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URBACT Study

“New Concepts and Tools for Sustainable Urban Development in 2014 – 2020”

Synthesis Report

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“Implementing new concepts and tools for sustainable urban development 2014-2020”
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1. Introduction

In the current Cohesion policy period (2014-2020), the URBACT programme (URBACT III) will work with cities that will have to use a series of new concepts, approaches and tools proposed in the new regulation of the Cohesion Policy and by the Managing Authorities for sustainable and integrated urban development. Achieving a common understanding of these concepts, approaches and tools amongst stakeholders having to implement them becomes of paramount importance. In this perspective, the URBACT Secretariat commissioned the study “Implementing new concepts and tools for sustainable urban development 2014-2020”, which addresses three core concepts, the first two of them focusing on a specific tool:

- **The integrated approach to sustainable urban development**, as implemented through Article 7 of the new ERDF regulation;
- **The participatory approach**, specifically through the deployment of the CLLD approach in urban areas;
- **Urban-rural linkages.**

This study had two main aims: First, to **develop a shared understanding of the concepts, and tools for sustainable and integrated urban development** among the different concerned stakeholders in the next programming period; and second, to **issue recommendations** so as to how these stakeholders may use these concepts and tools to foster sustainable urban development. For the purpose of this study, ‘stakeholders’ refer to the European Commission (i.e. their relevant services), the Member states (their national governments, managing authorities and local authorities) and the URBACT programme.

Box 1

Working method: co-generating knowledge with policy users

The backbone of the collection of information for this study was a series of three working seminars, each focusing on one of the three different core concepts of the study. At each seminar, invited experts and practitioners (EU, national, regional and city levels) confronted policy approaches, good practices, and their initial (critical) insights on the new approaches and tools. The seminars were not open to the public but closed working seminars, involving 30 – 60 invited representatives of national authorities, Managing Authorities and cities from across EU member states. Invited participants were selected to provide specific insights to the study based on their concrete expertise and experience in one or more of these approaches and tools. The organisation of each working seminar was preceded by desk research (review of reports and policy documents) and interviews with key informants (phone, email, in person). This work informed the selection of case examples that were featured in each seminar. A discussion paper containing background information about the specific subject of each seminar and basic information about the cases was produced and distributed amongst seminar participants in advance. Following each seminar, case study information was deepened, complemented and validated with key informants, leading to the production of three thematic reports, each focusing on one of the three key concepts of the study.

This synthesis report summarises the key findings on each of the three core concepts of the study. In addition, the report proposes a series of general lessons from the initial round of implementation of the new concepts and tools. The report concludes with a set of recommendations arising from these findings for policy makers at different levels, and in particular, for the URBACT programme.

2. Summary of key findings

This section is structured in three parts, each dealing with one of the core concepts of this study. First, a brief overview of the origins of each approach in European policies is provided ('background'), followed by a description of the new tools for the 2014-2020 period. Then, key findings of the study are presented, distinguishing between: 1) Initial uptake 2) Highlights from case examples collected in the context of this study, and 3) Capacity building needs identified. It is worth noting that, due to the different nature of the 'urban-rural linkages' compared to the other two, instead of 'initial uptake' a section on 'definition and state of play' is presented.

2.1. The participatory approach to sustainable urban development

2.1.1. Background

The basis of the participatory approach to urban development in EU policies can be traced back to the second phase of the Urban Pilot Projects starting in 1989. This approach ran through the URBAN Community Initiative, launched in 1994 as an instrument focusing on urban areas in critical state. The URBAN programmes applied an integrated approach to physical and environmental regeneration, social inclusion, entrepreneurship and job creation. URBAN s drew on and complemented national programmes.

The importance of public participation in urban development was further stressed by the Leipzig Charter (2007) and in the Cohesion policy 2007-2013, especially through Article 8 of the ERDF regulation. The latter highlighted public participation as a means to achieve a more efficient integrated and sustainable approach to the urban regeneration of those areas that suffer from complex economic, social and environmental problems. In 2007 – 2013 integrated urban approaches financed by mainstream operational programmes in both EU 15 and EU 12 often took the shape of 'area-based' interventions, at the neighbourhood scale and often included measures to stimulate participation of residents. The Barca report (2009) mentions public participation as a fundamental condition for the future of cohesion policy, stating that participation helps local choices to be more informed, in line with people's preferences, and allows citizens and collective bodies the freedom to experiment with solutions. The URBACT programme has consistently applied a bottom-up and integrated approach to sustainable urban development since its inception. URBACT II (2007-2014) in

particular promoted the participatory approach within integrated urban development through supporting the establishment of URBACT Local Support Groups consisting of relevant local stakeholder and the co-production of Local Action Plans.

2.1.2. The participatory approach in 2014-2020

In the new regulations, multi-stakeholder involvement, partnerships and wider public participation are mentioned in a series of policy documents as a key principle. For example, the regulation for ESF in 2014-2020 contains specific provisions to strengthen partnerships and to encourage the active participation of social partners and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in ESF investments. The European Code of Conduct also proposes a strengthened partnership approach in planning and spending, and lays down a common set of standards to improve consultation, participation and dialogue with partners during the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of projects financed by the European Structural and Investment Funds. The URBACT III Operational Programme 2014-2020 includes among its specific objectives to ensure a participatory approach through the involvement of the relevant stakeholders in the action-planning process.

