

The ‚Acquis URBAN‘

Using Cities’ Best Practises for European Cohesion Policy



*Common Declaration of URBAN cities and players
at the European Conference “URBAN Future”
on June 8th and 9th, 2005 in Saarbrücken (Germany)*



PREAMBLE

Broad Incorporation of the 'Acquis URBAN' into the EU Mainstream Funding

The ten years experiences within the Community Initiative URBAN I and II has demonstrated all over Europe that the successfully tested integrated, cross-sector and participative urban development approach contributes effectively to stabilise distressed urban neighbourhoods. Already in December 2003, the URBAN Network France and the German-Austrian URBAN Network - together with 40 URBAN cities from 10 different member states - elaborated the "Declaration of Strasbourg" which illustrates the essential criteria of the specific URBAN approach, the so called "Acquis URBAN". One crucial precondition for the effective implementation of the 'urban dimension' within the next funding period is the broad incorporation of the URBAN approach into the new mainstream programmes.

Due to the important role and potentials of cities and towns for regional development and the cohesion of the EU territory, on the one hand and the prevailing problems of urban areas on the other, for the coming period considerably more cities have to benefit from EU funding to a larger extent.

The member states have to acknowledge the added value of the „Acquis URBAN“ and shall integrate this approach as prerequisite for all future European funding programmes.

The administrative conditions for the implementation of the EU-funded measures by the cities have to be optimised.

Also during the next funding period, the cities need the support and capacity of a distinct body in the European Commission which is dedicated to urban issues.

Thus, the URBAN players from all over Europe welcome the Commissions` proposals on the urban dimension, as laid down in 3rd report on Cohesion, dated from February 18th, 2004 and the draft of the structural funds regulations dated from July 14th, 2004. There the Commission stresses the support of participative, integrated strategies to tackle the high concentration of economic, environmental and social problems affecting urban areas.

However, the URBAN players are concerned, if the urban dimension is adequately pursued by all member states and therefore plead for a binding integration of an "urban chapter" within the structural funds regulation. Moreover, the specific area-based, integrated and problem-oriented character of the "Acquis URBAN" has to be fully maintained within the next funding period, although it should be developed further in line with new EU goals of Lisbon and Gothenburg. In order to achieve this objective the indication of a 4th priority on urban policies is necessary, amending the three priorities concerning "attractiveness", "knowledge and innovation" and "employment", accompanied by a financial reserve of at minimum of 10% out of the entire budget.



With nearly 300 participants from 22 member countries the European conference “URBAN Future” in Saarbrücken gathered important players of the URBAN Community Initiative on local, regional, national and European level to reflect the results and experiences from URBAN on the basis of scientific and practical insights. Thus, the specific value added of the "Acquis URBAN" and its basic principles and key elements has been demonstrated and discussed. On this basis a common declaration was adopted in order to be presented to the EU-Commissioner for Regional Policy, Mrs. Danuta Hübner, as well as to other European and national politicians and decision makers. By this a signal has also been sent towards national and regional authorities and institutions to call on those to maintain the “Acquis URBAN” in the new funding period and to allocate appropriate funds to the urban dimension.



THE COMMON DECLARATION OF SAARBRÜCKEN

Maintain the value added of the “Acquis URBAN” for Future EU Cohesion Policy!

Based on the central success factors of the „Acquis URBAN“, there are the following key principles and basic characteristics that have to be preserved within all future urban measures of the EU structural fund programmes.

1) *The Integrated URBAN Approach*

The **integrated and cross-sector approach**, being a crucial success element of URBAN, has to be maintained. This means that measures concerning physical urban renewal and the adaptation of local basic infrastructures towards changing economic, social, demographic and ecologic settings have to be combined with business and employment promotion as well as social integration, education and qualification, cultural, leisure and environment protection. Besides, horizontal objectives like gender mainstreaming and sustainability constitute a core element of all activities. In order to achieve a substantially holistic urban development process the thematic possibilities of urban development actions must be as flexible as possible also concerning eligibility. All relevant policies on national, regional and local level should be better integrated, in terms of vertical and horizontal coordination.

