Representatives of the Ghent presented their current work on their Integrated Sustainable Urban Development Strategy during the Peer Review workshop organised by the Urban Development Network and hosted by the city of Ghent on 1-2 December 2016. The presentation was followed by peer discussions which have provided the bases for this report.
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PART 1 | UDN PEER REVIEW APPROACH

The Peer review methodology

The UDN Peer review approach builds on the S3 Peer review methodology that has been developed by the S3 Platform of the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission as a mutual learning tool for sharing, exploring and integrating policy knowledge in the context of regional and national Smart Specialisation Strategies. The S3 Peer review methodology has proven to be an effective tool in creating an open and trusted learning environment where practical and conceptual aspects of policy design and implementation can be discussed and explored through challenges and experiences of individual regions.

It has therefore been chosen to be experimentally applied at the city level to promote mutual learning and knowledge dissemination in the scope of the Integrated Sustainable Urban Development Strategies foreseen in article 7 of Regulation 1301/2013 on European Regional Development Funds (ERDF).

Objectives and expected outcomes

One objective of the Peer review is to allow participating cities to meet their peers, the European Commission staff, academic experts and others to discuss common issues and challenges related to their current work on Integrated Sustainable Urban Development Strategies.

The second objective is to allow cities to get involved into first-hand evaluation experience and use the peer review outcomes to further improve their own strategies.

The third objective is to support the creation of a community of practice in an open and trusted learning environment by discussing practical ways to address common problems (lessons to take home).

About the Peer review workshop

The Peer review is based on a participative approach that encourages all participants to engage in a dynamic and creative discussion, which benefits both the cities under review and their peers.

The Peer review workshop involved different categories of actors:

Participants from cities under peer review. Three representatives from the city were invited (six in the case of the host city Ghent) to represent their city at the workshop to allow for simultaneous discussions (separate discussion tables). Three cities presented their strategies and were peer-reviewed: 1. Ghent; 2. Maribor and 3. Gothenburg.

Critical friends. All peers at the workshop had the role of a critical friend, providing critical (yet friendly) advice and sharing their different knowledge and experience. The city being reviewed in one session acted as a critical friend in the next session. Prior to the peer-review workshop, the European Commission provided all critical friends registered for the workshop with the background documents to allow them to prepare for the workshop.

Invited experts. The European Commission invited several experts to the Peer-review workshop for distinct purposes. One expert supported the three cities in their preparation of the peer review. Notably by
explaining the objectives and EU policy context, by helping in the drafting of questions and in reviewing the cities' presentations and background documents.

*European Commission staff.* The UDN Peer review is the result of the collaboration between DG REGIO and JRC. Together with the host city, they were responsible for the organisation of the peer-review workshop. DG REGIO moderated the two days. Moderation and note taking of the workshop session was done jointly, where staff from JRC focussed on the correct implementation of the methodology of the peer review.

**Structure of the Peer review**

The Peer review workshop included three phases: preparation, workshop discussions, and workshop follow-up.

**Before the Peer review workshop - Preparation**

Prior to their workshop, each city under review had been working on: 1. Presentation on their existing Integrated Sustainable Urban Development Strategy; 2. Background document with relevant information on the city context and 3. Self-assessment questionnaire

The first two documents outline the main element of each ISUDS and specific questions to guide and focus further discussions. In addition, each reviewed city carried out a comprehensive self-assessment of its current work on ISUDS. This assessment covers eight principal areas: Integrated approach, Outward-looking dimension, Analytical work behind the development strategy, Shared vision, Action plan, Policy coordination an funding scheme, Stakeholder engagement, Framework for delivery: governance and monitoring system. This assessment exercise allows urban authorities to examine their strategy from the perspective of an external eye.

**During the Peer review workshop - Workshop discussions**

The Peer review workshops ran for one and half-days (on 1 and 2 December 2016). The agenda was structured with plenary and parallel sessions. In addition Day 1 contained a site-visit to The Ghent Old Docks. Plenary sessions aimed at providing general and technical information and to collect main outcomes of the Peer review workshop, both in Day 1 and Day 2.

Parallel sessions were devoted to peer reviews and organised in the following phases:

(1) Presentation by the city under review and Question & Answer;

(2) Table discussions around the questions/issues posed by the presenter;

(3) Collection of results and closing comments by the city under review.

