SHAPING EU POLICIES TOWARDS A PLACE-BASED APPROACH

The Urban Agenda for the EU

Cities and regions share many common challenges that are already being tackled jointly within a number of Urban Agenda partnerships. For the renewed Territorial Agenda, which intends to be more implementation-oriented in future, this offers important starting points. Sina Redlich (BBSR, IzR) interviewed Fiona Wieland.

The Pact of Amsterdam outlines the Urban Agenda for the EU and lays out its key principles. On key urban issues, the Agenda foresees thematic partnerships. Within these partnerships, cities, Member States, the European Commission and other organizations develop joint action plans.

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The Pact of Amsterdam, adopted in May 2016, was a key milestone in the development of a shared EU-wide approach to urban challenges. Through it, the Urban Agenda for the EU was launched, as an innovative urban policy initiative, which has put multi-level governance into action.

Most actions under the Urban Agenda for the EU are delivered through partnerships, each made up of a variety of members. The fourteen partnerships have brought together 23 Member States, 96 cities and/or metropolitan regions, 10 regions and 17 DGs of the European Commission, and no less than 33 institutions, ranging from European umbrella organisations, programmes and networks, to civil society organisations and private companies. In total, 262 partners work together, embodying the principle of shared ownership and multi-stakeholder involvement. Now three years on, implementation is well underway. Twelve of the 14 partnerships have launched an action plan, through which to date 114 distinct actions are under implementation.

Regions and cities share common challenges. Sustainable urban development solutions should not be limited to the physical boundaries of cities and urbanised neighbourhoods. Themes such as mobility and land use, for example are felt across city regions. Energy transition challenges similarly affect rural areas, given that whilst energy is often generated outside cities (in rurally situated power plants), cities are home to concentrations of energy consumers. Such functional links between city regions and their surroundings serve as territorial 'hinges' between urban and territorial strategies. Alignment and interlinkages are important in tackling key European issues effectively. The linkages between the Territorial Agenda of the EU 2020, the Urban Agenda for the EU and the new Leipzig Charter, which is to be adopted under the German Council Presidency, are important, since they offer new opportunities for place-based approach policies in the EU.

The urban reality is often a much wider functional area defined by flows of people, goods and services and hence it would be necessary to apply functional areas at a spatial level appropriate for effective integrated approaches to sustainable development. In functional urban areas, cooperation is based on a shared vision. This is essential for urban-suburban areas, which may be surrounded by towns experiencing specific economic difficulties and may be dependent on the core city. This is also the case for urban-rural relations. Due to this increased mobility and interdependence, functional urban areas have become an ever more important concept for policy-makers. Solutions to many common challenges require thinking – and cooperating – beyond municipal boundaries. This is acknowledged in the Territorial Agenda of the EU 2020 as well in the Principles on Urban Policy, recently published by the OECD.

Urban sprawl is one of the main challenges of developing towns and cities, where development spreads without proper control and management. The Sustainable Use of Land and Nature-Based Solutions Partnership developed an action to promote functional urban area cooperation as a tool to diminish urban sprawl. This is to be achieved through improved cooperation between municipalities pursuing coordinated spatial planning and appropriate financial incentive systems at the level of functional urban areas.

The Urban Mobility Partnership, which by the way is jointly led by the City of Karlsruhe and the Czech Ministry for Regional Development, has developed an action integrating urban mobility policies for cities covering their functional urban area and hinterlands. It seeks to facilitate more sustainable and efficient urban mobility across Europe at all levels of governance. Developing and implementing comprehensive and integrated urban mobility policies for towns and cities, which cover the functional urban area and hinterland connections, requires close cooperation between different levels of government and across administrative boundaries. The question the partnership is working on is how to implement this in a way that respects the respecti-

ve competences and responsibilities of all actors involved, while delivering results in a timely and efficient manner. The action of this partnership will collect and share examples of practical experiences with multi-level governance and partnership approaches in urban and functional urban areas across Europe.

The Territorial Agenda emphasizes the importance of small and medium-sized cities for a balanced development, how does the Urban Agenda include these actors?

The public spotlight is often on the larger and more well-known cities as major focal points for urban economic development and innovation. The common assumption is that, with the potential for agglomeration and significant infrastructure investments, larger cities will always have distinct advantages over smaller cities. This approach does not, however, take into account the spatial distribution of local economies in functional urban areas clustered around smaller cities that make up the bulk of the urban settlements in Europe. In view of the growing European economy, the he-

alth and wealth of these smaller cities and their connected hinterlands should carry as much importance as the competitiveness of our larger cities.

To showcase practical elements of such local economies and their importance for the Urban Agenda for the EU, several actions are highlighted. Partnership themes have different implications depending on the city size but are often particularly relevant for smaller towns and municipalities. In fact, several partnership actions specifically address the challenges faced by smaller and medium-sized cities. Climate change is a theme that affects all cities, no matter their size, to mention only one example.

The Urban Agenda for the EU also includes a Digital Transition Partnership. Their action shows that it is possible to increase the digital participation of citizens and to broaden their digital horizons. This as well is a topic with a strong relevance for smaller towns and municipalities. Further examples are mentioned in our recently published brochure on "the state of play of the Urban Agenda for the EU – Multi-level governance in action".

Source

European Union, 2019: The state of play of the Urban Agenda for the EU – Multi-level governance in action. Accessed: https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/urban-agenda-eu/online-brochure-state-play-urban-agenda-eu-multi-level-governance-action [retrieved on 05.08.2019].