To contribute to **competitive, sustainable, integrative and attractive cities** and towns, the interventions on local level should integrate measures in the following fields of action:

- **Synergy between jobs, economic development and competitiveness** (e.g. by strengthening entrepreneurship and economic development, partnerships between local enterprises, public and semi-public bodies, fostering the innovation capacity of enterprises, encouraging local business services, supporting lifelong learning, academic and extracurricular education and qualification as well as employment promotion and integration of disadvantaged persons to the labour market);
- **Environmental protection** (e.g. sustainable urban planning and management, use and development of new eco-technologies, environment friendly and efficient energy consumption, clean and efficient transport, preservation of natural resources);
- **Integration of disadvantaged groups of population** (e.g. by offering adapted local social and health services, involving ethnic minorities, improving offers for recreation and leisure);
- **Physical urban revitalisation** (e.g. redevelop brownfield areas and contaminated soils, realise activating urban planning, preserve and activate cultural heritage, reinvest in abandoned sites, adapt physical urban infrastructure according to the changing social, economic, demographic and ecologic situations).



The urban interventions have to be part of **integrated urban development concepts** comprising a profound ex-ante analysis of the socioeconomic situation, an adapted strategy and development objectives, concrete priorities of actions and measures, the allocation of financial means as well as structures and procedures of implementation. This integrated urban development concept should take into consideration the future development perspectives of the urban area concerned and be flexible enough to allow later adjustments due to the needs identified by local players and citizens as well as to a changing general development framework.

With regard to the orientation of EU Cohesion Policy towards the **goals of Lisbon and Gothenburg** urban development concepts have to be developed, that create a balance between economic competitiveness, social cohesion and ecological sustainability and that contribute to economic growth, competitiveness, innovation and creation of jobs as well as to environmental sustainability and a reduction of ecologic risks. However, the urban dimension should really focus on a local level, especially by supporting SMEs in getting more competitive and innovative, strengthening the entrepreneurial spirit of people as well as offering training and qualification which meet the needs of the local inhabitants. Moreover, a crucial issue for urban areas in need is to install **better physical and non-physical links** to surrounding areas of opportunities, e.g. via efficient urban transport systems or the connection to the knowledge society.

Urban measures within European Cohesion Policy should preserve the opportunity to realise **innovative approaches**, especially as new instruments of urban management and governance are concerned. This means on the one hand to carry on testing unorthodox approaches and on the other hand that projects have to proof their value added compared to national basic funding.

2) URBAN Governance – Efficient Management and Administration in Partnership

For implementing EU-funded integrated and cross-sector approaches **new instruments of urban management and governance** are required which have been successfully tested by URBAN. This involves the effective horizontal and vertical cooperation and coordination.

For the administrative implementation of EU-funded urban measures efficient and sustainable models shall be established **assigning more responsibilities to the local level**. Taking into account the different administrative systems of the individual member states the **competences have to be shared in partnership** between national and regional governments and the respective cities and their institutions in a way that on the one hand guarantees as much problem-orientation as possible by the local authorities and on the other hand the general programme responsibility by the national / regional governments.

Institutional coordination should therefore consider the **strategic role of cities in territorial development**: cities should be in the position to **contribute properly to the definition of territorial policies**, both in the elaboration of the National Strategic Frameworks as well as in regional, national and transnational programmes. Subsidiary will be thus confined in a



smart and cooperative interpretation, not only in programme management but also in the early stage of programme elaboration.

Based on the positive results of URBAN the **participation of citizens** and the **involvement of local players** shall be intensified in the mainstream programmes for the purpose of a real “bottom-up” approach. This participative approach can considerably strengthen local democracy and thus help to overcome raising scepticism of inhabitants concerning administrative and political interventions. In this context the involvement of private partners and finances (e.g. by PPP) is a crucial issue, considering the difficult financial situation of public budgets. However, to motivate more private players to invest into urban regeneration operations it is crucial to **make private financing eligible for funding**.

One important value added has been the **evaluation and monitoring** that went along with the URBAN programmes and allowed to check the results and impacts of the operations and, if necessary, to adapt the strategies. Bearing in mind a sound relation between the extra effort and the benefit, this basic principle should be kept for having an instrument that can be adapted to changing situations.

