

The European City – Improving the Quality of your Environment

Executive Summary

- The quality of the urban environment is generally considered to be poor. Respondents from the Southern MS have a more negative view than those in the Northern MS.
- Some environmental issues are considered to be improving (quality of water, attractiveness of the urban area, quality of green spaces, nature and energy efficiency) whilst others are considered to be worsening (air quality (but only marginally), levels of noise, levels of road traffic, volumes of waste generated and greenhouse gas emissions).
- Health and quality of life are the most important reasons respondents give for achieving a high quality urban environment. Experts thought that factors such as attracting business and creating a positive image of the city were more important than private respondents considered. The majority of respondents consider that environmental issues are only rarely coordinated at the local level.
- For urban transport, respondents identified improvements in public transport, promotion of cycling and walking, retrofitting of public vehicles and banning the most polluting vehicles from entering the city as the most important measures.
- For the environmental impact of their homes, respondents generally had some idea of the impact but 1/3 of respondents did not (particularly those in the Southern and Central MS).
- The majority of respondents said that they already undertake actions to improve the quality of the urban environment. A majority of respondents say that they would consider better heating and insulation in future. The most important factor in convincing respondents to make changes in behaviour was better environmental information.
- A high proportion of private respondents felt that they did not know about consultation exercises on environmental issues but said that they wanted to. Experts were better informed and participated more frequently than citizens.
- Expert respondents considered that learning from other cities was very important and that the most effective ways to do so were face to face training, training arranged by local or national authorities, meetings within networks to exchange best practice, demonstration projects within EU programmes and a network of focal points to give advice. Experts felt that voluntary initiatives such as Local Agenda 21 were effective and could produce some changes in environmental quality. Expert respondents from the Southern MS said voluntary measures were more effective.
- To raise awareness of the impact of buildings on the environment, experts highlighted public procurement, promotion of sustainable construction in the city and a common methodology to assess performance.
- Half of local authorities experts only collected the environmental data required by law. The other half collected additional data to monitor the performance of the city. Nearly all cities that collect data to measure the city's environmental progress found the idea of a European common methodology to collect environmental data and indicative objectives provided at the EU level useful or very useful (95%). Cities not collecting such data said that they might collect it if it allowed a comparison with data from other cities. The idea of common objectives for cities was considered useful or very useful by almost all experts.
- Around 25% of all respondents said that the survey did not meet their expectations giving the reason that the survey was too general.

ANALYSIS

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was launched on 28 July 2005 and ended on 21 September 2005. The aim was to collect the views of the public and experts on the quality of the urban environment, the most important issues that concern them and to identify the measures that they consider would be most useful in solving the problems. The results were used to inform the development of the Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment which was adopted on 11 January 2006.

Additional, more technical questions were put to respondents indicating that they were answering as 'experts' rather than as 'private individuals'.

In total, 2,807 responses were received which is within the normal range for responses for questionnaires of this sort.

Limitations

The questionnaire process was not designed to collect a statistically representative sample of responses from all Member States (see table 1) and so the summary of the results cannot be taken as representing the views of all EU citizens. The responses to the section relating to the actions that citizens would be prepared to take to improve the quality of the urban environment suggests that respondents are more motivated and active in environmental issues than the average citizen.

The questionnaire was available in all the main EU languages and several others (DE, DK, EN, ES, FR, IT, NL, PL, SV). Response rates from some countries where the national language was not made available were still amongst the highest (e.g. PT). The European Commission publicised the questionnaire through a press release and notices on its websites.

Responses have been checked for duplicate entries and obviously false names (none were found). It has not been possible to verify that each response is a genuine person or from the organisation named. It is considered unlikely that significant numbers of fake responses have been made.

As an exercise to collect responses from the public, the questionnaire was necessarily drafted to be easily understood. As a result, around 30% of respondents felt that the questionnaire was too general.

