



The Green City Dimension

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

UAEU Webinar: 27 September 2021



Welcome and introduction

The second event of the series of webinars addresses the Green City dimension, as outlined in the New Leipzig Charter.

Cities play a pivotal role in protecting and regenerating endangered ecosystems and in the use of nature-based solutions, where high-quality green and blue infrastructure are a pre-condition for healthy living environments. At broader EU level, the EU Green Deal represents the overarching policy framework: the long-term ambition of the European Commission is to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 and make Europe the first net zero carbon continent, with one of the most recent milestones being the new Climate Law, which was presented in June 2021. One crucial target is a 55% reduction in

net greenhouse gas by 2030, for which the recent 'Fit for 55' climate package was proposed in July. Cities are on the front-line to implement such changes, and the green transition has already been one of the priorities of the Urban Agenda for the EU (UAEU) and Urban Innovative Actions, among other initiatives. The 2014–2020 programming period put integrated urban strategies in place, out of which 700 included green investments. Cohesion Policy 2021–2027 offers further support to make our societies and economies greener.

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

The first part of the webinar showcased current local initiatives related to energy efficiency and the re-design of cities to improve the wellbeing of their citizens. All presentations from speakers are available on [Futurium](#).

Here are summaries of the main insights from these local experiences and interventions:

- The **Metropolitan City of Bologna** (MCBO) recently launched the Agenda 2.0 for Sustainable Development, a tool that translates the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN 2030 Agenda into local reality. MCBO has exchanged practices and solutions in the field of the green economy, social innovation, and circular economy, through its involvement in a variety of EU-funded projects (including the Partnership on Sustainable Land Use and Nature-Based Solutions, which the city of Bologna participated in). Support for the development of sustainable urban strategies through EU funding includes projects and initiatives such as [Green Startup Support](#) (GRESS Interreg Europe), [Circular Economy for SMEs](#) (CESME Interreg Europe), [Connecting Nature](#), and [Interreg](#).
 - the European [Efidistrict](#) project, for which social variables have been the most complex and important to manage.
- The **City of Prato** presented the Prato Green Deal programme, which it developed in 2014, as well as the [Prato Circular City Programme](#), which promotes and accelerates the transition of a city to circular economy. Being part of the UAEU Partnership on Circular Economy, the city developed actions which were implemented at EU level, including a position paper on water re-use, a [handbook](#) on sustainable and circular re-use of spaces and buildings which was developed in collaboration with the UAEU Partnership on Sustainable Land Use, and a [pay-as-you-throw toolkit](#) (PAYT) for waste management procedures.
- To win its fight against energy poverty and to better adapt and mitigate climate change, **the region of Navarra** promoted energy renovation projects at neighbourhood scale. To achieve this goal, six European projects related to the Navarra Bauhaus initiative and led by Nasuvinsa have been developed since 2009. One of them is
 - Common lines and key take-aways were captured by Eleni Feleki (Urban Sustainability Expert and Lead Expert of the URGE Network, URBACT):
 - Many are the interlinkages between the three city dimensions of the New Leipzig Charter (Green, Productive, and Just) dimensions should remain interrelated, in order to ensure the development of integrated approaches. The integration of these dimensions is present in the strategic plan of the Metropolitan City of Bologna, which could be used as inspiration for other regions and territories, by integrating the European policy framework into the local governance model.
 - Being part of city networks can be beneficial, as underlined by the work carried out by the City of Prato, which, through its participation in the UAEU Partnership on Circular Economy, had the opportunity to collaborate with other peers, contribute to actions at EU level, and put forward its knowledge and experience.
 - Finally, the work of the region of Navarra also highlighted the importance of adapting EU framework policies to local contexts. Participatory approaches in guiding circular and human-centred regeneration processes are of key importance, and represent the common point among the three local experiences presented. The main challenges, however, relate to linking supply to demand, building business models, influencing EU legislation to enable the re-use of secondary materials, and using EU funds in a way that improves people's soft skills.

Part 2: Future EU opportunities towards productive cities

The second part of the webinar was dedicated to looking towards the future in terms of opportunities and ways in which cities can be supported. A guided discussion with all speakers followed. The presentations are available on [Futurium](#).

DG RTD, DG ENV and DG REGIO presented some of their current and future initiatives, and relevant EU policy frameworks.

