

Introduction

On the 1st December 2010, the second day of the URBACT Annual Conference in Liege, the URBACT Café event was organised. During 2 hours, more than 250 people engaged in the activities of the Programme – representatives of the project partners, Lead Partners, Managing Authorities grouped around the national tables could discuss about the future of the URBACT Programme. To facilitate the discussion, each group was asked three questions:

- **What were the main results from your URBACT project or your experience of working with URBACT?**
- **What difficulties have you experienced with the URBACT Method?**
- **Which main changes and improvement would you propose in the perspective of the URBACT 3rd call for proposals?**

This summary presents the gross results of the URBACT Café deliberations classified by numbers of occurrences. All remarks and recommendations are stored even when they appear only once. .

Q1: What were the main results from your URBACT project or your experience of working with URBACT?

- **Local Support Groups** are a unique characteristic and a real added value of the URBACT Programme. The fact that the creation of LSG is obligatory but also flexible in its structure and organisation individualized URBACT from other trans-national cooperation programmes. These structures

lead to a collaboration of local stakeholders coming from different fields on a precise thematic area. By mutual exchange of knowledge clear goals are defined and critical opinions are shared. The cooperation among LSG members helps eliminating parallel activities and exchanging good practices at city level. **(18 tables)**

- **The participative method and integrated approach** (both for LSG and LAP) are a clear asset of URBACT. LAPs and LSG represent a new way of bringing stakeholders and of working at local level. They give a real experience of making network both at local level and at the trans-national level. **(11 tables)**
- Cooperation at European level increases the social cohesion and broadens the knowledge on specific subjects. It also puts facts, situations and contexts in a wider perspective. Cities can largely and concretely **contribute to integrated urban development policies at EU scale**, while gaining experience in working at international level. **(10 tables)**
- **Exchange of EU best practices.** Thanks to the study visits in selected cities as well as to URBACT workshops and seminars, exchanging experiences at European level became a reality. This is valid for city representants as well as for LSG members from different cities. There is an effective circulation of best practices and overall information in the field of sustainable development. As a plus, a positive spill-over effect of sharing experiences and practices is produce at an individual level, by opening minds and changing behaviour. Identification of good practice and potential for transferability. Nevertheless, there is still work to be done on the actual transferability of good practices between the actors. **(10 tables)**
- **The Local Action Plan is a concrete and useful output** due to its given structure. They are connected to the reality of each city and can be implemented because they respond to concrete needs. **(11 tables)**
- **New ways of working**, for example regarding meeting procedures, have taken place. New innovative approaches for better and active involvement of partners (on-line meetings, on line conferences) have been tested. The URBACT project

has an added value in terms of methodological framework (importance of communication and dissemination, assessment tools) **(9 tables)**

- The local plans that were produced during an URBACT project **attract more easily funding**. Due to the quality of the LAP and to the integrated approach, URBACT LAPs are interesting and realistic results that can be financed by Structural Funds. What is more, the URBACT label has a "leverage effect" for other EU programmes and actors are being capacitated in EU funding. **(8 tables)**
- Generally speaking, there is a **wide recognition of the URBACT label**. Local actions gain more visibility and credibility if they are part of the programme. **(7 tables)**
- **Tighter cross-sector cooperation at local level**. Working within URBACT, and the obligation to create LSG gave new insight and information about **public-private partnerships**. **(7 tables)**
- **The presence of Managing Authorities in the project is an added value**. Working with MAs is challenging and rewarding at the same time. On one side, there is the work of attracting them and obtaining a continuous presence and interest from their part. On the other hand, their participation puts "pressure" on the final LAPs which have to be good and coherent with the OP. It also opens the project to new opportunities. **(6 tables)**
- URBACT was seminal in moving away from target group thinking to real participation and co-creation. The programme creates conditions for **bottom-up-perspective in the local projects** and for engaging people on all levels. Thanks to stakeholders' involvement and to the methodology put in place LAPs are coherent projects that respond to the city's needs. **(6 tables)**
- The possibility that cities take part and reflect in an "**urban laboratory**". URBACT programme provides a real forum where cities can reflect on their own context and work. URBACT project allows to place emphasis on doing proper research on the proposed action which is not the normal course of planning in some cities. This kind of approach provides innovation and inspiration in the way of working at

