Riga Declaration (EU 2015a) and the Conclusions of the Luxembourg Presidency of the Council of the EU on the occasion of the informal meetings on Territorial Cohesion and Urban Policy (EU 2015b). The relevance of the polycentric urban structure of the EU and the importance of all types of urban settlements as centres for services, economic opportunities, connectivity and culture for their surrounding areas.
- Effective coordination of EU policies with an impact on urban development within the Commission and effective multi-level coordination of urban and territorial policies and policies with an urban and/or territorial impact, in full respect of the subsidiarity principle.
- The importance of cooperation and networking among cities and urban and rural areas.
- The importance of capacity building, knowledge sharing, mutual learning and strengthening the knowledge base on urban development.
- Joint challenges were formulated; some of the major challenges mentioned in the documents are:
  - creating and conserving high quality public spaces,
  - modernising infrastructure networks; affordable and sustainable urban transport systems,
  - increasing energy efficiency,
  - developing an active innovation policy for education and training,
  - strengthening the local economy and labour market,
  - promoting balanced territorial and development,
  - developing approaches to respond to climate change challenges,
addressing the impact of demographic changes
- recognising the specific development challenges and opportunities of small and medium-sized urban areas and cities, including those within cross-border polycentric networks.

The key declarations of the ministers responsible for urban development and for spatial planning and territorial development have had considerable impact on EU-level and on national and local level policies, by promoting a shared principles of urban and territorial development, awareness raising about the importance of an integrated approach to urban development, strengthening various coordination processes (esp. on EU level) and incorporation in EU programmes (URBACT, INTERREG).

However, it remains difficult to assess the real impact of the implementation of the actions proposed in the analysed EU documents. This is due to the (almost) absence of evaluation studies and reports. Only the implementation of the Leipzig Charter has been documented. Although this Charter is certainly not the only key document with a clear impact on urban policy making in European Member States and cities, its impact is better discernible.

In contrast, many of the other analysed EU documents – until the Riga Declaration – appear to have had a mainly short-term impact on the EU-level and even less impact on the ground. The TA2020 appears to be an exception; it received continuous attention from the subsequent Presidencies and the progress is described in the recent ESPON Territorial Monitoring Report. At the meeting on Territorial Cohesion at the invitation of the Luxembourg Presidency the Ministers agreed that the Territorial Agenda 2020 is still valid and invited the upcoming Presidencies together with the EU Institutions to start preparing the development of a Territorial Agenda post-2020. Many of the other documents (at least, until the Riga Declaration) missed some elements that made the Leipzig Charter relatively successful:

- The ministers responsible for urban and territorial development are the linking pin in all the actions agreed in the declarations and statements. The vision on furthering and implementing the integrated strategy of urban development remains rather top-down, from the national to the local level, as well as coordination on the intergovernmental level within the EU. Therefore, issues of coordination across policies of the European Commission and coordination of the European Commission with local authorities on urban development are missing. In all the key documents, the idea of an integrated approach to sustainable urban development was further developed. Once this method was widely disseminated, after the Leipzig Charter, there was a need for substantive priorities. This might be a reason why the Toledo Declaration had no clear impact.
- Many of the documents missed a clear focus; or they presented too many prescriptions without a concrete action plan and working method. A targeted focus and a programme of actions, regularly evaluated regarding its progress, are important drivers of the process of the urban agenda. However, even the Leipzig Charter only gained concrete form in the implementation process, in the URBACT programme and other EU policies and in Member State actions.
- Many of the documents did not utilise European instruments and programmes or were not incorporated in these programmes, such as URBACT. An exception is the TA2020, which did
have influence by the incorporation of its key concepts in INTERREG programs and ESPON projects.

- The attention for their priorities was short-lived, because ownership was not taken on by the following Presidencies. Political commitment and ownership for a longer timescale are crucial for an effective action oriented urban agenda. Thus, a working method is needed for the implementation of the EU Urban Agenda that is designed to foster commitment and ownership.

