

Cohesion Policy and Cities: an ambivalent relationship?

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Abstract

Since the early 1990s the European Commission has launched several urban initiatives that were considered to be part of Cohesion policy. Initiatives such as URBAN I and URBAN II were widely accepted as successful urban programmes that helped cities to cope with challenges such as social exclusion and regeneration of deprived areas. We argue that although the notion of *Integrated Sustainable Urban Development* is prominent in the current Cohesion policy programmes and a predefined share of each Member State's ERDF funds must be invested in urban areas, the urban dimension has remains rather 'fuzzy' and ill-defined. It remains to be seen if the new instruments that are thought to provide for better coordination of sectorial policy and more 'focused urban spending' will be implemented by the Members States.

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Introduction: the urban dimension in EU Cohesion policy

Cities initially began to attract the attention of European policy-makers in the late 1980s/early 1990s due to an extensive debate on urban poverty, social exclusion, and deindustrialisation which had a major impact on many urban areas in Europe (Atkinson 2000; Oberti 2000; Kazepov 2005; Murie and Musterd 2004). Since then the urban dimension of European policies has been the focus of considerable debate and discussion; in part this has been a result of the increased presence of cities at the European level, as 'actors' (LeGalès 2002) in the European multi-level polity. Moreover, and arguably more important, cities were increasingly seen as the 'drivers of the economy and of European economic competitiveness', an emphasis strengthened by firmly linking cities to the Lisbon-Gothenburg Strategy (see CEC, 2005 and 2009) and Cohesion Policy as major sources of jobs and growth (CEC 2006). More recently the EU discourse has been supplemented by a recognition that 'competitiveness' can produce negative consequences and that not all cities can be 'winners', also that the single-minded pursuit of 'growth for its own sake' may have negative consequences (e.g. social exclusion, decline in social cohesion) if the benefits are not more widely distributed, thus cohesion has become more important. The inclusion of economic, social and territorial cohesion in the consolidated Treaty of European Union (CEC 2012a), has led to a wider consideration of the need for 'balanced and sustainable development' which seeks to support forms of urban development that attempt to reconcile competitiveness and cohesion, although arguably the primary emphasis remains on competitiveness. Thus the search for 'urban competitiveness' has been supplemented by various forms of cooperation/collaboration enshrined in notions

such as polycentricity and collaborative planning which are intended to function both as mechanisms of development and inclusion. Nevertheless cohesion remains a rather ill-defined term and how its three dimensions – economic, social and territorial – are to be integrated and reconciled with competitiveness is unclear.

We will argue in our chapter that, despite some promising changes during last the decade, the role of cities and the recognition of urban areas as a relevant scale of implementation of European Cohesion Policy remains limited. The renaming of DG Regio as DG Regional and Urban Policy in 2012 indicated a stronger recognition of the importance of the urban dimension. However, the draft Urban Agenda of the European Commission (EC 2014b) published for consultation in late Summer 2014 crystallises this uncertainty, as for the moment it is unclear if it will ever be published as a formal document.ⁱ

Since 2000 a considerable share of the structural funds subsidies have been invested in urban areas reflecting a growing consensus that cities across Europe need to be supported, not only because of their role as the motors of the European economy, but also because they face a variety of challenges (demographic growth and shrinkage, social exclusion, lack of economic resilience, sustainability issues) that require a coordinated European response.ⁱⁱ Also what might be termed a European model for integrated urban policy has emerged in recent years. There is, at the very least, an implicit EU ‘urban policy’ – what may be described as an ‘urban agenda’ (see Atkinson, 2001) or what has more recently been termed the *acquis urbain* (see CEC, 2009). This term has been employed to suggest the building up of a common European methodology of intervention, a body of knowledge and examples of action (e.g. ‘good practices’) that can be seen in broadly similar terms to the *acquis communautaire* (EC 2014d; Atkinson and Rossignolo 2010). However, it remains questionable if the Structural Funds/Cohesion policy have developed a clear European urban strategy for sustainable urban development. In addition, within the context of multi-level governance cities still largely tend to be seen as passive recipients and less as active participants.

