

The crowded landscape of the Urban Agendas. Opportunities and path dependencies in Cohesion Policy 2021-2027

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Abstract:

Over the last five years there has been a significant emergence of the so-called New Urban Agendas: the Sustainable Development Goal 11 in 2015, the UN HABITAT III in 2016, the EU Pact of Amsterdam in 2017. Together with the ISO standards from 2014 and, in the case of the EU specific funding delivery and knowledge and capacity building instrument, they result in a cluttered landscape. This contribution to the AECPA Congress aims to attempt to tease out these different agendas their similarities, gaps and overlaps and their likely evolutionary trends.

About the Author

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OVERVIEW

On May 2016 the EU member states' ministers responsible for urban matters agreed what was called the “Pact of Amsterdam”. This result of decades long intergovernmental urban activism (Faludi 2009; Pazos-Vidal 2017, 2019) that resulted in a form of metagovernance (as in Jessop 2004) evolving type II to a type I form of Multilevel Governance (Hooghe and Marks 2003). For

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over a decade the Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities (RSFC, 2008), a French-led EU intergovernmental level aimed to develop a single format to formulate and evaluate the development and implementation of sustainable policies in cities. The European Commission also developed during that period the Smart Cities and Communities Initiative and the Covenant of Mayors (initially for Energy and latterly also to deal with Climate at EU and then at international level), in addition to about two dozen other policy-specific urban governance tools or funding instruments.

At global level the Sustainable Development Goal 11 *Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable* was adopted by the United Nations in September 2015 and the agreement Development of Sustainable Cities (HABITAT III) was signed in Quito in October 2016. Not to mention the ISO standards for Sustainable development (ISO 37120: 2014 and others) that many national governments and the private sector have developed and which go beyond technical standards to deal with policy and politically laden concepts such as good urban governance.

On the one hand this crowded, overlapping and often disjointed landscape provide policy entrepreneurs (Kingdon 1984) with ample choice to identify and pick and choose from a vast array of urban governance and policy delivery instruments and clustering around Transnational Municipal Networks (Kern and Bulkeley 2009).

On the other hand, such an array of similar instruments is extremely difficult to navigate let alone to articulate them in any coherent sense, risking the generation of policy silos and policy communities (Haas 1992, Adshead 1996) competing for resources.

The urban dimension EU Cohesion Policy precisely provides both a policy, governance, and rather uniquely, a dedicated financial support as well namely through Integrated Sustainable Urban Development and Urban Innovative Actions (Article 7 and 8 ERDF Regulation 2014-2020, European Commission 2011). The ongoing 2021-2027 EU Cohesion Policy reform provided an opportunity for a more integrative approach among these various EU and global initiatives namely the SDG 11. However, the European Structural and Investment Funds new cross-cutting Policy Objective 5 supporting locally-led development strategies and sustainable urban development across the EU is more reflective of existing path dependencies than of a

meaningful attempt to mainstream and integrate these various other agendas. Equally the Pact of Amsterdam, the output of whose pilot partnerships have not yet been absorbed into new more urban-sensitive EU policies risks being overtaken by the development of the Leipzig Charter 2.0. Drawing from an Actor-Centred Institutional perspective (Scharpf 2009) this presentation aims to look at the conflicting agendas that prevent a more coherent multilevel (global, EU, national and subnational) urban policy landscape from developing.

Fig. 1 An attempt to sketch the Global and European Urban Agendas and Instruments

	Ambit	Funding	Performance	Public/Private	Capacity	Knowledge
SDG 11	Global	NO	YES	Public	NO	NO*
Habitat III	Global	NO	NO	Public	NO	NO
ISO	Global	NO	YES	Private/Public	NO	YES*
OECD	Global*	NO	YES	Public/Private	NO	YES
UNECE	Europe	NO	YES	Public	NO	YES
Sust. Urban Development	EU	YES	YES	Public	YES	YES
Covenant of Mayors	EU/Global	NO	YES	Public	YES	YES*
SCCI	EU	YES	NO	Public/Private	YES	NO
RFSC	EU	NO	YES	Public	YES*	YES
RURBAN	EU	NO	NO	Public	NO	YES
URBACT	EU/EEA	YES	NO	Public	YES	YES
JPI Urban Europe	EU	YES*	YES	Public	NO	YES
KCTP	EU	YES	YES	Public	NO	YES
EUKN	EU*- Intergov	NO	YES*	Public	YES	YES
UDG	EU- intergov	NO	NO*	Public	NO	YES
EU Urban Agenda	EU	NO*	NO		YES*	YES
IUA	EU	YES	NO	Public	YES	YES*
EUI	EU	YES	YES	Public	YES*	YES
UDN	EU	NO	NO	Public	NO	YES
ESPON	EU/EEA	YES	NO	Public	NO	YES
JRC – Cities	EU	NO	NO	Public	NO	YES

