
5 – URBAN PLANNING AND DESIGN

We are committed to a strategic role for urban planning and design in addressing environmental, social, economic, health and cultural issues for the benefit of all.

This Commitment is about the importance of a strategic urban planning and design that is needed to address today's urban challenges. According to the "Impact Assessment of the Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment" (IAoTSUE) the land use in our cities is the strongest determinants of an urban area's character and its environmental performance. High density and mixed use settlement patterns can offer many environmental advantages over dispersed and segregated patterns of settlements. Land use policies which encourage urban sprawl can lead to dependence on private car use, greater land-use per capita and correspondingly higher levels of resource use. Urban areas can become more vulnerable to rises in the cost of fuels. For example, the length of the average journey by private car in an urban area increased by 20% in the 1990s. This process is driven by urban sprawl, as the highest increases in journey length (80%) are from the center to edge of the urban area. Journeys within the periphery also showed significant increase (36%).

However, the quality of life in urban areas can be compromised by noise or poor air quality when land-use densities are too high and priority is not given to ensuring quality of life in these areas. The trend for citizens to vacate city centers and live on the edge of the city instead is in part due to the quality of life experienced in poorly managed city centres (other factors such as cost and availability of housing stock are also important). For example, as air quality is improving and pollutants such as lead and sulphur dioxide are no longer significant problems in urban areas, then severe problems remain with pollutants such as particular matter (PM), nitrogen oxides and ozone. Major sources of these harmful air pollutants in urban areas are road transport and domestic heating (industry and shipping are significant in some cities). Road traffic is also the dominant source of noise exposure in cities.

In addition to environmental problems as air pollution and noise, many urban areas suffer from neglect of the built environment. Some 40% of citizens in the larger urban areas in the new Member States (Malta and Cyprus excluded) live in poor quality housing estates. The percentage is even higher in the Accession States. Estimates suggest that three fifths of the homes need major renovation due to low energy efficiency, poor maintenance and related health problems.

The uniform nature of housing estates with their lack of basic services and shops mean that they are not popular neighbourhoods to live in and many are suffering depopulation as citizens are looking for better living standards elsewhere. This may lead to areas of the city with extreme deprivation and encourage urban sprawl.

It is clear that many of the environmental problems facing urban areas have implications for economic and social issues.

We will therefore work to:

1. Re-use and regenerate derelict or disadvantaged areas.

The City Government leadership, local coordinated policies and public private partnerships are crucial in revitalizing derelict and disadvantaged areas. A good example in re-using of contaminated site is an urban Grifpark in the Netherlands that has now an ecological garden and various activities for children (<http://www.utrecht.nl/smartsite.dws?id=4441>). In Italian city Giulianova a big derelict urban area is being developed into area having various facilities for social, recreational and sports (http://www.greenkeys-project.net/it/pilot_projects/giulianova.html?newLanguage=it). In Manchester one of the largest regeneration and renewal project in post-war Britain is founded on strong partnership across public and private sectors in the city and has given greater momentum to a process of urban renaissance in the most deprived areas (http://www.aalborgplus10.dk/media/d05_whitmore_abstract_theme05.pdf).

2. Avoid urban sprawl by achieving appropriate urban densities and prioritizing brown-field site over green-field site development.

Urban sprawl is the unstructured expansion of urban areas into the surrounding countryside (IAoTSUE). Each development is likely to be properly planned and authorized but the overall vision of a high density, mixed use urban area is not maintained. Development takes place at low densities in a sporadic way. There has been an 11% increase in built-up area for just a 2,5% increase in population over the last 20 years. In order to halt urban sprawl the proportion of brown-field developments should be increased and conservation of the green-fields should be ensured (<http://status-tool.iclei.org/>). For example the city of Vienna has decided to create the “Vienna Green Belt” which is a part of a progressive urban planning (<http://www.bestpractices.at/main.php?page=hub/overview&lang=en>).

3. Ensure the mixed use of buildings and developments with a good balance of jobs, housing and services, giving priority to residential use in city centres.