Each peer review session developed along the following logic:

In the presentation, the city under review was asked to identify three questions they thought were relevant to be discussed among their peers in three different discussion tables (two times three in the case of the host city Ghent).
Each table was asked to develop the proposed question in three iterations, which ensure that participants can: (1) work together to better understand the actual problem behind each issue; (2) provide policy advice and propose solutions to these problems by discussing what worked well (good practices) and what did not work; and (3) learn together how to deal with new policy issues in different contexts as relevant lessons to take home.

All peers were asked to join one of the discussion tables. At each table there were also: one of the invited experts as table moderator; a representative from the city under review to take a full advantage of the discussions and to answer any clarifying questions; a European Commission staff member. Once each table finished its discussion, the urban expert from each table presented the results of discussions to the others. At the end of each peer review session, the reviewed city was invited to reflect on the presented results of the discussions.

The parallel sessions were followed by plenaries where invited experts and cities under review were asked to exchange feedback and reflect on Lessons Learnt. At the closure of Day 2, an additional plenary session (Closure session) allowed the three cities under review to share impressions and main outcomes of the workshop, discuss follow-ups, and draw joint conclusions together with experts, peers and European Commission staff.

After the Peer review workshop - Follow-up

After the Peer review workshop, each city under peer-review was set to receive the specific Feedback Report that summarises results of table discussion and reflections, discusses any existing shortcomings in the reviewed strategy, and offers relevant recommendations. Moreover, experts and peers were asked to fill in additional questionnaires and an online survey that partially fed the content of this report.

The link to the peer review workshop's website including all the presentations and Feedback Reports is available here.
PART 2 | CURRENT WORK ON THE INTEGRATED SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

ABOUT THE CITY IN BRIEF

In Ghent live 256,235 citizens and about 70,000 students and 95,000 Ghent-users (e.g. people working, but not living in Ghent). The population is on the rise since 1999 (12% increase, after decreasing for 19 years). This population increase is due to immigration. Foremost students staying in Ghent after their study, EU-citizens and asylum seekers. Ghent has a relatively young population compared to the rest of Flanders, though almost 1 out of 3 inhabitants is 55 or older. The city is a melting pot of 156 different nationalities. 30.6 percent of Ghent’s inhabitants are foreign born.

Ghent provides more than 170,000 jobs. The economic structure is determined by the Port of Ghent, which is providing almost 30,000 direct and 40,000 indirect jobs. Other important sectors for the local economy are industry, tourism, the creative economy and research and innovation. Ghent is the largest student city of Flanders, hosts 13 world class research centres and Ghent is a UNESCO City of Music. Unemployment is with 12.8% higher than the Flemish average. Charles Landry qualified Ghent as “pocket sized metropolis”.

KEY ELEMENTS PRESENTED BY THE CITY

The development of Ghent’s urban strategy has been a long-term development. It started off in 2003 with an important administrative reorganisation. During 2011 - 2012 the city engaged in a large participation exercise for the preparation of a new long-term strategy. This included a transversal city analysis, input
from citizens and a thorough evaluation of the 2006 - 2012 city policy. In 2013 - 2014 a new Board of Mayor and Deputy Mayors set strategic long-term objectives, a multi-annual plan and budget was approved and the implementation of the strategy started.

Ghent's mission is to become a child-friendly, climate-neutral city, counting on a community of responsible citizens. Ghent uses a strategy cascade with 9 main strategic goals, 40 strategic goals, operational goals, activities, projects and actions.

The 9 main strategic goals are:

1. Ghent opens opportunities
2. Climate neutral & energy independent
3. Ghent opts for sustainable transport
4. Living in Ghent is pleasant & affordable
5. Sustainable economy & industry
6. Ghent is a learning & creative city
7. A city with desire for experience and solidarity
8. Ghent is a safe, healthy & viable city
9. A network of effective and efficient public services

For its implementation Ghent strongly believes in the Quadruple Helix approach where government, academia, industry and citizens cooperate together. Citizen participation is strongly developed through neighbourhood programmes. Ghent invests in international cooperation to drive a policy agenda (Ghent is now the president of Eurocities) and uses a large array of policy tools for implementation of the strategy, among which are neighbourhood managers, an Urban development company, Public Private Partnership, strategic funding, use of temporary empty public space, a sustainable assessment tool, etc.

