Main conclusions of the survey regarding the Urban Agenda for the EU

-input paper -

This survey was one of the activities carried out within the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union on the Urban Agenda for the EU (hereafter often referred to as the UAEU). Data was gathered from 26 February until 29 March and was largely used as input for the Bucharest Declaration.

It also feeds into research activities carried out by the European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN) on behalf of the Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, investigating the UAEU’s impact at national level and specifically highlighting the Member State perspective on the Urban Agenda for the EU.

In summary, the survey’s main objectives are as follows:

- To identify the main achievements and benefits of implementing the Urban Agenda for the EU;
- To identify the obstacles / difficulties, recommendations and further direction for improving the functioning and implementation of the Urban Agenda for the EU;
- To provide an analytical overview of the changes in multilevel urban governance (policy and coordination structures) in selected EU Member States since the adoption of the Pact of Amsterdam and the way in which these changes have been influenced or brought about by the Urban Agenda for the EU.

The results of the survey were used by the Romanian Presidency as an input to the Bucharest Declaration and will also feed into the European Commission Assessment Study of the Urban Agenda for the EU.

The questionnaire was addressed to the Member States (Urban Development Group members), regardless of their involvement and participation in the current Urban Agenda Partnerships but based on their experience. It comprises the following sections:

1. Assessment of and recommendation on the Urban Agenda for the EU,
2. Current changes to urban policy and coordination structures, and
3. Links between the UAEU, national policy and structural changes.

This report summarizes the main conclusions of the first section that were largely incorporated in the text of the Bucharest Declaration. The section on shortcomings and recommendations has set the scene for the proposed directions written in the Declaration to support the implementation and continuation of the Urban Agenda for the EU by capitalising on and roll out the results, recommendations and lessons learnt in the Partnerships.

We received responses from 26 European countries: Austria (AT), Belgium (BE), Bulgaria (BG), Croatia (HR), the Czech Republic (CZ), Estonia (EE), Finland (FI), France (FR), Germany (DE), Greece (GR), Italy (IT), Ireland (IE), Latvia (LV), Lithuania (LT), Luxembourg (LU), Malta (MT), Netherlands (NL), Norway (NO), Poland (PL), Portugal (PT), Romania (RO), Slovak Republic (SK), Slovenia (SI), Spain (ES), Sweden (SE) and Switzerland (CH).
There were two European institutions / organizations that submitted responses: Committee of Regions and European Investment Bank.

1. ASSESSMENT OF AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE URBAN AGENDA FOR THE EU

This section focuses on the general assessment of the Urban Agenda for the EU as a process, as well as on the main achievements and benefits of implementing the Urban Agenda for the EU and the obstacles / difficulties, recommendations and further direction identified for improving the functioning and implementation of the Urban Agenda for the EU.

1.1. General assessment of the Urban Agenda for the EU

There is an overall tendency towards a positive general assessment of the Urban Agenda for the EU. From this point of view, a significant share of respondents from Member States that submitted answers (65%) consider that the Urban Agenda for the EU contributed to a better understanding of urban issues at the national level.
Fig. 1 Has the Urban Agenda for the EU process contributed to a better understanding of urban issues at the national level in your country?

Source: Romanian Ministry of Public Administration and Regional Development, 2019 (online survey)

At the same time, the Urban Agenda for the EU and its subsequent actions are perceived as coherent with national urban policy initiatives. From this perspective, 67% of respondents consider that the Urban Agenda for the EU is largely coherent with national urban policy initiatives and almost 50% of respondents think much of its actions in the same sense.

Source: Romanian Ministry of Public Administration and Regional Development, 2019 (online survey)

Regarding the performance of the Urban Agenda for the EU in terms of empowerment of urban authorities in EU policy-making, 42% consider it to be at least ‘good’. The most outstanding contributions of the Urban Agenda for the EU mentioned by experts from member States can be grouped in two main categories: ‘contribution to promote multi-level governance’ and ‘give voice to cities to make known their problems and share pathways for solutions’.
Consequently, a large share of respondents emphasise the role of the Urban Agenda for the EU in creating new opportunities for cities to connect with European Institutions and Member States:

A.1. ‘Cities have not had opportunities before to directly discuss policy proposals with EU institutions and other Member States’

A.2. ‘Gives opportunities for actors at different levels to interact more directly with EU-institutions’

In addition, it should be also mentioned that a notable share of answers emphasises the fact that it is ‘too early to discuss the performance of UAEU’ and other respondents raise the issue of the functioning of the Urban Agenda for the EU. Some of these respondents refer to unequal opportunities for small- and medium-sized cities, as well as for cities in lagging regions to participate:

A.1. ‘At the moment, it is difficult to assess what the real impact of city involvement in the UAEU is, for instance in the areas of better regulation and better funding. Has the European Commission taken recommendations from cities on board?’