In our contribution we will firstly describe the role of cities in European governance. Then we summarize the emergence of European urban policy initiatives since the early 1990s in two sections, giving more emphasis to recent developments. The regulations for the Structural Funds for the period 2014-2020 have signaled the importance of sustainable urban development; for instance, a minimum of 5% of a Member State’s ERDF funding has to be allocated to support integrated actions for sustainable urban development and new instruments, such as Integrated Sustainable Urban Development (ISUD) and Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) have been created, that could allow local authorities to take a more active role in using these funds to address urban problems (including cohesion). However, it seems likely that many Member States will either not use or make relatively limited use of these instruments because national and regional governments wish to retain control (i.e. as gate keepers) of the funds. Therefore, in our concluding section we will reflect on the critical aspects of a form of federalized European urban policy in a multi-level governance system that potentially contains conflicts between member states and DG

Regional and Urban Policy which wants to cooperate directly with city administrations and supports decentralization.

Cities as actors in the European multi-level governance systems

Strictly speaking municipalities are not actors in a European multi-level polity dominated by Member States governments. Municipalities have, for some time, lobbied for both more ‘voice’ at European level and greater recognition of their needs on the grounds that they are responsible for implementing much of of the EUs legislation and regulations (John 2000; Tofarides 2003; van den Berg et al. 2007). Within the institutional fabric of the EU, the Committee of the Regions (CoR) is the forum where cities and regions make themselves heard. The CoR was introduced in 1993 with the finalization of the Common Market (Treaty of Maastricht) but its competences were limited (see Chapter 12, Schönlaue, this volume).

Many European cities reacted quite early to address these deficits by creating city networks and associations such as EUROCITIES, *Quartiers en Crise*, and METREXⁱⁱⁱ as lobby organizations (Atkinson and Rossignolo 2010; Zimmermann 2008; Heinelt and Niederhafner 2008). In addition there are also the Covenant of Mayors^{iv} and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)^v that both represent the interests of local authorities and their associations. Despite all these efforts, the role of cities as actors in European politics is limited as the aforementioned networks and initiatives largely rely on informal measures and persuasive strategies. Their impact may also be limited as it is questionable which, if any, of these networks represents all of Europe’s cities. In other words: they lack a coordinated voice. In general the larger cities or city regions such as Stuttgart, Milano or Barcelona are most engaged in these city networks while small and medium sized cities are not well represented. The situation is further complicated by the existence of different local government systems in Europe which may result in a dispersion of interests and the fact that cities also play different functional and political roles in their own countries (Loughlin, Hendriks and Lidström 2010), taken together this makes the development of a ‘unified voice’ difficult to achieve.

Nevertheless in the course of the preparation of the Lisbon Treaty (2007) lobbying by urban actors had some impact. The treaty brought some changes as the text now reveals a clear commitment to local self-government^{vi} and the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. Also the CoR has been strengthened (it may now call for the European Court to make a judgement if the rights of subsidiarity and proportionality are violated, Zimmermann 2008). Nevertheless, the active role of cities in the European policy process remains limited as it is more of a ‘watchdog’ role rather than an active policy-maker.

The situation is slightly better when it comes to the programming of the Operational Programmes of the ERDF. For instance, in some of the German federal states cities were actively involved in the policy-making process but this is certainly not the case in all Member States as we will discuss later.

Historical background: from the Urban Pilot Projects to ‘urban mainstreaming’