Ghent tries to finance projects from different regional, national or European funding sources, often rather successfully. Already in the ERDF 2000 - 2006 programme there was dedicated funding for a difficult urban zone in Ghent. In the 2007 -2014 programme, Ghent received ERDF funding for e.g. business parks. Another part of the funding was earmarked for 13 Flemish cities. From this part Ghent received 11 million euro from which projects in the Old Docks area were financed. The 2014 -2020 ERDF programme is organised in a similar way. With the exception that a dedicated priority axis for urban development is only accessible for Antwerp and Ghent. Even in this scenario the funding is less for Ghent this time around: 7 million euro.
In compliance with the Article 7 requirements in the ERDF regulation, Ghent is involved in project selection. Ghent and Antwerp rate the projects on their content, the Flemish government checks the more technical requirements such as state-aid. Projects Ghent proposes are directly linked to Ghent’s multi-annual plan and focus on The Old Docks, brownfield development and transformation of heritage, for example churches. Ghent is well aware that there are much more funding sources available for project implementation. In order to better streamline this in the city administration Ghent has set up a Funding Office. The diagram below shows nicely that the multi-annual plan is at the centre of project development, but if other needs and ideas are identified and a funding opportunity presents itself, Ghent tries to cease such opportunities.

Ghent organised a site-visit to the Old Dockyards. This is an old industrial site close to the centre of the city. Since the industrial activity moved to the larger and newer docks at the outskirts of the city, this area is the focus of an important redevelopment. When finished it should house 1500 housing units, parks, bridges, sports facilities, a primary school and nursery, retail, offices, leisure and heritage. Ghent this development Ghent sets very high standards for sustainability with local energy production, reduced parking spaces, etc. Sometimes such a cutting-edge approach hurts against current legislation.
After the closure of the ship yard a movement started in order to keep or get back some of the harbour cranes: a need to assert a local identity. Ghent showed that long-term redevelopment does not necessary means you will have years of waste lands. The DOK association was very successful in setting up temporary projects and in organising temporary uses in co-creation with old and new Dock inhabitants.

The presentation of the city of Ghent is available here.
PART 3 | INFORMAL FEEDBACK FROM SELECTED EXPERTS, PEERS AND UDN

This part refers to the informal feedback given by the peers, the experts and the Urban Development Network. In this context, it should be noted that:
- Informal evaluations of the respondents are based on their individual understanding of the elements presented by the city in the short time allowed by the peer-review exercise. A different degree of understanding may result in a variety of responses.
- We suggest focusing attention on questions/issues where there is a substantial discrepancy in the judgement expressed by the city and the one expressed by the pool of respondents.
- Dispersion of evaluations of respondents across a wide range of different judgements may reveal a difficulty in understanding how the underlying issue was communicated by the city.

DETAILED FEEDBACK

The city of Ghent filled in a self-assessment questionnaire prior to the workshop and the experts filled in a standardized assessment questionnaire afterwards. In addition comments are included from participant evaluation forms.

Section 1 | INTEGRATED APPROACH

In general the experts and the city delegate agree that the strategy reflects an integrated approach. One expert disagrees that there is vertical integration and another expert has a neutral opinion on this subject.

Additional comments given on the questionnaires

The strategy has nine priority themes which are all very broad. Ghent should consider how they can rationalise and bring more focus into the strategy (of course without losing the integrated approach!)

Vertical governance appears to be restricted. Relation with the Flemish Government require to be strengthened and deepened. Ghent can perhaps to be more assertive in terms of influencing policy decision at the Flemish, National or European level. At the moment Ghent seems too often excluded from decision making processes. Early engagement in the policy cycle is important in this context, as is coordination with other cities (particularly Antwerp) in order to establish a unified position.

The G4 (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht) in the Netherlands are fairly successful in presenting a united front and are able to influence policy decisions. A challenge is that others often feel left out.
Section 2 | THE OUTWARD LOOKING DIMENSION

On this section the experts and city delegate agree that Ghent foresees cooperation through urban or other programmes. On the points whether the strategy takes into account its position regarding other countries and cities in the EU or whether efforts are made to avoid duplication, the opinions of the experts vary. For each statement there are experts that agree, disagree or feel there is insufficient information available.