The mixed use of buildings and developments are needed to increase the quality of living in uniform housing estates and avoid urban sprawl. The development and reactivating of inner areas of the city are for example strongly supported by the long term land use plan of Freiburg (till 2020). The development activities are accompanied by a discussion about personal property interests on the one hand and governmental welfare on the other hand. An extended citizens participation has been a crucial underlying method to achieve this integrated landscape plan. It is a democratic, sustainable and effective way to face the future challenge of city development (http://www.aalborgplus10.dk/media/a05_schr%c3%b6der-klings_abstract_theme05.pdf).

4. Ensure appropriate conservation, renovation and use/re-use of our urban cultural heritage.

The cultural heritage in European cities is vast. It is vital that this heritage is protected and reused. The city of Rome is re-looking at the role of historical centres as a focal point for sustainable planning priorities and the array of challenges Rome and Rome province are facing in city development.

(http://www.aalborgplus10.dk/media/d05_carlucci_abstract_theme05.pdf) In Cyprus more than 500 Greek Orthodox churches and chapels and 17 monasteries that are located in towns and villages have been pillaged, deliberately vandalized and/or torn down. In 2002 a Memorandum of Understanding was signed to protect Pre-Classical and Classical archaeological material from Cyprus. (<http://moi.gov.cy/>)

5. Apply requirements for sustainable design and construction and promote high quality architecture and building technologies.

In order to improve sustainability in the built environment it's important to turn the whole building sector into a more sustainable praxis by focusing on the professional building industry rather than focusing on a few examples of sustainable building often built by private builders. For this reason an architectural and environmental targets were defined for a social housing architectural competition in Aarhus, aiming to improve energy efficiency and overall sustainability in the built environment. A valuable lesson from the competition was that the consultants in the building industry are able to build much more environmentally friendly than they actually do, when asked to do so

(http://www.aalborgplus10.dk/media/c05_oehenschlaeger_abstract_theme05.pdf).

The city of Pamplona in Spain has adopted the "Solar Thermal Bylaw", promoting the installation of solar panels for heating water in new buildings

(http://www.aalborgplus10.dk/media/c05_martinez-remirez_abstract_theme05.pdf).

The European Community has funded various research projects that have studied the regeneration of European Cities (<http://www.rescue-europe.com/html/results.html>). In Germany a guideline for sustainable construction and renovation provides guidance on materials selection based on life-cycle comparison, delivers useful information on environmental friendly construction and use of buildings.

The role of local government internally (politicians and officers) is to ensure that urban planning involves all relevant city administration units and that environmental and social issues are considered at the core of the planning process as ignoring these issues would create higher economic costs for the local authority later in the development process.

Externally through capacity-building the local governments should promote and guide real estate developers and owners towards more sustainable construction and real estate solutions. As the topic is so broad the local authorities need a help and collaboration with many experts from various fields. These kind of knowledge centres have been established in several countries, for example Centre for Environment and Planning in UK

(<http://www.built-environment.uwe.ac.uk/research/cep/>) and Planning and Designing – MITE – MÜHLEY in Hungary (<http://mite.zbit.hu/>) Land use planning and designing built environment depends a lot also on proactive involvement of all members of the community.

As stated above that urban planning and design is one of a major source of cities performance in various fields. Thus, this Aalborg commitment has direct links to all other Aalborg Commitments (AC). AC 1 and 2 highlight the importance of decision-making

processes as well as stakeholder and community participation, this in turn requires effective management from the city government. This Commitment has direct influence on the usage and state of natural common goods covered by the AC 3. Urban design has an impact on citizens and businesses consumption patterns and lifestyle choices as in the AC 4 as well as affect directly the transport and mobility issues in the AC 6. This in turn affects the functionality and effectiveness of local economies as in the AC 8. Urban planning and design in combination with other above listed Aalborg Commitments has an effect on peoples health (AC 5), social equity and justice (AC 9). Finally, the urban planning impact through dependence on cars and increasing CO2 emissions has also global dimension as in the AC10.