Assessment Study of the Urban Agenda for the European Union (UAEU)

Final Report

November 2019

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Glossary

CEMR	Council of European Municipalities and Regions
CoR	European Committee of the Regions
DG REGIO	Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy
DGUM	Directors-General Meeting on Urban Matters
EEA	European Environmental Agency
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
EIB	European Investment Bank
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESPON	European Observation Network for Territorial Development and Cohesion
EU	European Union
EUI	European Urban Initiative
EUKN	European Urban Knowledge Network
JPI	Joint Programming Initiative
MS	Member State
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TIA	Territorial Impact Assessment
TP	Thematic Partnership
TS	Technical Secretariat
UATPG	Urban Agenda Technical Preparatory Group
UAEU	Urban Agenda for the European Union
UDG	Urban Development Group
UDN	Urban Development Network
UIA	Urban Innovative Action
UN	United Nations
URBACT	European exchange and learning programme promoting sustainable urban development

Abstract

This study aims to provide a holistic assessment of the implementation and performance of the Urban Agenda for the European Union (UAEU). The UAEU is a multi-level governance framework for dialogue and collaboration that was launched in 2016 to identify and tackle urban challenges by bringing together Member States, cities, the European Commission and other stakeholders.

The study explores how far the objectives of the UAEU (as described in its founding document, the Pact of Amsterdam) have been attained, and provides insight into the strengths, opportunities, challenges and shortcomings encountered throughout the implementation of the UAEU to date. It also identifies areas for improvement and considers how to make the UAEU more effective in future.

The study was carried out by external consultants from Ipsos and Technopolis Group in 2019. The evidence base includes both secondary data (gleaned via a review of relevant literature and monitoring data) and primary data (an online consultation, as well as over 70 in-depth interviews with UAEU stakeholders and participants).

Executive summary

About the Urban Agenda for the European Union

The Urban Agenda for the European Union (UAEU) was launched in May 2016 with the Pact of Amsterdam. It represents a **new multi-level working method** promoting cooperation between Member States, cities, the European Commission and other stakeholders in order to stimulate growth, liveability and innovation in the cities of Europe and to identify and successfully tackle societal challenges.

The key delivery mechanism of the UAEU are a series of **Thematic Partnerships** (TPs), each composed of around 15-20 members representing various governmental levels and stakeholders. 14 TPs have been launched in four "waves", addressing a wide range of social, environmental and economic issues, such as Housing, Air Quality, or Digital Transition, to name but a few. Each TP is tasked with developing an Action Plan to identify and address key issues under three "pillars" of EU policy-making and implementation: Better Regulation, Better Funding, and Better Knowledge.

About this study

This study was carried out by external consultants from Ipsos and Technopolis Group in 2019. It aims to provide a **holistic assessment of the implementation and performance of the UAEU**. The study explores how far the objectives of the UAEU (as described in the Pact of Amsterdam) have been attained, and provides insight into the strengths, opportunities, challenges and shortcomings encountered throughout the implementation of the UAEU to date. It also identifies areas for improvement and considers how to make the UAEU more effective in future.

The analysis for this study is based on **five assessment criteria**: Effectiveness, Efficiency, Relevance, Coherence and EU Added Value. For each of these criteria, a set of specific assessment questions were defined, and an assessment framework developed to clarify how these would be answered.

The findings and conclusions are based on a **mix of primary and secondary evidence** from the following main sources:

- **Analysis of monitoring data**: The study team has reviewed data collected by DG REGIO and/or the Technical Secretariat on a range of issues, including the composition of TPs, the financial resources invested, the objectives and target audiences of actions, and their implementation status.

- **Desk research and literature review**: The team compiled and reviewed a wide range of relevant documentation and literature, including previous and ongoing assessments of the UAEU and academic articles.

- **Online consultation**: A specifically designed online survey was developed and distributed among relevant stakeholders via a range of channels (including the Futurium website). In total, 118 respondents completed the survey. Most of

these (31%) belonged to a city or urban public entity, while 21% represented a regional or national public entity.

- **Stakeholder interviews**: A total of 71 in-depth interviews were carried out, including 26 with EU-level and other stakeholders who were directly or indirectly involved in the design, operationalisation and/or implementation of the UAEU, and 45 with members of all 14 TPs (including 18 representatives of cities).

- **Case studies**: To assess certain themes that were of particular interest in greater depth, seven case studies were carried out. Each of these drew on the review of relevant documentation as well as the interviews with members of selected TPs.

Main conclusions

Based on the findings obtained via the various research methods and sources (which are described in greater detail in the report), this study concludes that the UAEU has been a **qualified success**, and there is a strong case for its continuation (albeit not necessarily in the exact same form). It has been widely welcomed by the key stakeholders it is meant to serve, and has generated a number of important benefits. Having said this, there are areas and aspects where the UAEU's functioning and progress towards its objectives has been hampered by certain challenges and obstacles. The main strengths and achievements of the UAEU to date, as well as its main weaknesses and issues that need to be addressed to ensure its future success, can be summed up as follows.

Key strengths and achievements

Since its formal launch in 2016, the UAEU has contributed to establishing a more effective integrated and coordinated approach to EU policies and legislation with a potential impact on urban areas. By far the most important vehicle for achieving this are the 14 Thematic Partnerships (TPs) that have been launched. The main strengths and achievements to date can be summed up as follows:

1. The UAEU's added value stems primarily from its **multi-level, multi-stakeholder approach**. This innovative and (in the eyes of many) ground-breaking feature has fostered significant collaboration between cities, the European Commission, Member States, other EU institutions, and other stakeholders, who have engaged in discussions and jointly identified solutions to address key challenges facing cities across a wide range of policy areas and themes.

2. By implementing this approach, the TPs have provided a **unique opportunity** for stakeholders at all relevant levels to enter into dialogue, better understand each other's concerns, exchange views and ideas, identify issues with the design and implementation of policies with a strong urban dimension, and try to find common ground and instigate actions to address these. Cities in particular valued the opportunity to have a seat at the "EU table" for the first time, and saw it as a significant first step towards a greater involvement in future EU policy making.

3. The **Thematic Partnership approach** has enabled the UAEU to identify specific issues and bottlenecks for cities, and develop concrete Action Plans to address these. All of the themes (ranging from Housing, to Digital Transition, to Climate Adaptation, to name but a few) were highly relevant. Similarly, the three pillars (Better Regulation, Better Funding, and Better Knowledge) were highly relevant, and helped to orient TPs towards relevant areas for action.

4. The **flexible, 'experimental' nature** of the TPs was a key enabler for their success. It allowed them to take a genuinely 'bottom-up' approach and define their own remit, focus and working methods in a way that matched the interests and expertise of their members. This helped bridge and reconcile the sometimes significantly different perspectives and priorities of participants, and address the very wide range of themes in a broadly effective way. Although this process was frequently difficult and time-consuming, the overall level of engagement among participants was high, and most (especially cities) were happy to be involved in what many viewed as a longer-term investment in better urban policy making processes.

5. The 12 Action Plans that have been finalised contain a total of 114 actions, representing a wide range of types, target audiences, and levels of ambition. Among these are numerous actions where implementation is progressing well, and is **beginning to generate tangible impacts**, including a few Commission legislative proposals that individual TPs have reportedly had an influence on, guidelines or recommendations aimed at improving the implementation of existing legislation, as well as a large number of best practices, guides, toolkits and roadmaps to contribute to the generation and dissemination of Better Knowledge.

6. Thus, the UAEU is beginning to exert a certain, albeit limited **influence in terms of strengthening the urban dimension** in the design and implementation of EU as well as certain national policies. This includes the creation of new national structures that were inspired by the UAEU, as well as, more generally, the attempts (more successful in some TPs than in others) to reach out to and raise awareness of relevant issues among non-participating cities.

7. Overall, stakeholder feedback suggests the UAEU is increasingly living up to the ambition of becoming the **"common frame" for urban policy initiatives at EU level**, with other EU programmes, policies and initiatives relating to urban policy being aligned to the topics of the TPs of the UAEU, as was called for in the Pact of Amsterdam. For example, the calls for Urban Innovative Actions are based on the UAEU themes and some of the Horizon 2020 Work Programme 2018-2020 topics that are linked to cities and urban development are based on the themes of the TPs.

Key weaknesses and issues to be addressed

The strengths and achievements summarised above provide proof of the strong potential of the UAEU to build on its early successes and continue to increase its influence over relevant policy processes. A clear majority of the stakeholders consulted for this study supports the continuation of the UAEU. However, this study has also identified a number of **challenges, weaknesses and shortcomings** that have limited the effectiveness of the UAEU so far. In order to build on and learn from the experience

to date, and maximise its future usefulness, influence, and attractiveness for stakeholders, the following key issues will need to be addressed:

1. **The implementation of many actions is uncertain**. In spite of the positive examples alluded to above, overall, there are serious doubts about the extent to which TP members (or other stakeholders) are able to fully implement their respective Action Plans, and therefore there is a risk that the UAEU will ultimately fail to have the desired impacts. The reasons for this are manifold; many are related to the issues listed below, and include a lack of clarity about who is ultimately responsible, a lack of resources, and a lack of direct control by TP members over the policy and/or legislative processes that would be required to achieve the ultimate objectives of actions.

2. **Relatively few actions focus on Better Regulation or Better Funding** (the first two pillars of the UAEU), compared with Better Knowledge (the third pillar), which accounts for nearly half of all actions, and whose share has grown from wave to wave of TPs. Although many of the Better Knowledge actions are undoubtedly relevant and important, their prevalence raises questions about the TPs' level of ambition and ultimate impacts. Arguably, Better Knowledge actions tend to be 'easier' to formulate and implement (because they do not require legislative changes that cities have no direct control over). However, they are also less likely to have as significant (potential) impacts as actions under the pillars of Better Regulation or Better Funding, as well as less unique to the UAEU. In these areas, the TP Action Plans have successfully *identified* and *recommended* a significant number of desirable actions, but actual changes to EU legislation or funding programmes are still few and far between.

3. The high degree of flexibility and experimentation that characterised the first phase of the UAEU was necessary to get the TPs "off the ground" and enable the mix of stakeholders represented in them to begin to cooperate and find common ground (see above). However, it also had drawbacks. The widely felt **lack of clear and transparent processes, requirements and specific objectives** (in particular regarding the envisaged aims and content of their Action Plans, as well as with regard to who is responsible for the implementation and follow up of the actions) also led to challenges inefficiencies and delays in the Action Planning process. For the next phase of the UAEU, the balance needs to shift towards greater clarity and transparency, even if this is at the expense of a certain amount of flexibility.

4. **The level of engagement of stakeholder in and with the UAEU was uneven**. The progress of the TPs relied heavily on a relatively small 'hard core' of active and engaged members, especially coordinators. Some other members were quite passive, for a variety of reasons including both a lack of strong interest and a lack of specific expertise. Notable exceptions notwithstanding, the two groups that drew significant criticism from stakeholders (in particular city representatives) due to their perceived lack of engagement where (1) Member States and (2) Commission services (other than DG REGIO).

5. **The outreach to stakeholders who are not directly involved in the UAEU has been limited.** Although some TPs have been reasonably successful in reaching out to and disseminating information about their work to a "second circle" of cities

(based largely on intense efforts by active and committed coordinators and EU-level organisations with large pre-established networks), others have been more inwards-focused. Overall, the profile and visibility of the UAEU remains quite low.

6. **Resource constraints were a challenge for the TPs**, which had to rely primarily on the time members were able to make available (on top of their "day jobs") to progress their work. Although funding was available to support TPs, its effectiveness was limited due to both the relatively small amounts available, and, in some cases, a lack of awareness (some TPs did not use parts of the available budget).

7. **The governance mechanism for the UAEU is not effective**. The UDG and DGUM were only able to provide a limited extent of meaningful guidance and steer for, feedback to, or coordination between TPs. This was partly due to the large number and specialised thematic focus of TPs; it clearly would have been very challenging for UDG and/or DGUM members to engage with all 14 TPs and their Action Plans in any significant depth. Various TP members also felt that the Commission could have provided more direction to the Action Planning process, although it was generally recognised that the Commission had to walk a thin line between maintaining its impartiality in the framework of the UAEU, and moving the Action Planning forward.

8. **Internal communication within and between the different elements of the UAEU has been lacking**. The study results suggest the flow of information between key actors (in particular the European Commission, TP coordinators, and the Technical Secretariat), as well as from these to TP members at large, and from and to the governing bodies, has been suboptimal. This has contributed to the perceived lack of transparency and awareness of key issues including the available resources and how they can be used, the responsibilities for and implementation status of actions, etc.

9. **The internal and external coherence of the UAEU is low**. Internally, the extent to which its elements (including both the 14 TPs and other elements, such as territorial impact assessments or the "one-stop-shop" portal) complement and reinforce each other is not especially pronounced. Externally, the alignment between the UAEU and its TPs, and other relevant EU initiatives (such as the timing of URBACT calls for proposals) was limited. This results in a certain amount of "working in silos". There is room for improving the way the UAEU interacts with other relevant initiatives, which was recognised by the Commission in its proposal for the European Urban Initiative-post 2020.

Considerations for the future of the UAEU

The study considered specific ways in which the Urban Agenda for the EU could be updated and adapted, in order to build on the results achieved to date, address the key challenges and weaknesses identified, and try to ensure the UAEU functions as effectively as possible as it moves into the next phase of its existence, within the changed framework of urban policy, in particular the proposed new European Urban Initiative (EUI). The three key issues to be addressed are:

1. Enhancing the implementation and impact of actions (relating to key weaknesses 1,2 and 3);

2. Improving the engagement of stakeholder in and with the UAEU (relating to key weaknesses 4, 5 and 6); and

3. Refining the UAEU's governance mechanisms, internal communication, and place in the wider policy / institutional framework (relating to key weaknesses 7, 8 and 9).

The ways in which many of these issues can best be addressed depends inter alia on the **overall strategic approach** to the future UAEU. Broadly speaking, a choice will need to be made between a continuation and deepening of the current "**thematic**" approach, which relies primarily on the individual TPs to formulate and implement actions, or a shift towards a more "**holistic / integrated**" approach, which would focus more on the elements that are common to, or cut across, the different priority themes. Therefore, when looking at the first two groups of issues listed above, a distinction is made between two options that reflect this fundamental choice. Under each option, we list a number of measures that could be taken to address the main weaknesses identified, and are aligned with the chosen approach. It is important to note that options A and B are not necessarily scenarios or models to be implemented wholly; different elements could be combined, and not all aspects listed under different options are mutually exclusive (i.e. it could be possible to find a "middle ground" and choose to address some aspects by following a more thematic, and others via a more horizontal approach). The aim of the options is to serve as an inspiration for how to address the issues the UAEU is dealing with and to highlight possible ways forward, whilst considering the political context / support needed.

1. Enhancing the implementation and impact of actions

As noted in the conclusions, the implementation of many actions defined by the TPs is uncertain. Moreover, the fact that relatively few actions focus on Better Regulation or Better Funding raises questions about the TPs' level of ambition and ultimate impacts. Below we outline measures that can be taken to enhance the implementation and impact of actions.

Option A: Continuation and deepening of the thematic approach

Ways to enhance the implementation and impact of actions by means of finetuning the current, primarily thematic approach to the UAEU, could include:

- **Prolonging the current 14 TPs** (potentially by up to another two or three years) with a focus on implementing the Action Plans, and potentially launching new TPs if other highly relevant themes are identified.

- **Stimulating amendments to current actions**, in order to make them more "implementable" (e.g. by revisiting their specific objectives).

- **Formulating clear and transparent processes, requirements and specific objectives for TPs**, and providing guidance to ensure these are fully understood.

- **Promoting cross-Partnership collaboration**, e.g. by expanding on the current coordinators' meetings.

- **Improving information on the status and progress of action**s, inter alia to facilitate better outreach to stakeholders outside of the TPs.

Option B: Shift towards a more holistic / integrated approach

The implementation and impact of actions could benefit from a more coordinated, integrated approach that goes beyond the TPs. This approach would make use of commonalities in terms of cross-cutting themes and desired results. It could entail:

- **Letting the Partnerships in their current format end** after three years, as originally envisaged, and refrain from setting up new TPs.

- **Setting up an alternative transversal / integrated working method**, to allow the former 'core' TP members to work together (on a strictly voluntary basis) on implementing the actions. This could entail a systematic identification of lessons learned, challenges and potential solutions identified across all 14 TPs; an identification and prioritisation of actions with a potentially high impact and a reasonable chance of implementation; the formation of one or more working groups to cluster the selected actions and identify commonalities and synergies; and ultimately, the development of a joint proposal for implementation, combining and building on the original actions.

2. Improving the engagement of stakeholders in and with the UAEU

As highlighted above, the performance of the UAEU so far was hampered by the uneven level of engagement of stakeholder in and with the UAEU, and its limited visibility and profile beyond the "inner circle" of participants, which was caused by a number of factors including resource constraints. Below we outline actions that could be taken to enhance the engagement of stakeholders.

Option A: Continuation of the thematic approach

Possibilities to improve the engagement of stakeholders in and with the UAEU by means of finetuning the current, primarily thematic approach to the UAEU, include:

- **Allowing for a greater role of cities in the composition of Partnerships** by revisiting the selection process of members.

- **Ensuring all TP members have sufficient relevant thematic expertise** (rather than "just" urban policy experience), in order to ensure they are in a position to contribute constructively to the Action Planning and implementation process.

- **Ensuring adequate resources for TPs** to facilitate greater and more balanced engagement of stakeholders (including smaller cities).

- **Strengthening the relations of the TPs with relevant institutions**, for example by making other EU institutions and national authorities (co) responsible for the implementation of actions.

- **Reaching out to external actors** that are not directly involved in the TPs, in particular dissemination of information about the work of TPs to a "second circle" of cities.

Option B: Shift towards a more holistic / integrated approach

If opting for a more holistic / integrated approach to the UAEU, in which the TPs in their current format would be disbanded and more integrated structures created (see above), measures that could help ensure the engagement of stakeholders in and with the UAEU include:

- **Expanding on the format of coordinators' meetings**, e.g. via regular meetings of the core former TP members with high-level representatives of the Commission and the Member States to discuss the progress of the implementation of actions.

- **Active engagement in thematic working groups** (see above), which could also serve as a platform for multi-level cooperation with the institutions as well as knowledge exchange and sharing of best-practices.

- **Ensuring adequate resources for engagement**, as a holistic / integrated approach would necessitate making available sufficient resources for the stakeholders to participate.

3. Refining the UAEU's governance mechanisms, internal communication, and place in the wider policy / institutional framework

As noted above, the performance of the UAEU to date was also hindered by an ineffective governance mechanism, suboptimal internal communication, and low internal and external coherence. Measures that could be taken to address these issues are largely independent of the options discussed previously (i.e. could be envisaged under either a more thematic or a more holistic approach), but are dependent on broader policy developments and buy-in from the relevant actors (especially regarding some of the more far-reaching changes listed below):

- **Improving guidance from the DGUM/UDG, including the Commission,** for example by revisiting and clarifying specific roles of the DGUM, UDG and UATPG, and exploring whether some 'recalibration' of the way the Commission interprets its role is possible.

- **Enhancing the links between the UAEU and the decision-making processes and policy cycles**, by looking at ways to make it required to consider the Action Plans as more than just 'another stakeholder opinion'.

- **Enhancing the representation of cities in relevant decision-making / governance bodies at EU-level**, in particular improving the representation of cities in the UDG and DGUM.

- **Improving the alignment with Cohesion Policy programmes and other EU initiatives** in the framework of the European Urban Initiative-post 2020.

1. Introduction

This deliverable is the **final report** for the Assessment Study of the Urban Agenda for the European Union (UAEU). This study was commissioned to Ipsos and Technopolis Group in December 2018 under the FWC 575/PP/2016/FC, and was finalised in November 2019.

This report is structured as follows:

- Section 1 introduces the purpose of the assignment.

- Section 2 provides contextual information about the UAEU.

- Section 3 presents the methodology used to deliver the assessment, as well as the limitations and challenges found.

- Section 4 summarises the key findings on five criteria used to carry out the assessment: effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and EU-added value.

- Section 5 provides conclusions from the key findings.

- Section 6 provides considerations for the future of the UAEU.

- Finally, the annexes include some of the main elements used to carry out this assessment, mainly the synopsis report, case studies and bibliography. The assessment framework and the intervention logic developed during the scoping phase are also included in the annexes.

About the assignment

This assessment study responds to the Report to the Council of November 2017 on the Urban Agenda for the EU (COM (2017) 657 final), which states that 'by the end of 2019, the Commission plans to carry out an evaluation on the Urban Agenda for the EU'.

The overall purpose of this assessment is to holistically assess the implementation and performance of the UAEU to date since the launch of the four pilot Partnerships and the signature of the Pact of Amsterdam, and to explore possible ways to improve its utility and effectiveness, thereby contributing to a shared understanding of the best ways to work with cities and support them in their development. More specifically, the objectives of the study are:

- Providing evidence on how far the objectives of the UAEU, as described in the Pact of Amsterdam, have been attained;

- Providing insight into the challenges, shortcomings, strengths and opportunities that have arisen throughout the implementation of the UAEU;

- Striving to understand the causes and factors of success or failure of the UAEU;

- Examining the sustainability of results and impacts of the UAEU;

- Providing guidance and recommendations in order to make the UAEU more effective, more efficient, more relevant, more coherent and with an increased EU added value in view of its future implementation.

The study covers all aspects of the UAEU since its official launch in 2016, namely: the multilevel governance approach, the operationalisation of the UAEU through the work of the Thematic Partnerships – including the development of Action Plans and implementation of actions – as well as other aspects of the UAEU such as the one-stop-shop and urban proofing (Territorial Impact Assessment).

2. The Urban Agenda for the EU

2.1 Background and objectives of the UAEU

The main aim of the Urban Agenda for the European Union is to identify and tackle urban challenges by bringing together Member States, cities, the European Commission and other stakeholders, into a framework for dialogue and finding solutions on policy initiatives that affect urban areas (Pact of Amsterdam, 2016). The Urban Agenda proposes to use a new multi-level, multi-stakeholder working method to better achieve the objectives of the Union and national policy by involving urban authorities in both the design and implementation phases of policy making. This in turn is intended to strengthen the urban dimension of policies as well as facilitate their uptake, ultimately leading to a more efficient and effective policy making and implementation process.

The main objectives of the UAEU, as laid out in the Pact of Amsterdam, are presented in the box below.

Figure 1 : Objectives of the Urban Agenda for the EU

1. The Urban Agenda for the EU aims to realise the full potential and contribution of urban areas towards achieving the objectives of the Union and related national priorities in full respect of subsidiarity and proportionality principles and competences.

2. The Urban Agenda for the EU strives to establish a more effective integrated and coordinated approach to EU policies and legislation with a potential impact on urban areas and also to contribute to territorial cohesion by reducing the socioeconomic gaps observed in urban areas and regions.

3. The Urban Agenda for the EU strives to involve urban authorities in the design of policies, to mobilise urban authorities for the implementation of EU policies, and to strengthen the urban dimension in these policies. By identifying and striving to overcome unnecessary obstacles in EU policy, the Urban Agenda for the EU aims to enable urban authorities to work in a more systematic and coherent way towards achieving overarching goals. Moreover, it will help make EU policy more urban-friendly, effective and efficient.

4. The Urban Agenda for the EU will not create new EU funding sources, unnecessary administrative burden, nor affect the current distribution of legal competences and existing working and decision-making structures and will not transfer competences to the EU level (in accordance with Articles 4 and 5 of the Treaty on European Union).

Source: (Pact of Amsterdam, 2016)

The Urban Agenda seeks to stimulate action along three key objectives (or "pillars"): Better Regulation, Better Funding and Better Knowledge, as defined in the Pact of Amsterdam, signed by the EU Ministers responsible for Urban Matters. In addition, the UAEU aims to address several cross-cutting issues[1] and thematic priorities. The latter have been addressed in the form of Partnerships' themes, namely:

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[1] These cross-cutting issues are: 1 Effective urban governance; 2 Governance across administrative boundaries and inter-municipal cooperation; 3 Sound and strategic urban planning; 4 Integrated and participatory approach; 5 Innovative approaches, including Smart Cities; 6 Impact on societal change; 7 Challenges and opportunities of small- and medium-sized Urban Areas; 8 Urban regeneration;

1) Inclusion of migrants and refugees,
2) Air quality,
3) Urban poverty,
4) Housing,
5) Circular economy,
6) Jobs and skills in the local economy,
7) Climate adaptation,
8) Energy transition,
9) Sustainable use of land and Nature-Based solutions,
10) Urban mobility,
11) Digital transition, and
12) Innovative and responsible public procurement.

Two more thematic priorities (i.e. Partnerships) were added under the Austrian presidency:

13) Culture and Cultural Heritage, and
14) Security in Public Spaces.

2.2 EU Policy context

The first Commission Communication (1997) "Towards an urban agenda in the European Union" (COM (97)197) recognised cities as "sources of economic prosperity and sustainable development, and as the bases of democracy" (European Commission, 1997). In addition, the Urban Intergroup, which was set up in 2005 in the European Parliament (EP), further institutionalised urban policy at the EU level. Actions such as the Leipzig Charter on Sustainable Cities in 2007, signed by Member States' (MS) Ministers responsible for Urban Development, showed a growing momentum regarding the role of cities in Europe and their importance as players in multi-level governance. In addition, the Charter called for the development of a 'European platform to pool and develop best practice, statistics, benchmarking studies, evaluations, peer reviews and other urban research to support actors involved in urban development at all levels and in all sectors', asking thus for an EU level coordination of cities.

In order to increase the visibility of the urban dimension of all Community policies, the Commission published a guide on "The urban dimension in Community policies for the period 2007 – 2013". The attention to urban policies grew in line with the broader growth in the attention for cities. Territorial cohesion and multi-level governance were included in the Treaty of Lisbon, and in 2011, a resolution was adopted by the European Parliament to strengthen the urban dimension of European policy development and enhance the involvement of cities in the EU policy making process. Multi-level governance and the involvement of regional and sub-regional actors is a key feature of the shared management approach to the implementation of EU Cohesion Policy and the structural funds.

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9 Adaptation to demographic change and migration; 10 Provision of adequate public services of general interest; 11 International dimension.

The Urban Agenda for the EU (UAEU) reflects the recognition that cities play a key role in delivering EU policies on the ground and that, equally important, EU policies need to appropriately reflect and address urban realities and challenges. The Urban Agenda responds to a need to better involve cities in EU policy making. It also reflects their need to share best practices and to coordinate local policies in dealing with societal challenges at city level. The UAEU was devised in a bottom-up process from cities themselves, with Mayors of Amsterdam, Barcelona and other major cities pushing for a more coordinated approach to policy making at EU level.

In response to these calls for collaboration and within the ambit of the European intergovernmental framework, more concrete steps were undertaken at EU level since 2014 through Ministerial meetings to involve cities in creating and in adapting EU and national policy. In order to develop the UAEU implementation concept, the Commission organised workshops with key UAEU stakeholders (e.g. Member States, city associations and EU institutions), in which the Commission encouraged participants to identify relevant themes of interest. In addition, the Commission launched a public consultation on UAEU in order to gather the opinions of all relevant stakeholders and further clarify the rationale and possible scope of action for an EU Urban Agenda (European Commission, 2015). The 225 responses received from stakeholders across all governance levels and sectors in 29 European countries, as well as Canada and the USA confirmed the view that the UAEU should support cities in addressing society's challenges, such as demographic change, urban poverty or migration without necessarily developing new legislation but utilising instead soft policy approaches. The respondents expected that the UAEU would achieve the following results: empower cities to work in a systematic and coherent way towards overarching goals; and making EU action more effective on the ground. The consultation results pointed that better EU legislation through "urban proofing", improved policy coherence and coordination of instruments, and development and better use of the knowledge base are avenues for moving forward the urban agenda at EU level. The respondents also emphasised the need for concerted action on few priorities. Focusing on a limited number of important challenges would make it possible to achieve results. The three suggested areas were Green, Smart and Inclusive.

The declaration 'Towards the EU Urban Agenda', or the so-called Riga declaration (Council of Ministers on Urban Matters, 2015) was agreed at the informal Meeting of EU Ministers Responsible for Territorial Cohesion and Urban Matters in June 2015. The declaration provided political support for the further development of the Urban Agenda for the EU. In 2016, under the Dutch Presidency of the Council, this process culminated in the Informal Meeting of EU Ministers responsible for Urban Matters and the signature of the Pact of Amsterdam, which launched the Urban Agenda for the European Union (UAEU) and established its objectives, priority themes and way of functioning (Pact of Amsterdam, 2016)

In parallel, the European Union was also involved in global dialogues that led to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development goals (SDGs) in 2015. Several goals have an urban dimension, including a specific one on Sustainable Cities and Communities (goal 11) that has given global visibility to the issue of sustainable urbanisation. In 2016, this movement was reinforced when a first implementing agenda

was adopted in order to complement the global framework, with a dedicated urban focus: the United Nations (UN) New Urban Agenda[2].

In tandem with the preparations for the post-2020 EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), conclusions of the trio Council Presidencies of Estonia-Bulgaria-Austria on UAEU are to: "*capitalise on results of UAEU Partnerships; ensuring long-term support for UAEU process and partnership, develop time-line for Leipzig Charter review, integrating UAEU and Territorial Agenda (TAEU) processes; capitalize on lessons learned from the UAEU process and method so far; continue the work of the Technical Preparatory Group (UATPG); continue with new UAEU themes and partnerships development in an improved way, with a perspective towards the Ministerial Meeting in 2020; reflect upon future UAEU support from Cohesion Policy (or realistic alternatives) and continue cooperation on the governance model of this support*" DG meeting on Urban Matters (DGUM, 2019)*.*

The Bucharest Declaration of the Informal Meeting of EU Ministers Responsible for Urban Matters, published in June 2019, builds on the above conclusions and calls, among others, for an improvement of the way the UAEU delivers to cities and citizens and for an improved integration of the UAEU in the Leipzig Charter and the EU Territorial Agenda (Romanian Presidency of the EU Council , 2019). It also paves the way for a review of the Leipzig Charter, which is to be renewed during the German Presidency of the EU Council in 2020, and take into account the new EU policy frameworks and evolving role of the cities in the EU and at global level.

Post 2020, a new instrument, the European Urban Initiative (EUI) will build on the Urban Agenda themes and on the integrated approach developed by the UAEU. The stated overall objective of the EUI is "To strengthen integrated and participatory approach to sustainable urban development and provide a stronger link to EU policies and cohesion policy in particular[3]". It will preserve the collaborative philosophy of the UAEU, vertically across multi-stakeholder representation and horizontally across (mostly) EC services. At its core, the EUI will aim to solve urban problematics in a coherent manner. The suggested EUI will provide three types of support: capacity-building, innovative actions (experiments), knowledge and policy development and communication. Most of the foreseen budget will be allocated to the financing of experiments to develop urban solutions that have a potential to be scalable and transferable to other cities. It is foreseen the knowledge creation strand will build on work from recognised institutions such as ESPON, World Bank or the OECD. Besides, the EUI will be linked to the efforts in localising SDGs in cities.

The UAEU looks to be an important priority for the upcoming European Commission, which is expected to take office in December 2019. As noted in the mission letter of 10 September 2019 of the President-elect of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, to the Commissioner-designate for Cohesion and Reforms, Elisa Ferreira, the

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[2] United Nations, *New Urban Agenda,* UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Development – Habitat III, 17-20 October 2016, URL: http://habitat3.org/wp-content/uploads/NUA-English.pdf

[3] European Commission, *Explanatory Memo: European Urban Initiative- Post 2020*, Article 104(5) CPR Proposal And Article 10 ERDF/CF Proposal, 2019, URL: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/brochure/explanatory_memo_eui_post_2020_en.pdf

mission of the latter should have a specific focus on the sustainable development of Europe's cities and urban areas. The letter also refers to the upcoming review of the Urban Agenda for the EU as an opportunity to look at how the Commission can better work with cities on issues such as climate change, digitalisation and the circular economy.

2.3 UAEU Governance

The Pact of Amsterdam (2016) mentions that the UAEU "will be taken forward by Member States together with the European Commission, the European Parliament, the European Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), the European Investment Bank (EIB), representatives of the European Urban Authorities and other relevant stakeholders." Thus, a participation of all relevant actors is foreseen in the UAEU foundation.

The strategic steering of the UAEU is provided by the Directors-General Meeting on Urban Matters (DGUM), which is the high-level decision-making body initiated prior to the Urban Agenda for the EU. The DGUM is composed of all Member States, the Commission and city representatives and associations (European Committee of the Regions (CoR), Eurocities, Council of the European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), and is co-chaired by the country holding the EU Presidency and the Commission (European Commission, 2017). The DGUM meetings may include a range of organisations as observers, such as representatives of Partner States, European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), European Parliament (EP), European Investment Bank (EIB), URBACT, ESPON and European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN) (European Commission, 2016).

According to the Pact of Amsterdam, the DGUM's role is to:

1) "Ensure that the actions are organised in such a way that they are transparent, conceived with and supported by (representatives of) Member States, Urban Authorities and the European Commission, mutually reinforcing and having the most effective impact on EU policy making;
2) Report to the Informal meeting of Ministers responsible for Urban Matters and Territorial Cohesion;
3) Monitor progress on the actions of the Urban Agenda for the EU;
4) Provide feedback on the Action Plans to the Partnerships;
5) Give informal guidelines for future developments of the Urban Agenda for the EU;
6) Evaluate the current and future set of actions of the Urban Agenda for the EU at the latest by 2020;
7) Review the initial list of Priority Themes which will be revised by the Informal Meeting of Ministers responsible for Urban Matters."

The Urban Development Group (UDG) (expert working level) is made up of representatives of the Member State ministries responsible for urban issues, as well as other representatives of the multiple levels of governance (EC, EP, EIB, CoR, EESC, city representatives Eurocities and CEMR). Several organisations and networks may act as observers and / or be invited to participate in a particular relevant session, such as Partner States, URBACT, ESPON, JPI Urban Europe and EUKN. The UDG is an informal advisory body to Directors-General's meeting on Urban Matters (DGUM). Its role is to

both review the progress of the Partnerships and discuss issues pertaining to the UAEU at the intergovernmental level (European Commission, 2016). In principle, DGUM takes decisions based on the opinion forming process at the level of the UDG.

It was considered that the work of the Partnerships requires "operational guidance and interpretation of aspects of the Pact of Amsterdam and its Working Programme in between UDG meetings." (Bulgarian Presidency of the EU Council, 2018). As a consequence, the DGUM tasked the Estonian Presidency in 2017 to develop a proposal for a "smaller group of technical experts to work on technical issues and preparation of draft documents to be reflected in the UDG on the implementation of the UAEU" (ibid). The mandate, scope, responsibilities tasks of an Urban Agenda Technical Preparatory Group (UATPG) was thus created as a non-decision-making body, to act "as a technical executive group, supporting the actual Presidency of the Council in preparing UDG and DGUM meetings only with respect to the items related to UAEU", and coordinate the technical issues related to the preparation of UAEU Partnerships (ibid). The UATPG is composed of 10 members, including: six Member States at a time – representing the rolling Presidencies (the two past Presidencies, the current one and the three succeeding ones); Commission (with the UAEU Technical Secretariat until available); three members in total from the European Committee of the Regions, Eurocities and CEMR.

Other key supporters involved in the implementation of the UAEU and present as part of governance bodies' meetings include members of the Technical Secretariat – represented by Ecorys[4], which was commissioned as the body coordinating the secretariat, as well as Eurocities and European Knowledge Network as outreach and knowledge partners of the secretariat. The support from the Technical Secretariat for all Partnerships is based on the framework contract managed by DG REGIO (and which finished / will finish at the end of 2018 for the Amsterdam Partnerships, mid-2019 for the Bratislava Partnerships, February 2020 for the Malta ones and mid-2021 for the Vienna Partnerships). DG REGIO has been actively engaged in all Partnerships. In addition, DG REGIO supervises the work of the Technical Secretariat.

The Technical Secretariat is tasked with the following activities: Supporting the European Commission in the implementation of the Urban Agenda of the EU through Partnerships, Communication on the Partnerships towards external partners, Progress and final reporting on the achievements of the Partnerships, Providing management and administrative support to the Partnerships, Provision of (technical and thematic) expertise to the Partnerships and Organise and reimburse travels for Partnership members.

Below is a diagram of the governance structure of the Urban Agenda for the EU:

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[4] International service provider in the areas of research, consulting, programme management and communications services

Figure 2 : Governance structure of the UAEU
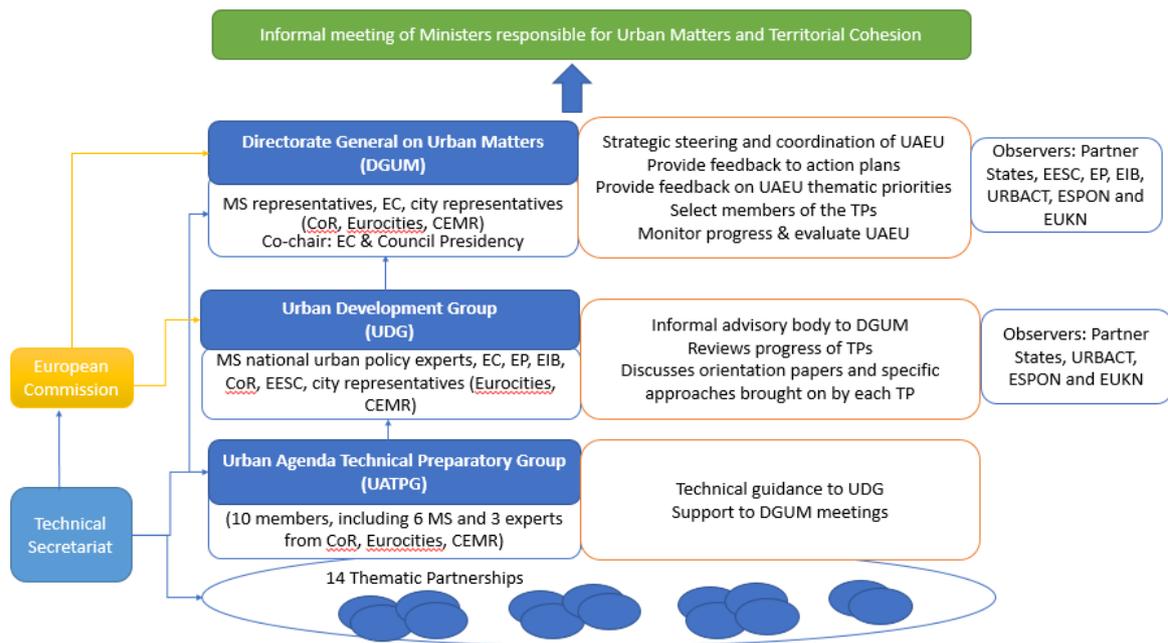
Source: Technopolis Group based on the Pact of Amsterdam (2016) and documentation received from the European Commission services

2.4 UAEU modes of implementation

The Urban Agenda for the EU is implemented through a set of four categories of actions, "aimed at Themes, Vertical and Horizontal Coordination, Impact Assessments and Knowledge". As specified by the Work Programme annexed to the Pact of Amsterdam, the following actions were foreseen to be undertaken under the UAEU:

1) "Thematic Partnerships
2) Mapping urban related Commission initiatives in the selected UAEU themes – identifying gaps, overlaps and synergies
3) Identifying main actors, networks and platforms within selected themes for streamlining cooperation and exchange of good practice
4) Exploring tools and methods for better urban impact assessment of EU policies for urban authorities
5) Alignment of Urban Innovative Actions with UAEU themes by the Commission
6) Contribution of URBACT to priority themes through exchange and learning, networking, capacity building, capitalisation and dissemination of urban knowledge and know how
7) Alignment of the work of UDN to the framework of UAEU
8) Use scientific work and solutions of JPI Urban Europe to promote and exchange evidence based proposals for urban policy and urban projects
9) Contribution of scientific research activities of ESPON, where relevant
10) Organisation of informal Ministerial Meetings, preferably once during each Trio Presidency term
11) Organisation of biennial CITIES Forum conferences

12) Development of appropriate tools and formats for transparent, inclusive and effective implementation of UAEU"

The Pact of Amsterdam led to the selection of an initial list of 12 priority themes for challenges to be addressed in Thematic Partnerships between Member States, regions, cities and city networks, the European Commission, other EU institutions, the Union's advisory bodies, and other stakeholders. In 2018, two more themes were added, and two Thematic Partnerships launched accordingly. According to the Working Programme of the UAEU annexed to the Pact of Amsterdam, the selected themes were chosen based on the following criteria: *"Themes must require integrated action at the EU-level and multi-level cooperation, clear support of MS, EC and Urban Authorities, address major challenges in Urban Areas, have the potential to generate concrete results in a reasonable timeframe and promote the EU2020 objectives"* (European Commission, 2016).

Figure 3 : Partnerships launched per Presidency

WAVE 1 – Amsterdam 2016	WAVE 2- Bratislava first half of 2017	WAVE 3 – Malta second half of 2017	WAVE 4 – Vienna end of 2018
•Air Quality •Inclusion of Migrants & Refugees •Urban Poverty •Housing	•Urban Mobility •Digital Transition •Jobs and Skills in the local economy •Circular Economy	•Climate Adaptation •Energy Transition •Innovative and responsible Public Procurement •Sustainable use of land and nature-based solutions	•Security in Public Spaces •Culture and Cultural Heritage in Cities

The Partnerships are tasked with developing an Action Plan aimed at addressing issues that hamper urban development in a specific thematic area. Each Partnership follows the same / a common organisational framework, which broadly consists of Urban Authorities, EU institutions, Member States, partner states, experts, umbrella organisations, knowledge organisations and stakeholders. Each Partnership should have one or two coordinators that should be designated from the start, with the responsibility to organise and chair the Partnership meetings, organise the work and coordinate the drafting of the Action Plan, implementation phase and monitoring (European Commission, 2016).

Each Partnership was launched with the same guiding principles: representation of all levels of government and relevant stakeholders (EU, MS, regions and cities, stakeholder organisations, etc.); a partnership of equals; 15-20 founding partners selected by DGUM following calls for expression of interest with possibility to add further partners and stakeholders; voluntary participation.

Figure 4 : Phases & Deliverables of Partnerships

Source: (Pact of Amsterdam, 2016)

Each Partnership is in principle following a process along five major phases as described in the box below and above figure. The duration of the Partnerships is, according to the Pact of Amsterdam, foreseen to be about three years. After this period, a Partnership can however request to the DGUM an extension, which would enable the Partnership to keep working under the UAEU umbrella, and for instance, use the visual identity of the Urban Agenda.

Figure 5 : The five phases of a Partnership

Phase 1: - Stocktaking

In the first step, the members of the Partnership would identify the existing work carried out on the Priority Theme (strategies, actions and working groups/ networks covering these issues at EU level). As the aim is to avoid duplication but rather ensure coordination and reinforce what is already being done, this step is crucial to decide how to move forward in building the Partnership (for example: adjust the topic of the Priority Theme and assessing the relevance of main cross-cutting aspects; limit the scope of the Partnership; organise active participation to existing strategies, actions and working groups/ networks to ensure that the urban dimension of all Member States is taken into account; etc.). In this stocktaking step, the members of the Partnerships would also identify the sources of funding and expertise which could be made available for the functioning of the Partnership. The Commission will contribute by providing the stocktaking at EU level.

Phase 2: Preparatory actions (identifying bottlenecks and potentials).

In the second step, the members of the Partnership would identify the bottlenecks and the potentials to identify the areas on which the Action Plan should focus. This will require in depth-research and analytical work. These could be at EU, national or local level. It would lead to a list of preparatory actions that are needed to define the final actions. The Partnership will take into account and respect the available data from Member States whose representatives are not included in the Partnership.

Phase 3: Define objectives and deliverables

In the third step, the members of the Partnership would agree on a set of actions that address the issues of the Priority Theme (Action Plan). The proposed actions need to respect the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. This should ideally be done in the first 6-12 months of the Partnership. A model Action Plan is available for each Partnership and should include:

- a Actions which could be, for example:
  - i Developing a proposal for better use of or adaptation of existing EU legislation and funding instruments;
  - ii Implementing a research project to find possible solutions and/or fill EU wide knowledge gaps.
- b Roadmap of each action indicating deliverables, target dates and the responsible organisation (e.g. Commission, participating Member States, Urban Authorities, etc.).
- c If appropriate, indicators and targets could be set (but only if there is a direct link between the Action Plan and the target).

Phase 4: Implementation of the Action Plan

In the fourth step, the members of the Partnership should coordinate the work (aimed at Better Regulation, Better Funding and Better Knowledge) on the implementation of the Action Plan with partners of the Partnership and other interested parties i.e. other Member States, Urban Authorities and existing Urban Networks concerned, etc. (once the Action Plan has been designed and agreed).

Phase 5: Evaluation of the Partnership

The DG meeting will coordinate the evaluation of the work of the Partnership after three years or earlier if deemed necessary by the DG meeting. Its outcomes should be presented to the DG meeting. The evaluation will provide input for other existing and new Partnerships and should, if appropriate, contain general suggestions for further exploration.

Source: (Pact of Amsterdam, 2016)

2.5 UAEU wider policy context

There are strong links between Cohesion Policy and the Urban Agenda for the EU process, for instance the multi-level governance approach. Around 115 billion euros from Cohesion Policy Funds are being spent in cities; out of which 17 billion are implemented locally through integrated urban strategies managed directly by urban authorities.[5] Specific initiatives that are funded through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) in the 2014-2020 period and are dedicated to urban areas include[6]:

- Earmarking a minimum of 5% of the ERDF for integrated sustainable urban development in each Member State (article 7, ERDF Regulation 1301/2013).

- Allocation of €371 million for Urban Innovative Actions, which promote the development of pilot projects in the field of Sustainable Urban Development (article 8, ERDF Regulation 1301/2013).[7] The initiative launches call for proposals to finance projects from cities. The entity in charge of the implementation of the UIA initiative is the Hauts-de-France region.

- The Urban Development Network (UDN), which is responsible for "reviewing on-the-ground deployment of European funds and boosting knowledge-sharing between cities involved in integrated sustainable urban development and in Urban Innovative Actions (article 9, ERDF Regulation 1301/2013)."[8] It helps cities implement article 7 and 8 and complements the work of URBACT III. It is the first formal REGIO platform where cities can interact directly with the Commission.

- The URBACT III programme, which is a European programme that promotes learning and exchanges on the topic of sustainable urban development and supports cities in cooperating towards finding solutions for urban challenges.[9] URBACT has three types of interventions: transnational exchanges, capacity-building and capitalisation and dissemination. ERDF funds the programme at nearly 75 million euro.

There are further areas of EU and/or global policies and initiatives that (may) address urban issues such as:

- Several sectoral EU policies and corresponding funding, managed by various DGs, address urban issues, such as the European Social Fund, Horizon 2020, the European Fund for Strategic Investments, LIFE programme, etc.

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[5] See https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/brochures/2019/urban-agenda-for-the-eu-multi-level-governance-in-action

[6] https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/urban-agenda/multi-level-governance-in-action

[7] See https://www.uia-initiative.eu/en

[8] See European Commission, 2019, DG Regional and Urban Policy, Urban Development Network

[9] See https://urbact.eu/

- The European Innovation Partnership for Smart Cities and Communities, which aims to "establish strategic Partnerships between industry and European cities to develop the urban systems and infrastructures of tomorrow",[10] especially with a focus on ICT, energy management and mobility.

- The Joint Programming Initiative Urban Europe, an instrument to align national research and innovation funding agendas, established in 2010 in the frame of the European Research Area and with the goal to "develop a European research and innovation hub on urban matters and create European solutions by means of coordinated research."[11]

- The Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy, a global movement of mayors who commit to curb green-house gases by 40% by 2030 adopt a joint approach to tackling mitigation and adaptation to climate change.[12]

- The UN New Urban Agenda, which provides a framework specifying how global cities should be planned and managed to promote sustainable urbanisation and social inclusiveness, and builds upon the UN's Sustainable Development goals (SDGs). The EU has undertaken a voluntary commitment to implement the New Urban Agenda through the UAEU.

2.6 Status of implementation of the UAEU

The information about the implementation of the UAEU has been collected during the process by the technical secretariat and DG REGIO. The study team has based its analysis on the monitoring data made available. Therefore, there are limitations to the information provided. In particular, the Partnerships' composition is based on a list of members that were nominated, but may or may not have been active during the implementation phase of the Partnerships. The data on the progress of the Action Plans' implementation was self-reported by the Partnerships, posing the risk of potential subjectivity and bias in the reporting.

2.6.1 PARTICIPATION IN UAEU PARTNERSHIPS

The table below shows the number of participating organisations per Partnership. There appears to be **no clear pattern between the different Partnership waves in terms of increase or decrease in participation**. The participation in the Wave 4 Partnerships is relatively higher than in the previous ones, with the Culture and Cultural Heritage Partnership achieving a record number of organisations participating, amounting to 37.

The UAEU Partnerships have a balanced composition, with the majority of participating organisations being urban authorities (37% of total participations),

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[10] See https://e3p.jrc.ec.europa.eu/articles/european-innovation-partnership-smart-cities-and-communities

[11] See https://jpi-urbaneurope.eu/about/intro/

[12] See https://www.covenantofmayors.eu/about/covenant-initiative/objectives-and-scope.html

followed by umbrella organisations (which include EU-wide organisations, knowledge organisations or other stakeholders) and EU institutions (which include the European Commission, European Committee of the Regions, EIB and European Environment Agency (EEA)), which each make up for 22% of participations. Member States account for 19% of the total number of participating organisations. It is interesting to note that the number of participating Urban Authorities has significantly increased for the Malta Partnerships.

Table 1 : Partnerships' composition by types of active organisations

Waves	TPs	EU institu-tions	Member State	Urban Authority	Umbrella org.& stake-holders	Total
Wave 1 (Amsterdam)	Air Quality	8	4	6	3	21
	Inclusion of migrants and refugees	6	4	5	6	21
	Urban Poverty	2	4	8	5	19
	Housing	5	6	6	5	22
Wave 2 (Bratislava)	Circular economy	5	4	7	4	20
	Digital Transition	3	7	7	3	20
	Jobs and Skills	3	4	8	3	18
	Urban Mobility	2	4	8	5	19
Wave 3 (Malta)	Climate Adaptation	4	2	5	6	17
	Energy Transition	5	2	11	7	25
	Public procurement	2	2	7	5	16
	Sustainable Land Use and Nature Based Solutions	6	7	9	5	27
Wave 4 (Vienna)	Culture / Cultural Heritage	11	6	15	5	37
	Security in Public Spaces	6	2	12	3	23
Grand Total		**68**	**60**	**115**	**68**	**311**
%		22%	19%	37%	22%	

Source: Technopolis Group based on the database of contacts for the UAEU Partnerships (updated to include only confirmed active members for the Wave 2-4 TPs, and the database of confirmed members of the Wave 1 TPs, verified based on the Final Reports of the Partnerships & interviews performed with the Partnership members).
Umbrella organisations include: EU-wide organisations, knowledge organisations or other stakeholders
Regions have been also counted as urban authorities

Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Germany have the highest number of participants (i.e. members) in the Partnerships. At the other end of the spectrum, Denmark, Austria, Estonia, Ireland and Slovakia participate very little in the Partnerships (see figure below). Overall, five countries (Denmark, Cyprus, Estonia, Slovakia, Slovenia) delegated only national officials to the TPs, whereas six countries only had participants in TPs from the city level (Austria, Ireland, Norway, Sweden, the UK, Latvia). Overall,

65% of the participants from Member States were the representative of an urban authority, while 35% were working at the national level.

