

URBACT Annual Conference

Workshop 10 - What role for Managing Authorities of Operational programmes in urban policies?





WORKSHOP 10 - WHAT ROLE FOR MANAGING AUTHORITIES OF OPERATIONAL PROGRAMMES IN URBAN POLICIES?

Workshop report by Pauline Geoghegan
The author is fully responsible for the content of the report

Answering to the request of cities getting involved in URBACT II, more than 120 different Managing Authorities of Operational Programmes have officially declared their intent to take part to the implementation of an URBACT project. For some of them, being associated to the activities of a Thematic network or a Working group, with a group of European cities and other Managing Authorities, turned out to be a real opportunity to better address challenges and develop policy answers in the field of urban development. For others, the experience is still to be assessed.

Key questions

- How are Managing Authorities getting involved within URBACT?
- What are the barriers to an effective cooperation between Managing Authorities and cities within URBACT and how to overcome these difficulties?
- What is the added-value of this cooperation for Managing Authorities?
- What is the impact on the way Managing Authorities support urban projects?
- What lessons to be drawn for the next programming period

Speakers

3

- Anna Krzyzanowska, Marshal's Office of the Lubelskie Voivodship, Poland
- Birgit Nikles, Municipal Department for EU-Strategy and Economic Development - Department for Urban Affairs, City of Vienna, Austria
- Costel Jitaru, Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism, Romania

- Robin Ramsey, Department of Finance and Personnel, Northern Ireland

Moderator: Alexander Ferstl, Urban Unit, DG Regio, European Commission

WORKSHOP REPORT

4

Speakers presentation

Introducing the workshop **Alexander Ferstl, Urban Unit, DG Regio, European Commission** recalled the importance given by URBACT to delivery on the ground. Cities should be engaged. The question will be how to involve cities more in the future.

As representing the Managing Authority for the City of Lublin, **Anna Krzyzanowska, Marshal's Office of the Lubelskie Voivodship, Poland**, attends most meetings (4 so far) of the HerO URBACT project. She also took part in a presentation of Local Action Plans in Brussels at the Conference of 'Regions for Economic Change', where many other Managing Authorities had been present. In Lublin a further event was organized gathering partners and other cities involved in revitalization issues in Poland. Anna described their role as a 'silent partner' in the Local Support Group: though they are not members of the group they try and participate in most meetings. Their Operational Programme includes cultural activities, with one part specifically dedicated to urban regeneration. The HerO meeting in Lublin was organised to coincide with another event in the city: the 'Festival of Tastes'. Personal contact and cooperation characterise their role with the city, and they look forward to future cooperation. They are also discussing organising a conference about JESSICA.

In general the Managing Authority is interested in finding good projects to be funded, and participation in the URBACT project provides them with a view of potential quality projects. Among the **barriers to cooperation**, Anna highlighted the need to define the role of Managing Authorities in URBACT as a whole, and specifically within the project: what is the purpose of their involvement? What are the objectives? Does it just mean contributing to the preparation of the Local Action Plans, or does this cooperation go further? It is also difficult to get decision makers (cities and Managing Authorities) involved, so Anna asked whether Managing Authorities should be stakeholders in the programme. Practical barriers also prevent their full participation, for example time is in short supply. Another key

issue is when the timeframe of a local Action Plan does not coincide with that of the Operational Programme, resulting in the postponement of approvals of funding requests. In the case of the HerO network the Local Action Plan proposals came too late for the current Operational programme but will provide an added value for the preparation of the next Operational Programme.

Future challenges include getting cities more involved in the next Operational Programme. Through cooperation with the cities, Managing Authorities have a better understanding of the needs of beneficiaries. The URBACT programme can also influence beneficiaries, and lead to more high quality projects to be funded. There is also a need to better understand the importance of cooperation between cities and regions, but also that cooperation with Managing Authorities should be extended to other Programmes.

From Romania, **Costel Jitaru**, Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism, **Counsellor to the Managing Authority of the Romanian Operational Programme** recalled that in Romania there is one Regional Operational Programme for all 8 regions. Priority Axis 1 of the programme (30% of the financial allocation) is dedicated to sustainable urban development and finances integrated urban development plans, amounting to €1B. Many local authorities submitted requests to be involved in URBACT networks under the urban priority. As a result the Managing Authority is partner Managing Authority for 27 Romanian cities that are involved urban thematic networks financed under URBACT II.