Source: Pazos-Vidal 2019. Asterisk (*) denotes partial measure.

GLOBAL AND INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

The 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (aka. Global Goals) were adopted by 193 member states attending the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit in New York in 2015. All member states are responsible for implementing the goals at home and contributing to global progress. The Goals comprise of a total of 169 targets, which seek to tackle a wide range of issues facing both developed and developing countries. These issues include extreme poverty, inequality, climate change, inclusive societies and access to health and education.

The backbone of the European Commission work on SDG is contained Reflection Paper "Towards a sustainable Europe by 2030, itself part of the work for the (post Brexit, post crisis post 2019 elections) work on the , on the future of Europe launched by the Commission in March 2017, itself part of the Bratislava-Rome-Sibiu summit process that led the preparation of the European Union's Strategic Agenda 2019-2024, and the priority setting of the next European Commission Delivering the SDGs is not just a necessity but also an opportunity for the economy and society. To support this a Multi-Stakeholder Platform on the implementation of the Sustainable Goals which presented its proposals in October 2018 (European Commission 2018) ahead of the EU proposals for the High Level Political Forum of July 2019.

While this is a step compare with the previously more tepid approach of the EU on SDGs (European Commission 2016) on the basis that the indicators of the SDGs being designed mainly with the developing countries in mind the EU do perform very well in most of them, certainly the case of the "urban" SDG 11 (Eurostat 2019). The EU contribution to HABITAT III (European Commission 2016) though obviously directly referring to the EU and SDG dimension of sustainable urban development is equally non-committal on specifics. Quite strikingly when it came to specific proposals on the 2021-2027 EU budget, which was tabled on May 2018 and whose negotiation is still ongoing only the Commission proposal on Common Agricultural Policy made a detailed – in in reality largely rhetoric- commentary on the need to localize the SDGs. Strikingly the proposals for Structural Funds 2021-2027 did not refer other than by

passing in a recital of the Common Provisions Regulation and in the draft ERDF regulation to the SDGs.