Figure 6 : Participation per Member State
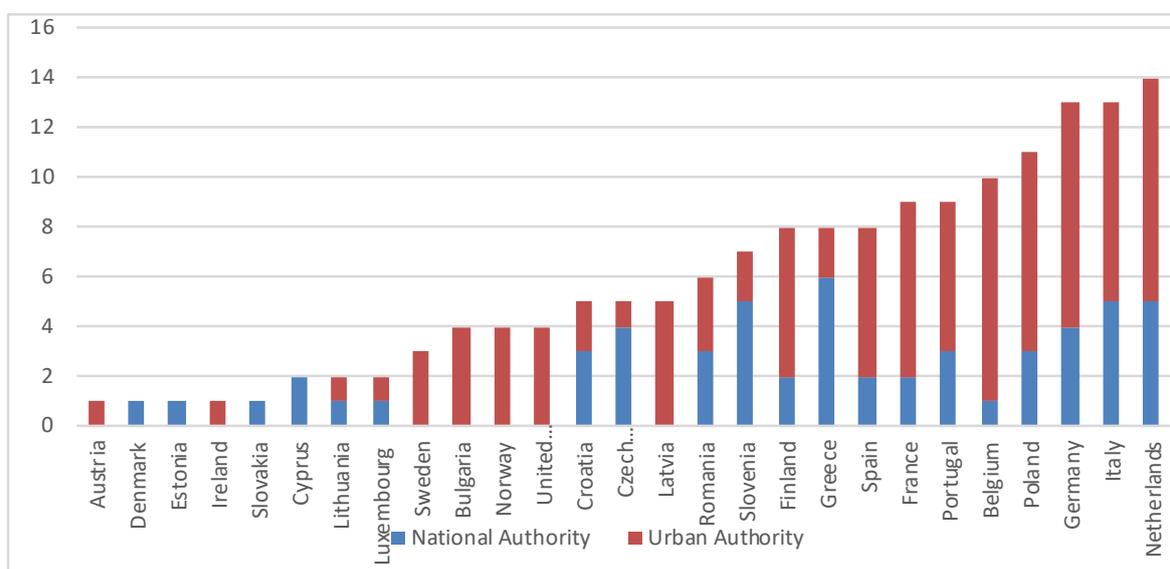
Source: Technopolis Group based on contact data of UAEU Partnership members. Note that the data is calculated based on the numbers of organisations categorised as partners, coordinators and members

2.6.2 OVERALL PROGRESS OF IMPLEMENTATION

A **total of 114 actions were planned through the Wave 1-3 Partnerships' Action Planning process**[13]. On the whole, **the majority of UAEU actions are in the incipient phase of implementation**, which makes it difficult to draw clear conclusions on their results or any longer-term effects achieved. In particular, almost half of the actions (46%) are in the initial implementation phase, while 18% are still in the planning and inception stage (see the Figure overleaf) (as of May 2019). Only 10% of actions (a total number of 11) are finalised, all of them stemming from three Wave 1 Partnerships, namely Air Quality, Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees and Housing. These three Partnerships seem to be the most advanced in terms of implementation, insofar as this can be made up from the monitoring data.

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[13] Based on the Monitoring data of the UAEU provided by DG REGIO. More details on the data used can be found in the Methodology section.

Figure 7 : Overall status of implementation of TPs – Waves 1-3
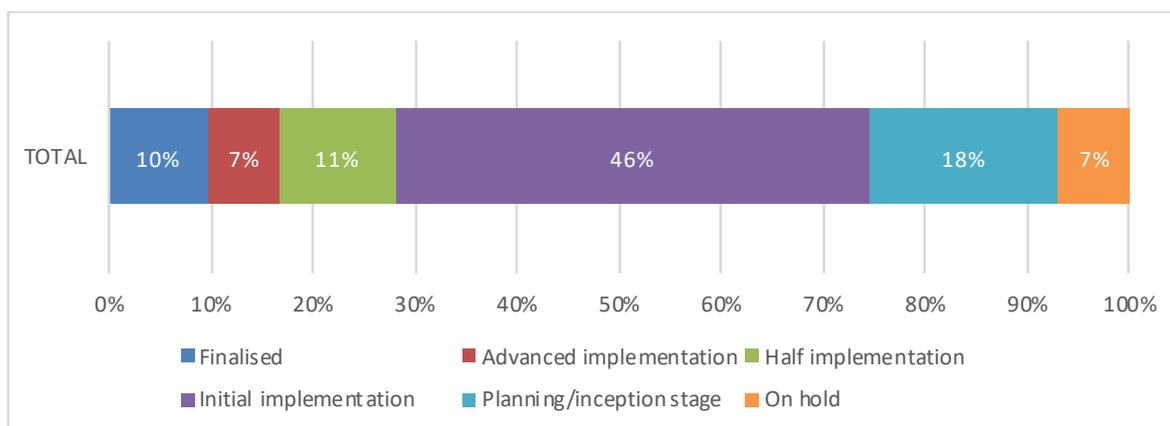
Source: Technopolis Group based on the UAEU Monitoring Table of Actions

It is interesting to note that the status of implementation is very different across TPs for the Wave 1 (Amsterdam) and Wave 2 (Bratislava) Partnerships' actions, covering the entire spectrum, from being in the incipient phase to the advanced or finalised phase. For example, in Wave 1, the Air Quality Partnership has finalised all of its five actions, whereas the Urban Poverty Partnership has not finalised any of its actions. In contrast, **all Wave 3 (Malta) Partnerships' actions are at the same initial stage of implementation, which hints at a potentially more coordinated approach to their development and implementation** (see figure below). A significant share of actions planned by the Wave 2 Partnerships are on hold, or in the initial implementation phase.

Figure 8 : Overall status of implementation by wave of Partnerships
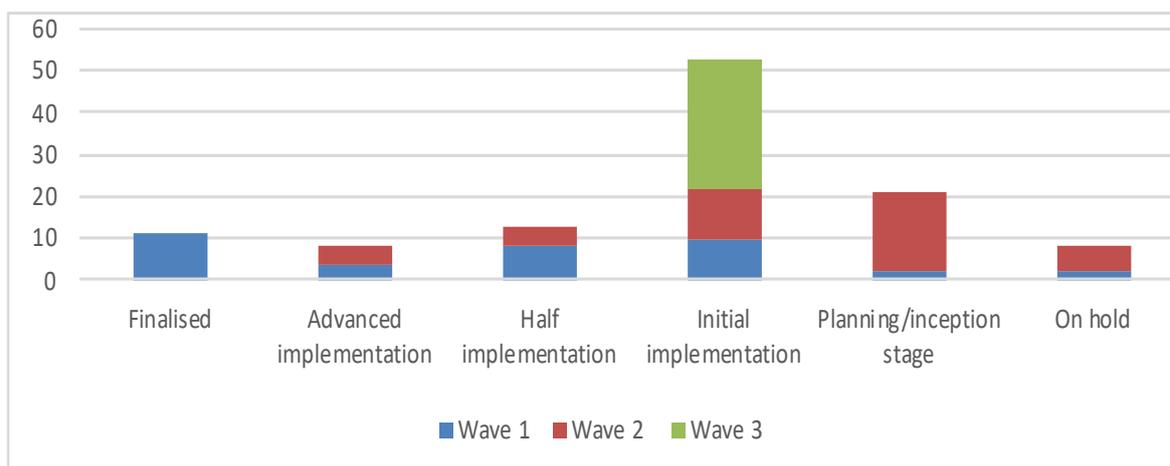
Source: Technopolis Group based on the UAEU Monitoring Table of Actions

We also looked at the implementation stage of the actions under each Partnership. As shown in the figure below, the number of actions per Partnership does not seem to be associated with a more advanced status of implementation. For example, the Wave 1 Partnerships (Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees and Housing) have a similar number of actions at an advanced / finalised stage, although the Housing Partnership has a larger number of actions than the Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees one. Two

Partnerships under the Wave 3 (Sustainable Land Use and Nature Based Solutions and Climate Adaptation) with similar number of actions as two Partnerships under Wave 2 (Urban Mobility and Jobs and Skills) are at a more advanced level of implementation. Granted, Partnerships with over 10 actions are the ones showcasing the most actions on hold or in an inception or initial implementation stage (Digital Transition – Wave 2, Urban Poverty, Housing -Wave 1). Apart from the number of actions, it is important to understand what other reasons drive the progress in implementing TP actions.

Figure 9 : Implementation status of Partnerships' actions
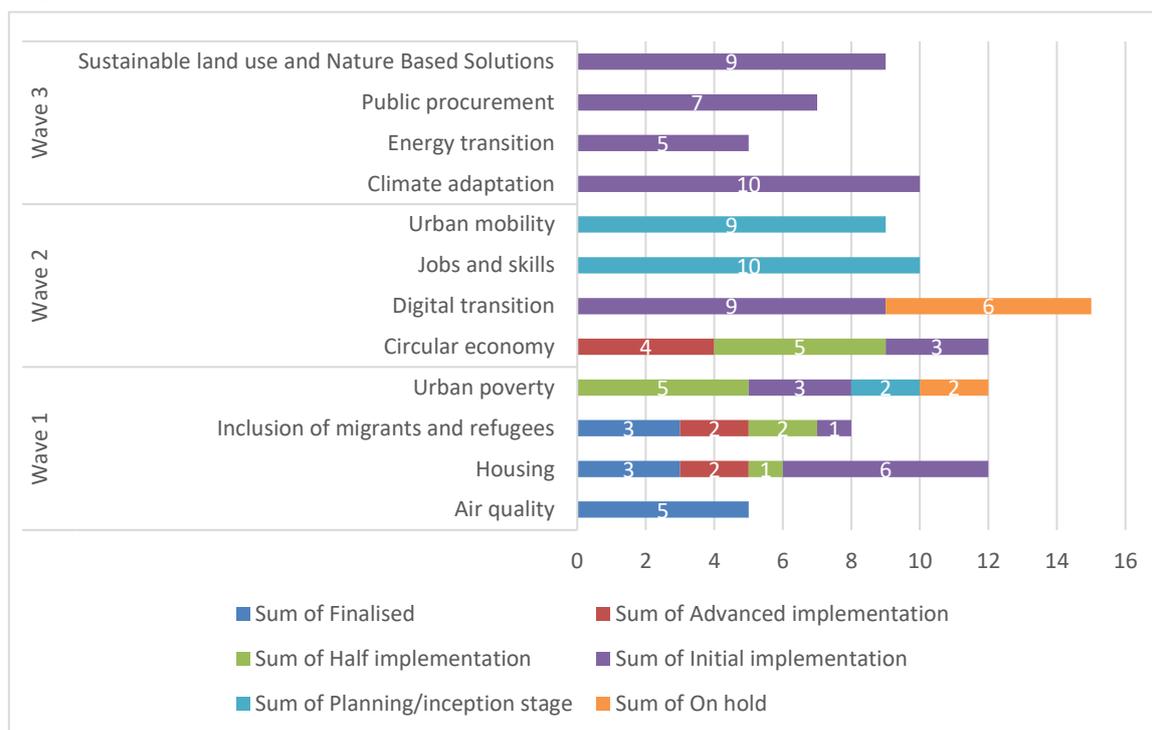
Source: Technopolis Group based on the UAEU Monitoring Table of Actions

2.6.3   OVERVIEW OF OUTPUTS OF THE THEMATIC PARTNERSHIPS ACTIONS AND TARGETED STAKEHOLDERS

The top three types of actions that have been taken up by the Partnerships consist of guidance documents and handbooks (22%), policy recommendations (21%), and data and indicators (18%). Partnerships engage the least in hands-on modification of EU legislation (6%) or policy preparation / impact assessment (3%). Moreover, none of the Wave 3 (Malta) Partnerships undertake the latter types of actions.

Figure 10 : Types of actions undertaken by UAEU Partnerships
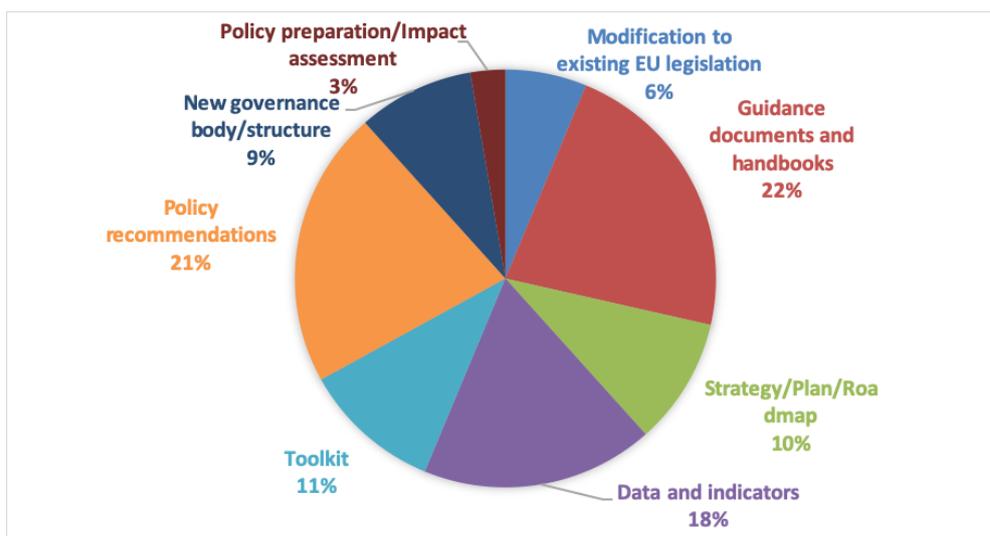
Source: Technopolis Group based on the UAEU Monitoring Table of Actions

Overall, **the majority of actions (48%) are oriented towards "Better Knowledge"**. Almost similar proportions of Actions are targeting "Better Regulation" (28%) and "Better Funding" (24%).

Comparing the Wave 1 (Amsterdam) Partnerships to the later waves, there is **a gradual shift of the actions away from focusing on Better Regulation, towards more focus on Better Knowledge.** While roughly 45% of the actions in the Wave 1 were focusing on Better Regulation, the percentage gradually decreased to 22% in the Wave 2 (Bratislava) Partnerships, and to 15% in the Wave 3 (Malta) Partnerships – in the latter wave the majority of actions focuses on Better Knowledge (58%).

Figure 11 : Percentage of actions per pillar and per wave of Partnership
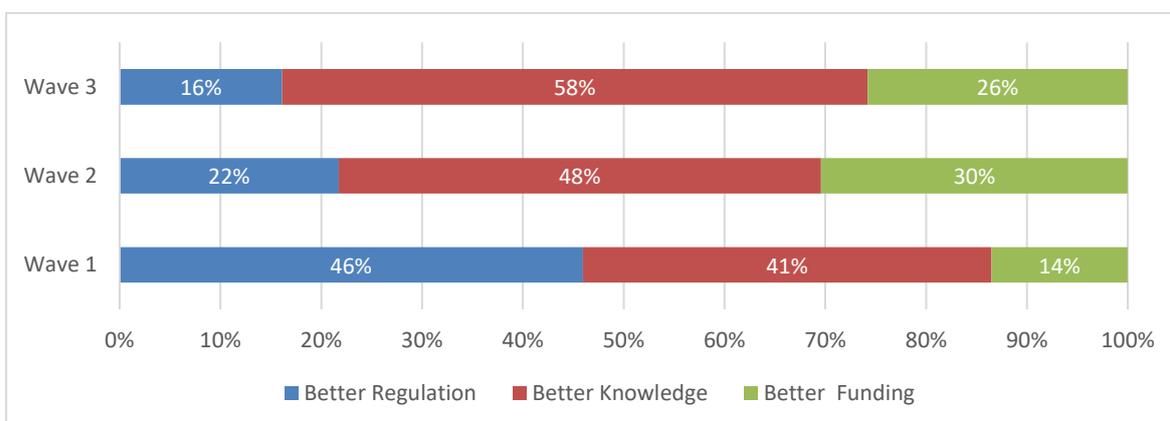
Source: Technopolis Group based on the UAEU Monitoring Table of Actions

When looking at the stage of implementation by pillar, the Better Regulation actions are the most advanced ones, with 19% finalised and 25% at advanced or half implementation stage. This might be explained by the fact that a large share of the actions targeting Better Regulation have been concentrated in the Wave 1 Partnerships.

On the other hand, Better Regulation is also the pillar with the highest share of actions on hold (9%). Overall, the Better Funding actions appear to be the less advanced, with only 4% of the Actions having been finalised and 8% being at advanced or half implementation stage.

Figure 12 : Overall implementation status by objective of action

	Finalised	Advanced implementation	Half implementation	Initial implementation	Planning/inception stage	On hold
BF	4%	4%	4%	56%	26%	7%
BK	7%	7%	13%	47%	20%	5%
BR	19%	9%	16%	38%	9%	9%
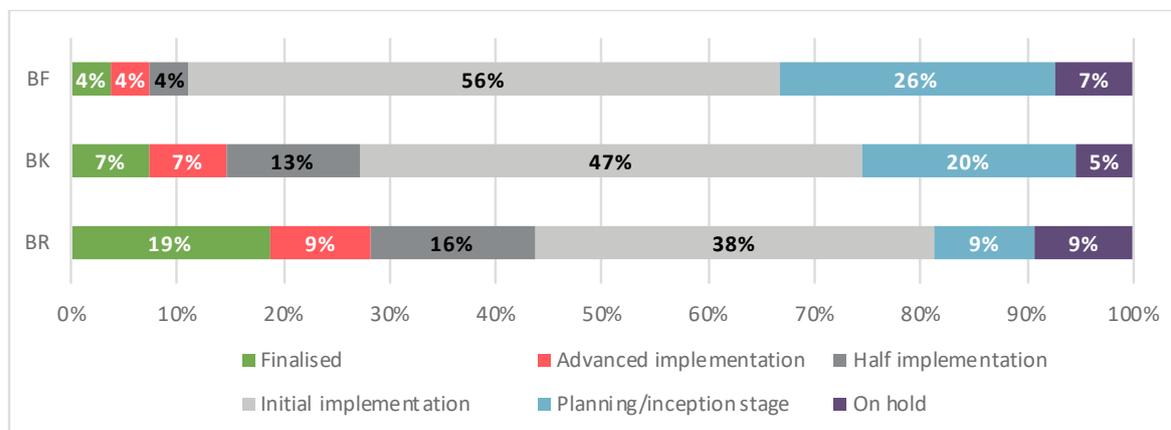
Source: Technopolis Group based on the UAEU Monitoring table of actions.

The actions are taken forward by one of the Partnership members who is appointed as 'Action Leader'. Most actions are led by urban authorities (58 of the 114 actions). The second most common leader of actions are the EU institutions (European Commission), which lead 35 actions. The EU level leads actions primarily in the Climate Adaptation, Urban Mobility and Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees Partnerships. The national level is leading actions in the Partnerships on Urban Poverty and Digital Transition. There is an uneven distribution of responsibilities across the Partnerships between urban and national authorities. The formers are active across the board, while the latter are not strongly engaged in Partnerships, either at the planning or implementation stage.

In terms of progress, it appears that the actions led by cities and urban authorities are most often in the advanced or finalised stage (21%), followed by those led by the Commission (17%). The national and local levels show similar shares of progress in terms of actions that are on hold / inception stage (26%), while this figure is slightly lower for the Commission (23%).

Figure 13 : Progress of implementation by type of action leader
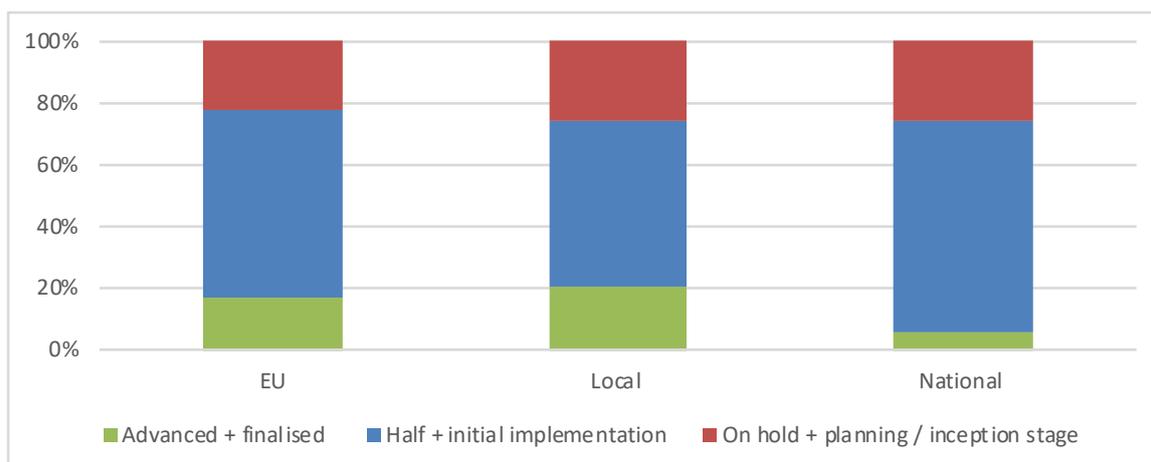
Source: Technopolis Group based on the UAEU Monitoring table of actions

Actions aim to address issues or bottlenecks at the EU, national or local level, and hence targeted institutions at the corresponding government levels. The implementation stage of actions seems, however, not to be related to the institutions targeted. There is no noticeable difference in terms of implementation status between actions targeted at the EU or the local levels: 9% of actions aiming at the EU level are finalised, versus 11% at the local level. At the national level, however, no actions are finalised. Slightly more than half (53%) of actions targeting the EU-level are either at the half implementation stage or at the initial implementation stage, whereas 62% of actions targeting the local level are at those stages. Notably, one fourth of actions targeting the EU level are in the planning or inception stage, compared to 17% of Actions for the national level and 13% of actions targeting the local level that reached the same stage. Finally, 6% of actions targeting the EU are on hold, compared to 7% of the actions targeting the local level.

Looking at the three pillars, we see that the Better Regulation and Better Funding actions often target EU actors, while the Better Knowledge actions largely target the local level. National actors, meanwhile, are less accounted for, with only 3% of Better Regulation actions and 9% of Better Knowledge actions targeted at the Member State level.

Figure 14 : Share of EU/National/Local targets by objectives of actions
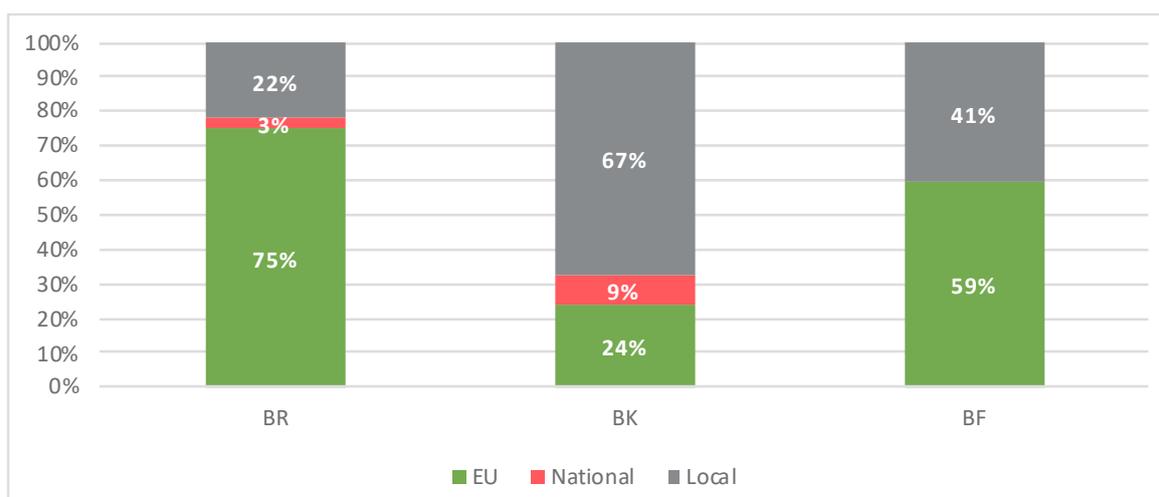
Source: Technopolis Group based on the UAEU Monitoring table of actions

2.6.4 <u>FINANCIAL RESOURCES AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE</u>

Based on information provided by the European Commission, the budget allocated to the UAEU technical support Framework Contract (FWC) amounts to € 4.8 million financed through the Technical assistance of DG REGIO and the European Parliament (preparatory action: € 2.5 million). It does not automatically mean that the full budget is available. In order to effectively use the necessary budget, the European Commission needs to formally request it and approval is subject to availability[14]. In total, circa €4.2 million are already allocated to the technical assistance to all Partnerships, in the form of tender contracts with the Framework Contract partners. According to the Technical Secretariat factsheet, the available budget for each Partnership is approximately **€ 250,000 for two years.**

The major blocks of activities of the FWC have been explained in the Technical Secretariat factsheet (Annex F) which was made available for TP coordinators and include:

- **Support to the Partnerships**. For each Partnership, a Project Manager and a Junior Coordinator have been appointed; they are responsible for providing management and administrative support activities about ½ day per week each, including assist and advise coordinators in setting up and functioning of the TPs, participate in meetings and draft minutes, help the monitoring and follow-up of Partnership activities etc.

- **Expertise to the Partnerships**. Expert days available with a view to fill specific Partnerships' needs and hence does not replace the expertise of its members.

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[14] See the factsheet 'Technical Secretariat in support to the Urban Agenda for the EU. General overview of the activities carried out', Urban Agenda for the EU (24 January 2018).

For each year of support, 35 senior expertise days are available to each Partnership.

- **Outreach and Communication.** The Technical Secretariat helps the dissemination of information on the Urban Agenda in general, as well as on the Partnerships, towards UAEU stakeholders and wider. Communication activities are mainly carried out via the online platform Futurium[15].

- **Reimburse travel costs to Partnership members**; maximum 3,197€/year per Partnership.

Based on the final reports of the Amsterdam Partnerships, it appears that the budget allocated to the travel reimbursements of Partnership members was totally spent in two Partnerships (Inclusion of migrants and Air quality), and up to three quarters spent in two others. All of the Amsterdam Partnerships were supported with close to 70 days of technical and thematic expertise from the secretariat (see Table overleaf), the use of the secretariat budget for experts was more mixed for the Bratislava Partnerships. Moreover, the Jobs and Skills Partnership did not make use at all of the travel budget, while the Circular Economy and Urban Mobility Partnerships also used less than a quarter of the travel budget.

Table 2 : Technical assistance budget spent (travel and technical expertise)

Wave	Thematic Partnership	Share of travel budget spent	Number of expert days used
Wave 1 (Amsterdam)	Inclusion of migrants	98.5%	70
	Housing	78.5%	68
	Urban poverty	73.1%	70
	Air quality	96.8%	70
Wave 2 (Bratislava)	Jobs & Skills	0	68
	Circular Economy	16.8%	87.5
	Urban Mobility	23.6%	81.5
	Digital Transition	76.6%	53

Source: Technopolis Group based on the Final reports of the Amsterdam (Wave 1) and Bratislava (Wave 2) Partnerships

In addition to the direct support to Partnerships, the Technical Secretariat was also engaged in a number of activities in support of the Commission, such as monthly

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[15] Futurium is a platform dedicated to European citizens for discussing EU policies and hosts the sub-page on the Urban Agenda for the EU.

reporting on the state of play of the TPs, development of guidelines, support for the organisation of meetings, etc.

2.6.5   COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

The main communication channels of the UAEU and Partnerships are: the Futurium website, the newsletter, the brochure and the Twitter account (https://twitter.com/EUUrbanAgenda). As of the end of 2018, most page visits (aside from those to the general Futurium website / Urban Agenda landing page) were received by the Inclusion, Housing and Circular Economy Partnerships' pages.

Figure 15 : Statistics on page views on the Futurium website
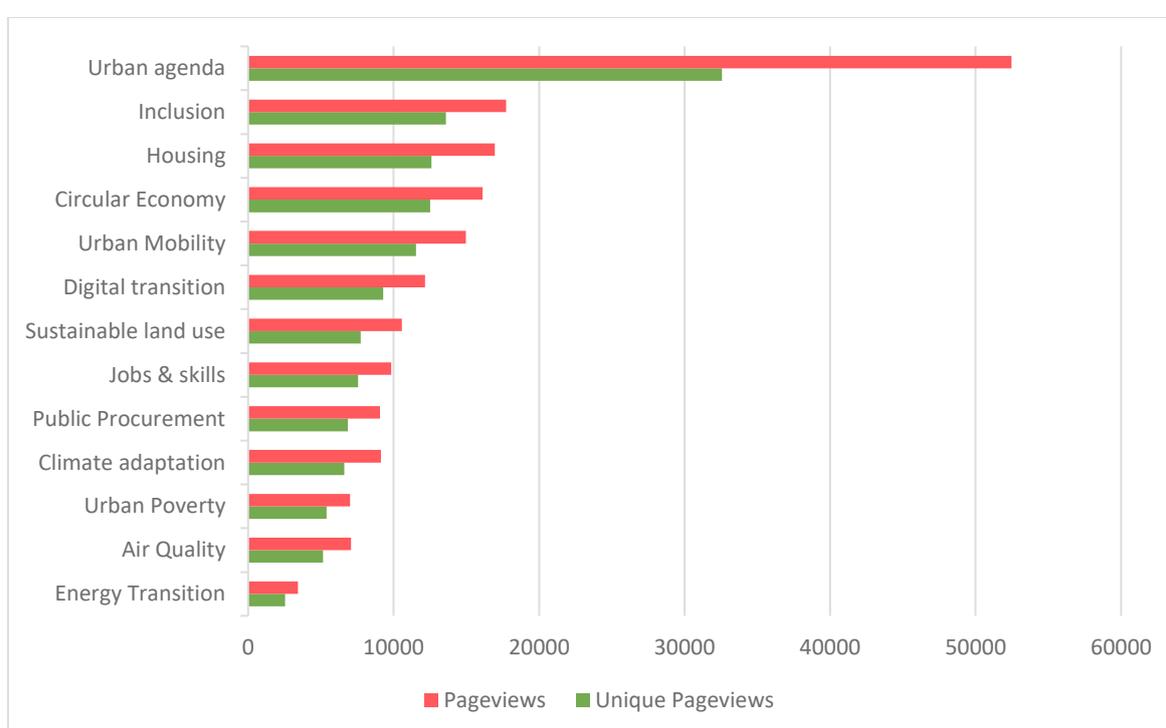
Source: Technopolis Group based on data provided by the UAEU Technical Secretariat

The Futurium website offers the possibility for registration on the platform according to one's own preferred Partnership topic or on the general webpage. By end of 2018, the number of registrations was rather limited: the Urban Agenda general website counted 98 registrations, while the top theme – Circular Economy – had only 48 registrations, with decreasing numbers for the rest of the Partnerships. This shows that the website communication platform / forum has not been used much.

The Twitter account increased its reach significantly in the 2018-mid-2019 period. The account had 1,110 followers with 279 posts by the end of 2018, but this increased to 3,540 followers by 30 May 2019. For comparison, the EUKN Twitter account has 1,297 followers, while URBACT Twitter Account has 13,600 followers.

The **newsletter grew its reach** from 176 newsletter recipients in March 2017, to 15,251 recipients in October 2019.

The **brochure** is a publication that showcases the activities of the UAEU as well as its achievements and therefore how it concretely benefits the citizens. For example, it includes "action stories" that present how actions support the three pillars of Better Regulation, Better Funding and Better Knowledge. It highlights how the UAEU cooperative process helps improve the governance, integrated urban development and implementing the UN New Urban Agenda. The brochure also presents the other EU programmes and initiatives that address sustainable urban development[16].

2.6.6 <u>SUMMARY OF FINDINGS</u>

The section lists the key findings of the monitoring data:

- The majority of UAEU actions (46%) are in the incipient implementation phase, which makes it difficult to draw clear conclusions on their results.

- The majority of actions (48%) are oriented towards Better Knowledge. The remainder was split more or less evenly between action aimed towards Better Regulation (28%) and Better Funding (24%).

- When comparing the actions of Wave 1 (Amsterdam) Partnerships to the actions of the later waves, a gradual shift can be observed away from actions focusing on Better Regulation, towards more actions focusing on Better Knowledge.

- The main target level of the actions are the local level (48% of actions) and the European level (47%).

- The Better Regulation and Better Funding actions mainly target EU actors while the Better Knowledge actions primarily target the local actors.

- Almost half of the actions are led by cities and urban areas (58 of the 114 actions). The second most common leader of actions are the EU institutions, with 35 actions.

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[16] European Commission, *Urban Agenda for the EU - Multi-level governance in action,* June 2019, URL: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/brochure/urban_agenda_eu_en.pdf

3. Methodology

3.1 The analytical approach / framework

The analysis for this study has been based on five criteria: Effectiveness, Efficiency, Relevance, Coherence and EU Added Value. For each of these criteria, a set of specific assessment questions were defined, and an assessment framework developed to clarify how these would be answered (see Annex C). The framework guided the data collection and analysis, and was informed by an intervention logic (IL). The IL was developed at the proposal stage and amended during the scoping phase (see Annex D).

The methodology included five tasks: analysis of monitoring data, desk research and literature review, online consultation, general stakeholder interviews and case studies. Each of these tasks in described in more detail below.

3.2 Data collection methods

3.2.1 ANALYSIS OF UAEU PARTNERSHIPS' MONITORING DATA

As part of the assignment, the research team reviewed the monitoring data collected by the Technical Secretariat in excel format (the Monitoring Table of Actions). The objectives of the MTA, as stated in the documents provided by the Commission include:

1. Monitoring the progress of the actions by the coordinators and other interested stakeholders.

2. Facilitating and supporting the coordination between Partnerships.

3. Integrating key information on all Urban Agenda actions, that can serve as a basis for further qualitative and quantitative analysis.

4. Communicating about the achievements of the Urban Agenda to the wider audience.

We received the latest Monitoring Table of Actions data as of 6th of May 2019. It is important to note that this data is self-reported by the Partnerships, which may lead to bias. As received, the data included a review of:

1. The actions by Partnership including the objective they refer to, the category of the actions, the starting date of implementation, the communication and outreach activities as well as the implementation status and results, the action leaders, the institutional level and target organisation that are targeted with the actions.

2. The action leaders' details and members of the Partnership involved by action as well as target institutions.

3. The cross-cutting issues covered by each thematic Partnerships' actions.

4. The SDGs covered by each thematic Partnerships' actions.

In addition, we have analysed the following data and documents provided:

5. Composition of the Partnerships (Wave 1 based on data available from the Partnership contacts at the end of 2018 and Waves 2, 3 and 4 based on updated Partnership data provided by DG REGIO).

6. Financial resources invested based on the information provided by DG REGIO and the final reports of the Amsterdam and Bratislava Partnerships.

7. Overview of the activities of the technical secretariat based on the final reports of the Amsterdam and Bratislava Partnerships.

8. Communication activities for the UAEU.

3.2.2 DESK RESEARCH AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The team engaged in a comprehensive review of all documentation received from the European Commission services and literature identified in the inception phase and interim phase. The literature review included previous and parallel assessments of the UAEU and academic articles, as well as PowerPoint presentations and summaries of surveys performed by UAEU members (EUKN, Eurocities, CEMR and the Romanian Council Presidency (2019).

Additionally, UAEU internal documentation including minutes and presentations of UDG, DGUM, UATPG meetings, coordinators' meetings and Communication meetings has been reviewed and reported in the following sub-chapter. The team also received final reports from the Amsterdam and Bratislava Partnerships, contextual information on the future of cities and the state of play of the Urban Agenda for the EU, as well as visions of the upcoming presidencies and the European mayors.

3.2.3 ONLINE CONSULTATION

The online consultation targeted all stakeholders by means of a single survey. This included the general public, cities and urban authority representatives, other public authority representatives (international, EU, national and regional), as well as other stakeholders including civil society organisations, NGOs, businesses, academic research organisations and experts.

The online consultation was turned live and posted on the Futurium website on 1 April 2019 and remained open until 30 June 2019. Apart from Futurium, the survey was distributed by DG REGIO and the Technical Secretariat by means of a range of other channels, including the Urban Agenda twitter, the Urban Agenda newsletters, the Inforegio website, as well as by the Presidency and other organisations (Covenant of Mayors, JPI Urban Europe etc.).

In total, **118 respondents** completed the online consultation. This included respondents based in 24 out of the 28 EU Member States. Most respondents were based in Belgium (22), followed by Portugal (12), the Netherlands (12), Germany (11), Italy (9) and Spain (6).

Most respondents (31%) who completed the survey belonged to a city or urban public entity. A further one fifth belonged to either a regional (10%) or national (11%) public entity. Other well represented groups of respondents were those from non-governmental organisations (8%) and those responding as a private individual (12%).

Table 3 : Type of organisation

	#	%
A city or urban public entity	37	31%
A national public entity	13	11%
A regional public entity	12	10%
European Commission	7	6%
Other EU institution / body	3	3%
An EU-level association / network	5	4%
An international organisation	3	3%
An academic / research institution	7	6%
I'm responding as an individual / private person	14	12%
A non-governmental organisation	9	8%
A private enterprise	5	4%
Other	3	3%
Total	118	100%

Q1.2. Please specify the organisation you belong to
All respondents (n=118)
Source: Online consultation

3.2.4 GENERAL INTERVIEWS

A total of 26 interviews with EU-level and other stakeholders who have been directly or indirectly involved in the design, operationalisation and implementation of the UAEU were carried out.

The aim of the general interviews was to collect information on: the effectiveness of the UAEU, particularly on the horizontal and vertical cooperation and interaction amongst UAEU stakeholders; the benefits achieved relative to the resources invested by the EU and other stakeholders (efficiency), the alignment of UAEU objectives with the needs of cities and urban areas in the EU (relevance); the complementarity of UAEU with other EU initiatives (coherence); and the added value of having the UAEU (EU added value). The table below provides a summary of the interviews carried out by type of stakeholder.

Table 4 : General interviews conducted

Stakeholder type	Number of interviews
EU institutions	7
Member State representatives at EU bodies	9

Stakeholder type	Number of interviews
International and European organisations working on urban and regional policy	7
Civil society	1
Cities	2
Total	**26**

3.2.5 CASE STUDIES

A set of case studies were conducted to assess certain themes that were of particular interest in greater depth than would have been possible solely through the methods described previously. The case study research focused on *seven themes*: 1) Governance, 2) Technical Assistance, 3) Partnership functioning and coordination, 4) The role of cities, MS and Commission in Partnerships, 5) Action Planning, 6) Implementation of APs and 7) Wider impacts and outreach. These themes were explored through the lens of the 14 Partnerships from all four waves. The table below shows how the seven themes were covered across Partnerships.

Table 5 : Themes covered across Partnerships

Thematic Partnership	Air Quality (W1)	Circular Economy (W2)	Digital Transition (W2)	Public Procurement (W3)	Housing (W1)	Migrants and Refugees (W1)	Urban poverty (W1)	Security in Public Spaces (W4)	Sustainable Land Use and Nature Based Solutions (W3)	Urban mobility (W2)	Climate Adaptation (W3)	Culture & Cultural Heritage (W4)	Jobs and Skills in the Local Economy (W2)	Energy Transition (W3)
1. Governance		x	x			x			x			x		x
2. Technical Assistance	x			x				x			x		x	x
3. TP functioning & coordination	x			x			x	x		x		x		
4. The role of cities, MS and Commission in TPs			x		x		x	x	x	x				
5. Action Planning		x	x			x				x		x		x
6. Implementation of APs	x				x		x				x	x	x	
7. Wider impacts and outreach		x		x	x	x						x	x	

The case study research comprised the following tasks:

- **Review of documentation** available for the 14 Partnerships. The study team reviewed relevant documentation for all fourteen TPs, including Action Plans, Progress reports, Partnership deliverables (if available) and, meeting agendas and minutes.

- **Interviews** with members of the Partnerships. The study team in principle carried out a minimum of three interviews per Partnership[17]. The total number of interviews carried out was 45. The table below shows the number of interviews per TPs and per member category.

Table 6 : Case study interviews conducted

Thematic Partnership	Member – category				Total
	MS	Cities	EC	Others	
Air Quality (W1)	1	1		1	3
Circular Economy (W2)	1	2			3
Climate Adaptation (W3)		1	1		2
Culture & Cultural Heritage (W4)		1		2	3
Digital Transition (W2)		2	1		3
Energy Transition (W3)	1	1	1		3
Housing (W1)	1	1		1	3
Jobs and Skills in the Local Economy (W2)	2	2			4
Migrants and Refugees (W1)	1	2	1		4
Public Procurement (W3)		2	1		3
Security in Public Spaces (W4)		1		2	3
Sustainable Land Use and Nature Based Solutions (W3)	3	1	1		5
Urban Mobility (W2)	1			2	3
Urban Poverty (W1)	2	1			3
Total interviews	**13**	**18**	**6**	**8**	**45**

3.3 Key challenges and limitations

As a general point, we would like to note that the study made relatively heavy use of qualitative data, based on stakeholder interviews. Substantial efforts were taken to weight and compare stakeholder feedback, and where possible findings were triangulated with stakeholder survey data and findings from the monitoring data.

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[17] Except for the Climate Adaptation TP, which was compensated in other TPs.

However, considering the limitations to the data available (see below), the options were limited in this regard.

In relation to the above, it should be noted that the UAEU's Partnerships' monitoring data (see Section 3.2.1) is based on information provided by DG REGIO and the coordinators of the Thematic Partnerships themselves, and there may well be differences in terms of how the different coordinators have interpreted and applied the categories (e.g. stage of finalisation or target levels of actions). Therefore, the data needs to be considered with a certain degree of caution – it provides an overview of the progress of Partnerships as perceived by their respective coordinators, rather than an objectively verifiable, fully consistent and robust account.

We also would like to note that the assessment was limited to some degree by the overall timing of the UAEU. Some Partnerships have not yet finalised their Action Plan, and many actions are still in the inception phase. This makes it, for example, challenging to draw conclusions on the impacts to emerge.

4. Assessment results

4.1 Effectiveness

In this chapter, we focus on the effectiveness of the UAEU to date, namely: the extent it has fostered cooperation, coordination and interaction across UAEU stakeholders, facilitated progress under the three pillars, and contributed to strengthening the urban dimension in the design and implementation of relevant EU and national policies. It also includes the main drivers and barriers of the UAEU's effectiveness.

4.1.1 <u>COOPERATION, COORDINATION AND INTERACTION BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS</u>

Assessment question 1: To what extent has the UAEU fostered effective cooperation, coordination and interaction between stakeholders at different levels?

According to the majority of the consulted UAEU stakeholders, **the Urban Agenda has been highly effective at fostering cooperation, coordination and interaction between stakeholders**. Moreover, multi-level cooperation is often considered the main achievement of the Urban Agenda to date. The UAEU brings together organisations that normally do not interact with each other (e.g. cities and DGs), allowing them to find solutions for urban challenges. The networks established by the UAEU, which include cities, Member States, the Commission and other stakeholders, have substantially changed the way these stakeholders interacted with each other, as highlighted by most interviewees. This was confirmed by the survey, in which 80% of respondents indicated that the Urban Agenda improved networking and collaboration on urban issues with all stakeholders.

The UAEU allows for a systematic and multi-level European dialogue, though the Thematic Partnership approach, in which all relevant levels of governance sit around the same table to co-design principles and actions that can contribute to addressing key urban challenges. The majority of stakeholders considered **this TP approach to be a first good formal step to get cities more directly involved in EU policy related to urban matters**. It was considered to be a unique approach in comparison to the other existing EU programmes and initiatives. For example, URBACT, an EU funding programme, provides a platform and funding for cities to work together and develop integrated solutions to common urban challenges. It differs from the UAEU in that it does not provide the chance to discuss and develop these ideas and solutions with other Members States and the Commission (see coherence).

Having cities at the table, discussing key urban challenges with MS and the EC was particularly valued by all stakeholders consulted. Cities usually got engaged in the UAEU with a clear objective to find practical solutions to their local challenges and needs, including by increasing their knowledge on certain urban issues and / or by trying to influence policy at the EU level (for example with the aim of improving local authorities' access to EU funding by relaxing certain requirements of certain EU funds). TP interviewees perceived cities as very valuable contributors as they share their local knowledge, experiences and challenges, and come up with concrete ideas and propositions. This practical experience was appreciated by Members States and the Europeans Commission – which tend to be further removed from what is happening 'on

the ground'. For this reason, these other stakeholders regarded the involvement of **cities as the key benefit of the multi-level approach.**

Moreover, many stakeholders highlighted **the importance of having "other stakeholders" involved in the UAEU,** such as ESPON, EUKN, URBACT as well as umbrella organisation such as CEMR and Eurocities, and their contribution to the advancement of informal intergovernmental cooperation at both the vertical and horizontal levels. At the UDG and DGUM meetings, these "other stakeholders" are perceived as key contributors, bringing extensive experience in urban issues, and with the potential to significantly support the discussions. Similarly, TP interviewees highlighted how relevant these other stakeholders' experience and advice were when preparing the Action Plans, as well as the importance of their role of mediator when needed. TP interviewees also emphasised the multiplier and consultative role of these organisations; they can consult members of their organisation about actions included in the APs and can disseminate information (including on the Action Plans) of the TPs.

The **TP approach** used in the UAEU to jointly identify issues, challenges and actions, and subsequently operationalise the ideas and proposals of different stakeholders, was described as **overall "quite practical and pragmatic"** by stakeholders. Several believed it to be one of the success factors of the UAEU, some criticism on its implementation notwithstanding (see below). Some Member States have been inspired by the Urban Agenda and applied similar approaches at national and/or regional level.[18] For example, the Habitat Urbano pilot group – part of the Urban Agenda of the Basque Region in Spain – brings together 40 stakeholders from the private and public sector to discuss themes that are important to cities in the region such as digitalisation, health, culture and cultural heritage, employability, gender, etc.[19]

Even though the overall perception of the cooperation, coordination and interaction between stakeholders at different levels through the UAEU is positive, stakeholders had mixed views on a number of elements, each of which is described in more detail below. This includes:

- **The formation and composition of the TPs**, particularly regarding the criteria for participation and the representativeness of members.

- **The participation and engagement of different stakeholders in the UAEU;** not only at the TP level but also with regard to their relationship with the DGUM and UDG.

- **The working methods of the TPs**, and particularly the role of the coordinators.

The formation and composition of the TPs

Most of the consulted stakeholders **did not have a clear understanding of the criteria for selecting the stakeholders that form part of each TP.** Interviewees perceived that the formation and composition of Wave 1 TPs was different than for the

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[18] Urban agenda for the EU Multi-level governance in action (2019), DG REGIO

[19] Ibid.

other three waves. Some stated that Member States played an important role in deciding which organisations were part of the TPs in Wave 1, and described the approach used to select members for wave 1 TPs as "a first come first served approach". This often meant in practice that participation was largely limited to those cities that had been actively involved in urban policy discussions at the EU level before, like the cities of Amsterdam and Vienna. For the other three waves, particularly for Wave 4 TPs, interviewees found the selection and formation process more structured, as the Commission was reportedly more involved in the selection of TP members. Contributing to the structure of the selection process in Waves 2 and 3, stakeholders also highlighted that stakeholders representing urban areas and cities, as well as Member States, could propose partners to get involved in Partnerships taking into consideration their expertise, and then DGUM representatives would discuss and decide on the final list of partners. The selection of TP partners for the 4th wave of TPs was done differently than for the first three waves; a call for interest was published in the Futurium website for which candidates could submit their applications following a template with selection criteria. Partners for the last two TPs (Wave 4) were selected based on the submitted applications by DGUM representatives, taking into account the geographical balance and size of cities. This process ensured a more transparent selection of partners. Even if the TP formation was more structured in the last three waves and to an extent more transparent in wave 4, **the criteria used to decide on the final list of TP partners were not clear to stakeholders.** Interviewees highlighted for example that in situations where stakeholders proposed two organisations from the same country to participate in a Partnership, there was a lack of clarity on why one, or both, were selected (some Partnerships have a ministry and city from the same Member State).

Several interviewees made **suggestions on how to improve the clarity in the selection process of TPs and define clear criteria for participation**. Firstly, they argued that, if any further TPs are launched in the future, there should be a guidance document outlining selection criteria as well as what is expected of members, including aspects such as participation in meetings, the type of expertise that members should bring to the TP (e.g. thematic expertise rather than general urban / spatial planning expertise), responsibilities of coordinators etc. It was suggested that, to ensure that TP members are selected based on the criteria included in the guidance document, each organisation should draft a letter of intent or application form stating their commitment to the TP and their responsibilities, in order to be considered in the selection process. Moreover, interviewees highlighted that some sort of feedback / explanation should be given to organisations that were not included in specific TPs.

Nevertheless, the **overall composition of the existing TPs was considered to be quite balanced**. Survey respondents were typically fairly positive on the composition of the Thematic Partnerships: when asked if the TPs of the UAEU are composed of a balanced set of members, more than half (54%) agreed or strongly agreed (see figure below). Some concerns were raised regarding the lack of representation of small cities and (in some TPs) Member States. Additionally, some interviewees questioned why regions seem to have been left out of the UAEU framework, as only one or two TP include them as members.

Figure 16 : **Composition of Thematic Partnerships**
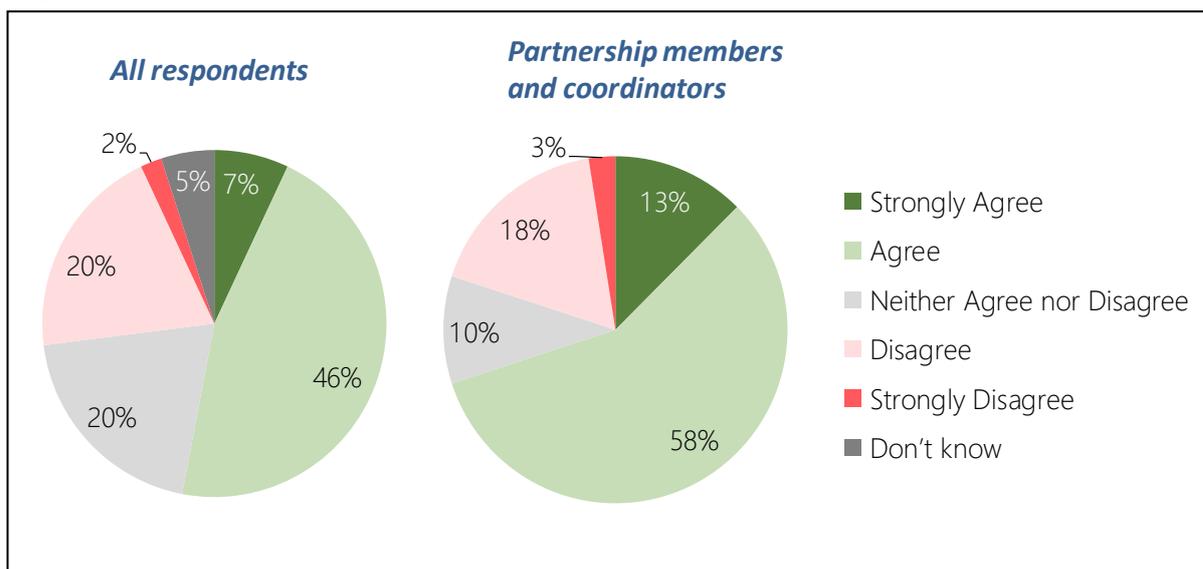
Q3.3. Do you agree or disagree that Partnerships of the Urban Agenda are composed of a balanced set of Members?
Please answer for the Thematic Partnership(s) you know best.
%; All respondents who are familiar with a Partnership / All respondent who are a Member or Coordinator in a Partnerships (n=82 / 40)
Source: Online consultation

The participation and engagement of different stakeholders in the UAEU

When considering which types of stakeholders were more engaged in the TPs, **most TP interviewees felt cities were generally most engaged.** It was noted that cities typically regard their involvement in the UAEU as an opportunity to find solutions to practical urban problems, increase their knowledge on relevant policies and practises and feed into EU policymaking. The high level of involvement of cities in TPs is also visible from the number of actions that they have put forward; according to the monitoring data, just over half of all actions are led by urban authorities. But even though cities on average appear to have been the most active members in the TPs, their engagement varied within each TP. According to TP interviewees, typically a limited number of cities were highly engaged, while others played a more passive role. This was thought to be driven by the following two key issues: 1) resource constraints, and 2) a high variability in expertise on the topics covered in the TPs. All TP interviewees highlighted the limited budget and time they could dedicate to the UAEU as key factors hindering the engagement of cities, particularly in case of smaller cities. Thus, large cities tend to take a more active role in the TPs (e.g. the coordinator role). The variability in the expertise of cities' representatives was another influential factor for cities' engagement and contribution to TPs. This related for example to some cities' representatives being experts in international cooperation, but not being knowledgeable on the specific topic of the TP. To some extent, the evidence suggests that the size and geographical location of cities was related to cities' representatives' expertise, with smaller or Eastern European cities more likely to be engaging directly with EU policy

fora for the first time, and therefore tending to play a less active role, and focus primarily on learning opportunities.

As for the engagement of DGs, **the overall perception was that DG REGIO was very active and committed to the functioning of the TPs and implementation of actions**. Its 'neutral' and supporting role was generally appreciated, even if some stakeholders would have liked DG REGIO to have provided more steering (see also section on governance). Generally speaking, other DGs appear to have been less actively involved. Even though the representation of DGs in each TP (average 2 to 3 different DGs) was considered appropriate by stakeholders, many of TP interviewees perceived a disconnect between their representation in the TPs and their involvement in, and contribution to, the TPs. For example, 21% of survey respondents perceived a lack of support of European Commission DGs (other than DG REGIO) when completing and implementing Action Plans as one of the key barriers to the Urban Agenda reaching its full potential.

The **contribution of the DGs varied across TPs.** Some TP members reported that DGs played a useful role in aligning the work of the TP with other EU initiatives, and in collecting / sharing relevant data for the drafting of the Action Plans. However, in other Partnerships, TP members highlighted that the DGs could have done more to contribute to Action Planning and implementation, the coordination with other relevant DGs not represented in the TPs, and/or to ensure that the work of the TP was aligned with broader EU initiatives. Whether or not DGs played an important role in TPs seems to have depended inter alia on whether the DG in question had direct competency in the policy areas targeted by the TP or not (those who had direct competency appear to have been more involved, e.g. DG HOME in the Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees TP). Also, the individuals that represented DGs seems to have been an important factor in determining the involvement of DGs. Overall, stakeholders recognised that **DGs often found it difficult to position themselves in the TPs**, especially in terms of striking the right balance between allowing for flexibility / facilitating a bottom-up approach, and guiding the process. A recurrent issue raised by various stakeholders, including representatives of several DGs, was the **limited coordination amongst DGs** on the UAEU, and more generally regarding urban policies at EU level.