Table 1: Milestones of European Urban Policy

1993-1999	Urban Pilot Projects
1996-1999	URBAN I
1997	<i>Towards an urban agenda in the European Union</i> (‘Urban Agenda’)
1998	<i>Sustainable urban development in the European Union. A framework for action</i>
1999	European Spatial Development Perspective
2000	‘Lille Agenda’
2000-2006	URBAN II and Urban dimension under target 2 of ERDF
2003	Beginning of URBACT (Network of URBAN II cities)
2004	Acquis Urbain (common principles of successful urban policy)
2005/6	‘Bristol Accord’
2005	<i>Report on the urban dimension of the extension</i> (authored by parliamentary group of the European Parliament)
2005	Start of EUKN (European Urban Knowledge Network)
2006	Communication of the Commission on <i>Cohesion policy and cities</i> Urban Framework for action period 2007-2013
2007	Leipzig-Charta for sustainable urban development
2007	Guideline on <i>The urban dimension of cohesion policy 2007-2013</i>
2009	Barca Report on place-based approach
2010	Toledo Declaration
2014	Draft Urban Agenda published for consultation process
2014-2020	European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) period with integration of Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI), Community Led Local Development (CLLD), and integrated sustainable urban development

As a result of the developments outlined in the previous section since the late 1980s the Community’s actions in urban matters have gradually multiplied and taken various forms

(many of these are catalogued in CEC, 2009; see also Table 1). For instance, through the Community Support Frameworks the Commission, between 1989 and 1999, supported 59 Urban Pilot Projects (UPP) under Article 10 for innovative actions of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) regulations which sought to promote urban innovation and experimentation in economic, social and environmental matters, aiming to develop an ‘integrated approach’ to urban regeneration. While in 1994 the Commission launched a special Community Initiative to support urban issues – URBAN I (the URBAN Community Initiative). In 2000, encouraged by the positive experiences of the UPPs and URBAN I, the Commission introduced URBAN II, which then became the main Community Initiative for sustainable urban development, within the general regulations on the Structural Funds (Frank 2006). Another relevant initiative launched in the 2000-2006 period was the URBACT network^{vii} (part of the URBAN II programme) which supports the exchange of information and experience on sustainable urban development across the EU.

The regulations and guidelines for the 2007-2013 programming period of the Structural Funds included a ‘stronger’ urban dimension. The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Cohesion Fund (collectively denoted also as Structural and Cohesion Funds) financed a wide range of urban development projects. While the URBACT II Programme continued the exchange of know-how and experience among key players in urban policy across Europe. Moreover, urban development was also supported by new Initiatives such as JASPERS, JEREMIE, JASMINE and JESSICA (see CEC 2009, pp. 36-37).

We can see from this chronological review that EU actions in urban matters have grown incrementally since the late 1980s, supported by the positive experiences with urban initiatives (most notably URBAN I and II) and the recognition that cities play a vital role in a balanced and competitive Europe. This led the European Commission to mainstream sustainable urban development into the Cohesion policy during the 2007-2013 period. In this period, European cities were expected to benefit in many ways from Cohesion Policy as the Commission anticipated that urban development issues would be integrated in all regional and national programmes supported by the Structural and Cohesion Funds (CEC 2009). As a consequence of this mainstreaming, ‘high profile’ initiatives such as URBAN ‘disappeared’.

The developments outlined in the preceding paragraphs led to the production and dissemination, through both official and informal mechanisms, of a considerable amount of ‘urban knowledge’ and an associated ‘urban methodology’ of action relevant to cities across Europe. What developed was a form of consensus (or conventional wisdom) that both constitutes and functions as a body of semi-official ‘urban knowledge’ developed over the last twenty years based on practices and experiences that have been sanctioned by the European Commission (in this case DG Regional and Urban Policy). For instance the Commission Communication (2006) *Cohesion policy and cities: the urban contribution to growth and jobs in the regions* codifies the argument, within the framework of the Lisbon-Gothenburg^{viii} Agendas, that for Europe strengthening cities is coterminous with strengthening Europe (a similar, arguably stronger, argument is developed in CEC 2009).

In addition to advocating widely held notions such as the dissemination of good practice in urban policy, supporting innovative urban projects, capitalizing on knowledge (knowledge transfer between cities and benchmarking) the added value of these developments, and their contribution to the '*acquis urbain*', may be seen as being constituted by the following:

- coordinating strategies and actions for urban development, supporting public/private partnerships, growing public participation in policy making (horizontal and vertical coordination);
- integrating local problems (housing degradation, socio-spatial polarization, urban poverty, traffic congestion, pollution, degradation of the built environment, etc) and single projects into wider strategies/city wide visions in a city-regional context based on an agreement on sustainable long-term perspectives;
- the need to monitor progress, in different phases of projects (ex-ante, on-going, ex-post evaluations) according to different sets of criteria and indicators (not only quantitative, but also qualitative).

