

Sustainable Cities at the centre of the knowledge-based economy and cohesive European society

Thematic domains for future European Research within the 7th Framework Programme of the European Community for Research

Executive Summary

Cities are the main drivers of economic growth, in addition to social and cultural diversity, across Europe. Given the problems and potential of the Lisbon Strategy, and other urban policies and strategies of the European Community, a range of research initiatives in the 7th Framework Programme are necessary in order to focus on the nature of the knowledge society and cities.

This policy paper identifies five priority areas in urban research:

1. **Function of cities from a user perspective** – integrating the emerging spatial, temporal and virtual structures of the knowledge-based society, in the context of complex historically-determined urban structures, both physical and social.
2. **Learning cities** and the social structures necessary to link individuals and social groups to the city, in order to support cohesion.
3. **Flexible urban and regional governance**, in the context of the new dynamics and dimensions of urban re/development.
4. **The role of cities in enabling a creative environment** for innovative forms of production and social processes in the networked knowledge-based society.
5. **Intercompetitiveness of cities** and their role in the global systems (economic, environmental, social and cultural).

In more specific terms, the paper lists a wide range of research actions relating to issues such as:

- improving citizens' quality of life through strategic, integrated urban and regional planning
- further involving stakeholders, in order to achieve sustainable cities for urban and regional governance
- social cohesion and capacity building in a knowledge-based economy
- urban redevelopment as a contributing factor towards improved living standards and sustainable resource management
- sustainable local and regional economies, in the era of globalisation

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I European Policy Position

The European Union – as stated in the **Lisbon Strategy**, March 2000 – aims at becoming “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.”

The Nice European Council (2000) focused on a coordinated EU strategy for social inclusion, and the Gothenburg European Council (2001) proposed a strategy for sustainable development, stressing the need to incorporate an environmental dimension into this strategy. Therefore, the **European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development “A Sustainable Europe for a Better World” (2001) highlights** that “...in the long term, economic growth, social cohesion and environmental protection must go hand in hand.”

The **Sixth Community Environment Action Programme (2002)**, the forthcoming **Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment (2004)** and **Aalborg+10 – Inspiring Futures (2004)** (providing a valuable framework for sustainable urban development) all emphasise the central and strategic roles of urban research, urban planning and urban policies in order to achieve a sustainable society with a competitive economy; a social cohesive society and a clean, healthy and safe environment. To achieve these aims, cross-cutting and integrated approaches are required, best provided by spatial policies on the urban and regional levels.

The current proposal for regulation of the European Parliament and of the **European Regional Development Fund’s** Council suggests that “the ERDF shall support the development of participative, integrated strategies to tackle the high concentration of economic, environmental and social problems affecting urban agglomerations.” The “Council Regulation: Laying Down General Provisions On The European Regional Development Fund, The European Social Fund And The Cohesion Fund” document proposes the reinforcement of urban issues (including urban regeneration), building on the strength of the **URBAN initiative**, which shall be expanded in the future.

Multidisciplinary by nature, urban and regional issues encompass a wide variety of European policy objectives in relation to the areas of health, energy, the environment, information and communication technologies, transport, education and training, employment, social affairs and economic cohesion. Therefore, further investigation into these areas will provide a major contribution to the vision of a sustainable Europe.

Within Europe, 80% of the population live in urban areas. These areas play a strategic role in efforts to achieve a dynamic, knowledge-based economy, socially cohesive society and good quality environment. However, environmental issues are at the fore in current discussions, as described in the forthcoming thematic strategy on the urban environment.

Additionally, European cities often experience the emergence of larger urban areas, with low living standards leading to social segregation; causing them to be excluded from knowledge-based society. These areas suffer multiple deprivation such as degraded housing, inadequate or inappropriate facilities (e.g. in terms of infrastructure and transport), rundown or derelict industrial

sites, and environmental risks and problems. Additionally, unattractive and disconnected urban structures, unemployment and weaknesses in social cohesion (e.g. poverty, low educational standards, ageing, poor health standards) are detrimental to the sustainable development of the city as a whole.

Any moves to improve the quality of life in these deprived areas have to address problems relating to highly unpredictable development trends and require long-term, multi-layered development, based upon flexible, integrated strategies. These must also be supported by the active participation of all stakeholders, including municipalities, developers, the general public and those involved in inter-governmental and cross-jurisdictional co-operation. Strategic, integrative and collaborative approaches are necessary to reconcile economic, ecological and social development and to achieve commitment from public, in addition to private, stakeholders.