- All the declarations are statements of informal meetings between the responsible ministers and thus they are made on a voluntary basis and non-committal. This is in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity. However, this principle should not be interpreted in a too restricted manner. European policy actually has great impact on cities and is implemented in important measure by local authorities. There is every reason to improve the coordination between all levels of government and to ensure that urban priorities are better reflected in EU policies. The challenge at EU level is to design a working method that will strengthen the political commitment to a non-committal action-oriented urban agenda.

- Some of the actions that were implemented – especially the development and testing of the Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities (RFSC) – were too complicated and demanding, with the result that they were ultimately only supported by the country that was its “owner”.

In addition, the Leipzig Charter had a clear thematic focus, on the dual theme of integrated urban development with special attention for deprived urban neighbourhoods. Many of the other documents lacked such a thematic focus. In conclusion, the major declarations related to urban development and territorial cohesion missed a strategy and an action plan focusing on a limited number of grand societal challenges, with priorities for the long-term and operational guidelines for the short-term.

5. Towards a focused and action oriented EU Urban Agenda

The analysis and evaluation of the key EU documents revealed the need for a more focused and action oriented EU Urban Agenda. This need is now recognised by the Member States and the Commission, as expressed in the Riga Declaration (EU 2015a) and the Commission Staff Working Document (EC 2015). This section identifies some directions towards such an urban agenda, based on the analysis presented in the previous section.

The principles on European cities and European urban territorial development are still relevant, but require some further reinterpretation within the changed circumstances. Five lessons can be drawn from the policy documents reviewed in this State of Play document:

Lesson 1: Acknowledge the diversity of urban Europe

The EU Urban Agenda should start from a proper understanding of the wide variety of cities and urban regions across Europe. Not only metropolitan and large cities are key to the sustainable development of the European Union. Differences in urban morphology may call for different policy responses. The question is when and under what circumstances? The importance of small and medium-sized urban areas for regional and cross-border development has been recognised in Presidency Conclusions during the Latvian and Luxembourgish Presidencies. These conclusions also underline the close link between the urban and the territorial agenda (EUKN 2015). More in general, there is a need for more
data and knowledge mapping and analysing the situation, competencies, challenges and potentials of cities in different Member States and regions in Europe, as a basis for the development of an EU Urban Agenda. This is not to deny the relevance of already existing research and data collection programmes, for instance ESPON research on territorial issues and urban research within JPI Europe.

**Lesson 2: Acknowledge the importance of multi-level governance**
Cities should be involved in developing and implementing the action programmes. This was one of the key success factors of the implementation of the Leipzig Charter. The EU Urban Agenda which is currently being developed should support effective multi-level governance and involve local and regional authorities in policy making, implementation and monitoring of urban policies and policies with an urban impact (Riga Declaration, EU 2015a). One key message from the public consultation on the EU Urban Agenda was to strengthen the partnership principle and strengthen multi-level governance.

**Lesson 3: Acknowledge citizen participation and public-private partnerships**
Engagement of all urban stakeholders implies cooperation with citizens and the private sector. In many European countries the public sector is reducing budgets through direct layoffs and increased reliance on the private sector (EC 2011). This requires new ways for public and private actors to collaborate on urban development issues. Public-private partnerships are becoming more and more important for the development of cities.

Citizens should be involved in addressing societal challenges in cities. Current trends such as the decreasing importance of national policy, due to the continuing process of decentralisation and the retreat of the welfare state, strengthen the importance of citizen initiatives and participation in the private and public sphere. There is a tendency for old models of representative democracy to be complemented by more participative modes of democratic engagement and accountability. This calls for the strengthening of the involvement of civil society organisations to solve societal challenges. The CoR report “Towards an Integrated Urban Agenda for the EU” (CoR 2014) stresses the increasing importance of a close cooperation between public authorities, business, knowledge institutions and civil society organisations (Quadruple Helix Model).