Detailed Analysis

This analysis is undertaken to identify the overall message from the responses and then according to expert and private respondents to identify if experts had different opinions from private individuals. Regional variations in opinions were also explored. The EU-10 was considered as a block to understand if these MS had any different perceptions and needs from the Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment. Further groupings of the Northern MS (SW, DK, FI where DK responses dominate), Southern MS (PT, ES, IT, EI) and central Europe (EI, UK, FR, NL, A, DE, LUX, BE where French responses dominate) were also analysed.

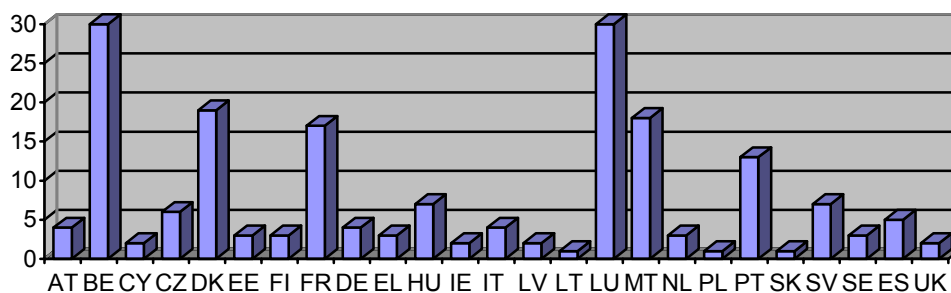
This analysis highlights the major issues that have come from the analysis. The full data of all responses per question is also made available in a series of graphs.

Response Rates

In total, 2,807 responses were received.

Response rates by Member State varied considerably with 35% of total responses coming just from France. However, response rates per million inhabitants were as follows:

Table 1: Response rates per million inhabitants



Of the 2,807 responses in total, 2,455 were from private respondents (88%) and 352 were from expert respondents (12%).

Private Respondents

Nearly 60% of the private respondents were aged 25-44, a higher ratio than for EU citizens. Private respondents were more often men (57%) than women (43%) and in the majority lived in large urban areas with more than 250,000 inhabitants where they live in the centre of the city rather than on the edge.

Expert Respondents

Expert respondents accounted for 12% of all responses. Expert respondents were from public authorities (30%), academia or consultancy (25%) or an environmental NGO (18%).

Local authorities had the highest response rates within the public authority category accounting for 22% of all expert responses. However, responses from local authorities only account for 3% of all responses received (just 76 out of 2,807 responses in total). Most local authority responses were from urban areas rather than rural areas.

Two thirds of expert respondents state that they are active in environmental protection although nearly 1/3 identified 'other' as they main work sector.

Satisfaction with the Survey

Respondents were asked about their satisfaction with the survey. Around 25% of all respondents said that the survey did not meet their expectations giving the reason that the survey was too general followed by the content not being pertinent.

There was a strong regional variation with 41% respondents from the Central MS reporting dissatisfaction compared to 30% in the Northern MS, 18% in the EU-10 MS and 13% in the Southern MS.

Question 1

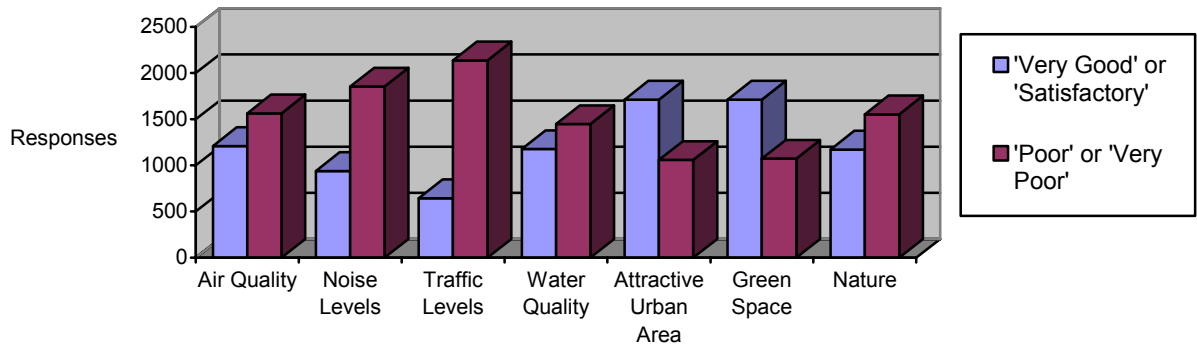
"The quality of the urban environment in the city where you live"