local level, taking cities beyond what they are doing normally. **(6 tables)**

- Thanks to URBACT it was possible to initiate a **cross-departmental way of working** in a specific area of the city, which had not been done before. It gives the opportunity to the local administration to use to work in group from sector to transversal way (both level political/administrative). It also represents a new way of sharing information and knowledge among workers of the same municipality **(5 tables)**
- **Human capital development.** An individual learning process is put into place through the exchange with other cities and the acknowledgement of other experiences (a capacity building process). **(5 tables)**
- **URBACT as a learning experience** at individual and collective level – learning in relation to a specific theme by comparing one's own practices, approaches and methods and open one's mind to other perspectives. It also implies learning to manage situations with different languages, different political cultures and different working cultures . Learning from each other is the main focus and a benefit for all partners - new and old member states **(4 tables)**
- **Impact on existing Local Policies.** Thanks to the experience gained in the Programme, it was possible to convince local policy makers to implement new initiatives, by exposing them to successful practice in other cities. Moreover, some local authorities integrated Local Action Plans (LAP) in Structural funding. **(5 tables)**
- The participation of **Lead and Thematic Expert** is a positive aspect. Their support refers to contents and methodology as well as general advice on project structure and development. **(4 tables)**
- **Working at a plurality of levels.** One added value of URBACT is the continuous exchange between the European, national and local levels. Developing experience and expertise and networks at all these three levels within the same project is much more rewarding than doing it within separate projects. **(3 tables)**

- Urbact is an **unique programme designed for the cities**, from a learning and networking perspective **(3 tables)**
- **Receiving external (international) input** from the other partners via field trips, workshops, etc. These exchanging moments help in taking stock of strengths and weaknesses and profile/benchmark one local plan against the others. They also provide a clarity of purpose to activities being undertaken - challenges practices and enables them to be refined and confirmed/modified based on critical review. **(3 tables)**
- Added value of the **Fast Track initiative**: strong connections with the European Commission, sensibilisation and better relations with the managing authorities, more chances to get funding for the LAP implementation **(2 tables)**
- The **joint URBACT website** and sub sites /projects/ is better than having separate project websites /an outsider reader can reach everything in one site. The other communication tools and the Wiki page are excellent! **(2 tables)**
- Obligation to have **50% convergence and 50% competitiveness** partners to bring experienced and less experienced partners together. **(2 tables)**
- **The relative small scale of the projects.** URBACT projects are manageable ones, they focus on the local context rather than the alternative programmes which operate on a much higher level. **(1 table)**
- The “competition” between the projects is a good source of energy. **(1 table)**
- The **two-phase structure** is a very positive thing. **(1 table)**
- Development of **Baseline study** in the beginning as input and to develop a common working program. **(1 table)**
- CityLab, excellent tool and way to meet and discuss issues. **(1 table)**

Q2. What difficulties have you experienced with the URBACT programme?

- The **Managing Authorities**, while being able to provide a substantial support to the project partners, are often very reluctant to engage in such cooperation. Often they offer no aid, do not monitor the networks and are not willing to link the activities under the URBACT project with their respective regional Regional Operation Programme. One reason for that might be the fact that the Managing Authorities have different roles and responsibilities than the project partners. Another is the lack of resources and capacities (manpower, funds, time) to engage in such cooperation. **(16 tables)**
- The **administrative burden** of the URBACT projects is considered to be too high, compared to the amount of funding offered to the project partners that manage to go through all the necessary procedures. It is connected with the very strict rules on financing and accountability. It was suggested that lump sums and flat rates for smaller expenditures should be introduced in order to decrease the level of financial bureaucracy. **(10 tables)**
- **Budget and co-financing** The budget of the projects is considered too strict and inflexible. The budgetary lines are far too numerous and it is very difficult to transfer funds from one line to another. Moreover, the co-financing causes problems to the project partners, due to long delays between producing a Payment Claim and receiving actual funds (sometimes amounting to 18 months). Some cities are unable to finance the activities of the URBACT project on their own, without the timely financial aid. This is especially important in times of economic downturn. **(9 tables)**
- The **local stakeholders** are not always aware of the usefulness of the URBACT programme, which might be a reason for their low involvement in its activities. **(6 tables)**
- Due to the above, there are sometimes problems with creating the **Local Support Groups**. The Local Support Group needs a clear mandate/authorisation to participate in the works connected with the URBACT project. Every member of the LSG should have a purpose for participating

