



Consultation on "The urban dimension of EU policies – key features of an EU Urban Agenda" (Consultation open from 18. July to 26. September 2014):

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/consultation/urb_agenda/index_en.cfm

Joint Statement of the Council of Cities and Regions (CoDCR) and the Urban Platform Danube Region (UPDR):

Q1. What are the main rationales for an EU urban Agenda? Where can EU action bring most added value? What elements of urban development would benefit from a more concerted approach between different sectors and levels of governance?

The Cities of the Council of Danube Cities and Regions (CoDCR) and the Urban Platform Danube Region (UPDR) agree with the European Commission that “Cities and metropolitan areas are the engines of economic development. They are also on the frontline when it comes to tackling obstacles to growth and employment, such as social exclusion and environmental degradation.”¹

The creation (and financing) by the European Commission of the “Covenant of Mayors” in 2008, uniting over 5000 Cities aiming at outdoing the Kyoto Protocol, shows that the EU has understood the central importance of the local level/cities as stakeholders of the EU 2020 strategy. It is however for the time being the only movement mobilising local and regional actors around the fulfilment of EU objectives and is seen as an exceptional model of multi-level governance.

Since the Leipzig Charter in 2007, the European Institutions have developed a comprehensive political agenda for the urban development in Europe which supports an integrated approach to a complex matter.

However, national line ministries and EU policies are still largely applying the sectoral and fragmented policies which often hinder sustainable and competitive urban development.

For instance, the Europe 2020 Strategy lacks a specific urban dimension, although the problems of implementing economic competitiveness, social cohesion and environmental sustainability at the same time are most complex as well as most visible in the urban context.

On the other hand, the regulations for the EU structural funds 2007-2013 have introduced for the first time the mainstreaming of the urban dimension in cohesion policy, and allow cities and metropolitan areas to be potential stakeholders and beneficiaries. The engagement by the EC of involving local and urban actors in the development of the national partnership agreements was a first step towards a new awareness of the necessity of integrated approaches at all levels.

A new European urban agenda should therefore first and foremost aim at a mandatory integration of local actors and the urban dimension in all relevant strategies and

¹ Cities of Tomorrow-Investing in Europe, Brussels 17.-18.02.2014

programmes of the European Union, including a monitoring of its implementation.

In the upcoming implementation process, national ministries and managing authorities should be encouraged to put the integration of local actors and urban policies at all levels as well as the implementation of a structured institutional cooperation including the local institutions and actors into practice.

National and regional boundaries mainly do not reflect the growing functional urban and metropolitan areas. National governments should be encouraged to support and finance trans-border and trans-regional cooperation on a large scale and at every governance level.

Q2. Should an EU urban agenda focus on a limited number of urban challenges? Or, should an EU urban agenda provide a general framework to focus attention on the urban dimension of EU policies across the board, strengthening coordination between sectoral policies, cities, national and EU actors?

The new Common EU funding provision enhances the urban dimension of the policy by specifically earmarking resources under the ERDF to be spent for integrated projects in cities and reinforces cooperation across borders by making the setting up of more cross-border projects easier. It also ensures that macro-regional strategies like the EUSDR and the EUSBR are supported by national and regional programmes and facilitates the alignment of funds by establishing a common set of rules.

This shows that there already are a number of theoretical strategies in place aimed at achieving urban and territorial cohesion through the implementation of integrated approaches (sustainable, inclusive, smart), which are recognized since the Brundtland Report in 1987 as being crucial to sustainable urban development.

However, due to the enforced competitiveness among cities and regions, cities today have primarily become investment areas, while social and environmental aspects are often seen as a cost factor. On the national level, ministries and local administrations at different levels find it structurally arduous to cooperate, which makes policy integration and project implementation difficult.

On the other hand, the intricate implementation of integrated projects is often challenging for the local/Civil Society/SME level.

The implementation of integrated, place-based and people-oriented projects, and of trans-regional or transnational projects will therefore largely depend nationally and locally on the ownership and implication of the political level, on the capacity (building) at the administrative as well as the project promoter level, as well as on the quality and competitiveness of urban management structures and schemes.

The Council of Danube Cities and Regions and the Urban Platform Danube Region work towards an increased awareness at national and regional level of the crucial importance of involving cities and metropolitan areas in a multi-level governance structure for the implementation of regional and local planning and funding, as well as strengthening their institutional and administrative capacities.