- DG RTD** presented the [Horizon Europe EU Missions](#), launched at the end of September, and the way ahead for their implementation. Among them, there is a [Horizon Europe Mission on Climate Neutral and Smart Cities](#), which aims to solve major societal challenges, such as greener cities. The main action of this EU Mission is to support, promote and showcase [100 cities](#) in their objective of achieving climate neutrality by 2030, and make them experimentation and innovation hubs. Another relevant initiative is the [City Science](#) initiative, which aims to strengthen science and research to help address urban challenges, and to develop a structured approach to evidence-informed policymaking at city level. Finally, the [EU Research & Innovation for and with cities – Yearly Mapping Report 2021](#) provides an overview of urban-related initiatives and programmes that were funded under the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme. It also maps city policy priorities and future trends under Horizon Europe.
- DG ENV** presented the [EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030](#). With the new European Commission, biodiversity has received an unprecedented policy attention; it no longer takes a backseat to climate change, and it has now been recognised as an integral part of it. The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 states that all ecosystems must be protected and restored, including urban ecosystems. Greener cities are havens for biodiversity and can provide higher standards of living for their citizens. Furthermore, greener cities are sustainable, and can develop nature-based solutions (e.g. against the impacts of flooding, and water and air pollution) which are proven to be not only ethically sound, but also effective and successful. The Biodiversity Strategy calls for the development of greening plans as long-term strategies to help cities optimise the sustainability and resilience of their endeavours. The European Commission is planning to support their development (e.g. mechanisms, tools, funding), and guidance on the development of greening plans should be published at the end of the year.
- DG REGIO** introduced the urban dimension of Cohesion Policy for the 2021–2027 period. Next to making the green transition a top priority (PO2 focuses on a ‘Greener and Carbon Free Europe’), the urban dimension has been reinforced and is stronger compared to the previous period, with a focus on sustainable urban development at all levels (e.g. urban neighbourhood, functional urban area) and inclusion of a new objective (PO 5) in the main framework of the policy: ‘A Europe closer to citizens’. There are minimum requirements for authorities to use the investments in integrated territorial developments. Various support tools for cities were created, such as the [Handbook on Sustainable Urban Development Strategies](#) and the [STRAT-Board](#) developed by the Joint Research Centre (JRC). The period 2021–2027 will provide an opportunity to build on the achievements of the previous periods and capitalise on them through an even stronger integrated and joint approach. In that spirit, the European Urban Initiative (EUI) will bring together many urban initiatives and programmes under one roof to better support cities and meet their needs (for knowledge, funding, capacity building etc.). The support from the European Commission to the UAEU, which will be renewed through the Ljubljana Agreement in November 2021, will continue via the EUI.



Based on these insights a **guided discussion** took place, starting from DG CLIMA, who introduced some initiatives for cities, such as the new EU Policy Support Facility for Municipal Climate Adaptation (which was launched during [the Covenant of Mayors event](#) on 7 October), the [European Climate Pact](#) (which promotes a bottom-up approach in which the Commission reaches out to participants beyond cities), and the [Horizon Europe EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change including Societal Transformation](#). The **UIA Secretariat** reflected on the importance of looking ahead and building on the work that has already been done, underlining that now is the time to capitalise on lessons learned through the collection of knowledge generated by UIA projects, allowing successful innovative practices to be shared. This will provide valuable insights for other cities, stakeholders, and EU policymakers in delivering similar approaches, and also help capacity-building in the future for both bigger and smaller cities.

In the discussion, cities agreed that joining European initiatives and projects is important to boost knowledge sharing and good practices. Cities need to invest in human resources and infrastructure in order to remain up to date on the EU policy context. This is also the case for creating the necessary linkages with international goals (such as SDGs and the thematic areas of the

UAEU) as part of urban strategies. In this context, it is important to ensure that knowledge reaches all cities, especially those of small to medium size. To do so, all relevant information and initiatives should be linked together, making knowledge more accessible. In this regard, Cohesion Policy aims to actively involve smaller cities and encourage them to use all available tools, ensuring that no city or region is left behind. The discussion also touched upon the important role of civil society in local initiatives, which should be involved in the creation of innovative policies. Experience shows that participatory processes are highly beneficial to inform and engage with citizens in developing local strategies. In particular, when it comes to the green transition, promoting a change of culture and lifestyle among citizens will be crucial to achieving meaningful results. It is not only awareness raising that is important, but also truly making citizens actors in the transition.





Conclusions and main take-aways:

- The webinar was concluded by stressing the importance of cooperation at all levels, which can be beneficial in achieving greener cities. Multi-level governance is indeed key for developing effective local strategies for sustainable cities, but peer learning and exchange among cities should also be further encouraged.
- A holistic approach is needed to achieve the Green Deal objectives, starting from the local level. Such an approach should, however, also be inclusive – the green transition should make sure no one is left behind, and that social divides are not further amplified.
- Initiatives and programmes such as the UAEU, Urban Innovative Actions, and URBACT have extensively invested in promoting and experimenting with green solutions, and have demonstrated the advantages of adopting integrated and cross-sectoral approaches toward a more sustainable way of designing cities.
- Future experiences should capitalise on innovations experimented so far, striving for more integrated approaches to a green and just transition, where social, economic, and cultural dimensions are fully integrated.