Section 3 | ANALYTICAL WORK BEHIND THE INTEGRATED SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

On the analytical work the city delegate agrees on all statements except the one on urban-rural linkages where he is neutral. One expert thinks there is insufficient information available for all points. The other experts tend to agree or are neutral on most points. One expert strongly agrees on all point except for the point on urban-rural linkages where this expert feels there is insufficient information. On this point he is joint by one other expert. Two experts simply consider that urban-rural linkages are not taken into account.

Additional comments given on the questionnaires

The strategy is very focussed on the strengths and does not really consider any weaknesses. A more explicit identification of risks and weaknesses can provide more focus and a more targeted approach.

Section 4 | SHARED VISION

The experts and the city delegate agree that the strategy includes a vision for the city that is credible and identifies priority fields. One expert thinks this vision does not clearly describe the expected change and one expert finds it is not clear whether the vision is expressed in writing and with visual representations.

Section 5 | ACTION PLAN

Concerning the action plan the city delegate agrees on all statements. The opinions of the experts vary. While one expert (strongly) agrees on almost all statements, most experts, however, express a general lack of information on the action plan or they disagree that the mentioned elements are present. This is the case for option analysis, time table, responsible bodies and coherence of objectives. The experts disagree with each other on the fact whether the actions are well defined and a clear logic is present.

Section 6 | POLICY COORDINATION AND FUNDING SCHEME

Again the city delegate agrees on most points and is neutral on two. The experts agree amongst each other that not present in the strategy or not sufficient information is available on budgetary sources, financial commitment of the private sector and financial instruments. One expert considers there is insufficient information to judge any statement. However, three other experts agree that the strategy considers the existing level of policy coordination, that its priorities are complementary to the regional level, that there are links with other strategies and that there is a clear idea on how to exploit synergies with EU funding.
Section 7 | STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Stakeholder engagement is the section that the experts rate higher – strongly agree - than the city delegate, although all-but-one experts agree there is no information on the mechanisms in place to keep stakeholders involved during the implementation of the strategy.

Additional comments given on the questionnaires

Ghent can build on a very strong citizen engagement approach. Perhaps it is worth considering if a tool like CLLD in the urban context can add value, in particular by giving Local Action Groups a tool to develop their own strategies.

The experiences of CLLD implementation in an urban context may be useful to further develop a strategic approach to involve local groups in the implementation process. Examples of such strategies are limited (The Hague and Gothenburg are perhaps most relevant but also developments in the UK may be useful).

It appears that especially for the participatory process which is already a good practice, Ghent could further improve this by providing trainings for citizens in relation to self-governance and conflict management, especially in larger scale projects (like the new transport plan).

Ghent could look at the stakeholder involvement in Palermo for the new transport plan. A local NGO created an application (TrafficO2) where citizens are incentivized to have sustainable mobility patterns, going on foot or using their bikes, through a system of points and tokens provided by local enterprises. The application was piloted with students who received free haircuts at the barber’s or cocktails at local bars if they could reduce their CO2 emission in moving around the city. The success rate was high and the data and feedback collected by the users was visualized on the city’s portal and integrated in the development of the new urban plan. It is an interesting way of getting users and citizens on board in the decision making process allowing them to provide suggestions and ideas but also to visualize and understand why certain technical choices need to be made by the administration.

Various Foundations in Europe are creating training programs for NGOs to support them in managing projects, seeking funds, optimize their efforts towards creating the desired impact. This is the case of European Cultural Foundation in the Netherland or MitOst in Germany. It was described that in some cases, like the Living Streets, the NGOs running the projects struggle with conflict management and other issues but the administration cannot intervene directly because it has to keep a neutral position. Supporting training to the local NGOs through the good city infrastructure that has been already developed (like the neighbourhood managers) could be very impactful.

Section 8 | FRAMEWORK FOR DELIVERY: GOVERNANCE AND MONITORING SYSTEM

The experts strongly agree that the strategy has a clear political backing and they agree the strategy identifies clear, achievable goals. Two of the experts agree on statements that refer to involvement of politicians, a framework for delivery and a governance and monitoring system. For several other statements the experts feel they don’t have enough information or they disagree. This is the case for all statements which relate to indicators, results and risks.
PART 4 | QUESTIONS AND PEER DISCUSSIONS

THE PEER REVIEW SESSION

The peer review session included around 60 participants from across Europe. For the discussions, the participants self-organized into six separate tables, all with representatives from different cities. The presentation from Ghent was given by Karl-Filip Coenegrachts from the city of Ghent.

