Making our cities attractive and sustainable

How the EU contributes to improving the urban environment

environment

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4

Table of contents

How the EU contributes to improving the urban environment

Making our cities attractive and sustainable

Foreword

The Urban Environment is important for all of us, not least because so many of us live in cities. The European Commission recognises the role that cities play in the lives of so many Europeans and has committed itself to act in this area. Urban environments directly influence the lives of millions of European citizens and, in turn, have a substantial impact on the wider environment. Europe's cities need more than ever to be sustainable and should offer the kind of quality of life and opportunity that make people want to live in them and make businesses want to invest.

There is a contradiction in the urban equation, however. Urban areas drive economic development and deliver many public services, such as education, healthcare and transportation; but they are also associated with environmental degradation, congestion, economic and social exclusion.

To improve the quality of the urban environment has therefore become a major objective for policy makers. But making sure that urban policies are coherent is a challenge. There are many institutions – both sectoral and territorial – with different aims, and policies are often carried out independently and with conflicting effects. The fact that urban issues are implemented locally while having a European or even global impact is also a big challenge. This demands effective co-ordination in all directions and at all levels; regionally, at member state level and in Europe.

The EU is working to ensure a future of healthy, attractive and vibrant towns and cities for future generations. It has ambitions to create a more competitive, sustainable and inclusive continent in an increasingly globalizing world. To realise this ambition, we need attractive areas to live, work and relax in. And creating liveable urban areas is a key way of establishing Europe in a strong economic position in a highly competitive world.

We recognise that there is no simple 'one size fits all' solution to achieve this. And for that reason the Commission is supporting EU wide exchange of best practice. This is what this brochure is about. It is meant as a useful resource for cities across Europe on how the EU is working to improve the urban environment. I am confident that it will be of interest to many Europeans who want improve their city environments and the quality of life for their citizens.

How the EU contributes to improving the urban environment

The EU and the urban environment

Key elements of the EU's approach to the urban environment:

❑ The **Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment** aims for better implementation of existing EU environmental policies and legislation at local level through exchange of experience and good practice between Europe's local authorities, in order to achieve 'a better quality of life through an integrated approach concentrating on urban areas'. Its principles and approaches are reflected further in other strategies such as the Thematic Strategy on Air Pollution.

❑ The **Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities** demonstrates a further commitment to making our cities healthy, attractive and sustainable places to live and work in.

❑ The renewed **Sustainable Development Strategy for the EU** calls for the creation of sustainable local communities with a high quality of life, attention to urban transport and greater cooperation between urban and rural areas.

❑ The renewed **Lisbon Strategy** sets as a priority the high quality of urban environments to 'make Europe a more attractive place in which to invest'.

❑ The **Europe 2020 Strategy** builds on the Lisbon Strategy and sets out a broader approach aimed at achieving a resource efficient Europe. This means decoupling economic growth from the use of resources, supporting the shift towards a low carbon economy, increasing the use of renewable energy sources, modernising our transport sector and promoting energy efficiency – actions that will affect Europe's cities.

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Introduction

Cities make up only two percent of the earth's surface, yet they are home to over half of the world's population. In Europe, the proportion of urban dwellers is even higher. Today, nearly 75% of Europeans live in cities and urban areas, and by 2020 this is expected to rise to 80%.

People choose to live in urban areas so they can have a better quality of life. They want to be at the heart of economic activity, and to have more job opportunities and other social and economic advantages. However, city living brings a range of challenges. While living in close proximity to our daily activities can lead to more resource efficiency and so contribute to sustainability, other factors such as air pollution can be far more acute in cities. Overcrowding, traffic pollution and noise, and industrial emissions are just a few of the issues that have to be constantly monitored and addressed to achieve a high quality of life without high environmental costs. But doing this will also bring benefits beyond city borders.

The European Union is committed to making Europe's cities healthy, attractive and sustainable, and to improving citizens' quality of life, now and for the future. Over the last 50 years, European cities have seen dramatic improvements in terms of mobility, green areas and waste management, and this has contributed to a significant improvement in living standards. However, Europe's cities still face a number of environmental challenges which influence the everyday lives of millions of Europeans and these often highly political issues need to be tackled through cooperation between local, national and EU authorities and their stakeholders.

In line with the principle of subsidiarity, the EU works closely with Member States and local authorities to address these challenges and ensure a high level of protection for citizens who live and work in urban environments. It promotes best practices and fosters an ethic of sharing of experiences and information among local governments working to make their cities sustainable.

The EU also acts in several other important ways: setting policies, adopting legislation including minimum quality standards, encouraging cooperation, and providing financial resources to support initiatives, notably in less advantaged areas of Europe. A key feature of many of the EU's laws and policies in areas such as environmental protection, regional development and transport, are measures aimed specifically at protecting and managing the urban environment.

This brochure reviews the many ways in which the EU supports citizens and local governments in their efforts to make our cities and towns clean and healthy, green and pleasant, efficient and sustainable, well-managed and democratic.

The EU's policies and measures in support of a quality urban environment for citizens are continuously evolving. As new issues come to the fore, additional policies and programmes are being developed to keep our urban environments clean, green and healthy.

How the EU contributes to improving the urban environment

Clean and healthy

Clean and safe drinking water, effective wastewater treatment, clean air, and proper waste disposal are basic elements for a high quality of life in Europe's cities.

Safe water to drink

A clean and healthy city guarantees its citizens access to clean and safe water for drinking and other daily uses. The EU recognises the importance of clean drinking water through the Drinking Water Directive (98/8/EC) which ensures that the water delivered to citizens via urban water supply systems is safe to drink. Cities and towns must regularly monitor the quality of water delivered at the tap and keep consumers informed of the quality.