The UAEU stakeholders highlighted that, generally, Member States were the stakeholders that were least involved in the operationalisation of the UAEU, although there were notable exception (e.g. the Netherlands, which was the main driver of the UAEU, while Czechia and Poland were active coordinators in the Urban Mobility and Sustainable Land Use and Nature Based Solutions TPs, respectively). Most TP members interviewed deemed the level of involvement of Member States to be fairly limited; various MS tended not to attend meetings or lead actions. Some interviewees believed that a potential explanation for Member States' limited involvement is that the UAEU does not offer strong advantages for them, as they are already part of the discussion with the Commission and take part in the inter-governmental legislative process at EU level, through their representation in the Council. Similarly, other TP members highlighted that MS might not be used to taking a multi-level, multi-stakeholders approach, and some might have failed to see the benefits for them in participating in this sort of initiatives. Some Member States interviewed highlighted that they are still learning about the new multi-level process within the frame of the UAEU.

TP members provided various other reasons for the in general rather limited involvement of MS in TPs, including the varying relevance of the ministries involved as well as resource constraints and skills gap. According to the Pact of Amsterdam, "it is important that all members of the Partnership have extensive experience and expertise on the topic". However, in several TPs, this was not the case for all the ministries involved, some of whom were not perceived as the most relevant ones for the purpose of the TP, and their representatives were not always individuals who were considered to be best placed to engage in conversations with other MS and other TP stakeholders on the specific themes being discussed. In other cases where TPs were treating more transversal policy issues, the ministries present were relevant but not necessarily able to cover all policy aspects (depending also on how urban policy is organised at the MS-level). Thus, in at least some cases it was not a matter of unwillingness to participate by MS, but rather a difficulty to involve the right experts (urban expert versus topic expert) that led to their limited participation.

In relation to their (lack of) participation in the UAEU, many MS also reported to suffer from significant resource constraints. Time constraints and severe opportunity costs were often mentioned as key factors hindering their active participation. Moreover, in several TPs, TP members also noted that a skills gap limited their participation, with a limited pool of civil servants having the right expertise and being fluent in English, meaning that those who do tick both boxes tend to be over-exposed to EU initiatives.

According to some interviewees, **the approach of the MS involved in TPs differed substantially from that of cities.** As noted above, cities usually approached the TP as an opportunity to find solutions to practical problems, such as 'why can't the EU provide financing for the types of projects we want to undertake?'. Member States, on the other hand, frequently opted for a broader, higher-level perspective. Stakeholders highlighted that MS tended to approach issues more conceptually, through the lens of 'policy, legal and/or institutional frameworks', with a keener interest to set up well-rounded, 'proper frameworks' at the EU-level as well as 'national sectoral policies'. TP members considered the MS approach beneficial particularly when a contextual information and higher-level perspective was needed to understand if actions could be implemented, taking into consideration not only practical factors, but also external / contextual factors.

As mentioned before, **umbrella organisations such as Eurocities, EUKN and CEMR have substantially contributed to the overall functioning and implementation of the UAEU.** This took place at the two levels: at the overall governance / coordination level, with umbrella organisations' active participation in the DGUM/UDG meetings (e.g. proposing members for TPs and providing insights on the work carried out by TPs); and at the operational level, by being active members of the TPs. To an extent, umbrella organisations (in particular the EUKN) also contributed to cross fertilising the discussion and actions across TPs, according to stakeholders. The interviewees highlighted that umbrella organisations have been crucial at DGUM/UDG meetings in contributing to advancement of informal cooperation to address current and future challenges faced by urban areas. Umbrella organisations were perceived as having extensive experience in urban issues and as having the potential to significantly support the discussions at EU level. Additionally, TP interviewees highlighted that umbrella organisations possess **extensive experience with coordinating pan-European networks of partners**.

They were recognised as key actors to provide an overarching, 'eagle eye view' of issues, liaise with cities that are not members of the TPs if needed, and, in certain cases, fill in for other stakeholders when these faced capacity gaps. Moreover, several stakeholders believed that umbrella organisation were instrumental in giving the DGUM/UDG a multi-level format – as they represent cities which do not normally attend these meeting (except when invited by their respective Member States). Despite the mostly positive views on the umbrella organisations' experience in coordinating European networks and reaching out to TP non-members, the case studies suggest that the extent to which TPs reached stakeholders that were not directly involved in the UAEU varied; in some TPs, members (including umbrella organisations) were actively informing non-TP members and disseminating their work, while in other TPs this was not the case.

The engagement of other EU level organisation and programmes, such as URBACT and the EIB, **was slightly more limited according to stakeholders**. This was related to the nature of these organisations' involvement in the UAEU, which mainly entails providing advice on funding opportunities, but also sometimes to a mismatch in the topics covered by the funding sources and those relevant for the TP. For example, the EIB is focused mainly on urban regeneration (EIB mandate) and does not tend to cover e.g. migration policy at urban level. Nonetheless, in certain cases, the EIB played an important role in identifying and providing source of funding for concrete TP actions, linked directly to the Better Funding pillar of the UAEU. For example, in two TPs the EIB helped to drive forward the work of the TP by publishing and funding two tenders to support the implementation of actions. In the case of URBACT, representatives highlighted that their funding programme did not align fully to the UAEU themes because URBACT funding themes were selected before the UAEU themes were determined (see Coherence section).

Overall the stakeholder engagement in the UAEU, and particularly in TPs, was relatively high. According to TP interviewees, the work carried out in the TPs was driven mainly by a few core members including the coordinators and in most cases actions leaders. Other TP members frequently took a more passive role and only participated in meetings, instead of committing time to implement actions. Interviews with TP coordinators also highlighted a disconnect between the partners' involvement *during* the meetings, and their commitment *in-between* the meetings. Whilst partners were generally happy to attend the meetings and participate in the discussions at the meetings, their engagement in the production and delivery of outputs was limited, and output production was commonly almost completely taken over by coordinators and/or action leaders. In some TPs, coordinators / action leaders stressed the lack of effective support from members. This resulted in coordinators and action leaders sometimes taking on a larger role and responsibilities than they had expected or felt comfortable with. The limited engagement by some TP members was also highlighted at the last coordinators' meeting (February 2019), where several TP coordinators emphasised that they expected/would expect more support from TP member in the implementation phase.

The relationship between Partnership members and the UAEU governance structure

Despite their generally positive views on the multi-level cooperation of the UAEU, the **consulted stakeholders were not entirely satisfied with the role of DGUM and UDG**. TP members seem to have little awareness of the specific roles of these governing bodies. Some argued that there is a lack of transparency and communication between the governing bodies and the TP members. Stakeholders (in particular cities) attributed this among others to the limited representation of cities in these bodies. TP members highlighted that they have not been informed from the beginning of the roles of the UDG / DGUM and that they felt slightly isolated from what is happening in these political bodies. Several stakeholders emphasised that they would like to be better informed by the DGUM and UDG about the overall development of the UAEU, and how different TPs are progressing in terms of Better Knowledge, Better Funding and Better Regulation. Several stakeholders also indicated that they would have liked more guidance from the DGUM/UDG in terms of the development and implementation of Action Plans. It was also recognised, however, that this would have been hard to implement in the current governance structure of the UAEU, as the DGUM and UDG already experienced difficulties with following-up 14 TPs. These difficulties included: covering the feedback needs of all TPs the first year when twelve TPs were set up – this required DGUM /UDG to spend substantial amount of time supporting TPs that they realistically did not have to spend on the UAEU – and providing meaningful feedback as many of APs were quite technical and outside of the expertise of DGUM representatives.

Working methods and arrangements and the role of coordinators

According to the survey respondents, **the internal functioning of the TPs is generally effective**. Seven out of ten respondents (69%) strongly agreed or agreed that the Thematic Partnerships' coordinators effectively fulfil their role. Close to six out of ten respondents (56%-58%) strongly agreed or agreed that the Thematic Partnership(s) meetings are well organised and that the Thematic Partnerships' members are generally involved / participate well. Only 6% oppose that coordinators had effectively fulfil their role and 7% that TP meetings were well organised.

As highlighted by survey respondents and by interviewees, the **role of the TP coordinator is key for the effective operationalisation of the UAEU.** TP members perceived having a 'knowledgeable, engaged and committed' coordinator as crucial for the effectiveness of the functioning of the TPs, regardless of their profile (cities, MS, or other types of organisations). Having an active coordinator was considered important in all the stages of the TP: from the inception to the implementation phase. Feedback from interviewees suggests that TPs in which the coordinator was less active, were considered less effective overall. Where coordinators were less active, this seem to have been due mainly to a lack of understanding and misinterpretation of the role of the coordinator and how the TP should function, what it should generate, and in which timeframe. This misinterpretation was less of an issue in the last wave, in which the Commission provided more guidance on the role of the coordinator and overall governance.

The Technical Assistance provided by the Technical Secretariat to the TPs was welcomed by the consulted stakeholders. This included the support and provision of expertise to the Partnerships; outreach and communication support; reimbursement

of travel costs to Partnership members and support to the European Commission. Stakeholders highlighted the benefits of having administrative and organisational support to ensure a smooth functioning of the TPs by supporting coordinators and other TP members with time-consuming tasks like the preparation of meetings and drafting meeting minutes. TP members highlighted that the Technical Secretariat provided good support in keeping the members active and involved during the organisation of the Partnership calls and meetings. However, TP members **were less satisfied with the outreach and communication support and the provision of expertise to the Partnerships**. TP members believed that there is a need for more support on communication, apart from the website and social media posts and updates. Several TPs would have appreciated support on putting together an infographic or a video presenting the TP and its objectives and impacts; however according to interviewees, this support was outside the scope of the Technical Secretariat.

A key concern regarding the support provided by the Technical Secretariat was the perceived lack of **transparency** about its remit and functioning. It appears the Secretariat could have done more to clarify what the Technical Assistance comprised of, but also that some coordinators may not have disseminated the information presented at coordinators' meetings on the Technical Assistance to their TP members. Stakeholders suggested that some TPs managed to have their travel cost reimbursed while others did not, they were also unsure how the travel budget was supposed to be reimbursed. According to the factsheet made available for TP coordinators on the Technical Secretariat in support to the Urban Agenda for the EU, the travel and accommodation expenses shall be covered in exceptional cases only; on average, a maximum of one travel per Partnership meeting can be accommodated (max. 3,197€ / year). Thus, stakeholders' perception that some TPs got their travel reimbursed and other didn't could be right if the TP members that asked for travel reimbursement were "exceptional cases". Stakeholders felt that the Technical Secretariat could have provided more guidance and information on its functioning and remit during the **initial phase of the Partnership formation** to address these kinds of issues.

4.1.2 THE THREE PILLARS: BETTER REGULATION, BETTER FUNDING, BETTER KNOWLEDGE

> *Assessment question 2: To what extent has the UAEU facilitated progress under the three pillars of EU policy making and implementation that it focuses on (Better Regulation, Better Funding, Better Knowledge)?*

As stated in the Pact of Amsterdam, to realise the full potential of the European Union and deliver on its strategic objectives, the Urban Agenda for the EU strives to involve cities in achieving Better Regulation, Better Funding and Better Knowledge.[20] According to stakeholders, **the UAEU has, to an extent, facilitated progress under these three pillars**, particularly increasing knowledge on urban issues and – to a somewhat lesser extent – access to funding for urban policies. However, stakeholders believed that

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[20] Urban Agenda for the EU, Pact of Amsterdam (2016).

the contribution of the UAEU to the implementation of existing and future policies, legislation and instruments (EU, national and local) has been more limited.

In the stakeholder survey, eight out of ten respondents (79%), felt that the Urban Agenda contributed to a great or some extent to "better knowledge and data on urban issues". Slightly less than two thirds of respondents (64%) felt that the Urban Agenda contributed to a great or some extent to "EU funding that is better adapted to cities and urban areas. A similar proportion (61%) felt that the Urban Agenda contributed to a great or some extent to "EU regulation that is better adapted to cities and urban areas". As can be noted in the figure below, notably smaller proportions of respondents (18%-30%) felt that the UAEU, and the TPs, contributed to a '*great* extent' to Better Funding, Better Knowledge and Better Regulation.

Figure 17 : Contribution to Better Funding, Better Knowledge and Better Regulation
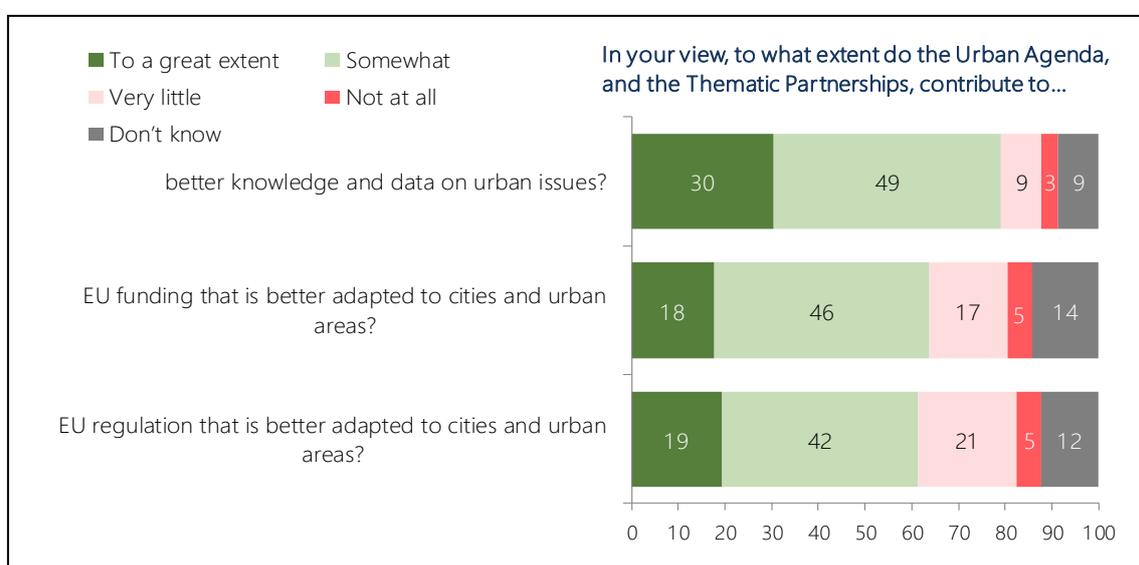
Q5.1. In your view, to what extent do the Urban Agenda, and the Thematic Partnerships, contribute to…
%; All respondents who answered question item (n=113-115)
Source: Online consultation

Noticeable actions

There are **noticeable actions from all three pillars**. Stakeholders highlighted the following actions, all of which have had a tangible impact on Better Funding, Better Knowledge or Better Regulation, or are expected to have an impact in the future. The first three actions were also part of the UAEU State of Play brochure published in June 2019.[21]

- The Housing Partnership is developing a good practice database on affordable housing. This database gathers best practices from the social and affordable housing sector from across the EU, in order to foster learning and knowledge

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[21] See: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/brochure/urban_agenda_eu_en.pdf

exchange about the provision of affordable housing in European cities.[22] The first prototype of the data base is available.[23] (*Better Knowledge*)

- The Air Quality TP has been working on identifying gaps in regulation and implementation on air pollutant emission sources, to help policy-makers to better understand and meet the requirements of European Air Quality Directive. This led to a joint position paper[24] that reviewed the interaction between different regulations and the implementation of air quality legislation, including with regard to funding mechanisms and knowledge sharing. The position paper includes recommendations on how to improve the implementation of air quality legislation and identify regulatory gaps in the urban environment through a cooperative and integrated approach. (*Better Regulation, Better Funding and Better Knowledge*)

- The Jobs and Skills in the Local Economy Partnership has been working on several actions to support the local economy. One of these actions is the *Talent Office*, which is a new governance structure to support and enhance the talent community and its development, acting as an enabler to connect talent and all stakeholders with an interest in the area of talent supply and demand. (*Better Knowledge*)

- The Circular Economy TP members have reportedly helped to convince the Commission to include aspects related to the circular economy among the areas that are eligible for funding in its proposals for the post-2020 Cohesion Policy and corresponding Funds. The TP also reported that its influence is apparent in the proposed regulation on minimum requirements for water reuse, and may yet influence future proposals on waste management and production of bio-based products. (*Better Regulation*)

- The Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees TP members highlighted that they have influenced the Commission proposal for the successor programme of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), which takes on board a recommendation from the TP specifying that local authorities and other local actors should be consulted to improve cities' access to funding. (*Better Funding, Better Regulation*)

- The Urban Poverty Partnership has developed two actions aimed at the 'Regeneration of Urban Deprived Areas and Neighbourhoods (UDAN)'. One of these actions (Action 7), calls for a 'Local Pact' for the regeneration of urban deprived areas, a multi-fund instrument giving cities a leading role in designing their urban regeneration strategies for UDAN in post-2020 Cohesion Policy. The Action Leader (URBACT) organised three 'Policy Labs' in 2018 to exchange experiences between countries (France, Germany, Poland and Spain) about methods to tackle local deprivation. This resulted in detailed guidelines on how

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[22] DG REGIO. Urban agenda for the EU Multi-level governance in action (2019).

[23]https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1RcxrQ2QqfgUAU9Pw3EkuIOYDyJw&hl=en&ll=52.86312542 5834454%2C28.997022443749983&z=4

[24] https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/system/files/ged/1.ua-aqp-position_paper-fitness.check_.aaqd_.pdf

to set up a Local Pact. Action 7 was flagged by interviewees as one of the successes of the Urban Poverty Partnership so far. (*Better Funding*)

Challenges encountered

Notwithstanding these examples of successful actions, **stakeholders felt that the UAEU could have contributed more to the three pillars**, particularly with regard to Better Regulation and (to a somewhat lesser extent) Better Funding. This in particular because numerous TPs struggled with the Action Planning process and the implementation of actions, as outlined below.

Stakeholders have highlighted **difficulties encountered at the Action Planning and implementation stage**. TP members reported that the process of selecting and designing actions was challenging, and considered that this process could have been dealt with differently. TP members had plenty of ideas for actions, but it took TPs a long time to reach a consensus on which actions to include in the Action Plans. As an explanation, stakeholders pointed to inefficiencies in the Action Planning process, including the drawn-out stock-taking and scoping phase, as well as to issues inherent to the format of the TPs, encompassing a very diverse set of members. This necessitated a high level of engagement of members and strong coordination. Coordinators generally did a good job, but for them the Action Planning process constituted a heavy burden (see also Chapter of Efficiency). Another key reason provided by stakeholders for the difficulties experienced was the perceived lack of guidance from the DGUM/UDG, including the Commission, both with regard to the Action Planning process and the implementation of actions (see above). What also played a role was a perceived lack of clarity about the target of the actions and who should implement them, i.e. TP members themselves, and/or other actors outside the TP (DGs, MS…).

TPs appear to have dealt with these challenges differently, as can be derived from the finalised Action Plans. These shows marked variation, notably in the division of actions between pillars. For example, the Urban Poverty Partnership's Action Plan contains seven Better Regulation actions out of a total of twelve actions. The Climate Adaptation Action Plan, on the other hand, includes one Better Regulation action, out of a total of ten actions. This divergence can, of course, partly be explained by differences between TPs in themes covered. For some TP themes, there was a clearer EU policy-angle than for others. For example, members of the Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees TP mentioned that the topic of their theme remains largely an MS competency while topics covered in the Climate Adaptation TP cover EU policy competencies. However, the evidence suggests that the divergence between TPs in terms of pillars covered is not only related to the topics, but is also related to differences in how the TP's interpreted their role and mandate.

Some TPs opted primarily for 'concrete' actions that could be implemented by the TP members themselves within the lifetime of the TP. For example, the Circular Economy TP only included actions in the AP that members were fully able and willing to implement (i.e. actions leaders had put forward the actions that they are in charge of coordinating and implementing). Other TPs formulated more 'high-level' actions. The high-level action typically targeted the Commission and targeted Better Regulation, while

'concrete' actions tended to target the local level and targeted Better Knowledge[25]. Stakeholders believed that the 'concrete' Better Knowledge actions were relatively easier to implement, among others because these actions require:

- Limited involvement of external actors: "Better Knowledge" actions often involve the development of a 'product' (such as a web portal) and as such are less dependent on the involvement of other actors compared to actions in the two other pillars. Numerous TP members noted that the implementation of actions targeting Better Regulation and Better Funding was "not in their control", but reliant on the involvement of the European Commission, Member States, the European Investment Bank, etc.

- Limited alignment with EU policy-making process: Better Knowledge Actions were considered relatively easier to implement because they require less knowledge of / access to the EU policy-making process and could be implemented by for example the Action Leader.

- Lack of time and resources: TP members felt that Better Funding and Better Regulation actions could not be implemented in the timeframe of the TPs, among other because these actions are dependent on the EU policy cycle and because of uncertainty about what would happen with actions after the Partnerships' planned timespan.

According to the stakeholders, perceived "feasibility" also explained TPs' apparent – and increasing – preference for formulating Better Knowledge actions. As noted in the monitoring data, almost half of all actions (48%) were oriented towards "Better Knowledge". The remainder were split between "Better Regulation" actions (28%) and "Better Funding" actions (24%)[26]. Moreover, across waves, there has been a shift towards TPs formulating relatively more Better Knowledge actions, compared to Better Funding and Regulation actions (see Figure below). While roughly 45% of the actions in the first wave focussed on Better Regulation, this percentage decreased to 22% in the Wave 2 TPs, and to 15% in the Wave 3 TPs. In wave 3, the majority of actions (58%) targets Better Knowledge. This might have been driven by previous experiences of TPs. For example, the Sustainable Land Use and Nature Based Solutions TP members had to redesign and merge actions at the implementation phase due to a lack of ownership of certain actions and of alternative ideas on how to implement them.

A certain preference for 'concrete' actions is also visible within the pillars, with for instance various Better Regulation or Better Funding actions that did not aim to tackle key urban challenges directly by, for example, proposing changes to key legislation, but rather aimed to develop guidelines and handbooks on how to solve these challenges.

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[25] This divergence between TPs focussing on very concrete actions (often evolving around better knowledge) and TPs focusing on more fundamental issues (often evolving around better legislation and funding) was also described in the report of the Urban Futures Studio on the Urban Agenda from 2018, available at: http://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/Research-UrbanFuturesStudio-def.pdf

[26] As noted in the case study on the Implementation of actions, the division across pillars varies substantially across Thematic Partnerships. For example, the Urban Poverty Partnership's Action Plan contains seven Better Regulation actions out of a total of twelve actions. The Climate Adaptation Action Plan, on the other hand, includes one Better Regulation action, out of a total of ten actions.

According to the monitoring data, only five of the 31 actions under the Better Regulation pillar target the "modification to existing EU legislation".

Figure 18 : Percentage of actions per pillar and wave of Partnership
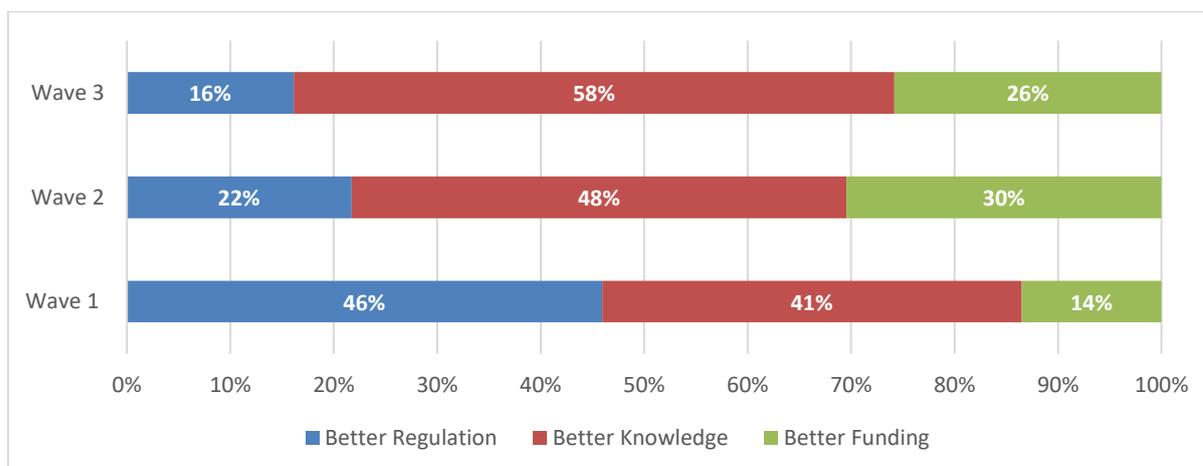
Was the prevalence of Better Knowledge actions a problem for the effectiveness of the UAEU? TP members can, of course, hardly be blamed for opting for feasible actions and the variation in actions formulated to some extent fitted the experimental nature of the UAEU. Moreover, Partnership members found the content of their APs overall satisfactory considering the time and efforts put into developing APs. Nonetheless, stakeholders felt that the prevalence of Better Knowledge actions, in combination with the slow progress with the implementation across all types of actions, was to some extent **detrimental** to the overall effectiveness of the UAEU. Partnership members felt that Better Regulation and Better Funding are key aspects of the UAEU, as it is here that multi-level governance could in theory have most impact, whereas Better Knowledge can to some extent be achieved through other means and networks.

To the above should be added, however, that there is no conclusive evidence that the Better Knowledge actions have indeed been easier to implement. The monitoring data (see Chapter 2) shows that Better Regulation are the most advanced actions with 19% finalised and 25% at advanced or half implementation stage, followed by Better Knowledge (7% finalised, 20% at advanced or half implementation stage) and Better Funding (4% finalised and 8% at advanced or half implementation stage). Moreover, there is no noticeable difference in terms of implementation status between actions targeted at the EU or the local levels, with 9% of actions aiming at the EU level having been finalised, versus 11% at the local level.

4.1.3 STRENGTHENING THE URBAN DIMENSION IN POLICY DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

Assessment question 3: To what extent has the UAEU contributed to strengthening the urban dimension in the design and implementation of relevant EU and national policies?

In order to strengthen the urban dimension in the design and implementation of relevant EU and national policies, the UAEU aims to ensure that, in the words of Potjer & Hajer (2018): "*locally*, national governments can act according to the needs of their specific national contexts; *horizontally*, implementation practices are constantly compared with the purpose of learning; and *vertically*, the EU level of government sets the policy framework, but also revises that framework based on experiences coming from practice."[27] To what extent has the UAEU facilitated progress towards these aims?

The tangible impact of the UAEU on Better Regulation and Better Funding to date has been fairly limited. This is due to several challenges raised in section 4.1.2. Moreover, it is important to stress that it is most often too early to observe impacts of UAEU actions, as some require years of implementation, dissemination and sustained follow-up to be effective. Hence, whether or not actions will have a concrete impact, will also depend on the future of the UAEU, from 2020 onwards.

Nonetheless, according to stakeholders, the UAEU **has given a stronger voice to cities** when designing and implementing relevant EU policies, programmes and initiatives, in particular cities that are directly involved in the UAEU. A majority of respondents to the survey specified that the UAEU has contributed to more involvement of cities in EU policy-making (74% agreed with this) and national policy-making (54% agreed with this), as well as improved policy-making on urban issues at the local level (60% agreed with this this).

It is impossible to provide a full overview of all actions that might have the potential to contribute to strengthening the urban dimension in the design and implementation of relevant EU policies. Nonetheless, stakeholders pointed to some (types of actions) that might have a tangible impact:

- TPs have developed **actions to ease cities' access to funding by developing guidelines** for EU funding programmes and/or other available funding streams. Ideas to develop these guidelines come directly from cities involved in the UAEU and other initiatives such Urban Innovative Actions, URBACT and cities implementing the European Regional Development Fund. These guidelines aim to help other cities to access European funding programmes (i.e. Urban Innovative Actions, URBACT, 5% of the European Regional Development Fund dedicated to cities). For example, the Climate Adaptation TP has developed an action to ease urban areas' access to LIFE funding for urban adaptation projects. Another example, is the 'Air Quality guide' developed by the city of Milan, with the assistance of the European Investment Bank and other members of the Air Quality Partnership. This guide outlines how to finance air quality investment at city level.

- TPs have developed actions aimed at **establishing permanent mechanisms to facilitate the exchange of ideas, projects and good practices related to EU initiatives** that require local expertise. An example is the online repository with good practices on digital skills development, developed by the Jobs and

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[27] Potjer, S., & Hajer, M. (2018). Learning with Cities, Learning for Cities: The Golden Opportunity of the Urban Agenda for the EU. Utrecht: Urban Futures Studio.

Skills TP. This repository aims to provide local level insights to the implementation of the New Skills Agenda.

- TPs have also developed **actions that aim to influence EU legislation**. An example is the paper developed by the Air Quality TP on how to improve the implementation of air quality legislation, which identifies urban regulatory gaps based among others on experiences and previous work carried out by the cities involved in the Air Quality TP.

Evidence of how the UAEU has contributed to the design and implementation of *national* policies, programmes and initiatives is not extensive. However, there is some evidence that the UAEU has contributed to improving or setting up national urban policies through the participation of MS in the UAEU and through concrete UAEU actions that target national policies and strategies.

The EUKN study findings, which include the survey conducted in early 2019 by the Romanian Presidency, suggest that **the UAEU has led to changes in existing or creation of new formalised or informal structures** (e.g. urban policy working groups) in several EU countries. The survey found that around half of the Member States noted substantial changes and re-evaluation of their urban policies due to the UAEU (see Figure below). The EUKN study points out several examples including the establishment of Partnerships in Lithuania to discuss urban policies in the draft of the National Urban Policy. Some Member States agreed that their involvement in the UAEU has encouraged them to adapt or enhance their national or regional policies. For example, the Polish Ministry of Investment and Economic Development launched in 2017 the Strategy for Responsible Development, which comprises several instruments dedicated to cities. This strategy was part of the recently adopted National Urban Policy. Another example of the impact of the UAEU on the implementation of a concrete national urban policy is the Spanish Urban Agenda[28], in which ten objectives reflect the themes covered by the UAEU TPs.

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[28] http://www.aue.gob.es/agenda-urbana-espanola#AUE_-_Agenda_Urbana_Espanola.

Figure 19 : Links between UAEU, national urban policy, structural changes
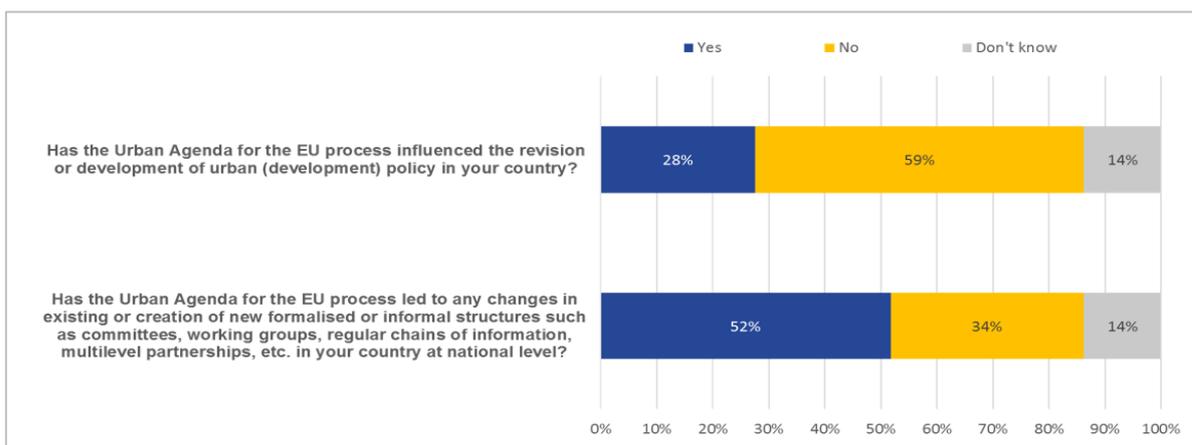
Source: Romanian Ministry of Public Administration and Regional Development, 2019 (online survey, N=27)

Apart from the effects on national urban policies and strategies due to the participation in the UAEU, stakeholders highlighted concrete UAEU actions aimed at national polices and strategies:

1. Climate Adaptation TP: Analysis of national multilevel urban development and planning regulations with a focus on climate adaptation.

2. Sustainable Land Use and Nature Based Solutions TP: Better regulation to boost Natural Based Solutions at European, national and local levels

3. Urban Poverty TP: Ending homelessness by 2030 through the reform of social inclusion strategies at national level

Many TP members highlighted the **positive impact the UAEU has had in terms of raising awareness on the issue of multilevel governance,** thereby bringing "EU urban policy-making closer to national urban-related discussions and stakeholders."[29]

To a greater or lesser extent, all TPs made efforts to **reach out to non-members**, especially other cities / urban authorities. Some of the TPs referred to the transfer of knowledge and information to non-member cities as a key part of the rationale of many of their actions. Stakeholders highlighted among others the following examples of actions that aim to reach out to non-TP members:

- The Circular Economy Partnership developed the Knowledge Pact for cities, including which members disseminated through their own networks and local channels.

- The Housing Partnership has developed an 'Affordable housing good practice database', which gathers best practices used in the social and affordable housing sector, in order to foster learning and knowledge exchange about the provision

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[29] European Urban Knowledge Network. (2017). One Year Pact of Amsterdam. The Hague: European Urban Knowledge Network.

of affordable housing in European cities. This database was disseminated at events and meetings that members held and attended across Europe.

- The Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees TP highlighted their 'Academy in Integration Strategies' as an action that successfully targets cities that did not take part in the TP itself.

- The Public Procurement TP has reportedly created a "second ring" of cities who were involved in drafting actions, and will be key to their dissemination.

- The Italian and Latvian members of the Jobs & Skills TP reached out to a "second ring" of cities in their respective countries (in the Latvian case, via the association of municipalities), informing them about the work of the TP on a regular basis.

Territorial cohesion

As noted in the Pact of Amsterdam, "the UAEU strives to establish a more effective integrated and coordinated approach to EU policies and legislation with a potential impact on Urban Areas and also to contribute to **territorial cohesion** by reducing the socioeconomic gaps observed in urban areas and regions". This aim was reinforced by the Austrian presidency, which stressed the importance of "a shift to a more process-oriented Territorial Agenda with similar cooperation or implementation partnerships [which] offer the opportunity to address common territorial and urban issues like functional regions including cities and rural areas or urban-rural partnerships".[30] However, the consulted stakeholders found it difficult to comment on whether the UAEU achieved these aims, mostly because they considered the links of the UAEU to the broader Cohesion Policy indirect and not clearly articulated in the Action Planning process.

One way in which the UAEU sought to foster territorial cohesion was via the enhanced use of territorial impact assessments. However, most interviewees were either unaware of progress made in this respect, or felt that the **UAEU has *not* contributed significantly to progress with territorial impact assessments**. Survey respondents were not very convinced about the Urban Agenda's contribution to progress on Territorial Impact Assessments either, with 43% agreeing that the Urban Agenda contributed to TIAs to a great or some extent.

Contribution of practical tools for policy-making

The **'One-Stop-Shop' portal[31]** was launched by the European Commission, as part of the UAEU, to be an online single point of entry for cities and other stakeholders to consult information on EU regulations, funds and knowledge related to urban development. **Stakeholders' familiarity with the "one-stop-shop" for cities portal was not high**. About a third of the surveyed stakeholders (33%) reported to

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[30] Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2018. (2018). *Austrian Presidency's Directors General Seminar "Setting the Course for the Future of Territorial Urban Policies at European Level" on 13 November 2018 in Vienna – Summary Report.* Vienna: Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2018.

[31] https://ec.europa.eu/info/eu-regional-and-urban-development/topics/cities-and-urban-development_en

have used the one-stop-shop for cities portal, with only 3% having used it extensively. Most other stakeholders (37%) were unaware about its existence. The "**Futurium" website** was used more frequently: about a fifth (21%) of stakeholders reported having used it extensively, whereas about half (49%) used Futurium rarely. Most of the interviewees believed that Futurium's use did not extend beyond the UAEU's direct stakeholders. Many stakeholders highlighted that they did not see much of an added value of having the public consultations (which formed part of the Action Planning phase) on the Futurium website, as stakeholders (outside of the UAEU 'bubble') rarely visit this website.

Contribution of the UAEU to international commitments

Through its contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda, the **UAEU aims to be outward-looking and connected to global challenges**.[32] In the stakeholder survey, more than two thirds of respondents (70%) believed that the Urban Agenda and the Thematic Partnerships indeed contributed somewhat or to a great extent to progress on the UN SDGs.

Figure 20 : Contribution to progress on the UN Sustainable Development Goals
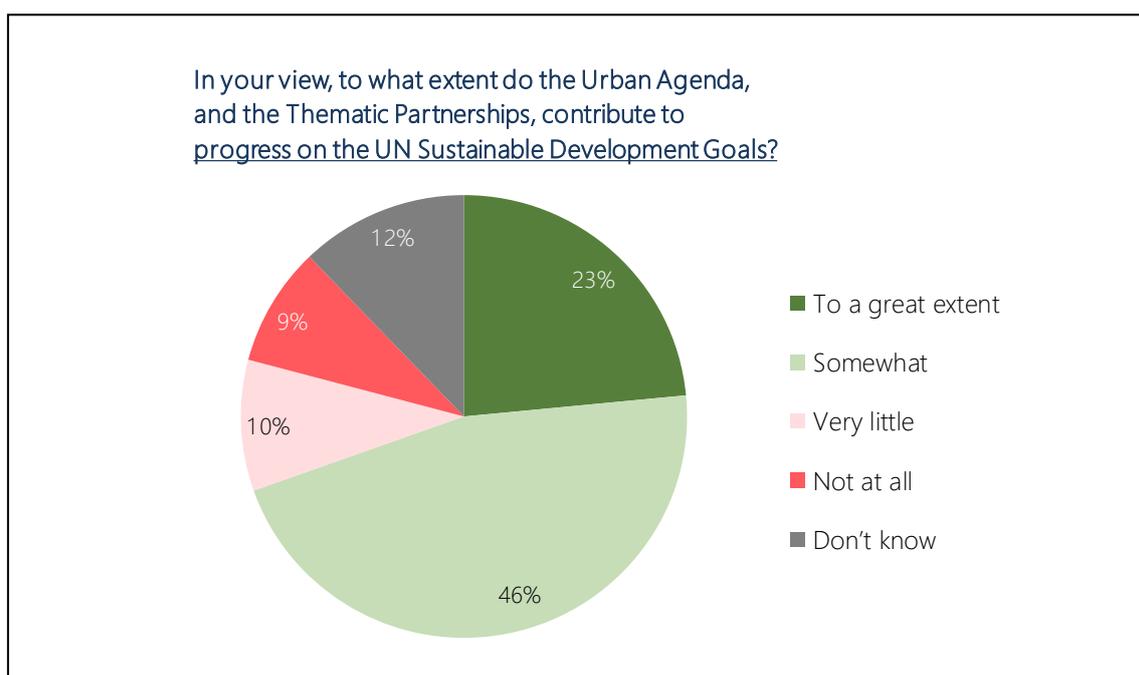
Q5.1. In your view, to what extent do the Urban Agenda, and the Thematic Partnerships, contribute to…
%; All respondents who answered question item (n=115)
Source: Online consultation

The monitoring data showed that the UAEU cross-cutting issues relating to the UN New Urban Agenda, were referred to 50 or more times in the TP's Action Plans. In relation to this, a few interviewees highlighted that almost all actions under the UAEU are consistent with the targets of SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities, as well as

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[32] Urban agenda for the EU Multi-level governance in action (2019), DG REGIO.

with other SDGs, such as SDG13 (which calls for urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts), and SDG10 (which aims for reduced inequality within and among countries). For example, the Urban Mobility TP proposed two actions that are linked to the implementation of SDG 13 at the European level, namely: 'Scaling up innovative clean buses' and 'Promoting sustainable and active mobility behaviour'. The Housing TP organised an international conference "Housing for all" held in Vienna in December 2018, which provided a platform for raising awareness on the TP and its Action Plan among a large number of cities and other international stakeholders. Additionally, a few interviews highlighted how the UAEU could contribute more to global urban challenges. Suggestions were made for greater alignment of the UAEU stakeholders (particularly cities) with beneficiaries of the International Urban Cooperation (IUC) programmes under the Foreign Policy Instrument (e.g. by encouraging cities involved in the UAEU to participate in the IUC).

It should be stressed that **only a few interviewees were aware of the UAEU's contribution to the UN SDGs and the New Urban Agenda**. Moreover, various interviewees noted that establishing whether the UAEU indeed contributed to the UN SDGs is very difficult, among others because the SDGs are very broad (meaning that the links with the UAEU are indirect) and because the UAEU's contribution to tackle global urban challenges is so far limited (as noted above).

4.1.4 MAIN DRIVERS OF EFFECTIVENESS

> *Assessment question 4: What are the main drivers of the UAEU's effectiveness (strengths, weaknesses, success factors and challenges)?*

What are the main drivers of the UAEU's effectiveness? Below we look at both strengths and weaknesses. Considering the former (**strengths**), the evidence points to the following:

1. **Strong and active TP coordinators.** The overall high level of engagement of the TP coordinators was considered a key driver for the functioning and operationalisation of the Agenda. The coordinators played a vital role in developing the Action Plans, from the inception phase through to implementation, other stakeholders reported. The evidence suggests that coordinators invested substantial time and own means in the TPs (see also Chapter on Efficiency).

2. **The experimental and flexible nature of the TPs.** Even though the flexible and experimental nature of the UAEU caused some issues (see also below under barriers), it was also considered a key asset by stakeholders. TPs in the UAEU had a lot of freedom to determine their focus and remit (e.g. focusing on actions members had expertise in), which allowed them to take into account the different policy areas / themes, and interests of members.

3. **Strong support amongst stakeholder groups (particularly cities).** As noted before, TPs were all stakeholders were engaged throughout the duration of the TP tended to believe that their work have been effective. Stakeholders

highlighted each stakeholder play a different and crucial role in the design and implementation of actions (e.g. Member States bringing information on contextual factors) and their engagement and contribution to the TP is key enabler. Particularly cities were engaged, noted many stakeholders. Cities valued the opportunity to feed into EU policymaking and believed their work as part of the UAEU could have a 'real impact' on their daily work.

4. **Relevant themes covered by TPs.** The majority of stakeholders highlighted that the 14 themes covered by the UAEU match the needs and problems faced by cities in the EU (see section on Relevance). The 14 themes are also expected to remain relevant in the future. The overall feeling was that there are no important gaps in the themes covered.

5. **The cooperation of all levels of government in the TPs.** Stakeholders highlighted as a key driver of the effectiveness of the UAEU that it brings various government levels around the table. This is not replicated in other existing networks and programmes, which encompass a less varied group of stakeholders (such as the various city networks). Other initiatives also do not emphasise multi-level *governance*, but focus more on for example technical cooperation and the exchange of best practices (such as URBACT). Moreover, stakeholders stressed that each level of government involved in the UAEU brings a different set of skills and experience to the table. Stakeholders emphasised that cities bring practical solutions to problems that they would like to tackle, Member States provide the context and delimit the proposed solutions/problems that cities put forwards, and DGs bring the required knowledge of the EU policies, regulations and funding that TP members need to consider in their APs.

6. **The role and involvement of "other stakeholders"** and particularly umbrella organisations. Stakeholders highlighted that these stakeholders played a significant role in moving forward the work of the Partnerships, for example by consulting their networks about actions in the Action Planning phase, or by providing feedback based on their own often extensive experience with EU policy-making. Additionally, stakeholders believed that "other stakeholders" functioned as multipliers; their (direct or indirect) involvement in the TPs opened up communication and dissemination channels that facilitated outreach to cities across Europe. However, stakeholders didn't provide concrete examples on how these stakeholders opened up communication and dissemination channels (see communication barrier below).

At the same time, the research suggests there are a number of **barriers to the** UAEU reaching its full potential to date. These include:

1. **The voluntary nature of the UAEU.** Stakeholders believed that the voluntary nature of the UAEU has limited the contribution of certain TP members. TP members were not obliged to contribute to the TPs and the Action Planning, which reportedly led to some members keeping a low profile in meetings and/or contributing little between meetings – in particular the latter appears to have been an issue in many TPs.

2. **The lack of formal mechanisms.** The lack of formal mechanism implies that the Commission is not required to consider the outcomes of the APs. Many stakeholders saw the lack of formal mechanisms as a main barrier for the success of the UAEU, and believed that the UAEU should in some way be formalised and be part of the policy evaluation process of the European Union. A few stakeholders (most others were not aware) welcomed the new European Urban Initiative, which is aimed at tackling the fragmentation of support offered to cities under Cohesion Policy and which acknowledges that the urban dimension of Cohesion Policy relies on a strategic multi-level partnership with local authorities and civil society as well as on the strengthening of the urban dimension under the post 2020 Cohesion Policy.

3. **Limited outreach.** Some notable exceptions notwithstanding, overall, TPs and their members have not been able to reach out to and raise awareness of the UAEU and their work among significant numbers of non-participating cities. This is evidenced inter alia by the low response rates to the consultations on draft Action Plans, as well as the online consultation that was undertaken for this study. UAEU stakeholders should put greater efforts in promoting the UAEU to a "second ring" of cities, and make better use of the umbrella organisations in this, which have a wide network of stakeholders that could be interested in the UAEU if made aware of it.

4. **Resources available.** Several TP members highlighted that resource constraints had a direct impact on the effectiveness of the TPs, as it affected the engagement of all stakeholder types. They highlighted that limited budget was available for travel and for engaging experts. The latter limited the technical support available for the implementation of actions, when TP members did not have the expertise. However, it is important to note (see efficiency) that some TPs did not use all their available budget for travel and expert support. Many TP members faced significant opportunity costs, as they had to balance their involvement in the work of the UAEU with competing priorities in their respective organisations. According to a few TP members, resource constraints were particularly acute for smaller (and to some extent Eastern European) cities.

5. **Limited engagement of MS and DGs (other than DG REGIO).** Even though all stakeholder groups showed varying levels of engagement, in particular the Member States and European Commission DGs (other than DG REGIO) were relatively often not very engaged, reported the stakeholders. This was mainly related to weak incentives, lack of capacity, internal bureaucratic challenges, political sensitivities and, according to a small number of MS and DGs, insufficient relevance of the themes.

6. **Limited guidance from the UDG/DGUM.** The overall governance and coordination of the UAEU appears to have been somewhat ineffective: the DGUM / UDG / UATPG were seen by many stakeholders and TP members as adding relatively little value. Key reasons included: 1) the DGUM / UDG were unable to closely follow the work of the TPs and provide detailed feedback on (draft) Action Plans (due to a combination of the large number of TPs and the

lack of in-depth thematic expertise among DGUM/ UDG members) and 2) the role and coverage of the different groups / fora is not clearly defined and sometimes overlapping.

7. **Varying expertise in TPs.** Due to the breadth of the topics covered in some TPs, not all TP members were reportedly fully aware of the intricate details of the subjects covered. Stakeholders noted this was compounded by some members sending representatives to the TPs with mainly knowledge on general urban issues, but not with expertise in the theme of the TP. The assistance by the Technical Secretariat appears to have only partly addressed this issue, considering that the Technical Secretariat's mandate is limited to assisting on selected occasions, rather than provide expertise throughout the duration of TPs.

Our research has also identified **some external factors that have limited to a certain extent the performance of the UAEU** since its inception.

- **The timing and process of the EU policy and funding cycles.** Because these cycles are set, they frequently do not match the 3-years lifetime of the UAEU TPs. Some TPs tailored their Action Plans accordingly, other TPs did not, either do to a lack of awareness about the policy-cycle or varying views about what actions should look like and who should implement them (i.e. should they be "actionable" by the TP members, or be taken forward by the institutions, see case study on Implementation of Actions).

- **The changes in policy priorities across different stakeholders**, particularly national governments. According to interviewees, it has taken twenty years to build momentum about the need of having urban authorities more involved in the EU and national polices on urban matters. Thus, if the benefits of having urban authorities more involved in the EU and national polices on urban matters are not showcased appropriately, other EU and national priorities might end up being prioritised to the detriment of the UAEU.

4.1.5 CONCLUSIONS: EFFECTIVENESS

Overall, **as an innovative multi-level framework for dialogue** on policy issues and initiatives that affect urban areas, the UAEU has turned out to be **effective**. It has fostered significant collaboration between Member States, cities, the European Commission and other EU institutions as well as other stakeholders, who have engaged in discussions and jointly identified solutions to address key challenges facing cities across a wide range of policy areas and themes. The UAEU's main method of implementation, the 14 Thematic Partnerships (TPs), were valued positively by nearly all participants, as they provided a unique opportunity for stakeholders at all relevant levels to engage, better understand each other's concerns, exchange views and ideas, and try to find common ground with a view to addressing issues with the design and implementation of policies that significantly affect cities. Unsurprisingly, urban authorities themselves tended to be most appreciative of the first-hand exposure to,

and involvement in, discussions at EU level on an equal footing with the other levels of government.

The **thematic approach** to the UAEU – i.e. the launch of multi-stakeholder Partnerships on a set of highly relevant priority themes – has been conducive to constructive and (mostly) focused collaboration, which has enabled the TPs to make concrete progress in the form of the development and adoption of Action Plans. The different priorities of participants were not always easy to reconcile (cities were typically most interested in solving very specific problems – such as 'why can't the EU provide financing for the types of projects we want to undertake?' – while Member States tended to focus on slightly more abstract issues related to policy frameworks – such as 'what are the elements of a good housing policy?'). However, bringing together the different perspectives on specific topics around the same table was ultimately instrumental in helping to raise awareness of key urban issues and challenges, foster mutual understanding, and identify common ground and areas for further action. Overall, it is clear that the UAEU brought together the 'right' stakeholders to pursue its objectives in a broadly effective format, combining the local expertise of cities, contextual knowledge and experience in similar initiatives of MS, knowledge about the EU policy cycle and funding programmes of the Commission, and specific contributions (including networks and dissemination channels) of other EU-level organisations into a 'complete picture' (specific issues with the level of participation, engagement and expertise of certain actors in certain TPs notwithstanding).

The **working methods** adopted by the TPs were also quite effective overall, with those who were directly involved providing mostly positive feedback on the format and frequency of meetings, roles played by the coordinators, phasing of the Action Planning process, and availability of Technical Assistance to facilitate the work and alleviate the administrative burden on coordinators. A key feature of the TPs (especially in the first and second waves) was their 'experimental' nature. This meant the working methods and expected outputs were not defined very prescriptively at the outset. Instead, individual TPs had significant leeway to go about their work in the way that best suited them and the topics they intended to tackle. This flexibility was a key enabler for the TPs' success, as it enabled them to take a genuinely 'bottom-up' approach and define their own remit and focus in a way that matched the interests and expertise of their members.

However, the flexible and informal nature of the TPs, and the lack of more explicit processes, rules, guidance and/or expectations brought with it certain **challenges**, the main ones of which were:

- Many TPs suffered from an **initial lack of clarity regarding the envisaged aims and content of their Action Plans**, including what to focus on, and how best to achieve objectives (in particular, what kinds of actions were eligible for inclusion in the Action Plans, and whether TP members themselves were expected to fully implement all actions). This led to some difficulties and delays in the development, adoption and implementation of most Action Plans (for more on the latter see below), as well as significant differences in their content and level of ambition.

- There were also some misgivings about the **lack of transparency regarding how TP members were selected** (especially in the early waves), as well as, to a certain extent, the lack of clarity regarding the type and level of commitment to the TP process that was expected of members.

- The voluntary and informal nature of the TPs led to a **heavy reliance on a (frequently quite small) 'hard core' of active and engaged members,** especially coordinators, who were the main driving force behind the progress in most TPs, and often invested a very significant amount of their own time and resources, while some other members were quite passive. This was partly due to a lack of expertise of some participants in the specific topics and issues discussed in their TPs. But there was also a certain degree of disappointment among members (especially cities) of some TPs about what they perceived as a lack of meaningful engagement from certain stakeholders, in particular:

  o While some **MS representatives** participated very actively in some TPs, many others did not. There appears to be a sense among some MS that the UAEU does not offer significant benefits for them, as they are already involved in discussions at EU level. In some cases, there may have also been a certain reluctance to engage with cities on an equal footing, as well as a lack of experience with the multi-level, multi-stakeholder approach, and/or a feeling that the issues discussed were of limited relevance for the specific ministry that represented the MS in question in the TP.

  o The participation of the **Commission services** was also highly uneven. The main factors that led to a lack of engagement were that DGs sometimes found it difficult to position themselves in the TPs (especially in terms of striking the right balance between being "just" another member, and guiding the process), and that some of the issues discussed in TPs were not high on the priority list of participating DGs.