- **Respondents considered that quality of the environment in the city where they live was generally poor.**

A higher number of respondents identified the quality of the following environmental issues as 'poor' or 'very poor' rather than 'satisfactory' or 'very good': air quality, levels, levels of road traffic, quality of water and nature. The highest number of negative opinions was given for 'levels of road traffic'.

A higher number of respondents considered that the attractiveness of the urban area and quality of green spaces were satisfactory or very good quality than those who felt that they were 'poor' or 'very poor' quality.

Table 2: Quality of the environment where I live



- Responses from expert and private respondents were consistent.**
 For example, 43% of expert responses and 44% of private respondents said that air quality in the urban areas where they live was good (i.e. 'very good' or 'satisfactory'). This corresponds to the results from a similar survey for the Clean Air for Europe Programme.
- Responses for some parts of question 1 showed strong regional variations.**
 Regional variations were noticeable for the parts of the question that related to air quality, noise, nature and levels of road traffic.

Table 3: Regional variations for the quality of the air

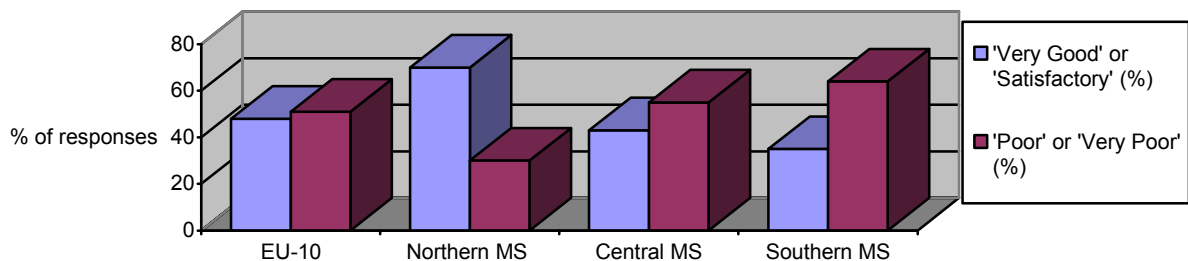


Table 4: Regional variations for the levels of noise