Focus on CLLD in urban areas¹

A core innovation in the field of public participation in the 2014-2020 regulations is the possibility to apply “Community Led Local Development” (CLLD) to urban areas. The immediate model for CLLD came from the LEADER programme, applied in the field of rural local development since 1991. However, there had also been examples of CLLD type activity in urban areas under both EU and national programmes in selected Member States. It is expected that CLLD will encourage local communities to develop integrated bottom-up approaches in circumstances where there is a need to respond to territorial and local challenges calling for structural change. This approach should also help build community capacity and stimulate innovation (including social innovation), entrepreneurship and capacity for change by encouraging the development and discovery of untapped potential from within communities and territories. What we can call the current model of CLLD is the result of over 20 years of experience by LEADER in rural areas, several years by Axis 4 of the EFF in coastal and fisheries areas, and a number of other programmes that contain elements of CLLD in cities supported by ERDF and dealings with social inclusion through the ESF. As a result, a basic system has been developed to help local partnerships through the initial critical steps of launching a CLLD process. This process can be broken down into a series of iterative steps or cycles for designing and shaping three basic components: the strategy, the partnership and the area. These are often referred to as the “trinity” of CLLD.²

CLLD in urban areas is expected to promote community ownership by increasing participation within communities and build the sense of involvement and ownership that

¹ A more detailed account of CLLD in urban areas can be found in the thematic report “The Participatory Approach to Sustainable Urban Development in the Cohesion Policy Period 2014-2020: Making CLLD in Urban Areas Work” conducted in the context of this study.

² See European Union (2014).

can increase the effectiveness of EU policies. Also, this approach could assist multi-level governance by providing a route for local communities to fully take part in shaping the implementation of EU objectives in their areas. Under CLLD, local people take the reins and form a local partnership that designs and implements an integrated development strategy. The strategy is designed to build on the community's social, environmental and economic strengths or "assets" rather than simply compensate for the problems. For this, the partnership received long-term funding – and they have to decide how it is spent. It is worth noting that urban CLLD is not an obligatory tool and that a variety of other existing and new approaches share with it this partnership-based bottom-up approach to local development.

2.1.3. Key findings from the study on CLLD in urban areas

Initial uptake

According to figures provided by DG Regional and Urban Policy in the context of this study, 17 Member States intend to support CLLD with ERDF. In 12 of these, ERDF will be complemented by ESF. Austria, Spain, Italy and Slovakia will use solely ERDF, while Lithuania will support CLLD exclusively through ESF.

The study identified a number of reasons that explain this relatively modest initial uptake, including but not limited to:

- Many Member States stated that they already implemented similar initiatives in urban areas as part of their own national policy and did not want to disrupt or reinvent this as CLLD;
- Despite the production of two guides on CLLD by the European Commission (one for managing authorities and the other for local actors), national and regional authorities were disinclined to include CLLD in partnership agreements and operational programmes - possibly due to their reluctance to share power with user groups;
- The novelty of the approach in urban areas, which means that it takes time for national and regional authorities to become familiar with it;
- The nature of the CLLD approach requires time to build trust and collaboration relationships between actors. Hence, it is too early to see the fruits of any initial efforts taking place in this direction;
- Unwillingness to collaborate between political and operational (i.e. technical) levels;
- In some cases, the inexistence or weak networks that transfer knowledge from the past LEADER experience on CLLD from rural to urban actors at national level may have hindered initial uptake.

Table 1 – Initial uptake of CLLD in urban areas: Key enabling conditions and obstacles

Initial uptake (as at Dec 2014)	Enabling conditions	Obstacles
<p>-17 MS intend to support CLLD with ERDF. In 12 of these, ERDF will be complemented by ESF. Four MS (AT, ES, IT, SK) will use solely ERDF, while one (LT) Lithuania will support CLLD exclusively through ESF.</p> <p>-Examples of pioneering cases embed U-CLLD within ITI and/or urban-rural linkages.</p>	<p>-Existing partnerships at local level;</p> <p>-National and institutional cultures open to co-decision approaches;</p> <p>-Specific support for (vulnerable) target groups;</p> <p>-Networks or informal exchanges between rural and urban actors.</p>	<p>-New approach takes time to be diffused and adopted;</p> <p>-Trust building takes time: possible U-CLLD in formation not visible yet;</p> <p>-Reluctance to collaborate between political and operational levels.</p>

The study found important contextual differences across Europe in terms of pre-conditions to successfully implement the CLLD approach in urban areas: factors such as institutional and political cultures (more or less open to co-decision models) and the number and size of urban centres ('rural' vs. 'urban' societies) featured as possible determinants of the uptake and / or success of this approach.

Highlights from case examples

The study identified a couple of pioneering examples, namely: the city of Gothenburg (Sweden) and the city of The Hague (the Netherlands). Each case illustrates a different approach to CLLD in the new period.

The city of **Gothenburg** is part of an urban-rural CLLD searching for synergies between both types of areas. The thematic focus is on fostering entrepreneurship, innovation and creativity through sustainable local food production and consumption in a penta helix-type cooperation setting. In this case CLLD will combine urban and rural instruments in a territorially integrated approach. It will draw on different funds to meet different objectives, thereby achieving complementarity. A pre-existing rural partnership will take the lead, while the role of the City will be of a newcomer, gradually embedding its priorities and bringing in its assets into the mix - e.g. its multi-cultural character, which the city regards as an asset instead of a 'problem'. This approach has a rich potential for urban-rural synergies and complementarities. Challenges, in this regard, will probably relate to learning to combine the differences between rural and urban contexts in terms of target groups, agendas and other specificities, while creating win-win dynamics that enrich both contexts.