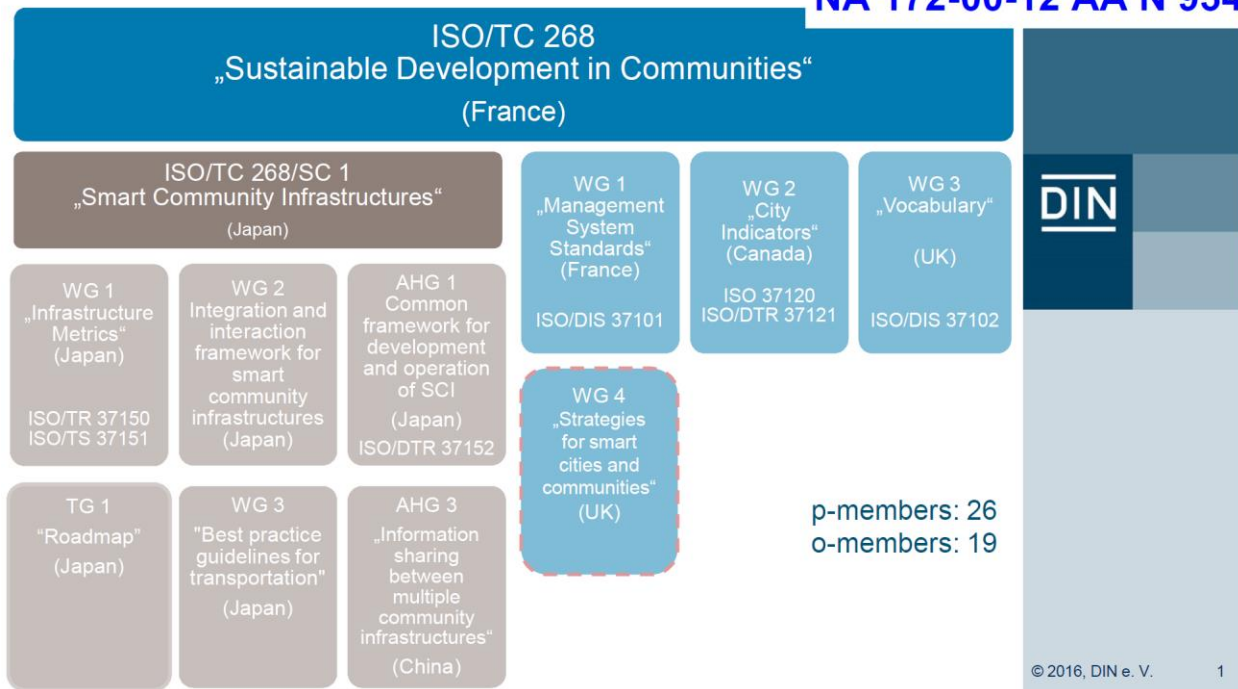
At the same time in the European continent there are parallel (yet separate from the EU) attempts to localise the SDGs and to adapt the UN SDG indicators to the European context. The most notable example is the work of UNECE (the UN Economic Commission for Europe) notably through its Housing and Land Management Committee and the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE region and the work that is ongoing on UNECE and UN-Habitat on the preparation of the guidelines on policies for sustainable urban development (UNECE 2018).

Not to be outdone OECD, has also built on previous cooperation with the EU/EUROSTAT and the UN to develop the OECD report “Measuring Distance to the SDG Targets” to assist member countries with their national implementation of the UN SDG 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Part of the OECD Action Plan on SDGs (OECD 2016), it “provides a high-level overview of strengths and weaknesses in performance across the SDGs and the 5Ps, helping countries navigate the SDGs’ complexity and identify priorities within the broad 2030 Agenda”. A pilot version of the report was presented by the OECD in the margins of the UN High-Level Political Forum on the SDGs in New York in July 2016. The second edition of the report was published in June 2017, with a refined methodology and expanded indicator and country coverage. The third edition (OECD 2019), includes expanded country and target coverage. It also includes novel analyses on measuring trends and measuring the transboundary aspects of the 2030 Agenda. Rather than a simple matter of competition within an increasingly crowded market there is a significant, and welcome degree of cooperation, as OECD data were used in compiling the 2016 and 2017 UN Secretary-General’s reports to the General Assembly on SDGs progress, and the associated *Sustainable Development Goals Report* publications. In addition, OECD has provided data and metadata to the UN database on SDG indicators (OECD 2017)

More controversially, there is another international standard on sustainable development that is mainly led by the private sector **ISO 37120:2014**. Developed by ISO TC/268 „Sustainable development in communities“ (led by France) it has been by a number of working groups

notably its Working group on “City Indicators“ (ISO/TC 268/WG 2) has adopted and published the standard on „Sustainable development and resilience of communities -Indicators for city services and quality of life“ (ISO 37101). The Working group 2 on “Management Systems Standards” (ISO/TC 268/WG 1) developed the standard 37101 „Sustainable development and resilience of communities -Management systems -General principles and requirements“. Additional sets of city indicators were compiled by the now-defunct **Global City Indicators Facility** led by Toronto and a network of 253 willing (mainly north-American, Middle Eastern, Latin-American, African and Philippines) participating cities (Lojevski 2016)

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There are concerns about ISO, some of them not to dissimilar to that of the process of elaborating policy recommendations by the EU Urban Agenda thematic partnerships (see below). Chiefly among those is the issue of self-selection – for most of the participants are voluntary but their proposals are meant to be representative. Secondly though ISO produces technical standards the content of ISO 3712 straddles well into matters of political choices for a sustainable city is a complex set of variables and models, not necessarily mutually exclusive. Thirdly, and this is more of a problem specifically of ISO, its working groups tends to be dominated by private representatives, normally in their own right or simply because they act in representation of a government (e.g. British Standards) with only few cases (Germany) where

there are city representatives contributing to the national representation to ISO. Sometimes its internal timescales result in standards adopted without necessarily a clear majority view (Szentpetery 2015). While ISO is and remains a voluntary set of standards its global reach and the importance of the major technological and utility players that contribute to its standardization process make it difficult to avoid it once a global standard already exist as the transaction costs would discourage the development of a new one would be (Moschen *et.al.* 2019).