- **Resource constraints** also had a limiting effect on the TPs, which had to rely primarily on the time members were able to make available to progress their work. Finding sufficient time for this (on top of their "day jobs") was challenging for many members, in particular (smaller) cities. Although some funding was available to support TPs (in the form of technical assistance, access to experts, and reimbursement of travel cost), its effectiveness was limited due to both the small amounts available, and, in some cases, a lack of awareness of the available support (some TPs did not use parts of the available budget).

- The **overall governance mechanism for the UAEU was quite ineffective**. The extent to which the UDG and DGUM were able to provide meaningful guidance and steer for, feedback to, or coordination between TPs, was very limited, which was due to a lack of clarity around how the role of these for a vis-à-vis the UAEU was defined, but also the large number and specialised thematic focus of TPs, which meant it would have been very challenging for UDG and/or DGUM members to engage with all 14 TPs and their Action Plans in any significant depth. Various TP members also felt that the Commission could have provided

more direction to the Action Planning process, although it was generally recognised that the Commission had to walk a thin line between maintaining its impartiality in the framework of the UAEU, and moving the Action Planning forward.

- In relation to the governance of the UAEU, it should also be highlighted that the **internal communication within and between the different elements of the UAEU left something to be desired**. The study findings suggest the flow of information between key actors (in particular the European Commission, TP coordinators, and the Technical Secretariat), as well as from these to TP members at large has been suboptimal. The same applies to the information flow from the governing bodies to the TPs. This has contributed to the perceived lack of transparency and awareness of key issues including the available resources and how they can be used, the responsibilities for and implementation status of actions, etc.

These challenges highlight the difficulty of **striking the right balance** between enabling a high degree of flexibility on the one hand, and ensuring sufficient clarity on the other. The UAEU process prioritised the former and, in spite of the difficulties it created in some cases, we conclude this was the right decision, as it allowed TPs to experiment and find their own solutions to the issues they faced (even if this sometimes took considerable time and effort). As such, the UAEU has been highly effective at fostering cooperation, coordination and interaction between stakeholders at different levels, and has enabled TPs to make significant progress in identifying and defining actions under all three pillars that it focuses on (Better Regulation, Better Funding, Better Knowledge).

However, judging the extent to which this progress has translated into a tangible **contribution to strengthening the urban dimension of policies**, as well as facilitate their uptake, ultimately leading to a more efficient and effective policy making and implementation process, **requires a nuanced assessment**. The nature and level of ambition of Action Plans varies considerably, and generally speaking, whether they will ever be *fully* implemented is highly uncertain. This is not to say that there are not plenty of examples of actions where implementation is progressing well, and is beginning to generate tangible impacts, including a few Commission legislative proposals that individual TPs have reportedly had an influence on (usually regarding EU funding programmes for the post-2020 period), guidelines or recommendations aimed at improving the implementation of existing legislation, as well as a large number of best practices, guides, toolkits and roadmaps to contribute to the generation and dissemination of Better Knowledge. However, viewed across all 12 TPs that have finalised their Action Plans, and in light of the large number of actions included in these, we can draw the following key conclusions:

- The highest number of actions are under the **Better Knowledge** pillar. While many of these are undoubtedly relevant and important, they are typically less likely to have a direct and significant effect on what is arguably the key aim of the UAEU, namely strengthening the urban dimension of (primarily EU) policies, by actually changing policies, legislation and/or access to funding opportunities where appropriate. The prevalence of Better Knowledge actions appears to be

primarily due to the fact that they are often targeted directly at the local level, and tend to be 'easier' to address and implement because they do not require legislative changes that cities have no direct control over. This makes them perfectly acceptable (and potentially useful) actions for TPs to pursue; however, they typically appear less likely to have as significant (potential) impacts as actions under the other pillars, as well as less unique to the UAEU (seeing as other fora for knowledge generation and exchange on urban issues already exist).

- As noted above, a key part of the UAEU's raison d'être is arguably the ability to influence EU and/or national policy via changes to relevant laws and/or funding streams. This requires not only enhancing the knowledge base on urban issues (see above), but also action under the pillars of **Better Regulation** ("the more effective and coherent implementation of existing EU policies, legislation and instruments", as per the Pact of Amsterdam) and **Better Funding** ("identifying, supporting, integrating, and improving traditional, innovative and user-friendly sources of funding for Urban Areas"). In these areas, the TP Action Plans have successfully *identified* and *recommended* a significant number of desirable actions, but actual changes to date are still few and far between. In some ways, this is only natural – after all, TPs and their members have no direct influence over the relevant policy and legislative processes. In some cases, TP members were cautiously optimistic that their demands and recommendations would be addressed at the appropriate stage in the policy cycle in the coming years, and felt the Action Plans would continue to serve as useful tools in their lobbying efforts. Nonetheless, the fact remains that, even though this study was able to identify a few examples of policy changes at the EU as well as national level, the overall tangible impact of the UAEU on policy design and implementation to date appears relatively limited.

- In relation to actions under all three pillars, it should also be noted that, in many cases, a perceived **lack of resources and/or unclear responsibilities related to the governance model** represent significant constraints to the continued implementation of actions beyond the formal end of the lifetime of TPs (usually three years). While individual TP members reportedly intend to continue to make efforts to progress these, there is a risk that progress will remain limited and uneven in the absence of a clear framework for follow-up, and clarity over the resource implications.

Beyond the implementation of the Action Plans developed by the TPs, there are other ways in which the UAEU can contribute to strengthening the urban dimension in the design and implementation of relevant policies at the EU but also at the national level:

- Regarding the EU level, it is clear that the existence of the UAEU has already given a **stronger voice to cities**, many of whom see it as an important first step towards greater involvement of cities in EU decision-making.

- Evidence of tangible **effects of the UAEU on national policies**, programmes and initiatives is limited (partly because it was not possible for this study to

undertake a detailed review of national policies and structures). In a recent survey, less than a third of MS reported the UAEU process had influenced urban policy in their country as such, but slightly over half reported it had led to changes in formal or informal structures. This study identified a few examples of new national structures that were inspired by the UAEU, such as the recently launched Spanish Urban Agenda, and a Greek network of municipalities hosting refugees.

- As regards **wider outreach and awareness raising**, especially among cities that are not directly involved, all TPs share an ambition to disseminate information about their work and Action Plans as widely as possible. Some TPs have been quite successful in reaching out to a "second ring" of cities, based largely on the efforts of coordinators and EU-level organisations with large pre-established networks. However, other TPs have been more inwards-focused, and it also appears that the potential for umbrella organisations (such as EUKN) to disseminate information on the UAEU systematically among its members was not fully utilised.

- The **wider (non-TP) elements of the UAEU** have been relatively ineffective. Progress with territorial impact assessments has been limited, and familiarity and use of the 'One-Stop-Shop' portal and the 'Futurium' website seems to not have extended beyond the UAEU's direct stakeholders.

4.2 Efficiency

This chapter explores two main elements of the UAEU's efficiency: 1) the extent to which the UAEU's governance, coordination, management and administrative structures ensure the UAEU is implemented efficiently, and 2) the degree to which the financial and other resources invested by the EU and other stakeholders are proportionate to the benefits.

4.2.1 OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY OF THE THEMATIC PARTNERSHIPS

Assessment question 5: To what extent do the UAEU's governance, coordination, management and administrative structures ensure the UAEU is implemented efficiently?

Stakeholders' feedback on the **overall operational efficiency of the Thematic Partnerships** was fairly positive. When asked about the efficiency of the Urban Agenda and in particular the Thematic Partnerships, a clear majority of stakeholder (61%) agreed or strongly agreed that the meetings organised for the TPs and the Action Plans were delivered in a cost efficient and timely manner (see Figure below). A similar proportion of respondents (57%) agreed or strongly agreed the Action Plans were delivered in a cost efficient and timely manner. Opinions were more divided regarding the cost efficiency and timeliness of the public feedback for the Action Plans, as well as the activities implementing the final Action Plans. Less than half of the surveyed stakeholders (40%-48%) agreed or strongly agreed that the latter elements were delivered in a cost efficient and timely manner. It should be added that for all four elements relating to the TPs operational efficiency in the figure below, the proportion of respondents "*strongly* agreeing" was low, varying between 4% and 7%.

Figure 21 : Operational efficiency
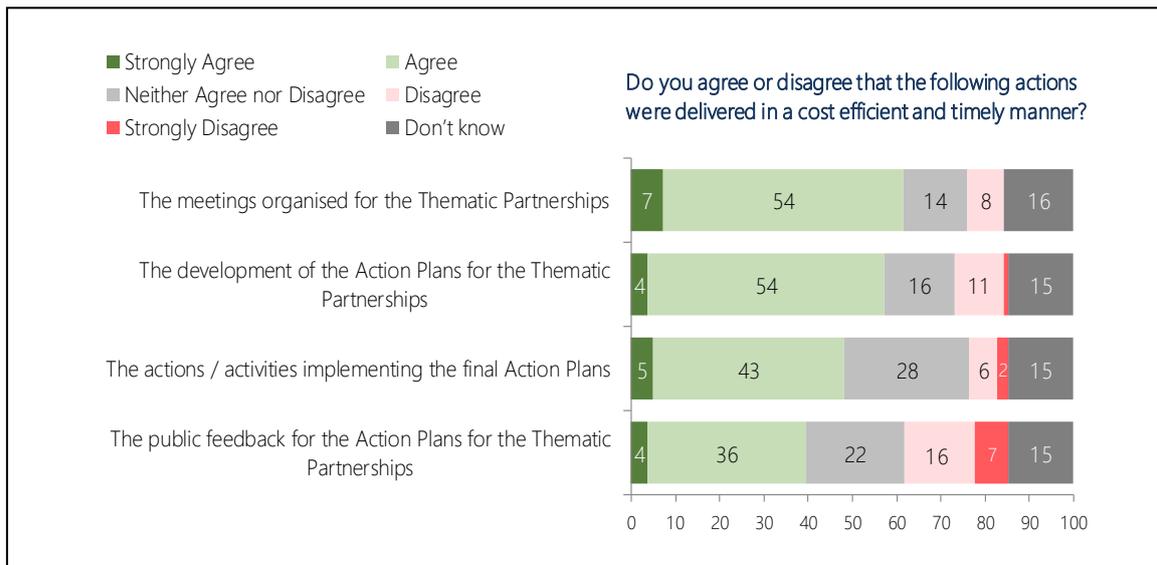
Q4.1a. Thinking about the Urban Agenda, do you agree or disagree that the following actions were delivered in a cost efficient and timely manner?
%; All respondents who are familiar with a Partnership and who answered question item (n=81-83)
Source: Online consultation

The survey findings broadly align with the qualitative feedback obtained through the interviews. The organisation of the TP meetings was generally viewed positively. In most TPs, the coordinator / TP management team organised weekly meetings (conference calls) to coordinate the day-to-day activities. In some TPs, these meetings were held monthly. In addition, the Partnerships organised face-to-face meetings, bringing the TP members together. The latter meetings were usually organised around every three months. By and large, TP members felt that meetings were well prepared and organised and appreciated the opportunities to liaise with other members. Face-to-face meetings were valued, but also added to the travel costs for TP members, which caused issues for some participants (see below). No substantial negative feedback was given on the timeliness or appropriateness of meeting materials such as agendas, presentations or minutes. The atmosphere in meetings appears to have been positive and constructive in most TPs, with members talking for instance about a "fun experience". Collaborative relations were formed and TP members generally felt that they could voice their opinion / that their opinions were listened to during the meetings.

In line with the survey results displayed in the figure above, opinions were more divided regarding the efficiency of the public feedback consultations for the Partnerships, hosted on Futurium. While the theoretical added value of these consultations as a tool for collecting feedback, and reaching out beyond the TPs was not disputed, many TP members felt that the added value of the public feedback consultations for the Action Planning was not proportionate with the efforts required. A reason for this appears to have been that the overall response to the consultations was quite low.

More in general, stakeholders noted that progressing through the often-packed meeting agendas for the Action Planning was no easy task. The format of the TPs appears not always to have been conducive to efficient working. TPs encompassed a diverse set of members with sometimes widely diverging opinions, areas of interest, resources, expertise and experience with similar processes, making it challenging to make progress in meetings. Moreover, some coordinators appear to have been more experienced with presiding over such meetings than others. Although overall, coordinators were considered to have done a good job in term of getting to a finalised Action Plan, in a few TPs, some members noted that a stronger / more experienced coordinator might have been able to provide more direction to the Action Planning process and broader TP. This could, for example, have helped when boiling down a plethora of good ideas to an actionable Action Plan in a reasonable amount of time – something that proved challenging in numerous TPs.

A lot of time was spent in the TPs on discussing, consolidating, and detailing the actions and how to implement them. Most TPs experienced delays during the Action Planning process (see also case study on Action Planning and chapter on Effectiveness). This apparent lack of efficiency in the Action Planning process was certainly not blamed exclusively, or even at all, on coordinators. Stakeholders pointed towards various difficulties inherent in the Action Planning process, including the (too) limited time foreseen for the Action Planning process. In addition, it was felt by significant numbers of stakeholders that certain elements of the UAEU's governance and support structures were detrimental to the efficiency of the Action Planning process and broader UAEU, including the following (all discussed in the section below):

1. a perceived lack of guidance provided to the TPs;

2. limitations in the technical expertise in TPs and the technical support provided; and

3. limits to the funding provided.

Operational efficiency of the governance and support structures

In relation to the first point above, many stakeholders believed that the Action Planning process could have been more efficient **if more guidance had been provided to the TPs** on the processes to follow and steps to take, as well as on the expected outcomes of the Action Planning. It was noted by stakeholders that the Pact of Amsterdam was not detailed on the Action Planning process and the implementation of Actions, and that the DGUM/UDG and the Commission provided / were able to provide only limited guidance and steering. For example, it was reported that the DGUM/UDG lacked the capacity and/or know-how to follow-up all 14 Action Plans in detail. The Commission felt it could not play a more central role during the later stages of the Action Planning, as it needed to maintain a neutral position (see Chapter on Effectiveness). This provided the TPs and coordinators with **ample room for own initiative**, which was valued by TP members, taking into account the UAEU's experimental nature. However, at the same time, in at least some TPs, the absence of steering appears to have went hand in hand with a **lack of direction** in the Action Planning process. Several TP members also felt themselves that they could have used more steer. Coordinators mentioned for example that they would have welcomed more feedback from the Commission on their orientation or scoping papers, before moving on to preparing the draft Action Plan.

Overall, the support that was provided by the Technical Secretariat (TS) was seen as beneficial to the efficient implementation of the UAEU. Stakeholders were especially positive regarding the logistical support for organising meetings and coordination. Stakeholders recognised that this support was a crucial factor for efficient Action Planning, especially because it was instrumental in keeping the members engaged in the TPs' calls and meetings. Stakeholders rated the day-to-day administrative support offered by the TS positively as well. The TS was described as generally responsive. Coordinators noted that its assistance helped them to perform their role more efficiently, allowing them to focus on the more strategic parts of their tasks, like preparing the actions. This support could, for example, take the form of the TS assisting with launching a survey among TP members in order to identify priority actions. Coordinators who were less accustomed to EU projects (as was notably the case for some smaller cities) found the support of the TS particularly useful. Several interviewees believed, moreover, that the TS fostered cooperation between the TP members and the European Commission, as it played the role of intermediary.

Availability / sufficiency of resources

As noted in section 2.6.4, the budget allocated to the UAEU technical support Framework Contract (FWC) amounted to € 4.8 million, of which circa €4.2 million was allocated to the technical assistance to all 14 Partnerships. This means the available budget for each TP was about €250,000 for two years (for more information on the technical assistance budget, please refer to section 2.6.4).

Notwithstanding the available resources, some **concerns** were raised by stakeholders regarding the technical assistance provided to the TPs. This was for the most part linked to **perceived limitations to the TS' mandate and funding**. Some stakeholders praised the involvement of the TS in for example drafting the Action Plan and other more technical elements, but others had the feeling that the TS could mainly provide administrative and organisational support. And the latter stakeholders felt that this had, to some extent, a negative impact on the efficiency of the Action Planning. For example, it was noted by some TP members that it would have had a positive impact on the efficiency the Action Planning if more external technical experts could have been involved through the TS. In relation to this, a Member noted for instance that the single external expert on his / her TP was not knowledgeable on all facets of the TP theme and that they had favoured involving someone else[33]. Members from other TPs reported, however, to be quite happy with the work of the external expert on their TP.

There was also a feeling that the TS in theory could have done more in terms of **communication and outreach** to third parties. As noted in section 2.6.5, the number of page views of the TP specific landing pages on the Futurium website, as well as the number of Twitter followers of the UAEU account, was not especially high, for instance compared to the URBACT Twitter account. However, it is unclear whether more communication activities would have fitted in the TS's current mandate.

The divergence in opinions on the level of support of the TS appears to have been partly related to a **lack of clarity or awareness** about the role of the TS and the support it could provide. It appears that it was not always communicated very well by the TS itself or the coordinators what the TS could do. Several TP members noted that they were not fully aware about what kind of support they could get from the TS. A few stakeholders also noted that it was not clear to them how the TS budget was spent.

A lack of funding for the TPs and their members was perceived as a problem by stakeholders. As noted above, through the TS, approximately €250,000 was available per TP for support, expertise, outreach and communication, travel reimbursements, and support to the European Commission. Nonetheless, TP members had to invest substantial own means (see also section 4.2.2 below). This might have had a negative impact on the efficiency of the Action Planning process, as some TP members reduced their involvement, in particular in between meetings. With the extension of the duration of TPs (see below), these issues appear to have become more pressing, especially during the implementation stage, with some members effectively stopping their involvement in the TP.

In particular the **limited funding available for travel** was frequently raised as an issue (a little over €3,000 per year, as mentioned above). TP members reported that this was sometimes not sufficient, due to the high number of stakeholders involved in the TPs. It should be added that, based on the final reports of the Amsterdam TPs, it appears that the budget allocated to travel reimbursements of TP members was almost completely spent in only two of the four TPs that were part of this wave (Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees and Air Quality, see table below), while most wave two TPs spent

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[33] In relation to this, it should be noted that in principle TPs decided on the basis of consensus on the experts to involve, but that the coordinator could make the decision if no agreement could be reached.

very little. The divergence between TPs in term of travel budget spent might be explained by different needs and planning in the TPs. However, some members also noted that the lack of awareness on the funding possibilities (as mentioned previously) played a role. This again appears to have been an issue of communication. It was part of the coordinators' and the Secretariat's role to inform members about funding possibilities, but nonetheless some TP members appear not to have been aware about the possibilities for reimbursement of travel.

Table 7 : Technical assistance budget spent (travel and technical expertise)

Wave	Partnership	% travel budget spent	No. of thematic & techn. expertise days used
Wave 1 (Amsterdam)	Inclusion of migrants and refugees	98.5%	70
	Housing	78.5%	68
	Urban poverty	73.1%	70
	Air quality	96.9%	70
Wave 2 (Bratislava)	Jobs & Skills	0	68
	Circular Economy	16.8%	87.5
	Urban Mobility	23.6%	81.5
	Digital Transition	76.6%	53

Source: Technopolis Group based on the Final reports of the Amsterdam (Wave 1) and Bratislava (Wave 2) Partnerships

Some stakeholders also noted that the fact that no funding was provided for the implementation of actions, including for Action Leaders, hampered the implementation process, partly explaining the limited progress with achieving Better Regulation and Better Funding, in particular. In relation to this, it should be mentioned that every Partnership received funding for two years through the TS which could be used for implementation. With most TPs being extended beyond the initially foreseen timeframe, this means that limited or no technical support is available during the later stages of the TPs, although targeted support was made available for TPs that were not receiving general TS support anymore[34].

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[34] The support for TPs that no longer receive TS support is provided in the form of 1 to 15 days of expert work. The experts are selected based on individual requests and in cooperation with the Action Leader. In a pilot phase, up to two actions per Partnership can benefit from support services, if they meet certain criteria (e.g. the TP has decided to continue its activities, the action reflects the commitment of different TP members and involves multiple levels of governance (city, national, EU, etc.) and relevant stakeholders, etc.). See: 'Amsterdam Partnerships', Urban Agenda for the EU (11 February 2019).

4.2.2 PROPORTIONALITY OF COSTS AND (PERCEIVED) BENEFITS

Assessment question 6: To what extent are the financial and other resources invested by the EU and other stakeholders proportionate to the benefits?

The coordinators themselves reported that the Action Planning process constituted a heavy burden for them. As noted in the Chapter on Effectiveness, the coordinators played a crucial role in moving the Action Planning process forward, due to a variety of reasons, including the limited involvement and expertise of some other TP members, the limited guidance provided, and the limitations in the technical support provided (see above). In practice this meant that coordinators did a lot of work. Notwithstanding the overall positive opinions on the support offered by the TS (see above), this reportedly included more practical tasks such as drafting articles for the Futurium website. Most coordinators appear to have taken their task **very seriously**. For example, in the Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees TP, one of the two coordinators (the city of Amsterdam) reported having had someone working on the project full time for the entire three years of the TP, with multiple people in a supporting role. While this may not be representative for all coordinators, it does show that coordinators needed to invest substantial own means in the Action Planning process.

The feedback suggests that the same was also the case for many other members of the TPs. It appears that active TP members typically **invested substantial own means** in the UAEU. A national-level government ministry noted, for example, to have paid for moderators, travel for other partners etc. In the stakeholder survey, TP members (including coordinators) reported on average to have invested 0.78 FTE on the TP in 2018. This figure varied between 0.02 and 4 FTE (excl. zeros)[35]. Members' self-declared average resources invested in the TP in 2018 amounted to 18,826 EUR on average; an amount which would be substantially higher if disregarding some very low amounts. Despite the fact that these figures could not be verified with other data, meaning that they should be interpreted with care, they do point to a substantial commitment in terms of time and resources by TP members.

Did the TP members believe that the investments they made for the UAEU, in terms of time and resources committed, were proportionate to the costs? Also in relation to this, the feedback received was usually positive. **Most interviewees noted that the resources invested by their organisation in the UAEU/TPs were in line with, or were outweighed by, the benefits.** In the stakeholder survey, only about one in ten surveyed stakeholders (12%) felt that they spent *too much* time on the Urban Agenda (see Figure below). A relative majority of surveyed stakeholders (37%) reported that they had spent *less* time than they would have liked on the UAEU. The latter figure was substantially higher for cities and urban entities: half (50%) of city-level respondents reported that they spent *less* time than they would have liked on the UAEU.

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[35] 1 zero was excluded

Figure 22 : Opinions on the amount of time committed to the UAEU
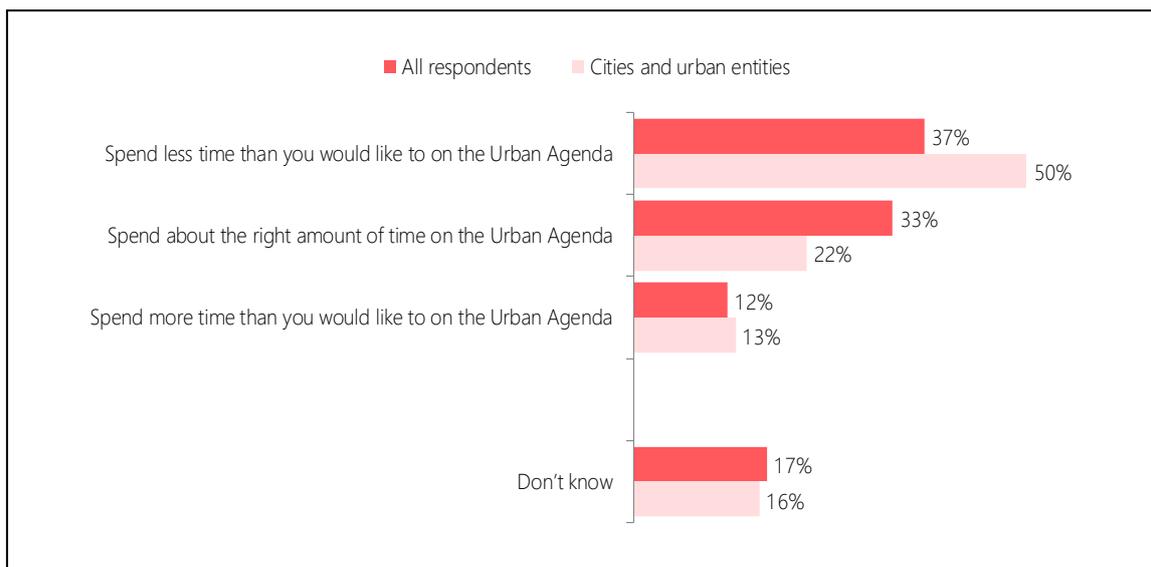
Q4.2. Thinking about the number of working hours your organisation commits to the Urban Agenda and the benefits the Urban Agenda generates, would you say you…
%; All respondents who are familiar with the Urban Agenda / cities and urban entities that are familiar with the Urban Agenda (n=99 / 32)
Source: Online consultation

To a certain degree, the figure above contradicts the finding that the TPs so far had limited success with implementing actions, in particular 'Better Regulation' and 'Better Funding' actions, especially because many stakeholders considered these Actions to be a vital success factor for the UAEU (see for example Chapter on EU Added Value). An explanation for this apparent paradox is that stakeholder based their opinion on the time they committed to the UAEU on the expected **long term impacts**, as the UAEU was often seen first and foremost as a stepping stone towards greater involvement of cities in EU decision-making.

4.2.3 CONCLUSIONS: EFFICIENCY

In view of the diverse and often intangible effects, as well as the unclear total costs to all stakeholders, the cost-effectiveness ratio of the UAEU cannot be robustly quantified. However, based on the feedback from those involved, the TPs **operational efficiency** – in terms of the extent to which its governance, coordination, management and administrative structures have helped to ensure its efficient implementation – seems to have been **fairly high**. The atmosphere in most TPs appears to have been collaborative, and members felt able to freely voice their views and opinions. The majority also agreed (albeit not strongly) that both TP meetings and the Action Planning process were delivered in a cost-efficient and timely manner. This was facilitated in large part by the critical work of the coordinators, as well as the availability of support from the Technical Secretariat. The latter provided a wide range of support, which was seen as beneficial, especially the logistical support for organising meetings and coordination, allowing coordinators to focus more on strategic aspects of their role.

It would be wrong to conclude from the above that the **Action Planning process** of most TPs was efficient in the strict sense of the word. It appears to have been difficult for TP members to boil down ideas and agree on concrete actions. The Action Planning process often took longer than participants had anticipated and those involved sometimes felt that there was limited overall direction. This was linked to a multi-level governance format and experimental nature of the TPs. The fact that Partnerships bring together such a diverse group of members, with varying degrees of expertise, previous experience, perspectives and expectations, meant it was often challenging to agree on where to focus efforts and progress from the initial exchanges of ideas and priorities to the definition and filtering of concrete actions. The evidence suggests that this was further exacerbated by the limited guidance and steer available to the TPs from the DGUM, UDG and/or DG REGIO, as well as the *perceived* limited ability to draft in more relevant technical expertise via the Technical Secretariat (which appears to have been to a large extent a communication problem – as coordinators and the Technical Secretariat appear not to have been able to explain to all members the support that was available). These factors / gaps made the role of the coordinators even more crucial, and resulted in an especially heavy burden on them in terms of time and resource investment.

But the need to invest substantial own resources extended to all TP members, not just coordinators. The findings suggest that the **burden** for TP members' involvement in the UAEU in terms of time and opportunity costs was **sometimes heavy**. Nonetheless, almost all were **happy to make this commitment**, also the UAEU is seen as a long-term investment on the way to a better representation of cities, and a better consideration of urban concerns, in EU decision-making. Nonetheless, the limited availability of financial resources did have a negative impact on the work of TPs, especially the action Planning and implementation. A particular issue was the limited funding for travel, which caused some TP members to limit their participation or even (in a few cases) drop out entirely whereas every TP had a budget available, which was unfortunately not always fully used. Also the fact that technical support largely stopped before the end of the TPs appears to have been detrimental to the implementation of actions, if only because TP members had the feeling that they were left to their own devices.

4.3 Relevance

This section aims to assess the extent to which the key objectives of the UAEU are aligned with the current societal needs and urban challenges the initiative is intended to address. It is important to understand whether the objectives of the UAEU correspond with the most pressing needs of stakeholders and citizens, and are therefore appropriate to tackling the most significant underlying problems and barriers. We focus the analysis of relevance on the main features of the UAEU, i.e. its approach to streamlining urban concerns into policy via facilitating cooperation between stakeholders at different levels from across the EU, and the main pillars, themes and issues on which the UAEU seeks to make progress.

4.3.1 RELEVANCE OF THE MULTI-LEVEL AND MULTI-STAKEHOLDER COOPERATION APPROACH

Assessment question 7: To what extent is the UAEU's approach of multi-level and multi-stakeholder cooperation relevant for strengthening the urban dimension in EU policy?

The JRC's 2019 "Future of cities" report[36] highlights a growing trend at global level towards emphasising urban governance and the role of cities in tackling societal challenges (JRC, 2019), with a series of recent reports by EU and international organisations outlining similar point (EU and UN-HABITAT, 2016). In February 2019, the Seville Commitment was adopted by representatives of the United Nations (UN), national, regional and local governments, civil society, private sector and academia to emphasise the need to involve local and regional governments in implementing the UN 2030 Agenda and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2019).

As it currently stands, the EU-level governance set-up by default foresees a very limited role for cities, as national governments remain the main contact points and negotiation partners for the Commission (Purkathofer, 2019). The Urban Agenda for the EU distinguishes itself from its predecessors (e.g. the Leipzig Charter of 2007, Toledo Declaration of 2010 and the Riga Declaration of 2015) by being "the first to translate the recognition of the cities' role in EU and national policies into concrete actions" (Potjer, 2017). This is also acknowledged and appreciated by the Mayors of EU capital cities, who are positive about the UAEU and its implications (Mayors of the Capital Cities of EU, 2018).

Broadly speaking, views from the academic community confirm that the UAEU can be a tool that responds to the gradual trend towards a new type of governance: (Potjer, 2017) and (Hajer, 2018) describe the UAEU as "promising" (providing significant opportunities for cities to have an impact on EU policy-making) but also "vulnerable" (since it is an informal and voluntary method), with a strong need to demonstrate its own success "by delivering concrete results".

In its 2018 opinion, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) acknowledged the potential of the UAEU, and welcomed its "ground-breaking working methods", but also raised some concerns around (1) a possible "lack of ownership" (due to the voluntary

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[36] https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/publication/eur-scientific-and-technical-research-reports/future-cities

profile of the overall governance structure, the passiveness on the part of certain Members States and some internal organisation issues), and (2) the lack of resources (particularly to cover the costs of participation of small and medium cities, see also section 4.2.1. on for example the reimbursement of travel). The CoR highlighted that the UAEU should not be "restricted to a mere networking exercise", which, in the view of the CoR, may require a "more binding political commitment" as well as consideration of a "specific financial mechanism" (CoR, 2018).[37]

The stakeholders surveyed as part of this assessment study attached great importance to the key objectives of the Urban Agenda. Improved access of cities and urban areas to EU funding was rated as most important (rated 8.8 out of 10, in which 10 is very important). This was followed by having Better Knowledge and data on urban issues (8.6 out of 10), more cooperation with cities and urban areas in other European countries (8.5 out of 10), increasing the influence of cities and urban areas on national or regional policy-making (8.4 out of 10), and increasing the influence of cities and urban areas on EU policy-making (8.3 out of 10), see figure below.

Figure 23 : Importance attached to key aims Urban Agenda
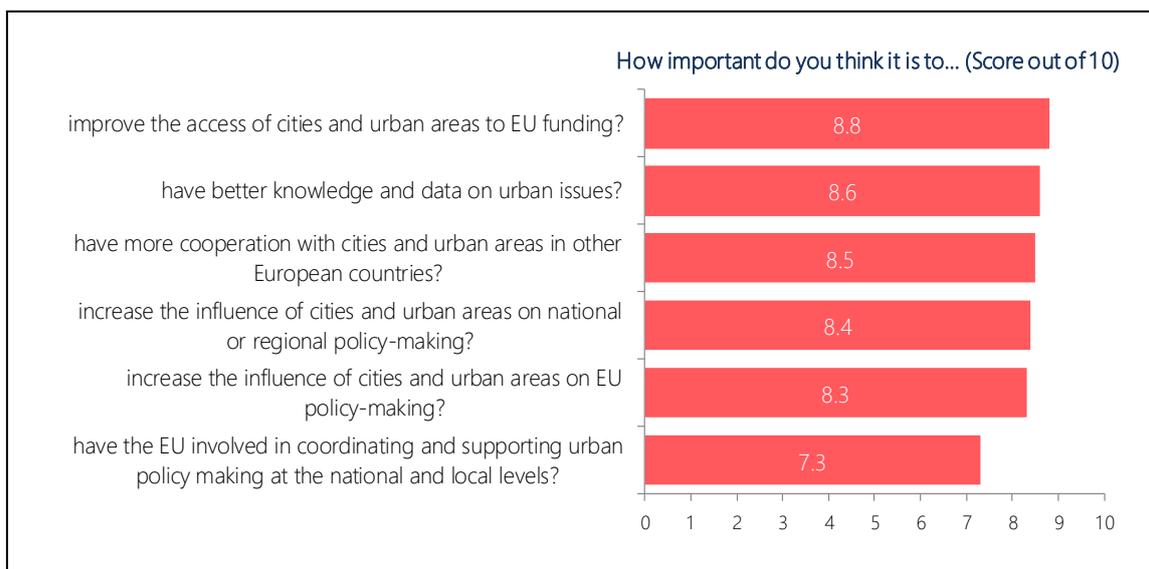
Q2.2. Thinking about the current situation in your country / the EU, how important do you think it is to…
Please answer using the scale in which 10 is "very important" and 0 is "not important at all".
Score out of 10; All respondents who answered question item (n=115 to 117)
Source: Online consultation

Another key finding is that 61% of the stakeholders surveyed in the context of this study were of the opinion that there are **not enough ways for cities to influence EU policy on urban matters without the Urban Agenda**. This underlines the perceived necessity for a forum such as the UAEU for cities to be more integrated in the EU-level policy cycle and influence agendas at EU, national or local levels across EU.

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[37] European Committee of the Regions (2018): Opinion - Implementation assessment of the Urban Agenda for the EU, COTER-VI/037

Following the experience of the first 2.5 years of implementation of the UAEU, the views of the stakeholders interviewed as part of this study support the idea that **the UAEU approach to promoting cooperation across multiple governance layers is generally relevant and needed,** with a view to making cities' voices better heard at EU level. In its report published one year after the launch of the Pact of Amsterdam, EUKN found that the UAEU had reinforced the focus on co-ordination of urban topics at EU level both horizontally (within and between relevant EU institutions) and vertically (by building "bridges" between cities, Member States and EU institutions) (EUKN, 2017). In a joint meeting of the European Commission's DGs involved in the UAEU TPs organised in February 2019, the participants agreed that "*the multi-level governance is key to the achievements of the Urban Agenda*".[38] However, as pointed out by the Mayors meeting at the 2019 Mayors Summit in London, "*there is still a considerable discrepancy between the impact of Mayors on the citizens' lives and the level of involvement by Mayors in European and national policy making*" (EU Capital City Mayors, 2019).

Nevertheless, specific points for improvement were raised. Notably, **the UAEU multi-level cooperation approach is not considered equally relevant by all types of stakeholders involved.** As explained in more detail in the sections below, city representatives generally find it a relevant means to channel their concerns to the EU level, and the Commission especially appreciates the opportunities to understand the urban implications of EU legislation implementation and enforcement and to have a direct dialogue with the local level. The Member State representatives consulted for this study, on the other hand, on average found the UAEU somewhat less relevant to their own interests.

Relevance of the UAEU approach to the Commission

Discussions at the DGs meeting in 2019 assessing the experiences of Commission representatives participating in UAEU[39] suggest that, to the European Commission, the UAEU multi-level cooperation method is the most important achievement of the initiative to date. Its relevance is considered generally **important especially for the Commission to understand enforcement and implementation issues related to EU policies**. Furthermore, as confirmed by interviews, Commission representatives find it important that through being involved in the UAEU, they can obtain a clearer picture of the realities on the ground and have the opportunity to explain EU policies to the TP members.

As highlighted in other sections of this report, the role of the Commission may also be somewhat conflicting when it comes to the Commission DGs' engagement in TPs. On the one hand, the Commission can be an equal member in UAEU Partnerships and allows the bottom-up development of ideas and actions within the TPs; on the other hand, based on the interviews and case studies, TP participants expect the Commission to act on the recommendations resulting from the Action Planning work. In the stakeholder survey performed for this study, 26% of TP participants believed that the lack of support

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[38] Based on minutes of the EC meeting taking stock of EC DGs' involvement with UAEU shared by the EC with the assessment team

[39] Based on minutes of the EC meeting taking stock of EC DGs' involvement with UAEU shared by the EC with the assessment team

from Commission DGs (other than DG REGIO) is one of the main barriers to the UAEU realising its full potential. Commission-level stakeholders noted that the Commission position in TPs is to a certain extent a balancing act. Especially when involved in an EU legislative process on a particular topic, the Commission needs to take into account different views beyond the ones expressed in the TP on that topic, and its role should not necessarily be expected to be to influence or endorse the positions by the Partnerships or their members.[40]

The consensus among the DGs is that the UAEU cooperation approach should be better structured, especially when working within TPs. The EU Capital City Mayors proposed as a solution to nominate a Commission Vice-President for Urban Affairs, and hand over the coordination of Commission's involvement in the Urban Agenda to the Secretariat General of the European Commission (EU Capital City Mayors, 2019)[41]. Moreover, they are of the opinion that the Urban Agenda activities should be included in the Commission's Annual Work Programme (ibid).

Relevance of the UAEU approach to the MS

The governance framework of the UAEU, which considerably relies on UDG and DGUM meetings, provides a space for vertical cooperation between national and European governance levels. Based on interviews performed in the inception phase of the present assessment study and desk review, the role of the MS and Council Presidencies was key in promoting the UAEU at EU level. Many participating MS reportedly highlight the positive impact that the UAEU governance and cooperation model has had in terms of raising awareness to the issue of multilevel governance, thereby bringing "EU urban policy-making closer to national urban-related discussions and stakeholders (EUKN, 2017)." According to the survey performed by the 2019 Romanian Presidency among MS participating in the UAEU, the main benefits to MS include: Exchanges with other countries on urban issues; Updated information on urban policy at European level; exchange of best practices, networking; learning on how to better integrate urban concerns in national policies (Romanian Presidency of the EU Council , 2019).

However, this type of benefits may be insufficient for some MS to ensure proactive engagement in the UAEU. Based on the survey with UAEU stakeholders performed in this study, **one of the top bottlenecks to the UAEU realising its full potential is the lack of interest and involvement from MS** (according to 31% of the TP members and coordinators surveyed). The EUKN report assessing the UAEU after one year from the Pact of Amsterdam also highlights that this unbalanced engagement from the side of the MS can be one bottleneck related to the cities' voice being sufficiently heard through the UAEU (EUKN, 2017). This finding is confirmed by interviews and case studies performed within this assessment.

As stated in the minutes of the European Commission DGs' meeting on tacking stock of Commission's experiences with engaging in the UAEU from February 2019, there is an

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[40] Based on minutes of the meeting of EC DGs on experiences on UAUE, shared by the EC with the assessment team.

[41] EU Capital City Mayors. (2019). Joint declaration by the Mayors of the 28 EU Capital Cities, 25 June 2019. 8th EU Capital City Mayors Meeting. London.

impression among the DGs that the **benefits of participation in the UAEU seem limited for the Member States**, and therefore the representatives involved in the TPs may place less importance on their involvement.

Some of the reasons mentioned for the low MS participation relate, on the one hand, to the fact that the Member States' participation in the EU-level inter-institutional legislative process through the EU Council provides them with an important forum for representation and formally influencing EU policy. On the other hand, **the topics developed within the UAEU TPs might not always be sufficiently relevant to the MS.** Some stakeholders (in particular MS representatives) believed that issues related to national implementation of EU rules, national legislation or national implementation processes would be more interesting to MS and potentially ensure their increased engagement.

In addition, according to findings from this assessment's case studies, further factors may hamper the MS' active participation:

- **Relevance of the ministries involved**: the Ministries involved in the TPs have been perceived as less relevant in a large share of TPs; in many cases, representatives from the Ministries of Regional and Urban Development were involved, which were not as knowledgeable of the topic discussed or were not always individuals who were considered to be best placed within their MS to open doors and start conversations with other MS. Several interviewees considered that representatives of line Ministries dealing with the specific topic would have been better suited to take part in the TP.

- **Cultural issues:** there might be a reluctance to get involved in multi-level, multi-stakeholder initiatives such as UAEU from the side of MS, as they might not be used to working in this type of environment. Based on the case study findings, this might have had an impact on their initial decision to join the TP, but also on their involvement throughout the TP, as at least a third of the Partnerships noted that the engagement of MS had starkly decreased over time.

- **Resource constraints and skills gap**, including time constraints, opportunity costs for participation, lack of suitable or English-speaking staff.

Based on the 2019 survey with MS representatives performed by the Romanian Council Presidency, there were several ideas on how MS' participation, or the relevance of UAEU to their needs could be increased. These ideas relate to:

- Facilitating the translation of UAEU TP results into nationally relevant issues – e.g. by "fostering linkages and reports of national urban policies and feeding them into the Action Planning" / "synthesising local outcomes into strategic / national approaches"; "Linking the results closely to the national circumstances and communicate them to cities"; "Establishing national focal points for the Urban Agenda, linked to URBACT and EUKN focal points".

- Clarifying more the role of the MS and stronger involvement of line ministries in TPs.

- Improving funding to UAEU e.g. by promoting financial opportunities for MS to develop actions under UAEU, or requiring national funding for financing UAEU actions.

Relevance of the UAEU approach to cities

According to case study interviewees, cities are a key stakeholder in the multi-governance, multi-stakeholder approach adopted by the UAEU, and they were considered as critical actors in the Thematic Partnerships. The representation of cities in most Partnerships was described as excellent, and generally well-balanced across sizes and locations. Across the TPs considered for this study, cities have generally been **engaged actors**, as they valued the opportunity to feed into EU policymaking and believed their work as part of the UAEU could have a 'real impact' on their daily work. Nevertheless, there were also examples of cities that were not engaged (e.g. because they lacked the financial and/or human resources), as noted by the coordinators interviewed.

Generally, the city representatives interviewed as part of the case studies found it useful to engage in TPs in order to find or develop practical solutions to their local challenges, e.g. through:

a) increasing their knowledge on specific aspects within the theme they were working on, exchange experiences, share good practices;

b) trying to influence policy at the EU level in the particular thematic area, especially with a view to obtaining more EU funding for the urban level or decrease the bureaucracy in accessing the EU funding; and to a lesser extent, adjust the EU regulatory frameworks on some issues, which were perceived as not reflecting the local experiences.

Not all types of cities manage to get engaged in UAEU. Several sources including TP members' interviews performed for case studies, as well as the Romanian Presidency's assessment of the UAEU (Romanian Presidency of the EU Council , 2019) point to the fact that there are unequal opportunities for cities of smaller or medium sizes to get involved, as well as for cities in lagging regions, due to the lack of resources (financial or staff resources) to participate. It appears that larger cities and capital cities are the most represented types of cities in TPs. The strong representation (or 'overrepresentation', in the view of some stakeholders) of larger cities in TPs is further amplified by the participation of associations such as Eurocities, which is a network of large cities.

Key barriers and bottlenecks in making cities' concerns heard at EU level through the UAEU

While the UAEU represents a new approach to multi-level cooperation at EU level by increasing the voice of cities, there is uncertainty surrounding the question of how precisely to incorporate cities in the governance model, which points to the need to pay specific attention to methodological processes (see (Hajer, 2018)). There are therefore still particular issues in the UAEU cooperation model that need calibration in the future.

In sum, as specified earlier, the following issues still need to be addressed in order to remove barriers to cities' more concrete involvement at EU level through the UAEU:

- Alignment of expectations between the stakeholders participating in the TPs and the governance bodies, for example with regard to the lack of clarity in terms of the roles of the Commission, the low participation of MS and the relatively less strong participation of cities of small sizes;

- The perceived lack of appropriate resources for (especially medium to small) cities to contribute to the TPs.

- Clarification of incentives for the participants to engage in UAEU activities, especially when it comes to the participation of MS representatives and Commission DGs.

4.3.2 RELEVANCE OF THE PILLARS, THEMES AND CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

Assessment question 8: To what extent are the pillars, themes and cross-cutting issues defined in the Pact of Amsterdam conducive to addressing the main needs and priorities of urban areas in the EU?

Based on the stakeholder consultation performed in this study, the **relevance of the 11 cross-cutting themes of the Urban Agenda was rated high.** Stakeholders rated the cross-cutting themes overall with an 8.4 out of 10. This score varied between 8.9 for "sound and strategic urban planning" to 7.9 for the "international dimension" (see figures overleaf). However, many interviewees argued that the **cross-cutting issues included in the Pact of Amsterdam are not being considered systematically by UAEU stakeholders**. UAEU TP coordinators generally considered cross-cutting issues as an important element of the Partnerships' work, as they are embedded in the Pact of Amsterdam; however, they highlighted the need for more methodological guidance on how to better address these issues through the Action Plans.[42]

In terms of the UAEU Partnership themes, the **stakeholders consulted perceived the relevance of the themes of the 14 Thematic Partnerships as high**. On average the Thematic Partnerships themes were rated with an 8.4 out of 10, in which 10 is very relevant. Stakeholders rated the 'climate adaptation' and 'urban mobility' themes as particularly relevant (rated 9.0 and 9.1 out of 10, respectively). The 'security in public spaces' and 'culture and cultural heritage' themes (both of which were addressed by wave 4 Partnerships) were seen as less relevant (rated 7.3 and 7.7 out of 10, respectively), although differences are relatively minor (see figures below). A survey performed by CEMR, an EU-wide association representing local authorities shows as well that the Partnerships' themes are still relevant.[43]

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[42] Minutes of the UAEU TP Coordinators' meeting, March 2018, shared with the assessment team by the EC

[43] Based on the presentation of an assessment of UAEU performed by CEMR and presented at the UAEU Coordinators' meeting, February 2019

Figure 24 : Relevance Urban Agenda themes

How relevant do you consider the following themes... (Score out of 10)

Theme	Score
Urban mobility	9.1
Climate adaptation	9.0
Energy transition	8.9
Air quality	8.8
Sustainable use of land and nature-based...	8.6
Circular economy	8.6
Housing	8.5
Urban poverty	8.4
Jobs and skills in the local economy	8.4
Digital transition	8.3
Inclusion of migrants and refugees	8.1
Innovative and responsible public procurement	8.0
Culture and cultural heritage	7.7
Security in public space	7.3

Q2.4. How relevant do you consider to be the following themes of the Urban Agenda for cities and urban areas in your country / the EU? (Link to more information on themes)
Score out of 10; All respondents who answered question item (n=114 to 117)
Source: Online consultation

Figure 25 : Relevance Urban Agenda 'cross-cutting' issues

How relevant do you consider the following 'cross-cutting' themes... (Score out of 10)

Theme	Score
Sound and strategic urban planning	8.9
Integrated and participatory approach	8.7
Effective urban governance	8.6
Governance across administrative boundaries and inter-municipal...	8.6
Urban regeneration	8.6
Provision of adequate public services of general interest	8.4
Innovative approaches	8.4
Adaptation to demographic change and in- and out migration	8.3
Challenges and opportunities of small- and medium-sized cities and...	8.2
Impact on societal change, including behavioural change	8.2
International dimension	7.9

Q2.5. How relevant do you consider to be the following 'cross-cutting' issues for urban policy-making in your country / the EU? (Link to more information on 'cross-cutting' themes)
Score out of 10; All respondents who answered question item (n=113 to 117)
Source: Online consultation

Overall, the stakeholder consultation performed for this study provided evidence that **the themes and pillars of UAEU are in line with the needs and the problems faced by the cities**, as well as with the key challenges for sustainable urban development covered by the New Urban Agenda. Moreover, stakeholders interviewed also mentioned that the UAEU themes are in line with the ESPON evidence for future development trends in different social, economic and environmental policy fields. The themes seem to remain relevant as also shown by the 2019 Future of Cities Report, where affordable housing, climate action, mobility, social segregation are mentioned as key future challenges (JRC, 2019). The only other challenge mentioned by the report

and not covered by the TPs is ageing. The JRC (2019) report highlights, nevertheless, some cross-cutting themes where cities can be take more action, acting towards more resilience, sustainability, fostering innovation and involvement of citizens, as well as improve urban governance (ibid). Interviewees consulted during this assessment also mentioned that some of the cross-cutting themes not sufficiently covered by TPs are 'accessibility' and 'environmental friendly basic infrastructure in cities'.

At an overall level, the stakeholders surveyed (from all levels of governance) felt that policy-makers at EU, national and regional level make efforts to take the priorities and needs of the cities and urban areas into account, however, not to a great extent. Most city-level respondents (54%) felt that their needs and priorities are only somewhat taken into account by policy-makers at EU-level, while 14% believed that their needs and priorities are taken into account to a great extent. With regard to policy-makers at the national or regional level, these figures were quite similar (57% and 19%, respectively).

Interviewees, particularly representatives of European organisations, highlighted that **cities' needs are very broad and diverse**, thus the **UAEU should only focus on those where a coordinated and integrated intervention is needed** (e.g. reduce air pollution, create opportunities for circular businesses). This is also one of the conclusions of the joint meeting of the representatives of Commission services involved in UAEU TPs organised in 2019: there should be more focus on cross-sectoral issues (e.g. how to deal with the impacts of the sharing platform economy on the liveability of the cities).[44]

Interviewees also mentioned that the clustering of the TPs and cross-cutting issues themes is creating silos and that a better clustering could be arranged. An interviewee suggested to split the cross-cutting themes into enablers - such as the Internet of things, connectivity and physical and digital infrastructure - and TP themes or as stated by interviewee "vertical themes" into themes with commercialisation purpose - such as industry, mobility, food etc.

The UATPG input paper for the UDG's discussion on the future of UAEU[45] analysed the current TPs' Action Plans and clustered the actions in two alternative ways:

A. Clusters identified under the three main strands of the UAEU: Better Regulation, Better Funding and Better Knowledge.

B. Clusters based on the cross-thematic issues

The clusters identified under the three main strands of the UAEU are:

- Actions intended to affect better regulation. This encompasses 30+ actions identified under the better regulation strand, as well as several better funding

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[44] Minutes of the meeting of the EC DGs involved in UAEU TPs (February 2019)

[45] Internal document shared with the assessment team by the EC services (August 2019)

related actions. This can be sub-divided into further sub-groups: better implementation, changes to existing legislation, new legislation;

- Actions intended to contribute to better funding. The 25+ actions under this header can be categorised as 1) action that make suggestions for areas of investment or new forms of investment mechanisms to institutions such as the EU institutions and local governments, and 2) actions that seek to disseminate information among different actors regarding funding mechanisms or their development;

- Actions (50+ in total) intended to contribute to knowledge creation and sharing, which includes actions form the Better Knowledge and Better Funding strands. These can be sub-divided into further sub-groups: better governance as a specific topic for knowledge, data and indicators, and knowledge production (best practices, guides, toolkits and roadmaps).

The clustering based on the cross-thematic issues was approached in two ways:

1. Clustering based on the cross-cutting issues identified in the Pact of Amsterdam (notably land-use planning, digitalisation and the city and digital innovation in cities); and

2. Clustering based on wider integrative themes (for example green city related actions).

Following the proposed ways of clustering actions, the document highlights the fact that there are opportunities for, for example (ibid):

- Reinforcing synergies by sharing contacts of partners involved in the different TPs and by combining upcoming events, focussing events on clusters of actions;

- Discussing common approaches to tackle the challenges under the better regulation strand;

- Reinforcing linkages between urban matters and territorial cohesion;

- Etc.

All in all, there is consensus that, while the themes selected for the Partnerships' work remain relevant, some **horizontal and cross cutting issues that require an integrated approach are not fully covered by the UAEU**. Nevertheless, achieving more cross-sectoral cooperation within UAEU may also prove difficult, due to the low resources allocated to the initiative and the need for enhanced coordination across the different sectors from all participants.

4.3.3 CONCLUSIONS: RELEVANCE

Overall, the relevance of the UAEU and its approach (multi-level and multi-stakeholder cooperation) was high, in the sense that it addresses what stakeholders perceive as the

clear need to enhance the ways for cities to influence EU policy on urban matters. It also reflects a growing trend at global level towards emphasising urban governance and the role of cities in tackling societal challenges. Stakeholders believed the UAEU provides a significant and important (even "ground-breaking" according to the European Committee of the Regions) new way for cities to influence policy at the EU level – "the first to translate the recognition of cities' role in EU and national policies into concrete actions" – although this new approach still needs to demonstrate it can consistently deliver concrete results (see above). Improved access of cities and urban areas to EU funding was rated as most important. However, there are some differences between how the three main groups perceive the relevance of the UAEU:

- Unsurprisingly, the UAEU was seen as most relevant for **cities and urban authorities,** both by themselves and by other stakeholders. City representatives frequently described the UAEU as a crucial opportunity to engage with and feed into EU policy-making, and saw strong potential for this to have a tangible impact on their daily work. The Urban Agenda also has the merit of being a concrete initiative / framework. For example, a stakeholder described the UAEU as "the best we have". However, not all types of cities manage to engage in UAEU. The survey from the Romanian presidency has pointed out that there are unequal opportunities for cities of smaller or medium sizes as well for cities in lagging regions.