QUESTIONS UNDER REVIEW

During its preparation for the Peer Review workshop, the city was asked to prepare 3 questions to be later discussed with peers. The representatives of Ghent formulated the following questions:

1. How to deal with 'keys' that are closely guarded by regional or national authorities?
2. How to improve the quality of citizen participation?
3. How to cope with professional stakeholders with different expectations?

DISCUSSIONS 1 ON REGIONAL OR NATIONAL KEYS

ORIGINAL QUESTION 1: HOW TO DEAL WITH 'KEYS' THAT ARE CLOSELY GUARDED BY REGIONAL OR NATIONAL AUTHORITIES?

Gent experiences a top down approach by the Flemish Region. Urban policy became for example less important in financial terms (ERDF 2014 - 2020: 8% ERDF 2007-2013: 25%). Another problem is gold plating: the region introduced rules which are more prescriptive than what is mentioned in EU rules & regulations causing an additional administrative burden.

RETHINKING THE QUESTION

After a group discussion in group 1 it became clear that 'to deal' means 'change or cope with' and 'keys' are 'rules, constraints, control, risk aversion, non-alignment, etc. of higher levels of government. Therefore the question was rephrased as 'How can we establish a more coordinated and multi-level-governance approach to urban development based on a co-creation process?' Group 2 identified as a sub-questions 'how to reduce the administrative burden for cities in managing ERDF?'
POLICY ADVICE AND LESSONS LEARNED AMONG THE CRITICAL FRIENDS

This problem was very recognizable for many cities. In general there is a lack of consultation of cities by their regional or national governments. This is notably the case for the distribution and prioritization of EU funding and the mechanisms for cities to manage these funds, such as Integrated Territorial Investment. Cities feel they co-create policy with their citizens, but there is no co-creation with higher levels over government. However, there are some examples where the relation city – regional management authority (MA) worked better. Gothenburg confirmed that they were consulted by their MA. Good examples of jointly developed smart specialization strategies are South Moravia with Brno and Catalonia with Barcelona.

In the case of Hungary, in the preparation phase of Operational Programmes a set of criteria/principles for cities was set up. A matrix of thematic priorities was prepared in order to show the relevance and the opportunities that could be developed in relation to urban development aims. Financial aid and animated support was provided by the MA to cities for 1 up to 5 years.

Regarding ERDF funding it is important to realize is it not ‘free money for cities’. Cities should best focus on a few manageable projects and ask whether ERDF is the right source of funding. In parallel it would be wise to get involved early in discussions on the next period. This early engagement, having a seat at the table, is very important. Cities can show they are a part of the solution by being informed, active and prepared to take up responsibility.

Ghent itself has good experiences with ‘city contracts’ between the city and the regional government. Exchanging such best-practices, share information and co-ordinate positions between cities is important to maximise influence.

A key issue is confidence between the various government levels. In part a city could gain confidence by showing their competence to the regional or national level. In part it might also be a shift in mind-set. Cities should be part of a long term process based on continuous change (which is the reverse of the gold plating logic). This change could be stimulated by staff exchanges and mobility between MAs and cities. Though such an exchange programme all staff becomes aware of difficulties and specific context limitations. It might also be beneficial for management authorities to peer-review each other.

For a next period the Commission should actively enforce the partnership principle so that cities are included by their national governments from the start. It would be good not to change the regulations too much, now that cities know what to expect and have been able to gain experience.
DISCUSSIONS 2 ON CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

ORIGINAL QUESTION 2: HOW TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION?

Ghent considers that the most important building block of a smart city are smart citizens. Smart cities need smart citizens to be truly inclusive, innovative and sustainable. Therefore the participation of these citizens is crucial.

RETHINKING THE QUESTION

From what Ghent has shown citizen participation already seemed well organised and common practice. The city of Ghent presented two examples, one on „living streets“, a local project where participation of stakeholders and civil society was a success, and one, on a long term strategic mobility plan, where despite a thorough participation process, protests and resistance against the final plan was/ is high.