**Lesson 4: Acknowledge the importance of socio-economic aspects of urban development**
Attention for both social cohesion and economic development. The analysed key documents show a gradual shift from a focus on disadvantaged regions, cities and urban neighbourhoods to strategies aiming at the development of the potential and opportunities of all regions, cities and neighbourhoods (cf. EP 2007). This shift should be strengthened: not only urban regeneration of disadvantaged neighbourhoods, but also the wider strategic role of cities as potential drivers of economic and territorial development should receive attention in the urban agenda. This implies a commitment to use and foster the cities’ potential for economic growth and job creation at regional, national and EU level. The Latvian Presidency theme of small and medium-sized urban areas called for recognition of the economic development potential of these urban areas.
Lesson 5: Capitalise on existing structures

A European strategy for addressing major challenges for urban and territorial development will only have impact if it takes into account the institutional structure of the EU and the Member States. The strategy should make use of existing European platforms, programs and policies. For instance, it will need support from the Commission and it should be incorporated in existing programmes including URBACT, INTERREG, the EU Cohesion Policy and European Structural and Investment Funds and Financial instruments. An example is the CSI Europe network of cities supported by the URBACT programme that aims to make financial instruments work for cities, responding to city strategic priorities for urban development. One key message of the public consultation on the EU Urban Agenda was that there are already many relevant EU networks, programmes, initiatives and platforms; they should be strengthened and forge closer links to EU policies (EC 2015).

The conceptual framework and other EU Urban Agenda building blocks

This State of Play document outlines the shared conceptual framework in progress on urban development in European cities. It provides a common baseline for taking the next steps. It includes general principles, values or ideals on what European cities and European urban territorial development should be. A series of informal ministerial meetings on urban development have shaped more specific common European objectives and principles for an integrated approach to urban development, with a focus on deprived neighbourhoods, and balanced territorial development. The analysis and evaluation of this shared framework in progress revealed the need for updating. This previous section proposed some directions for revision or elaboration in the light of recent developments in urban Europe. These changes are already in progress, accelerated by the Riga Declaration, the Commission Staff Working Document and the activities undertaken by the incoming Dutch Presidency to prepare a declaration to be adopted by the responsible Ministers on 30 May 2016, establishing the EU Urban Agenda, its priorities and working methods.

An EU Urban Agenda, to be effective, should combine a shared and regularly updated conceptual framework with a broad thematic framework guiding a limited number of actions to address identified grand societal challenges through partnership between all levels of governance. Thus, the biggest challenge is to get beyond a shared understanding of principles, and to give focus to the EU Urban Agenda and get things done. This requires a thematic focus and a working method based upon partnerships between all key urban actors, including cities.

The EU Urban Agenda is a priority for the 2016 Dutch EU Presidency. Further actions to develop the EU Urban Agenda were taken already during the Latvian and Luxembourgish EU Presidencies. After extensive consultation with Member States, cities and urban experts, including three thematic workshops on priority themes for the EU Urban Agenda organised by DG REGIO in September 2015, the Director-Generals responsible for Urban Policy agreed on a list of twelve priority themes during a meeting on 21 October 2015 in Luxembourg.

These themes are: 1) Jobs and skills in the local economy; 2) Urban poverty; 3) Housing; 4) Inclusion of migrants and refugees; 5) Sustainable use of land and Nature-Based solutions; 6) Circular economy; 7) Climate adaptation; 8) Energy transition; 9) Urban mobility; 10) Air quality; 11) Digital transition; and 12) Innovative and responsible public procurement. In addition, they agreed on 12 cross cutting issues
The Commission and the incoming Dutch Presidency of the EU proposed a working method for the EU Urban Agenda in their joint memo (Joint Memo on Organisation of and Deliverables from the Partnerships). During the DG meeting there was a general agreement to start testing the working method and governance with the first 3-4 partnerships, on: Housing, Urban poverty, Inclusion of migrants and refugees, and Air quality. These first Partnerships will be facilitated by the Netherlands and will serve as first tests of the working method and the governance.

The combination of the above-mentioned three building blocks – the conceptual framework, the thematic focus and the working method – would give an impetus to the EU Urban Agenda. This is only possible when principles of subsidiarity and proportionality are respected. Different players have different roles. The challenge is how to respect these roles and to make sure that each role functions as effective as possible, given the existing political constraints. Targeted focus and concrete actions will be the main drivers of that process.
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