A clean urban environment is among the goals of the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive (91/271/EEC). This Directive requires all cities and towns with populations of 2000 or more to have sewage collection systems in place and to treat the wastewater to certain minimum standards before it is discharged into the environment. Although it is the most costly of all of the EU environmental requirements to implement, the reductions in pollution it has brought are significant. This legislation has helped clean up our rivers, lakes and coastal areas and has been important for meeting the health-based standards of the Bathing Water Directive (2006/7/EC).

Overall protection for Europe's precious water resources is provided through the Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC), which sets in place a framework for river basin management aimed at achieving good status of EU waters by 2015 while balancing the competing demands for water from consumers, agriculture, industry and nature. Other measures aimed at preventing pollution from contaminating our water resources include directives on Priority Substances (2008/105/EC), Integrated Pollution Prevention & Control (IPPC) (2008/1/EC) and Groundwater (2006/118/EC).

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Clean air to breathe

Air pollution seriously affects human health, damages our ecosystems and causes deterioration of buildings and monuments. Cleaning up our cities' air is another key priority for the EU. The EU's Clean Air for Europe strategy, which includes the Cleaner Air for Europe (CAFÉ) Directive (2008/50/EC), forms the overarching policy framework for achieving safe air quality levels for all citizens, notably those living in cities.

The CAFÉ Directive sets harmonized, health-based standards for the air pollutants of greatest concern. It requires governments to define air quality zones covering the entire country; boundaries are set based on population density and exposure criteria. Where standards are not met, air quality management plans must be developed by the local and national authorities holding responsibilities for these zones to achieve the quality standards throughout the zone or country as soon as possible. These plans tackle pollution from the worst local sources, which often include transport, domestic heating and local industry. The Directive also includes mechanisms for informing citizens about the quality of the air they breathe, including when local air pollution reaches potentially unhealthy levels and special measures are needed.

Many urban areas are also industrial centres. Controls over environmentally damaging emissions from some of the heaviest air polluters are in place through the Large Combustion Plants (2001/80/EC), IPPC (2008/1/EC), and Waste Incineration (2000/76/EC) Directives, along with two directives (94/63/EC; 1999/13/EC) controlling VOCs (volatile organic compounds – which contribute to ozone formation) resulting from the storage and distribution of petrol and the use of organic solvents in certain activities.

Citizens wanting to know more about emissions from major sources of pollution near their cities and towns can log onto the European Pollutant Release and Transfer Register. The E-PRTR (http://prtr.ec.europa.eu/) provides access to emissions data reported annually by some 24,000 industrial facilities covering 65 economic activities across Europe.
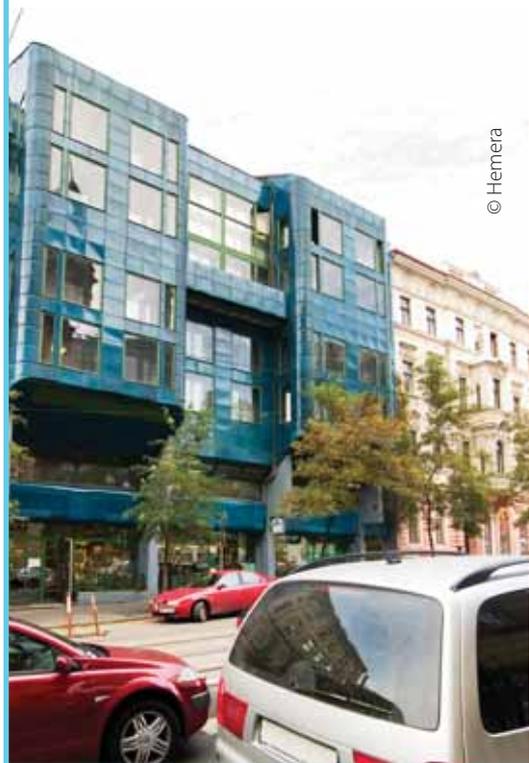
Did you know...

The protection of water resources, ecosystems and the water we drink and bathe in are key priorities pursued in EU regulations – and financing programmes. In the 2000-2006 spending cycle, projects supported by the EU Cohesion Policy funds connected 14 million Europeans to modern water supply systems, and 20 million citizens to wastewater treatment.

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Motor vehicles are another major source of air pollution in our urban environment. The EU regulates vehicle emissions through two Directives covering cars and vans (70/220/EEC) and heavy-duty vehicles (88/77/EEC), and a series of amendments which steadily tighten these emission standards. Also important is the Fuel Quality Directive (2009/30/EC), which aims to further reduce polluting emissions from petrol by setting minimum quality standards. The Directive also addresses climate change by requiring a minimum 6% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from road transport by 2020.

Collection and disposal of solid waste

Every year, each of the 500 million citizens living in the EU throws away more than half a tonne of waste. The management and disposal of this waste is a major challenge for our cities and towns. The Waste Framework Directive (2008/98/EC) sets out basic concepts and principles for waste management across the EU, such as the "polluter pays principle" and the "waste hierarchy". The waste hierarchy sets an order of priorities for waste management with the preferred option of waste prevention, followed by re-use, recycling, other forms of recovery such as energy from waste, and improved final disposal followed by monitoring. Waste should be managed so that it does not endanger human health, harm the environment, pose risks to air, water, soil, plants or animals, be a nuisance through odours or noise, or adversely affect places of special interest.