Ghent did point to some difficulties: citizens not always participate when they are invited, there is a need to manage expectations of citizens; not everything is possible, not all civil servants are at easy with citizen participation, etc. A profound restructuring of the relation city government - citizen is under way.

Therefore the two workshops reformulated the questions as: „How to organize the decision making process with participation?” and “How to improve the acceptance of the new city - citizen relation, both by citizens, civil servants and politicians?”

POLICY ADVICE AND LESSONS LEARNED AMONG THE CRITICAL FRIENDS

The group discussion came up with several elements for a successful planning/ decision making process:

It is important to map the decision making process and identify clearly for which elements and at what moment a participatory process is envisaged. Some parts will be decided through a participatory process, other elements through political decisions of the city council. Some decisions will be based on expert knowledge for technical issues. If participation is done too early (and then nothing happens) or too late (everything important is already decided) this might be counterproductive.

A participation strategy needs to have a good and inclusive communication from the start. Citizens should have the right expectations when they are asked to participate. Sometimes an additional effort is needed to reach out to groups that usually do not participate, e.g. children. Participation might also be organised by different means, e.g. digital participation has the potential to connect much more citizens in an inexpensive way. One interesting example comes from Barcelona. Here they have built a data platform which is resourced by both city and citizens. The level of engagement increases: people can access the data, pose questions and propose solutions.
A participation strategy would also need to be evaluated from time to time. Do citizens want to participate on these issues and through these means?

The more practical and local the issue at stake, the easier to organize a participatory process. Small successes that follow participation can be an encouragement for citizens to participate more. Organising participation for strategic and long term plans is more difficult as issues are rather theoretical.

To get citizens and stakeholders interested in participating, trust has to be built. It has to be ensured that stakeholders will be heard, taken seriously, and/or that their decision will be implemented. Which kind of power the participatory process will have needs to be clarified before and communicated well. The fact that Ghent scores highly in citizen’s trust in the administration could be a result of long time participation efforts.

Encouragement of citizens and stakeholder participation needs commitment and investment from the city administration (participation as strategy, e.g. a budget, neighbourhood managers, street workers, community representatives, youth workers, digital participation, etc.). All public servants should be aware of this. It might be useful to organise out-on-the-street sessions for all city officials.

A good slogan for participation would be „One city, one voice, one ear“.

**DISCUSSIONS 3 ON DIFFERENT EXPECTATIONS OF STAKEHOLDERS**

**ORIGINAL QUESTION 3: HOW TO COPE WITH PROFESSIONAL STAKEHOLDERS WITH DIFFERENT EXPECTATIONS?**

Ghent experiences that urban development projects are complex, have a long-term horizon and expectations and interests of different stakeholders are often incompatible.

**RETHINKING THE QUESTION**

After discussion in the group it became clear that various professional stakeholders each have their own expectations and interest, but that also other governmental stakeholders have different interests. In the case of The Old Docks the city is bound by many choices that are made at Flemish level (e.g. energy distribution) but also by choices made by private companies (e.g. energy suppliers). So the question was reformulated as 'How to engage with private sector and other governmental stakeholders who have different expectations?'

**POLICY ADVICE AND LESSONS LEARNED AMONG THE CRITICAL FRIENDS**

It might be worthwhile to analyse for each issue 1) how important it is to the city and 2) how autonomous the city can act on it. Although autonomy is not the same as influence, cities can place themselves in one of the following quadrants.
The actions of stakeholders could also be explained according to whether they have power and can control, or whether they would need to influence decisions in other ways, e.g. through persuasion. Cities can analyse their power and adapt their strategy to the situation. In the case of energy, besides own city initiative/production, they city could also try to influence the market by persuading citizens to act differently. The city might be able to achieve the results it seeks (more sustainable energy use) even if it does not control all aspects.

Cities should exploit the maximum room for manoeuvre now, but also push the limits of the existing framework: take a longer term view, stay ambitious. Sometimes you have to break the rules a little bit in order to advance.

A city doesn’t need to own a policy in order to change it. Nantes, for example, managed to make the national social and environmental procurement policy more inclusive. A good example of multi-level-governance might be found in the Czech Republic were ‘standing conferences’ collect the views of cities, both at the beginning and at the end of a national policy process.