in different meetings. It was suggested that perhaps two kinds of meetings should be organized – discussions between all participants and working meetings in smaller, more effective workgroups. It was also stated, that the transnational involvement of the LSG members poses problems – due to lack of sufficient funding and time that can be devoted to such activities.

(6 tables)

- The obligation for the project partners to prepare the **Local Action Plans** is considered by some to be too heavy. It was suggested that the rules of creating LAPs should be less strict and that more time is needed for crafting of such a document. There was even a suggestion from one table, that preparation of a LAP should not be mandatory for all project partners. **(4 tables)**
- The **translation** of all the necessary URBACT documents, so that the city councils in non-English speaking countries could profit from them is costly and poses difficulties. **(3 tables)**
- The **implementation** of the LAPs may also cause problems. The ideas in the LAPs often do not fit into the current Operational Plan. There is no coordination between the drafting of a LAP and of the Operational Program. **(2 tables)**
- The role of the **Lead Experts** is perceived as too strong. It was stated that the LEs are 'difficult to manage'. On the other hand, they have difficulties in being fully involved in the creation of a LAP. **(2 tables)**
- The **criteria of networking** between cities in the URBACT projects do not fully take into consideration the competences and complementarities of the partners. It was suggested that the 50% competitiveness/convergence rule should be made more flexible. **(2 tables)**
- The **dissemination** of the results of the URBACT projects needs to be more effective **(2 tables)**
- There seems to be greater need for **skill sharing** and **deep learning** **(2 tables)**

- The **Pressage system** creates troubles for its users. It should have been functional from the very beginning and there should be trainings on how to use it efficiently. **(2 tables)**
- The **URBACT Website** needs to be more transparent, flexible and user-friendly. It should give more visibility to projects. There is need for better access to existing data-bases **(2 tables)**
- The possibilities to present the results of the projects in a creative form are limited. It was suggested that more possibilities of using case studies and expert commentaries are needed in order to achieve more effective in in-depth presentations **(2 tables)**
- The new participants of the URBACT projects have troubles with understanding its functioning and joining procedures. **(1 table)**
- The lack of clear justification for rejecting the project to the application leader – do not allow to improve with the next proposal. **(1 table)**
- The lack of communication between the Program partners and the URBACT National Contact Point (Greek experience). **(1 table)**
- There seems to be an insufficient scrutiny of networks and experts. **(1 table)**
- There seems to be an insufficient flow of information flow between the Lead Partner, Lead Expert and the project partners **(1 table)**
- There is too little work and progress between the meetings and workshops. Some project partners are very passive and unresponsive. **(1 table)**
- Cities that have more complex system of governance (e.g. the case of Budapest) with elected representatives on the municipal and neighbourhood levels find it difficult to cooperate within URBACT networks. It was suggested that in such situations there should be exceptions from the 2 cities/project rule. **(1 table)**

- The solutions created within the URBACT networks are perceived as technocratic ones. There is little place to discuss the values, that are engaged in decision-making. **(1 table)**

Q3: Which main changes and improvement would you propose in the perspective of the URBACT 3rd call for proposals?