Furthermore in a clear sign that urban agendas, standards and performance is a market of both ideas and economic interests ISO is currently adapting its pre-SDG standard to the SDG world. It has already published 14 ISO standards of which 7 under the direct responsibility of ISO/TC 268; and further 16 ISO standards are under development related to the TC and its SCs of which 5 under the direct responsibility of ISO/TC.

EUROPEAN UNION'S URBAN POLICIES, PROGRAMMES AND KNOWLEDGE

The EU due to the *sui generis* nature of its integration process (as EU rules supremacy have direct effect upon national and local ones), and the fact that its investment budget in territorial development, including urban, is the largest in the world (Binswanger-Mkhize *et al.* 2009) Though it is open to question whether the EU has powers on urban policy, as it is not listed as a shared competence in article 4 TFEU, there is abundant legislation concerning urban areas due to the EU competence on Internal Market, Environment (Environmental Impact Assessment, Emissions), Energy (Energy Efficiency, Building Standards), Transport (Urban Mobility, though there is a live controversy on this *vid.* Pazos-Vidal, 2019).

Thus the EU involvement with urban matters has been twofold, as a developmental policy (notably the EU Structural Funds and most specifically European Regional Development Fund investing in urban areas – which we will not cover here in detail-) and as space for policy formulation and legislation on urban areas.

The Pact of Amsterdam

On the latter the main development is the so-called EU urban agenda. This is not a new development, it has been in development over many decades, and most particularly since the 1999 Potsdam Declaration, adopted by the Informal meeting of ministers responsible for Spatial Planning, and which gave birth to the so-called *European Spatial Development Perspective* (ESDP). A succession of policy milestones had ensued since with the Pact of Amsterdam of 2017 being the latest, but surely not the last, major development (Van Lierop 2015, 5-6):

The **Pact of Amsterdam**/EU urban agenda agreed in 2017 is a prime case of policy entrepreneurialism that has been sustained for over two decades (Faludi, 2009) to address urban matters at EU level by a small group of committed policy entrepreneurs, notably the Dutch Government working with and sometimes intellectually competing other set of policy entrepreneurs, notably French ones. This reflected the Kingdon (1984) model of policy entrepreneurs within government, including their outside policy communities, according to which actors wait for the political window of opportunity to turn ideas into formal rules and policies. The aim of achieving EU recognition for urban matters took priority over content: what was originally an EU-wide initiative focused on territorial socio-economic development was turned into a form of multi-level governance. The new Juncker (Timmermans) European Commission's focus on “better regulation” offered the window of opportunity for achieving that recognition by creating 12 partnerships of EU, national and city officials to assess the appropriateness of existing policies for urban areas. They don't only address “classic” Territorial Cohesion/funding targeting issues but also a wider set of domains such as digital, migration or climate adaptation. This successful recasting is problematic however: what is a “city” remains a normative concept and many of these 12 themes are not necessarily “urban” in nature. Also the fact that the participation of individual cities, networks, national ministries and EU Directorates-General is voluntary makes it a prime case of risk of self-selective bias. Furthermore, as the EU Urban Agenda is led by DG REGIO and not by the Secretariat General of the Commission the application of the recommendations made by each of the partnership depends on the goodwill of each individual DG -proof of that is that reference to the Urban Agenda in each DG departmental

plans is tenuous and the Better Regulation Agenda makes only cursory references of the EU Urban Agenda – which is we shall insist, Better Regulation “for” urban areas-. All this will affect the survival of this initiative in the future for it fails to build a sufficiently large multi-level coalition (Type II, Marks and Hooghe,2003) to be self-sustainable if the current Commission, national and city network entrepreneurs falter in their support (Pazos-Vidal 2019). Indeed the Pact of Amsterdam states: “In order to realise the full potential of the European Union and deliver on its strategic objectives, the Urban Agenda for the EU strives to involve cities in achieving Better Regulation, Better Funding and Better Knowledge.”

