

Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment
URBAN ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH AND TRAINING NEEDS
WORKING GROUP
Inception Report

The following Inception Report reflects the background and the main thematic and organisational aspects for the activities of the Working Group on "Urban Environment research and training needs" (WG) having been set up by the European Commission. It is based on the first WG meeting held in Stockholm on 25 May 2004. The Report was discussed and agreed by the group at the 2nd meeting on 23 June 2004.

1. Background

The Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment is one of the key actions outlined in the Sixth Community Environment Action Programme and is to be presented to the European Parliament and the Council in 2005 after an intensive consultation process.

As a result of a first round in this consultation process, Working Groups on four priority themes - Sustainable Urban Transport, Sustainable Urban Management, Sustainable Urban Construction, and Sustainable Urban Design - were established, which presented their final reports early in 2004. Based on the results of these reports, on the consultation process itself and on former publications and communications, the Commission adopted in January 2004 Communication COM(2004)60 "Towards a Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment" as an intermediate step in developing the thematic strategy on the urban environment:

"To improve the environmental performance and quality of urban areas and to secure a healthy living environment for Europe's urban citizens, reinforcing the environmental contribution to sustainable urban development while taking into account the related economic and social issues" is seen as the overall aim of the thematic strategy. The Communication recognises that towns and cities themselves are best placed to develop the solutions to the problems they face, proposes that the Community's role should be to establish a framework to support them in this task and highlights the importance of further research in certain areas to provide knowledge, tools and techniques necessary to help achieve a high quality and healthy urban environment.

2. Goals and tasks of the Working Group

The working group of independent experts is asked to define the research and training needs for the urban environment. The starting point of the working group is the conviction that the integration of various fields within sustainable urban development needs to be located in the centre of practical/reasonable urban research, but that in so doing particular importance should be attached to the priorities identified in the Communication. European towns and cities will only be enabled to rise to meet future challenges, if WE succeed in establishing integrated and flexible urban development.

The results of this Working Group will serve as an input to the EU Expert Group on the Urban Environment for further discussion. Particular attention will be paid to research needs

on integration of the four priority themes mentioned above, and also integration between these and other urban environment issues. The identification of the research priorities will take account of local, national and European level research activities, including the activities undertaken by the "City of Tomorrow and Cultural Heritage" Key Action under the 5th Framework Programme.

The working group will consider how to structure research activities in order to maximise the involvement of end-users (principally cities, regional and national authorities) in the research, usefulness of knowledge, tools and techniques developed and to ensure a high level of dissemination and use of the products developed.

The working group will also consider the future training needs in the urban environment, in order to provide input to discussions on future priorities for Community education and training programmes. The wide range of education and training activities in different groups (school, university, vocational training) needs to be considered. The WG should also consider other initiatives that can be undertaken outside of the EU funding initiatives to support the training needs identified.

3. Thematic areas and methodology

The focus of WG activities / discussions will be on the integration and the inter-linkages of four priority themes identified for the Thematic Strategy:

- sustainable urban management,
- sustainable urban design,
- sustainable urban transport,
- sustainable urban construction.

In addition, further areas and fields of action will be identified by the group and incorporated into the overall considerations.

In order to ensure that relevant considerations and approaches will be taken into account, the following documents, programmes and strategies will serve as starting points for the work of the WG:

- the final reports of the 2003 working groups on the four thematic areas,
- the Communication "Towards a Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment" 2004,
- the "City of Tomorrow and Cultural Heritage Key Action" under the 5th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development,
- projects and actions being supported under the 6th Environment Action Programme and the 5th Framework Programme,
- the Lisbon strategy,
- the Gothenburg strategy,
- recent research on sustainable urban development
- additional discussion and resource papers supplied by WG members.

These documents and activities are themselves based on additional sources. For example, prior to the working groups being set up on the four thematic areas, stakeholder consultation was initiated and evaluated. Similar sources will also be used as reference in this instance.

Based on the documents mentioned above, on existing and forthcoming (EU) programmes and approaches, on global trends affecting cities and the respective urban challenges, and the experience and approaches in Member States (represented by the WG members), the WG will identify future research and training needs, suggest existing and new instruments in order to put them into practice, and will identify appropriate actors and target groups.

Members of the Working Group

To ensure a wide range of stakeholder, expertise and professional/national backgrounds, the group comprises 25 experts from 11 Member States. Thus the participants represent a wide range of European Member States and cities, working as researchers and academics, and as government officials, from the local to the regional, national and European levels. Also represented are architects, planners, consultants and others. Due to the wide provenance and range of qualifications of these experts, valuable contributions and reliable results can be expected.

The group is chaired by Prof. Björn Malbert, of Chalmers University of Technology, Institute of Architecture, in Göteborg, and is supported by the European Academy of the Urban Environment as consultant.

Schedule and deliverables

The WG will meet four times and will submit a final report at the end of November 2004. The following (provisional) schedule has been agreed upon:

Dates	event	tasks / deliverables
25 May 2004	1st WG meeting (in Stockholm)	outline/delineate the topic/subject / tasks, initial discussions on the basis of (WG members') experience and provisional working papers
		background and working papers on research needs draft inception report
23 June 2004	2nd WG meeting (in Stockholm)	discussion of inception report establish work programme further discussion and identification of research needs

		(in writing) formal acceptance/adoption of the inception report draft interim report prepared further background papers on training needs interim report to be submitted
07 - 08 September 2004	3rd WG meeting (in Brussels)	prioritise research needs identify actors and instruments (research) identify training needs prioritise training needs identify target groups, actors and instruments
		draft Final Report prepared
08 November 2004	4th WG meeting (in Ascona, IT)	discussion of draft Final Report
		editing Final Report
End of November		(in writing) formal acceptance/adoption of the Final Report

Annexes:

- terms of reference (updated)
- list of WG members
- minutes of 1st meeting on 25 May 2004