Cities can instigate change by setting an example, be a ‘Frontrunner’ that other stakeholders and levels of government want to follow. One such example is the recycling of waste products (already in 1996) in Toscany that led to re-use of waste materials and reduced taxes for its citizens.

Another element is communication. When people from different background sit at the same table, it is necessary to clarify concepts at the centre of the discussion in order to gain a common understanding and be able to build shared expectations.

In dealing with different stakeholders is it also very important that the city speaks with one voice, both from the administration and at political level.
PART 5 | LESSONS LEARNED AND FOLLOW UP

GHENT: SUMMARY OF LESSONS AND ACTIONS

What are the specific lessons for Ghent from this peer review exercise? Below are the main three lessons learnt and possible actions linked to these lessons.

Lesson Learnt 1
The importance of involving everyone (services, decision-makers, University, private partners, citizens,...) from the beginning of a project. Make sure that there is enduring commitment from the start till the final audit.

Linked Action 1
Provide tailor made support per project.

A continuous action from the Strategic Funding unit.

Lesson Learnt 2
The importance to focus on themes & priorities of a programme that match best with the city's multi annual plan and to do a reality check on projects (timeframe, complexity, budget, audit proof, etc.)

Linked Action 2
Invest more in project preparation; actively follow the menu of grant programmes, build up and take care of a network of contact persons (internal/external) & on the political level.

A continuous action from the Strategic Funding unit.

Lesson Learnt 3
Article 7 recognizes the role of cities and can be a strong tool/insurance for cities in the post 2020-programmation.

Linked Action 3
Work on a strategy to influence the EU-level (fully recognised role for cities in post 2020 cohesion policy) and the Flemish region (partnership instead of top-down approach, involvement of cities in design of operational programmes).

A continuous action from the International Relations and Networks unit (through the Eurocities working group on Cohesion Policy) and the Strategic Funding unit.

UDNs FURTHER SUGGESTIONS

Both from the presentations and the site-visit it became clear Ghent has worked for years on an integrated urban strategy and on citizen participation. And it has done so thoroughly: the entire city administration is
organized towards achieving the goals of the strategy and on citizen participation Ghent is one of the leaders. This seems to pay off. While walking through Ghent the city gives a very dynamic impression with several urban projects nearing completion. Another indicator of success is the fact that Ghent has one of the highest scores on citizen’s trust in the administration in Belgium.

Although the external experts rated many statements in the assessment form highly, they were also unanimous on the fact that it was not clear how successful the strategy is in objective terms: Which are the indicators used, what are the results, are risks identified? And in general: how is a strategy with such broad objectives being followed up? This is not to say that this does not happen, but information on these elements (rather crucial in European policy making) was lacking. It could be worthwhile for Ghent to verify that also these aspects of a strategy are clearly defined.

This relates directly to a second point of attention. It was not very clear how Ghent’s strategy is helping to achieve European policy goals and how European (funding) instruments are helping Ghent in its efforts. Certainly, Ghent has set up a professional Funding Office that is able to tap a variety of European and national funding sources. However, some arrangements that are usually most associated with urban development were not mentioned. This was the case for the European Social Fund. The way Ghent is involved in the implementation of the article 7 requirements of the ERDF regulation (e.g. the selection of projects) only became clear in a follow-up discussion after the workshop. Some other experts pointed to this too; suggesting Ghent to look at Community-Led Local Development as an option to support local initiatives from citizens.

A recurring topic in the discussions was the seemingly tense relationship between the city and the regional government of Flanders (and also surrounding municipalities given the lacking urban-rural dimension of the strategy?). Furthermore the role of the business sector in achieving the strategic goals was not much talked about. Especially a better vertical coordination appears to be a dimension where the strategy, or the implementation of the strategy, can still improve.

Many suggestions were given by the experts and peers on how Ghent could try to improve the vertical coordination with the region. Next to initiatives that should be taken by the regional level, several peers pointed to the importance for Ghent of demonstrating expertise and taking a pro-active attitude. If Ghent wants to follow up on these suggestions it is important to 1) show the region Ghent’s crucial role in achieving European targets and 2) know which regional and European policy set-up is most helpful and least cumbersome for Ghent. In other words: be prepared for post 2020 discussions.