A.2. ‘Cities who are involved as partners in the UAEU are mostly large cities. That is understandable as the involvement requires a certain amount of resources and capacity (not only funding for travelling, but also staff). However, large cities are also represented by EUROCITIES. It seems that their voice is more easily heard than that of small and medium-sized cities.’

Moreover, respondents also call attention to the insufficient planning of Action Plans outcomes:

A.1. ‘Cities have been involved in the partnerships and in designing the action plans, bringing their experiences and their capacities. However, the actual outcome and impact of these actions are still too unknown for the score to be the highest possible’.

Fig.3 How would you rate the performance of the Urban Agenda for the EU in terms of empowerment of urban authorities in EU policy-making on a scale from 1 to 5?

Source: Romanian Ministry of Public Administration and Regional Development, 2019 (online survey)
Most respondents (42%) indicate that the Urban Agenda for the EU has generated added value in addition to national initiatives. However, in terms of matching results and impacts with incurred costs at national level, the results are quite the opposite. 36% of received answers give credit for appropriate match, while 23% of respondents don’t see a match, the latter being largely determined by the failure to deliver the expected results.

Fig. 4 On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means ‘not at all’, and 5 ‘to a great extent’...

...To what extent does the Urban Agenda for the EU generate value that is additional to the one that would have resulted from interventions initiated at national level?

...To what extent are the results and impacts of the Urban Agenda for the EU commensurate with the costs incurred at the national level?

Source: Romanian Ministry of Public Administration and Regional Development, 2019 (online survey)

At the level of Member States, the Urban Agenda for the EU is perceived at great extent in terms of fostered cooperation and working methods across different levels of governance, by a large category of respondents (71%). The participation and mobilisation of Member States is overall considered as effective by only 19% of the respondents, thus indicating that this component should be furthered improved.

Fig. 5 On a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means ‘not at all’, and 5 ‘to a great extent’...

...To what extent has the Urban Agenda for the EU fostered cooperation and working methods across different levels of governance?

...To what extent have the participation, contribution and mobilisation of Member States in the Urban Agenda for the EU been effective?

Source: Romanian Ministry of Public Administration and Regional Development, 2019 (online survey)
1.2. Achievements and benefits of implementing the Urban Agenda for the EU

Respondents’ views on the main national benefits of being involved in the Urban Agenda for the EU range from systematic and coherent multilevel European dialogue, to the recognition of the full potential and contribution of urban areas of all sizes to a balanced territorial development. In addition, the wealth of knowledge and expertise is focused upon by many respondents.

The answers can be grouped in nine categories, as follows:

- Systematic and coherent multilevel European dialogue on urban matters
- Opportunity to discuss and influence European principles and instruments
- Better use of knowledge and expertise
- Integrated framework for national urban policies joining up sectoral perspectives
- Co-design of priorities and solutions based on improved knowledge
- Opportunity to call attention to new priorities/trends
- Direct participatory approach to deal with urban matters
- Tailor-made tools for specific/unique urban matters
- Recognition of the full potential and contribution of urban areas of all sizes

**Systematic and coherent multilevel European dialogue on urban matters** - There is a significant sense of achievement related to the openness towards European level dialogue, bringing cities around the same table with other levels of governance, thus inspiring new methods of co-designing principles and actions that could have a notable impact on urban development.

A majority of respondents indicate that informal multilevel cooperation has vastly increased thanks to the Urban Agenda for the EU process, and opened new opportunities of being involved in the discussions of wider challenges experienced by urban areas across the EU.

