



Brussels,
DG ENV/MaB D(2005)

**EU EXPERT GROUP ON THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT
MEETING OF 17 May 2005**

MINUTES

Attending: See end of minutes.

Item 1: Brief Update with Progress since last meeting (24 September 2004)

Chantal Bruetschy (Head of Unit, European Commission) opened the meeting¹. She stressed that the Commission was still consulting stakeholders to ensure that the Thematic Strategy generated a real added value in meeting the needs of local, regional and national authorities in improving the quality of the urban environment. The EU Expert Group was highly encouraged to continue contributing to the process with specific proposals.

The agenda was approved. The key documents for discussion at the meeting were all available on the website².

Item 2: Results of Consultation so far

The Commission outlined the main elements of the consultations held since the interim Communication³, which included a wide internet consultation, Council Conclusions, an Opinion of the Committee of the Regions, bilaterals with Member States, meetings with city associations and letter to city networks.

Key messages were: support for the analysis of the problem and the key importance of the four priority themes (management, transport, construction, design); a predominance of objections to obligations (the importance of the subsidiarity issue and the need to take into account local conditions (geographical, cultural, historical), local administrative systems and existing requirements).

In addition, the recent messages from cities and city networks were: local authorities welcomed guidance on integrated environmental management and for the implementation of a number of Directives; they welcomed support for exchange of best practices, skills and knowledge. Cities also expressed the need for city-focused guidance, a dedicated website, and for documents to be translated into local languages.

Item 3: Final Results from the 3 expert Working Groups

¹ Apologies were received from Prof Colin Fudge, co-chair of the EU Expert Group

² http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/environment/urban/home_en.htm

³ "Towards a Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment" COM(2004)60

The Commission outlined the results of the 3 working groups (available on website).

Item 4: EU Expert Group's Views on Possible Measures

Based on the final reports of the expert working groups, the EU Expert Group was asked for ideas on how the reports can be used in the development of the Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment.

Research

The Expert Group highlighted the need for:

- Research on urban issues should be open for participation by local authorities, both as leaders of the research and as active participants in the projects (i.e. the “Code of Urban Research” in the WG report). Many issues are political and cultural in nature (e.g. environmental management plans or on decision making processes) and so the close involvement of local authorities is necessary to ensure success.
- Research to produce tools and information for use by local authorities needs to be easily comprehensible by local authorities. This is not always the case at present. Results of projects and research needs to be available in the local language.
- Research is needed to understand political decision-making processes, understanding behaviour of citizens, complex interactions in the ‘urban ecosystem’.
- Training and demonstration projects on practical examples. These are as important as research projects. Successful examples where all 3 are combined (e.g. CIVITAS, CONCERTO) should be seen as good practice models and a way to deliver ‘life-long training’ for existing decision makers and professions.

In conclusion, additional support is needed to help cities plan and manage their urban environment in a more integrated way and National and Regional Authorities have an important role in providing this. The Expert Group felt that the added value for the Urban TS would be to establish mechanisms to facilitate the transfer of experience between local authorities so that they can learn from each other.

Management and Transport

The Expert Working Group highlighted the following issues:

- The Thematic Strategy should make recommendations on whether environmental management should take place on the basis of administrative boundaries or on the basis of the real urban area.
- The process for preparing integrated plans is important (securing stakeholder involvement and support).
- The Thematic Strategy should aim to ensure that competition between cities does not take place at the expense of the environment, but rather that the quality of the environment becomes a key issues in deciding future investment.
- National strategies for the urban environment were important although several MS said that they already had them.

Some members of the EU Expert Group called for specific targets and mandatory plans stating that the report from the management plans working group in particular left too many issues open. However, the majority of the Expert Group did not voice support for these views and the Commission outlined the practical difficulties with obligations foreseen at this stage (i.e. the difficulty in ensuring that the obligation to adopt a plan

achieves a tangible result in the quality of the urban environment, the difficulty in evaluating the success or otherwise of the plan and the impossibility of setting specific and common targets for most of the issues covered by the Thematic Strategy).

Exchange of knowledge, skills and experience

- Much can be learnt from case studies that are not ‘best practice’.
- Focal points (one at EC level providing coordinated coverage of all local authority issues, and a network of national focal points) could provide better access to information and facilitate the exchange of experience, knowledge and skills. The Dutch Government’s pilot project on a network of national focal points was highlighted (the UK Presidency of the EU would take forward this pilot project).
- Voluntary initiatives such as Aalborg can play an important role.