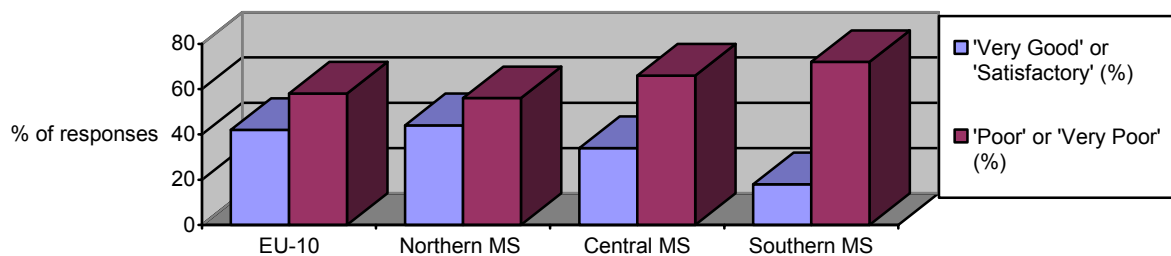


Table 5: Regional variations for the quality of nature

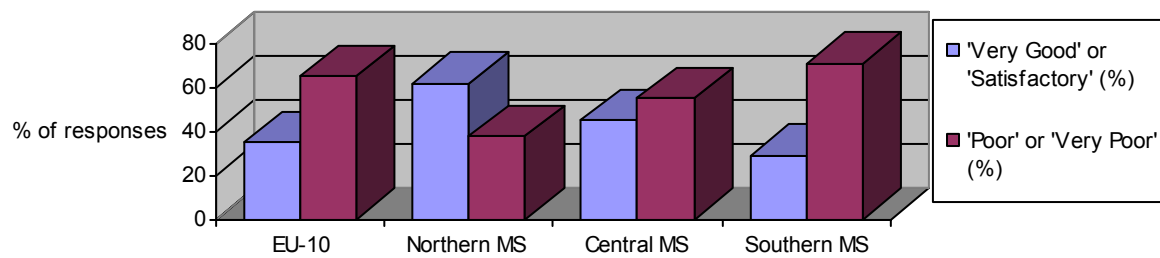
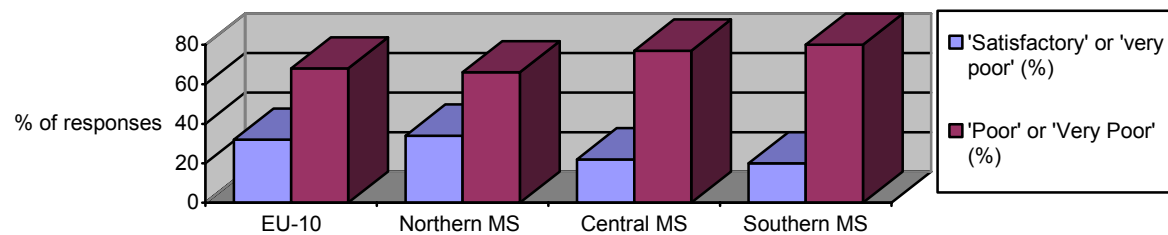


Table 6: Regional variations for the levels of road transport



Question 2

“Has the quality of your urban environment improved in the last 5 to 10 years?”

The following areas were considered to have improved over this period: quality of water, attractiveness of the urban area, quality of green spaces, nature and energy efficiency (the largest improvement was perceived to be in the quality of green spaces).

The following issues were perceived to have worsened over this period: air quality (but only marginally), levels of noise, levels of road traffic, volumes of waste generated and greenhouse gas emissions with levels of road traffic and noise being the issues considered to have worsened most.

- **There were significant differences between expert and private respondents for air and water quality, energy efficiency.**

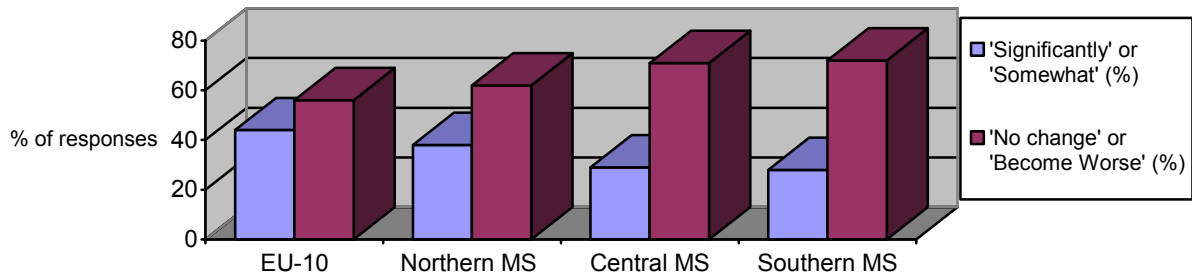
A higher proportion of experts considered that air quality had improved (50%) than private correspondents (28%) although a similar number of responses were received from both groups stating that air quality had got worse (28% and 35% respectively).

A higher proportion of experts (40%) considered that water quality had improved but only 28% of private respondents agreed.