Sustainable urban and regional development will provide major contributions towards improving citizens' **quality of life**, particularly within areas subject to multiple deprivation.

- Sustainable urban development requires far-sighted strategic planning and development.
- Sustainable urban development aims to maximise developmental opportunities by focusing on an **integrated approach**, incorporating environmental, economic, social and cultural factors into decision making.
- As sustainable urban development cannot be solved by public authorities alone, a **good urban and regional governance** approach is crucial for capacity building and increasing stakeholders' commitment. Stronger emphasis should be placed on co-operative networking, the exchange of experiences, public participation and stakeholder involvement (citizens, businesses, the voluntary sector, the media etc.), and mediation and arbitration. It is necessary for sustainable urban development to recognise and further the learning community strategy which European cities are adopting and to meet the knowledge transfer and capacity building requirements of stakeholders, in the development of sustainable communities. Creating favourable conditions for private sector developments is also important.
- Sustainable urban development requires the achievement of economic benefits without having a negative impact upon social cohesion or the environment. Sustainable urban land-use planning plays a strategic role in achieving this aim by promoting environmentally sustainable transport through the protection of soil, water, and air quality, biodiversity and by reducing the volume of waste.
- Sustainable urban development implies measures to **combat social exclusion** and poverty in addition to finding solutions in terms of the **challenges of demographic development**, such as the ageing population.

II Proposals for Future Urban Research Priorities

Taking into account European Policies, future research is necessary in the following areas :

6. **Function of cities from a user perspective** – integrating the emerging spatial, temporal and virtual structures of the knowledge-based society, in the context of complex historically-determined urban structures, both physical and social.
7. **Learning cities** and the social structures necessary to link individuals and social groups to the city, in order to support cohesion.
8. **Flexible urban and regional governance**, in the context of the new dynamics and dimensions of urban re/development.
9. **The role of cities in enabling a creative environment** for innovative forms of production and social processes in the networked knowledge-based society.

10. **Intercompetitiveness of cities** and their role in the global systems (economic, environmental, social and cultural).

III Examples of Future Urban Research Needs

Within the framework of the proposed future urban research priorities, the following topics should be taken up within the 7th Framework Programme:

1. Improving the quality of life by strategic, integrated, urban and regional planning:

- The interdependences of urban design, public health, the environment, cultural heritage, transport, social aspects and economic development need to be investigated further.
- Methods for integrating the various levels of planning (including levels of urban agglomeration: the city-region, the city, urban districts and neighbourhoods) require closer analysis, in terms of both planning and implementation. Strategic plans and instruments of governance should be able to take these links and interdependencies into account.
- Research is also required in terms of flexible tools to support the elaboration, adoption, implementation and regular revision of the concepts underpinning strategic integrated urban and regional development, plus associated environmental management plans.
- Methodological and technical advice must be suitable in working to solve the specific problems faced by regions and cities. Research and demonstration activities will be necessary, including focus upon end-users and their requirements.
- In seeking solutions to complex urban and regional problems, it is necessary to investigate a strategic planning process, including: the identification of strengths and weaknesses; problems and potentials; opportunities and threats; and scenario-building and visioning
- Methods and techniques for strategic planning need to take into account short-term actions in addition to long-term planning. This includes futures and assessment methods as well as methods and techniques for supporting strategic policy-level decision-making, long-term flexible programming and the initiation of joint learning processes.
- Research is required into the integration of expert opinions, from different spheres, into the implementation of strategic integrated plans on urban, regional, national and European levels and broadening the exchange of experiences towards improving the implementation of good practice.
- Methods of monitoring the impact and/or successes of strategic, integrated urban and regional plans must be developed. Monitoring tools are needed, in order to provide early distress warnings and preventative approaches to enable communities to avoid negative outcomes.

2. Involvement of stakeholders to achieve sustainable cities for urban and regional governance

- Methods and techniques are needed to empower stakeholders from various spheres (citizens, private investors, NGOs, etc.), thus strengthening both their ability to engage in participative urban and regional planning activities and their interest in them.. Active stakeholder involvement will be championed as a major factor in a good urban and regional governance. In the long run, joint learning processes will be initiated and maintained.
- It is also necessary to develop methods and techniques aimed at increasing the accessibility of information and expertise and to delegate decision-making powers and responsibilities to stakeholders. These are essential requirements for a strategic collaborative approach in urban and regional development.