- **European Commission**: the UAEU multi-level cooperation method is the most important achievement of the initiative to date. The UAEU is seen as the unique governance method that makes UAEU different from many other initiatives. Its relevance is considered as important for the Commission to understand enforcement and implementation issues related to EU policies. Obtaining a clear picture of the realities on the ground and have the opportunity to explain EU policies to the TP members are seen as important.

- **Member States** provided a more mixed picture – while the relevance of the UAEU was also recognised by practically all representatives of national authorities consulted for this study, they were often less clear on the benefits to them specifically (as they are more interested in issues related to national implementation of EU rules, national legislation or national implementation processes). This might also explain MS somewhat lower overall levels of engagement and involvement, notable exceptions notwithstanding. Some ideas on how MS' participation, or the relevance of UAEU to their needs could be increased are: facilitating the translation of UAEU TP results into national relevant issues; clarifying more the role of MS and stronger involvement of line ministries in TPs and improving finding to UAEU (promoting financial opportunities for MS to develop actions under UAEU, or requiring national funding for financing UAEU actions).

Regarding the relevance of the UAEU's themes, pillars and aims, and cross-cutting issues (as defined in the Pact of Amsterdam), the available evidence points to the following:

- The **themes** of the 14 Thematic Partnerships are highly relevant and are in line with the ESPON evidence for future development trends as well as with the Future of Cities report (2019), with exception of ageing (although slightly less so for the two TPs of Wave 4, based on stakeholder feedback), as they align with the key needs and the problems faced by cities.

- The three **pillars** (Better Regulation, Better Funding and Better Knowledge) were all considered very important by stakeholders. The survey results confirm that the same applies to the key aims of more cooperation with cities and urban areas in other European countries, increasing the influence of cities and urban areas on national or regional policy-making, and increasing the influence of cities and urban areas on EU policy-making.

- Although the **cross-cutting issues** were found as relevant by survey respondents, the interviews suggest they **only played a minor role in practice in the work of the TPs**. They may have been taken into account implicitly in the Action Planning process to some extent.

- Many stakeholders highlighted the **importance of focusing on those themes where a coordinated and integrated intervention is needed**. In this sense there should be more focus on cross-sectoral issues (taking an "integrated approach").

- A better clustering could be arranged to avoid creating silos as well. This could be through creating synergies between TPs work and/or addressing the most recurring issues that have been raised by a majority of Partnerships' Action Plans in a coordinated way.

In summary, expecting the UAEU to duly consider all three dimensions equally in their work may have been unrealistic. As the UAEU's main delivery mechanism (the TPs) were organised along *thematic* lines, this ended up being the main focus, with the cross-cutting issues much less of a priority. It may be worth considering whether, in the next phase of the UAEU, this balance should be redressed in order to take a more integrated and participative perspective which is the backbone of the urban dimension of Cohesion Policy.

4.4 Coherence

In this chapter, we look at both the *internal* and *external* coherence of the UAEU. Section 4.4.1 elaborates on to what extent the different elements of the UAEU, including the 14 Thematic Partnerships, complement and reinforce each other. Section 4.4.2. discusses to what degree the UAEU is coherent with other urban policy initiatives at international, EU and national level.

4.4.1 <u>INTERNAL COHERENCE OF THE ELEMENTS OF THE UAEU</u>

> *Assessment question 9: To what extent do the elements of the UAEU (including the 12 Thematic Partnerships) complement and reinforce each other?*

Cross-Partnership collaboration

To what extent did the UAEU Thematic Partnerships in the Urban Agenda collaborate with each other? The available evidence suggests that there was **room for improvement** in this area. In the stakeholder survey, cross-TP collaboration was not rated highly. Only about a third of respondents (32%) strongly agreed or agreed that the TPs collaborate well amongst each other. Moreover, a substantial share of respondents (20%) did not know whether the TPs collaborate well, which might hint at a lack of attention for cross-TP collaboration in the Action Planning process (see Figure below).

Figure 26 : Collaboration with other UAEU Thematic Partnerships
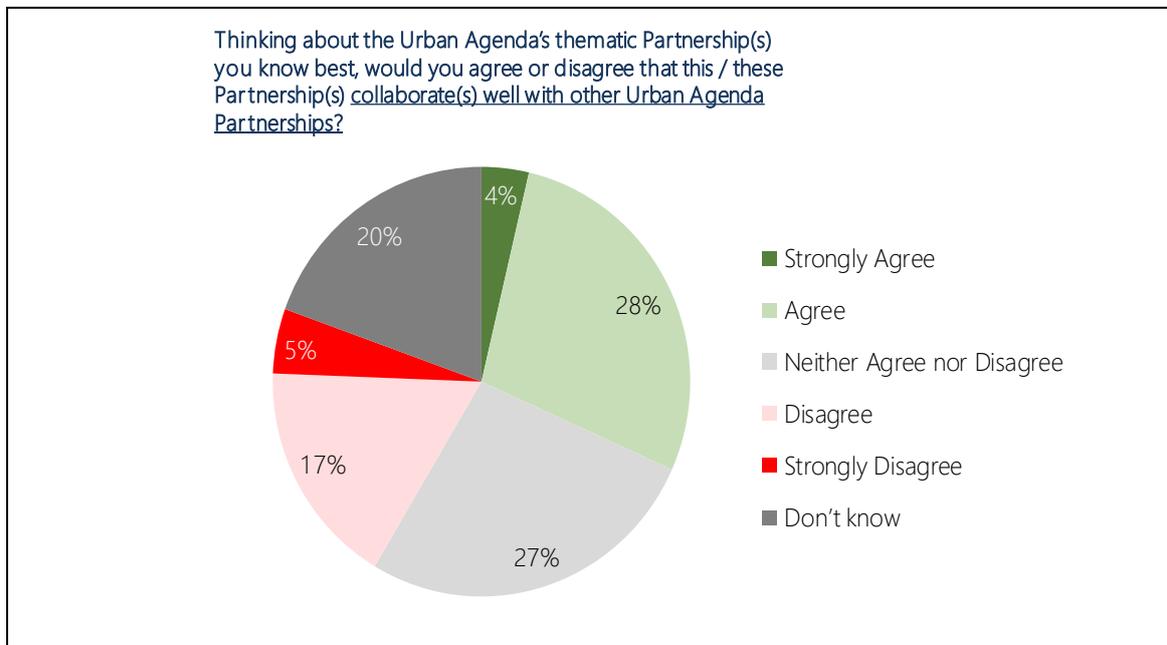
Q3.7. Thinking about the Thematic Partnership(s) you know best, do you agree or disagree that this / these Partnership(s)…
%; All respondents who are familiar with a Partnership and who answered question item (n=82)
Source: Online consultation

At least some TPs appear to have developed strong bilateral ties with one or more other TPs. Stakeholders reported this was done with the aim to share best practices and to prevent overlap in themes covered. There have been relatively strong ties between, for example, the Urban Poverty and Housing Partnerships. However, this kind of cross-TP cooperation appears to have been **largely ad-hoc**. Cross-TP cooperation seems not to have been 'institutionalised' or 'mainstreamed' in the framework of the UAEU, notwithstanding some efforts in this direction, such as the yearly coordinators (of the TPs) meetings organised by the European Commission. Cross-TP cooperation was likely not helped by the general lack of guidance on the Action Planning process, as reported by stakeholders (see Chapter on Effectiveness and Action Planning case study).

As was the case with the broader UAEU and TPs, much appears to have depended on the individual coordinators and other leading TP members, such as – depending on the TP – Commission DGs, Members States, URBACT or the EIB, who needed to explore and point to opportunities for collaboration and to prevent potential overlaps. It should be added that the Pact of Amsterdam specified "cooperation with the other Partnerships, when deemed of added value" as a responsibility of the coordinators.

It seems reasonable to assume that more cross-TP collaboration could have been helpful for TP members and could have led to more cross-TP fertilisation, at least for the TPs with themes that have certain overlaps with the themes of other TPs (see below). However, the lack of cooperation among TPs was not **judged to be a major issue** by stakeholders, including TP members. In the stakeholder survey, only 13% of respondents indicated that a lack of cooperation across the different Thematic Partnerships was a *significant barrier* to the UAEU reaching its full potential[46]. This figure was similarly low (14%) when focussing on the responses from TP members only.

Remit of Thematic Partnerships and overlaps

As noted in the Chapter on Relevance, the stakeholders consulted for this study were generally very positive about the themes of the TPs. Stakeholders believed that the crucial themes for cities are covered and were generally not in favour of adding more themes / TPs. On the other hand, overlap between the themes of the TPs and the Action Plans **seems to have been an issue**. In the stakeholder survey, less than half of respondents (48%[47]) strongly agreed or agreed that the Action Plans of the Thematic Partnerships prevent overlap in themes covered, of which less than one in ten (8%) strongly agreed (see Figure below). This compared to, for example, eight in ten respondents (79%) who in the same question strongly agreed or agreed that the Action Plans are relevant to the actual needs of the cities in the EU.

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[46] This question was only asked to the slightly more than half (58%) of respondents who perceived a significant barrier to the UAEU reaching its full potential.

[47] 48%, not 47%, due to rounding.

Figure 27 : Action Plans and overlap
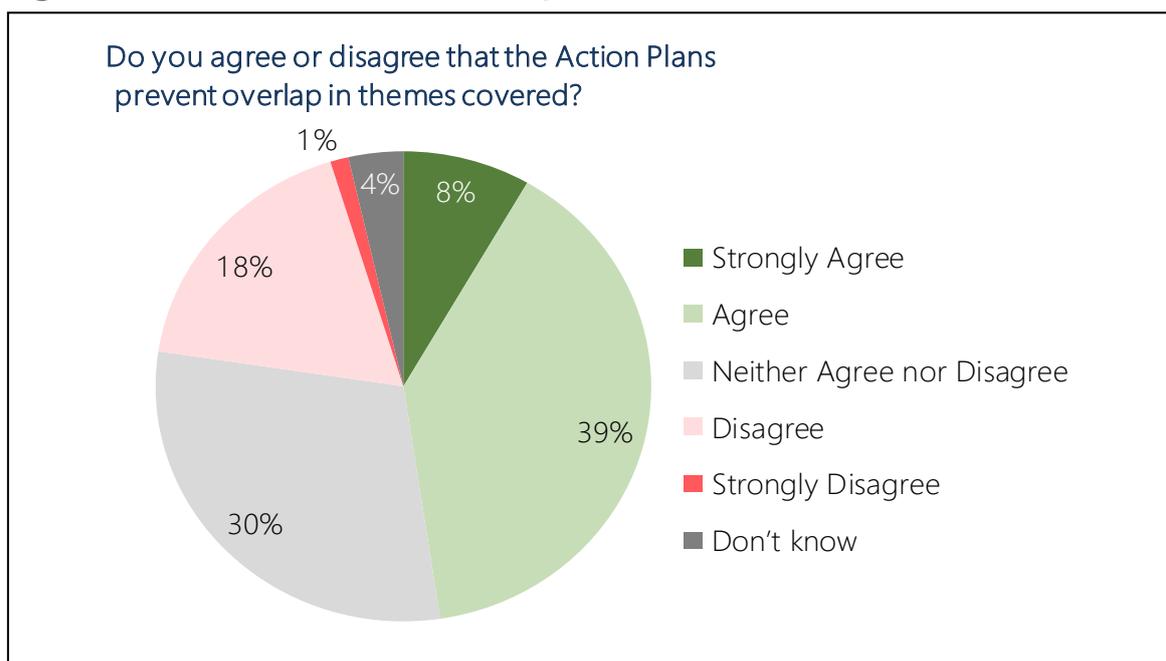
Do you agree or disagree that the Action Plans
prevent overlap in themes covered?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree
- Don't know

8% · 39% · 30% · 18% · 1% · 4%

Q3.2. For each of the thematic Partnerships of the Urban Agenda an Action Plan was developed.
Do you agree or disagree that these Action Plans?
%; All respondents who are familiar with a Partnership and who answered question item (n=84)
Source: Online consultation

Limited feedback was obtained from the TP members and other actors on why this overlap in themes of the TPs / Action Plans occurred. It is likely, however, that the **limited cooperation** among Partnerships played an important role (see above), as did the shortcomings in the governance of the UAEU and the limited guidance for the TPs. A certain overlap in themes and the remit of TPs might also have been **ingrained** in the setup of the UAEU. As noted in the case study on the Implementation of Actions, many TP themes were very broad and multifaceted. Demarcating the topics during the Action Planning process proved challenging for many TPs, among others due to the variety of stakeholders and opinions represented in the TPs. Moreover, as specified in the Pact of Amsterdam, the UAEU had to come to an integrated approach towards urban challenges, making overlap of themes desirable to a certain extent, insofar as this led to cross TP-collaboration and fertilisation (for the latter there is, however, only limited evidence, as discussed above).

Considering the cross-cutting themes listed in the Pact of Amsterdam, most Thematic Partnerships members appear to have been aware of these and noted that these had been taken into account during the Action Planning to a greater or lesser extent. As noted in the Relevance chapter, the themes were also considered relevant. However, there is no tangible evidence that the cross-cutting issues had an important impact on fostering cross-TP cooperation and convergence.

Stakeholders were markedly less aware about the elements, or 'actions', part of the UAEU other than the Thematic Partnerships, such as the enhanced use of territorial impact assessments (TIAs) and the 'one-stop-shop' for cities portal. Hence they often found it difficult to comment on whether these elements were aligned to the broader UAEU. As noted in the chapter on Effectiveness, most interviewees who were aware, felt that the UAEU has not contributed significantly to progress with the TIAs. This feedback

was confirmed by the stakeholder survey: 43% of survey respondents agreed that the UAEU contributed to TIAs to a great or some extent. Awareness about the 'one-stop-shop' was similarly low. In the survey, only about a third of the stakeholders (33%) reported having used the 'one-stop-shop', with only 3% having used it extensively. While this limited awareness and use of the TIAs and the one-stop-shop does not imply that both elements were not coherent with the broader UAEU, it does suggest that the focus in the UAEU was strongly on the TPs (as was confirmed by various interviewees), perhaps to the detriment of other elements / actions.

4.4.2 <u>EXTERNAL COHERENCE WITH OTHER URBAN POLICY INITIATIVES</u>

Assessment question 10: To what extent is the UAEU coherent with other urban policy initiatives at international, EU and national level?

The UAEU, in the European Commissions' own words, "constitutes the common frame for urban policy initiatives" at EU level[48]. This means among other things that other EU programmes, policies and initiatives relating to urban policy should be aligned as much as possible to the topics of the TPs of the UAEU and that the UAEU and its TPs should make use of / contribute to existing European policies, instruments, platforms and programmes where possible. The Pact of Amsterdam refers specifically to Cohesion Policy, including its sustainable urban development strand, Urban Innovative Actions (UIA), URBACT, ESPON, the 'Covenant of Mayors', Civitas 2020, the Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities, EUKN and the European Innovation Partnership 'Smart Cities and Communities'[49]. In addition, the Pact of Amsterdam states that the UAEU should foster coherence between urban matters and territorial cohesion, as set out in the Territorial Agenda 2020. The Pact of Amsterdam also outlines a number of actions for the UAEU to bring about 'coherence' with other EU programmes, policies and initiatives, including in actions 2, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8.[50]

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[48] European Commission. (2017). *Report from the Commission to the Council on the Urban Agenda for the EU*. *Retrieved from:* https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/reports/2017/report-from-the-commission-to-the-council-on-the-urban-agenda-for-the-eu

[49] See Dutch Council Presidency. (2016). *Urban Agenda for the EU. Pact of Amsterdam.* Retrieved from:

[50] Action 2 calls for "a) Mapping the urban related Commission initiatives in the selected Themes of the [UAEU] with a view to identifying gaps, overlaps and synergies, and b) Identifying the main actors, networks and platforms within the selected themes with a view to streamlining cooperation and exchange of good practice"; action 4 calls for "alignment of the Urban Innovative Actions with the selected Themes for the [UAEU] by the European Commission"; action 5 calls for "Contribution of URBACT to the Priority Themes with its activities of exchange and learning through transnational networking, capacity building, capitalisation & dissemination of urban knowledge and know-how"; action 6 calls for "Alignment of the work of the Urban Development Network (UDN) of the European Commission to the framework of the [UAEU] by the European Commission"; action 7 notes that "The scientific work and solutions developed by the Joint Programming Initiative Urban Europe in the area of research and innovation will be used to promote and exchange evidence based proposals for urban policy and urban projects"; action 8 calls for the "Contribution of specific research activities of the European Observation Network, Territorial Development and Cohesion (ESPON) to the selected Themes, where deemed relevant." See *Pact of Amsterdam* (2016).

Alignment of the UAEU with other initiatives

As noted in the case study on Action Planning, as part of the Action Planning process, all TPs (at least in theory) considered how their proposed actions could align with, and contribute to, existing programmes, policies and initiatives. For waves 1-3 of TPs, the Commission performed a mapping of EU policies and initiatives linked to the topic of the TP.

In the Urban Poverty TP, for example, two experts with URBACT experience were contracted by the Dutch Presidency to prepare scoping documents and to support the development of the Action Plan[51]. As part of the same scoping exercise, the Commission (DG for Regional and Urban Policy and DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion) performed a mapping of EU policies and initiatives linked to urban poverty issues and people in a situation of poverty. For each of the actions in the Urban Poverty Action Plan, it was described how existing EU policies / legislations / instruments contribute.

Were these efforts by TPs sufficient to align the UAEU with other existing programmes, policies and initiatives related to urban policy? The consulted stakeholders could be qualified as **cautiously positive** in this regard, although some important concerns were voiced, and overall awareness about the alignment with specific programmes was low (see further below).

In the stakeholder survey, more than half (58%) of respondents agreed to a great extent or somewhat that the Urban Agenda and the Thematic Partnerships contribute to better alignment with other relevant EU programmes and policy instruments. Similarly, slightly more than half (56%) of respondents in the stakeholder survey strongly agreed or agreed that the Action Plans developed for the Thematic Partnerships are well aligned to other EU policies. Moreover, only 14% of respondents disagreed with this statement (see the figures below and overleaf).

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[51] Action Plan Urban Poverty Thematic Partnership. (2017). Retrieved from:
https://urbact.eu/sites/default/files/annex_1_eu_urban_agenda_upp_action_plan_171221_final.pdf

Figure 28 : Alignment with other relevant EU programmes and instruments
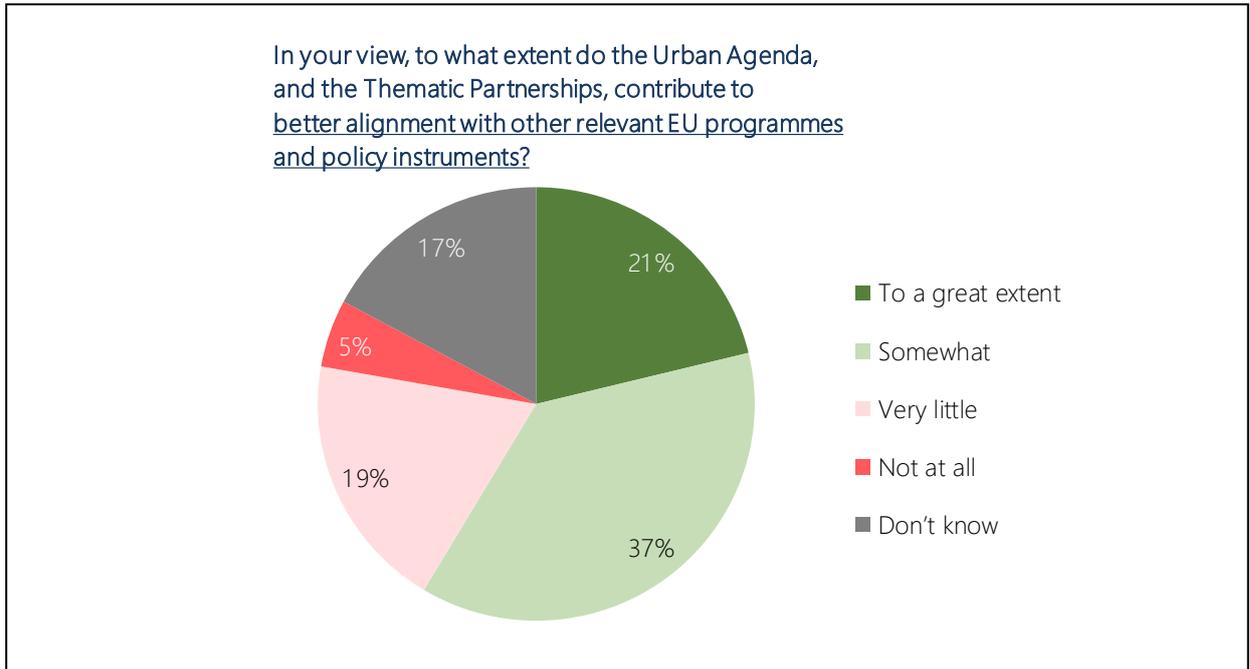
Q5.1. In your view, to what extent do the Urban Agenda, and the Thematic Partnerships, contribute to…
%; All respondents who answered question item (n=115)
Source: Online consultation

Figure 29 : Alignment Action Plans with other EU policies
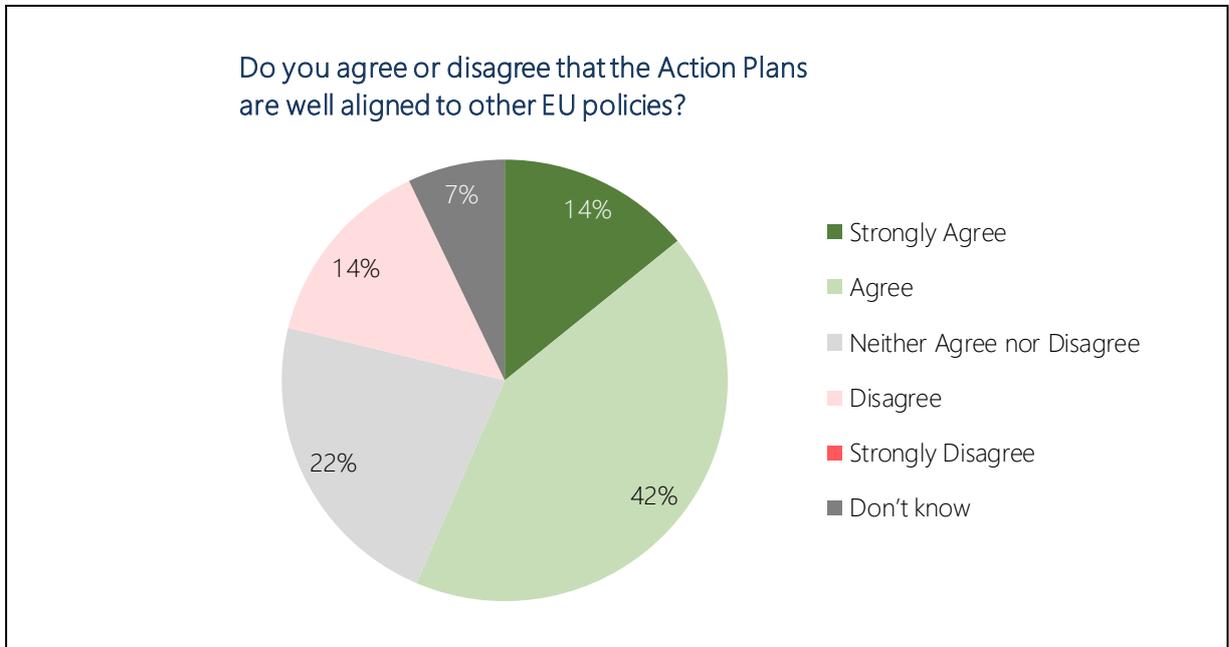
Q3.2. For each of the thematic Partnerships of the Urban Agenda an Action Plan was developed. Do you agree or disagree that these Action Plans…
%; All respondents who are familiar with a Partnership and who answered question item (n=85)
Source: Online consultation

Likewise, just 16% of respondents in the survey found that a lack of alignment with other relevant EU programmes and policy instruments was a significant barrier to the

UAEU reaching its full potential[52]. This figure was lower still for TP members and coordinators (7%). This compared to, for instance, 76% of Partnership members and coordinators who perceived a lack of funding for the TPs as a significant barrier to the Urban Agenda realising its full potential.

It should be added that in the view of many stakeholders the alignment of the UAEU with other EU policy initiatives, even if desirable, should not be an end in itself. Various stakeholders mentioned that because the UAEU is 'unique' in terms of its multi-level governance approach, it does not need to align fully with other programmes, or at least not to a much greater extent than is currently the case, perhaps with the exception of URBACT (see below).

Notwithstanding the cautiously positive opinions noted above, a substantial group of stakeholders voiced **concerns** about the limited alignment between the UAEU and other relevant EU programmes and policy instruments. Two key reasons were provided for these concerns:

1) A lack of overall coordination of EU policy initiatives related to urban policy

2) A divergence in the planning and timing schedules of the different mechanisms

With regard to point 1, some stakeholders noted that the current EU initiatives related to urban policy (during the 2014-2020 programming period) are fragmented, with highly heterogenous governance structures, as also acknowledged by the European Urban Initiative proposed for the post-2020 period. Moreover, the various EU initiatives related to urban policy are spread across different Commission departments. Some interviewees noted that this leads to working in silos, with limited coordination, or even some competition, between the various actors responsible.

Stakeholders also noted that the various EU initiatives do not align because they do not follow the same time schedule / planning and funding cycle (point 2 above). This was reportedly especially an issue with regard to the UAEU's coherence with URBACT, as the latter programme's current planning period (called URBACT III) runs from 2014-2020. The fact that URBACT III was already in place before the inception of the UAEU, made alignment between both programmes challenging. This was considered a particular problem because the UAEU and URBACT have clear overlaps. As part of the 'URBACT method', URBACT works directly with cities and other stakeholders across the EU through the so called 'URBACT Local Groups' and does a lot to promote knowledge sharing between cities and other levels of government. A stakeholder noted, for example, that in his / her view some of the existing city partnerships established through URBACT could have been taken forward by the UAEU, but this was apparently not done due to the fact that the calls of URBACT were not aligned with the TPs work.

Complementarity of the UAEU with other initiatives

Stakeholders often viewed the UAEU as **complimentary to other initiatives** because it is unique. The key reason provided for this was the UAEU's emphasis on multi-level

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[52] This question was only asked to around half (58%) of respondents who perceived a significant barrier.

governance, providing cities a 'seat at the table' with EU and Member State officials as equals (see also Chapters on Relevance and EU Added Value). Notwithstanding some reported overlaps with other EU programmes, notably with URBACT (see above), the unique 'collaboration mechanism' of the UAEU is not replicated in other initiatives, noted several stakeholders. It should also be noted that the "Better Knowledge" pillar of the UAEU was considered less unique than the other pillars (Better Regulation and Better Funding), as some TP members reported the existence of extensive alternative opportunities for knowledge sharing, inter alia through city networks.

Several stakeholders also felt that the UAEU is complimentary to other initiatives because it has **increasingly become the framework for urban policy making** in the EU, as was intended by the Commission (see above). This view is supported by the fact that the themes for the calls for Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) are based on those of the UAEU[53]. Moreover, some of the Horizon 2020 Work Programme 2018-2020 topics that are linked to cities and urban development are based on the themes of the UAEU.

Practical coherence

It is important to add to the above that the case studies and general interviews delivered limited feedback on the actual coherence of the UAEU with other specific initiatives. For instance, interviewees had little to say on the level of mutual support the UAEU and other initiatives related to urban policy lend each other, or the extent to which transferable best practices are shared between initiatives. This was, first of all, because many stakeholders admitted being **insufficiently aware** about other EU programmes, policies and initiatives related to urban policy. From this, it could perhaps be deduced that external coherence was not a main focus during the Action Planning process, although this was seldom explicitly stated by consulted TP members and cannot be validated with information from the Action Plans. It should also be noted that as part of the Action Planning process, for Waves 1-3 of TPs, the Commission performed a mapping of EU policies and initiatives linked to the topic of the TP.

Stakeholders did note that the alignment of Action Plans with other urban policy initiatives at international, EU and national level was facilitated by including representatives of certain organisations as members in the TPs: Commission DGs other than DG REGIO, Member States, URBACT representatives, EIB representatives, etc. Whether these actors indeed played an important role in aligning the Action Plan with existing policy initiatives seems to have varied depending on the TP, but anecdotal evidence suggest that this was indeed the case in at least some TPs.

4.4.3 CONCLUSIONS: COHERENCE

The **internal coherence** of the UAEU (i.e. the extent to which its elements complement and reinforce each other) **is not especially pronounced**. It appears there has been relatively limited collaboration between TPs; although some bilateral collaboration

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[53] See for example on the website of the UIA: https://www.uia-initiative.eu/en/initiative/uia-topics-better-urban-environment

amongst certain TPs (those with strong thematic links) was established, this was not 'institutionalised' in the framework of the UAEU, but depended almost entirely on the initiative of leading TP members, in particular coordinators. Similarly, there was limited awareness among stakeholders (including TP members) of the other (non-TP) elements of the UAEU (such as territorial impact assessments or the one-stop-shop portal), and even more limited evidence of any significant complementarities or reinforcing effects. However, **the lack of greater coherence between TPs, and with other UAEU elements, was not considered a major barrier to the UEAU reaching its full potential** and may well have been another consequence of the flexible, experimental approach taken to the TPs, with relatively broad themes and a general interest in cross-fertilisation that has not been fully put into practice yet.

There is reason for cautious optimism regarding the UAEU's **external coherence and alignment with other EU urban policy initiatives**. The evidence suggests that the UAEU had to some extent become the common frame for urban policy initiatives at EU level, as intended; this is corroborated e.g. by the fact that Urban Innovative Actions are based on the UAEU themes. However, stakeholders could provide limited concrete feedback on possible synergies between the UAEU's TPs and other initiatives, suggesting alignment was not prioritised during the Action Planning, although it should be noted that the Commission and Action Plans did pay attention to external coherence. However, there was some feedback suggesting that the relevant EU initiatives work in silos; the UAEU's alignment with URBACT in particular seems to have been a problem, due to its different planning periods and the overlap between both initiatives. There is **clearly room for improving the way the UAEU interacts with other relevant initiatives**, which was recognised by the Commission in its proposal for the European Urban Initiative-post 2020.

4.5 EU Added Value

This chapter explores whether the UAEU created value that is additional to the value that would have been otherwise created by Member States alone. Section 4.5.1 answers this question from the perspective of the importance of EU involvement. Section 4.5.2 looks at to what extent the effects of the UAEU would be sustained if EU support for the UAEU was discontinued.

4.5.1   IMPORTANCE OF THE EU INVOLVEMENT

> *Assessment question 11: To what extent does the UAEU generate value that is additional to the value that would have resulted from interventions initiated at regional or national levels?*

The Pact of Amsterdam was devised based on the recognition that cities and urban areas play a key role in preparing, designing, financing and implementing EU policies, but lack a formal role[54] or strong voice in the institutional framework of the EU. As noted in Chapter 2, this recognition was not new. Already in 1997 the Commission mentioned the need for an "urban agenda", a call which was repeated by several political declarations. This included the Leipzig Charter in 2007, the Toledo Declaration in 2010 and the Riga Declaration in 2015[55]. During this period the EU also strengthened the urban dimension of its policies, as demonstrated for example by the European Innovation Partnership on Smart Cities and Communities (launched in 2012), the Urban Community Initiative (URBAN I & II), the inclusion of sustainable urban development in the ERDF (Article 7), the Urban Development Network, Urban Innovative Actions, the European Capital of Culture, European Green Capital and European Capital of Innovation, and the Covenant of Mayors[56].

It was the Urban Agenda, however, that first provided cities and urban areas with a 'seat at the table' with the European institutions and Member States, based on partnership and equality. Even though there is undeniably some overlap of the Urban Agenda with other EU programmes (see chapter on Coherence), the *sui generis* and *innovative* nature of the Urban Agenda was recognised by most of the stakeholders consulted for this study. The Urban Agenda was regularly described in terms like "different" and "unique". Most of the consulted stakeholders perceived this **'uniqueness' as a key added value**. Because of this, the consulted stakeholder also gave the Urban Agenda a lot of credit for its *theoretical* added value, even if not always fully living up to expectations (see below). The Urban Agenda was often described as an important, even if perhaps 'experimental' and / or 'imperfect', **first step** towards a larger role of cities and urban areas in the institutional framework and decision-making of the Union.

This positive basic attitude of stakeholders vis-à-vis the Urban Agenda can be explained first of all by the fact that **many stakeholders perceived a strong need for greater**

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[54] Except through cities' representatives in the Committee of the Regions, which has an advisory role.

[55] Urban future studios report.

[56] EP report on the role of cities in the institutional framework of the Union (2017/2037(INI)).

involvement of cities and urban areas in EU policy-making. For instance, when asked whether the needs and priorities of cities and urban areas are taken into account by policy makers at the EU-level, half of respondents (50%) to the survey answered with "somewhat", whilst more than a quarter of respondents (28%) answered with "very little" or "not at all" (see Figure below).

Figure 30 : Needs and priorities taken into account by EU-level policy-makers
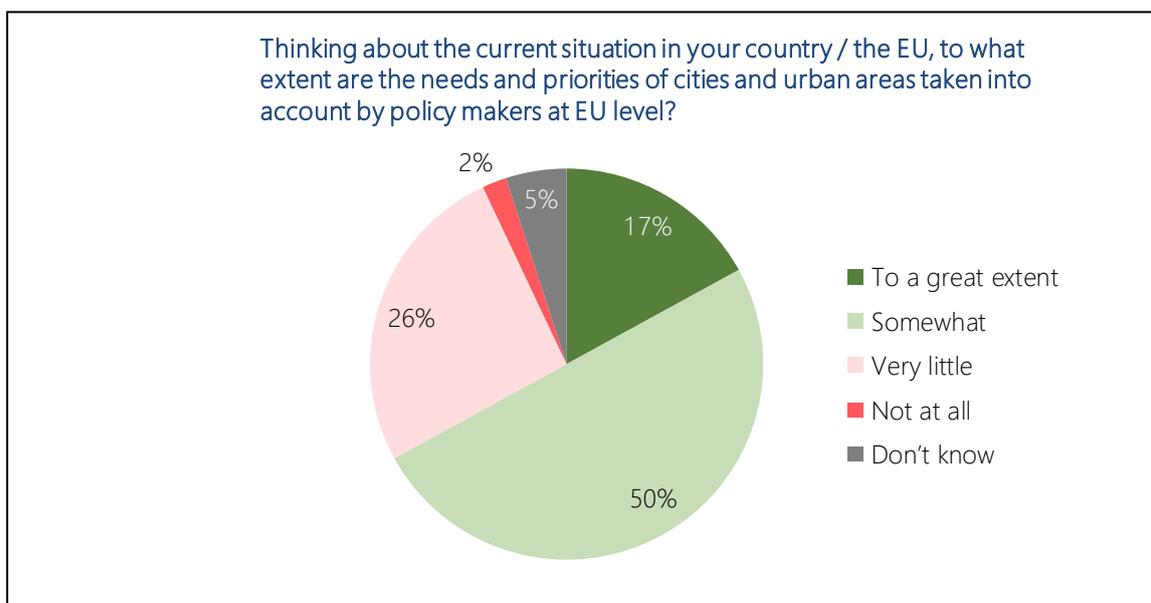
Q2.1b. Thinking about the current situation in your country / the EU, to what extent are the needs and priorities of cities and urban areas taken into account by policy makers at EU level?
%; All respondents (n=116)
Source: Online consultation

Stakeholders generally also believed that more involvement of cities and urban areas in EU policy-making is *necessary* and that the Urban Agenda addresses this issue. In the survey, six in ten stakeholders (61%) strongly *disagreed* or disagreed with the statement that "Also without the Urban Agenda there are enough ways for cities to influence EU policy on urban matters", whilst only 13% *agreed* or strongly agreed with this statement (see Figure below).

Figure 31 : Need for Urban Agenda
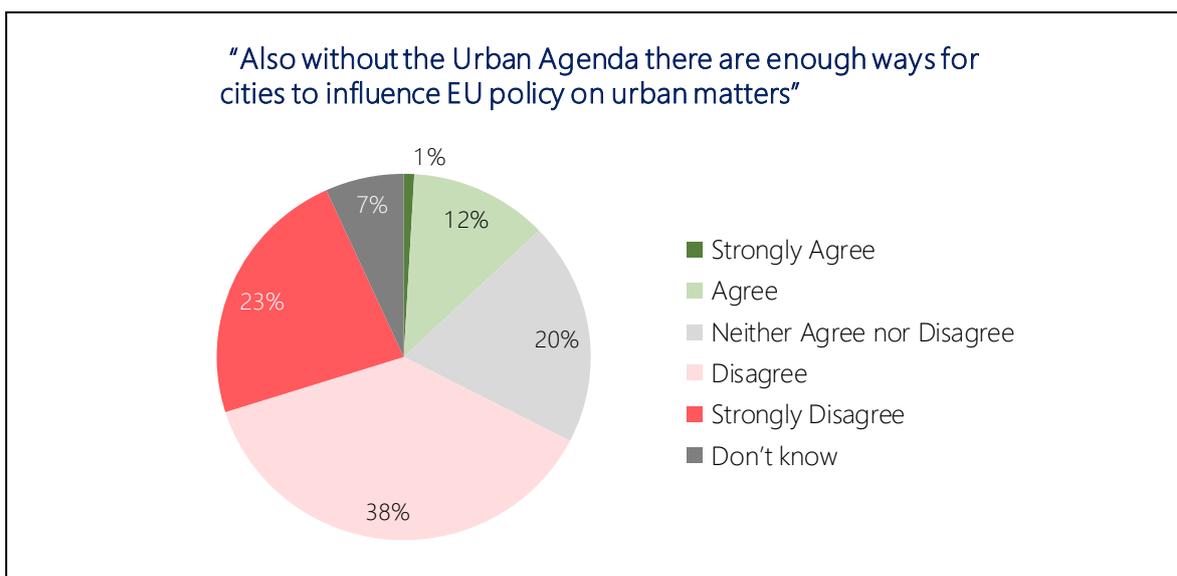
"Also without the Urban Agenda there are enough ways for cities to influence EU policy on urban matters"

- Strongly Agree — 1%
- Agree — 12%
- Neither Agree nor Disagree — 20%
- Disagree — 38%
- Strongly Disagree — 23%
- Don't know — 7%

Q2.3. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements…
%; All respondents who answered question item (n=117)
Source: Online consultation

The reasons provided by stakeholders for the (theoretical) added value of the Urban Agenda echoed to a large degree the motives for setting up the Urban Agenda, as described in the Pact of Amsterdam. The three pillars of Better Regulation, Better Funding and Better Knowledge were generally considered as relevant (see also section on Relevance). Stakeholders noted, for example, that EU legislation is to a large degree implemented in urban areas and as such has direct and indirect implications for urban authorities, meaning that EU legislation should consider and anticipate its impact at city-level. City representatives praised the opportunity the Urban Agenda provides to liaise directly with EU and (in some countries) national-level policy-makers. European Commission representatives valued the chance to obtain input directly from the city-level on how EU policies impact local circumstances.

Stakeholders also recognised that funding is of crucial importance for cities and urban areas and that accessing EU funding is sometimes difficult due to administrative barriers and lack of awareness about funding possibilities among cities. It was widely felt that there is a need for improved accessibility and coordination of existing EU funding options and that the Urban Agenda can play a vital role in this through its Better Funding pillar.

Somewhat less certain is the added value of the 'Better Knowledge' pillar in the Urban Agenda. City networks like Eurocities and CEMR do provide a platform to cities for knowledge sharing and the exchange of best practices. In line with this, some Thematic Partnership members noted that a significant amount of data already existed in the area of the topic covered by their Partnership. The large number of Better Knowledge actions, moreover, can be linked to the relative ease of implementing these actions, compared to the Better Funding and Better Regulation actions, not to their perceived greater usefulness (see Section on Effectiveness and case study on Implementation of Actions).

Nonetheless, the opportunities offered by the Urban Agenda for cities from across the EU and of different sizes to learn from each other and share knowledge and good

practices were widely recognised as an important added value of the UAEU. Stakeholders noted for example that the Urban Agenda offers a platform to spread solutions throughout the EU and prevents cities having to 're-invent the wheel'. This is particularly important because many solutions to challenges cities are facing germinate at the local level, it was reported. The cross-cutting and cross-border nature of many of the challenges cities deal with, for example in areas such as digital transition, circular economy and environmental policies, was often mentioned as an additional reason for the added value of the Urban Agenda. This is due to the fact that the multi-level cooperation of the Urban Agenda brings together actors from various government levels, policy fields and countries to an extent that does not happen in other EU initiatives.

The Pact of Amsterdam stresses the importance of **subsidiarity** and **proportionality** and specifies that the Urban Agenda should "refrain from taking action when Member States can better achieve the same objectives". Generally, stakeholders felt that the Urban Agenda adhered to this aim. Some stakeholders underlined the importance of subsidiarity, especially those stakeholders representing the Member States, but virtually none believed that the Urban Agenda exceeded the competences attributed to it. To the contrary: many stakeholders believed that the Urban Agenda was a *cautious* step towards greater involvement of cities in the institutional framework of the Union. After all, the Urban Agenda does not fundamentally alter EU decision-making and the role of cities in this process. The latter was regretted by some stakeholders, who felt that a more institutionalised role of cities in EU policy-making and/or direct role of the EU in urban policy-making in EU countries as part of the Urban Agenda could have increased its added value. However, it was also recognised that more substantial changes to the EU decision-making process would have been unrealistic for the Urban Agenda, among others due to urban policy remaining a Member State competence.

Does the above suggest that the added value of the Urban Agenda can be taken for granted? This would be too simplistic. Even if there is broad consensus about the *theoretical* added value of the Urban Agenda, **there is less conclusive evidence for its practical added value** so far. As noted in the chapter on effectiveness, significant reservations exist about the Urban Agenda's performance since 2016, in particular concerning the UAEU's ability to have a tangible impact on better legislation and funding through the implementation of actions. It was generally agreed that the Urban Agenda would have limited added value if it turned out to be a mere "networking exercise" (in the words of a stakeholder). Moreover, the coherence with other EU policies and programmes touching on urban matters was not always judged very positively (see chapter on Coherence). A substantial number of stakeholders felt that even though the Urban Agenda should maintain its unique character, it should be better integrated in the overall EU policy framework and be better aligned to other EU programmes (see also below). Because of these factors, many stakeholders reserved their final judgement on the added value of the Urban Agenda, noting that this depends on the future direction the UAEU will take, as discussed in the following section.

4.5.2 CONTINUATION OF THE URBAN AGENDA

> *Assessment question 12: To what extent would the effects of the UAEU be sustained if EU support for the UAEU was discontinued?*

There was broad consensus among the stakeholders that the Urban Agenda should be **continued in some form**. This is partly because stakeholders had positive opinions on what has been achieved so far. Some stakeholders were impressed by the progress made, when considering that the entire UAEU started only three years ago and now 14 Thematic Partnerships are set up and running. Other stakeholders were less enthusiastic about progress made, but noted that the Urban Agenda at the very least has the merit of being a concrete initiative / framework. For example, a stakeholder described the UAEU as "the best we have", taking also into account the long time it took to come to an initiative that allows for a greater role of cities in EU policy-making, as noted in the introduction to this chapter.

Furthermore, the added value of the UAEU was often seen as primarily linked to its long-term impact and it was frequently considered too early to tell if the Urban Agenda is a definite success.[57] If the 'plug were pulled' from the UAEU now, however, much of the efforts made would certainly have been in vain, according to many stakeholders. For instance, whilst Partnership members were generally positive about the collaborative relationships established with other members, they feared that this collaboration would not survive a potential end of the Urban Agenda. In the survey, more than half (55%) of respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that, if the Urban Agenda would be discontinued, the established collaboration between stakeholders would likely continue (see Figure below). It was also felt that a discontinuation of the UAEU would jeopardise the implementation of the actions, notwithstanding the relatively limited progress that has been made with implementation and the uncertainty about the future of the Urban Agenda (see section on Effectiveness and case study on the Implementation of Actions).

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[57] This was confirmed by the findings from the survey of the Romanian presidency.

Figure 32 : Likelihood of continuation of cooperation without Urban Agenda
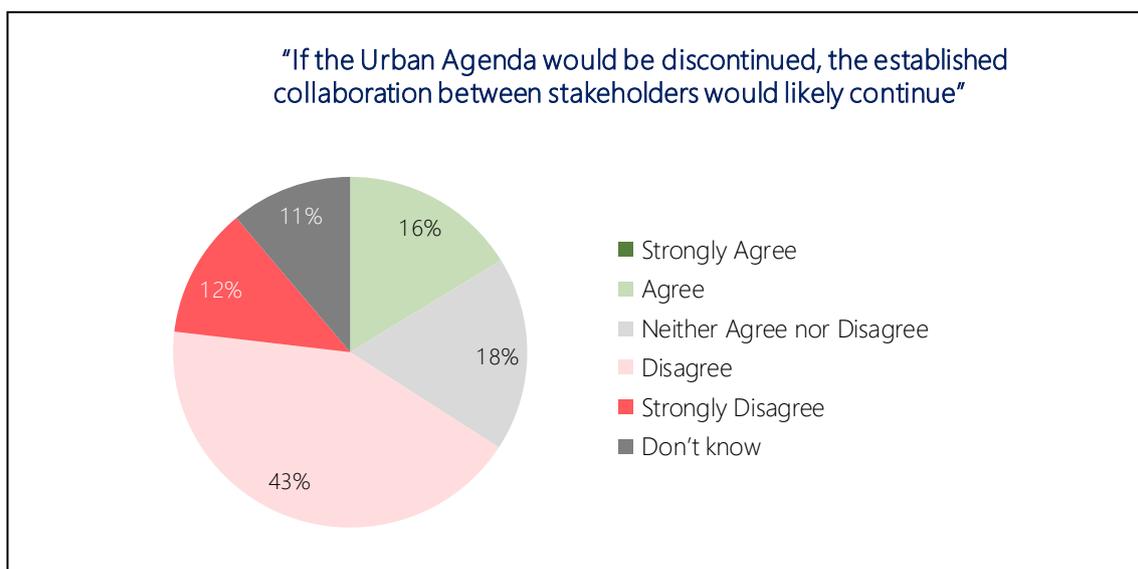
Q2.3. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements…
%; All respondents who answered question item (n=117)
Source: Online consultation

The fact that most stakeholders supported the continuation of the Urban Agenda does not imply that most stakeholders were in favour of continuing the UAEU in its current form. Most stakeholders agreed that increasing the number of Thematic Partnerships would not bring added value, as the most important topics are already covered with the current 14 Partnerships. And many felt that the existing Partnerships in their current format had more or less 'run their course', now most Action Plans are finalised. Some interviewed TP members believed for example that the implementation of actions was largely outside their TPs' control, and that the Commission should take the Action Plans forward.

Only roughly a quarter of respondents in the survey (27%) felt that the duration/continuation of Thematic Partnerships should be extended using broadly the *same approach and/or format*. A majority of surveyed stakeholders (51%) believed that the Partnerships should be extended beyond the three years originally envisaged, but in a ***significantly changed format***. The figure was even higher (59%) when considering only the responses of cities and urban areas, as the primary target group of the Urban Agenda. Only 4% of respondents felt that a continuation of the Partnerships would not provide additional benefits. This figure was more or less similar for the different groups of stakeholders (taking into account that for some groups only a limited number completed the survey).

Figure 33 : Need to continue Thematic Partnerships
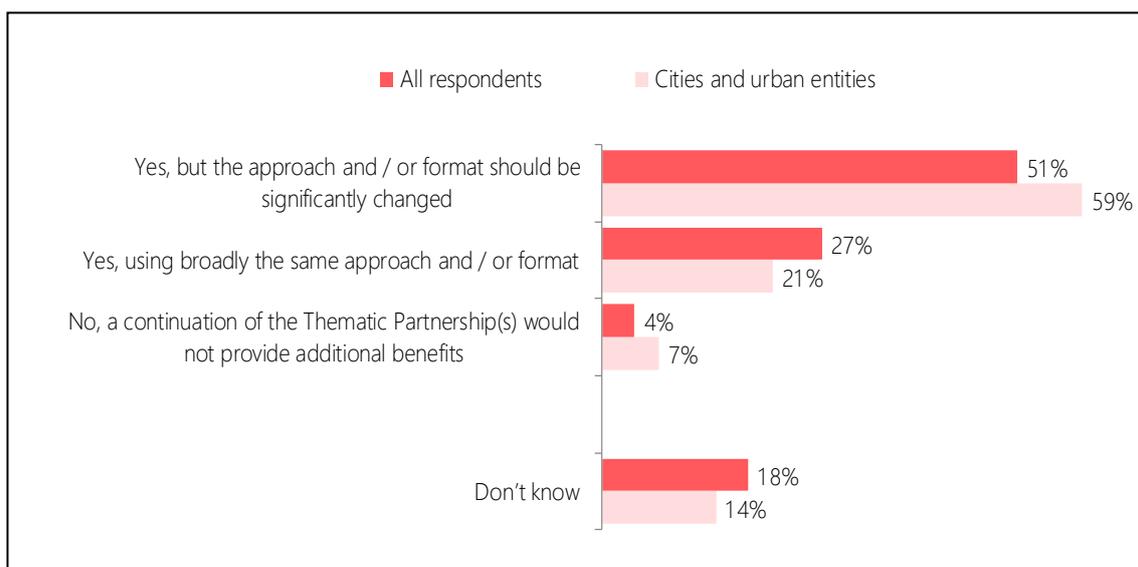
Q3.8a. Thinking about the Thematic Partnership(s) you know best, do you think that there is a need to extend its / their duration beyond the 3 years originally envisaged?
%; All respondents who are familiar with a Partnership / cities and urban entities that are familiar with a Partnership (n=84 / 29)
Source: Online consultation

Perhaps unsurprisingly, considering the variety of the stakeholders the Urban Agenda brings together, there was less agreement on what the future "significantly changed" UAEU should look like. Many stakeholders felt insufficiently aware of the discussion on the future of the UAEU to be able to provide detailed comments. A smaller group of stakeholders had taken note of the discussions surrounding the proposal for the European Urban Initiative (EUI) for the post 2020 period, published by the Commission in March 2019[58]. A few of these stakeholders provided opinions on, for example, the role of the Commission and Member States in the management of the UAEU, the need for indirect versus direct governance of the EUI, or the up- and downsides of bringing together the various relevant EU policies under one roof. Although it is not possible to generalise too much based on this limited number of comments, it should be noted that most stakeholders who expressed an opinion were in favour of a more harmonised EU approach to urban policy and supported bringing together the various EU initiatives relating to urban policy-making under one roof, although it was also felt that such a 'harmonisation' should take into account the unique nature of the UAEU.

Stakeholders did generally feel that the Urban Agenda would bring more added value if more guidance was offered to the members of the Partnerships. As noted in the Chapter on Effectiveness, many Partnerships struggled with the Action Planning process and the implementation of actions. As a solution, it was frequently suggested to enhance the role of the UDG and DGUM, making a clearer differentiation between the strategic and operational roles of DGUM and UDG. According to stakeholders, this could be done, for example, by organising these bodies differently, so as to allow the UDG and DGUM to follow individual Partnerships more closely, and by expanding their involvement in the

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[58] Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/news/2019/03/20-03-2019-european-urban-initiative-post-2020-the-commission-proposal

implementation of actions. A couple of stakeholders also believed that it is essential to improve the representation of cities in the UDG and DGUM, including with regard to the discussion around the continuation / successor programme of the Urban Agenda. Cities complained about not being involved in these discussions.

There also was a certain level of support among stakeholders for a stronger role of the European Commission in guiding the successor of the Urban Agenda. It was suggested that this could be achieved, for example, through a dedicated Commissioner or Vice-President (as suggested in the Joint declaration by the Mayors of the 28 EU Capital Cities[59]) responsible for urban matters, or an expanded role of the Technical Secretariat, which could potentially play a bigger role in the implementation of actions. Importantly, various stakeholders saw the need for an "**institutionalisation**" of the UAEU in EU policy-making. This would entail moving away from the UAEU's current voluntary nature and making it obligatory for the EU institutions to, for example, consult the Partnerships and/or consider regulatory proposals from the Action Plans.