The city of **The Hague** is supporting a CLLD in the harbour area of Scheveningen. The urban CLLD strategy originated in the context of the city's ITI and focuses on matching local skills to job opportunities in the area. While the ITI strategy focuses on longer-term, structural aspects linked to innovation and high skills jobs creation in The Hague area, the CLLD focuses on short term local needs targeting vulnerable groups in a specific area of the wider urban

region. Thus, this is an interesting example of the combination and complementarity of new tools for sustainable urban development. Another interesting aspect of this CLLD is the enabling leadership approach taken by the city, which hired an independent chair for the group for their initial meetings and will step in as stakeholder once the local group has consolidated. This low-key approach responds to the perceived need to generate trust amongst local stakeholders.

Capacity building needs

The CLLD approach relies to a large extent on the ability of local actors to collaborate, which often involved putting aside past conflicts and histories of mistrust and building bridges across their respective interests. Findings from our study pointed to the specific nature of urban areas as opposed to rural contexts where the CLLD approach originally came from: the existence of a wider variety of social groups in close proximity in cities means that frictions and competition for (limited) resources often conspire against collaboration. Accordingly, capacity building needs identified by the study referred specially to so-called ‘soft skills’ such as trust building, mediation, conflict resolution and consensus building between actors representing these different and often conflicting interests. Specific and reinforced support is required for countries with less capacities and / or resources to start a CLLD in urban areas. Weaknesses to tackle in this direction include, for example, the lack of third sector organisations representing community groups, poor literacy or language skills to absorb technical documents produced internationally, and the existence of extremely disempowered or vulnerable target groups.

2.2. The integrated approach to sustainable urban development

2.2.1. Background

The 2007-2013 period saw the mainstreaming of the ‘urban dimension’ in cohesion policy, with urban areas becoming potential beneficiaries of EU structural funds. Since then the “integrated approach” to sustainable urban development has been promoted by EU Cohesion policy as a way to overcome the limitations of a sectoral approach to urban questions. Within this context “integration” in the EU urban policy context³ generally refers to coordination between policy areas (horizontal), between different levels of government (vertical) and across different scales in specific areas (territorial cooperation). The integrated approach calls for a paradigm shift in the way local government manages policy fields, multi-level governance and functional urban areas. One of these requirements is the need to delegate aspects of programme management to local authorities and other stakeholders. This and other lessons from past experiences are reflected in a set of new tools to perform sustainable urban integrated development in the 2014-2020 regulations, as outlined below.

³ See, for example, definition of integrated urban development used by URBACT (<http://urbact.eu/combining-horizontal-and-vertical-integration>) or the European Commission (http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/informat/2014/urban_en.pdf)

2.2.2. The integrated approach to sustainable urban development in 2014-2020: Article 7⁴

Article 7 of the ERDF regulation introduced in the programming period 2014-2020 the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) should support sustainable urban development through integrated strategies that tackle the economic, environmental, climate, social and demographic challenges of urban areas, as stated in:

“The ERDF shall support, within operational programmes, sustainable urban development through strategies that set out integrated actions to tackle the economic, environmental, climate, demographic and social challenges affecting urban areas, while taking into account the need to promote urban-rural linkages.”

This has two implications: first, resources should be concentrated in an integrated manner to target areas with specific urban challenges; at the same time, the integrated approach to urban areas also needs to fit into the programming logic (strategies, objectives and results) of the programme(s) from which the resources are drawn.

According to the new regulations, EU Member States should seek to use the European Social Fund (ESF) in synergy with the ERDF to support measures related to employment, education, social inclusion and institutional capacity designed and implemented under the integrated strategies. Article 7 requires that a minimum of 5 % of the ERDF resources allocated to each Member State be invested in the implementation of integrated strategies for sustainable urban development. The latter can be financed and implemented through three mechanisms: a specific operational programme, a specific priority axis and Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI).

Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) is a new tool in this period, devised to implement territorial strategies in an integrated way. ITI allows Member States to implement Operational Programmes in a crosscutting way and to draw on funding from several priority axes of one or more Operational Programmes to ensure the implementation of an integrated strategy for a specific territory. The ITI is expected to support integrated actions in urban areas as it offers the possibility to combine funding linked to different thematic objectives, including the combination of funding from those priority axes and operational programmes supported by the ERDF, ESF and Cohesion Fund (Article 36 of the Common Provisions Regulation). An ITI can also be complemented with financial support from the EAFRD or the EMFF. An ITI could be targeted on part of a city – for example an opportunity area or an area of disadvantage, or it could cover a whole city region.