Several waste streams have been targeted for special attention by various EU directives, including Packaging Waste (94/62/EC), End-of-life Vehicles (2000/53/EC), Batteries (2006/66/EC, as amended), and Electrical and Electronic Equipment (2002/96/EC). Most of Europe's cities and towns now have special systems in place to collect, re-use, recycle and dispose of these types of waste. In fact, several EU countries already recycle over 50% of packaging waste. The Waste Framework Directive introduced new targets for Member States to recycle 50% of their household waste and 70% of construction and demolition waste by 2020.

Did you know...

The EU's waste management requirements have led to increased composting, recycling and incineration with energy recovery. Despite this progress, the total amount of household waste produced per EU citizen continues to rise each year. This issue is receiving heightened attention as the EU focuses more strongly on resource efficiency.

When waste cannot be re-used or recycled, it must be disposed of, with landfill only used as a last resort. Incineration can lead to energy recovery and is regulated by the Waste Incineration Directive (2000/76/EC). The Landfill Directive (99/31/EC) sets strict guidelines for landfill management, including targets for reducing quantities of biodegradable waste. Although 45% of municipal waste is still sent to landfills, an increasing amount is composted (37%) or incinerated with energy recovery (18%). (See more under Resource Efficiency below.)

EU funds can help cities implement waste legislation. For example, in Râmnicu Vâlcea, Romania, a city with a population of over 100,000, EU funds have been used to close an unsanitary landfill site and build a recycling centre and composting station.

Toxic free

Concern is growing about the effects of exposure to hazardous substances because of their potential harm to human health and so there is a need for careful monitoring, review and regulation of chemicals in general. The EU has set a new international standard for chemical regulation through the REACH Regulation (EC/1907/2006) on the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemical Substances.

Further regulatory controls important for the urban environment are provided through the Plant Protection Products Regulation (EC/1107/2009), the Biocides Directive (98/8/EC), and the recent Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive (2009/128/EC). The latter requires Member States to draw up National Action Plans for reducing risks and impacts of pesticide use on human health and the environment, taking account of specific national, regional and local conditions. Provisions include measures to protect drinking water and to reduce pesticide use or risks in specific areas such as public parks and gardens, sports and recreation grounds, school grounds and children's playgrounds.

Green and pleasant

Green spaces, quiet streets and recreational parks are important for relaxation, health and sport, nature watching and social activities. Open areas and green parks are important building blocks for promoting quality of life in urban environments.

Green urban areas

Several EU policies and laws support cities in using land sustainably by providing green habitats, quiet places to live and respecting urban heritage. The EU's promotion and protection of green spaces help to restrain urban sprawl which, if unregulated, can lead to dependence on private car use, increased land-use and higher demand on resources, as well as detrimental effects on the services nature delivers to us.

Green spaces are promoted through the EU legislation for nature and biodiversity protection. The Habitats (92/43/EEC) and Wild Birds (2009/147/EC) Directives require Member States to protect habitats and species of EU conservation concern (including all wild bird species, a range of other species from bats to bears, as well as rare and vulnerable habitats). The most important sites for these habitats and species should be designated as protected areas. This long-term effort has led to the establishment of the Natura 2000 network, comprising over 26,000 protected areas across all the Member States and covering nearly 20% of the EU's land area. Several EU cities are home to Natura 2000 sites: the Sonian Forest in Brussels is one example of a growing number of sites within urban boundaries. These sites, as well as Natura 2000 sites outside urban areas, provide ecosystem services for city dwellers such as water catchment, air purification and recreation.

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Did you know...

A number of cities across the EU are drawing up action plans to reduce pesticide use or risks in public urban areas such as public parks and gardens, sports and recreation grounds, school grounds and children's playgrounds.

14

The EU also fosters green space initiatives through its funding programmes. For example, the "Green and Blue Space Adaptation for Urban Areas and Eco Towns" (GRaBS) project, supported by Cohesion Policy funds, promotes urban planning efforts aimed at preserving and adapting open spaces to improve quality of life while also combating climate change. Additionally, the LIFE funding programme has supported a number of projects creating green infrastructure in urban, peri-urban and rural areas.

Biodiversity friendly

Biodiversity makes our cities green and pleasant places. Yet biodiversity is extremely delicate and frequently threatened by urban development.

The Habitats and Wild Birds Directives require the integration of biodiversity concerns into spatial planning. Many areas of urban policy can help foster biodiversity in cities – for example, by removing deterrents such as transport noise or specifically allocating space for nature reserves. Moreover, Natura 2000 procedures exist to avoid or minimise the impact of planned projects that could significantly affect any Natura 2000 site such as proposals for road development.

If managed correctly and smartly, urbanisation can actually contribute to biodiversity through spatial planning at city level. The EU is in the process of developing a strategy on green infrastructure to protect biodiversity and ecosystem services. The strategy will embrace both the Natura 2000 network and the four-fifths of the EU territory that falls outside it. Urban areas can mitigate and adapt to climate change by using solutions provided by nature and biodiversity, such as green roofs and walls or biodiversity-rich parks or gardens.

Quiet places

Environmental noise is the most common source of stress for city-dwellers. Health experts have linked noise pollution to a number of health problems, including cardiovascular disease, elevated hormone levels, psychological problems and even premature death. Yet, as the demand for mobility grows, the use of cars, trains, and planes increases, and so does the level of noise.

Did you know...

In the case of developments which could have a significant adverse impact on Natura 2000 sites, special EU procedures ensure that any loss of habitat is minimal and compensated. For example, proposals for the expansion of the Port of Rotterdam include plans for a significant package of measures to offset the loss of habitats in a nearby Natura 2000 site.

