



Local & Regional
Europe

Consultation on “The urban dimension of EU policies – key features of an EU Urban Agenda”

CEMR’s discussion paper

September 2014

Following the CITIES Forum in February 2014, an event organised by the European Commission on how to strengthen the urban dimension of EU policymaking, the European Commission has launched a [consultation](#) on an EU urban agenda, addressing five questions that we answer in this discussion paper. For the Commission, the two main aims of the EU Urban Agenda identified so far are: 1) better coordination and coherence of EU policies to reflect city needs, and 2) stronger and more direct involvement of cities in EU policymaking.

A clear reference to the work of CEMR so far has been done by the Commission in its [communication](#) coming with the consultation. Based on its first contribution drafted in February, CEMR has decided to respond to this consultation open until 26 September 2014, and to provide its input to the debate.

With this new contribution, CEMR would like to pass on three main messages to encourage the new Commissioner to continue the debate launched by Commissioner Hahn:

- Subsidiarity: planning and urban policy is clearly a national and most commonly local power. Nevertheless the development of such agenda will be very helpful in order to give better consistency between the different EU policies and programmes which, for most of them, have an impact at local level. The local dimension should therefore be mainstreamed in all EU policies and programmes. The EU role is about optimisation, rationalisation and improving efficiency of the current *acquis* not creating a new policy that would extricate national and local powers.
- The European Commission should build an integrated territorial/local agenda, developing a genuine place-based approach. An EU Urban Agenda should take into account the links between urban and rural areas which administrative borders are often too restrictive to develop projects on a territory – it should not oppose urban, rural, peri-urban, mountains, etc. territories which all face challenges of economic development, research and innovation, attractiveness, quality of life, energy efficiency, social inclusion, etc. It should promote the diversity of European territories.
- The Commission should develop systematic local impact assessments of its policies when drafting a new legislation and analyse the feasibility of its policies and programmes at local level. It should encourage the contribution of local governments throughout this process.

1. 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?

For CEMR, an urban agenda is one of the strands of territorial development. It should promote the development of European territories regardless of their sizes, but respecting their diversity and specificities. It should not oppose local authorities from urban, rural, peri-urban, coastal, mountains areas, neither forget regional authorities which are key to ensure a balance development of regions. Numerous socio-economic, environmental and democratic challenges take place in cities and municipalities. Many topics with an urban stamp (innovation, broadband) are important for local governments of all sizes. Thus, the EU Urban Agenda should be related to a European Territorial Agenda to place diversity of territories at the heart of EU development/cohesion, but with a special focus on the development of local and urban aspects of EU policies. "Urban" seems to focus too much on cities and forgetting urban areas of municipalities and towns. All the more so as administrative borders are becoming less and less pertinent when trying to address development challenges at local level. Both rural and urban areas are subject to dynamic change, disregarding administrative borders. More and more, we find situations where administrative rural areas have urban characteristics and vice-versa.

The construction of an EU Agenda is a good opportunity to rationalise and coordinate EU policies and programmes which have an impact at local level, but also to provide better impact assessment when developing new EU initiatives, to develop statistical data in order to help EU officials and politicians understand the reality in Europe's cities and municipalities when drafting regulations, and to foster the dialogue between EU institutions, Member States and local and regional governments.

Finally, the preparation of the Habitat III Conference and the shaping of a new urban agenda at global level also calls for a strong European voice and vision, of both national and local governments. Sustainable local and territorial development is a mission that is shared globally, which all EU actors can learn from and share knowledge on.

2. 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, city, national and EU actors?

An EU Agenda should create a tool/framework for all Commission's DGs to analyse local issues and the impact of EU legislation on the local level. It should also help a better coordination of EU policies, which would maximise synergies and avoid conflicts on the ground. Local governments are transposing regulations/directives on the ground in direct contact with their citizens. It can thus bring added value if EU legislation fits in and supports local governments' actions, avoiding adding burdens and costs. It would help tackle possible issues of implementation from the beginning of the drafting process with local governments. A better knowledge of territorial impact of policies would also entail more consistent public policies, as the actions would be tailored to local needs. Therefore a European Agenda should also ensure the development of accurate data on local situation to help decision-makers develop the right targeted policies.