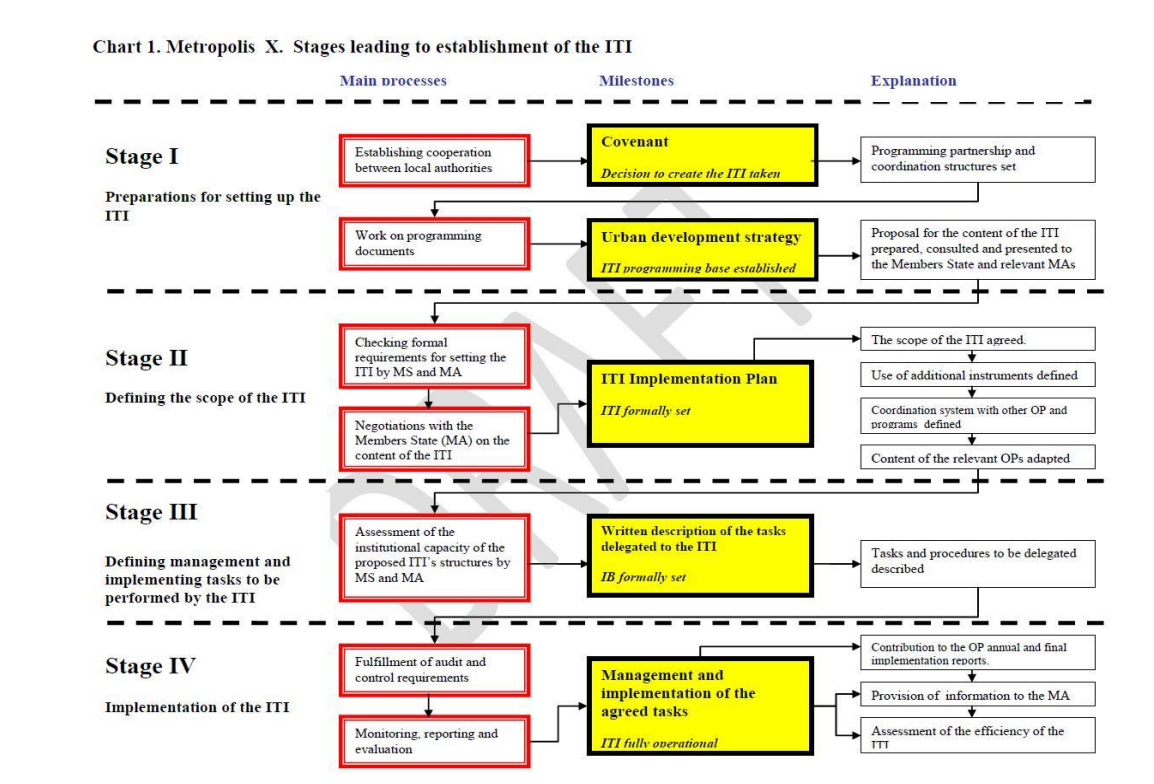
As compared to the past programming period, there is a stronger focus on urban development at programming level, whereby Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes set out the arrangements to ensure an integrated approach to the use of ESI funds for the sustainable development of urban areas within the wider context of territorial

⁴ A more detailed account of the new regulations on the integrated approach to sustainable urban development can be found in the thematic report “The Integrated Approach to Sustainable Urban Development in 2014-2020: Implementing Article ” conducted in the context of this study.

development. The Commission also expects to see this urban development approach closely linked to the integrated approach addressing the specific needs of geographical areas most affected by poverty, or of target groups at highest risk of discrimination or exclusion – as set out in the Partnership Agreement and subsequently in the Operational Programmes.

A number of the thematic objectives supported by the ESI funds have urban-specific investment priorities e.g. promoting low-carbon strategies for urban areas; improving the urban environment, including the regeneration of brownfield sites and the reduction of air pollution; promoting sustainable urban mobility, and the promotion of social inclusion through supporting the physical, economic and social regeneration of deprived urban areas (listed under Article 5 of the ERDF regulation). These investment priorities could be embedded in the integrated urban development strategy of an urban area (Article 7 ERDF regulation), complemented by actions supported by the ESF under its investment priorities (Article 12 of the ESF regulation). Figure 1 shows how ITI can be linked to different priorities and programmes.

Figure 1 – Possible links between ITI and different priorities and programmes



Source: "ITI Scenarios". Presentation by Piotr Zuber and Martijn De Bruijn at URBACT seminar "The Integrated Approach to Sustainable Urban Development In 2014-2020: Implementing Article 7". 10 September 2014, Rome.

The implementation of sustainable urban development strategies requires a degree of delegation to the urban authority level (Article 7(4) and 7(5) of the ERDF regulation). This may vary according to the institutional arrangements of each Member State but the regulation requires that urban authorities shall be responsible for at least the selection of operations. Each Member State is required to set out in its Partnership Agreement the

principles for the selection of the urban areas where integrated actions for sustainable urban development are to be implemented and an indicative allocation for those actions.

2.2.3. Key findings from the study on Article 7

Initial uptake

At the time of data collection for this study (May-December 2014), evidence showed that most member states were choosing to implement Article 7 through an Urban Axis or through ITI. Some Member States will use both mechanisms (e.g. Germany). Only three cities (Brussels, Prague and Stockholm) have been identified as having a specific Operational Programme for their city (list cities) while in Italy a specific programme for the main city-regions also falls under this category.

The case examples featured in the study portray a variety of structural arrangements to implement Article 7, including multifaceted designs combining more than one implementation mechanism (e.g. The Netherlands, France) and approaches involving ESF And ERDF (e.g. Ile de France, the Randstad region and Poland). The study identified great interest in the new instrument ITI from the onset of the new programming period, in particular amongst Eastern European ‘new’ member states. Amongst these, Poland stands out as a country with large ERDF funds at its disposal that devised a specific institutional arrangement to implement ITI.

Table 2 provides an overview of key enabling conditions and obstacles found by the study in the initial phase of implementation of Article 7.

Table 2 – Initial uptake of Article 7: Key enabling conditions and obstacles

Initial uptake (as at Dec 2014)	Enabling conditions	Obstacles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Large number of initiatives but lack of quality data on each type of mechanism; -ITI attracting high level of interest especially in ‘new’ Eastern European member states; -Cases involving priority axis (Germany, Italy), and a mix of Operational Programme and Priority Axis in the Netherlands (see thematic report of this study). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Existence of integrated approaches to sustainable urban development; -Established institutional structures allowing for complex management of EU projects; -Match between local thematic priorities and EU2020 thematic objectives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Duty to delegate problematic for some countries without such culture and or (political) willingness; -Lack of competences and skills to plan and implement effective strategies with Art 7 at all levels (MS, MA, UA); -New regulations seen as introducing further administrative burden (despite efforts towards simplification) merely by being new; -Ensuring no conflict of interest, good governance and high quality of selected projects; -Reluctance to apply new approaches if existing one considered effective enough.