In this context DG REGIO's, *Promoting Sustainable Urban Development in Europe. Achievements and opportunities* (2009) may be seen as summarising and bringing together the outcomes of these experiences. But it arguably sought to do more than this: it attempted to create a particular way of thinking and acting by enunciating a particular methodology (the integrated approach) that entailed new modes of governance (including an enhanced role for citizens) and management (drawing upon New Public Management, NPM^{ix}).

The question remains: what has been the cumulative impact of all these developments? In some countries with long-standing national urban regeneration policies (e.g. the UK, France and the Netherlands) the impacts were relatively marginal. While in southern European countries, but also in Germany, initiatives such URBAN were considered to be policy innovations and had a considerable impact at the local level (Frank 2006; Güntner 2007; Zimmermann 2005; Tofarides 2003). From the 1990s onwards in many European countries local governments experimented with area-based initiatives to combat social exclusion in distressed urban neighbourhoods (Oberti 2000; Atkinson 2000; Atkinson and Carmichael 2007). The contribution of the URBAN experience to the programming and design of the German programme *Social Integrative City* in the late 1990s was significant. The actual amount of subsidies was less relevant to the process. What took place was a diffusion of urban policy principles and governance mechanisms that were adapted to local contexts. Since then a common set of principles of urban policy has emerged also in connection with the formulation of the Territorial Agenda of the European Union (2007).

Atkinson and Rossignolo (2010) described the European methodology of urban intervention (the *acquis urbain*) as a body of knowledge and examples of action. It is more a selection of good practices and principles but not a formalized procedure or set of instruments. The Ministry for Regional Development of the Czech Republic (2010), referring to EU documents, defined the methodology as six principles of urban policy:

Principle 1: The regional nature of urban policy (functional interdependence of cities and towns in regions)

Principle 2: Strategic and integrated approach to urban development

Principle 3: Polycentric development of the population pattern

Principle 4: Promotion of the development of towns as development poles in a territory

Principle 5: Care for the urban environment

Principle 6: The deepening of cooperation, the creation of partnerships, and the exchange of knowledge in sustainable urban development.

These principles have been repeatedly mentioned as forming the core of integrated and sustainable urban development in Europe (Swaniewicz, Atkinson and Baucz 2011; CEC 2009). However, despite the fact that they are widely circulated in background reports, policy papers, etc. they have never found their way into Structural Funds regulations or were explicitly accepted by all member states; moreover, the mainstreaming of these principles has arguably proven to be even less successful.

Recent developments: 2014-20

There was significant discontent surrounding the mainstreaming of URBAN during the 2007-13 period, with even DG Regio (2008) expressing concern about the overall success of the process; the situation was summed succinctly by Swaniewicz, Atkinson and Baucz (2011), who noted:

according to the analyses of the European Commission and the opinion of numerous experts, in many EU Member States (mainly in the EU-12) in the course of... [the 2007-2013 period] mainstreaming the approach that had been successfully implemented under URBAN Initiatives was lost or blurred. At the same time, it has to be underlined that the regulations enabled the Member States to prepare instruments or solutions that could support the integrated urban development – some Member States decided however not to take advantage of those opportunities. On the other hand, in Member States such as France, Germany or the Netherlands, the mainstreaming of the urban dimension is showing good results (ibid, p. 9).

As a result, the Commission decided to take a more proactive approach and took some significant steps to more firmly anchor the urban dimension in the new programming period (2014-20). The measures and mechanisms now in place are:

- each member state has to ensure that a minimum of 5 per cent of its ERDF allocation will be invested in integrated sustainable urban development, which in principle implies that local authorities will have a greater role in administering the funds.
- €330m will be invested in innovative actions in the field of sustainable urban development over a seven-year period.