A.1. ‘The multilevel procedure through which cities, regional and national authorities enter directly in contact with each other and with European institutions. This strengthens mutual understanding and collaboration across Europe. The collaboration facilitates mutual understanding and challenges the traditional institutional frameworks. It also generates new ideas.’

**Opportunity to discuss and influence European principles and instruments** - Respondents widely point out that the Urban Agenda for the EU gave voice to cities in discussing urban challenges, thus cities being recognised as a key partner in working with other levels of governance towards the aim for better regulation, funding and knowledge sharing.

A.1. ‘Having a dialog and international cooperation with various stakeholders on specific theme. Involvement of cities in the international exchange of views. Having opportunity and impact on preparing recommendations at EU level regarding better regulation and financing, hoping it will help in the future programming period regarding the instruments and initiatives for cities.’

**Better use of knowledge and expertise** - The Urban Agenda for the EU ensured that cities, policy-makers and urban practitioners came together to build common ground for sharing practical knowledge, expertise and hands-on best practices that were also made more visible.
A.1. ‘Peer-learning, exchange of experiences and innovation.’
A.2. ‘Updated information on urban policy at European level.’

Integrated framework for national urban policies joining up sectoral perspectives - Attention is drawn to the recommendations resulted from the activity of the Urban Agenda for the EU partnerships that can help national governments to produce a more tailored and cross-sectoral urban policy to address the different needs of cities.

A.1. ‘Lessons learned from the urban agenda can be utilised in formulating national/regional urban agenda.’
A.2. ‘Promoting integrated territorial and urban planning.’

1.3. Difficulties of implementing the Urban Agenda for the EU

There is a common understanding among respondents of the shortcomings of the Urban Agenda for the EU, that can be outlined in terms of:

- Methodological weakness
- Lack of political willingness and awareness
- Lack of wider capacity to participate
- Limited impact
- Too little commitment of some partners

Methodological weakness - There is a wide range of shortcomings associated with the overall practical functioning Urban Agenda for the EU, most respondents having indicated concrete weakness like: insufficient time and funding, inefficient partnership set up, insufficiently resourced secretariat, poor outreach, inefficient links to sectoral fields, unclear roadmap for implementation, uncertain follow-up.

A.1. ‘The need for a secretariat support was a barrier overcome during the first partnerships but is again a challenge for future partnerships beyond culture and security.’
A.2. ‘Low budget/bad distribution of financial resources including implementation and dissemination’
A.3. ‘Composition of partnerships and action plans are not representative, therefore actions not always transferable.’
A.4. ‘Need a follow up and feedback implementation by the EC regarding the action plans.’
A.5. ‘Relatively poorly promotion of the results of partnerships among the general public and non-experts.’
A.6. ‘Unclear processes, roles of actors, stakeholders, and goals.’
A.7. ‘A follow up is required as regards a feedback mechanism/implementation regarding various programmes/action plans.’
Lack of political willingness and awareness - Most respondents call attention to closing the gaps between the activities undertaken by Partnerships and the national and European levels in terms of political willingness and awareness. For the process to work, it is important that the right EU policy makers are around the table, also turning to the need to clarify ownership and specific roles.

Several points were raised by respondents, particularly the commitment to implement relevant actions into different national urban policies, as well as to uptake regulative proposals at the European level. In order to avoid transforming the Urban Agenda for the EU into a silo process, opportunity is seen in complementing the commitment of DG REGIO by the active participation of sectoral DGs.

A.1. ‘Modest openness of EU institutions to take regulative proposals on board or even into processing.’

A.2. ‘Securing a political agreement on supporting the continuation of the Urban Agenda for the EU, as well as for the implementation of actions proposed by the partnerships is a difficult task.’

A.3. ‘On some issues reluctance of member states to assign responsibilities to cities.’

Lack of wider capacity to participate - Despite recognizing the fact that the Urban Agenda for the EU should be relevant for all cities, no matter their size, it can be observed that one drawback of the process is lining up more opportunities for large and wealthy cities to get involved in the Partnerships.

A.1. ‘To participate to the thematic partnerships has a cost that not all the cities can afford (especially the small ones).’

Limited impact - Wariness regarding the impact of the Urban Agenda for the EU is also determined by uncertainty in terms of ownership and alignment with other European urban initiatives and programmes. Sometimes the Urban Agenda for the EU is still perceived as a mere networking exercise that doesn’t produce longstanding impacts.