Highlights from case examples

Thematic fields covered by the case examples reflect a general trend to focus on three specific EU 2020 thematic objectives (or similar), namely: TO 4 (low carbon economy in the Randstad region and Germany); TO 6 (Environmental protection and resource efficiency, in Italy and Germany), and TO 9 (Social inclusion and combating poverty, in all cases).

In most cases covered by the study, delegation will happen mostly at the level of selection of operations – which is the minimum requested in the regulation. While some countries and cities enjoy a long-standing culture of delegation and even co-decision (e.g. the Netherlands and Nordic countries), higher governance levels in other European countries tend to be reluctant to delegate (mostly in Eastern and Southern European countries). The term ‘*delophobia*’ was used in the seminar on Article 7 to illustrate the apparent contradiction between the tendency for higher levels of governance to be reluctant to delegate, on the one hand, and (some) local governments wariness of ‘too much’ delegation. Possible reasons for the alleged wariness of delegation amongst some local governments include perceived lack of (own) capacity to deal with higher and more complex workloads, and / or the lack of financial resources to undertake more responsibility, although technical assistance resources would be available to cover the cost of units as well as capacity building activity.

Findings from the study’s seminar on Article 7 pointed to a general lack of clarity amongst stakeholders with regards to the evaluation criteria and indicators to assess results of the new tools. Despite evaluation frameworks being set out clearly in each programme document and for ITI a basic principle that the results of each operation should be reported back to its parent programme priority in the way specified in that priority, it may be advisable to involve end users in early design stages of these indicators and evaluation systems. There were calls from city representatives amongst seminar participants for adopting a learning approach to evaluation that favours cyclical and iterative evaluation methods.

Capacity building needs

Capacity building needs in the field of Article 7 focused on two main topics: project management skills and access to and management of EU funding. These correspond to the higher (perceived) complexity of the new tools – despite efforts by the Commission to achieve greater simplification. At least in an initial phase, managing authorities and local authorities would benefit from training and exchange opportunities to familiarise themselves with the specific administrative aspects of these tools, as well as to learn from each other on the different possibilities of combining funding opportunities to achieve their specific urban development goals. The study identified some initial efforts from the national level to provide training to officials dealing with the implementation of Article 7, and in particular with the new tool ITI.

2.3. Urban-rural linkages

2.3.1. Background

A series of milestones and strategies describe the development of the framework of the urban-rural debate in European policies over the last decades, starting with the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). One of the oldest European policies, together with the EU budget review, it resulted in a change of focus for EU policy-making. The EU budget review included reforms in spending priorities and funding instruments – such as the CAP and structural funds – leading towards the development of a new Financial Framework. On 21 July 2001, the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive 1 came into force.

From an urban-rural relationships point of view a positive outcome could occur in the “studying the alternatives” phase within the framework of a Strategic Environmental Assessment, as it help to preserve the natural and cultural heritages, landscapes, resources, and at the same can prevent spatial “conflicts” in the urban-rural area(s) in question. In 2005 the Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment made reference to “urban area” rather than “city”, leading the way for a greater urban-rural perspective. Two years later, in 2007, the Lisbon Treaty identified the Community objective of territorial cohesion, as well as economic and social cohesion. The same year, under the Territorial Agenda, “Strengthening Urban-Rural Partnership” featured as one of its six guiding principles. In 2008 the Convention for a Sustainable Urban and Rural Europe (CURE) was established, aimed to offer recommendations on policy frameworks and measures which will assist a sustainable approach to the future of urban and rural areas in Europe and to build a partnership of organisations that are committed to building sustainable urban-rural relations throughout Europe.

2.3.2. Urban-Rural linkages in 2014-2020⁵

While only an option in the 2007-2013 programming period, urban development will be implemented through strategies setting out integrated actions in the 2014-2020 period under Article 7 ERDF regulation. Article 12 of the ESF regulation also provides for the complementary contribution of ESF to such strategies, reinforcing the integration in tackling urban challenges. Also, a more functional approach allowing for interventions at the right scale is promoted; as interventions of sustainable urban development can cover different types of cities and urban areas, as defined by Member States, it allows financing of integrated actions ranging from neighbourhood or district level to functional areas such as city-regions or metropolitan areas – including neighbouring rural areas. A key change by the introduction of new tools to promote integrated approaches and actions: new and more flexible tools such as integrated territorial investment (ITI) and community-led local

⁵ A more detailed account of the new regulations affecting urban-rural linkages can be found in the thematic report “Promoting Urban-Rural Linkages in Small and Medium Sized Cities” conducted in the context of this study.

development (CLLD) support the integrated approach to sustainable urban development and facilitate a mix of instrumental and participatory ways of implementing urban development strategies.

With the new regulatory framework, it is expected that cities will have more responsibilities and more opportunities; Member States will be able to give cities the opportunity to design and implement fully integrated strategies, which combine the resources of different priority axes from one or more operational programmes as well as from the EARDF and the EMFF. The implementation of integrated urban development strategies will be enhanced by the possibility to combine actions financed by ERDF, ESF and CF either at programme or operation level. Cross financing between ERDF and ESF of a part of an operation (up to 10 % of each priority axis of an Operational Programme) will remain to complement the multi-fund approach (Article 98, Common Provisions Regulation). A stronger voice is given to cities that can play a key role in Cohesion Policy and in meeting the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy. For the 2014-2020 programming period, Cohesion policy enhances the role of urban areas. In this perspective, the Common Strategic Framework refers to urban-rural linkages in order to strengthen territorial cohesion that promotes the sustainable urban development and should take into account the need to address urban-rural linkages in a “smart urban-smart rural” perspective.