Main results in the order of recurrence:

- More **cooperation with and involvement of the MA**, e.g. informative workshops for the representatives of the MA, more support from the JTS in the relations with MAs, especially when they have difficulties materializing. Include among the evaluation criteria of the Monitoring Committees of ESF and ERDF an incentive (premiability) score for MA that made concrete networking in URBACT Organization of nationwide meeting with the MA; **JTS should offer support in the relations with MAs (8 tables)**
- **Less bureaucracy:** Less formalized application forms. Reduce the amount of reporting to absolutely needed. Simplification of the project management procedures with more flexible rules. Presage system is too complicated and confusing **(8 tables)**
- **Budgetary aspects:** Fewer budget lines and simplification regarding the transfers between them. Reduce budget lines, introduce flat rates instead of detailed budget. Finance information and financial reporting templates should be multilingual. Enhancement of the budget of the projects. LSG should be allowed more important budgets **(7 tables)**
- **Strengthening the links between URBACT and the EU structural/social funds:** Improvement of correlation between the funds of the 4th Community Support Framework and the outputs of the LAPs. National Funding Programs (ERDF, ESF) should have specific budget for the implementation of URBACT projects. **(7 tables)**

- More active role of the **National Dissemination Points**. Promote the dissemination of the project results in the National Level, with the support of the National Contact Points, the MAs and the URBACT Secretariat **(5 tables)**
- **Assure better dissemination:** Better transfer of outcome/experiences from former and current projects to the future ones. Each project should be obliged to end with a final conference with the engagement of the MA, national ministries, public services, NGOs, EC **(4 tables)**
- **Exchanges with other European programs** in order to ensure complementarities and better results. Cooperation between projects developed by former URBACT Networks, within other EU programs, such as CIP, IEE , INTERREG. **(4 tables)**
- **The projects should contain more “functional partners”**, not only institutional ones – NGOs should be engaged as partners, students as well in order to enhance the research dimension of the project. **(3 tables)**
- **More contents, less bureaucracy:** Create conditions for less bureaucratic and more creative structure for knowledge exchange and innovation. More diverse ways of presenting the project activities – multi-media, videos, photos, social media; More space for discussions about values, not only technocratic solutions. **(3 tables)**
- **Make better use of thematic experts.** There should be more involvement of the lead experts in the elaboration of the LAP. Lead Partners should sign a direct contract with the lead experts **(3 tables)**
- **Partnership within the project:** more roles and obligations for project members. Allow the possibility to change the Lead Partner if it is weak and does not do his job. **(2 tables)**
- **Better learning mechanisms within the city** – local actors should benefit from the support of experts, or be able to use documentation facilities, libraries and so on. **(2 tables)**
- **Follow-up of the implementation** of the LAP after the end of the project (by the URBACT Secretariat) **(2 tables)**

- **URBACT website** should have a special space for exchange of project ideas and a project partner search engine (Baltic Sea Region website referred as a possible model). Partner search cafes should be organized during the annual conferences **(2 tables)**
- In times of crisis, a **pre-financing** system would be a good idea **(1 table)**
- More interaction between project within a **thematic pole (1 table)**
- Appoint experts to support the preparation of proposal applications for new member states to become a project partner **(1 table)**
- **Greater external recognition** of URBACT projects. Including the successful deliver an URBACT project it should be formally recognized/accredited in other programme applications. This would give another incentive to participate in URBACT programme **(1 table)**
- Division between **'learning networks' and 'capitalization networks'** as an alternative to the 'thematic networks' and 'working groups' **(1 table)**.
- **Cluster meetings/smaller groups** of partners meetings should be organized in order to analyze specific issues, as a more efficient tool than meetings of all partners **(1 table)**
- **Skill workshops should contain 3 dimensions:** preparing a good LAP, involving and organizing work of the LSG, preparation correct settlement of the eligible expenditure **(1 table)**
- Financial support for the **participation of lead experts at national URBACT meetings** (e.g. national German/Austrian URBACT day) **(1 table)**
- Re-think the **50% convergence-competitiveness ratio (1 table)**
- **The length of working groups** – 18 months too short, please extend to 30 months **(1 table)**
- Draft URBACT Networks in accordance to the **EU Strategies 2020 (1 table)**

FINAL COMMENTS

The Secretariat will analyse in depth these remarks and recommendations and draw lessons for the near future.

Indeed the detailed results will be provided to the mid-term evaluator of the programme, the European Commission and the members of the Monitoring Committee.