It should be stressed that most stakeholders were certainly not in favour of a European Commission that steers the Urban Agenda directly. In Thematic Partnerships where the European Commission played a pivotal role, for example as Action leader, some Partnership members tended to regret this (in their view) "overbearing" Commission role, even if many acknowledged that the Commission must walk a thin line between impartiality on the one hand, and moving the Partnerships forward on the other. The bottom-up nature of the UAEU was valued by cities and urban areas and other actors alike and was seen as an important success factor of the programme. The same applied to the more neutral role of DG REGIO, which was generally seen as a plus.

Broad agreement existed on the need for more funding for the Urban Agenda to realise its potential added value. As noted in the chapter on Effectiveness, in almost all the Partnerships at least some members struggled with a lack of resources and this hampered the development and implementation of actions. Moreover, a lack of funding had a negative impact on the representativeness of certain Partnerships. If the Thematic Partnerships were prolonged, this would only become a more pressing issue. Less feedback was obtained from stakeholders on where this funding should come from, although there appears to be some level of support for giving the successor programme of the UAEU its own budget, as the Commission proposes for the EUI.

4.5.3   <u>CONCLUSIONS: EU ADDED VALUE</u>

The key aspect of the UAEU's added value is its **uniqueness** in terms of bringing all different levels and stakeholders together and how it addresses the clear need for greater involvement of cities in EU policy-making on issues that have a strong urban dimension. In spite of some of its shortcomings to date in terms of for example the implementation of actions (see section of Effectiveness), the UAEU is widely appreciated as a very important first step towards giving cities a "seat at the table" in order to

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[59] Joint declaration by the Mayors of the 28 EU Capital Cities (June 2018). Retrieved at:
https://www.ccre.org/bibliotheques/getFile/ffeb4f7b078e7244db2e88e0ac1a413ccde17f1b

mainstream urban concerns into relevant EU policies. This is especially true for the pillars of Better Regulation and Better Funding, while the added value of action under the Better Knowledge pillar is less significant, as other platforms / mechanisms for knowledge generation and sharing already exist (although the UAEU also does provide some added value compared with these, mainly because of the involvement of different government levels).

It is important to reiterate the fact that urban policy remains a competence of the Member States; the UAEU is an attempt to facilitate collaboration and action at EU level while respecting the principle of **subsidiarity and proportionality**. This attempt has been successful overall; there are no significant concerns about the UAEU potentially infringing on the national prerogative in this field, although (as noted previously) Member States on average have embraced the UAEU somewhat less enthusiastically than the other stakeholder groups, which may be due to a desire to ensure it does not infringe on their competences.

There was near consensus among stakeholders that, **in order for the achievements of the UAEU to date to be sustained**, **it needs to be continued in one form or another**. Most stakeholders agreed that the Partnerships should be extended beyond the three years envisaged but in a changed format. It was felt that increasing the number of TPs would not bring added value, as the most important topics are already covered. However, it was generally felt that the continuation of Partnerships and the broader UAEU would only be fruitful if a number of changes to the UAEU are effectuated, including by:

- Striving for a more harmonised EU approach to urban policy and bringing together the various EU initiatives relating to urban policy-making under one roof, taking into account the unique nature of the UAEU;

- Enhancing the role of UDG/DGUM, allowing these bodies to (1) follow individual TPs more closely and expand their involvement in the implementation of actions, and (2) provide more strategic guidance so there is a clearer differentiation between the strategic and operational roles of DGUM and UDG;

- Improving the representation of cities in UDG/DGUM, allowing cities to be more involved in the future of the UAEU;

- Maintaining the bottom-up nature of the UAEU, which was valued as an important success factor;

- Increase funding for the UAEU to realise its potential added value. There appears to be support for giving the successor programme of the UAEU its own budget, as the Commission proposes for the EUI.

The UAEU has clearly been valuable and useful as an experiment, or "proof of concept", to highlight the importance of the multi-level multi-stakeholder approach, demonstrate how it can work in practice, and illustrate its benefits. However, it also appears clear that the current approach (based primarily on a series of TPs operating more or less in isolation) has outlived its usefulness to some extent, and the majority of stakeholders favour a different approach going forward. This is based on a recognition that, although

there is a need to follow up and build on the work of the current TPs, it is probably time to end the initial "experimentation phase" and move on and consider how the results achieved and lessons learned to date can be used to **address key urban challenges** (in particular as regards the implications of EU regulations and funding opportunities) **more systematically**. A substantial number of stakeholders felt that even though the UAEU should maintain its unique character, it should be **better integrated in the overall EU policy framework and be better aligned with other EU programmes**. Most of the stakeholders noted that their final judgement on the added value of the UAEU depends on the future direction the UAEU will take.

5. Overarching Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study obtained via the various research methods and sources (as described in the previous chapter), we conclude that the Urban Agenda for the EU (UAEU) has been a **qualified success**, and there is a strong case for its continuation (albeit not necessarily in the exact same form). It has been widely welcomed by the key stakeholders it is meant to serve, and has generated a number of important benefits. Having said this, there are areas and aspects where the UAEU's functioning and progress towards its objectives has been hampered by certain challenges and obstacles. The following pages provide a summary overview of the main strengths and achievements of the UAEU to date, as well as its main weaknesses and issues that need to be addressed to ensure its future success.

Key strengths and achievements

Since its formal launch in 2016, the UAEU has contributed to establishing a more effective integrated and coordinated approach to EU policies and legislation with a potential impact on urban areas. By far the most important vehicle for achieving this are the 14 Thematic Partnerships (TPs) that have been launched. The main strengths and achievements to date can be summed up as follows:

1. The UAEU's added value stems primarily from its **multi-level, multi-stakeholder approach**. This innovative and (in the eyes of many) ground-breaking feature has fostered significant collaboration between cities, the European Commission, Member States, other EU institutions, and other stakeholders, who have engaged in discussions and jointly identified solutions to address key challenges facing cities across a wide range of policy areas and themes.

2. By implementing this approach, the TPs have provided a **unique opportunity** for stakeholders at all relevant levels to enter into dialogue, better understand each other's concerns, exchange views and ideas, identify issues with the design and implementation of policies with a strong urban dimension, and try to find common ground and instigate actions to address these. Cities in particular valued the opportunity to have a seat at the "EU table" for the first time, and saw it as a significant first step towards a greater involvement in future EU policy making.

3. The **Thematic Partnership approach** has enabled the UAEU to identify specific issues and bottlenecks for cities, and develop concrete Action Plans to address these. All of the themes (ranging from Housing, to Digital Transition, to Climate Adaptation, to name but a few) were highly relevant. Similarly, the three pillars (Better Regulation, Better Funding, and Better Knowledge) were highly relevant, and helped to orient TPs towards relevant areas for action.

4. The **flexible, 'experimental' nature** of the TPs was a key enabler for their success. It allowed them to take a genuinely 'bottom-up' approach and define their own remit, focus and working methods in a way that matched the interests and expertise of their members. This helped bridge and reconcile the sometimes significantly different perspectives and priorities of participants, and address the very wide range of themes in a broadly effective way. Although this process was frequently difficult and time-consuming, the overall level of engagement among participants was high,

and most (especially cities) were happy to be involved in what many viewed as a longer-term investment in better urban policy making processes.

5. The 12 Action Plans that have been finalised contain a total of 114 actions, representing a wide range of types, target audiences, and levels of ambition. Among these are numerous actions where implementation is progressing well, and is **beginning to generate tangible impacts**, including a few Commission legislative proposals that individual TPs have reportedly had an influence on, guidelines or recommendations aimed at improving the implementation of existing legislation, as well as a large number of best practices, guides, toolkits and roadmaps to contribute to the generation and dissemination of Better Knowledge.

6. Thus, the UAEU is beginning to exert a certain, albeit limited **influence in terms of strengthening the urban dimension** in the design and implementation of EU as well as certain national policies. This includes the creation of new national structures that were inspired by the UAEU, as well as, more generally, the attempts (more successful in some TPs than in others) to reach out to and raise awareness of relevant issues among non-participating cities.

7. Overall, stakeholder feedback suggests the UAEU is increasingly living up to the ambition of becoming the **"common frame" for urban policy initiatives at EU level**, with other EU programmes, policies and initiatives relating to urban policy being aligned to the topics of the TPs of the UAEU, as was called for in the Pact of Amsterdam. For example, the calls for Urban Innovative Actions are based on the UAEU themes and some of the Horizon 2020 Work Programme 2018-2020 topics that are linked to cities and urban development are based on the themes of the TPs

Key weaknesses and issues to be addressed

The strengths and achievements summarised above provide proof of the strong potential of the UAEU to build on its early successes and continue to increase its influence over relevant policy processes. A clear majority of the stakeholders consulted for this study supports the continuation of the UAEU. However, this study has also identified a number of **challenges, weaknesses and shortcomings** that have limited the effectiveness of the UAEU so far. In order to build on and learn from the experience to date, and maximise its future usefulness, influence, and attractiveness for stakeholders, the following key issues will need to be addressed:

1. **The implementation of many actions is uncertain**. In spite of the positive examples alluded to above, overall, there are serious doubts about the extent to which TP members (or other stakeholders) are able to fully implement their respective Action Plans, and therefore there is a risk that the UAEU will ultimately fail to have the desired impacts. The reasons for this are manifold; many are related to the issues listed below, and include a lack of clarity about who is ultimately responsible, a lack of resources, and a lack of direct control by TP members over the policy and/or legislative processes that would be required to achieve the ultimate objectives of actions.

2. **Relatively few actions focus on Better Regulation or Better Funding** (the first two pillars of the UAEU), compared with Better Knowledge (the third pillar), which

accounts for nearly half of all actions, and whose share has grown from wave to wave of TPs. Although many of the Better Knowledge actions are undoubtedly relevant and important, their prevalence raises questions about the TPs' level of ambition and ultimate impacts. Arguably, Better Knowledge actions tend to be 'easier' to formulate and implement (because they do not require legislative changes that cities have no direct control over). However, they are also less likely to have as significant (potential) impacts as actions under the pillars of Better Regulation or Better Funding, as well as less unique to the UAEU. In these areas, the TP's Action Plans have successfully *identified* and *recommended* a significant number of desirable actions, but actual changes to EU legislation or funding programmes are still few and far between.

3. The high degree of flexibility and experimentation that characterised the first phase of the UAEU was necessary to get the TPs "off the ground" and enable the mix of stakeholders represented in them to begin to cooperate and find common ground (see above). However, it also had drawbacks. The widely felt **lack of clear and transparent processes, requirements and specific objectives** (in particular regarding the envisaged aims and content of their Action Plans, as well as with regard to who is responsible for the implementation and follow up of the actions) also led to challenges, inefficiencies and delays in the Action Planning process. For the next phase of the UAEU, the balance needs to shift towards greater clarity and transparency, even if this is at the expense of a certain amount of flexibility.

4. **The level of engagement of stakeholder in and with the UAEU was uneven**. The progress of the TPs relied heavily on a relatively small 'hard core' of active and engaged members, especially coordinators. Some other members were quite passive, for a variety of reasons including both a lack of strong interest and a lack of specific expertise. Notable exceptions notwithstanding, the two groups that drew significant criticism from stakeholders (in particular city representatives) due to their perceived lack of engagement where (1) Member States and (2) Commission services (other than DG REGIO).

5. **The outreach to stakeholders who are not directly involved in the UAEU has been limited.** Although some TPs have been reasonably successful in reaching out to and disseminating information about their work to a "second circle" of cities (based largely on intense efforts by active and committed coordinators and EU-level organisations with large pre-established networks), others have been more inwards-focused. Overall, the profile and visibility of the UAEU remains quite low.

6. **Resource constraints were a challenge for the TPs**, which had to rely primarily on the time members were able to make available (on top of their "day jobs") to progress their work. Although funding was available to support TPs, its effectiveness was limited due to both the relatively small amounts available, and, in some cases, a lack of awareness (some TPs did not use parts of the available budget).

7. **The governance mechanism for the UAEU is not effective**. The UDG and DGUM were only able to provide a limited extent of meaningful guidance and steer for, feedback to, or coordination between TPs. This was partly due to the large number and specialised thematic focus of TPs; it clearly would have been very challenging for UDG and/or DGUM members to engage with all 14 TPs and their Action Plans in

any significant depth. Various TP members also felt that the Commission could have provided more direction to the Action Planning process, although it was generally recognised that the Commission had to walk a thin line between maintaining its impartiality in the framework of the UAEU, and moving the Action Planning forward.

8. **Internal communication within and between the different elements of the UAEU has been lacking**. The study results suggest the flow of information between key actors (in particular the European Commission, TP coordinators, and the Technical Secretariat), as well as from these to TP members at large, and from and to the governing bodies, has been suboptimal. This has contributed to the perceived lack of transparency and awareness of key issues including the available resources and how they can be used, the responsibilities for and implementation status of actions, etc.

9. **The internal and external coherence of the UAEU is low**. Internally, the extent to which its elements (including both the 14 TPs and other elements, such as territorial impact assessments or the "one-stop-shop" portal) complement and reinforce each other is not especially pronounced. Externally, the alignment between the UAEU and its TPs, and other relevant EU initiatives (such as timing of URBACT calls for proposals) was limited. This results in a certain amount of "working in silos". There is room for improving the way the UAEU interacts with other relevant initiatives, which was recognised by the Commission in its proposal for the European Urban Initiative-post 2020.

6. Considerations for the future of the UAEU

In this final chapter of the report, we consider specific ways in which the Urban Agenda for the EU could be updated and adapted, in order to build on the results achieved to date, address some of the key challenges and weaknesses identified, and try to ensure the UAEU functions as effectively as possible as it moves into the next phase of its existence, within the changed framework of urban policy, in particular the proposed new European Urban Initiative (EUI). In doing so, we looked at how the key weaknesses of the UAEU identified in this report (see conclusions in Chapter 5) could be addressed by:

1. Enhancing the implementation and impact of actions (relating to key weaknesses 1,2 and 3);

2. Improving the engagement of stakeholder in and with the UAEU (relating to key weaknesses 4, 5 and 6); and

3. Refining the UAEU's governance mechanisms, internal communication, and place in the wider policy / institutional framework (relating to key weaknesses 7, 8 and 9).

The ways in which many of these issues can best be addressed depends inter alia on the **overall strategic approach** to the future UAEU. Broadly speaking, a choice will need to be made between a continuation and deepening of the current "**thematic**" approach, which relies primarily on the individual TPs to formulate and implement actions, or a shift towards a more "**holistic / integrated**" approach, which would focus more on the elements that are common to, or cut across, the different priority themes. Therefore, when looking at the first two groups of issues listed above, a distinction is made between two options that reflect this fundamental choice. Under each option, we list a number of measures that could be taken to address the main weaknesses identified, and are aligned with the chosen approach. It is important to note that options A and B are not necessarily scenarios or models to be implemented wholly; different elements could be combined, and not all aspects listed under different options are mutually exclusive (i.e. it could be possible to find a "middle ground" and choose to address some aspects by following or more thematic, and other via a more horizontal approach). The aim of the options is to serve as an inspiration for how to address the issues the UAEU is dealing with and to highlight possible ways forward, whilst considering the political context / support needed.

1. Enhancing the implementation and impact of actions

As noted in the conclusions, the implementation of many actions defined by the TPs is uncertain. Moreover, the fact that relatively few actions focus on Better Regulation or Better Funding raises questions about the TPs' level of ambition and ultimate impacts. Below we outline measures that can be taken to enhance the implementation and impact of actions.

Option A: Continuation and deepening of the thematic approach

Under Option A, we look at ways to enhance the implementation and impact of actions by means of finetuning the current, primarily thematic approach to the UAEU, adjusted by:

- **Prolonging working on the current 14 TPs.** It could be considered to prolong the current TPs. After all, the 14 themes were considered to be relevant and the multi-level collaboration within the TPs was seen as fruitful. Members established good working relationships and noted that these will be endangered if the TPs were stopped. Moreover, many members recognised that three years was not enough to come to definitive results, as shown by the fact that many actions are still in the early implementation phase. During the extension (potentially by up to another two or three years), TPs could in the first instance focus on implementing the current actions, while at a later stage it could be decided to add new actions, if deemed beneficial. It should be recognised that this approach would necessitate looking at ways to maintain or refresh momentum in the TPs, including by taking some of the measures to foster engagement outlined below.

- **Stimulate amendments to current actions** – Many actions are currently on hold. Instead of considering these actions as 'lost', it could be considered to encourage TPs to make amendments to actions included in the finalised Action Plans, in order to make them more "implementable" (which could entail, for example, revisiting the specific objectives to ensure they relate to issues that TP members can realistically do something about). Revisiting the actions, taking into account lessons learned during the implementation phase (including by other TPs) and the current policy context, would allow to improve the feasibility and actionability of actions.

- **Formulating clear and transparent processes, requirements and specific objectives for TPs** – Whilst it is recognised that important steps have been taken in this area, notably for the fourth wave of TPs, more could be done to clarify the aims and objectives of the Action Planning process. This could entail providing to TP members more specific guiding materials (as well as ensuring existing materials are used and disseminated among TP members), training sessions and opportunities for the exchange of best practices with other TPs.

- **Promoting cross-Partnership collaboration** – So far, the TPs of the UAEU appear to have worked to a substantial degree in silos, with limited cross-TP interaction (some bilateral collaborations between specific TPs notwithstanding). The Commission could explore options to expand on the current coordinators' meetings, in order to promote inter-TP learning with an eye on the implementation of actions. 'Core' TP members from various TPs could work together on developing plans for implementing the actions and discuss common approaches and best practices (even if the TP members would remain responsible for their 'own' actions, taking into account the substantial differences between topic areas).

- **Improving information on the status of actions** – Better communication around the status and progress of actions (which would necessitate improved monitoring of progress) would facilitate inter-Partnership collaboration and, in particular, the outreach to stakeholders outside of the Partnerships.

Option B: Shift towards a more holistic / integrated approach

Under Option B, we suggest a way to enhance the implementation and impact of actions by means of a holistic approach to the implementation of the actions, based on the understanding that the implementation of actions benefits from a more coordinated, integrated approach that goes beyond prolonging or deepening the collaboration in the TPs. Instead, this approach would entail ending the TPs (see below) and making use of commonalities in terms of cross-cutting themes and desired results to implement the actions, together with actors from across the different TPs. As such, this approach builds on the recent (June 2019) paper on the continued implementation of UAEU from the Urban Agenda Technical Preparatory Group (UATPG). It could entail:

- **Ending the Partnerships in their current format** – This recognises that the current TPs have in a way 'run their course' and that with the current TP format it would be very hard to maintain momentum and engagement.

- **Setting up an alternative transversal / integrated working method** – The former 'core' TP members would work together (on a strictly voluntary basis) on implementing the actions. Such an approach would allow to realise the 'cross-cutting' aim of the UAEU, and to harness synergies between TPs – two areas where the UAEU's performance so far has left something to be desired. In practical terms, we envisage that this working method could consist of the following steps:

  o Stocktaking phase – This would entail a systematic identification of lessons learned, challenges and potential solutions identified across all 14 TPs in order to use these to further prove the importance of tackling urban concerns and challenges in consultation and cooperation between the different administrative levels, maintain and raise the profile of the UAEU, and determine key priorities for future action, as well as ways and means (including sources of funding, but also key legislative and policy processes) to facilitate their achievement.
  o Identification of promising actions – The 'core' TP members and an external actor (DGUM/UDG or the Commission) would together make a selection of actions perceived as having a potentially high impact and a reasonable chance of implementation. The latter would, for example, entail excluding actions that do not align to the policy-making cycle – but would *not* imply discarding actions that are considered hard to implement in the current TP approach.
  o Formation of main working group – A main working group would be formed, consisting of coordinators and other active TP members from all former TPs. The main aim of this working group would be to cluster the selected actions, taking into account their functional area (e.g. "reduce air pollution") and goals (e.g. Better Regulation, Better Funding, etc.), with the aim to establish where actions from different TPs align and where synergies can be found. Sub-working groups could also be formed to focus on the holistic aspects / functional areas identified.

- o <u>Recommendations</u> would be formulated, based on the work of the working groups. The end result would be a joint proposal for implementation, combining and building on the original actions.

2. Improving the engagement of stakeholders in and with the UAEU

As highlighted in the conclusions, the performance of the UAEU so far was hampered by the uneven level of engagement of stakeholder in and with the UAEU, and its limited visibility and profile beyond the "inner circle" of participants, which was caused by a number of factors including resource constraints. Below we outline actions that could be taken to enhance the engagement of stakeholders in and with the UAEU.

<u>Option A: Continuation and deepening of the thematic approach</u>

Under Option A, we look at possibilities to improve the engagement of stakeholders in and with the UAEU by means of finetuning the current, primarily thematic approach to the UAEU, adjusted by:

- **Allow for a greater role of cities in the composition of Partnerships –**This would entail moving away from the current selection process of members, which was perceived as lacking transparency, to a model where the TP members themselves play a pivotal role in the composition of the TPs. This would entail building on the adjustments to the selection process that have been made for the wave 4 Partnerships.

- **Ensure all TP members have sufficient relevant thematic expertise –**Part of the reason for the sometimes limited engagement of members (in particular Member States) with the TPs has been that some of their representatives lacked in-depth knowledge and expertise in the specific issues that were discussed. If the existing TPs are prolonged, it should be clarified further that all participants are expected to have significant experience in the specific policy area the TP focuses on (rather than "just" urban policy experience), in order to ensure they are in a position to contribute constructively to the Action Planning and implementation process. Thematic expertise could also be sought outside the core TP members, for instance via outreach to other non-participating cities and stakeholders.

- **Ensure adequate resources for TPs –** Members, and in particular coordinators, noted to have invested substantial own means in the TPs. While most appear to have been happy to do so, the lack of funding did have a negative impact on the participation in TPs, a problem that aggravated over time and would become more pressing if the TPs were prolonged. This has a particular impact on smaller cities with less own human and financial resources. More funding for expertise, procedural / administrative support and travel could ensure more balanced engagement in the TPs.

- **Strengthen the relations of the TPs with relevant institutions –** Within the TPs this could be achieved by stimulating more active participation of the TPs members representing the EU institutions and MS, for example by making them (co-)responsible for the implementation of actions (where this is not already the

case) or by designating EU institutions and MS as co-coordinators. To ensure outreach to relevant institutions that are not represented in the TPs, more could also be invested in the communication of actions to the relevant actors.

- **Reach out to external actors** – in line with the point above, more should be done to engage actors not directly involved in the TPs. This should encompass increased outreach and dissemination of information about the work of TPs to the "second circle" of cities which are not involved in TPs. This would likely necessitate increasing the communication efforts and budget.

Option B: Shift towards a more holistic / integrated approach

Under Option B, we identify ways that could help ensure the engagement of stakeholders in and with the UAEU when opting for a more holistic / integrated approach to the UAEU, in which the TPs in their current format would be disbanded and more integrated structures created (see above).

- **Expand on format of coordinators' meetings –** To safeguard the continued engagement of the core members of the former TPs, the format of the annual coordinators' meeting could be prolonged and expanded upon. This would entail regular meetings of the core former TP members with high-level representatives of the Commission and the Member States to discuss the progress of the implementation of actions.

- **Active engagement in thematic working groups –** As described above, the horizontal / transversal approach under option B would involve setting up working groups, with the aim to cluster actions, taking into account their functional area and goals, in order to establish where actions from different TPs align and where synergies can be found. These working groups should also serve as a platform to actively engage the former core TP members, for example by ensuring that these working groups serve as a platform for multi-level cooperation with the institutions as well as knowledge exchange and sharing of best-practices. The working groups could also seek to ensure outreach to other non-participating stakeholders and cities.

- **Ensure adequate resources for engagement in holistic / integrated approach –** It is clear that also a holistic / integrated approach to the UAEU and the implementation of actions would necessitate making available sufficient resources for the stakeholders to participate, as this approach would place a heavy responsibility on former core TP members.

3. Refining the UAEU's governance mechanisms, internal communication, and place in the wider policy / institutional framework

As noted in the conclusions, the performance of the UAEU to date was hindered by an ineffective governance mechanism, suboptimal internal communication, and low internal and external coherence. In this section, we included measures that could be taken to refine the UAEU's governance mechanisms and coherence. These are largely independent of the options discussed previously (i.e. could be envisaged under either a more thematic or a more holistic approach). Many of these are ambitious measures,

which would be hard to implement in the current model of the UAEU and are dependent on broader policy developments. Nonetheless, if buy-in from the relevant actors could be ensured, the following changes and enhancements could help to address the weakness in this area:

- **Improved guidance from the DGUM/UDG, including the Commission –** Stakeholders singled out the lack of guidance from the DGUM/UDG and from the Commission during the Action Planning and implementation phase as one of the key impediments to the UAEU reaching its full potential. The DGUM/UDG could look at ways to provide more support to TPs (or their successor structures), for example by expanding the role of the Urban Agenda Technical Preparatory Group (UATPG). The specific roles of the DGUM, UDG and UATPG could be better defined, with a clearer division of labour between notably the DGUM and UDG. Regarding the Commission, it is worth exploring whether it can improve its role in coordinating and facilitating the Action Plan implementation, without upsetting the bottom-up approach of the UAEU. This could entail better communication by the Commission to the TPs regarding the processes to follow and about what is expected from them. More in general, transparent and effective internal communication should be part of an improved governance model, notably between the governance bodies and the TPs.

- **Enhance the links between the UAEU and the decision making processes and policy cycles** – While we are conscious that full-scale changes to the EU decision-making process are unrealistic, we would suggest looking at ways to make it required to consider the Action Plans as more than just 'another stakeholder opinion'. This could potentially be done by specifying and formalising the role / position of the UAEU and the Action Plans in the stakeholder consultation process for e.g. the European Commission's regulatory fitness and performance (REFIT) programme.

- **Enhancing the representation of cities in relevant decision-making / governance bodies at EU and national level –** This would first of all entail improving the representation of cities in the UAEU's own governance mechanisms, the UDG and DGUM. The representation of cities in the governance bodies of the European Urban Initiative-post 2020 should also be safeguarded (we note that the Commission talks in its proposals about an "EUI Steering Group" in which cities would be represented). In addition, the European Parliament, the European Committee of the Regions and Member States could seek to better represent cities and give them a voice in relevant decision-making processes and in EU and national policy frameworks. For Member States, applying the UAEU method at national level could be an option worth considering.

- **Improve the alignment with Cohesion Policy programmes and other EU initiatives –** This could be done in the framework of the European Urban Initiative-post 2020, which would also allow to link the UAEU directly with Cohesion / ERDF funds after 2020. The EUI should also stimulate the implementation of UAEU actions. Including the Urban Agenda in the European Urban Initiative work programme could be a first step in this direction. As for

other EU initiatives, ensuring stronger links with the UAEU should take place in their inception phase.

Annexes

Annex A: UAEU Consultation Synopsis report

1. Introduction

As part of the assessment of the Urban Agenda for the EU, the study team undertook three types of direct consultation activities: 1) an online consultation, 2) interviews with key stakeholders, and 3) case studies that included interviews with members of the Thematic Partnerships. The results of the case studies are not covered in this Synopsis report, but are included in Annex B of the Draft Final Report.

The online consultation was open to all interested parties, but targeted mainly key UAEU stakeholders, namely: cities and urban authority representatives, other public authority representatives (international, EU, national and regional), as well as other stakeholders including civil society organisations, NGOs, businesses, academic research organisations, and experts.

The interviews were conducted with stakeholders who have been directly or indirectly involved in the design, operationalisation and implementation of the UAEU: EU institutions, Member States representatives at the EU bodies, European and national organisations working on urban and regional policy, civil society and cities.

The combined online consultation and interviews results are an important source of evidence for all five assessment criteria (effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and EU added value) and most assessment questions, as formulated for the broader assessment study (see Annex C).

2. Online consultation

Overview of the participants

Between 1 April and 30 June 2019, 118 stakeholders completed the survey (which was promoted via the Futurium website and various other channels). This included respondents based in 24 different EU Member States. Most respondents were based in Belgium (22), followed by Portugal (12), the Netherlands (12), Germany (11), Italy (9) and Spain (6).

Table 1: Country of respondents

	#	%		#	%		#	%
Austria	3	3%	Germany	11	9%	Poland	4	3%
Belgium	22	19%	Greece	2	2%	Portugal	12	10%
Bulgaria	2	2%	Hungary	2	2%	Romania	3	3%
Croatia	0	0%	Ireland	2	2%	Slovakia	1	1%
Cyprus	0	0%	Italy	9	8%	Slovenia	2	2%
Czechia	1	1%	Latvia	2	2%	Spain	6	5%
Denmark	2	2%	Lithuania	0	0%	Sweden	3	3%
Estonia	1	1%	Luxembourg	1	1%	UK	5	4%

	#	%		#	%		#	%
Finland	4	3%	Malta	0	0%	Iceland	0	0%
France	4	3%	Netherlands	12	10%	Norway	2	2%

Source: Online consultation

Most respondents (31%) who completed the consultation belonged to a city or urban public entity. A further one fifth belonged to either a regional (10%) or national (11%) public entity. Other well represented groups of respondents were those from non-governmental organisations (8%) and those responding as a private individual (12%).

A majority of respondents (53%) noted to be directly involved in the Urban Agenda, whilst most of the remainder (32%) indicated to be familiar with the Urban Agenda, but not directly involved. Roughly two-thirds (65%) of respondents who were directly involved in the Urban Agenda, were replying as a Coordinator or a Member of a Thematic Partnership (including Participants, Observers and Stakeholders).

Respondents' familiarity with Thematic Partnerships of the Urban Agenda was spread fairly evenly, ranging from 10% of respondents for the Security in Public Space Partnership, to 28% for the Urban Mobility and Jobs and Skills in the Local Economy Partnerships[60].

Effectiveness

Impact on cooperation, coordination and interaction between stakeholders

Opinions on the formation / composition of the Thematic Partnerships of the Urban Agenda were typically positive. Most surveyed stakeholder (54%) agreed or strongly agreed that the Partnerships of the Urban Agenda are composed of a balanced set of members. One fifth of respondents (20%) neither agreed nor disagreed, whilst a similar proportion (22%) disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Those respondents who disagreed that the Thematic Partnerships of the Urban Agenda are composed of a balanced set of members felt that the main issues regarding the composition of the Partnerships are: 1) a lack of participation of organisations from civil society or research / academia, 2) a lack of geographical balance among the cities and/or EU Member States included as members, and 3) a lack of balance in the size of cities and urban areas included as members (33%-36% of stakeholders indicated these to be the main issues).

Regarding the working methods and arrangements of Thematic Partnerships, opinions were mixed. On the one hand, the views on the internal functioning of the Partnerships were mainly positive. Seven out of ten respondents (69%) strongly agreed or agreed that the Thematic Partnerships' coordinators effectively fulfil their role. Close to six out of ten respondents (56%-58%) strongly agreed or agreed that the Thematic Partnership(s) meetings are well organised and that the Thematic Partnerships' members are generally involved / participate well. On the other hand, only about a third (32%-33%) of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the Thematic Partnerships

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[60] Only respondents who noted to be directly involved or familiar with the Urban Agenda were asked about their familiarity with Partnerships.

receive sufficient support from Commission DGs other than DG REGIO, receive adequate administrative or technical support, and that the governing bodies of the Urban Agenda (Directors-General Meeting on Urban Matters, Urban Development Group) provide clear guidance.

Action plans and implementation of actions

Opinions on the Action Plans developed by Thematic Partnerships were overall positive. About eight out of ten surveyed stakeholders (79%) agreed or strongly agreed that the Action Plans are relevant to the needs of the cities in the EU. Stakeholders agreed as well that the Action Plans are ambitious in terms of goals, sufficiently reflect stakeholders' opinions and input, comprise a clear plan for implementation, are well aligned to other EU policies, and encompass concrete and measurable objectives (54%-64% agreed or strongly agreed). Respondents were somewhat less convinced about whether the Action Plans are realistic in terms of their aims (49% agreed or strongly agreed).

As regards the continuation of Thematic Partnerships, only roughly a quarter (27%) felt that the Partnerships should be extended using broadly the same approach and / or format. A majority of surveyed stakeholders (51%) believed that the Partnerships should be extended beyond the three years originally envisaged, but in *a significantly changed* format. Only 4% of respondents felt that a continuation of the Partnerships would not provide additional benefits.

Contribution to strengthening urban dimension in EU and national policies

Overall opinions on the contribution of the UAEU to strengthening the urban dimension in EU and national policies were positive. Most surveyed stakeholders indicated that the Urban Agenda contributed to a great or some extent to:

1. improved networking and collaboration on urban issues with other stakeholders (80%);

2. more cooperation with cities and urban areas in other European countries (77%);

3. more involvement of cities and urban areas in EU policy-making (74%);

4. progress on the UN Sustainable Development Goals (70%);

5. improved policy-making on urban issues at the local level (60%); and

6. more involvement of cities and urban areas in national policy-making (54%).

Stakeholders were less convinced about the Urban Agenda's contribution to progress on Territorial Impact Assessment; with 43% agreeing that the Urban Agenda contributed to TIAs to a great or some extent.

Concerning the three pillars of EU policy-making and implementation, which the UAEU focusses on (i.e. Better Funding, Better Knowledge and Better Regulation), stakeholders' opinions diverged somewhat. Eight of ten surveyed stakeholders (79%) felt that the Urban Agenda contributed to a great or some extent to "better knowledge

and data on urban issues". The comparable figures for "Better Funding" and "Better Regulation" were notably lower, although still mainly positive. Slightly less than two-thirds of respondents (64%) agreed that the Urban Agenda contributed to a great or some extent to "EU funding that is better adapted to cities and urban areas. A similar proportion (61%) agreed that the Urban Agenda contributed to a great or some extent to "EU regulation that is better adapted to cities and urban areas".

Stakeholders' familiarity with the "one-stop-shop" for cities portal, as a tangible tool of the Urban Agenda that is meant to facilitate a more effective approach to policy-making, was not high. About a third of the surveyed stakeholders (33%) reported having used the "one-stop-shop" for cities portal, with only 3% having used it extensively. Most other stakeholders (37%) were unaware about its existence. The "Futurium" website was used more frequently: about a fifth (21%) of stakeholders reported having used it extensively, whereas about half (49%) used Futurium rarely.

Main barriers to effectiveness

Slightly more than two thirds of surveyed stakeholders (69%) perceived barriers to the Urban Agenda reaching its full potential[61]. A lack of funding was mentioned most frequently as a barrier (47% of respondents who perceived a barrier mentioned this), followed by a lack of alignment with the EU regulatory / financing cycle and processes (40% of respondents mentioned this). Other important perceived barriers to the Urban Agenda reaching its full potential were a lack of support of European Commission DGs (other than DG REGIO), completed Action Plans not being followed up and implemented, a lack of interest or involvement of cities and regions, and a lack of interest or involvement of EU Member States. Between 21% and 26% of respondents who perceived a barrier mentioned these barriers.

Efficiency

Efficiency of governance, coordination, management and administrative structures

Regarding the operational efficiency of the Urban Agenda, majorities of stakeholders (61%-57%) agreed or strongly agreed that the meetings organised for the Thematic Partnerships and the Action Plans were delivered in a cost-efficient and timely manner. Opinions were more divided concerning the cost-efficiency and timeliness of the public feedback for the Action Plans as well as the activities implementing the final Action Plans. Less than half of the surveyed stakeholders (40%-48%) agreed or strongly agreed that the latter elements were delivered in a cost-efficient and timely manner.

Proportionality of costs and perceived benefits

Members of Partnerships, including coordinators, spent substantial time and resources on the Partnerships. On average, members estimated having committed 0.78 FTE over 2018, excluding those who did not commit any time. The average (self-declared) resources invested in 2018 amounted to 18,826 EUR; an amount which would we

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[61] This question was only asked to those respondents who indicated to be familiar with the Urban Agenda, or who were directly involved.

substantially higher if deducting some very low amounts. Nonetheless, a relative majority of surveyed stakeholders (37%) felt that they had spent *less* time than they would have liked on the Urban Agenda; this figure was substantially higher (50%) for cities and urban entities. Only about one in ten surveyed stakeholders (12%) felt that they spent too much time on the Urban Agenda[62].

Relevance

Relevance of multi-level and multi-stakeholder cooperation

Roughly three quarters of stakeholders (76%) felt that the needs and priorities of cities and urban areas are taken into account (to a great extent or somewhat) by policy makers at national or regional level. This compared to two thirds of respondents (67%) who felt that the needs and priorities of cities and urban areas are taken into account by policy makers at EU level. Does this suggest that stakeholders saw no need for more involvement of cities and urban areas in national / regional and EU level policy-making? Not per se, as only 16%-17% of stakeholder felt that the needs and priorities of cities and urban areas are taken into account *to a great extent* by policy makers at national / regional or EU level.

The surveyed stakeholders attached great importance to the key objectives of the Urban Agenda. Improved access of cities and urban areas to EU funding was rated as most important (rated 8.8 out of 10, in which 10 is 'very important'). This was followed by having better knowledge and data on urban issues (8.6 out of 10), more cooperation with cities and urban areas in other European countries (8.5 out of 10), increasing the influence of cities and urban areas on *national or regional* policy-making (8.4 out of 10), and increasing the influence of cities and urban areas on *EU* policy-making (8.3 out of 10). The surveyed stakeholders attached somewhat less importance to having the EU involved in coordinating and supporting urban policy making at the national and local levels (rated 7.3 out of 10).

Relevance of pillars, themes and cross-cutting issues

The stakeholder perceived the relevance of the themes of the 14 Thematic Partnerships as high. On average, the Thematic Partnerships were rated with an 8.4 out of 10, in which 10 is very relevant. Stakeholders rated the 'climate adaptation' and 'urban mobility' themes as particularly relevant (rated 9.0 and 9.1 out of 10, respectively). The 'security in public spaces' and 'culture and cultural heritage' themes (both of which were addressed by wave 4 Partnerships) were seen as less relevant (rated 7.3 and 7.7 out of 10, respectively), although differences are relatively minor.

The relevance of the 11 cross-cutting themes of the Urban Agenda was rated equally high. Stakeholders rated the cross-cutting themes overall with an 8.4 out of 10. This score varied between 8.9 for "sound and strategic urban planning" to 7.9 for the "international dimension".

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[62] This question was only asked to those respondents who indicated to be familiar with the Urban Agenda, or who were directly involved.

Coherence

Complementarities, reciprocal linkages, synergies

More than two thirds (69%) of surveyed stakeholders agreed or strongly agreed that the Thematic Partnerships have established strong collaborative relationships among their members. Opinions were more divided when it comes to reaching out beyond the Partnerships. Slightly less than half of the stakeholders (46%) agreed or strongly agreed that the Partnerships have actively involved associations / city network beyond their members. Only about a third (32%) of stakeholders agreed or strongly agreed that the Urban Agenda Partnerships collaborate well with other Urban Agenda Partnerships.

Duplications, overlaps, incompatibilities

Stakeholders were overall not convinced about whether the Action Plans prevent overlap in themes covered (48% agreed or strongly agreed). The proportion of surveyed stakeholders who felt that the Action Plans align to other EU policies was also not particularly high (56%).

EU added value

Most surveyed stakeholders felt that the UAEU generate value that is additional to the value that would have resulted from interventions initiated at regional or national levels. Notably, six in ten stakeholders (61%) strongly *disagreed* or disagreed with the statement that "Also without the Urban Agenda there are enough ways for cities to influence EU policy on urban matters". Similarly, more than half (55%) of surveyed stakeholders strongly *disagreed* or disagreed that, if the Urban Agenda would be discontinued, the established collaboration between stakeholders would likely continue.

3. Stakeholder interviews

The study team carried out **a total of 26 interviews** with EU-level and other stakeholders who have been directly or indirectly involved in the design, operationalisation and implementation of the UAEU (see the table below). The aim of the general interviews was to collect information on: the effectiveness of the UAEU, particularly on the horizontal and vertical cooperation and interaction amongst UAEU stakeholders; the benefits achieved relative to the resources invested by the EU and other stakeholders (efficiency), the alignment of UAEU objectives with the needs of cities and urban areas in the EU (relevance); the complementarity of UAEU with other EU initiatives (coherence) and the added value of having the UAEU (EU added value).

Table 2: General interviews conducted

Stakeholder type	No. of interviews
EU institutions	7
Member State representatives at EU bodies	9
International and European organisations working on urban and regional policy	7
Civil society	1

Stakeholder type	No. of interviews
Cities	2
Total	**26**

When asked generally about the governance of the UAEU, interviewees noted that the **multi-level governance approach of the UAEU is its main achievement.** They felt it works well, because it brings together organisations from different governance levels that do not usually interact with each other and it allows UAEU stakeholders to operationalise their ideas to tackle urban challenges as well as establishing political coordination through the DGUM and the UDG.

Despite the positive views on the multi-level governance structure of the UAEU, most interviewees were not entirely satisfied with the role of DGUM. Stakeholders believed the **DGUM role is limited**; even if it does discuss them and provide feedback on the Thematic Partnerships' Action Plans, interviewees see room for improvement in the translation of actions into policy. **Cities highlighted that they would like to be better informed by DGUM and UDG about the overall development of the UAEU**, and how different TPs are progressing in terms of Better Knowledge, Better Funding and Better Regulation, as they felt slightly isolated from what is happening in these political bodies. Interviewees acknowledged that the DGUM had to engage with too many TPs in the first years, which also made it difficult for this body to provide detail feedback on the Action Plans. They questioned how effective it is to have DGUM approving Actions Plans. According to feedback, Action Plans are normally approved during DGUM meetings, which follow the Council presidency schedule, meaning that some Partnerships might not get feedback for months, which delays their work.

It was also emphasised that **too many stakeholders participate at DGUM meetings**, which hinders participants' ability to have meaningful discussions. Besides, interviewees (particularly cities representatives) mentioned that these discussions continue to have an intergovernmental nature rather than having more "multi-level" discussions. Additionally, Member States representatives highlighted that the same ministry representatives tend to attend both DGUM and UDG meetings, thus these bodies end up having similar roles and participants tend to discuss the same topics. Despite these obstacles, interviewees pointed out that some stakeholders, such as CoR, Eurocities, CEMR and EUKN contribute to the advancement of informal cooperation to address current and future challenges faced by urban areas. Several interviewees highlighted that these stakeholders have extensive experience in urban issues and have the potential to significantly support the discussions at EU level.

Interviewees, particularly city representatives, emphasised **two recommendations** to potentially improve the roles of UDG and DGUM within the UAEU. Firstly, city representatives should be involved at the UDG meetings to ensure the political and strategic coordination is more "multi-level", boosting multi-level discussions at these meetings. Secondly, DGUM should provide more strategic guidance so there is a clearer differentiation between the strategic and operational roles of DGUM and UDG.

When asked about the role of **Urban Agenda Technical Preparatory Group (UATPG),** only a few interviewees (mainly MS representatives) knew about this body

and those who did, described its role differently. Some believed it is a subgroup of the UDG that was set up to address issues coming out during the implementation of the TPs, which are not covered by the Pact of Amsterdam. Others thought that the role of UATPG is to prepare the agenda and discussions for the DGUM and UDG meetings. Even though interviewees described the UATPG's role differently, they agreed that timing of UATPG meetings and their coverage is subject to the Council's presidency, which tend to define the role of this body and the discussions participants will have at UATPG meetings.

The process of selecting Partnership members was considered **political and non-transparent** by most of the stakeholders interviewed (except MS representatives). Interviewees acknowledged that the selection of partners in the first wave of Partnerships was experimental; the selection process was less structured because of its novelty and the fact that no real selection criteria were applied to participants, beyond that of the timing of their application. Some described it as "first come first served basis" approach. Interviewees considered that the **selection of partners for the other three waves of TPs was more structured.** Stakeholders representing urban areas and cities, as well as Member States, could propose partners to get involved in Partnerships taking into consideration their expertise, and then DGUM representatives would discuss and decide on the final list of partners. It was **the decision on the final list of partners that city representatives and other organisations considered non-transparent**, and some also considered it highly politicised. They highlighted that in situations where stakeholders proposed two organisations from the same country to participate in a Partnership, there was a lack of clarity on why one, or both, were selected (some Partnerships have a ministry and city from the same Member State). Interviewees argued that there should be **clearer guidance** on what happens when two organisations from the same Member State are put forward by any of these entities: CEMR, Eurocities, COR or a Member State. Likewise, it was unclear to them under what criteria organisations are being left out.

Interviewees described the UAEU's working methods (of having Thematic Partnerships to prepare Actions Plans), as **"quite a practical and pragmatic approach",** the effectiveness of which depends strongly on how active TP members are. Particularly important for the effective operationalisation of the UAEU is the role of the coordinator, in particular how involved the coordinator is in the organisation of work and tracking progress. Moreover, interviewees raised some aspects regarding the operationalisation and working arrangements that they believed are worth noting after three years since the UAEU was launched.

1. **Variety of actions.** The actions put forward are very varied, which has a direct effect on the feasibility and length of their implementation. Some actions are short-term while other actions require years of implementation, meaning that some short-term actions can be implemented during the three years a TP is active, whilst others will require more time and additional funding. Moreover, there are also actions that are outside of the control of TP members to implement, mainly because these require the Commission to change regulation.

2. Connected to the first point, it was also highlighted that due to the **lack of resources and time needed** to implement actions targeting Better Regulation

and Better Funding, most of the actions put forward by TPs targeted the Better Knowledge pillar. The reviewed monitoring data (Section 2.1.2) also shows that the pillar covered by most actions is the Better Knowledge pillar.

3. **Broadness of themes.** Interviewees highlighted some of the TP themes can be very broad and that there are many initiatives covering the UAEU themes. Thus, EU institutions' representatives mentioned that TP members needed to focus and tailor their work in a coherent way to avoid duplication.

In addition to the three implementation aspects raised, interviewees also pointed out several uncertainties that have hindered the operationalisation of the UAEU to date.

1. **Voluntary nature of the UAEU.** Member States, Commission DGs and other UAEU stakeholders are not obliged to provide feedback on the proposed Action Plans, thus some TPs might not obtain information on their Action Plans and might not get the support needed to implement the actions. A few interviewees highlighted that they invested time and efforts on drafting the APs, but did not receive feedback nor political recognition to ensure the take-up of actions.

2. **Ownership of actions**. According to the interviewees, it is unclear who should be in charge of the implementation of Action Plans. TP partners are frequently not clear whether their role includes the implementation of actions, or simply stops at the drafting of the Action Plan. Many interviewees pointed to the Urban poverty Partnership as an example where most actions have not been implemented, because a lack of clarity of who should implement the actions.

3. Some of the actions put forward by the TPs **require more resources than those currently available**. They also mentioned that the Commission could point to available and existing sources of funding to be used for the implementation of actions (e.g. Urban Innovation Actions).

4. Some interviewees, particularly MS and city representatives, mentioned that **greater steering from the Commission is needed**, particularly in those TPs where members struggle to decide on actions and/or to navigate the EU decision making process.

Interviewees were also asked to provide tangible examples of the benefits of the multi-level structure of the UAEU, namely what they considered the main achievement of the UAEU to be. They highlighted the following actions being finalised or executed by the TPs:

1. **Circular City Funding Guide to assist cities in accessing funding for circular economy projects.** The European Investment Bank (EIB) developed an e-book (guide) with help of the cities involved in the circular economy Partnership that explains the funds available for circular economy projects at city-level. This guide, according to interviewees, was a good tool for knowledge sharing on circular economy financing at city level, but they were unsure of the sustainability of the guide.

2. **Financial Blending Facilities for Cities, Migrants and Refugees[63]**. The Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees Partnership looked into how the next multi-annual framework funds, targeting integration and inclusion of migrants, namely the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the European Social Fund (ESF), could be adjusted to set the general conditions for funding (including allowing an inclusion blending facility for cities) after 2020.

3. **The city of Milan** is developing an air quality guide for how to finance air quality investment at city level with assistance of the European Investment Bank's expertise and other members of the Air Quality Partnership.

Interviewees were also asked about the **elements of the UAEU** other than the Thematic Partnerships, but the awareness of these was low and most of interviewees did not have much to say. Only a few member states representatives, also participants of DGUM, mentioned that the UAEU has not contributed to the territorial impact assessments studies even though they believed this to be very important. These interviewees also highlighted that there should be more cohesion between the UAEU and the Territorial Agenda as there is a need to have a more integrated approach and go beyond administrative boundaries, meaning that territorial cohesion work should not be treated in isolation and should be reinforced within the UAEU.

Efficiency

Most of the interviewees, particularly cities and MS representatives, mentioned that **"they get more out of the UAEU than what they put in"**, meaning that the benefits obtained from participating in the UAEU are equal or larger than the resources their organisations invested. In term of benefits, they argued that many of those they obtain from the UAEU are intangible and difficult to quantify; namely, networking, relationship building and sharing of best practices.

It was also noted that the costs and resources currently being invested by organisations involved in the UAEU **are in line with, or less than** the benefits they extract, because TPs are mainly working on Better Knowledge actions, which tend not to require very significant resources. Interviewees believed that for TPs to implement Better Regulation actions, stakeholders involved in the TPs will need more resources. As mentioned before, interviewees felt **there is a lack of clarity regarding where resources should come from** in order to implement actions. Some TP members thought resources would have come, at least partially, from the Commission and Members States. Several members believed that the Commission and Member States would have either provided them with the necessary resources, or informed them on how to obtain financing (e.g. Urban Innovative Actions, URBACT programme).

Interviewees **welcomed the administrative and organisational support provided by the Technical Secretariat**, but they were hesitant on whether it is the best possible arrangement for the funds available to support the implementation of the UAEU. It was noted that, at the moment, the Technical Secretariat is focused on the organisation of

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[63] https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/inclusion-migrants-and-refugees/financial-blending-facilities-cities-migrants-and-refugees

TP meetings, rather than the actual implementation of actions that have potential to have impact (e.g. the migration advisory board).

According to the stakeholders consulted as part of the general interviews, the **UAEU aligns with the needs and problems faced by cities**, as well as with the key challenges for sustainable urban development covered by the New Urban Agenda. Moreover, they also mentioned that the UAEU themes are in line with the ESPON evidence for future development trends in different social, economic and environmental policy fields. Interviewees, particularly representatives of European organisations, highlighted that **cities' needs are very broad and diverse**, thus the UAEU should only focus on those where a coordinated and integrated intervention is needed (e.g. reduce air pollution, create opportunities for circular businesses). The UAEU seems to be aligned with those key challenges that call for an integrated approach. However, a few stakeholders seem to believe that some horizontal and cross cutting issues that required an integrated approach are not fully covered by the UAEU, namely: accessibility and environmental friendliness of basic infrastructure in cities.

Moreover, many interviewees argued that the cross-cutting issues included on the Pact of Amsterdam are not being considered properly by UAEU stakeholders. Interviewees also mentioned that clustering of the TPs and cross-cutting issues themes is creating silos and that a better clustering could be arranged. An interviewee suggested to split the cross-cutting themes into enablers - such as IoT, connectivity and physical and digital infrastructure - and TP themes or as stated by interviewee "vertical themes" into themes with commercialisation purpose - such as industry, mobility, food etc.

Coherence

Many interviewees perceived the UAEU as a **very different "machine" compared to other EU initiatives**, because of the multi-level nature of the agenda and how it is supposed to feed into the policy making process. Thus, the level of alignment is limited to certain activities of the UAEU, which are to an extent aligned to the Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) and Horizon 2020 calls. However, some stakeholders claimed there are silos between EU initiatives such as the Covenant of Mayors, the European Innovation Partnership on Smart Cities and Communities, and the International Urban Cooperation (IUC), as well as with the urban policy work being carried out by other DGs and the initiatives with an urban focus put forward by DGs. Some interviewees felt the UAEU's alignment with other existing initiatives (particularly those under the aegis of other DGs) was not fully understood before its launch.

Moreover, representatives from URBACT mentioned that there is little alignment between the UAEU and **URBACT III programme** because this started in 2014, hence it was already in place before the inception of the UAEU.

In relation to the proposed new **European Urban Initiative (EUI),** most of the stakeholders interviewed seemed to be in favour of the Commission taking a stronger role in the UAEU and providing greater steering. However, member states representatives highlighted they would not be in favour of having the Commission directly managing the UAEU, as they believe it will make the UAEU less transparent, and

they would prefer to have shared management of the UAEU, like in the case of URBACT. If the UAEU is directly managed by the Commission, stakeholders emphasised they would like more transparency in issues such as the selection of members for TPs and how money is spent - certainly if UAEU gets its own budget under EUI.

EU added value

All interviews were positive about having an UAEU. Interviewees pointed to several reasons why there is an added value of having the UA at EU level:

1. **Find solutions to issues that affect many cities in the EU.** Cities in the EU face similar challenges, particularly when it comes to digital transition, circular economy and environmental policies. The EU role is important for cities and other players to share solutions, create spaces for urban stakeholders to reflect on common challenges and share best practices. It was recommended by an interviewee the UAEU should focus on issues where there is a lack of knowledge to create "transnational knowledge" and best practices.

2. **Boost solutions found locally, but that can be transferred and used by others.** For example, digital transformation in the health care systems which tends to happen at the local level, should be boosted by the EU to ensure cities are not investing their resources in solutions that are already out there.

3. **Cross cutting and cross border issues.** Some "hot topics" cannot be solved at city level and require multi-level coordination and support, for example: security in public spaces.