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15

The EU's Environmental Noise Directive (2002/49/EC) aims to manage noise exposure in built-up areas whilst paying particular attention to noise-sensitive areas hosting vulnerable groups of society such as hospital and school settings. At local level, similar to the approach adopted under the Air Quality Directives, the Directive requires authorities to map the areas where noise is excessive and draw up action plans to reduce noise where necessary.

The European Environment Agency's 2008 report 'Transport at a crossroads' highlights the growing public demand for more stringent regulation of noise throughout the EU. In parallel, EU laws controlling noise emissions from certain products spur innovations that can help limit noise pollution, such as low noise tyres and more silent road surfaces, as well as noise barriers and soundproofing.

Respect for urban heritage

Europe has a rich history and culture, and citizens form emotional, physical and even economic attachments to urban heritage. The preservation of historical buildings, monuments, conservation areas and other heritage sites is therefore important to link citizens to European traditions.

Yet a range of factors threaten historical buildings and sites, including urban development and lack of funding for protection and preservation.

The Lisbon Treaty specifies that safeguarding and enhancing Europe's cultural heritage is a priority for the EU. This strengths the language in previous treaties: already in 1992, the EU's Maastricht Treaty identified cultural heritage as an area of action and this provided the legal basis for protection initiatives. The EU's URBACT programme (see below) supports several projects in this area: for example, the REPAIR project promotes the re-use of abandoned military heritage for urban regeneration by recognising the buildings' potential for economic action and employment. Another example is FORTIMED, supported by EU research funds, a project for the restoration of medieval fortifications in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Sustainable land use

Urban sprawl is a pressing issue as it results in loss of ecosystem services and biodiversity, and limits future food production by using up arable land. Sustainable land use policies and practices means finding the right balance between the needs of urban, rural and residential areas. The Territorial Agenda of the European Union adopted informally by EU ministers, calls on spatial development plans to address sprawl and promote stronger partnerships between urban and rural areas.

Soil sealing, the covering of land for housing, road or other construction works, is a growing concern related to urban sprawl. Agriculture, forestry and nature conservation play a crucial role in maintaining soil quality and revitalising the soil. These are lost where land is "sealed" by new roads, buildings and factories. The demands of urban development need to be balanced by considering the effects of soil sealing, and the rehabilitation of "brownfield" sites such as former industrial areas needs to be considered as an alternative to building on open land.

Where soil sealing does occur, urban planners should provide for construction and drainage that would allow as many soil functions as possible to be preserved. The European Commission has proposed a Soil Framework Directive to address the problems of soil sealing as well as soil contamination.

The EU`s Global Monitoring for Environment and Security (GMES) programme is enabling better monitoring of land use and land use change in Europe by supporting mapping at continental ("CORINE land cover") and local hot spot areas ("Urban Atlas") as the basis for designing sustainable urban policies.

Did you know...

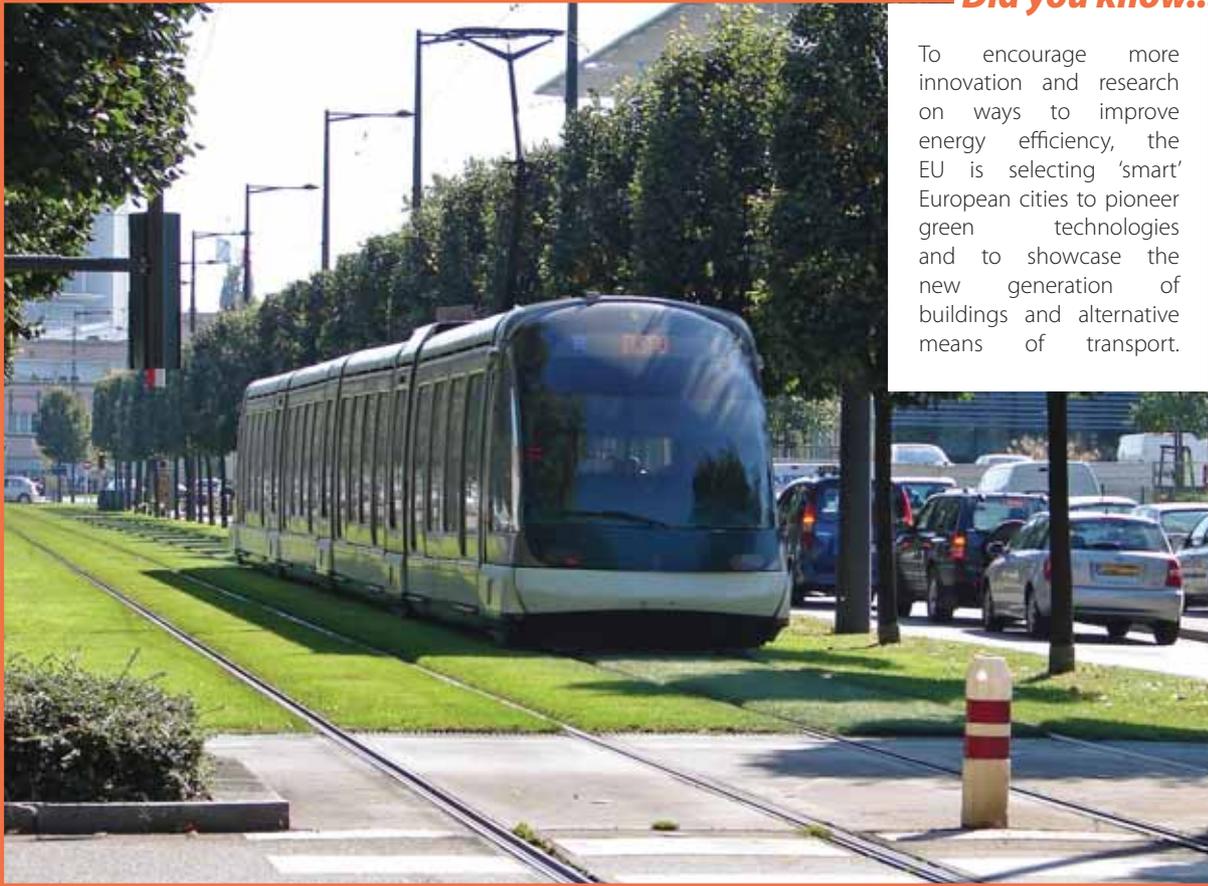The EU's Noise Observation and Information Service for Europe (http://noise.eionet.europa.eu/) database allows citizens to see how many people are exposed to excessive noise generated by air, rail and road traffic across Europe.