Item 5: Possible Revision to EMAS

Questions were circulated on the use of EMAS for the management of broad environmental issues in local authorities were circulated before the meeting (Annex I).

Only a few interventions were made which highlighted:

- The important role of national authorities in promoting EMAS at the local level;
- The difficulty in applying an industry based mechanism such as EMAS to the management of environmental issues in urban areas and the need to consider adjusting EMAS to fit this different use;
- The need to supply detailed guidance to local authorities in applying EMAS to the management of broad environmental issues at the local level.

The EU Expert Group was invited to send comments in writing to the Commission by 15 June (to mark.bacon@cec.eu.int).

Item 6: Guidance for MS and cities on the implementation of EC law

Questions related to the need for EC guidance on specific issues were circulated to the Expert group in advance of the meeting (Annex II to the Agenda) and to city networks in February but there was no time to discuss these questions further at the meeting. Several responses were received beforehand, including from ACRR, CEMR, Eurocities and Med-Cities. These highlighted that:

- General guidance was welcome but it must be supplemented by MS for the national situation
- Guidance must be concrete, practical and specifically designed for cities
- Guidance is needed for MS, regional and local authorities on integrated environmental management and on the implementation of various EU Directives (e.g. air quality, noise) at the local level
- Guidance should be supported by a focal point of up-to-date information (a website focussed on cities would be useful)
- Guidance must be available in the local language.

Members of the EU Expert Group were invited to send comments to the Commission by 15 June (to mark.bacon@cec.eu.int).

Item 7: Impact Assessment for the Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment

The Commission outlined that a consultant had been appointed to provide basic data on the likely costs and benefits of environmental management plans (EMP), environmental management systems (EMS) and sustainable urban transport plans (SUTP). The reports related to the Impact Assessment contract are all available on the website (survey of national systems, survey of EU cities, report on likely costs and benefits).

The consultant (Sujith Khollamthodi from AEA Technology) outlined the assumptions on which the reports were based. The EU Expert Group was invited to comment:

- The figures in the report probably double-count some costs (EMP and EMS were not, in reality, entirely separate and an authority adopting both would not have to incur the full costs of an EMP and an EMS) and overestimated others (local authorities undertake planning already so the cost of implementing an EMP is unlikely to be the full cost estimated in all cases). The EMP and EMS could produce savings (reduced reporting in different plans). Possible costs associated with new organisations are not part of the study.
- Quantified benefits are difficult to deliver and quickly risk becoming unsafe. In particular, the benefits due exclusively to the plan are very hard to identify.

The Commission concluded that the EU Expert Group agreed with the approach and found the consultant's reports to be an acceptable basis on which to base the Impact Assessment.

Item 8: Integration of urban environment issues into other policies: Future Cohesion Policy

DG REGIO (Sylvie Harburger) outlined the current state of play on the future Cohesion Policy. The Commission's proposals for the different Regulations were under discussion in Council and the Commission had recently presented its ideas for the Strategic Guidelines on which MS would base their own National Strategic Reference Frameworks. It was important that urban issues were adequately reflected in these National Strategic Reference Frameworks and MS members of the EU Expert Group were encouraged to discuss this with their colleagues leading on the Cohesion Policy discussions. DG REGIO's presentation is attached to these minutes.

Item 9: Any Other Business

The Commission referred to the forthcoming events Urban Green Days (see www.urbangreendays.org) and Green Week (see http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/environment/greenweek/index_en.htm), both of which have an important focus on urban environment issues. Members of the EU Expert Group are encouraged to participate.

Follow Up

The Commission would consider all replies received from the experts. A final stakeholder consultation would be launched this summer with adoption in December in 2005. In principle, this was the final meeting of the EU Expert Group in its current form.

The representative from Austria outlined that urban environment was a priority for the Austrian Presidency (1st half of 2006) and that it would be a major point on the Ministerial informal meeting in May 2006.