2.3.3. Key findings from the study on urban-rural linkages

Definition and state of play

The study identified the need to adopt clear operational definitions of the terms ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ when discussed in relation to each other, which can be used in the European context. These definitions are important as they, in turn, are required to understand the concept of ‘urban-rural’ linkages. Key informants and seminar participants in this study coincided in that the definition of these terms in relation to each other is not self-evident and is highly context-sensitive.

There is a wealth of existing rural and/or coastal networks in many parts of Europe, which could be extended to include urban areas focusing on topics of common interest. In EU-15 member states, these linkages range from very small scale informal ones in small and medium size cities, to more complex ones, such strategic partnerships in large metropolitan areas. In EU-12 member states, most of the new urban-rural linkages are the result of their adaptation to EU funding tools and opportunities.

Overall, the role of the city was found to be as initiator of urban-rural linkages in most cases, due to factors such as: its larger size in terms of population and budget, and greater institutional capabilities, infrastructure and technological capacity. A key aspect to consider when building urban-rural linkages is equality and balance in terms of rights and responsibilities of each type of actor (urban and rural) despite their different capacities and resources. This is fundamental to build long-term relationships based on mutual trust and respect.

Table 3 – State of the play of urban-rural linkages: Key enabling conditions and obstacles

State of play (as at Dec 2014)	Enabling conditions	Obstacles
No specific instrument, but existing networks to build on and / or complementarity with other approaches and tools.	-Existence of rural-urban partnerships; -Trust and history of cooperation between urban and rural areas.	-Unbalance power between urban centres and rural areas; -Predominance of large metropolis that regard rural areas merely as 'hinterland'; -Lack of appropriate conceptualisation of the relationship between urban and rural areas; -History of mistrust and conflict between urban and rural actors.

Highlights from case examples

Three out of a series of examples of existing functional urban-rural linkages and/or partnerships were documented in the thematic report on this topic, namely: The Finnish “LEADER cities” approach and the example of the city of Pori; the city of Győr and its hinterland (Hungary); and the case of the city of Alba Iulia and its intercommunity association (Romania). Despite the differences between these examples, amongst their common features was the creation of a local urban-rural coordinating entity to lead the process with a clear delivery framework and decision-making mechanisms, and an approach towards locally rooted answers and solutions. At the study’s seminar on this topic, the issues, challenges and responses in these above cases resonated with participants and there was consensus on the availability of a significant number of similar examples on which to build on.

Capacity building needs

Capacity building needs to foster urban-rural linkages identified by the study include training on specific skills on:

- Trust building, mediation and conflict resolution (for example between neighbouring municipalities);
- Technical understanding and capacities in the field of land use management;
- Matching local needs to EU funding opportunities;
- Understanding on how to apply for 2014-2020 Operational programmes and specifically how to work with the new territorial tools (ITI and CLLD where these are being deployed);
- Working at different territorial and administrative scales.
- Brokering across government levels;
- Network organisation and management.

3. Towards a shared understanding of the new concepts and tools: Lessons from the initial round

Further to the specific findings on each of the three ‘core topics’ of this study outlined above, the study identified a number of themes that run across two or all of them.

Contextual specificities

Contextual specificities play a very important role in understanding first, the adoption, and later on, the (successful) implementation of the different approaches and tools. The study’s findings show - in particular from the seminar discussions – that there are important geographical, cultural, economic, social, and political differences in how the concepts and tools are to be used/supported in each case. The *CLLD approach*, for example, tends to come easier in countries with a well-established tradition or ‘culture’ of power sharing, delegation to lower levels of governance and consensus building. Examples of these enabling conditions can be found in Nordic countries and in the Netherlands, for instance. However, other countries have developed integrated approaches to urban development with significant levels of citizen involvement, which can be seen as a launching platform for CLLD or similar approaches to co-decision at local level. On the other hand, current developments in Southern-European countries in terms of citizen-led movements at local level as a response to austerity in the post-recession context can also be seen as fertile ground to build on for the use of CLLD in urban areas.

Similar contextual differences apply to findings on *Article 7*, in particular on the topic of delegation. As we have seen, while delegation is already part of integrated approaches to sustainable urban development in a small number of countries, the *level* at which delegation happens varies amongst them. Furthermore, the adoption of new mechanisms for delivery (e.g. ITI), which imply additional administrative layers and/or requirements coming from the EU, represents new challenges for many cities. For countries with weak traditions of delegation, this requirement means that they have to rethink their institutional structure and processes.

In *urban-rural linkages*, contextual specificities matter greatly for additional reasons. We have pointed out the need to adopt context-specific definitions of what constitutes ‘urban’ and ‘rural’. The umbrella operational construct of ‘functional urban areas’ (FUA)⁶ needs to allow enough flexibility for local realities to fit in.

All in all, further actions to support the adoption and implementation of these approaches and tools should distinguish between specific contexts to be effective.

⁶ For a definition of FUA in the European context, see for example: http://www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/EN/Publications/1zR/2005/DL_Heft07_Antikainen.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=3

Delegation and co-decision

All three concepts and tools require increased delegation in the new programming period. Delegation, however, does not come easily in most cases. National cultures differ in terms of their ability and/or willingness to delegate to or share power with lower governance levels. The situation takes different features across the three concepts and tools under study. While co-decision defines the CLLD approach and higher levels of delegation (as compared to the previous programming period) are a requirement for Article 7 across all three implementation mechanisms, in urban-rural linkages it takes the shape of greater involvement of local communities in such partnerships. Initial evidence shows different types of enablers and challenges encountered in each case. Table 2 provides an overview of the study's findings on delegation across the three core topics.