4. **Understand EU regulation that affects cities directly and / or needs to be implemented by cities (e.g. Air quality Directive).** Legislation at the EU level has a direct effect at other levels, thus it is important to understand what is the directly impact of EU legislation on cities. The direct contact between the Commission and cities can help ensure that what is happening at the EU level is not harmful at the local level.

Annex B: Case study reports

Case study 1: Governance

Introduction

This case study report focuses and explores the UAEU's multi-level **governance** approach, through the lenses of a sample of the Thematic Partnerships (TPs) launched under the UAEU to date. The aim of this case study report is to provide evidence-based findings on the UAEU's multi-level governance approach, in particular the following issues:

- The formation of the Thematic Partnerships, including the nomination of Partnerships members and other aspects of the formation process.

- Vertical coordination of the UAEU, considering the roles of DGUM and UDG regarding how they provide strategic direction to the Partnerships, review their progress, contribute to establishing linkages between Partnerships, etc.

- Cooperation between European institutions and other organisations in relation to the UAEU (e.g. Eurocities and Covenant of Mayors).

The evidence base

This case study report draws on information from six of the 14 TPs launched under the UAEU to date. For each of these, we have reviewed relevant documentation, and conducted interviews with selected members. The table below provides an overview on the Thematic Partnerships that are covered in this case study report.

Name of TP	Wave	Number of interviews conducted
Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees	Wave 1 (Amsterdam)	4
Sustainable Land Use and Nature Based Solutions	Wave 1 (Amsterdam)	5
Circular Economy	Wave 2 (Bratislava)	3
Digital Transition	Wave 2 (Bratislava)	3
Energy Transition	Wave 3 (Malta)	3
Culture and Cultural Heritage	Wave 4 (Vienna)	3

The UAEU's multi governance approach

The Thematic Partnerships formation process

The majority of interviewees across four Partnerships do not know the process by which the TP has been created, and how the participation of the partners from different countries was decided. Nevertheless, especially coordinators in two Partnerships were more aware of these issues.

The majority of interviewees assume that the participation of specific countries is decided at the level of the DGUM. According to many interviewees, the formation of the Partnerships also differed by wave of the TP. Thus, the interviewees perceived that the Member States played an important role in the formation of the first waves of TPs, contrary to latter waves in which the European Commission had a more marked involvement in the selection of TP members (which the Member States did not always fully agree with). Nevertheless, this could be explained by the fact that the first wave of TPs was different from all other waves in the sense that it existed prior to the Pact of Amsterdam, and prior to the establishment of a formalised process for Member selection.

The majority of the Partnership members interviewed still have **no clear understanding of the criteria for selection** of countries, and/or representatives of cities, MS, or other stakeholders. Several interviews point to the fact that, once the country composition is decided (in most cases based on national priorities), the partners were nominated by a national Ministry, based on the relevance to national priorities, expertise of the organisation, and the best fit city to participate in the theme based on a national selection process. Others mention that the partners were suggested by organisations like Eurocities, or that the European Commission Services would decide who would join the TP.

In general, there is agreement that the **process of TP formation should be more transparent, with clearer criteria for participation, as well as more guidelines on what is expected from each partner** (e.g. including participation in meetings, the responsibilities of a coordinator or a member etc.). Drafting a Memorandum of Understanding was suggested by an interviewee as a means of ensuring that the partners have clarity on their commitments and responsibilities. A Partnership coordinator also mentioned they would like to have more decision-making power in the composition of the Partnership.

In the majority of cases there seems to be agreement on the fact that the selected members represent all the relevant levels of governance, although there are some exceptions to this finding. For instance, members of one TP were questioning the relevance of their TP having a large share of the members representing the national level, since they believed that actions should be more targeted to the city level. Some TPs included regions as partners, and one interviewee was wondering why regions in general seem to have been left out of the UAEU framework. One of the interviewees highlighted that it is not clear how inactive members can be replaced.

Vertical coordination of the UAEU

The evidence from the majority of the interviews with Thematic Partnership members shows that there is little to no awareness of the details of the overall governance structure of the UAEU, and the specific roles of the governing bodies (UDG, DGUM, etc.). There is a clear lack of transparency and communication between the governing bodies and the TP members. Interviewees pointed out that they have not been informed from the beginning of the roles of the UDG / DGUM, have not been provided with information on the discussion and do not interact with them.

The few interviewees who were aware of the UAEU governance roles were of the opinion that it has not been a successful set up, and there is a belief that it can be improved. The overall impression conveyed is that the governing bodies of UAEU are not facilitating the work of the Partnerships, nor did they provide any useful or strategic advice.

There were a few suggestions for improvement, nevertheless there seems to be diverging positions:

- On the one hand, some TP members are of the idea that the UDG / DGUM should only be overseeing the progress of the TP implementation, without providing direct guidance, but rather letting the TP members be more independent. There was also a feeling that the UDG / DGUM members don't have the expertise to provide advice on some issues.

- On the other hand, other suggestions for improvement have been quite the contrary to the previous one, demanding the closer involvement of the UDG / DGUM into the implementation of the actions directed at stakeholders other than the ones involved in the TPs, or especially in the communication and dissemination of results.

Interviewees believed that the results of the UAEU TPs would have more reach and impact in case the MS representatives involved in the governing bodies would support in capitalising on the results of the TPs and share them with cities or other relevant actors in their own countries. This could help to raise visibility of actions and combine efforts of other Member States that are actively involved.

Nevertheless, in general, the multi-level governance, understood as cooperation between entities at different levels of government within the UAEU context, is viewed as necessary to tackle some of the issues as it provides a direct connection between cities and the MS and the Commission, showcasing the needs on the ground.

Key actors driving the work of the Thematic Partnership

In terms of involvement of the different types of actors in the governance processes, cities interviewed find it particularly difficult to comprehend what is happening at the UDG / DGUM level, and some do not consider that these bodies take into account their grievances. They do not feel involved in the governance of UAEU per se.

According to interviews, Member States representatives have been some of the least active members of the Partnerships. The interviewees do not have a clear sense of progress in ensuring coherence of the TP work with the national agendas.

A major point of interest for the majority of the interviewees has been the involvement of the European Commission, which provided the cities with the sense that their voice is heard at EU level. Nevertheless, there were some interviewees who were disappointed that the Commission services tended to act more like observers, and any outputs of the Partnerships' work that imply "better regulation" and target the Commission are not directly taken into account in EU policies (also bearing in mind the regulatory cycle at EU level). It is therefore important to clarify expectations, roles and availabilities from the start, in order to minimise scope for disappointments.

The role of "Other stakeholders"

In the majority of cases, the interviewees **were positive about the role and contributions of "other stakeholders**" (other than cities, national authorities or the Commission). The city networks in particular were recognised as important stakeholders in the Partnership due to the extent of their networks and the inputs they provide. One interviewee stressed the importance of their role in the implementation phase.

The role of other stakeholders has been as providers of expert advice when drafting orientation papers, guiding the process, mediating between views. Particularly when these organisations consult their cities' networks about the actions included in the AP (Action Planning phase), communicating to cities the knowledge being generated by the TP (i.e. promoting publications prepared by the TP) and finally interviewees believe these organisations will be useful for the dissemination of the "final products" when these are ready.

Networks such as Eurocities and CEMR have been found to be very proactive and supportive. Eurocities and CEMR are appreciated for the 'eagle view' they provide and knowledge of what is going on in cities outside the Partnership. According to an interviewee, there is a need to bring in more people from umbrella organisations to provide information from outside the Partnership. However, these organisations do not gather 100% of the information, as they do not represent all cities in Europe, specifically smaller ones that may have interesting cases to make.

In at least two cases, the EIB helped to drive forward the work of the TP by publishing and funding two tenders to support the implementation of actions, which was very appreciated by the Partnership members, who are strapped for resources.

There is a noticeable lack of involvement in the TPs from CoR and the European Parliament, although according to interviewees in one Thematic Partnership, CoR has been facilitating the diffusion of results towards smaller cities.

Enhancement of Role of Cities

The majority of interviewees believed that the role of cities in the EU urban polices has been enhanced by the UAEU. The TP approach is the first formal step to get cities directly involved in EU policy related to urban matters, even if the Commission and MS have

been consulting them in the past through different channels. There has been an improvement but interviewees believe more can be done to get cities involved directly in decisions being taken at the EU level on urban policies – firstly by providing more economic support to small cities so they can also participate in the UAEU. However, it is not only about economic support but also about building awareness at the EU level that cities are an important player for the decision-making process and that they should have direct contact and exposure to the decision being taking at the EU level on urban polices.

Summary of key findings

The majority of interviewees across four Partnerships out of six do not know the process by which the TP has been created, and how the participation of the partners from different countries was decided.

There is a clear lack of transparency and communication between the governing bodies and the TP members. Interviewees pointed out that they have not been informed from the beginning of the roles of the UDG / DGUM, have not been provided with information on the discussions in these bodies, and do not interact with them.

There is little to no awareness of the details of the governance structure of the UAEU, and the role of the governing bodies (UDG, DGUM, etc.). The overall impression conveyed is that the governing bodies of UAEU are not facilitating the work of the Partnerships, nor did they provide any useful or strategic advice.

The roles of the TP members, and especially of the Member States and the European Commission services, have not been very clear. The Member States have been perceived as the least active participants in the TPs, although some MS did take leadership in either coordinating or leading the implementation of actions. Several TP members had expected the European Commission to be more active. However, the members were surprised to understand that the Commission took an observer role in the majority of cases.

Case study 2: Partnership functioning & coordination

Introduction

This case study report focuses and explores the UAEU's TP functioning and coordination, through the lenses of a sample of the Thematic Partnerships (TPs) launched under the UAEU to date. The aim of this case study report is to provide evidence-based findings on the UAEU's functioning and coordination, in particular the following issues:

- Thematic Partnerships coordinators' role and effectiveness

- Frequency, format and effectiveness of meetings and other coordination activities

- Level of involvement of Members, Participants and Observers

- Expertise of partners

The evidence base

This case study report draws on information from six of the 14 TPs launched under the UAEU to date. For each of these, we have reviewed relevant documentation, and conducted interviews with selected members. The table below provides an overview on the Thematic Partnerships that are covered in this case study report.

Name of TP	Wave	Number of interviews conducted
Air Quality	Wave 1	3
Urban Poverty	Wave 1	3
Urban Mobility	Wave 2	3
Public Procurement	Wave 3	3
Security in Public Spaces	Wave 4	3
Culture and Cultural Heritage	Wave 4	3

The UAEU's functioning and coordination

Thematic Partnerships coordinators' role and effectiveness

The role played by coordinators in the TPs included the preparation of meetings' content, the moderation of the sessions and discussions at the meetings, the liaising between different partners (members, Technical Secretariat, Commission) to progress the agenda, the oversight of the different strands of activities, (e.g. each coordinator is leading one of the working groups), the identification of priority areas and the drafting

and delivery of key reporting milestones (e.g. the orientation paper). In some cases, coordinators also took charge of identifying potential gaps in skills or expertise within the Partnership and writing the Terms of Reference to recruit external partners with the relevant skillset/ expertise.

Several coordinators expressed the difficulties they encountered when first getting the role, and several interviewees regretted the lack of formal onboarding process for coordinators and members alike. One interviewee suggested a document with clear guidance and guidelines for coordinators, along with key milestones, would also have been useful.

The coordinators imposed more or less structure to the TP as they were left free in choosing their approach to coordination. Some left much freedom to action leaders, others set up advisory boards composed of thematic experts. Generally, the approaches have been satisfactory for coordinators and members alike. In several cases, members more acquainted with European projects have supported the work progress.

In some TPs launched in the early UAEU waves, members interviewed started the work unsure of what to generate beyond the Action Plan; while the members of TPs launched in later waves seem to have received clearer guidelines on the expectations from their work. In a Wave 4 Partnership, interviews with coordinators revealed that it was made clear to them from the onset that the Commission expected the implementation of the majority of the actions to unfold during the timeframe of the Partnership, and that it is intended for TP members to be key stakeholders in the implementation of the Action Plan. This has driven a clear communication from the coordinators to take a realistic approach when drafting the Action Plan.

Overall, the coordinators have been crucial in ensuring the Partnerships go forward. Generally, they were recognised by their members as having a good knowledge of the area of the TP, some even had significant experience in coordinating cross-European networks. In one case, the coordinator had a previous working relationship with the Commission ensuring a good buy-in from this partner.

In terms of the Action Planning process, the majority of interviewees were largely happy with the content of the Action Plan and the driving role of the coordinators in putting the Action Plan together on basis of their inputs.

The number of coordinators does not seem to correlate with a more effective TP. In some TPs, only one coordinator was able to push the work effectively. In one Partnership, it was highlighted that the two coordinators have different approaches and had to make an effort to align these in order to ensure a positive work dynamic.

Coordination of the TP Scoping and Action Planning processes

A series of initial plenary sessions were generally used to set the scope of the work in TPs, discuss and identify key issues to be set at the agenda. Interviewees also mentioned that these first sessions were also useful for the different members to get to know each other, understand their respective agendas and expertise, and gauge the interest of the different members in taking some themes/ actions forward. Outcomes of the discussions held at those plenary sessions were summarised in the orientation paper

submitted to the Commission. In a few TPs, an online consultation was launched to gather suggestions about the TP or its Action Plan.

In most TPs, the members were divided in sub-groups to decide on specific priority actions. The members volunteered to be included in one or several of the working groups, generally along the member specific interests and expertise. Despite this fragmentation, interviewees generally estimated that it was not detrimental to the TP rather it enabled to best utilise the diverse expertise of the TP members. In several TPs, a higher number of actions was related to the risk of diluting the efforts, as coordinating many actions with a wide scope was challenging.

Coordination was done through an online document platform Microsoft Sharepoint in a few TPs, but several stopped using it after technical issues. For example, in the Security TP, the members eventually relied on emails to exchange and communicate in-between meetings and turned to Google documents/ drive for the drafting of outputs (e.g. orientation paper). In general, access to online folders with documents was necessary, though not ensured in all TPs (e.g. Public Procurement).

Frequency, format and effectiveness of TP meetings

In terms of meetings organisation, the majority of Partnership members interviewed were satisfied by the way the meetings were held, with the exception of one TP where it was highlighted that discussions were too short in the initial plenary sessions and members felt they could not cover all topics at length. The meetings were organised regularly. In most TPs, the management team organised weekly meetings to coordinate the day-to-day activities though there are examples of TPs with monthly virtual meetings.

Partnership face-to-face meetings were less recurrent (about every 3 months) for they are costly, but they were the opportunity to take stock and run stakeholder consultations. In several TPs, the location of the meeting changed on a rotating basis, which was appreciated for constituting an opportunity to meet during conferences or workshops. However, it may have caused issues of travel arrangements and raised the issue of lack of travel funds. In all cases, when meetings were organised at short notice the members attendance decreased.

Level of involvement of Members, Participants and Observers

Interviews with coordinators highlighted a disconnect between the partners' involvement *during* the meetings, and their commitment *in-between* the meetings. Whilst partners are happy to attend the meetings and participate in the discussions at the meetings, their engagement in the production and delivery of outputs has been limited, and output production was commonly almost completely taken over by coordinators and / or action leaders. In many TPs, coordinators/action leaders stressed the lack of effective support from members. This resulted in coordinators and action leaders taking on a larger role and responsibilities than they sometimes expected.

In most TPs, the level of involvement of Member States was deemed insufficient. In several TPs, representatives of Member States stopped attending meetings and/or did not lead actions as agreed in the Action Plan. A potential explanation is that the UAEU

does not offer strong advantages for the MS as they are already part of the discussion with the Commission and take part in the inter-governmental legislative process at EU level, through their representation in the Council. The MS also already have consultations with the cities. From the interviews performed with MS, a few MS representatives mention they have undergone a learning process within the frame of the UAEU, however, the scale of the knowledge transfer and awareness raising of cities' problems is unclear.

Across the board, the most active members in the TPs were the cities. Observers such as URBACT and CEMR brought their specific expertise to the table, which was appreciated by coordinators. In some Partnerships, members stressed the important support offered by URBACT in guiding the Partnership work, improving the quality of work to better focus in a technical way the suggestions.

As for the Commission, it was felt that the Commission has had issues positioning itself towards coordinators, especially in striking the right balance between a will to allow for flexibility / bottom up approach and the need to provide a clear set of guidelines, direct support and efficient processes to coordinators. For instance, coordinators mentioned that they would have welcome more feedback from the Commission on their orientation paper before starting to draft the Action Plan. In two TPs, interviewees stressed that the Commission was more involved in the beginning of the Partnership work. In one case, the Commission explained it withdrew at the recommendation stage, as it cannot agree to take any position, being a regulation body. The Commission generally positioned itself as a knowledge provider, though in a few Partnerships it contributed to the day-to-day coordination of the TP.

In some TPs, other members, particularly cities, became disengaged as time passed, mostly due to high resource constraints.

Some interviewees recommended to set up a memorandum of understanding or an agreement, which should align expectations and resources that each partner commits. In one TP, the coordinator kept in contact with members, calling when one was absent and ensuring a strong commitment.

Expertise of partners

The level of expertise available varies per Partnership. In a few Partnerships, it was observed that expertise was spread unevenly in the TP, or that there was high variability in terms of motivation and focus between members. In one TP, of the two coordinators one had much more expertise on the topic and was able to take on more of the work.

In several cases, the interviewed TP members would have appreciated that the MS representative could stem from a line ministry (which has responsibilities relevant to the theme of the TP). However, in the majority of cases, the MS representative came from the Ministries dealing with urban and / or regional affairs, which meant that they had less expertise on the topic at stake.

As a rule of thumb, when the expertise of partners was not sufficient, the TPs hired external experts.

The Commission expertise on EU polices, programmes and initiatives was highly appreciated in some TP, as members did not generally have an EU-wide vision or knowledge of an issue. This was also the case with European networks (i.e. Eurocities, CEMR) representatives who supported with the comparative perspective on experiences on the particular topic across EU cities.

Summary of key findings

Thematic Partnerships coordinators' role and effectiveness

The support of the coordinators was highly appreciated, as the majority of the coordinators have been viewed as performing their tasks according to the needs of the TPs. In return, though, the coordinators tend to consider they could have received more support from the Commission and in the initial phases of the TP through guidelines on their role, and during the Action Planning from the members. The coordinators took on a large share of the work putting together the Action Plan. It is unclear whether a Partnership is better managed when there are more coordinators.

Coordination of the TP Scoping and Action Planning processes

Each Partnership was coordinated according to the preferences and working style of its coordinator(s). However, in most cases, the Action Planning was organised first in plenary sessions for all members to meet and know each other and then in dividing in sub-groups of Partnership members who focused on priority issues on basis of their interest and expertise. This resulted in some Action Plans having more actions than others. The coordination could be challenging due to technical issues, difficulties in organising meetings or coordinating the many actions.

Frequency, format and effectiveness of meetings

In most TPs, the management team organised weekly virtual meetings to coordinate the day-to-day activities, although in a few cases, the meetings were held on a monthly basis.

Level of involvement of Members, Participants and Observers

Overall, it was the assessment of the coordinators that the members were more interested in partaking in meetings than providing inputs for the Action Plan. As a result, the coordinators were often the primary author of the Action Plan. The lack of involvement of Member States was a recurring complaint of TP members. The involvement of the Commission depended on the Partnership but overall it was more a knowledge provider than an active member of the Action Planning. This is due to the dual role of the Commission as participant to the TP and sometimes target of the actions. The members felt there were avenues for improvement to push the members to be more involved in the TPs.

Expertise of partners

There was no clear trend in terms of lack of expertise in the TPs. Some interviewees considered that the members' expertise was not always sufficient to draw the Action Plan. In some TPs, the members used extensive support from external experts. The expertise of the Commission was appreciated as well as the expertise of the network representatives. The representatives from ministries were not always the most relevant ones for the specific theme.

Case study 3: Technical Assistance

Introduction

This case study report focuses and explores the UAEU's Technical Secretariat (TS) contribution, through the lenses of a sample of the Thematic Partnerships (TPs) launched under the UAEU to date. The aim of this case study report is to provide evidence-based findings on the UAEU Technical Secretariat's added value. We will cover the following aspects:

- The extent to which the technical assistance is in line with the needs of the Partnerships, and their level of satisfaction with it.

- Explore differences (if any) in the way Partnerships use the available support.

- Understand if there are any additional technical needs across Partnerships and DG REGIO that are not addressed by the Technical Secretariat.

The Technical Assistance is provided by Ecorys since 2017. The TA is funded by the Commission. It supports the Commission and the Partnerships in the following ways, mostly on **administrative and organisational matters**:

- Monthly reporting on the state of play of the Partnerships and progress reports every six months.

- Delivery of guidelines for Partnerships' implementation.

- Maintaining and updating the contact list of the Partnership members.

- Providing overview of the use of senior expertise days and reimbursement status of travel and accommodation.

- Support to UAEU meetings organisation (minutes, moderations, presentations).

- Support to UAEU Coordinators' Meetings (January 2017, June 2017, March 2018 and February 2019).

- Support to preparation of UDG and DGUM meetings (8 in 2017-2018).

- Ad-hoc support (e.g. dissemination of online consultation, organisation of the Cities Forum in Rotterdam etc.)

The evidence base

This case study report draws on information from six of the 14 TPs launched under the UAEU to date. For each of these, we have reviewed relevant documentation, and conducted interviews with selected members. The table below provides an overview on the Thematic Partnerships that are covered in this case study report.

Name of TP	Wave	Number of interviews conducted
Air Quality	Wave 1	3
Jobs and Skills	Wave 2	3
Climate Adaptation	Wave 3	2
Public Procurement	Wave 3	3
Energy Transition	Wave 3	3
Security in Public Spaces	Wave 4	3

The Technical Secretariat (TS)

Services provided and satisfaction with the technical assistance

The TA involves five specific tasks:

- Support to the Thematic Partnerships (TPs)
- The provision of expertise to the Partnerships
- Outreach and communication support
- The reimbursement of travel costs to Partnership members and
- Support to the European Commission

Support provided to the TPs across the phases of the TPs

The majority of interviewees were satisfied with the services provided under the technical assistance to the TPs (especially related to the logistical support to organising meetings and coordination). They also recognised that it was a crucial factor for the success of the Partnership, especially because it was instrumental in keeping the members active and involved through the organisation of the Partnership calls and meetings.

There was **positive feedback on the assistance of the TS regarding day-to-day administrative support** and helping the coordinators frame their role and organise activities (e.g. by assisting in launching a survey among members in order to identify priority actions). The support of the TS to speed up the process of Action Planning and regarding the relationship between the TP members and the European Commission was acknowledged by several interviewees. A few interviewees appreciated the TS keeping a low profile during the meetings, focusing on its administrative and organisational tasks while ensuing the Action Plan would be delivered on time.

One point of concern that was stressed by several interviewees who were not TP coordinators was the **lack of transparency/relationship between the TS and the members of the TP.** While the role of the TS in communicating is key, ensuring the

flow of information reaches all members of TP equally is also a responsibility of coordinators. Interviewees often mentioned not being (completely) aware of the role of the TS and areas and ways of support. The reimbursement options as well as the lack of formal process to introduce the technicalities to the partners and the expected involvement of the partners were all points where interviewees saw room for improvement. This hints that clearer guidelines and information packages should be provided along the lifetime of the TP, especially considering that new members may join. Besides the Secretariat, information should be provided by the TP coordinators and DG REGIO. Information from coordinators' meetings and factsheets were provided to TP members, however it appears the role of coordinators was not always clear regarding this duty to inform.

A large number of TP members also felt the **need for further assistance in the Action Plan implementation phase**, as they lack both the TS support and the guidance on how to implement actions. This was particularly mentioned as an impediment in progressing with the implementation phase of the TP.

On the topic of information exchange, some interviewees mentioned that the TS could also have shared more knowledge of the work carried out by the other Partnerships. In one TP, the reactivity of the technical secretariat was considered suboptimal. For a minority of interviewees, the fact that the TS was composed of 2 persons was considered excessive for the number of Partnership members. The working relationship between the TS and the TP coordinators has been good in all Partnerships however twice there was feedback on the coordination costs of working with the TS.

The provision of expertise to the Partnerships

In Partnerships where the members were strong thematic experts, the consensus was that the budget on experts could have been used on the TP members who were experts themselves. The selection process of the external expert was not the same across TPs. In one TP, the Terms of Reference for the external consultant were written by the Technical Secretariat support team without inputs from the TP members, which led the members estimating that it was not very cost-effective since the external expert was not located close to the city receiving expertise. On the contrary, in another Partnership, the Terms of Reference for the external expert were drafted by the TP coordinator. It should be noted that the Terms of Reference writing falls under the responsibility of the TP coordinator with inputs from the TP members. Related to the question of the expert choice, another interviewee claimed that the TS had not been proactive in informing the TP members about available experts. Finally, the funds for external experts were communicated on an ad-hoc basis.

Outreach and communication support

Several interviewees believed the communication activities of the technical assistance team could be improved. Several mentioned they found the communication activities insufficient and/or basic. The technical assistance provided to communicating the results of the UAEU TPs could be improved as the page of the UAEU doesn't have much followers, the social media presence could be extended (at the moment, only Twitter is used) and the website needs restyling. While TP members often considered the communication activities to be lacking, it is clear in the mandate of the TS that TP

members should largely handle the communication activities (e.g., the coordinators were invited to provide inputs for the newsletters). The role of the TS seems to have been misunderstood in this regard. The communication activities were also key to strengthen the UAEU community outside its members. Therefore, the communication team has been encouraged to widen the UAEU community, tap into more relevant networks, keep contact with those cities that applied to Partnerships but were ultimately not considered[64]. A key element that has been established to address these issues is the Futurium website, single digital access point for all actors involved. For instance, the website management is considered to be (too) centralised, making content uploaded by the respective Partnerships themselves rather restricted.[65] In a similar vein, Futurium is predominantly used as a post-hoc portal for providing information rather than a tool for cross-sectoral and -boundary communication, knowledge transfer and information exchange between Partnerships and further relevant external actors.[66] As a result, the Meeting on the State of Play on Communication in December 2018 stressed the desire to strengthen involvement and engagement of the FUTURIUM website and in February 2019 the Meeting on the State of Play on Communication stressed the need to go beyond the Futurium website to engage the community.

There is a need for more expertise on communication, outside website and social media posts and updates. Several TPs would have appreciated support on putting together an infographic or a video presenting the TP and its objectives and impacts, however this support was outside the scope of the FWC. More information sharing is expected about the services offered by the FWC as well as the available budget and experts. The members also wished to receive more information about the activities of the other TPs.

The reimbursement of travel costs to Partnership members

One role of the TS was also in organising and paying for the members' travel. Several interviewees stressed a lack of transparency and in some cases of ownership of the TP members over the travel budget. Several interviewees pointed out it would be useful to estimate the utilisation of the budget. In one TP, the budget was quickly spent, and members dropped out since they had no funds left to travel to meetings.

It appears the members of the first waves encountered more often issues related to the funding of the travels. In several cases, the budget was deemed insufficient, which might be due to TP members not knowing the total travel budget.

Use of support across Partnerships

The secretariat provided practical support to all six TPs considered for this case study. It also helped hiring experts to support the work of all TPs. The Partnerships from wave 1 were already launched and received technical assistance from the Secretariat at a later stage. However, it does not appear to have resulted in particular issues. On the

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[64] DG REGIO & Technical Secretariat. (2018). *4th State of Play Meeting on Communication.* Brussels: DG REGIO & Technical Secretariat.

[65] UATPG. (2018). *Urban Agenda Technical Preparatory Group.* Vienna: UATPG.

[66] DG REGIO & Technical Secretariat. (2018). *3rd State of Play Meeting on Communication.* Brussels: DG REGIO & Technical Secretariat.

contrary, the first wave Partnerships seem to have welcomed very positively the arrival of the Technical secretariat which took charge of logistical and administrative issues such as finding and booking venues for the meetings, organising travels, taking notes during the meetings and drafting follow-up updates after the meetings, arranging conference calls between meetings for progress updates, drafting template for the reports and the Action Plan, and sourcing and recruiting relevant experts. It lifted the burden off coordinators who could then focus on content**.**

Some partners did not ask for technical assistance because they had difficulties understanding what the needs were in time to ask for support. It is unclear whether the TS did not sufficiently explain what support could be received. It generally seems than the TPs that made the most use of the external experts were the ones that needed support writing the Action Plan. In Partnerships where the Action Planning ran behind, hiring an independent expert to provide inputs and helping to write the Action Plan was common.

There is no clear link between the distribution of roles and responsibilities among TP members and the tendency to request assistance. The quality of the services provided by the TS was overall consistent, in one case the TS was hindered by organisational issues on the end of the TP members.

Coordinators less accustomed to European projects (cities except capitals) found the support of the TS particularly useful. The TS helped them understand the requirements and expectations of their role, helped set up an effective working methodology and actively supported the draft of the Action Plan.

Summary of key findings

Generally, the service provided by the Secretariat to TP coordination activities have been deemed satisfactory by the majority of the interviewed TP members. These have been an important element supporting the continuity of work in the Partnerships, ensuring that members are active when they meet, pushing the work forward through the support in organising meetings, drafting agenda, moderating sessions, sharing minutes and maintaining a relationship with coordinators.

The support in hiring experts was not always used and in one case did not seem to fully respond to the needs of the TP.

Several points related to the use of the budget were also questioned: the procedure for hiring external experts, the lack of transparency regarding the travel and expert budgets. In the absence of information on the cost of the TS services, the interviewees did not form an opinion on the value for money of such services.

In terms of supplementary support, the most recurrent point related to the need to both improve and develop the communication activities. A second point related to the importance of transparency. Transparency was expected on the use of the services provided by the TS (especially the funds). It appears the members could have benefited from a clearer internal communication.

In addition, the Technical Secretariat support seems to need further improvement when looking at the different stages of TP development. In particular, clearer guidelines and information packages should be provided in the early phases to the TP members on the role of the TS. Further, more TS support was requested for the Action Plan implementation phase, similar to the one received in the Action Planning phase.

Case study 4: The role of cities, MS and Commission in Partnerships

Introduction

This case study report focuses and explores the role of cities, MS and Commission in the UAEU's Partnerships, through the lenses of a sample of the Thematic Partnerships (TPs) launched under the UAEU to date. The aim of this case study report is to provide evidence-based findings on the UAEU's multi-level governance approach, in particular the role of cities, Member States (MS) and the European Commission (EC) in the TPs, and the nature and perceived quality of their respective representation, involvement, contributions in the Partnerships, as well as key challenges and shortcomings. It also touches upon the role of cities as coordinators, and highlights common themes, which have emanated from a variety of stakeholders regarding their role in the TPs or the multi-level governance approach more generally.

The evidence base

This case study report draws on information from six of the 14 TPs launched under the UAEU to date. For each of these, we have reviewed relevant documentation, and conducted interviews with selected members. The table below provides an overview on the Thematic Partnerships that are covered in this case study report.

Name of TP	Wave	Number of interviews conducted
Housing	Wave 1	3
Urban Poverty	Wave 1	3
Digital Transition	Wave 2	3
Urban Mobility	Wave 2	3
Sustainable Land Use and Nature Based Solutions	Wave 3	5
Security in Public Spaces	Wave 4	3

The UAEU's multi-level governance approach

Overall, feedback on the multi-level, multi-stakeholder approach was very positive. Discussions in the various TPs were described as open and constructive, and allowed all stakeholders to be able to provide input in the Thematic Partnerships. The opportunity to exchange, get the views and experiences, and understand the perspective and agendas of a variety of stakeholders was mentioned in all Thematic Partnerships covered in this case study as a key added value of the TPs, and of the Urban Agenda more generally – this was thought not to be replicated in any other European fora or networks, and the multi-level, **multi-stakeholders approach was praised** in this regard.

Before turning to the respective roles of cities, MS and Commission in the following subsections, a range of issues and remarks identified to be common to all stakeholders are fleshed out below:

In all TPs, **engagement was highly varied across members** (and across all stakeholder types). While this is perhaps unsurprising for a subset of members to be more passive given the relatively large size of these TPs, this was thought to be exacerbated by (1) a rather opaque selection process and (2) a voluntary-based participation.

There was also **a high variability in the expertise on and prior experience** of the TP members with the specific topics discussed in the TPs, especially at the EU-level, and this was noted as an influential factor for the nature of the stakeholders' engagement and contribution in the TPs (whether for cities or MS). Evidence points to this phenomenon being (at least partially) **geography-based**, with predominantly (but not only) Eastern European cities and in some respect MS having less practical experience of different approaches, less knowledge of the EU context, as well as fewer resources available for the TPs, meaning they tended to play a more passive role, focused more on learning than actively contributing.

Resource constraints in terms of budget for travel as well as time to dedicate to the work of the Partnerships was reported as a key factor hindering engagement for all stakeholder types. However, as noted below, constraints were particularly acute for smaller (and to some extent Eastern European) cities. As such, all TP members faced **significant opportunity costs**, as they had to balance their involvement in the work of the UAEU with competing priorities in their respective organisations.

Other stakeholders, such as umbrella organisations, European networks and commissioned external experts were noted in no less than 4 of the 6 TPs to have played a significant role in progressing the work of the Partnerships, either as members or coordinators. It was highlighted that they possessed significant policy expertise, knowledge of the EU context as well as extensive experience in coordinating pan-European networks of partners. They were recognised as key actors to provide an overarching, 'eagle view' of issues, liaise with cities external to the TPs if needed, and fill in for other stakeholders when they faced capacity gaps (especially at the implementation stage). However, in 2 TPs, caution was raised on the fact that those organisations also tend to have their own agenda and attempt to steer discussions in specific directions.

Role of cities

According to case study interviewees, cities are a key stakeholder level in the multi-governance, multi-stakeholder approach adopted by the UAEU, and they were considered as critical actors in the Thematic Partnerships. The representation of cities in each Partnership was described as excellent, and well balanced across sizes and locations. Across all TPs considered for this case study, cities have been **very engaged actors**, most enthused as they valued the opportunity to feed into the EU policymaking and believed their work as part of the UAEU could have a 'real impact' on their daily work.

Indeed, cities usually got engaged in the different TPs with a **clear objective to find practical solutions** to their local challenges and needs. This included:

To increase their knowledge on certain aspects of the issue, contrast their approach and policies with those of other cities in the Thematic Partnership, learn from their experiences and initiatives and share best practice. For instance, in the Housing TP, two cities, both with significant experience in housing-related matters, were widely recognised as prime examples of different approaches to the issue of social housing, and this complementarity between the two was thought to have enriched discussions in this Partnership, and fostered learning for 'less experienced' cities.

To influence policy at the EU level in the areas in question, specifically aiming to:

(1) improve local authorities' access to EU funding by relaxing certain requirements of certain EU funds, which were frequently perceived as 'putting off' cities because too burdensome (in terms of resources and bureaucracy). This was a relatively common objective, touched upon in at least half of the TPs covered in this case study (Housing, Urban Poverty, Security in Public Spaces).

(2) to a lesser extent, flex or adjust the legislative frameworks at the EU level, currently perceived as too restrictive and not reflecting well their daily preoccupations. This was perhaps more of a consideration for certain TPs in which the regulatory frameworks were perceived as especially divorced from local responsibilities and practicalities (e.g. Urban Poverty, Security in Public Spaces). For instance, members of the TP on Security in Public Spaces highlighted that needs and challenges of cities around security at the local level (e.g. installing CCTV or other surveillance instruments for security-related concerns) was somewhat 'caught up' in broader debates around individual liberties, privacies and data protection laws, in which cities tended to have had limited input at the EU level thus far.

Cities, by sharing their local knowledge, experiences and challenges, and coming up with **concrete ideas and propositions** for the Action Planning, were perceived as **valuable contributors to the TP**. This practical experience was appreciated by Members States and the European Commission – perhaps more remote from the realities of the ground – and for this reason these other stakeholders regarded cities as a key actor of the multi-level approach. Given the excellent representation of cities in the TPs overall, stakeholders agreed that cities were able to reach a critical mass to have their voice heard and to influence the content of the Action Plans. Yet, in a third of the TPs covered in this case study, cities themselves raised some doubts over their ability to influence the workings of their respective TPs and steer its agenda. Of all stakeholder types, they were also the **most likely to highlight that the TPs operated under a relative 'top-down' approach** and remained, in their view, remote from local considerations and challenges. However, this appears to have had only a minimal impact on their engagement, as only interviewees from one TP noted a significant disengagement of cities over time.

However, engagement was often noted to have varied across cities within each Partnership, with typically a limited number of cities most engaged and others taking a more passive role. This was thought to be driven by the following set of issues:

Resource constraints – both in terms of budget for travel and time to dedicate to the UAEU – were mentioned in all 6 TPs covered as a key factor hindering the engagement of cities both during Partnership's meetings as well as in-between meetings. Half of the TPs considered resource constraints to be particularly acute for smaller cities, and to some extent, for Eastern European cities.

High variability in expertise on and prior experience of the issue, especially at the EU-level, was noted as an influential factor for engagement and contribution in the TP. To some extent, evidence points again to a size and geographical gap, with smaller, eastern European cities more likely to be engaging directly with EU policy fora for the first time.

Turning to the **role of cities as coordinators,** there was no clear evidence that it differed significantly from that of other stakeholders who have held this position, and cities did not seem to possess any advantage or disadvantage in terms of their suitability for the role. Based on the case study interviews, the fact of having one (or more) cities as coordinator also did not seem to bear any influence over the perceived effective functioning and performance of the TP. In most cases, coordination of the TP was perceived as effective, in a few others less so, but either way this seems to have depended more on the individual characteristics and experience of coordinators or the broader characteristics, circumstances and challenges of the TPs, rather than on specific traits of cities as coordinators. However, the evidence gathered strongly suggests that coordinators were key to the performance of the TPs. As such, the TPs perceived as more 'successful' tended to be those that had coordinators described as 'knowledgeable, engaged and committed', regardless of their profile (cities, MS, or other types of organisations).

Role of Member States (MS)

Case study interviewees also perceived MS to be key actors in the multi-stakeholder approach adopted for the TP, although their feedback indicates that their participation and **engagement in the TPs has been highly variable across TPs and across MS** in each TP. A range of factors were mentioned to explain this:

Composition of the TPs, representation of MS, and relevance of the ministries involved: It was mentioned in 2 of the 6 Partnerships covered that they could have benefitted from the presence of a larger MS, perceived to hold greater legislative and political influence within the EU system (France, Germany, Italy and the UK were mentioned as examples). In half of the TPs, some of the ministries involved were also not perceived as the most relevant ones for the purpose of the TP, and their representatives were not always individuals who were considered to be best placed within their MS to open doors and start conversations with other MS. In other cases where TPs were treating more transversal policy issues, ministries present were relevant but not necessarily sufficient in their own rights to cover all policy aspects.

Cultural issues: In half of the TPs covered (Urban Mobility, Sustainable Land Use, Security in Public Spaces), it was highlighted that MS might not be used to taking a multi-level, multi-stakeholders approach, and some might have failed to see the benefits for them in participating in this sort of initiatives. This might have had an impact on their initial decision to join the TP, but also on their involvement throughout the TP, as

at least a third of the Partnerships noted that the engagement of MS had starkly decreased over time. Members of the Partnership on Security in Public Spaces, suffering from a particularly low representation of MS (only 2 volunteered) considered that this might be especially the case in their TP, as security was typically perceived a prime national competence.

Resource constraints and skills gap: just like cities, most MS reported to suffer from significant resource constraint. Time constraints and severe opportunity costs were often mentioned as key factors hindering their active participation. In several TPs, MS also noted a skills gap in their respective states, with a limited pool of civil servants having the right expertise and being fluent in English, meaning that those who do tick both boxes tend to be over-exposed to EU initiatives.

When MS have been involved and actively contributing to the work of the TP, their approach tended to differ somewhat from that of cities. While (as noted above) cities usually approached the TP as an opportunity to find solutions to practical problems, MS frequently opted for a broader, higher-level perspective. They tended to approach issues more conceptually, through the lens of 'legal and institutional frameworks' with a keener interest to set up well rounded, 'proper frameworks' at the EU-level as well as 'national sectoral policies'. Taking the example of the Housing Partnership, according to interviewees, MS appeared more interested in asking more abstract questions such as 'what are the elements of a good housing policy?'; whereas cities were more interested in 'practical solutions', such as 'why can't the EU provide financing for the types of projects we want to undertake?'.

Some interviewees identified a risk that MS **could steer the agenda of the TP in certain directions,** as it was noted in at least 2 TPs that the engagement of Member States somewhat narrowed to specific aspects of the work of the TP, generally falling along the lines of their national interest, agenda and initiatives (Digital Transition, Urban Poverty). For instance, MS in the Urban Poverty Partnership were involved in working groups and proposed actions, which aligned with or reinforced their national agenda. While interviewees felt that this may have been beneficial to the TP to some extent, as it had allowed it to capitalise on the key strength and expertise of each MS, there was limited evidence that, conversely, MS had adjusted their own national policies to align with the work undertaken in their respective Partnerships. Only anecdotal evidence was mentioned in the TP on Sustainable Land Use and Nature Based Solutions that one MS had done so.

A certain **degree of complementarity was highlighted between MS and cities**, whereby MS tended to act as moderating presence, and provided a welcome 'reality check' on the (sometimes overly) ambitious vision set by cities. Indeed, in **several TPs a link could be established between their ability to reconcile the differing views of MS and cities, and the overall (perceived) 'success' of their TP**. As such, those TPs (Housing, Sustainable Land Use and Nature Based Solutions) which reported to have been more successful at reconciling those views at the Action Planning stage were also much more positive when assessing the overall 'success' of their TP. On the contrary, those who reportedly had difficulties in 'finding a middle ground' between MS and cities tended to report that their Action Planning phase dragged on, encroaching on the later implementation phase (Digital transition, Urban mobility).

Role of the European Commission (EC)

Case study interviewees held relatively **mixed views with regards to the role played by the European Commission** in the different Partnerships, although there was some variability across TPs and evidence indicates that this role has somewhat evolved over time. It should however be noted that our pool of interviewees involved very few DGs representatives (2 as part of the 6 TPs covered in this case study), who would have allowed us to draw a more comprehensive assessment of the Commission's role.

On the one hand, **representation of the European Commission in the different Thematic Partnerships was overall perceived as very good**, with on average 3 to 4 different DGs represented in each TP. For the TPs covered in this case study, representation of the Commission had also improved over time, with Partnerships from the last two waves benefitting from the participation of at least 4 Commission DGs as opposed to between 2 and 4 in previous waves. The vast majority of case study interviewees also reported that the participating DGs were very relevant for the work of their respective TPs. Attendance of the various DGs was judged satisfactory overall, though highly variable across DGs and without a clear causal explanation. For instance, DGs perceived as 'most remote' from the issues debated in a TP were not necessarily less likely to attend meetings).

However, there was a **perceived disconnect between this extensive representation in the TPs**, the generally satisfactory attendance of the DGs' representatives at the meetings, **and the Commission's involvement and contribution** at and in-between meetings. **Views were split on this issue across TPs**, with some improvement over time. In about a third of cases (most pertaining to the most recent waves), the Commission was reported to have played a useful role in aligning the work of the TP with other EU initiatives, and collecting/sharing relevant data for the drafting of the Action Plans. In the remaining two thirds, it was suggested that, overall, the Commission could have done more to contribute to the action planning and implementation, coordinate with other relevant DGs not represented in the TPs when needed, and ensure that the work of the TP was aligned / embedded into broader EU initiatives. In those instances, a certain sense of a 'lack of institutional backing' from the Commission transpired to the rest of the stakeholders. It is however interesting to note that perceived 'buy-in' at the EU level might have improved for wave 4 TPs, as the subjects for those TPs were defined more collaboratively (or at least it was perceived by interviewees as such). In the case of the wave 4 TP considered for this case study, prior relationships had been established with the key relevant DG for some years prior to the Urban Agenda. It was perceived to have enabled TP members (and especially coordinators) to develop a good relationship with this key DG, and ensured that the Partnership benefitted from a good buy-in at the Commission from the onset, with a keen interest to integrate the work of the TP into their own work.

Like all other stakeholders, the Commission **reported that significant resource constraints** (in terms of time especially) and opportunity costs had hindered its participation in the TPs. But the role of the Commission within the TPs was also considered as ill-defined by the majority of case study interviewees, and as such, it was thought that the Commission **encountered difficulties to find its place and reconcile its different roles** in the Partnerships. In the two TPs where the tension

between the Commission's different roles was not reported as a key issue, the position of the Commission (as representative of the EC, TP member, and potentially as addressee of some of the proposed actions) was still reported as 'paradoxical' by members of the TPs, and perceived by the DGs representatives themselves as relatively challenging to navigate. In the remaining TPs where tension between the various roles of the Commission was acknowledged, these difficulties seem to have become increasingly evident at the implementation stage of the TPs, as most interviewees reported that the engagement of the Commission had been particularly challenging at this stage of the process. Indeed, the Commission usually did not volunteer to be action lead in TPs, and DGs were generally not much involved in implementing actions, although the majority of Actions Plans have actions that require contribution from the Commission as they stand out of the direct control of TP members. Although, as noted above, the role of the Commission appears to have evolved over time and it could be that, as a result, it has better managed to reconcile its different roles and support the implementation of the APs in the most recent waves of TPs. However, the evidence currently at our disposal does not allow us to draw such conclusions, as those last waves have not yet reached the implementation stage of the process.

Finally, **cities and MS also hoped the Commission to play a more leading role** to set the context for the Partnerships from the onset, and to provide feedback on the direction taken and the feasibility – from the Commission's perspective – to implement suggested actions. It was also noted that the Commission had repeatedly fallen short of clarifying how the output of the TP's work would be exploited and feed into the new programming of EU policies.

Summary of key findings

Overall, feedback on the multi-level, multi-stakeholder approach was very positive. The opportunity to exchange, get the views and experiences, and understand the perspective and agendas of a variety of stakeholders was mentioned in all Thematic Partnerships covered in this case study as a key added value of the TPs, and of the Urban Agenda more generally. This was thought not to be replicated in any other European fora or networks, and the multi-level, **multi-stakeholders approach was praised** in this regard.

According to case study interviewees, **cities** are a key stakeholder level in the multi-governance, multi-stakeholder approach adopted by the UAEU. They have proven to be very engaged actors and valuable contributors to the work of the TPs, coming with clear objectives to find practical solutions to their local challenges and needs, and providing concrete ideas and propositions for the Action Planning. However, of all stakeholder types, cities were also the most likely to highlight that the TPs operated under a relative 'top-down' approach and remained, in their view, remote from local considerations and challenges. Their engagement was also noted to have varied across cities within each Partnership, with typically a limited number of cities most engaged and others taking a more passive role. This was thought to be driven by resource constraints and a high variability in expertise on and prior experience of the issue across cities. Turning to the role of cities as coordinators, there was no clear evidence that it differed significantly from that of other stakeholders who have held this position, and cities did not seem to possess any advantage or disadvantage in terms of their suitability for the role.

Case study interviewees also perceived **Member States** to be key actors in the multi-stakeholder approach adopted for the TP, although feedback indicates that their participation and engagement in the TPs has been highly variable across TPs and across MS in each TP. A range of factors were mentioned to explain this, including (1) the composition of the TPs, representation of MS, and relevance of the ministries involved, (2) cultural issues, and (3) resource constraints and skills gap. Member States tended to approach issues more conceptually than cities, through the lens of 'legal and institutional frameworks' with a keener interest to set up well rounded, 'proper frameworks' at the EU-level as well as 'national sectoral policies'. Yet a certain degree of complementarity was highlighted between MS and cities, whereby MS tended to act as moderating presence, and provided a welcome 'reality check' on the (sometimes overly) ambitious vision set by cities. Indeed, in several TPs a link could be established between their ability to reconcile the differing views of MS and cities, and the overall (perceived) 'success' of their TP.

Case study interviewees held relatively mixed views with regards to the role played by the **European Commission** in the different Partnerships, although there was some variability across TPs and evidence indicates that this role has somewhat evolved over time. Representation of the European Commission in the different Thematic Partnerships was on the whole perceived as very good. But there was a perceived disconnect between this extensive representation in the TPs, the generally satisfactory attendance of the DGs' representatives at the meetings, and the Commission's involvement and contribution at and in-between meetings. Like all other stakeholders, the Commission reported that significant resource constraints (in terms of time especially) and opportunity costs had hindered its participation in the TPs. But the role of the Commission within the TPs was also considered as ill-defined by the majority of case study interviewees, and as such, it was thought that the Commission encountered difficulties to find its place and reconcile its different roles in the Partnerships (as commissioner, TP member, and potentially as addressee of some of the proposed actions). Other stakeholders also hoped the Commission could have played a more leading role to set the context for the Partnerships from the onset, provide feedback at key milestones, and clarify how the output of the TP's work would be exploited and feed into the new programming of EU policies.

Case study 5: Action Planning

Introduction

This case study aims to provide evidence-based findings **on the Action planning process** (i.e. the process of stocktaking; preparatory actions; defining objectives and deliverables), the process that UAEU Thematic Partnerships (TPs) are going or have been through to develop their Actions Plans (APs) to then implement their actions. This case study examines in particular the following issues related to the Action planning process:

- Stages of the Action planning process and differences across TPs;

- Effectiveness of the Action planning process;

- Final content of the Action Plan;

- Consideration and usefulness of the three Pillars (Better Regulation, Better Knowledge, Better Funding) and the eleven cross cutting issues;

- Consideration of EU policies and programmes (including URBACT, UIA and Cohesion Policy);

- Challenges experienced when developing the APs.

The evidence base

This case study report draws on information from six of the 14 TPs launched under the UAEU to date. For each of these, we have reviewed relevant documentation, and conducted interviews with selected members. The table below provides an overview on the TPs that are covered in this case study report. Please note that the Culture and Cultural Heritage TP is still in an early stage development, thus there is limited information on the action planning process from this TP.

Name of TP	Wave	Number of interviews conducted
Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees	Wave 1	4
Circular Economy	Wave 2	3
Digital Transition	Wave 2	2
Sustainable Land Use and Nature Based Solutions	Wave 3	5
Energy Transition	Wave 3	3
Culture and Cultural Heritage	Wave 4	3

The Action Planning phase

Stages of the Action Planning phase

Twelve of the fourteen Partnerships have published final APs and two (wave 4) are still in the early stages of their action planning phase. This means that **most of the TPs have completed their action planning phase**. According to the Pact of Amsterdam, each Partnership should follow a process of five phases (Figure 1) that last around three years. **This preparation phase has been followed by most of the Thematic Partnerships interviewed for this case study**, including sub-steps such as: drafting orientation papers as part of the stocktaking exercises, having working groups discussing the themes covered by the orientation papers and decide on preliminary list of actions, public and targeted consultation on draft APs and final consolidation of APs. According to most of TP members interviewed, **the preparation of the APs took between eighteen months to two years,** as several meetings/co-creation exercises were needed to decide on the list of final actions and how to implement these. For example, members from the Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees TP spent a year identifying the bottlenecks related to European funding, regulations and knowledge exchange which were translated into scoping papers, and around eight months consulting stakeholders (including migrants and refugees) on the eight actions included on the scoping papers. This TP participated in twelve events to promote the TP prior to deciding on the final list of action and publishing the final AP. Only members of one TP mentioned that they had the impression the action planning phase could take three years, and that the actual implementation of actions would take place afterwards. In this case, a lot of time was spent on formulating draft actions in the first place; during the ensuing process of discussing, consolidating, and fine-tuning the actions and how to implement them, a number of changes to the actions included in the AP were made, which then impacted on what could be implemented in the remaining time. For most of the interviewees, the action planning was described as lengthy but not necessarily ineffective as it is described below. For more than half of survey respondents, the action planning phase was carried out in a cost-efficient and timely manner as well as the meetings organised for the TP.

Figure 1: Phases and deliverables of Partnerships

Source: Pact of Amsterdam

Effectiveness of the Action Planning phase

Members of the Thematic Partnerships covered by this case study **had mixed views on the effectiveness of the Action Planning phase**, even if all TP members

interviewed found the process participatory. Based on the interviews carried out, it seems that in most TPs **the Action Planning process was found reasonably effective**. Particularly, in TPs that had active coordinators (e.g. Circular Economy and Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees), driving and steering the Action Planning phase and members from all levels of government involved in the stock taking, preparatory actions and final selection of actions that were included in the APs. For members of two TPs, the Action Planning process was considered slightly less effective as these had little steering/coordination from the coordinators and a lack of members' participation, particularly from Member States representatives. The **lack of steering from coordinators was mainly linked to a lack of understanding and misinterpretation of how the TP should function, what it should generate and in which timeframe**.

Moreover, several cities (coordinators and non-coordinators) **found the process of selecting and designing actions challenging**, and considered that this process (part of Action Planning) could have been dealt differently (i.e. selecting actions where TP members would commit to be action leaders and action leaders have a clear idea on how to implement them). For example, the Sustainable Land Use and Nature Based Solutions TP members had to redesign and merge actions at the implementation phase due to a lack of ownership of certain actions and of alternative ideas on how to implement them. On the other hand, members of the Circular Economy TP only included actions in the AP that members were fully able and willing to implement (i.e. actions leaders had put forward the actions that they are in charge of coordinating and implementing).