Latest info on the Strategy: www.europa.eu.int/comm/environment/urban/home_en.htm

Participants to meeting with member states and stakeholders

Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment

17th May 2005, Brussels

1. CHAIRS:

Ms. Chantal Bruetschy (Directorate General Environment)

2. MEMBER STATES:

AUSTRIA:	Mr. Werner Thalhammer , – Transport, Mobility, Human Stellement and Noise Division Mr. Robert Thaler – Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management
BELGIUM:	Mr. Van Staeyen Bjorn – Flemish region - Animal DTG
BULGARIA	Ms. Zlatka Ormanova – Ministry of Regional Development
CZECH REPUBLIC:	Mrs. Martina P á s k o v á Ministry of the Environment Department of Ecology of Urban Areas and Tourism
DENMARK:	Mrs. Vibeke Jorgensen - Ministry of Environment
FINLAND	Mr. Matti Vatile - Ministry of Environment
GERMANY	Ms. Brigitte Helff – Ministry for Traffic, Housing and Builging
GREECE	Ms. Panagiota Kaperoni – Ministry for the Environment, Spatial Planning & Public Works
HUNGARY	Dr. Kálmánné BÚZÁS - Ministry for Environment and Water
IRELAND	Mr. Liam Whelan – Department of the Environment and Local Governement
ITALY	Ms. Silvia Vaghi - Ministry for the Environment and Territory
LATVIA	Mr. Laimonis Osis Project Director at the Riga City Environment Centre Agenda 21
NETHERLANDS	Ms. Jitske Pultrum – Ministry of Housing
SLOVAKIA	Mr. Laszlo Florian – Ministry of Environment, Territorial Planning and Construction Division
SLOVENIA	Ms. Alenka Burja - Ministry of the Environment Spatial Planning and Energy of the Republic of Slovenia
SPAIN	Mr. Ignacio Elorrieta - Ministry of the Environment
SWEDEN	Mr. Michael Hagman – Ministry of the Environment
UNITED KINGDOM	Mr. Timothy Morgan, Ms. Abigail Cottrell - Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

3. OTHER STAKEHOLDERS:

Ambiente Italia
EEB – European Environmental Bureau
City of The Hague
City Planning Administration Stockholm
Ville de Grenoble
City of Bremen
Helsinki City
Landeshauptstadt Hannover
ACCESS-EUROCITIES
Deutscher Städte-und Gemeindebund (DSEGB)
Union of Baltic Cities
Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)
Global Warming, Local Warning Network
Environmental Platform for Regional Offices (EPRO)
ILS NRW
Architects Council of Europe (ACE)
Finnish Forest Industries Federation
University of Groningen
German Institute of Urban Affairs
Ministere de la Region Wallonne
CCRE
Ile de France Representation in Brussels
RICS
European Environment Agency
North Rhine-Westhalia
Dublin City Council
CEMR
AEAT
Ministry if Infrastructure of Poland
CCRE
Genoa Commune
Sustainable Performance Group
Birmingham City Council
NGO GEFI

Ms Maria Berrini
Ms. Kerstin Meyer
Mr. Alfons Finkers
Mr. Torsten Malmberg
Mr. Pierre Kermen
Mr. Michael Glotz-Richter
Ms. Anja Vallittu
Mr. Reinhard Martinsen
Ms. Eva Baños de Guisarda
Mr. Holger Adam
Mr. Mikko Jokinen
Ms. Pirita Lindholm
Mr. Bryan Boulton
Ms. Eva Dalman
Mr. Herbert Kemming
Mr. Alain Sagne
Mr. Ari Ilomäki
Mr. Christian Zuidema
Mr. Jens Libbe
Mr. Stany Carbonnelle
Mr. Sylvain Chevassus
Ms. Francoise Chotard
Ms. Jill Craig
Mr. Sven Dammann
Mr. Ranier Danielzyk
Mr. Dick Gleeson
Ms. Eva Hagglund
Mr. Sujith Kollamthodi
Mr. Maciej Lasocki
Ms. Angelika Poth-Moegele
Mr. Alberto Santel
Mr. Ralf Stappen
Mr. Gavin Tringham
Ms. Marie-Alice Budniok

4. EUROPEAN COMMISSION REPRESENTATIVES:

Directorate General Environment

Joint Research Center
Directorate General Regional Policy
Directorate General Enterprise

Ms. Chantal Bruetschy
Mr. Bacon Mark
Ms. Susanne Wegefeld
Mr Jorge Diaz del Castillio
Mr. Niall McCormick
Ms. Sylvie Harburger
Mr Marek Przeor