A.1. ‘Universal policy approach remains a priority in EU, influence is therefore limited.’

A.2. ‘Bridge to implementation is not fully built and good results are in risk of not being utilized.’

Too little commitment of some partners - This is perceived as a lesser shortcoming of the process considering the voluntary nature of the Urban Agenda for the EU, yet the success of the Urban Agenda for the EU largely depends on the dedication of partners.

A.1. ‘UAEU being a voluntary agenda thus hard to encourage and motivate partners to continuously engage in partnerships.’

A.2. ‘Lack of engagement from Member States as it is difficult to deal with 12 Partnerships at UDG/DGUM in more detail.’
1.4. Recommendations and further direction for improving the functioning and implementation of the Urban Agenda for the EU

The recommendations provided by respondents in view of functioning, visibility and commitment should be interpreted in view of these drawbacks.

Recommendations for improving the functioning of the Urban Agenda for the EU follow several dimensions:

- Methodological opportunities (i.e. partnership structure, funding, secretariat)
- Clearer distinction between European, Member State, city levels in terms of leadership and ownership of the Urban Agenda for the EU
- A better link between the European Commission and the Urban Agenda for the EU - top-down initiative of EC (i.e. regulatory field)
- Improved outreach (e.g. through associative structures of cities)
- Better alignment to other initiatives (e.g. REFIT), programmes and improve cooperation on cross-cutting issues
- Plan realistic and concrete outcomes of UAEU actions

Taking note that most answers pointed out methodological weakness in the overall functioning of the Urban Agenda for the EU, respondents would welcome much simpler workflows to avoid administrative burden, better funding for implementation and for secretariat support, as well as flexibility in organising the activity of Partnerships.

A.1. ‘Be open to reorganise a partnership if progress is slow / find a way to better make coordinators and participants accountable whilst respecting voluntary nature of the partnerships.’

A.2. ‘More dedicated funding, for the secretariat but also for pilot projects based on actions.’

A.3. ‘More capacity to guide and support the partnerships.’

A significant share of respondents emphasises the need for a clearer distinction between European, Member State, city levels in terms of leadership and ownership of the Urban Agenda for the EU. Better coordination between all these levels is called upon by better shaping responsibilities.

A.1. ‘The role of the member states: how do we find a well-suited role, benefits and motivations?’

A.2. ‘The UAEU needs to involve politicians, policy makers and opinion leaders to further its cause.’

Recommendations for improving the visibility of the Urban Agenda for the EU include designing communication plan and tools (e.g. improved Futurium website, events, webinars, public discussions and active campaigns), ensuring wider access to a wealth of knowledge (e.g. national contact points), increasing cooperation with associations that promote city networking and knowledge sharing (including national associations).
A.1. ‘Once the Action Plans are finalised, a series of dissemination campaigns with appropriate feedback mechanisms should be organised via national Ministries and/or other multipliers including Brussels-based city/regional offices.’

A.2. ‘Develop an outreach and capitalisation strategy (similar as URBACT and ESPON) that goes beyond simple publicity and communication measures done by the secretariat.’

A.3. ‘Promoting the idea that the Urban Agenda for the EU is practically a “One - Stop - Shop” that provides reliable information on EU regulations, funds and Knowledge on all the EU initiatives.’

Recommendations for improving the commitment emerge from acknowledging that the success of the Urban Agenda for the EU depends on the willingness of cities, Member States and the European Commission to put it into action and to ensure concrete results on the ground.

Most respondents draw attention to the need to better explain at national level the importance of the Urban Agenda for the EU and its opportunities in order to raise political willingness and awareness. Besides focusing on the national level, it is widely acknowledged that the support (i.e. financial, the uptake of recommendations) from the European Commission is pivotal in upholding the interest of the partners in the Urban Agenda for the EU. Possibilities to better explore links with national urban policymaking are another way to increase this part of commitment.

A.1. ‘As a follow-up of a concrete and thorough evaluation process, the cities/MS/EC can be better informed about the whole agenda and its opportunities.’

A.2. ‘Member states would be more committed after tangible results (recommendations taken aboard by the Commission, action plans work, etc.).’