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17

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To encourage more innovation and research on ways to improve energy efficiency, the EU is selecting 'smart' European cities to pioneer green technologies and to showcase the new generation of buildings and alternative means of transport.

18

Efficient and sustainable

It is vitally important for our cities and towns to function efficiently and to lower the use of scarce natural resources, to achieve a sustainable quality of life for European citizens now and into the future. To this end, the EU has adopted a number of key policies and initiatives aimed at decoupling economic and social development from consumption of resources.

Resource efficiency

Cities make demands on a wide range of resources, from energy and water to minerals and metals. The EU's Thematic Strategy on the Sustainable use of Natural Resources highlights the danger of using natural resources at a rate that exceeds their regeneration capacity. Resource efficiency is also one of the themes of the Thematic Strategy on the Prevention and Recycling of Waste, which requires Member States to draw up waste prevention programmes.

Cities offer an opportunity to manage our use of resources better, use them efficiently and cut down on waste and pollution. For example, studies have found that per capita consumption of resources such as energy tends to be lower in urban areas, because of efficiencies achievable in areas with higher population densities. However, there are considerable differences between cities in terms of performance, and there is room for improvement in all cities across Europe.

Energy efficiency

Green buildings that require less energy for lighting, heating and cooling through clever use of glass and innovative air flow systems, are an important component of the effort to achieve efficient and sustainable European cities. The EU promotes green buildings through several measures including the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (2010/31/EC), which sets minimum standards requiring Member States to make new and existing buildings more energy efficient. The EU's Green Building Programme supports this, encouraging renewable energy to be integrated into non-residential buildings.

The EU is also working on reducing our dependency on fossil fuels by increasing the amount of energy that comes from renewable sources. The Renewable Energy Directive (2009/28/EC) requires 20% of energy across the EU to come from renewable sources by 2020.

Green mobility

Efficient urban transport is fundamental to citizens' quality of life and to economic development. Yet our current reliance on the internal combustion engine is a major source of air and noise pollution and negative impacts on health and the environment.

Did you know...

The EU has dedicated five billion EUR to the research, development and manufacturing of battery-powered and electric cars and to demonstration projects.

The EU's Thematic Strategy on the urban environment strongly urges cities to develop Sustainable Urban Transport Plans. These plans aim to improve traffic flows in and around cities, by factoring in economic interests and promoting the use of public transport, cycling and walking in cities and towns, as well as to balance environmental impacts. The EU has developed guidance documents for city administrations on how to prepare these plans.

Each year the EU organises European Mobility Week to raise public awareness about the need to act against pollution from motorised traffic and to improve the quality of urban life. Citizens are encouraged to change their travel behaviour and try alternatives to the car such as cycling, walking, and public transport. European cities are urged to promote these modes of transport and to invest in the necessary infrastructures.

The EU is also promoting the use of electric and hybrid cars through the European Green Cars Initiative, launched in 2009.

Local actions on climate change

Fighting climate change is one of every city's long-term sustainability goals. The increase in the frequency of extreme weather such as heat waves and floods underscores the importance of action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and prepare for climate change impacts.

The European Commission supports cities in reducing carbon emissions through initiatives such as the Covenant of Mayors. More than 1900 cities across Europe have committed to go beyond the EU emission reduction targets of a 20% cut in CO_2 emissions by 2020 – through the development and implementation of Sustainable Energy Action Plans. The European Commission supports these cities in the exchange and application of good practices to improve energy efficiency and promote low-carbon business and economic development. The EU also provides measures to identify emissions reduction opportunities – including better energy efficiency in buildings and green mobility– as well as funding to realise them.

Did you know...

The EU's Climate and Energy targets

❑ A 20% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020
❑ 20% of the EU's energy to come from renewable sources by 2020
❑ A 20% cut in energy consumption through energy efficiency by 2020

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The Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment also emphasises the importance of preparing for climate change. The European Commission's White Paper on adapting to climate change noted that urban areas will face particular problems. The Commission is supporting actions such as the GRaBS project) and BaltCICA (Climate Change: Impacts, Costs and Adaptation in the Baltic Sea Region), which assesses flood risks and sea level rises in the Baltic Sea area with its many coastal cities.

Technological innovations and green jobs

Technological innovation and creativity are indispensable for ensuring the sustainable future of cities. The promotion of creativity and innovation are central to the Europe 2020 Strategy. The European Commission has supported programmes to integrate science and technology into all cities. These include RuNuP ("Role of universities in urban poles") projects for small and medium-sized cities without university centres. Under the Environmental Technologies Action Plan (ETAP), the EU is promoting the adoption of eco-friendly technology projects such as recycling plants for wastewater from baths, showers and washing machines.