Another observation linked to why some TP members found the Action Planning phase slightly more effective than others, is that **TPs that found this process effective managed to carry out targeted consultation with key stakeholders**: contacting members of existing networks and presenting and participating at events and workshops to gather feedback on proposed actions. For example, the Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees TP members presented their scoping papers at two working conferences organised by the TP (in Amsterdam in November 2016 and in Berlin in February 2017), to consult a broad range of stakeholders and gather their feedback on the bottlenecks identified and possible actions to address them. These consultations were carried out on top of the public consultations published on the Futurium website. **All the TP members interviewed found the public consultation of limited value to decide on actions to include in APs.** The public consultations were disseminated by TP members and umbrella organisations, however not necessarily through channels other than the Futurium website.

Even though most of the interviewees were positive about the overall Action Planning process in their TPs, all TPs interviewed in this case study believed **it would have been helpful to have defined a clearer methodology for the Action Planning phase** as this is considered the most important but also challenging stage of the operationalisation of UAEU. It is the stage when TPs decide on which actions to include in their APs, available resources to implement selected actions and leaders of each actions. According four interviewees, the Pact of Amsterdam does not define in detail what kinds of actions are envisaged and what their aim should be, hence **TPs had to find by themselves what the best approach to develop APs is**. In this approach, each TP had to decide

the appropriate level of ambition and concreteness of actions, including who should be the target of the actions and who should implement the actions (e.g. TP members themselves, and/or other actors (DGs, MS…) outside the TP). As noted above, members of four TPs managed to find an approach to develop their APs that they considered effective, following the light-touch guidelines of the Pact of Amsterdam, and other TP members highlighted that they struggled to find an effective way to plan their APs. The Sustainable and Land Use and Nature Based Solutions TP members took a long time to reach a consensus on which actions to include, finally deciding on actions that were realistic to implement within the time they had left. Thus, according to interviewees, the actions included were not considered that ambitious meaning that the implementation of their actions will not result in concrete solutions to key urban challenges but rather show elements/examples of how to solve these challenges (e.g. guidance document on how to finance brown fields). The difficulties encountered by some TPs to effectively manage the Action Planning phase is not solely due to the lack of a clear methodology but, as highlighted above, other aspects such as lack of coordination and active participation of TP partners.

Final content of the Action Plan

Partnership members **found the content of their APs overall satisfactory** considering the time and efforts put into developing APs. Most interviewees highlighted that level of ambition of actions depend on the scope of the action, and that their APs included actions with different scopes. The actions which outcomes are to provide policy recommendations to different stakeholders are considered less ambitious than actions that equip cities with expertise and tools to implement solutions to target existing urban challenges (e.g. resource management roadmap for cities). A few interviewees highlighted that they were highly satisfied with the fact that they have managed to agree on sustainable actions that will be continued after the TP finishes. For example, action 6 of the Circular Economy TP, which aim is to develop a Circular Economy Portal for cities. The TP partnered with European Circular Economy stakeholder platform so they will help to develop the portal and will be in charge of update it after the TP finishes in December 2019.

Most interviewees highlighted that **actions under the Better Regulation pillar are the most ambitious actions included in their APs** but also the hardest to implement, as their implementation depends on stakeholders involved in the legislative process and thus, outside of the control of TP members. There are not many actions under this pillar and the majority of actions under the Better Regulation do not relate directly to the modification of existing legislation but rather policy recommendations and guidance documents for existing Regulation. According to the monitoring data, only five of the 31 actions under the Better Regulation Pillar target the "modification to existing EU legislation".

Consideration of UAEU Pillars, eleven cross-cutting issues and EU policies and programmes (including URBACT, UIA and Cohesion Policy) when preparing APs

When developing the APs, **all the TP members mentioned that they had considered the three pillars** (Better Knowledge, Better Funding and Better Regulation) defined in the Pact of Amsterdam and believe that the Pillars are useful to

understand the focus and work of UAEU. The role of partners from DGs was crucial to discuss which actions should fit under which pillar/s, particularly for actions that targeted the Better Regulation pillar as the DGs needed to provide insight from the EU policy making cycle. On the contrary, the cross-cutting issues exercise[67] appears not to have added significant value to the preparation of the APs. According to interviewees, the consideration of the cross-cutting issues played a limited role in the development of APs and many considered that "these cross-cutting issues require a re-think". Although the responses to the survey shows that all the cross-cutting issues were considered to be relevant (with scores above 7.9 out of 10), feedback from the interviews suggests that they were too numerous, broad and general to be useful to effectively guide the Action Planning work of the TPs.

During the Action Planning phase, **all TPs considered how their proposed actions could align with existing EU programmes (e.g. URBACT and Urban Innovative Actions), policies and initiatives.** Similarly, the majority of stakeholder survey respondents (56%) believed that APs were aligned with EU policies. The involvement and active participation of TP members from DGs was considered key to understand which are the programmes, policies and initiatives related to the policy areas covered by the TP and how the TP could align and contribute to these. Apart from DGs, URBACT also helped to align the actions with existing EU programme and policies, but also try to align actions across different TPs. Even though some degree of alignment was achieved with Urban Innovative Actions and URBACT, TPs found it difficult to align their actions with relevant EU policies and their cycles. This misalignment is mainly due to the amount of EU programmes, policies and initiatives, which relate to the topics of the TP (e.g. Circular Economy) which is not possible to cover by TP members.

Challenges experienced when developing the AP

Several challenges related to the selection of actions and overall development of APs were highlighted by the TP members consulted for this case study, namely:

1. **Choosing actions that are manageable**, that TP members can implement with the resources available. Manageable actions are not always easy to identify at the Action Planning phase as TP members could not predict exactly the resources that each action would need. In the case of the Energy Transition TP, members highlighted that they reduced their actions to eight that were manageable to implement by the end of the Partnership focusing mainly on policy recommendations and guidance documents. The Circular Economy TP members decided on manageable actions slightly different; members listed their expertise and matched their expertise to the urban challenges that they wanted to contribute, and they reached out to other stakeholders that were doing similar work so they could contribute to each other work.

2. **Choosing actions that are sustainable** and will continue having an impact after the end of the TP.

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[67] There was a template provided for the AP that included a section on cross-cutting issues.

3. **Identifying which other organisations are working on similar actions and initiatives** and align TP actions to theirs.

4. **Degree of ownership of actions,** some partners felt very strongly that certain actions needed to be included in the APs but did not take responsibility to implement the action (i.e. becoming action leader).

5. **Action planning timeline.** Some members of one TP highlighted that in their TP, members misunderstood the Action Planning process timeline. TP members had the impression that they would have 3 years to write the Action Plan and the implementation would follow.

Summary of key findings

Most interviewees reported the Action Planning process was effective overall, and were satisfied with the APs developed by their TPs. However, the process of identifying issues to address and defining specific actions was quite challenging in most cases, and not all TPs managed to finalise their APs in the two-year window envisaged for this. **The effectiveness of the Action Planning phase seems to be directly linked to** how active coordinators were; driving and steering the Action Planning and the involvement of TP members from different levels of government in the stock taking, preparatory actions and final selection of actions that were included in the APs. Many TP members believed that the Action Planning phase **should have had a clearer methodology** to ensure that coordinators took responsibility of the steering and driving the process, and TP members understood what was required from them at the initial stage of their TPs. Many interviews highlighted that TPs had to find by themselves what the best approach to develop APs was, which took longer and was potentially less effective than it would have been, if a clearer methodology had been in place. However, they still found the **Action Planning process participatory and enjoyed the co-creation** meetings and exercises that were needed to develop their APs even if the process was lengthy.

When asked about the challenges experienced during the Action Planning process, **TP members highlighted several challenges**: choosing manageable actions and sustainable actions, identifying other organisations working on similar actions and initiatives, degree of ownership of actions and the misunderstanding with the overall Action Planning timeline.

Overall, TP members believed that the **content of their APs was satisfactory** considering the time and efforts put into developing them. There are actions that are more ambitious than others in the APs, depending on the target these have (local, national or EU) and the pillar these are under. However, many TP members highlighted that actions were not particularly innovative but rather pilot actions that will show examples and best practices of how to solve a problem rather than finding a definite solution.

All the TPs **considered the three pillars** (Better Knowledge, Better Funding and Better Regulation) when developing their APs and believed that the Pillars are useful to understand the focus and work of UAEU. However, the cross-cutting issues did not add much value to the preparation of the APs. **The involvement of the DGs in the TPs**

was considered crucial to understand the pillars and link the actions to these. Moreover, the role of DGs was also considered important to align the APs to EU programmes, policies and initiatives. Even though some degree of alignment was achieved with UIA actions – some of the UIA actions are funding TP actions – TPs found it difficult to align their actions with relevant EU policies and their cycles.

Case study 6: Implementation of Action Plans

Introduction

This case study aims to provide evidence-based findings on the **implementation of Action Plans** in the UAEU, in particular with regard to the following issues:

- Progress made with implementation, emerging and expected future results and impacts;

- Reasons for (lack of) progress, enablers and preconditions, including buy-in from different types of actors and funding requirements / sources;

- Differences between actions related to Better Knowledge, Better Funding and Better Regulation;

- Sustainability of actions, barriers and drivers.

The evidence base

This case study report draws on information from six of the 14 TPs launched under the UAEU to date. For each of these, we have reviewed relevant documentation, and conducted interviews with selected members. The table below provides an overview of the Thematic Partnerships that this case study report draws on.

Name of TP	Wave	Number of interviews conducted
Air Quality	Wave 1	3
Housing	Wave 1	3
Urban Poverty	Wave 1	3
Urban Mobility	Wave 2	3
Jobs and Skills	Wave 2	4
Climate Adaptation	Wave 3	2

The implementation of Action Plans in the Urban Agenda

Progress made with implementation

Across all UAEU Thematic Partnerships, there have been a total of 114 actions planned. The monitoring data shows that out of these actions, 46% are in the initial implementation phase, 18% are in the planning and inception stage and 10% have been

finalised[68]. A broadly similar picture emerged from the Thematic Partnerships reviewed for this case study, with most actions still being in the initial implementation phase. Substantial differences are visible at the Partnership-level. This is of course partly related to the wave of the Partnerships. The monitoring data shows that all completed actions are of first wave Partnerships, while none of the wave 3 Partnerships' actions has passed beyond the initial implementation phase. However, also within the same wave significant differences can be observed. For example, in wave 1, the Air Quality Partnership has finalised all its five actions, whereas the Housing Partnership has finalised three out of twelve actions.

Reasons for lack of progress

A key reason for the limited number of finalised actions was the often longer than foreseen Action Planning process (see separate case study on Action Planning for more details). This implies that there has been limited time for the implementation of Actions, even in some first wave Partnerships. For this reason, several of the Thematic Partnerships have extended their work plan beyond the originally planned timespan. The implementation status of Actions is not only a question of time, however, as confirmed by the fact that also within individual Partnerships the implementation status of Actions varies significantly. Moreover, in most of the Partnerships reviewed for this case study, uncertainty exist about whether certain Actions will be implemented at all.

An important reason for this is that it appears to have been difficult to find the right balance between ambition and feasibility. Some Action Plans are very ambitious, but 'high-level', with not easily 'actionable' actions, for others the opposite was true[69]. This divergence can be explained by the fact that **Partnerships frequently felt uncertain about what needed to happen with the actions after the Action Plan was completed**. It was often unclear who was in charge of implementation and what the 'audience' was / to whom to direct actions. In for example the Urban Poverty Partnership, the Partnership members – notably the cities and urban areas – initially foresaw for themselves a chiefly advisory role and limited direct involvement in the implementation, which was supposed to be the responsibility of the Member States and / or the Commission. This led to a high number of Better Regulation actions (seven out of a total of ten actions in this Partnership), which were outside the direct control of the Urban Poverty Partnership during the implementation phase. In general, it was often raised as an issue by Partnership members that the **Pact of Amsterdam was not specific about the implementation and follow-up of the actions and that not much guidance had been provided during the implementation stage by the DGUM or the Commission, meaning that the Partnerships had to find out a great deal by themselves**. Moreover, it was felt that developing Implementation Plans

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[68] These figures should be interpreted with some care, as it is not always clear what 'finalised' means, as explained further below.

[69] This divergence between TPs focussing on very concrete actions (often evolving around better knowledge) and TPs focussing on more fundamental issues (often evolving around better legislation and funding) was also described in the report of the Urban Futures Studio on the Urban Agenda from 2018, available at: http://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/Research-UrbanFuturesStudio-def.pdf

required experience which similar processes, know-how which was not always available among Partnership members[70].

The latter links to a related issue that explains the limited progress with implementation: Implementing actions demands a good knowledge of EU policy-making cycle and funding mechanisms, knowledge which Partnership members – especially cities and urban areas – not always have. Hence, much depended on the level of involvement of Partnership members with expertise and direct access to the policy-making process, such as Commission DGs and Member States. This involvement varied, according to the interviewed Partnership members and as confirmed by the stakeholder survey results[71]. It was generally felt that the Technical Secretariat played an important role in the Action Planning process, but could only partly address the need for expertise, considering its restricted budget and mandate[72]. Another issue that was raised was that in many cases the Technical Secretariat's support stopped (or will stop) before the actions were (or will be) implemented.

A lack of resources / funding was, perhaps not unexpectedly, also reported as an important stumbling block when implementing actions. In most if not all of the Partnerships reviewed for this case study, at least part of the members seems to have struggled with resources, which made it hard to get them to commit to implementing actions. This is in line with the findings from the stakeholder survey, which showed that a lack of funding was perceived as the greatest barrier to the UAEU realising its full potential. As the Partnerships were prolonged, the lack of funding became a more pressing issue, with some Partnership members reportedly reducing their involvement because of a lack of resources. Also in the case of funding, initial unclarity about the functioning of the UAEU seems to have had an impact on the implementation of actions, as in some Partnerships doubts existed about whether the members or other actors needed to fund actions.

Emerging and expected future results and impacts

The stakeholder survey data suggests that, when looking at the three pillars, the Thematic Partnerships have contributed most to better knowledge and data on urban issues (79% agreed to a great extent or somewhat). This was followed by EU funding that is better adapted to cities and urban areas (64% agreed to a great extent of somewhat) and EU regulation that is better adapted to cities and urban areas regulation (61% agreed to a great extent or somewhat). It should be added, however, that just 18%-19% agreed that the Thematic Partnerships have contributed to a great extent to Better Regulation and Better funding; for Better Knowledge, this figure was 30%.

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[70] This was confirmed by the results of the stakeholder survey, in which only 57% of respondents agreed that the Action Plans comprise a clear plan for implementation.

[71] In the stakeholder survey about a third (32%) of respondents found that the Thematic Partnerships receive sufficient support from other Commission DGs (other than DG REGIO). In a different question, the lack of interest or involvement of EU Member States was rated as the third most significant barrier to the UAEU realising its potential, after a lack of funding and a lack of alignment with the EU regulatory / financing cycle.

[72] In the stakeholder survey, a third (33%) of respondents found that the Thematic Partnership receive sufficient administrative or technical support.

Partnership members found it hard to comment on the (future) impact of actions. Partly this was because it was "too early to tell", with few actions having been implemented. Moreover, the Partnership members regularly found it hard to judge what 'implemented' or 'finalised' means. Not all actions have a clear end-point, and often actions' impact will depend on their long-term sustainability, which is frequently unclear considering the uncertainty about the future of the UAEU (see section on sustainability of actions). It should be added that many Partnership members, especially if not 'core members' such as coordinators and Action Leaders, admitted to be unaware about the current status of the actions in their Partnership and the next steps.

Nonetheless, two main groups of members can be distinguished across Partnerships, with their relative weight varying depending on the Partnership[73]. The first group of Partnership members highlighted the innovative nature of the UAEU and the importance of the progress made. This group provided examples of successful actions, but more often stressed the importance of looking at the long-term effects of the Partnerships, beyond the impacts of the individual actions to date. The members of the Urban Poverty and Housing Partnerships stressed for example the continued usefulness of the Action Plan as an advocacy and lobbying tool to increase attention for the topic. The second group of Partnership members expressed mainly concerns about the results and (future) impacts of the actions. These concerns related to three broad factors, described in more detail in the sections below: 1) disappointment about the Better Funding and Better Regulation actions, both regarding their low number compared to Better Knowledge actions and their implementation status; 2) the perceived limited use of Better Knowledge actions, and 3) concerns regarding the follow-up of actions.

Differences between actions related to Better Knowledge, Better Funding and Better Regulation

As noted in the monitoring data, almost half of all actions (48%) are oriented towards "Better Knowledge". The remainder are split between "Better Regulation" actions (28%) and "Better Funding" actions (24%). The division across pillars varies substantially across Thematic Partnerships. For example, the Urban Poverty Partnership's Action Plan contains seven Better Regulation actions out of twelve actions. The Climate Adaptation Action Plan, on the other hand, includes one Better Regulation action, out of ten actions. On the implementation side things look somewhat different. The monitoring data shows that Better Regulation are the most advanced actions with 19% finalised and 25% at advanced or half implementation stage, followed by Better Knowledge (7% finalised, 20% at advanced or half implementation stage) and Better Funding (4% finalised and 8% at advanced or half implementation stage).

Undoubtedly, the preponderance of Better Knowledge actions does *not* imply that Better Knowledge was considered more important than the other two pillars of the UAEU. To the contrary: Partnership members felt that Better Regulation and Better Funding are key aspects of the UAEU, as it is here that multi-level governance could in theory have most impact, whereas Better Knowledge can to some extent be achieved through other means and networks. In the Urban Mobility Thematic Partnership, for instance, some

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[73] It was difficult to discern a clear pattern, with members with more positive and negative opinions present in both advanced and less advanced Partnerships.

members reported a wealth of existing knowledge and knowledge sharing networks. Hence doubts existed about to which extent the generated better knowledge (such as guidance materials and data) would be used in the field, certainly in the absence of clear communication about the knowledge produced (the latter was reported to be a problem in other Partnerships as well). Nonetheless, the Urban Mobility Partnership formulated mostly Better Knowledge actions, like most other Partnerships.

This can be explained by Better Knowledge actions' perceived feasibility. Notwithstanding the monitoring figures mentioned above that show that Better Knowledge actions are *not* more often finalised than the other actions, there was broad consensus among the interviewed Partnership members that the Better Knowledge actions are easiest to implement. This mainly because Better Knowledge actions often involve the development of a 'product' (such as a web portal) and as such are less dependent on the involvement of other actors compared to actions in the two other pillars. On the other hand, with regard to Better Regulation and Better Funding actions, numerous interviewed Partnership members noted that the implementation of actions was "not in their control", but reliant on the involvement of the European Commission, Member States, the European Investment Bank, etc. This involvement was often seen as inadequate, with the Member States' representatives and, to a lesser extent, the Commission DGs other than DG REGIO regularly described as not very engaged.

In line with the above, the consulted stakeholders felt that Better Knowledge actions are relatively easier to implement because they require less knowledge of / access to the EU policy-making process and could be implemented by for example the Action Leader. Timings seem to have played an important role as well. Partnership members felt that Better Funding and Better Regulation actions could not be implemented in the timeframe of the Partnership, among other because these actions are dependent on the EU policy cycle and because of uncertainty about what would happen with actions after the Partnerships' planned timespan. One of the consequences was that some Partnerships opted for formulating 'recommendations' in the Action Plan in areas that in theory would have been suited for Better Regulation and Better Funding actions.

Sustainability of actions, barriers and drivers

Most of the consulted stakeholder found it hard to comment on the long-term sustainability of actions. This related mainly to uncertainty about the implementation of actions (as explained above). What was clear for Partnership members is that many actions' long-term impact depends on the sustained action and commitment of partners that goes beyond the time frame of the current Partnerships. It was noted for example that many Better Knowledge actions require continuous updates to achieve concrete results, whilst many Better Regulation and Better Funding actions will only have an impact when taken into account in the decision-making process for the next EU planning and funding period. In relation to this, several Partnership members pointed to the importance of further clarity about the future of the UAEU and on how actions will be followed up in the longer term (2020 and beyond), as well as about the role of Partnership members after the implementation stage. There is also a clear link between the sustainability of actions and funding. The Partnership members struggle with resources, which hinders their continued involvement in actions beyond the implementation phase. With an eye on sustainability, Partnership members also called

for formal procedures to make sure that actions are taken into account in the EU decision-making process. Members of the Air Quality Partnership mentioned for example to be disappointed that the Partnership's feedback on the Fitness Check on the Air Quality Directive was not treated differently compared to other stakeholder feedback obtained through the stakeholder consultation for the Fitness Check.

Summary of key findings

To what degree has the UAEU facilitated progress under the three pillars of EU policy making and implementation that it focuses on (Better Regulation, Better Funding, Better Knowledge)? When looking at the implementation of Actions it appears fair to say that this is still work in progress, notwithstanding the impact of individual Actions.

Only 10% of actions are finalised and most others (46%) are in the initial implementation stage. This can be explained by a lengthy Action Planning process, producing actions of variable feasibility and 'actionability'. This can in turn be explained by unclarity about the process of Action Planning and the implementation phase, for example with regard to whom to address actions: Partnership members or external actors. Partnership members felt that not much guidance had been provided during the implementation stage by the DGUM or the Commission. Members also often missed the needed expertise in EU policy-making and funding mechanisms, and / or were constrained by a lack of resources. Hence, implementation depended on the involvement of Commission DGs and Member States, which varied depending on the Partnership.

The Partnership members often found it hard to comment on the (future) impacts of the actions due to uncertainty about the future follow-up of actions. When they did comment, opinions were mixed. Some Partnership members emphasised successful actions and / or what has been achieved so far as part of the broader UAEU. Others voiced concerns about the relatively low number of actions in the Better Funding and Better Regulation pillars, the perceived limited impact of Better Knowledge actions, and concerns regarding the follow-up of actions after the Partnerships have ended. The former two points relate to the finding that Partnerships seem to have opted for Better Knowledge actions because these were considered most feasible, not because they were most desirable with an eye on the needs they address.

Concerning the sustainability of actions, barriers and drivers, Partnership members found this difficult to judge, as long as there is no certainty about the future of the UAEU and the Partnerships. What is clear is that many actions will need follow-up after the implementation phase to achieve long-term results. In the view of Partnership members, this requires clarity about the future of the UAEU and the Thematic Partnerships, including the role of members after the implementation stage and how this will be funded.

Case study 7: Wider Impacts & Outreach

Introduction

This case study report focuses and explores the wider impacts and outreach of the UAEU through the lenses of a sample of the Thematic Partnerships (TPs) launched under the UAEU to date. The aim of this case study report is to provide evidence-based findings on the extent to which TPs have wider effects (beyond the implementation of the actions defined in their respective Action Plans), e.g. by raising awareness of certain issues, building linkages between stakeholders, directly or indirectly influencing policy making processes, etc. It explores inter alia:

- The extent to which TPs reach out to non-members, in particular other cities, and any impact at city level;

- The level of influence of TPs on national or EU policy processes, and any changes resulting from this;

- European or international policy links, particularly the links to the UN New Urban Agenda.

The evidence base

This case study report draws on information from six of the 14 TPs launched under the UAEU to date. For each of these, we have reviewed relevant documentation, and conducted interviews with selected members. The table below provides an overview of the Thematic Partnerships that are covered in this case study report.

Name of TP	Wave	Number of interviews conducted
Housing	Wave 1	3
Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees	Wave 1	4
Circular Economy	Wave 2	3
Jobs and Skills	Wave 2	4
Climate Adaptation	Wave 3	2
Public Procurement	Wave 3	3

Wider impacts and outreach of the UAEU's TPs

Outreach to non-members and awareness raising

According to case study interviewees, the work on the TPs helps to create and/or strengthen **linkages among their members**; for some of these, there are strong indications that the collaboration and exchange of information between them is likely to continue long after the end of the 3-year implementation period of TPs. This finding is also confirmed by the consultation results, where 69% of respondents agreed (many of them "strongly") that the work of the TPs has contributed to establishing a strong collaborative relationship among members.

To a greater or lesser extent, all six TPs covered for this case study also made efforts to **reach out to non-members**, especially other cities / urban authorities. For example:

- The TP on Housing and its members made a concerted effort to raise awareness of its work and share relevant information and guidance as widely as possible, via the website as well as participation in conferences, meetings, seminars, webinars. The international conference "Housing for all" held in Vienna in December 2018 (organised and paid for by the city of Vienna) was reportedly an excellent opportunity to share the results of the TP with attendants (including reportedly over 200 cities). TP members (especially the coordinators) also attended a variety of other meetings across Europe to share insights and disseminate information about the TP and its actions / recommendations.

- The Public Procurement TP has reportedly created a "second ring" of cities who were involved in drafting actions, and will be key to their dissemination. Similarly, the Italian and Latvian members of the Jobs & Skills TP reach out to a "second ring" of cities in their respective countries (in the Latvian case, via the association of municipalities), informing them about the work of the TP on a regular basis.

- For several TPs, EU-level organisations (Eurocities, CEMR, URBACT, the Covenant of Mayors) were key multipliers; their (direct or indirect) involvement in the TPs opened up communication and dissemination channels that were described as facilitating outreach to cities across Europe. However, stakeholders did not provide concrete examples on how these stakeholders opened up communication and dissemination channels (see communication barrier below).

- Some of the TPs referred to the transfer of knowledge and information to non-member cities as a key part of the rationale of many of their actions. For example, members of the TP on Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees highlighted the Academy in Integration Strategies as a key action that successfully targets cities that did not take part in the TP itself. The Circular Economy TP also developed guides and toolkits that are intended for non-member cities, and could significantly raise awareness of key issues if disseminated widely.

- Members of the Circular Economy TP also referred to an application for URBACT funding that resulted from one of its actions, and brought together a group of

two TP members and eight new cities, which helped share the knowledge generated in the TP with a wider group of cities.

Interviewees varied somewhat in their assessment of how intense and successful their TPs' efforts to reach out beyond their membership were. All TPs share an **ambition to disseminate information** about their work and Action Plans as widely as possible. Some appear to have been quite successful in doing so, based largely on intense efforts by very active and committed coordinators and EU-level organisations with large pre-established networks and – crucially – an ability to commit resources to awareness raising activities. As a result, interviewees from these TPs tended to be confident that the work of the TP has had a significant effect in terms of raising awareness of key issues related to the issues in question among cities and other relevant audiences across Europe. However, some other TPs appear to have been more inwards-focused in terms of how they have gone about their work to date, with no clear plan for how to systematically reach out to and make the results of their work known to the highest possible number of non-members. In these cases, interviewees tended to be more sceptical about the eventual impact in terms of wider awareness.

Influence of TPs on EU policy processes

Interviewees from some but not all TPs were able to pinpoint how their work had influenced – or was likely to influence – **policy and/or legislative processes at EU level**. However, it is important to note that the exact amount of influence of the work of the TPs (relative to other factors) is usually difficult to substantiate. For example:

- The Housing TP has developed a proposal to revise the definition of the term 'Social Housing' in the regulation on Services of General Economic Interest (SGEI) and gathered some support for this, but it is not clear if and how this will be considered and taken forward by the next European Commission and European Parliament. It is likely to depend partly on how successfully TP members can lobby and keep the memory of the TP and its Action Plan alive in relevant circles.

- The work of the Circular Economy TP has reportedly helped to convince the Commission to include aspects related to the circular economy among the areas that are eligible for funding in its proposals for the post-2020 Cohesion Policy and corresponding Funds. Interviewees also reported its influence is apparent in the proposed regulation on minimum requirements for water reuse, and may yet influence future proposals on waste management and production of bio-based products.

- According to interviewees, the TP on Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees has influenced the Commission proposal for the successor programme of the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), which takes on board a recommendation from the TP specifying that local authorities and other local actors should be consulted to improve cities' access to funding.

- The Housing TP has also contributed to steps towards the re-establishment of the Housing Focal Points (a first meeting is reportedly planned for 2020 under the German Council Presidency) and the informal Ministerial Meetings on

Housing. It was also reported that the EIB has become more active in providing funding to cities for affordable housing, which could be partly attributed to its participation in the TP.

Other TPs appear not to have had much of a discernible impact on EU policy processes to date. According to interviewees, this was due to a variety of reasons including the early stage of Action Plan implementation (e.g. Climate Adaptation TP), and the TP having identified no need for any changes to EU legislation (Public Procurement TP).

Influence on national or local policies

Although some interviewees thought that it was likely the work of "their" TPs would have indirect **effects on national policies** in some MS, they lacked specific information on this, and found it difficult to pinpoint specific areas of influence. For example, members of the Housing TP noted that some MS (e.g. Latvia, Slovenia) showed a keen interest in using learning from the TP for developing or reviewing their national housing policies; however, they were unsure of the progress made in this respect, and the level of influence of the TP.

As regards **local effects** (at city level), similarly, several interviewees reported a strong interest in the policy approaches discussed, identified and disseminated during the work of the TPs, but again struggled to point to specific changes made as a result. It was widely felt that many of the actions developed by the TPs (in particular those focused on enhancing knowledge, capacity building, dissemination of good practices, development of policy tools etc., such as the Knowledge Pack for cities developed by the Circular Economy TP; other examples are listed above) have the potential to influence the way cities across Europe tackle some of the challenges facing them.

One interesting example of where the **TP approach** as such appears to have served as inspiration for cities in a specific MS was provided by members of the TP on Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees, who pointed to the creation of a Greek network of 12 municipalities hosting refugees[74], which followed / was inspired by the format and working methods of the TP.

Coherence with other EU and international policies

Generally speaking, interviewees felt the work of their TPs was coherent with other **EU urban policy initiatives as well as wider policy objectives in relevant areas** (e.g. social policy, environmental and climate policy), although they often lacked the in-depth insights into EU policy to provide specific feedback on how this general coherence translated into tangible synergy effects. They tended to feel that, to date, the influence of the TPs on other EU policies was more potential than actual (see above).

As regards the **UN New Urban Agenda** (NUA), most interviewees were unaware of if / how the UAEU relates and/or contributes to this. However, a couple of interviewees with first-hand experience of the NUA felt that both are based on similar principles, recognising the need for a multi-level partnership approach to achieve change. As such,

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[74] https://www.accmr.gr/en/news/665-ddd.html

the TPs can contribute to broader international discussions about how to approach the urban dimension of the SDGs, and the TP working methods can serve as inspiration for any country in the world regarding the practicalities of how the multi-level partnership approach can be put into practice.

Summary of key findings

In summary, the interviews conducted as part of this case study confirm that the TPs have been relatively successful in building sustainable collaborative relationships between their members. Moreover, the evidence suggests that TPs reached out to non-members with a view to share relevant information, knowledge and tools. **Outreach, dissemination and awareness-raising** is a shared ambition of all TPs, although some appear to have been more successful in this respect than others (based largely on the efforts and resource investments of coordinators, and the involvement of EU-level organisations such as Eurocities, CEMR, URBACT, and the Covenant of Mayors). The public consultation results also suggest that the UAEU and the TPs have had significant impacts on networking, collaboration and knowledge among participants and, to some extent, other cities and stakeholders. A clear majority of respondents agreed that it has contributed "to a great extent" or "somewhat" to improved networking and collaboration on urban issues with other stakeholders (80%), to better knowledge and data on urban issues (79%) and more cooperation with cities and urban areas in other European countries (77%).

As regards policy impacts, a majority of respondents to the consultation also identified a contribution to more involvement of cities in EU policy-making (74%) and national policy-making (54%), as well as improved policy-making on urban issues at the local level; (60%). However, the interviews confirmed that it is challenging to substantiate in specific terms how this perceived **policy influence** has materialised and had tangible effects in practice. For two of the TPs explored as part of this case study (Circular Economy and Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees), interviewees reported their work had influenced / was reflected in specific EU proposals for post-2020 expenditure programmes, though without a counterfactual, it is impossible to assess whether the elements in question might have also been addressed in the absence of the TPs. Interviewees also expressed the hope that the results of certain other TPs would be considered in future policy discussions. In the case of Housing, the TP sought the re-establishment of an EU-level policy forum (Informal Ministerial Meetings on Housing). An influence on national or local policies is even harder to ascertain due to the lack of detailed knowledge among interviewees, but some were optimistic that the work of their TPs had provided inspiration for the development or review of policy approaches in some MS and/or cities.

Overall, this case study confirms both (1) the usefulness of the TPs as a forum for networking, collaboration, awareness-raising, knowledge generation and exchange among stakeholders representing different levels of government from across Europe, and (2) their *potential* to generate wider effects and impacts via the dissemination of the results of their work and the implementation of specific actions that seek to strengthen the urban dimension in the design and implementation of relevant EU and

national policies. At the same time, it illustrates some of the key challenges in this respect, in particular the fact that, since the TPs are "soft" initiatives with a somewhat "random" membership and limited resources, they are not in a position to exert direct control over relevant EU or national policy or legislative processes. Instead, the best they can realistically hope to achieve is often that the ideas and proposals developed by them are subsequently considered and, ideally, taken on board by the relevant policy-makers and regulators. This case study has found a number of examples where this has already been the case and others where TP actions may yet influence policies in the coming years. However, in the case of several TPs, the extent to which they will achieve tangible effects on relevant EU or national policies remains highly uncertain.

Annex C: Assessment framework

* MD = Monitoring data; DR = Desk research; C = Consultation (public & targeted); Int = Stakeholder interviews; CS = Case studies

Assessment criteria	Questions	Judgment criteria	Indicators	Data sources / methods*				
				MD	DR	C	Int	CS
Effective-ness	1. To what extent has the UAEU fostered effective cooperation, coordination and interaction between stakeholders at different levels?	Formation composition of Partnerships	• Level of stakeholder interest in Partnerships			✓	✓	✓
			• Perceived appropriateness of the selection process of members			✓	✓	
			• Balance of membership (across stakeholder types and levels of government)	✓		✓	✓	✓
		Working methods and arrangements	• Frequency and format of Partnership meetings / events	✓		✓		✓
			• Perceived effectiveness of coordinators in fulfilling their role			✓	✓	✓
			• Perceived adequacy of support provided by the Member States, EC, the Secretariat, outreach partners			✓	✓	✓
		Participation / engagement	• Level of active participation from Partnership members	✓		✓	✓	✓
			• Role of and relationship between different groups of actors (incl. cities, MS and EC DGs)		✓	✓		✓
			• Relationship between Partnerships and UAEU governance structures (DGUM, UDG)			✓	✓	✓
	2. To what extent has the UAEU facilitated progress under the three pillars of EU policy making and implementation that it focuses on (Better Regulation, Better	Development of Action Plans	• Perceived effectiveness of Action Plan development process (evidence-based, participatory, timely, etc.)			✓	✓	✓
			• Difficulties encountered in drafting APs (e.g. delays, disagreements) and underlying reasons	✓		✓	✓	✓
			• Perceived effectiveness of the consultation process (incl. amount of feedback received on draft APs)			✓		✓

Assessment criteria	Questions	Judgment criteria	Indicators	Data sources / methods*				
				MD	DR	C	Int	CS
	Funding, Better Knowledge)?	Content of Action Plans	• Number and types of actions, pillars, target audiences	✓				
			• Extent to which cross-cutting issues have been addressed	✓				
			• Level of ambition of actions (e.g. extent to which they target fundamental multi-level issues)		✓	✓	✓	✓
			• Perceived feasibility of actions (e.g. in terms of resource requirements, level of buy-in of key actors)			✓	✓	✓
		Implementation of Action Plans	• Extent to which actions have been implemented by relevant actors (Partnership members / others), by AP and pillar	✓		✓		✓
			• Expectations regarding future implementation, opportunities and challenges			✓	✓	✓
			• Success stories of successful implementation, key drivers				✓	✓
	3. To what extent has the UAEU contributed to strengthening the urban dimension in the design and implementation of relevant EU and national policies?	Stronger voice for cities	• Strengthened opportunities for cities to voice their concerns and feed them into relevant processes and fora			✓	✓	✓
			• Stronger involvement of urban authorities in the design and implementation of EU / national policies			✓	✓	✓
			• Raised awareness among other stakeholders of urban issues, needs and potential contribution			✓		✓
		More effective approach to policy-making	• Use and perceived usefulness of the one-stop-shop for cities portal	✓		✓	✓	
			• Use of territorial impact assessments	✓			✓	
			• Enhanced ability of cities and other urban stakeholders to influence the development and implementation of relevant EU policies after participating in the UAEU			✓	✓	✓

Assessment criteria	Questions	Judgment criteria	Indicators	MD	DR	C	Int	CS
			• Evidence of specific policy or legislative processes that have used a more effective, integrated, coordinated approach due to the UAEU	✓				✓
		Contribution to more effective EU policies	• Evidence of results of AP actions reflected in EU, national or local policies in the fields of Better Regulation, Better Funding and Better Knowledge	✓	✓		✓	✓
			• Evidence of impacts of UAEU on EU, national or local policies in the priority themes and cross-sectoral issues of UAEU	✓	✓		✓	✓
			• Effects on territorial cohesion	✓				✓
			• Wider economic, social, environmental effects of policies influenced by UAEU			✓		✓
		International effects	• Contribution to the implementation of UN SDG #11; Habitat III			✓	✓	✓
	4. What are the main drivers of the UAEU's effectiveness (strengths, weaknesses, success factors and challenges)?	Internal drivers of effectiveness (positive / negative)	Extent to which the following aspects of UAEU have contributed to the achievement of its objectives: • Working methods; Stakeholder participation / engagement; Governance structures; Available support and resources; Priority themes and cross-cutting issues; Other aspects to be identified			✓	✓	✓
		External drivers of effectiveness (positive / negative)	Extent to which the following contextual factors have contributed to the achievement of the UAEU's objectives: • Stakeholder policy agenda; Competing priorities; EU Cohesion Policy context; Wider socio-economic context; Other aspects to be identified				✓	✓
Efficiency	5. To what extent do the UAEU's governance, coordination, management and administrative structures	Operational efficiency of the Thematic Partnerships	• Ease / difficulty of coordination within Partnerships (between participants)			✓	✓	✓
			• Perceived efficiency of key Partnership processes and mechanisms (e.g. set-up, meetings, consultation, etc.)			✓	✓	✓

Assessment criteria	Questions	Judgment criteria	Indicators	Data sources / methods*				
				MD	DR	C	Int	CS
	ensure the UAEU is implemented efficiently?		• Main causes of administrative burden, delays, and inefficiencies			✓	✓	✓
		Operational efficiency of the governance and support structures	• Efficiency and timeliness of reporting and monitoring and reporting processes	✓		✓		✓
			• Ease and speed of access to technical assistance, key barriers	✓		✓		✓
			• Ease / difficulty of coordination between different Partnerships			✓	✓	✓
	6. To what extent are the financial and other resources invested by the EU and other stakeholders proportionate to the benefits?	Availability / sufficiency of resources	• Amount of time and other resources invested by participants			✓		✓
			• Amount of EU resources (incl. technical assistance budget and secretariat)	✓			✓	
			• Demand for technical assistance and other support	✓		✓	✓	✓
			• Extent to which resource shortages hamper participation in Partnerships			✓	✓	✓
			• Extent to which resource shortages affect implementation of Action Plans			✓	✓	✓
		Proportionality of costs and (perceived) benefits	• Key UAEU effects (as per questions 1-3 above)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
			• Main benefits reported by stakeholders			✓	✓	✓
			• Extent to which participants remain willing to invest their own resources			✓	✓	✓
			• Level of satisfaction with benefits generated in view of resources invested			✓	✓	✓
Relevance	7. To what extent is the UAEU's approach of		• Extent to which cities feel relevant EU policies (e.g. Cohesion policy, R&I policy, inter-regional		✓	✓	✓	

Assessment criteria	Questions	Judgment criteria	Indicators	MD	DR	C	Int	CS
	multi-level and multi-stakeholder cooperation relevant for strengthening the urban dimension in EU policy?	Main barriers to a stronger urban dimension in EU policy	cooperation) reflect their key needs and priorities, and those of their citizens					
			• Extent to which cities feel able to influence the development and implementation of relevant EU policies			✓	✓	✓
			• Key barriers and bottlenecks that prevent urban concerns from being more fully addressed	✓	✓	✓	✓	
		Alignment of UAEU cooperative approaches with these barriers	• Extent to which cities perceive a need for cooperation with other stakeholders from across the EU			✓		
			• Extent to which other stakeholders perceive a need for cooperation with cities from across the EU			✓		
			• Extent to which UAEU's pillars of Better Regulation, Better Funding and Better Knowledge continue to be relevant to cities and citizens			✓	✓	
			• Existence of alternative ways in which cities can influence EU policy (outside of UAEU)			✓	✓	
	8. To what extent are the pillars, themes and cross-cutting issues defined in the Pact of Amsterdam conducive to addressing the main needs and priorities of urban areas in the EU?	Main themes and issues of concern for cities in the EU	• Policy areas / problems in which cities report strong misalignment between their needs and relevant EU / national policies	✓	✓	✓		
			• Key governance, urban planning and regeneration, and other challenges faced by cities, and their priorities / approaches in tackling these	✓	✓	✓		
		Alignment of UAEU themes and issues with these concerns	• Level of alignment between key problems and needs of cities, and the priority themes of the UAEU			✓	✓	✓
			• Level of alignment between key governance and other challenges faced by cities, and the cross-cutting themes of the UAEU			✓	✓	✓
Coherence	9. To what extent do the elements of the UAEU (including the 12 Thematic Partnerships)	Complementarities, reciprocal linkages, synergies	• Level of cross-Partnership collaboration and cross-fertilisation			✓	✓	✓
			• Extent to which later waves of Partnerships build on and learn from earlier ones				✓	✓

Assessment criteria	Questions	Judgment criteria	Indicators	Data sources / methods*				
				MD	DR	C	Int	CS
	complement and reinforce each other?		• Existence of synergies, economies of scale in how UAEU governance and technical assistance is provided				✓	✓
		Duplications, overlaps, incompatibilities	• Extent to which the remit of Thematic Partnerships is clearly defined	✓		✓		✓
			• Level of similarity / overlap / contradictions (if any) between Action Plans of different Partnerships	✓		✓		✓
	10. To what extents is the UAEU coherent with other urban policy initiatives at international, EU and national level?	Theoretical coherence	• Extent to which the objectives of UAEU and other initiatives are aligned / consistent		✓		✓	
			• Extent to which target audiences and approaches of UAEU and other initiatives are complementary		✓		✓	
		Practical coherence	• Level of mutual support initiatives lend each other (e.g. in terms of implementing Action Plans)			✓		✓
			• Amount of consistency / overlap between themes, issues, participants			✓		✓
			• Extent to which transferable best practices are shared between initiatives					✓
EU added value	11. To what extent does the UAEU generate value that is additional to the value that would have resulted from interventions initiated at regional or national levels?	Results / benefits of the UAEU	(As per questions 1-3 above)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
		Importance of the EU involvement / dimension in generating results	• Extent to which cooperation between stakeholders from different MS was necessary to generate results			✓	✓	✓
			• Extent to which EC, DGUM, UDG involvement was necessary to generate results			✓	✓	✓
			• Other facets of EU added value (e.g. networking, exchange of good practices, addressing cross-border threats, efficiency gains…)	✓		✓	✓	✓
	12. To what extent would the effects of the UAEU be sustained if EU	Sustainability of results	• Likely effects of UAEU discontinuation on existing Partnerships (collaborative relationships between stakeholders)			✓	✓	✓

Assessment criteria	Questions	Judgment criteria	Indicators	Data sources / methods*				
				MD	DR	C	Int	CS
	support for the UAEU was discontinued?		• Likely effects of UAEU discontinuation on implementation of Action Plans			✓	✓	✓
			• Perceived need for new Thematic Partnerships			✓	✓	✓

Annex D: Intervention logic of the Urban Agenda for the EU

Rationale
- Considerable and growing importance of cities in both economic and social terms
- Urban authorities are often the level of government closest to EU citizens
- However, cities often not adequately involved in the conception & implementation of EU & national policies
- As a result, many policies are not ideally adapted to the urban context
- Need for a more integrated and coordinated approach to policies and legislation that impact on urban areas

Contextual factors
- Polycentric structure of Europe
- Diversity of urban areas
- Wider economic, environmental, social developments
- Diversity of national, regional and urban policy priorities

EU policy context
- Europe 2020 Agenda
- Cohesion policy, Energy Union, Digital Single Market, Mobility Package, EU Adaptation Strategy, EU environmental policy & Creative Europe through Cities
- Horizon 2020 funded projects (e.g. Civitas 2020 and EUKN)
- Exchange and cooperation actions such as URBACT and UN Habitat III
- Initiatives related to urban policy: Covenant of Mayors (DG ENER & CLIMA), Urban Innovative Actions (DG REGEIO), EIP 'Smart Cities and Communities'
- Regional policy priorities from other EU bodies: ESPON, CoR etc.

Impacts

Political
- Strengthen urban governance (e.g. systematise urban experimentation)
- Increase policy influence of cities at the EU level
- Common EU urban policy agenda to share with international bodies

Economic / social / environmental
- Greater cohesion between EU cities and regions
- Better socio-economic conditions at urban level (e.g. effective housing, poverty reduction)
- More sustainable conditions at urban level

EU Urban Agenda (EU Intervention)

Objectives

General
Strengthen the urban dimension in relevant policies by establishing a more effective integrated and coordinated approach to EU policies and legislation

Specific
- **Better regulation**: Design EU legislation to better reflect urban needs, practices and responsibilities
- **Better funding**: Improve accessibility and coordination of EU funding opportunities for urban areas
- **Better knowledge**: Enhance the urban policy knowledge base and facilitate exchange of good practice

Operational
- Focus on a number of Priority Themes (thematic objectives below) and cross-cutting issues
- New multi-level and cross sectoral cooperation to deliver partnerships
- Impact assessments of EU policy on urban areas
- Monitoring data - reliable urban data

Thematic objectives (Partnerships)
1. Effective integration of migrants and refugees in urban areas
2. Ensure good air quality
3. Reduce poverty and improve the inclusion of people in poverty
4. Affordable housing of good quality
5. Increase circular practices among citizens and authorities
6. Ensure jobs and skills in local communities
7. Anticipate adverse effects of climate change in urban areas
8. Have a long-term structural change in energy systems
9. Sustainable land use
10. Sustainable and efficient urban mobility
11. Promote digital transition of public services
12. Innovative and responsible public procurement
13. Culture and Cultural Heritage
14. Security in Public Spaces

Cross-cutting issues of the UAEU related directly to the selected thematic objectives

Inputs
- Policy orientations (priority themes, guiding principles, etc.)
- Futurium and EC websites
- EC secretariat and technical assistance
- Participants' own resources
- Support and resources from existing regional & national networks

Activities

Designation of Thematic Partnerships and selection of partners

14 Thematic Partnerships undertaking activities incl.:
- Partnership set-up,
- Meetings,
- Research and analysis,
- Draft Action Plans,
- Consultation,
- Final Action Plans,
- Implementation actions through e.g. blending funding facilities, peer-to-peer academies, establishment of advisory boards, codes of practice etc.

Coordination and outreach
- Promotion of consultations via Futurium portal
- Awareness raising activities through social media channels and Futurium
- International, European and national conferences

Effects

Outcomes

Increased awareness of, and priority for, urban concerns at all levels (national, EU, international)

Sustainable partnerships in different thematic areas

Actions implemented:
- Legislation / policies that meets the needs of urban areas
- Better access to / coordination of funding opportunities for urban areas
- Enhanced urban policy knowledge base / good practices

Concrete actions established by partnerships (e.g. green initiatives for public authorities and businesses)

Outputs
- Thematic Partnerships set up
- Meetings
- Organisation of conferences and forums (e.g. Biennial CITIES Forum)
- Cooperative relationships formed
- Different group of stakeholders reached
- (Draft) Action Plans adopted
- Monitoring and progress reports
- Urban Data Platform (JRC)

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Annex F: Technical secretariat factsheet

URBAN AGENDA FOR THE EU
WORKING TOGETHER FOR BETTER CITIES

Technical Secretariat in support to the Urban Agenda for the EU
General overview of the activities carried out

DG REGIO is the holder of a framework contract, which is partly funded by the European Parliament. After an open call for tenders, in December 2016 it awarded the framework contract to the consulting company Ecorys; Eurocities and EUKN have been included as outreach partners for dedicated tasks. The framework contract has a maximum budget of € 4.8 million and a maximum duration of four years (until 2020). However, this does not automatically mean that the full budget is available. In order to effectively use the necessary budget, the European Commission needs to formally request so, and approval is subject to availability. By now, DG REGIO has secured part of the budget for the assistance to the current Partnerships (Amsterdam Partnerships until end of 2018, Bratislava and Malta Partnership until summer 2019). The available budget for each Partnership is approx. € 250,000 for two years.

Agreed support for each of the Partnerships is divided into five specific tasks:
1. Support to the Partnerships;
2. Provide expertise to the Partnerships;
3. Provide outreach and Communication;
4. Reimburse travel costs to Partnership members;
5. Support to the European Commission.

1. Support to the Partnerships
For each Partnership, a Project Manager and a Junior Coordinator have been appointed; they are responsible for providing management and administrative support activities about ½ day per week each, including (not exhaustive list):
- Assist and advising Coordinators in setting up and functioning of the Partnerships;
- Provide methodological support to the Partnerships;
- Organise mailing lists for each Partnership;
- Create and update a calendar of events;
- Assist the Coordinators in organising meetings (excluding catering and rental of venues);
- Participate in meetings and draft minutes;
- Advise the Coordinators of the Partnership on the needed expertise;
- Help the monitoring and follow-up of Partnership activities;
- Collect and organise documentation produced by the Partnership as well as relevant literature that could benefit its work and development of knowledge through the use of the SharePoint platform.

2. Provide expertise to the Partnerships
External or in-house experts with EU experience on specific topics related to the Partnerships can be mobilised by the Technical Secretariat. Upon Partnerships' or the coordinators' approval, expertise days are made available for specific content-related activities including the provision of analytical work, review and drafting of documents, analysing surveys, structuring information, etc. An expert can be mobilised with a view to fill specific Partnerships' needs and hence does not replace the expertise of its members. Preferably the Partnership members select on the basis of consensus the expert(s) and if this is not feasible the coordinators can select the appropriate expert(s) to deliver expertise. In total, for each year of support 35 senior expertise days are available to each Partnership. In addition, some junior expertise days are made available to carry out for example small research tasks – to be performed by Ecorys staff.

The role of the Secretariat is to inform regularly the Partnerships (in particular the Coordinators) on the available senior expertise days and to manage the contract of the expert. Decisions regarding the use of experts are made by the Coordinators and such decisions are later communicated to the Commission.

3. Provide outreach and communication

As part of its horizontal tasks, the Technical Secretariat helps the dissemination of information on the Urban Agenda in general, as well as on the Partnerships, towards stakeholders and the public at large. Communication activities are mainly carried out via the online platform Futurium (https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/urban-agenda), which aims to engage and motivate stakeholders to provide their input and to enable the Partnerships to reach out to target audiences.

The main tasks of the Technical Secretariat include:
- Develop general Urban Agenda communication material (logos, templates, leaflets, etc.);
- Prepare information material, to be used internally within the Partnership and/or to be distributed to the public (e.g. guidelines to facilitate internal communication, logos and word templates such as agenda, invitation, save the date, practical info kit, registration list, etc.);
- Maintain the collaborative platform, the website Futurium including the drafting, layout and publishing of monthly newsletters on the activities of the Urban Agenda;
- Develop communication material to be used/distributed during key events, e.g. the Cities Forum. Material may include leaflets, rollups, etc.

In order to facilitate the work among Partnership members and the exchange of documents, the Technical Secretariat is also offering the possibility to Partnership members to make use of the SharePoint platform.

4. Reimburse travel costs

Upon the need and request of the Partnerships, the Technical Secretariat organises and reimburses travel expenses for members.

Travel and accommodation expenses shall be covered in exceptional cases only; on average, a maximum of one travel per Partnership meeting can be accommodated (max. 3,197€/year). Therefore, the requests will need to be approved by the Partnership Coordinators and submitted to the Technical Secretariat (urban_agenda@ecorys.com) prior to the event for approval by the European Commission. A specific sheet has been circulated to all Partnership Coordinators, to be used as template for the reimbursement request. Once approved, travel and accommodation will be organised by the Technical Secretariat.

5. Support to the European Commission

As part of its tasks, the Technical Secretariat gives support to the European Commission in the implementation of the Urban Agenda for the EU. In this regard, its main functions are the following:
- Monitor the progress of each Partnership, and propose to the European Commission – where appropriate – actions that can help to address challenges and bottlenecks;
- Draft guidelines and templates for the development of key documentation (e.g. Orientation Papers, Action Plans and Public Feedback);
- Prepare State of Play reports of the Partnerships twice a year and present these in person to the UDG/DG UM meetings;
- Provide support to the two Coordinators' meetings per year;
- Provide assistance to the European Commission in managing the Urban Agenda.

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