- A network of cities is supposed to review the ‘deployment on-the-ground’ of European funds. Following the experience of URBACT and European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN) this network will also facilitate the exchange of experience between cities involved in integrated sustainable urban development and in the above mentioned urban innovative actions.
- A new instrument, Community-Led Local Development (CLLD), derived from the LEADER Community Initiative, will be implemented and should secure greater involvement of local stakeholders (or action groups) from all societal sectors. This is expected to be implemented in particular in the realm of neighborhood regeneration but also more widely.
- Another new instrument called Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI) may be used to implement flexible and targeted place-based strategies that combine funding streams from different funds and priority axes (including ESF).

However, it remains to be seen to what extent member states engage with the spirit of these new proposals and actually use them. The Commission has attempted to provide a European framework based on Europe 2020 (CEC 2010) and the Territorial Agenda of the European Union (Hungarian Presidency 2011) which also refers to the principles of sustainable urban development. The intention is that economic, social and territorial cohesion should be at the centre of the approach and the Structural Funds are to be deployed to support these objectives. To emphasise this, the Commission has published a Common Strategic Framework (CSF) to achieve enhanced coordination between all European Structural Investment (ESI) Funds. The objective of the CSF is to ‘increase coherence between policy commitments made in the context of Europe 2020 and investment on the ground. It should encourage integration by setting out how the funds can work together’ (CEC, 2012, p. 3).

In practice the Partnership Agreements will have an important role in structuring territorial development in ways that allow for the greater integration and more focused use of different strands of the Structural Funds. It is in the Partnership Agreements that the role of the ‘urban dimension’ within individual Member States will be more clearly defined. It is here that the strategic use of Integrated sustainable urban development (ISUD), ITI (Integrated Territorial Investment) and CLLD (Community Led Local Development) will be outlined; they will also include the criteria for selection of the cities in which integrated actions for sustainable urban development will be implemented, while Operational Programmes will include the list of criteria for the selection of cities in which integrated actions for sustainable urban development will be implemented. However, the regulations allow some room for manoeuvre and in the dual translation process from the European level to the national level (Partnership Agreements) and then to regional level (Operational Programmes) it is quite possible, if not likely, that the ‘urban dimension’ could become ‘lost in translation’ in some member states. Indeed in some member states there are already signs that there will be only limited use of the new instruments such as ISUD, CLLD and ITI.^x Initial feedback suggests that Member States will use these new instruments selectively and sectoral approaches will tend to dominate over integrated territorial approaches.

As a result the way(s) in which the ‘urban dimension’ develops in the new period will vary from country to country and within countries from region to region (Van der Zwet, Miller and Gross 2014). Much will depend on which cities are selected for action, how ISUD and ITI are deployed and the role allocated to CLLD. What is likely to happen is that some Member States will enthusiastically utilise these new opportunities to develop the ‘urban dimension’, although these are likely to be coupled with existing strategies to support the development of urban areas and/or clusters of cities/towns identified as having a key role in improving national and regional economic development and competitiveness (EC 2014d; Van der Zwet, Miller and Gross 2014). What remains unclear is the extent to which this approach will be used, along with other instruments, to address wider territorial imbalances and enhance territorial cohesion. Furthermore the degree to which cities take on responsibility for managing integrated sustainable urban development is likely to vary; in part this will depend on the attitudes of national governments and managing authorities, but also on the capacity of cities to carry out such a task. However, we do not agree with Tortola (2013) who stated that the mainstreaming of URBAN ended the ‘EU’s engagement in explicit urban policy’ (ibid. p. 2), not least because it is highly questionable if the EU has ever had what amounts to an ‘explicit urban policy, arguably, as we have suggested above, there has been an ‘implicit urban policy’ for some time and if anything this has been strengthened in recent years.

