European
Commission

The Productive City Dimension

How are urban initiatives and actions supporting Green, Just and Productive Cities in the EU?

UAEU Webinar: 20 September 2021

Regional and
Urban Policy

Welcome and introduction

Introductory remarks referred to this event as being the first in a series of webinars, addressing the Productive City dimension as outlined in the New Leipzig Charter.

Speakers underlined the timely moment of this webinar, as the current phase of the Urban Agenda for the EU is coming to an end, and as it is time to capitalise on the knowledge gathered by the 14 Partnerships and their 132 Actions. Thus, this webinar series represents an opportunity to showcase the work done so far and explore possible paths for the future, also considering the finalisation of the seven-year period of Cohesion Policy, and entry into the new one with the next generation of EU funding. The practices developed under the Productive City heading should support cities in their socioeconomic development. In this context, the recent European Commission 2021 Strategic Foresight Report highlights the digital hyperconnectivity and technological transformation as one of the first three major global trends. With digitalisation processes, cities need to adapt to challenges in terms of creating jobs and preserving fundamental social rights.

Part 1: Dynamics and solutions around UAEU Actions and other EU initiatives

The first part of the webinar showcased current local initiatives related to digital solutions carried out in the context of the Urban Agenda for the EU and URBACT. All presentations from speakers are available on Futurium.

Three cities presented their initiatives and projects:

- The City of Porto presented Porto for Talent, an integrated strategy for attraction, development, and retention of talent in Porto and surrounding region, initially designed in the context of the Urban Agenda for the EU Jobs and Skills Partnership. It responds to the challenges faced by cities for the transformation and reinvention of jobs and skills in the urban context, as often the talent demand is not met by the local labour market. For tackling this issue, the city developed a 'talent observatory', 'growing – lifelong career guidance', and a 'talent ecosystem'.

- Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of Florence (member of the Urban Agenda for the EU (UAEU) Partnership on Culture/Cultural Heritage and Action 7 Leader) had to manage 14 million visitors yearly, which led to the creation of the FeelFlorence app. Gathering data from different sources, this tool allows for better management of tourist flows by suggesting unusual itineraries in the city and incentivising visitors to avoid crowded places through providing live information. In this context, Wi-fi hotspots and video surveillance assistance were put in place to develop a smart ecotourism system.

- The Piraeus municipality presented its Blue Growth Strategy with a strategic document at its core, covering Blue Growth and Blue Economy-themed economic, social, and environmental issues, with European and national actions in parallel. The Blue Act project is part of the URBACT TechRevolution Transfer Network, labelled as a good practice related to entrepreneurship competition in the maritime sector. More information on the project can be found on the Piraeus website.

Key take-aways were formulated by Eddy Adams (Programme Expert, URBACT):

- The interconnectivity between the three parallel dimensions of the New Leipzig Charter was underlined, as well as the significance of the current EU programming period in light of the COVID-19 crisis, digital upscaling, and the climate emergency.

- In this context, cities act as facilitators and enablers, and must collaborate among themselves to create local and multilevel partnerships, building relationships based on trust.

- Examples show that working with data, and specifically big data, triggers some necessary adaptation for cities to be able to own, share, and manage it.

- Moreover, optimising available resources through new initiatives and clustering available opportunities to maximise the potential of cities and territories is of key importance for making cities more productive.

Q&A with participants

During the discussion, it was highlighted that talent has the tendency to move internationally, not only in response to wages, but also in response to urban living conditions. In that sense, civil society is of significant importance in supporting cities' ability to attract and retain talent. In response to questions regarding the upscaling potential of the initiatives, it was confirmed that the system behind the FeelFlorence app could be extended to any city that would be interested in using it.

Part 2: Future EU opportunities towards productive cities

The second part of the webinar presented some EU initiatives which can support cities in becoming more productive. It also included a guided discussion with all speakers. All presentations from speakers are available on Futurium.