Many of these initiatives are creating green jobs, ranging from mechanics trained to repair low-emissions vehicles to new enterprises building solar panels. The EU is supporting this type of job creation by providing €105b in green projects under its Cohesion Policy funds (2007-2013). The EU 2020 Strategy also puts innovation and green growth at the heart of its blueprint for competitiveness.

21

Check it out!

Learn more about eco-innovative projects and get inspired at:
http://ec.europa.eu/environment/eco-innovation/

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Making our cities attractive and sustainable
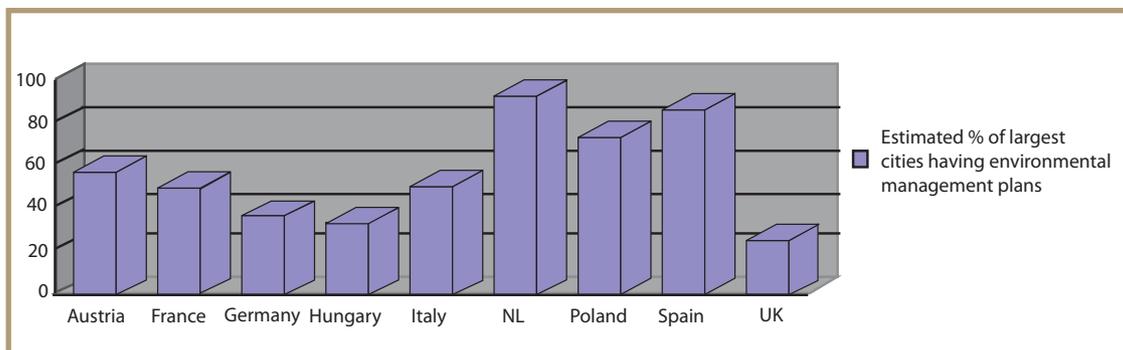
Well-managed and democratic

Well-governed cities and towns that involve their citizens in environmental decision-making will lead to better planning for the future and help to ensure the sustainability of the systems we create. A number of important EU tools exist to strengthen protection of the urban environment.

Integrated Environmental Management Systems

One of the tools cities and towns can use in the move towards greater sustainability is an Integrated Environmental Management System (IEMS). A well-developed IEMS helps avoid conflicts by considering the competing demands between various policy areas and initiatives (economic well-being, competitiveness, health, environment, spatial planning), and by setting long-term goals.

EU guidance on IEMS in urban areas provides best practice examples and experiences. In developing their IEMS, many urban areas also follow the guidelines set out in the EU Regulation for a voluntary Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS).

An IEMS represents a strong voluntary commitment by the city to act on its environmental problems and is often linked to a Local Agenda 21 initiative. Under the 1994 Aalborg Charter of European Cities & Towns towards Sustainability, many European cities committed to engage in preparing these local action plans towards sustainability; to date, more than 5,000 Local Agenda 21 strategies have been developed in Europe.

Estimated % of largest cities having environmental management plans

How the EU contributes to improving the urban environment

Green public procurement

Green public procurement (GPP) allows public authorities to achieve environmental targets by opting for greener products and services. The 2008 Communication on public procurement for a better environment sets the policy basis for GPP in the EU, promoting eco-innovation, energy and resource efficiency, and with it the competitiveness of the EU economy in new and emerging markets. Several EU policies call for GPP including the Sustainable Development Strategy, the Action Plan on Sustainable Consumption and Production and Sustainable Industrial Policy and the EU 2020 Strategy.

Public authorities at all levels, including cities, are encouraged to use the most environmentally friendly products and services to achieve more sustainable consumption and production, and higher environmental standards. By using GPP, cities contribute to achieving the EU target for 50% of tendering procedures to be green. This applies to products and service groups for which common GPP criteria have been developed.
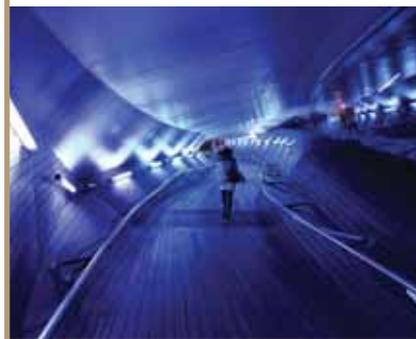
The legal basis for GPP is laid down in the EU Public Procurement Directives (2004/17/EC and 2004/18/EC). The European Commission has developed GPP common criteria for 18 products and services to help public authorities such as city authorities to implement GPP, together with a GPP Training toolkit and the Buying Green Handbook. It releases monthly News Alerts on best practices to demonstrate the efficiency of GPP and provides assistance to stakeholders through a GPP Help Desk.

Participatory urban planning

Involving citizens in urban planning helps ensure sustainable economic development and plays a vital role in providing well-planned cities. As citizens are deeply affected by urban planning, authorities need to ensure that they are involved and provided with a forum for expressing their opinions. The Aarhus Convention on access to information, public participation in environmental decision-making and access to justice, enshrines the right of citizens

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to participate in urban planning processes. Some Member States such as Germany make it mandatory for cities to involve all stakeholders in urban planning.

The internet has huge potential for involving citizens in all policy areas. The EU has piloted 'eParticipation' projects for citizen involvement in urban planning. EU funding is also available for projects such as Chance2Sustain.eu, demonstrating a clear commitment to involve citizens.