- Greater stakeholder involvement in planning activities will include research into creating integrated funding instruments which make use of public and private sources, ensuring investments are adequately used in progressing towards strategic integrated urban and regional development.
- Research should be carried out on incorporating marketing and promotional activities into the integrated urban and regional planning approach, in order to directly address and engage the target audiences (inhabitants, entrepreneurs and other urban market members) thus stimulating urban and regional development and strengthening / enhancing the local and regional image and identity.
- Research should be carried out on improving a municipality's capacity to manage and implement these new approaches.

3. Social cohesion and capacity building in a knowledge-based economy

- Promoting capacity development in terms of social capital and citizenship - responsibility, autonomy, solidarity, trust cooperation.
- Fostering social cohesion, against the background of growing socio-spatial segregation, should be progressed as a central issue. Consideration should also be given to providing adequate access to employment, education, housing and infrastructures for disadvantaged groups of the population.
- Ways of exploiting Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to foster education, lifelong learning and human resource development should be investigated, in order progress towards the knowledge-based society. Use of ICTs can work to prevent further exclusion, which can force urban areas to become disconnected from social and economic development.
- In response to the increasing number of migrations in European cities, research should respond to the scientific demands for strategies promoting diversity and integration amongst different ethnic groups, and the development of more multicultural spaces. Strategies based at neighbourhood or urban district level could make a valuable contribution toward strengthening integration whilst also benefiting ethnic and cultural diversity.

4. Urban redevelopment as a contributor towards improved living standards and sustainable resource management

- Apart from fostering good urban governance and social cohesion, improving living standards through urban redevelopment requires particular focus on urban structure, environmental quality, the protection of cultural heritage, economic development, and on the image of the urban areas or regions, both internally and externally. Methods of integrating these issues into strategic redevelopment/rehabilitation merit further investigation.
- Successful regional and urban redevelopment very much depends upon the creation of a positive image of the target area. Therefore, the reasons behind a poor image, and its consequences (e.g. crime, high proportions of minority groups, poor physical environment) must be investigated, in addition to research into strategies to improve the images of deprived urban areas.
- The redevelopment of brownfields, unused, underused and derelict land, which aims to emulate models of compact cities with high density and mixed use settlements, is a major element in sustainable resource management. Therefore, strategies will have to be elaborated to incorporate the effective prevention of developments on the greenfields, by

strengthening urban redevelopment. Furthermore, research is required on how to adapt the model of compact cities with higher densities to maintain relevance for declining and shrinking urban and regional areas.

- Tools and instruments for creating and supporting strategies which will protect open spaces, cultural landscapes and natural areas against urban sprawl should be further developed and disseminated.
- The development of appropriate methodologies and tools is required for cities to acquire financial and political support towards promoting safe and healthy environments, and safeguarding urban open spaces in order to make cities more people-friendly.
- Research is needed on energy efficient settlements and on strategies to reduce urban waste, promote renewable energy sources and provide incentives and awards for overall resource efficiency, including within existing building stock.

5. Sustainable local and regional economy in the era of globalisation

- Further research is required into achieving the potential offered by ICTs and the knowledge society, including the integration of ICT development and implementation within overall economic regeneration planning.
- Structural problems in existing European funding regimes that do not support the adoption of sustainability evaluation for either the planning or programming of regeneration projects.
- Methods of initiating a rise in weak local economies through promoting investments, business-start-ups and a move towards knowledge-based economy have to be researched. On the urban district level, special consideration should be given to the role of small- and medium-sized enterprises.
- Research should be undertaken on how to strengthen the commitment of the private sector to urban and regional development; for example, through a stronger focus on public-private and public-public partnerships. Small- and medium-sized companies are often strongly rooted within their urban districts. This should be actively exploited through the development of strategies to support these enterprises, thus stimulating urban development.
- Large amounts of funding are requested for urban recovery in rehabilitation. Municipalities and firms suffer insufficient capacity to gather financial resources. It is necessary to promote and diffuse knowledge of efficient methods and techniques amongst them, towards access to super-national, national, regional and local public funding in addition to access to the financial markets.