In order to achieve this, the dissemination of know-how, information and experiences and the transnational exchange and cooperation between the cities and networks of the Danube

Region must be developed, especially with a view to institutional memory which is essential for a stable and sustainable administration and governance at all levels.

Successfully integrated urban projects should implement smart, inclusive and sustainable urban development and/or renewal accompanied by horizontal policies like labour market qualifications, housing policies or social welfare measures etc...

In this context, the JESSICA, URBAN, URBACT and INTERREG IVC programmes as well as programmes for (potential) candidate countries and countries of the European Neighbourhood have helped a number of cities and regions to start exchange of knowledge and cooperation. But without easily accessible funding possibilities for capacity building and the institutional memory for local administrations and the Civil Society on a much larger (national and macro-regional) scale, as well as a better, institutionalized integration of cities and regions in the national governance system, these relatively small programmes and projects cannot lead to the much needed difference that would be felt and seen on a macro-regional or even European scale.

Many cities in the Danube Region would profit from the exchange of knowledge and good practices as well as from a stronger involvement in planning procedures at national or regional level in order to develop and maintain stable and sustainable governance and implementation structures. However, the administrative and financial capacity, knowledge and experience, as well as institutional and governance framework to develop such projects hugely differs between the cities and regions of the Danube Region, and even more between different European regions, especially in the new member states.

The selecting of priorities for action, the fixing of a concrete strategy with targets and deadlines at EU level seems an almost impossible task in this context.

The EU urban agenda could however strengthen knowledge about and implementation of good governance and urban management models and best practice projects by disseminating studies, results and guidelines for the development of integrated urban/metropolitan/regional projects, as well as sharing better information on possible funding sources for urban development at EU and national level.

The EU Urban Agenda could help to foster shared strategies and projects on a regional and transnational level, thus strengthening the Danube Cities position for the implementation of an integrated, inclusive and sustainable urban development in the Region.

The European Union should further this development by inviting member states to strengthen, on a national level, multi-level governance structures and capacity building programmes for administrations and underpin this development at European level by financing cooperation structures, platforms and networks with easily accessible funding.

The engagement by the EC of involving local actors in the development of the national partnership agreements was a first step towards a new awareness of the necessity of integrated approaches at all levels. However, in the coming implementation process, national managing authorities should be encouraged to put the integration of policies at all levels as well as a structured institutional cooperation including the local institutions and actors into practice.

The transparent division of power, resources, sharing of responsibilities and well qualified, stable, strong public administrations are a prerequisite for the implementation of good governance; “EU urban policies need more effective coordination of different policies, actors and planning mechanisms, more sharing of territorial knowledge, more multi-level governance arrangements and greater integration of place-based approaches into the public policies at EU, national, regional and local level”.²

The Council of Danube Cities and Regions is convinced that with greater administrative stability and capacities, easily accessible, transparent funding and investments and better integration in the national multi-level governance, cities could be a driving force for the achievement of the EU 2020 targets in the Danube Region.

Q3. Is the European model of urban development as expressed in “Cities of Tomorrow” a sufficient basis to take the work of the EU urban agenda further?

The Council of Danube Cities and regions and the urban Platform Danube Region agree with the European Commission that European Cities of the future “should be places of advanced social progress, platforms for democracy, cultural dialogue and diversity, places of green, ecological or environmental regeneration and places of attraction and engines of economic growth.

At the same time, European urban territorial development should reflect a sustainable development of Europe based on balanced economic growth and balanced territorial organisation with 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.³

The Danube Region is one of the European regions with the largest density of cities, many of them capital cities, and metropolitan areas, giving the Region a potentially powerful and competitive polycentric urban structure. However, cities in central and eastern Europe are experiencing specific challenges, on the economic as well as on the demographic level, with urban poverty, brain drain, lack of administrative capacity and financing for public services (housing, transport, schools, health...), lack of public and private investments, etc...

Therefore, a European model of urban development has to take account of the huge disparities between metropolitan areas/cities in Europe.