To support the process of public participation in planning, the EU has put in place a number of measures, including the INSPIRE Directive establishing an Infrastructure for Spatial Information in the European Community (2007/2/EC). The INSPIRE programme supports spatial planners and decision-makers in developing policies and plans aimed at sustainable land use, by creating an EU-wide spatial data infrastructure. This will enable the sharing of environmental spatial information among public sector organisations and facilitate public access to spatial information across Europe. EU funds are also available for sustainable land use projects.

Assessing environmental impacts

The EU has developed two mandatory procedures for cities to assess potential environmental impacts. They enable cities to ensure that environmental consideration is given to plans likely to have significant effect on the environment such as road building projects. These tools are the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive (2001/42/EC) (SEA) for public plans and programmes, and the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (85/337/EC) (EIA) for certain public and private projects.

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Did you know...

Between 2000 and 2006, the EU's URBAN II initiative enabled 2,314,000m^2 of buildings to be converted and renovated, created 3,238,000m^2 of green space, and supported 6,000 small businesses and start-ups, creating 2,000 jobs. Local leadership and ownership was the key to the success of these projects.

How the EU contributes to improving the urban environment

The EIA Directive specifies those cases where environmental impact assessments should be carried out. The Directive requires local authorities to decide whether the project falls within its scope, and if so whether the project has a significant environmental effect. Cities are legally obliged to carry out SEAs, for example, before the adoption of Sustainable Urban Transport Plans. Both Directives give citizens the right to comment on plans, programmes and projects before the final decision to proceed is taken.

Tracking progress

Tracking our progress through self-evaluation and critical analysis is essential if Europe is to stay on top of its environmental challenges. The EU has developed guidelines and tools for this such as Local Evaluation 21, an online self-assessment tool for participating cities to gauge the progress of their sustainable development processes.

In order to recognise the essential role that cities play in improving the environment and their high level of commitment to genuine progress, the EU has set up the European Green Capital Award. The award is given each year to a city, not necessarily a capital, which is leading the way in environmentally friendly urban living and which can act as a role model to inspire other cities.

The European Green Capital Award recognises and rewards the efforts that can be made at local level to improve not only the environment and the economy but also the quality of life of Europe's growing urban populations. The first proud title-bearers are Stockholm for 2010 and Hamburg for 2011. Both were recognised for their 'consistent record of achieving high environmental standards' and 'commitment to ambitious goals for further environmental improvement and sustainable development'.

Following a 2008 ministerial agreement, the European Commission, Member States, regions and city associations are jointly developing a common European Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities. This tool – which should be available in 2012 – will help cities to implement the Leipzig Charter (see page 3). It will provide local authorities and actors with a practical toolkit to help them take an integrated approach, balance their economic, social and environmental needs and interests, and ensure the overall sustainable development of cities.

EU funding available for cities

The EU supports local authorities in their efforts to achieve sustainable urban development and promotes sustainable cities through a range of funding programmes including the Cohesion Policy funds, LIFE+ for environmental projects, the Framework Programmes for Research and Technological Development (FP) and the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (for SMEs). These and other EU funding sources support many of the projects described in earlier sections.

LIFE funds and the urban environment

The LIFE+ programme finances innovative environmental and nature conservation projects. The programme supports pilot projects in cities that develop new technologies, policy approaches, methods and instruments for urban environmental management, in line with the Thematic Strategy on the urban environment.

LIFE+ is the successor to the LIFE Programme, which financed over 3000 projects across all fields between 1992 and 2006. For example, in 2005 LIFE supported Elefsina 2020, a project to regenerate this environmentally degraded port and city in Greece. LIFE+ has a total budget of €2 billion for the 2007-2013 period.

Cohesion policy funding for urban areas

Promoting sustainable urban development has been at the heart of the EU's regional policy since its inception in 1989. Through its structural funds – the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund – regional policy invests in projects that promote good local governance, ensure a sustainable urban environment, foster social inclusion and equality, regenerate urban areas and boost economic growth and jobs. The EU Cohesion Fund finances environmental infrastructure in the poorest EU countries including urban wastewater treatment plants and public transport. The European Regional Development Fund finances infrastructure as well as a range of other investments such as supporting environmental business in southern Sweden (InnoEnvi project. The European Social Fund promotes employment in the EU and helps improve citizens' skills and job prospects. An example of one such project is a training programme in the Czech Republic to support environmental job skills.

Between 2007 and 2013, around €30 billion will be spent on urban projects within region policy programmes. In addition to the policy's financing for infrastructure and people-based actions, the European Territorial Cooperation objective (formerly "INTERREG") can be used by cities to develop joint cross-border or transnational projects.

The Commission also provides special support for cities to work together through the URBACT programme, which is a European exchange and learning programme promoting sustainable urban development. In the current programming period URBACT offered financial support to 289 cities participating in 44 different projects. The programme enables cities to jointly develop solutions to major urban challenges, reaffirming the key role they play in facing increasingly complex societal changes.

Under the system, Member States and regions develop the Operational Programmes that set out specific goals addressing areas of concern, including for cities.

Support from the funds can be supplemented by lending opportunities through the European Investment Bank, and innovative financial instruments such as JESSICA combine resources from the funds and the EIB.

Did you know...

The Community Strategic Guidelines on Cohesion (2007-2013) set sustainable urban development as a major objective, underlining the vital role cities play in achieving social, economic and territorial cohesion as well as environmental sustainability. Check out:

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/themes/urban/index_en.htm

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Research for innovation

The EU's Research Framework Programmes support research and development. The current 7th Framework Programme (2007-2013) provides financial support for projects related to a broad range of topics for urban areas, from research on cultural heritage to the clean-up of brownfield areas. Cities can benefit from recent projects such as ALTENER on renewable energy, CIVITAS-plus on green urban transport, and STEER on transport.