Table 4 – Delegation and co-decision: Overview of enabling conditions and obstacles per topic

Approach / instrument	Key features	Enabling conditions	Obstacles
Urban CLLD	Delegation or sharing of power not always understood as core to the CLLD approach.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -National and/or institutional cultures of local decision-making, co-decision and consensus building (Northern Europe, The Netherlands); -Positive past experience with LEADER to build on in urban CLLD. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Higher levels of governance unwilling to share power; -Conflicting agendas of different (urban) interests groups; -History of conflict and mistrust between groups and/or with local authority; -Unwillingness to collaborate across political and operational (technical) levels;
Article 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -In most cases only selection of operations is delegated (minimum required in regulations). See enabling conditions and obstacles; -In some countries, delegation 'imposed' by Article 7 seen as duplicating existing forms of delegation or co-decision (e.g. Germany). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -National and/or institutional cultures of local decision-making, co-decision and consensus building (Nordic countries, the Netherlands). -Existing capacities and skills (cross-department organisation, project management, EU funding management, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Higher levels of governance unwilling to share power; -Local authorities wary of new responsibilities due to (perceived) lack of capacities and/or resources.
Urban-rural linkages	Delegation and co-decision between rural and urban actors is often unbalanced, with rural areas in general being the 'weaker' partners in terms of capacities, skills and resources.	Similar levels of capacities, skills and resources in both rural and urban areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Lack of balance in capacities, skills and resources in favour of one type of area or the other; -Unilateral decisions by either urban or rural governments unwilling to share power with each other -Rural actors wary of sharing responsibilities due to (perceived) lack of capacities, skills or resources.

Capacity building needs

Through the three thematic reports, the study identified a variety of capacity building needs. While the emphasis varies according to the specific approach and instrument, in general these can be divided in three main groups:

- 1) *'Soft' skills for partnership formation and development*: in all three topics, collaboration between stakeholders is crucial, requiring skills on issues such as conflict resolution, mediation, consensus building and trust building. These often require the involvement of third-party actors who act as enablers and facilitators of these processes.
- 2) *Technical skills on project management in general, and on access and management to EU funding*: although administrative complexity of the different tools examined in this study varies, understanding the fundamentals of project management and financial administration of EU funding is a key requirement. These types of skills are particularly lacking amongst local stakeholders with no formal training in these matters.
- 3) *Formation and management of exchange and peer-to-peer learning networks*: this was raised particularly in the context of the learning potential from past (e.g. LEADER for CLLD) or current experiences with each of the approaches and tools.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation systems are also a crucial element to ensure successful implementation of the new approaches and tools. While acknowledging that these exist, the study identified calls from city-level stakeholders to further clarify them at local level. Actors lack understanding of the new results based approach that has been introduced in this period. More specifically, a learning approach to evaluation was emphasized, involving iterative and cyclical measurement and analysis of results as well as processes. This learning approach is deemed to enable early feedback into the policy and programme (re)design and implementation cycle. As mentioned earlier, the early involvement of end users in the design of these indicators and evaluation systems is needed to ensure that they reflect the reality of local circumstances as well as ownership by local stakeholders.

Post-recession and austerity context

The implications of the post-recession austerity measures in many European countries were highlighted by stakeholders consulted for this study, as a particularly important aspect to take into account in the current programming period. Funding needs in cities have increased in many European cities as a result of deep funding cuts in local authorities' budgets, leading to reduced capacities stark reductions in staff and organisational changes such as abolishment and / or mergers of departments. The European Commission should take into account this (new) reality in the funding criteria and allocation process, as well as on the expected results from local authorities. For example, co-financing rates, pre-financing and eligibility of costs could be adjusted to the new budgetary situation of local authorities facing drastic cuts.

Complementarities and synergies between the different approaches and tools

The study identified important complementarities and synergies between the different approaches and tools. As can be seen through the case examples presented in the three thematic reports, there are examples of cities combining approaches and/or tools to achieve complex multi-level objectives. These include, for instance, combining tackling wider urban issues through ITI with targeting local populations through urban CLLD (Schevening example) or linking local development (CLLD) across urban-rural areas through common thematic objectives (Gothenburg example).

4. Recommendations

Building on the findings of this study, in this section we provide a series of recommendations on how a variety of relevant stakeholders may use these concepts and tools to foster sustainable urban development. In the introduction to this report, we have defined these stakeholders as the European Commission (through its relevant services), the Member states (their national governments, managing authorities and local authorities) and the URBACT programme. In addition, there are a number of other relevant stakeholders in each case, such as European institutions and networks dealing with specific issues at national, regional and local level (e.g. AIEDL, FARNET, Committee of the Regions, Eurocities, CEMR, etc.). There are multiple interdependencies, complementarities and possible synergies between these different agencies, as well as eventual duplications and overlaps.

Within this landscape, **the specific role(s) that URBACT III** can play to support cities with the implementation of these approaches and tools in the current period, is inevitably linked to the role that other urban actors and networks at European and national level may take. Such actors and networks ought to try and work together looking for complementarities and synergies. Each of them has their own experience and expertise to contribute. The aim should be to avoid duplication and to focus on achieving the best possible match between needs, resources and capacities. These combinations will vary by type of approach and instrument. In some cases, overlaps may be unavoidable, but not necessarily undesirable: cities and managing authorities could benefit from a variety of approaches and methods on how to do things, which could foster diversity and innovation.