Not all the local public authorities involved in URBACT networks received a letter of support from the Managing Authority as they would in fact be better supported by other Operational Programmes; so such applications were transferred to these other programmes. The Managing Authority is actively involved in such networks as REGGOV, SUITE, MILE, URBAMECO, etc. Their involvement consisted of participating at various meetings, support in drafting the local action plans, and participating actively in local support groups, etc. There are **barriers** to Managing Authority participation. It is difficult to support some cities and not others as long as there is a competition for structural funds. There is also what is described as a "distance inconvenience", meaning that sometimes it is difficult for the MA to work with cities located in a considerable

distance and participate in local support groups. A solution could be to have an active involvement of the Intermediate Bodies, such as the Regional Development Offices, in the networks and to better link regions with cities. In Romania for example there are 8 regional development offices and only one Operational Programme Managing Authority. Added value of such cooperation will be an increased awareness of local development needs: beneficiaries can identify needs and correlate them to the different Operational Programmes; this would mean that better project proposals would be presented. Finally Costel pointed out that URBACT has an important role in explaining 'integrated urban development', often a new concept in some member states.

Lessons for the future are that the exchange of experience between cities should be continued. The Managing Authority will continue to support Romanian cities to participate in this kind of activities, since this has proved to be useful for our cities and there is a real need for Romanian cities to better understand the integrated approach in urban policies. There should be a better coordination in the timing between the period of drafting the Operational Programmes and the implementation of URBACT projects in order to better link the needs identified in Local Action Plans with EU financing. URBACT networks should also include separate meetings between Managing Authorities to exchange views on integrated urban policy implemented in different countries.

There was discussion with the floor concerning whether Managing Authorities could use technical assistance to help develop good projects. It was agreed that although this could be a good idea it would raise the difficult issue of giving support to all cities requesting it. It was pointed out by Elisabeth Helander that many programmes already use a two step process: a first short period to develop first project ideas, then on the basis of a short 2-3 page proposal a smaller number of projects are selected to go further.

Birgit Nikles, Municipal Department for EU-Strategy and Economic Development - Department for Urban Affairs, City of Vienna, Austria: Vienna is a partner in the Open Cities project. The Managing Authority cooperates well within the city, and is a member of the Local Support Group. The city is responsible for project and programme

management. Their Local Action Plan is nearly complete but it is difficult to identify potential funding opportunities within the different Operational Programmes. The Operational Programme was adopted in 2006, and project started in 2008, so the operational programme could not take the Open City Local Action Plan into account.

Within the Local Support Group the Managing Authority presented the Operational Programme and explained the priorities, not focussing solely on the one programme. In any case the Managing Authority cannot force the Local Support Group to come up with specific projects to suit its programme. This leads to a question as to whether a separate activity could be included in future Operational Programmes to deal with URBACT issues.

Regarding the future of the Local Action Plan, it is being discussed with the political authorities to have measures implemented. Proposals within the Local Action Plan include social issues that are not included in the Operational Programme; other issues concern governance, getting inhabitants more involved; Open City would also like to create assistance for migrants, such as language learning and the possibility to learn about the system in Vienna.

Robert Ramsey Department of Finance and Personnel, Northern Ireland, does not represent a Managing Authority but coordinates between the programmes for the ERDF, ESF, and the special PEACE II programme and Interreg 4A. He also has a responsibility for following transnational aspects of the implementation of the programmes.

Challenges include a lack of understanding of the Managing Authority Role: advising on the Local Action Plan was straightforward but identifying meaningful transnational activities for MAs was more challenging than the local role. They tried to seek guidance or examples of practice by others. Managing the expectations of partner cities meant clarifying that funding was not automatically guaranteed for their Local Action Plans. As the Lead Partner's Managing Authority, the Belfast Managing Authority took on a coordinating role between the project partners' respective Managing Authorities, for example by coordinating a questionnaire to partners, and stocktaking existing similar projects already being funded. They also liaise and disseminate information to other cities. They notify other MAs of transnational thematic workshops and set the agenda for MA group Meetings, monitor

the budget, coordinate agreed actions of the group, and seek guidance from the lead Partner, URBACT or Commission, and disseminate results to others.

The Managing Authorities of the Open City project partners have agreed **Terms of Reference** covering: background, membership, focus and meetings. These include responsibilities: members of the group are expected to:

- “Engage with, and advise and support their local partner city where possible, including in their Local Support Group, and in the formation and implementation of their Local Action Plans Text level 3
- Attend meetings of the Group and project as agreed by the Group and subject to the budget
- Consult and inform other relevant stakeholders and policy leads in their regional administrations
- Agree and engage in a work programme which involves the interests of all members of the Group, including following up agreed actions
- Ensure the Group’s budget is used as economically as possible for travel costs and any other agreed activities
- Ensure that the lessons and findings of the project are provided to the relevant policy organisations and bodies in their region including EU Structural Funds Programmes Monitoring Committees where appropriate. This should include activities for consideration in future EU Programmes subject to paragraph 3 and national procedures concerning regional EU Structural Funds Programmes.”