A major part of EU legislations impacts cities and municipalities, with more or less importance according to local characteristics. We can mention several challenges for sustainable development

(climate-friendly and resource-efficient policies, mobility, energy and promotion of renewable energies), social, territorial and economic cohesion (justice, employment, education, equal participation of citizens, migration, social services, demographic change and senior participation, equality, tax, e-Government, TTIP), cultural diversity and tourism, the globalisation, etc. These challenges constitute reasons for cooperation and building-up partnerships in functional areas, beyond traditional administrative borders.

3. Is the European model of urban development as expressed in "Cities of Tomorrow" a sufficient basis to take the work on the EU urban agenda further?

There is no one-size-fits-all model, given the diversity of European local and regional territories. The aim, especially through the EU cohesion policy, is to have a balanced territorial development. Cities are not isolated entities, they are part of a territorial system and have many socio-economic, cultural, governing interactions with other cities or municipalities, in their surroundings or beyond.

The integrated approach promoted by the Leipzig Charter is a good basis for work. It implies that various sectoral policies are being coordinated, different actors are involved in policy-making (active citizenship), multilevel dialogue is taking place and daily policy-making is based on a vision and a strategy with proper follow-up mechanisms. Cities and municipalities, whatever their size or location shall tend to reinforce their economic attractiveness; develop a diversified local economy through knowledge and skills provision; ensure connectivity; meet the needs of the population in terms of education, training, employment and access to jobs; improve the quality and accessibility of public services for everyone; promote good public health all inhabitants; ensure high-quality housing and neighbourhoods for everyone; promote cultural and leisure opportunities for its citizens; mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change; protect and promote biodiversity; reduce pollution; preserve the quality and availability of natural resources; promote active stakeholder and inhabitant participation (active citizenship), and networking and exchange of knowledge both nationally and internationally.

In line with the principle of subsidiarity, the action of the Commission should be to develop measures to promote dialogue between all relevant parties and renew support to the cities and municipalities responsible for local development to engage a continuous dialogue with their citizens.

Furthermore, the European urban agenda should take stock of new developments and trends in society. In "Cities of Tomorrow", the European Commission concentrates its visions on governance, but neglects the developments in society which are affecting this governance: the development of active citizenship as a result of the digitalisation of society and the empowerment of citizens, as well as the cooperation between local government and local partners (business, knowledge institutions and NGO's) due to the scale of societal challenges, shrinking government budgets and the complexity of local problems.

4. 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?

It is important the Agenda takes into account the expertise available at local level. Before and when drafting EU legislation, the Commission should seek expertise of representative Associations of local and regional authorities, representing different aspects and sizes of local Governments. They usually work together with experts within their membership and analyse potential impact of EU legislation at an early stage. Municipalities and cities should be involved closely at all stages of the policy cycle.

CEMR also promotes the concept of 'Governance in Partnership': all relevant authorities at the different levels of governance should cooperate in order to share ownership and make sure that actions are implemented successfully.

Local development would indeed benefit from a more concerted and continuous dialogue approach between different sectors and stakeholders, including socio-economic partners, and from the coordination of policies with the region which has an important role to play to maintain the territorial balance between different kinds of areas. The added value of a European agenda could be to encourage local and regional partnerships between different kinds of stakeholder. It should also push to support the local dimension in national policies, and favour the use of local expertise at national level by promoting the partnership principle, like at EU level.

The added value of the EU action could also lie in supporting education, information and awareness-raising campaigns to foster values and attitudes conducive to sustainable local development and active citizenship. This is particularly relevant as we are about to adopt sustainable development goals applicable globally, thus also in Europe, and that local governments will be one of their major drivers and implementers. It could help citizens to better understand what the EU does for his city and municipality (more readability).