Impact and learning

We would contend that despite recent developments the role of cities in European Cohesion policy is ambivalent. Today many cities in the Member States are potential beneficiaries of Cohesion policy; the CSF and new ERDF regulations directly refer to integrated urban development and support the use of new instruments, such as CLLD and ITI. But we can also conclude that European ‘urban policy’ or the ‘urban dimension’ of Cohesion Policy is a somewhat slippery notion and it remains difficult to pin down exactly how it will be implemented in the Member States and what it means in practice. In part this is inherent in the need to take on board that the process should not simply be viewed from a top-down perspective, but also as a process that can take bottom-up and horizontal forms. Moreover, we should see it as taking place at different spatial scales that interact in unpredictable ways and varying across policy/sectoral domains. In addition to Cohesion Policy other EU policies such as the European environmental policy (air pollution control, noise reduction) and the European transport policy have considerable impact on local governments and cities. Also DG Connect identified cities as a relevant scale and object for intervention, referring to the notion of Smart Cities.^{xi}

In strict formal terms there is no role for a European urban policy in the Treaty of Lisbon but a process of ‘Europeanization of urban policies’ across Europe clearly has taken place during the last two decades. There is no question that the reluctance of Member States and regional authorities to accord a significant, treaty based, role for the EU in urban matters is a major obstacle to the emergence of a European urban policy. There are, however, a number of other factors that need to be taken into account:

1) **Lack of coordination.** As stated in a Commission document: ‘The different European Commission DGs are tackling urban agendas differently’ (EC 2014d, p. 53). Urban policy as well as Cohesion policy is a cross-cutting issue and urban mainstreaming within the Commission faces the same problems that can be observed at the national and regional levels. Sectoral approaches to policy-making are frequently acknowledged to be ineffective but a lack of coordination and integration is a problem that is spread across all levels of policy-making. This has been confirmed by a report about the implementation of 50 Urban projects in the ERDF phase 2007-2013 (Ramsden and Colini 2013).

2) **Different salience and prioritisation.** Some Member States give priority to urban policy while others do not. Indeed some Member States have an explicit national urban policy while others do not. The different priorities and emphases accorded to urban issues across Europe have obstructed the emergence of a more binding European model for urban intervention that goes beyond the above mentioned policy principles.

3) **Diversity of cities and urban realities in Europe.** At a general level it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to identify a common notion of the ‘European City’ (in both a normative and conceptual sense) (see the discussion by Häussermann and Hailia 2005). This creates a challenge for any European urban policy which therefore requires both a clear vision of what sustainable urban development means and one that is able to embrace this diversity. Such a task is a challenging one within such a diverse body as the European Union when there is not even an agreement among Member States that an EU Urban Policy is necessary.

Moreover, urban realities and local government systems are highly diverse in Europe and so are the challenges that need to be addressed locally (shrinkage, growth related problems such as congestion and sprawl, energy efficiency, flood risk, poverty and social exclusion, economic decline, contaminated brownfields, protection of cultural heritage, etc.) (Ramsden and Colini 2013). In some Member States municipalities play a very important role in the implementation of welfare state goals, and therefore are responsible for social cohesion (i.e. Sweden, Germany), in others they did so in the past but today face severe budgetary problems, while in some member states municipalities provide only residual welfare services. Following Kazepov (2005; 2008) and Sellers and Lidström (2007) we see the type of local government systems as an essential feature of welfare regimes that also structures the role of cities in (European) urban policy. However, due to welfare state and wider reforms (e.g. as expressed in New Public Management and decentralization of social services without sufficient financing) central-local relations are changing (Sellers and Lidström 2007; Kazepov 2008). Comparative research on national welfare regimes has pointed out that the administrative and fiscal capacity of local government as well as the level/degree of legal supervision differs considerably between welfare regimes (Sellers and Lidström 2007). We argue that these differences matter and that they impact on the capacities of local government to address problems. At the moment the European Union is not able to support local authorities significantly when it comes to important welfare policy fields such as housing. As a consequence we cannot describe European Urban Cohesion Policy as a federated city

welfare programme (similar to the German *Städtebauförderung* or the French *Politique de la ville*, see: Couch, Sykes, and Börstinghaus 2011).