Lessons learnt: in practice MAs have attended more regularly and been more involved in project meetings. 4 – 5 Managing Authorities are present at each meeting: most of this time is spent within the project meeting rather than organising longer separate meetings which can generate ‘conspiracy theories’. Managing Authority minutes are circulated to all partners; involving the Managing Authorities also means that cities are clearer about their role. Robin had also prepared a presentation of the roles of all the Operational Programmes for their project meeting. The different speeds and stages of partners allow MAs to advise each other, as some have more experience than others; the Managing Authorities agree their role of advice to the Local Action Plans: especially in times of crisis they need to focus on their own cities. Transnational Managing Authority activity is

secondary to the local role but MAs have been supported to carry out their role as advisors.

At local level in Belfast their knowledge of transnational projects is useful to other managing authorities, for example the ERDF can see how some of the Local Action Plan strands can fit into their own programmes, so quality projects can emerge from the Open Cities project. The Managing Authorities are positive, and thanked Belfast City Council for working with them; this way of working has now spread to other projects. The European Commission is also present at all the Open City project meetings, as well as at the Managing Authorities’ meetings.

In discussion following the presentations, to the question as to whether the Managing Authorities would take the Local Action Plans forward to the next period, the response in one case is that yes, they will be taken into account, and that local authorities will be more involved; another Managing Authority representative felt that there should also be better coordination between cities.

Looking to the future, **Alexander Ferstl** confirmed that Operational Programmes will be able to select from sub priorities. The challenge will be to include the urban dimension. It is pointed that that central governments also need to pick up the issue of urban policy, and that commitment is needed from all departments around this issue, despite the local problems of lack of interest, lack of time and lack of language.

Melody Houk, URBACT secretariat, confirmed that URBACT is carrying out a survey of Managing Authorities’ activities within URBACT; they are also gathering examples of good practice, and preparing a guide for cities and Managing Authorities; the aim is that the timing of the third call for proposals under URBACT II will mean that work on Local action Plans will proceed during the period when Local Action Plans are being developed; within this call, network topics will be linked to the 2020 objectives.

In a final round of views the speakers summarised their key proposals for their role in urban policies, and specifically within URBACT:

- Guidance from URBACT (and/or the Commission) on the role of Managing Authorities, and coordinating the timeframe of

Operational Programmes and Local Action Plans.

- Greater flexibility in managing Operational Programmes (activities and financing), and a faster less complicated process for the adoption of projects
- Linking all future network topics to 2020 objectives (since future OPs will be linked to 2020)
- Clear definition of objectives for partners and Managing Authorities

Main conclusions

Arising from the workshop discussions some key points arise for the future:

- **The purpose of the role of Managing Authorities in URBACT:** all speakers agree that this needs clarifying by the URBACT programme, both for the cities and for the Managing Authorities. In Open Cities the Managing Authorities have drawn up Terms of Reference for their participation in the project.
- The experience of **participation of Managing Authorities in network meetings** is mixed: some organise separate meetings between MAs but this can lead to a type of 'conspiracy theory' so it is better to involve them more in the meeting as a whole.
- Managing Authorities also have a role in **dissemination of results.**
- The **timing of Local Action Plans and Operational Programmes** are often out of step, leading to difficulties to able to fund projects within the current OPs
- Managing Authorities can support networks by **giving information about other Operational Programmes** which may be more suited to a particular LAP proposal.
- In future intermediate bodies, such as **Regional Development programmes** (as appropriate), could also be brought into the URBACT network discussions
- The URBACT programme can contribute to improving the **quality of projects** presented under the Operational Programmes
- URBACT has an important role in contributing to a better understanding of the '**integrated approach**', especially in New Member States.
- For some MAs better **coordination between the city departments** can also contribute to successful LAP funding

URBACT II

URBACT is a European exchange and learning programme promoting sustainable urban development.

It enables cities to work together to develop solutions to major urban challenges, reaffirming the key role they play in facing increasingly complex societal challenges. It helps them to develop pragmatic solutions that are new and sustainable, and that integrate economic, social and environmental dimensions. It enables cities to share good practices and lessons learned with all professionals involved in urban policy throughout Europe. URBACT is 255 cities, 29 countries, and 5,000 active participants

www.urbact.eu



EUROPEAN
PROGRAMME
FOR
SUSTAINABLE
URBAN
DEVELOPMENT