The EU is currently targeting funds at 'eco-innovation projects' as part of its Environmental Technologies Action Plan. The aim is to support innovative products, services and technologies that make efficient and sustainable use of our natural resources such as recycling urban waste to develop high performance lightweight aggregate for concrete.

29

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Further information

(weblinks, by theme)

Introduction

- European Commission website: http://ec.europa.eu
- EEA website: http://www.eea.europa.eu/
    - Ensuring quality of life in Europe's cities and towns, EEA Report No 5/2009
    - 10 messages for 2010 - Urban ecosystems
    - Signals 2009, key environmental issues facing Europe
- Sustainable Development Strategy

Clean and healthy

Safe water to drink

- EU information on water: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/index_en.htm

Clean air to breathe

- European Commission: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/air
- European Commission: http://ec.europa.eu/health-eu/
- EEA: http://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/air/

Collection and disposal of solid waste

- Diverting waste from landfill - Effectiveness of waste management policies in the European Union, EEA Report No 7/2009
- Objectives set by EU waste legislation.
- 20 country fact sheets providing an overview of the legislative frameworks and waste management plans: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/waste

Toxic free

- European Chemicals Agency ECHA: http://echa.europa.eu/home_en.asp
- DG Environment: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/chemicals

Green and pleasant

Green urban areas

- Natura 2000: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/index_en.htm
- EU's information on Natura 2000 and related directives: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/index_en.htm
- GRABS project: http://www.grabs-eu.org/
- Green Infrastructure: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/ecosystems/index_en.htm

Biodiversity-friendly

- Natura 2000: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/index_en.htm
- DG Environment: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/

Quiet places

- NOISE: http://noise.eionet.europa.eu/
- EEA: http://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/noise/
- DG Environment: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/noise/
- WHO: http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/environmental-health/noise

Respect for urban heritage

- URBACT: http://www.urbact.eu/
- FORTMED: http://users.auth.gr/~papayian/
- LIFE: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/
- DG Research: http://ec.europa.eu/research/environment
- Europa Nostra: http://www.europanostra.org/heritage-awards/
- ' Preserving our heritage, improving our environment - 20 years of EU research into cultural heritage': European Commission, Research DG, EUR 22050

Sustainable land use

- EEA, 'Urban sprawl in Europe - The ignored challenge', EEA Report No 10/2006
- 'Guiding Principle on Sustainable Spatial Development of the European Continent' : http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/heritage/cemat/
- 'European Spatial Development Perspective': http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/
- The URBAN II Community Initiative (2000-2006) and Operational Programmes implemented within the Community Initiative: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/urban2/index_de.htm

Efficient and sustainable

Resource efficiency

- EU information on the Thematic Strategy on the Sustainable Use of Natural Resources: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/natres/index.htm

Energy efficiency

- DG Energy: http://ec.europa.eu/energy/
- Green Building Programme: http://www.eu-greenbuilding.org/
- EEA: http://www.eea.europa.eu/signals/articles/urban

Green mobility

- DG Environment: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/urban/urban_transport.htm
- European Mobility Week: http://www.mobilityweek.eu/
- European Green Cars Initiative: http://ec.europa.eu/research/industrial_technologies/lists/green-cars_en.html

Local actions on climate change

- Intelligent Energy Programme: http://ec.europa.eu/energy/intelligent/
- European Committee for Standardisation: http://www.cen.eu
- Covenant of Mayors: http://www.eumayors.eu/

Technological innovations and green jobs

- European Technologies Action Plan http://ec.europa.eu/environment/etap/index_en.htm

Well-managed and democratic

Integrated Environmental Management Systems

- Aalborg Charter: http://www.aalborgplus10.dk/
- Eco-management and Audit Scheme (EMAS): http://ec.europa.eu/environment/emas/index_en.htm

Green public procurement

- The EU's GPP Helpdesk: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/gpp
- http://ec.europa.eu/environment/gpp/training_toolkit_en.htm

Participatory urban planning

- eParticipation: http://www.epractice.eu/en/cases/massa
- Chance2Sustain project: http://www.Chance2Sustain.eu
- Spatial Data Infrastructures for the environment, INSPIRE
- More information on INSPIRE: http://inspire.jrc.ec.europa.eu/
- Join the INSPIRE Forum at: http://inspire-forum.jrc.ec.europa.eu/

Assessing environmental impacts

- More EU information on SEA and EIA at http://ec.europa.eu/environment/

Tracking progress

- European Green Capital Award: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/europeangreencapital/
- Local Agenda 21: http://www.localevaluation21.org/
- European reference framework for sustainable cities: http://www.rfsustainablecities.eu/

EU funding available for cities

LIFE funds and the urban environment

- European Commission: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/urban/thematic_strategy.htm
- European Investment Bank: http://www.eib.org
- "Best LIFE environment projects 2007-2008", European Commission (2006) available through: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/

Cohesion policy funding for urban areas

- Regional Policy – Inforegio: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/
- http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/object/
- URBACT: http://urbact.eu
- Guide on the urban dimension of European Union policies, European Commission: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/guides/urban/index_en.htm
- DG REGIO, Promoting sustainable urban development in Europe – Achievements and opportunities, April 2009: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/presenta/urban2009/urban2009_en.pdf

Research for innovation

- CORDIS: http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/
- "World and European Sustainable Cities : Insights from EU research", DG Research (2010) available at http://ec.europa.eu/environment/urban/pdf/rport-en.pdf

33

Making our cities attractive and sustainable

35

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