4) Ambivalence of territory and institution - missing acknowledgement of territory or place. Governance is important because by bringing together the different stakeholders in a place a strategic and action dimension can be developed. However, many territorial and urban issues transcend traditional institutional/administrative boundaries and across Europe there remains a profound mismatch between them. In various places across Europe attempts at developing ad hoc solutions to these problems have been put in place, but they have rarely been successful or long-lasting, often foundering on traditional rivalries/conflicts between adjacent administrative areas in which the governing elites seem unable to transcend/set-aside these rivalries. At European level the Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion (CEC 2008) represented a significant step forward in the development of an approach that sought to bring together the territorial, social and economic dimensions, recognising that they cannot be considered in isolation and that, as a result, policies must be developed in an integrated manner and directed at 'meaningful places of intervention' (i.e. not limited by administrative boundaries/borders) (see Barca 2009, p. 93). However, this approach has been inadequately followed through at European, National and sub-national levels leaving the dissonance between territory and administrative unit largely intact (EC 2014d, p. 13-14; see also Servillo 2010; Atkinson 2012).

5) The problems of mainstreaming the urban dimension of European Cohesion policy. The omens for the new programming period are not particularly encouraging; once again the update of the new instruments is likely to be very mixed (EC 2014d). In part this is simply *because they are new* and those responsible within Member States are not familiar with them and lack the knowledge and experience to develop the more integrated and territorially fluid approaches required. Moreover, using a new approach would also challenge long established sectoral approaches and the interests associated with them; it is never easy to bring about a 'reframing' of how strategy and action are conceived and implemented, and to create new institutional/organisational forms to implement policy. Despite a growing awareness of the need to do so, progress has remained painfully slow on the ground. Even where cities have apparently embraced European notions of sustainable urban development '... this does not mean that they are simply, or directly, translated into the organisational structures and practices of a country or city, in a sense they undergo a process of transmutation shaped by national (and local) political structures, traditions and cultures' (Atkinson and Walliser 2013, p. 146).

6) The marginalisation of anti-poverty orientation. It is instructive to recall one of the most interesting European 'urban initiatives', ironically under the umbrella of what was then known as Directorate-General V (Employment, Industrial Relations and Social Affairs): Poverty 3. This Community Initiative ran from 1989-1994 and its aim was to promote effective strategies to combat social exclusion in Europe; its key principles were partnership, multi-dimensionality and participation. While this initiative has largely been forgotten, its principles were central to much of the thinking at European level and within Member States

when addressing urban issues. Thus during the 1990s the debate was clearly focused on urban poverty and social exclusion (see Atkinson 2000). However, as the emphasis began to switch to 'urban competitiveness' and more recently 'sustainable urban development' the poverty/social exclusion dimension has become more marginal and the European urban agenda has, in a certain sense, become more diffuse. Currently what we term European urban policy has become trapped in the ambivalence of linking competitiveness and social cohesion through a place-based approach. The place-based approach, while entirely laudable, is in danger of becoming a generic 'cure all' lacking the specificity originally intended in the Barca Report (2009). In a similar manner the notion of sustainable urban development is a broad theme and has a degree of 'plasticity' which means that it can be defined and redefined in a multiplicity of, often conflicting, ways to suit a range of interests and situations. Given this fluid situation it remains to be seen whether a clear urban policy emerges or whether sectoral policies will continue to dominate. Thus we are inclined to ask: Is there still a European urban question that needs to be addressed by new instruments (as we experienced it in the 1990s with social exclusion and area-based initiatives)? Or are there a series of European urban questions that constitute a 'menu' Member States can select from according to their interests and priorities? If it is the latter, then the prospects for a coherent 'European Urban Policy', building on the urban dimension in Cohesion Policy, remains remote.

