



CEMR First Contribution to an EU Urban Agenda

The increasing number of initiatives at European and international level show that **urban areas are recognised** in the role they play. They face and respond to economic, social and environmental challenges and thus contribute to achieve political objectives and deliver a major part to a sustainable development of our communities.

At EU level, **many initiatives have risen in the last years**, supporting actions of cities and accompanying them in their efforts towards sustainable and integrated urban development: the Leipzig Charter, the Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities, the Covenant of Mayors, the URBACT programme, the Territorial Agenda 2020, the RURBAN initiative, funding for sustainable urban development in the European Regional Development Fund, sustainable urban development objectives in the 7th Environment Action Programme, etc.

These multitudes of initiatives are sometimes overlapping and counterproductive which leads to less effective EU legislation and policies; therefore **a more coherent EU approach** would be useful.

More and more European legislation and policies have an impact on the local level, and cities must comply with these rules. However, we believe that their concerns are not always sufficiently taken into consideration.

Europe's diversity reflected at local level

Europe is characterised by a high number of small and medium-sized cities; therefore, 'urban' in a future EU Urban Agenda must relate to **cities, towns and municipalities of all sizes**: small, medium-size and big cities.

The local level plays an important role in our **democracy**; locally elected politicians have the duty to provide a good **quality of life** to their citizens, and for that purpose, to take the necessary decisions for which they are also held accountable (common well-being).

Their main objective is the wellbeing of the people, the conditions in the different areas of their lives. Many cities are facing economic and financial constraints, but still they have to provide a range of services to their citizens and the businesses. This needs to be better reflected in EU policies and legislation.

We should not keep thinking the city in its traditional way, in its administrative borders. A future EU urban agenda has to take into account the **interdependencies of cities and their surroundings**. According to the OECD, almost 80% of rural population live close to an urban area, and many opportunities appear in intermediary and small cities. Coordination with surroundings is often essential to tackle urban issues, and address economic, social, environmental matters.

What should an EU Urban Agenda contain?

Urban policy is not a separate policy field. **It is a key part of a wider place-based, local development policy.** Urban policy should not distract the Commission from the development and promotion of a place-based local development policy which can work to the benefit of areas of all types. Europe's diversity – which is also reflected in its cities – is best preserved by respecting the specificities of the territories.

It will be important that the Urban Agenda takes into account the expertise and the knowledge that is available at local level. CEMR promotes the concept of '**Governance in Partnership**', which means that all relevant actors should cooperate at the different levels of

governance in order to share ownership and make sure that actions are implemented successfully.

We advocate for an EU Urban Agenda as a **non-binding strategy** to support the dialogue with and between cities. The Agenda could **provide a framework**, e.g. via a White Paper, in which the **local perspective could be better taken into account** when new legislation or policy is drafted. It should also undertake proper and serious evaluation of all EU legislative proposals and other EU initiatives to examine their impact at local level.

Such a coherent EU framework could encourage local authorities to take innovative actions in a long-term perspective and would help them to implement sustainable urban development strategies as well.

It is also essential to better inform local policy makers and project leaders on the EU support opportunities in all fields, in order to increase the engagement of their territory into European programmes and facilitate the use of funds. It is necessary to closely involve local authorities through a **direct dialogue with EU institutions**.

The **new cohesion policy** (2014–2020) is a step into the right direction: binding partnership principle, integrated urban strategies, including urban-rural cooperation, may be implemented by local and regional authorities in the programming period 2014–2020. A follow-up of the territorial and urban dimension of cohesion policy and other EU policies and programmes should be included in an EU Urban Agenda, as well as the involvement of local authorities in the monitoring of structural funds (5% of ERDF for urban areas, community-led local development, integrated territorial investments, and innovative actions). CEMR research shows for instance that ITI and CLLD are going to be instrument of very limited use because of the internal contradictions of the EU rules, reluctance of Member States or lack of sufficient ownership at local (or sub-local) level.

Furthermore, if the EU is to have better urban policies it needs 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. This in turn affects the quality of the 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.

CEMR duly recognises that this is a sensitive issue as EU funds continue to use GDP as the main criteria for their allocations. However the new EU urban agenda is a great opportunity to address this challenge. In the new programming period 2014-2020, part of the funds 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 bring enormous benefits for the countries' own domestic policy making, moving to a fact based approach of what happens at local and sub-local level.

The international dimension

CEMR and its members are concerned about the developments of “urban” indicators of when a city or town is to be considered as “smart” by international (ISO) or European (DIN) business-driven organisations. Any standard should be, if any, the result of a bottom up approach. Therefore we urge the EU to not systematically support ISO and DIN standards on urban policy.

Finally, to make the EU framework on urban development more coherent, it should also serve as basis for an EU common vision on the **international scene**. Cities have been pleading for an urban sustainable development goal in the post-2015 framework that the UN is developing, but EU Member States don't seem very eager to support this action. A coherent vision of the EU internally and internationally would be very useful for local authorities and citizens to have a coherent and continuous actions and opportunities for a sustainable development, and take an active part into the New Urban Agenda at international level (Habitat III). **Furthermore the Commission needs to closely involve local government repre-**

sentatives in translating the outcomes of Habitat III into European policies and legislation.

An EU Urban Agenda should:

- *Take into account the diversity of Europe and its cities;*
- *Be understood as part of a wider local development, place-based, local democracy context;*
- *Apply a meaningful partnership approach of all relevant actors at all levels of governance;*
- *Ensure that urban policy interventions across different EU policies are consistent and that the different EU funding schemes are consolidated;*
- *Ensure that the new instruments in the cohesion policy in relation to the urban dimension are fit to purpose to the needs of local areas;*
- *Develop new EU wide indicators at local and neighbourhood level that reflect the multi-variable aspects that affect local communities;*
- *Reject transposing International standardisation measures into EU policies unless they have been developed bottom up.*

★