Many actions and programmes aiming at regional/urban development or networking between cities are not geared to the needs of secondary and small cities building the bulk of urban landscapes in south-eastern and central Europe. Therefore, a combination of policies aimed at strengthening macro-regional development and catering to the specific needs of cities in these areas is needed. The fact that URBACT III does not finance city networks or specifically cities in macro-regional areas, makes participation in such programmes difficult for many cities in the EUSDR, and hinders

² (ESPON Report 2012)

³ UN-HABITAT (2013), The State of European Cities in Transition 2013

the development of much needed instruments for the dissemination of best practice or the development of joint trans-regional or transnational urban projects.

Q4. How can Urban stakeholders better contribute to the policy development and implementation processes at EU level? Do cities need to be more involved in policymaking at regional, national and EU level? How?

If urban stakeholders are to contribute to policy development and implementation processes, cities must, as a prerequisite, be ready and enabled to implicate a broad range of public and private local actors in their own governance system and policy making, especially in those cities where the administrative capacity and economic situation is weak and the political situation unstable, which is the case in many cities of the Danube Region.

Only strong cities can be partners in the development and furthering of European urban issues. Urban governance requires competitive, stable and sustainable urban management, which itself needs committed experts and decent salaries. On the other hand, urban governance needs the implementation of civil society and local actors as stakeholders for the development of sustainable competences and competitiveness in central urban intervention areas such as culture, tourism, education, or e-government, and activities like planning, cooperation, project development. Funding for capacity building programmes and easily accessible EU or national funding and seed money for small projects is a central implementation tool.

Q5. What are the best ways to support stronger urban and territorial knowledge base and exchange of experience? What specific elements of the knowledge base need to be strengthened in order to better support policymaking?

The establishment of a “metropolitan network” was required in the 2011 EUSDR plan of action and in 2012, the creation of the Urban Platform Danube Region (UPDR) was promoted by Priority Area 10 “Stepping up Institutional Capacity and Cooperation” of the EUSDR.

The UPDR especially caters as a “one stop shop” to the information needs of cities in central and eastern Europe, who are experiencing specific challenges, on the economic as well as on the demographic level, with urban poverty, brain drain, lack of administrative capacity and financing for public services (housing, transport, schools, health...), lack of investments, etc...

Collection of data, research, monitoring, evaluation and capitalization of projects as well as the dissemination of the results is still not widespread, however important it would be for city leaders, administrations and city investors to dispose of such data for efficient policy or project development.

This is all the more important for cities in the Danube Region, where due to often rapidly changing political and thus administrative responsibilities, there is often no institutional memory available for sustainable strategies. Moreover, many cities in the Danube Region do not have the necessary financial and/ or personal resources to develop, implement and evaluate EU-funded projects or to cooperate and disseminate results in European networks.

The Urban Platform Danube Region will try to remedy this situation by creating an easily accessible knowledge base for cities, networks and local actors in the Danube Region, linked to the political level by the Council of Danube Cities and Regions. The investment of Vienna and Ulm for the Urban Platform Danube Region shows that relatively small sums can make a significant change for many cities, possibly even for the macro-region.

The Council of Danube Cities and Regions and the UPDR confirm that, if the EU Strategy for the Danube Region is to be successful, the goals of Europe 2020 and of the new EU structural fund period must be implemented especially in urban regions, as was recognised in the Action Plan for the EU Strategy for the Danube Region in 2011.

The Cities and Regions of the EUSDR need an EU Urban Agenda, underpinned by easily accessible financing for the implementation (akin to the secretariat of the “Covenant of Mayors”) of platforms and measures to facilitate the development of the cities of the Danube Region towards the model of European sustainable urban development, the Europe 2020 and SEE2020 goals and the implementation of the EU funds in urban and metropolitan areas of the region.

Q6. What should be the role of the local, regional, national and EU levels in the definition, development and implementation of an EU urban agenda?

The respective roles of the local, regional, national and EU levels are well defined in European primary law. One success factor for the urban agenda could be for the European institutions to initiate an “urban agenda awareness campaign”, which would foster the “urban mainstreaming” within EU policies through a strong leadership of the Commission and the European Parliament (for example by introducing an explicit social and inclusive dimension of public procurement markets). Another important role for EU institutions would be the enhancement and furthering of cross-sectoral cooperation and harmonisation as well as a further restructuring of the EU funding towards the urban agenda.