To sum up we have argued that over the period since the late 1980s/early 1990s a range of urban initiatives have been developed and supported by the European Union with the gradual emergence of an 'urban agenda'. There is no question that the European Commission, most notably what is today called DG Regional and Urban Policy, has sought to include a stronger emphasis on urban issues in the Structural Funds and Cohesion Policy through the development of an explicit urban dimension, most notably in the new programming period. However, we have also noted the continuing tensions and ambivalence between 'urban competitiveness' and social and territorial cohesion, with a general tendency to favour the competitiveness dimension. Moreover, some Member States have tended to be reluctant to fully embrace new policy instruments provided by the Commission that have the potential to create an integrated approach to sustainable urban development (however defined). In combination with the range of local government systems and variations in central-local relations and the position of cities within the European multi-level polity the outcome is, perhaps predictably, a highly fragmented 'urban policy landscape' across the EU with the urban dimension as contained in current Cohesion Policy taking a multiplicity of national forms. More generally we have suggested that while there have been attempts to define a 'community method' appropriate for sustainable urban development through the development of the *acquis urbain* the urban dimension remains a rather 'fuzzy' and ill-defined field of thinking and action amenable to multiple, and conflicting, interpretations. Perhaps this is inevitable as the Commission, lacking a treaty basis for action, attempts to develop a 'consensus' around what constitutes sustainable urban development and the urban dimension.

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ⁱ At the informal meeting of EU ministers responsible for territorial cohesion and urban matters in June 2015 in Riga the ministers expressed their desire to support the EU Urban Agenda (Latvian Presidency 2015)

ⁱⁱ This is demonstrated in the last report on economic, social, and territorial cohesion that refers frequently to urban areas (European Commission 2014).

ⁱⁱⁱ These city networks emerged during in recent decades mainly because cities had very limited access to the formal sphere of European politics. Some of these networks are issue-based (climate change, social exclusion) or have a broader agenda (EUROCITIES). They all have in common that they want to facilitate exchange of knowledge between cities and that they aim to make sure that urban issues are on the political agenda (lobbying). EUROCITIES represents larger European cities such as Barcelona or Stuttgart and is probably one of the strongest city networks with strong presence in Brussels; in some ways it has gone beyond being merely a ‘peak’ representative and lobbying organisation and has also become a source of ‘technical expertise’ on urban matters that is often consulted by the relevant sections of the European Commission (notably DG Regio). METREX was founded in the mid 1990s and represents metropolitan areas and city regions. *Quartiers en Crise* is also a network of cities, however, its focus is on developing an integrated approach to the regeneration of deprived urban areas.

^{iv} The Covenant of Mayors is an initiative of thousands of political leaders of European municipalities, counties, provinces, departements, etc. that support actions against climate change. <http://www.covenantofmayors.eu>.

^v In contrast to EUROCITIES and METREX CEMR represents a much larger number of local authorities (150.000) also from non-EU countries. It was founded in 1951. www.ccre.org

^{vi} This refers at least in part to the European Charter of Local Self-Government, a policy document published by the Council of Europe in 1985.

^{vii} URBACT is a programme of the European Commission co-financed by the Cohesion Funds and ERDF. Its function is to support the exchange of knowledge and best practice on urban policy between cities.

Knowledge networks like URBACT are a further example of how the Commission has sought to construct an ‘urban dimension’ despite lacking a formal (treaty based) competence in urban policy. www.urbact.eu

^{viii} The Lisbon-Gothenburg agendas refer to two ‘merged’ overarching approaches developed by the EU. The Lisbon Agenda aimed to make Europe the world’s most competitive and sustainable dynamic

knowledge-based economy in combination with increased high quality job growth and enhanced social cohesion. While the Gothenburg Agenda supplemented the largely economic focus of the Lisbon Agenda by adding on the sustainability (in the environmental sense) dimension.

^{ix} New Public Management represents an attempt to modernise the public sector and make it more efficient. This involves the greater use of market mechanisms and treating public service users as customers. It may involve privatisation of public services, the introduction of quasi-market mechanisms into the public sector, outsourcing of service provision (to private or voluntary delivery bodies) or some combination of these. A good overview can be found in Lane, 2000).

^x See for instance the Operational Programme of the German state of Northrhine-Westfalia that clearly says that ITI will not be implemented (NRW 2014)

^{xi} Smart cities is one of the lead indicators for the measurement of impact of the Digital Agenda: <https://ec.europa.eu/dgs/connect/en/content/smart-cities-0>, accessed 7 May 2015.