5. What are the best ways to support a 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?

Since they have the competence to implement a significant part of EU legislation, local and regional authorities, as democratically elected, must be involved at an early stage in the legislative process. Representative Associations of local governments can provide expertise together with their members. They can also consult their citizens and local actors directly. Further steps must then be taken in order to raise awareness of the Commission's services on their importance.

The Agenda could also develop accurate data of what happens on the ground. The current NUTS II, III and LA1 levels often do not reflect places where real communities live, which affects the quality of impact assessment and policy-making at EU level. We need real local and sub-local indicators available EU wide. Equally we need to move from measuring well-being by looking at GDP alone (cf. OECD work).

In the programming period 2014-2020, part of ESIF earmarked for Thematic Objective 11 could be spent to develop a set of sub-regional indicators. This will benefit the post 2020 debate but also MS' policy-making, moving to a fact-based approach of what happens at local and sub-local level.

However, this data collection should not mean the creation of indicators by EU institutions, and the development of “urban” indicators of when a city or town is to be considered as “smart” by international (ISO)/European (DIN) business-driven organisations. Any standard should be, if any, the result of a bottom-up approach. Networking and capacity-building are important building blocks.

The exchange of experience and knowledge can benefit to local governments, and the Commission and the competent authorities should reinforce the exchange of best practices in this field, taking advantage of existing collaborations with European associations of local authorities.

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

The Commission should make use, wherever possible, of existing institutions, programmes and instruments. We support the idea that the Commission should identify possible available resources within the existing financial framework for financial support to local development, reinforcing the coordination between its services, and explore potential funding opportunities for attaining the goal of a sustainable balanced local development. Regular meetings with local authorities for the analysis of all aspects of local development, could help local, regional, national authorities, EU institutions, and other stakeholders to exchange information and good practices; the Commission could then consider their possible incorporation into some of its existing initiatives.

It will be important that the Agenda help ensure a “governing in partnership” approach (including local, regional, national and European authorities, as well as the private sector and civil society for active citizenship) when drafting European policies; guarantee transparent, efficient and democratic participation of citizens at all levels; recall the importance of local and regional authorities in the design, implementation and monitoring of the future EU legislation. Thanks to the Lisbon Treaty, we now have the political legitimacy to advocate this partnership to ensure tangible results and the integrated place-based development of Europe.

All levels of governance are concerned, the European, national and regional, so all of them should take local issues into account, without forgetting the necessary enhancement of local authorities’ role. A multilevel governance approach is needed.

Local authorities and citizens are the final users of many of the EU policies. So, to guarantee the success of the implementation of those policies, it is very important to take into account the real local needs.

Without the full participation of local and regional authorities, the Europe 2020 strategy objectives of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth cannot be achieved. This new model of European governance must also involve citizens, businesses, civil society and any other relevant stakeholders in order to reach these common goals.

CEMR calls on the new European Commission to continue the debate on the Urban Agenda with full participation of local and regional authorities, in order to present before the proposals for the new programming period of the ESI Funds an EU Urban Agenda which incorporates a real urban dimension in all relevant EU policies and legislation.

Contact

Marlène Siméon
Square du Meeûs 1 - 1000 Brussels
Tel. + 32 2 213 86 93
Marlene.simeon@ccre-cemr.org

About CEMR

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) is the broadest organisation of local and regional authorities in Europe. Its members are over 50 national associations of municipalities and regions from 41 European countries. Together these associations represent some 150 000 local and regional authorities.

CEMR's objectives are twofold: to influence European legislation on behalf of local and regional authorities and to provide a platform for exchange between its member associations and their elected officials and experts.

Moreover, CEMR is the European section of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), the worldwide organisation of local government.

www.ccre.org