A.3. ‘Member States are motivated and committed, but we find that the voice of the Partnerships is not taken into account by the Commission.’

A.4. ‘Foster linkages and reports of national urban policies and feed them into the action planning.’

2. CURRENT CHANGES TO URBAN POLICY AND COORDINATION STRUCTURES

According to almost 50% of Member States who answered the questionnaire, substantial changes to urban (development) policy took place, including any explicit National Urban Policy, in the past three years. An important share of experts from Member States (35%) indicate that there is a re-evaluation of urban (development) policy ongoing at national level.
Fig. 6 Current changes to urban policy and coordination structures

Have there been substantial changes to urban (development) policy, including any explicit National Urban Policy, in your country in the past three years?

- Yes: 48%
- No: 45%
- Don't know: 6%

Is there currently a re-evaluation of urban (development) policy ongoing at national level in your country?

- Yes: 35%
- No: 58%
- Don't know: 6%

Source: Romanian Ministry of Public Administration and Regional Development, 2019 (online survey)

The Member States where the urban policy underwent major changes or is subject to re-evaluation can be identified on the following maps:

Source: Romanian Ministry of Public Administration and Regional Development, 2019 (online survey)
3. **LINKS BETWEEN THE UAEU, NATIONAL POLICY AND STRUCTURAL CHANGES**

29% of the respondents consider that the Urban Agenda for the EU has influenced the urban policy revision or making process in their own country, and 50% associate the Agenda with changes occurring in existing or creation of new formal or informal structures such as committees, working groups, regular chains of information, multilevel partnerships, etc.
The Member States where the Urban Agenda for the EU largely influenced the urban policy revision or it led to changes in existing or creation of new formalised or informal structures can be identified on the following maps:

Source: Romanian Ministry of Public Administration and Regional Development, 2019 (online survey)
CONCLUSIONS

To summarize the main messages emerging from this survey, the following elements can be mentioned in terms of general assessment of the Urban Agenda for the EU.

There is an overall positive perception of the role and benefits of the Urban Agenda for the EU in terms of:

- Contribution to a better understanding of urban issues at national level
- Coherence of the Urban Agenda for the EU with national urban policy initiatives
- Coherence of the Urban Agenda for the EU actions with national policy initiatives
- Empowerment of urban authorities in EU policy-making
- Added value of the Urban Agenda for the EU in addition to national initiatives
- Match results and impacts with incurred costs at national level
- The Urban Agenda for EU fostered multilevel governance cooperation
- Participation, contribution and mobilisation efficiency

In view of main benefits of the Urban Agenda for the EU, the following elements have been highlighted:
• Systematic and coherent multilevel European dialogue on urban matters
• Opportunity to discuss and influence European principles and instruments
• Better use of knowledge and expertise
• Integrated framework for national urban policies joining up sectoral perspectives
• Co-design of priorities and solutions based on improved knowledge
• Opportunity to call attention to new priorities
• Direct participatory approach to deal with urban matters
• Tailor-made tools for specific/unique urban matters
• Recognition of the full potential and contribution of urban areas of all sizes

However, besides a general enthusiasm regarding the opportunities brought by the Urban Agenda for the EU, several shortcomings were underlined for future improvements:

• Methodological weakness
• Lack of political willingness and awareness
• Lack of wider capacity to participate
• Limited impact and too little commitment of some partners

The recommendations provided by respondents in view of functioning, visibility and commitment should be interpreted in view of these drawbacks.

As process:

• Methodological opportunities
• A better link between the European Commission and the Urban Agenda for the EU
• Better alignment to other initiatives
• Plan realistic and concrete outcomes of UAEU actions

For increasing visibility:

• Designing communication plan and tools
• Ensuring wider access to a wealth of knowledge
• Increasing cooperation with associations that promote city networking and knowledge sharing

For strengthening the commitment of Member States:

• Better explain at national level the importance of the Urban Agenda for the EU and its opportunities in order to raise political willingness and awareness
• Support from the European Commission
• Better explore links with national urban policymaking

Most respondents draw attention to the fact that it is too early to have a clear image on the impact of the Urban Agenda for the EU, however a continuous reflection is called upon in order to make room for its improvement.