DG GROW, DG CONNECT, and DG REGIO presented some of their current and future initiatives and relevant EU policy frameworks:

- Cities have a key role in implementing the EU Green deal, and in particular its industrial strategy. The importance of the green and digital transition of European industry, and also of small and medium enterprises, as well as the proximity economy, was stressed. In this context, transition pathways co-created by the European Commission and local authorities, cities, stakeholders, industries, and SMEs resulted in a set of actions to ensure such transitions. In this context, **DG GROW** launched the 100 Intelligent Cities Challenge Initiative, which supports 136 smaller European and international cities in using cutting-edge technologies to lead a green, digital, and socially responsive recovery. It mobilises cities to deliver Local Green Deals (with a dedicated blueprint for action), support the green and digital transformation of local businesses, create new jobs, reskill their workforce, launch local renovation and affordable housing programmes, support the New European Bauhaus and local supply chains, and foster citizen participation and wellbeing.

- In times when cities and communities are looking to digital solutions to tackle a growing range of interconnected challenges, a 'European Way' can offer the right digital solutions to help create places where people enjoy living and working. Thus, **DG CONNECT** developed the Living in EU movement to help cities to build their local data platforms, create a data space for smart communities, create a digital twin toolbox, and prepare roadmaps to be scaled-up. In this context, the local Digital Twins act as a tool for enabling many EU cities to build a digital model of their physical assets, processes and systems, and to help cities take short and long-term operational and strategic decisions, while at the same time increasing the twins' level of maturity and creating industry standards that ensure European interoperability.

- **DG REGIO** presented the urban dimension of Cohesion Policy, which has been reinforced in the programming period 2021-2027. It includes minimum requirements for investment in territorial development, support to a smarter Europe (policy objective 1) in urban areas, and the launch of the European Urban Initiative. In the context of the urban dimension of Cohesion Policy, a handbook on Sustainable Urban Development Strategies was also published. As the first phase of the Urban Agenda for the EU is closing, DG REGIO has been collaborating with Member States and cities on the next steps, which will consist of the renewal of the UAEU through the Ljubljana Agreement, to be endorsed in November 2021. The European Commission will continue to provide support through the European Urban Initiative and its Secretariat.

A **guided discussion took** place, starting with an intervention from the European Investment Bank (EIB), explaining the support provided by the EIB to Productive Cities, following the implementation document of the New Leipzig Charter. There is a need for financing Productive Cities, and also for supporting the regeneration of specific districts of cities, allowing them to function as innovation hubs and smart districts. Thus, the EIB support package available for cities to address their challenges and seize opportunities was presented, including the Jaspers Urban Advisory Programme, and the new web portal on the Circular City funding guide.

The discussion then touched upon the advantages of collaboration, working through partnerships, and developing collective solutions. Challenges and issues are common to all cities in Europe. They affect different territories, and are not restricted to urban areas; thus, solutions must be developed through multi-level decisions and governance. Moreover, working together implies sharing knowledge, and avoids reinventing the wheel, as solutions could already have been developed by others.

Inclusive approaches are also of key importance for cities to become more productive, and this includes engagement with the co-creation processes of new EU initiatives. In this regard, the European Commission is putting forward several initiatives, including the interoperability framework for smart cities and communities and an online dialogue on Smart, Green and Resilient cities and communities between the Commissioner and EU mayors.

The current challenges can represent opportunities for cities, thanks also to the available support provided. The upcoming UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) can act as a platform for cities to be ambassadors in bringing forward new jobs, sectors, and opportunities that can be created. The success of the Green Deal will be based also on ensuring that there is space and opportunities for all. In this context, attention must be paid to equal opportunities, including gender balance, as highlighted in the gender equal cities report.

Conclusions and main take-aways:

- The webinar was concluded by stressing the close connections between the individual experiences of cities in a sectoral dimension, and EU initiatives. Over the last five years, the development and implementation of the partnership approach and the multi-level governance has produced valuable bridges, that could prove useful for future purposes.

- The substantial challenges that cities face, especially after the COVID-19 crisis, emphasise the importance of resilience. However, challenges also mean opportunities, and bringing together talents will allow for the success of the Productive City.

- In this context, it is important to collaborate with neighbouring municipalities, like-minded cities, and institutions, while keeping in mind the importance of adopting an integrated approach and involvement of national and regional authorities.

- Finally, there is a need to capitalise and build on what has already been achieved, making use of the support provided. In this respect, we are in a better place than we were only five years ago.