On improvements in energy efficiency, 43% experts reported improvements against only 26% of private respondents but this may be due to a lack of knowledge (27% of private respondents answered ‘don’t know’ compared to just 13% of experts).

- **There were significant regional differences in responses for air quality, transport an urban sprawl.**

Table 7: "Has air quality improved in your urban area in the last 5-10 years?"



For the levels of transport, a higher number of respondents perceived a worsening or no change in the Southern MS (87%) than elsewhere (EU-10 MS 83%, Central MS 81% and Northern MS 76%). Urban sprawl was felt to be reducing in the northern MS, the only region to show this trend.

Question 3

"Why is it important to have a high quality environment in your city?"

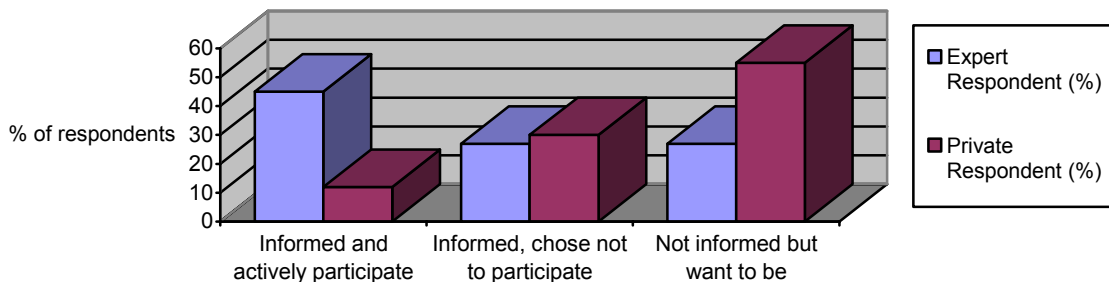
- **Respondents gave avoiding health problems, making the city a good place to live and work, and protecting nature in the city as the most important reasons.**
Creating a positive image of the city and attracting jobs and businesses were not considered to be as important.
- **There were differences between expert responses and private responses.**
A higher number of expert respondents thought it more important to have a high quality urban environment for creating a positive image of the city (87%) than private respondents (73%) and also for attracting businesses and jobs (76% compared to 59%).

Question 4

"How is the environment in your city managed?"

- **A higher number of respondents were not aware of the decisions that affect the quality of the environment that were aware. However, a high number of respondents wanted to be aware of such decisions.**
- **There are significant differences between expert and private respondents in their awareness and involvement in decisions that affect their environment.**

Table 8: Awareness and involvement in environmental decision making



- **There was some regional variation in responses.**
The majority of respondents from Northern MS said they were aware of the consultations on key decisions but chose not to participate. The majority of respondents in the other regions said that they were not aware about the decisions but wanted to be.

The majority of all respondents said it was important or very important to have access to information on the quality of the environment in your city compared to the environment in other cities.

- **Environmental policies are not considered to be coordinated**

On coordination of policies, over 50% of respondents felt that policies were rarely or never coordinated. The views of experts were more positive: 38% of experts felt that policies were sometimes coordinated compared to 27% for private respondents.

Question 5

“Managing Transport – Identifying Important Measures”

Respondents identified improvements in **public transport, promotion of cycling and walking, retrofitting of public vehicles and banning the most polluting vehicles** from entering the city as the most important measures.

There was little difference between expert and private respondent’s views or any significant regional variation.

Question 6

“Are you aware of the environmental performance of the building you live in?”

The majority of respondents indicated that they had some idea of the impact their home had on the environment but nearly 1/3 of all respondents did not know.

Experts had more understanding of the impact of their home on the environment than private respondents (48% compared to 30%). 33% of private respondents did not know the impact at all but only 17% of experts responded in this way.

Respondents from the Northern (33%) and Southern (32%) regions knew least often the impact their home had on the environment (EU-10 MS 17% and Northern MS 19%).

Question 7

“What would you do to improve the quality of the urban environment and environmental performance of your city?”