The **administration and control systems** both of the URBAN programmes and the urban measures within mainstream are far too complex and time-consuming, which can lead to inefficiency, frictional losses, delays or unnecessary barriers for sensible projects. Therefore, the administrative structures and procedures have to be considerably simplified, also in order to improve the consumption of funds. All involved levels of administration must commit themselves to reduce administrative problems.

The so called “**monofund principle**” successfully applied within URBAN II should be kept, whereas the financial proportion of measures originally assigned to the ESF should be more flexible than proposed by the Commission.

All **administrative and financial regulations** have to be shaped in a clearer, more transparent and more efficient way for giving the responsible persons on programme and project level concrete and targeted guidelines.

3) Selection of Cities and Eligible Areas – Area Based Concentration in a City and Regional Perspective

The **selection of cities** and city districts should be done by **clear, transparent, socio-economic criteria** that are oriented on URBAN experiences and marked by a **sound and comprehensible selection procedure** reflecting the administrative system of each member state. Depending on the regional situation and objectives as well as on the specific urban problem complex **cities of different sizes and functionalities** should be considered.

The **concentration of resources and competences** on well defined urban areas showing high deprivation should be preserved by reason of stronger effectiveness and visibility. However, this **principle should be applied in a less strict sense** and amended with possibilities of cooperation between the core city and its surrounding area as well as clustering cities in larger regions. Moreover, urban measures should pursue besides a pure city also a city-



regional perspective having in mind that different urban problems require solutions on several geographical scales.

4) Networking, exchange of experiences and benchmarking to improve urban development approaches

To continue the development of further integrated urban development instruments as well as to keep a national and European dynamic in the management of urban programmes, initiatives for **exchanging experiences and know-how**, for **capitalising acquired knowledge** as well as for **benchmarking** of different approaches and methods shall be intensified in the future.

In this networking and cooperation process established and recognised **national networks and organisations** have to be involved completely since they are most appropriate for capitalising the gained experiences within different countries and can assure the national backing of European urban development issues. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to maintain or to set up national networking structures between the representatives involved in European funded urban development measures.

Based on the very positive experiences and results of URBACT, there should be one **overall European “umbrella”** gathering all national activities, supporting additional European network and cooperation activities of cities as well as capitalising European know-how in the field of integrated urban development.

Commitment for the „Acquis URBAN” and Development of Concrete Ideas and Concepts

The result should be a consistent and coherent programmatic approach which covers - funded by means of the national / regional EU programmes – all the stated aspects and combines and qualifies the different objectives of present programmes in a broad sense.

For concluding and resuming URBAN players emphatically stress their **five main concerns**:

- 1) The urban dimension has to be an obligation within the structural funds and should not only be an option. It should be an integral part of the Community Guidelines on Cohesion Policy - representing a specific priority with a financial reserve of at least 10% - as well as the National Strategic Reference Frameworks and the Operational Programmes.
- 2) Due to limited financial means, a greater visibility and effectiveness as well as the basic propose of the EU Cohesion Policy, urban interventions should be concentrated on geographically delimited urban districts showing deprivation. However, considering the Lisbon goals the opportunity based approach should be strengthened for assisting those areas in becoming more competitive and innovative.
- 3) When defining the scope of action in different strategic and programmatic documents the acknowledged “Acquis URBAN” has to be fully reflected.
- 4) According to a better problem-orientation and the available resources among citizens in urban areas as well as a better effectiveness and visibility, the local level has to be in-



volved directly in the development and implementation of the measures of the urban dimension.

- 5) As not all cities and towns will have the chance to participate in EU funded programmes there should be a stronger support of European and national networking and exchange for gathering good practices and spreading them to the whole urban community.

To guarantee a successful and efficient continuation of the “Acquis URBAN” within the mainstream programmes, all actors on national, regional and especially municipal level are called on to participate actively in the running debate and to introduce their own positions, ideas and concepts. To establish integrated urban development approaches within the Cohesion Policy distinct urban measures are necessary due to their positive contribution to an economic competitive, socially balanced and ecologically sustainable EU territory. Moreover, only an early starting, intensive and broad discussion and preparation process can ensure that from 2007 on integrated urban development measures within the EU structural funds programmes will get started and implemented in time.