Table 5 provides an initial overview of possible matches between needs and core competences of a selection of urban actors and networks, including the URBACT programme in its third programming period. In addition, the newly created Urban Development Network (UDN) features as a key partner in the overall aim to support the implementation of these new approaches and tools. Others include national governments, other services of the European Commission, other European institutions working with cities and regions and a variety of European civil society actors and networks working on local and community development in cities and regions.

Needs	URBACT programme	UDN / EC	National governments	Managing Authorities	Others
Information	Information through the communication activities of the programme e.g. website, publications, etc.	-Main producers of policy and guidance; -Strengthen and better target dissemination; E.g. Organise road shows of guidelines, training workshops, etc.	-Reinforce dissemination, support EC efforts with identifying target groups and networks; -Support access to information by target groups in local languages.	Collaborate with the dissemination efforts from the EC and national governments to reach out to local authorities and other local stakeholders.	Information through their own communication activities e.g. website, publications, etc.
Capacity building	Apply the 'URBACT method' through multi-stakeholder local support groups and the development of action plans to those cities that are in networks; E.g. organise for each or selected approach / instrument: -National seminars; -Workshop at summer universities targeted at members of LSGs in participating cities in networks.	-Provide up-front preparatory assistance for the adoption and implementation of each approach / tool; -Tailor specific capacity building activities to each approach/instrument e.g. treat CLLD as different to Article 7; -Coordinate with URBACT to avoid duplication and build on respective added value.	-Facilitate access to capacity building activities organised by EU level networks; -Identify key target groups in conjunction with MA and city administrations.	-Identify key topics and target groups in conjunction with national governments and city administrations. -Actively participate in capacity building activities alongside local authorities and other relevant stakeholders.	<u>FARNET and similar networks:</u> Collaborate with urban actors and other EU networks to facilitate knowledge transfer from LEADER experience (especially CLLD and urban-rural linkages). <u>CoR, Eurocities, CEMR, others:</u> Facilitate peer-to-peer learning and exchange activities amongst their members.
Network organisation and management	Encourage the formation of topic-specific (CLLD, Article 7, urban-rural) transnational networks, both Action Planning and Implementation.	Design and implement a regular programme of activities of the UDN, that provides a framework for development, capacity building and monitoring / evaluation.	Facilitate creation of national networks on each topic, including urban rural.	Participate in networking and activities and peer-to-peer exchanges	<u>CoR, Eurocities, CEMR, others:</u> Facilitate creation of national thematic on specific topic (as relevant).
EU funding: access and management	Embed within capacity building and/or network actions (above).	-Increase/strengthen technical support to understand EC policy and funding guidelines (linked to information, above); -Monitor understanding of regulations so as to simplify as required.	Provide technical support to understand EC policy and funding guidelines (linked to information, above)	Provide technical support to understand EC policy and funding guidelines (linked to information, above)	
Monitoring and	Specific support on results framework	-Ensure ongoing data collection and trends	Collaborate with data collection e.g. through	Collaborate with provision of relevant data on their	<u>CoR, Eurocities, CEMR, others:</u>

evaluation	and indicators for implementation networks.	analysis; -Follow pioneering cases and extract lessons to share with others.	national statistics office and/or similar.	own activities in the field for monitoring and evaluation purposes.	Collaborate with data collection from their members, e.g. through national statistics office and/or similar.
Capitalisation	URBACT capitalisation activities (reports, studies, work streams, etc.);	Commission thematic studies;	Contribute to the production of thematic studies and other capitalisation activities carried out by other stakeholders.	Contribute to the production of thematic studies and other capitalisation activities carried out by other stakeholders.	<u>CoR, Eurocities, CEMR, others:</u> Commission thematic studies.

Table 5 – Complementing needs, resources and competences to support the new approaches and tools in 2014-2020

5. Concluding remarks

In this study we have begun a reflection on how different stakeholders understand the new approaches, concepts and tools proposed in 2014-2020 for sustainable urban development. We have focused on three ‘topics’, which represent very different territorial scales and rationales. Together, they aim to contribute to the overarching goals of more sustainable urban areas. As pointed out earlier, there are important complementarities and synergies between these different approaches and tools. However, we also need to understand their specificities: for example, the voluntary nature of CLLD in urban areas requires a more long-term approach to mainstreaming this particular way of implementing local co-decision models in European cities. There is no one-size-fits all formula to doing this: the role played by contextual specificities, as highlighted earlier, has to be born in mind when evaluating the uptake of this approach. This also holds true for urban-rural partnerships. We have seen that there is a large and rich acumen of urban-rural collaboration across Europe. In the new period, the goal is to strengthen these linkages, but the specific ways to doing this will vary greatly. We can aim, however, to learn from each other through the great potential of peer-to-peer exchange networks. Last but not least, Article 7 provides a new set of tools to implement sustainable urban development in cities. Once the initial implementation phase is over, the role of evidence and evaluation will be crucial to ensure timely and effective feedback into the policy (re)design process in order to improve results. For this, the coordination of the activities carried out by the different stakeholders addressed in this study will be key. In our last section we have attempted to provide an initial framework for these synergies, which we hope may serve as a roadmap to this process. The URBACT programme, with its vast experience supporting cities to build capacity and learn from each other, has a particularly important role to play in this effort.

6. Useful bibliography and resources

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Other resources

Integrated approach to urban development:

<http://urbact.eu/combining-horizontal-and-vertical-integration>

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