- **The majority of respondents indicated that they already do the measures listed in the survey** (use public transport, not use a car in the city centre, purchase energy efficient appliances).

Only for improving ‘heating and insulation’ and ‘participate in decisions that affect the urban area’ did a majority of respondents indicate that they would be prepared to do this in future. Better information on environmental issues was cited as the most popular factor in making these changes in behaviour.

A higher number of experts than private respondents say that they already purchase energy efficient appliances for the home (67% compared to 55% of private respondents) but 37% of private respondents say they would be prepared to do this in future.

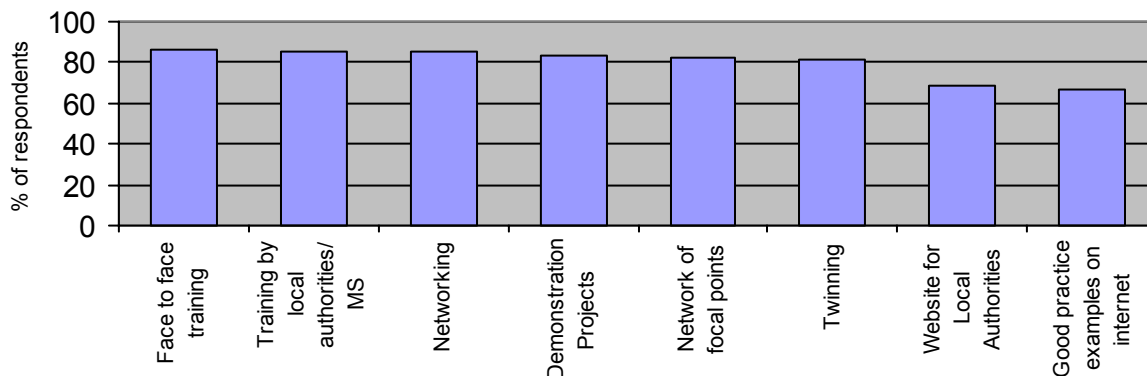
As with question 4, experts said that they participate in decisions that affect the urban areas more than private respondents (45% compared to 13%). Private respondents expressed a high level of interest in doing so in future (60%). To encourage changes in behaviour, private responses favoured better information (48%) whereas experts favoured financial incentives (45%).

Responses from the Northern MS slightly favoured financial incentives over provision of environmental information (the majority response in the other regions). Respondents in the Southern MS wanted financial incentives the least.

Questions for Experts Only

- **Experts considered that learning from other cities was very important (64%)**
The best approaches were face to face training, training by other local authorities and Member States and through networking activities.

Table 9: The most efficient way for a city to learn



On voluntary initiatives, 40% of experts felt that **initiatives such as Local Agenda 21 or the Aalborg Commitments were effective and could produce some changes in environmental quality** whilst 34% felt that they were less effective and only sometimes produces changes. Only 15% of experts felt that these initiatives were very effective but fewer (only 6%) felt that these initiatives were not all effective and failed to produce changes.

Regional variations exist: expert respondents from the Northern MS primarily regarded voluntary initiatives as sometimes producing changes in environmental quality whereas respondents from the other regions regarded that they do produce some changes. Expert respondents from the Southern MS said voluntary measures were 'very effective' more often than in the other regions.

Sustainable Construction

To raise awareness of the impact of buildings on the environment, experts highlighted setting requirements for environmental performance in the procurement of buildings, a programme to promote sustainable construction in the city and a common methodology to assess the performance of the building as the most important measures.

Data Collection

The experts from local authorities were asked about data collection. Half of them collected data only as required by law and the other half collected data to monitor the performance of the city.

95% all cities that collect data to measure the city's environmental progress found the idea of a European common methodology to collect environmental data and indicative objectives provided at the EU level useful or very useful.

For cities not collecting such data, nearly all said that they might collect it if it allowed a comparison with data from other cities and the idea of common objectives for cities was considered useful or very useful by almost all experts.