Three years on, “most actions under the Urban Agenda for the EU are delivered through partnerships, each made up of a variety of members. The fourteen partnerships have brought together 23 Member States, 96 cities and/or metropolitan regions, 10 regions and 17 DGs of the European Commission, and no less than 33 institutions, ranging from European umbrella organisations, programmes and networks, to civil society organisations and private companies. In total, 262 partners work together, embodying the principle of shared ownership and multi-stakeholder involvement.” (Ecorys *et al* 2019). The Partnerships were launched and financed by the Dutch Presidency and only after much hesitation did the Commission step in and contracted Eurocities and ECORYS to run the secretariat and finance the meetings.²

While the 2019 Bucharest Declaration (Romanian EU Presidency 2019) is to serve as a bridge between the Pact of Amsterdam, the Territorial Agenda of the European Union and the Leipzig Charter (to be revised during the German EU Presidency in 2020). Ironically though the Pact of Amsterdam is a direct inheritor of the 2008 Leipzig Charter (Pazos-Vidal 2019) the competition among policy entrepreneurs that resulted in the Pact and most importantly the multilevel better regulation methodology that it developed to be set up, risk being undermined by the German process of reinventing the Leipzig Charter 2.0.

² Notice No 2016.CE.16.0GT.004 - Support in the implementation of the Urban Agenda for the EU through the provision of management, expertise and administrative support to Partnerships. Official Journal of the European Union: 2016 / S 127-227373

However by no means this has been an exercise that has been led by an intergovernmental fashion alone. The European Commission not only under the treaties the holder of near monopoly of the EU legislative initiative but also in most cases the real policy entrepreneur of the EU policy formulation and decision-making system, had long moved ahead of the curve of the latest surge of “new urban agendas”. Indeed it was not the Dutch but the Commission the one to bring urban policies at the forefront of EU policymaking. That first attempt for REGIO to regain the initiative on the Urban Agenda was the "Cites of Tomorrow" document of October 2011 (EC 2011b) that essentially made a business case for the EU (DG REGIO) to have a new Urban Agenda given the new challenges emerging in cities that require an European response.

While this was eventually taken over by the Dutch activism and the jury is out whether the 2019-2024 European Commission will regain the initiative (or whether that will be the Germans under Leizig 2.0) by no means the Commission has been idle well before the Pact of Amsterdam in developing support, capacity, networking, knowledge and, crucially, financing in support for urban development.

Urban capacity building and knowledge

Prior to the launch of the Pact of Amsterdam the Commission had proposed in the ERDF Regulation that it would create an **Urban Development Network**. The Commission wanted to directly select a small number of cities to work with the Commission on urban policies. In the end, Member States imposed their view that it would be them who would select cities (Pazos-Vidal, 2014).

During the 2014-2020 EU budget negotiations a number of opportunistic coalitions emerged. They were very much subject and incentive-dependent. The alliance between LRAs and MS led to the scrapping of the Commission proposal of selecting 300 cities to be part of the Urban Development Network³ on the basis that such a request would create unnecessary conflicts between local authorities than its potential value. While the Commission aimed to have a select

³ Article 8 ERDF

group of cities with whom to experiment new ideas and policies it ended up as another networking exercise such as those that already exist under URBACT. This network does not imply funding, as it only consists of a series of workshops, in the model the Dutch Presidency partnerships : The first was held during the so-called Urban Forum of the EU on June 2, 2015, and the second in March 2016, aiming to have a direct dialogue with major cities and the problems that affect them.

By contrast the **Innovative Actions in the field of Sustainable Urban Development**⁴, was an attempt for the 2014-2020 period from DG REGIO to revive the old URBAN initiative not as an investment tool but as a policy learning exercise (as the Commission is no longer interested in direct management, Bachtler and C. Mendez 2007, 553) managed to survive the negotiations as it and posed no major effect in the balance of power between the different players as it ended up as a series of meetings. Based on article 8 of ERDF, its budget is not insignificant the Initiative has a total ERDF budget of EUR 372 million for 2014-2020.⁵

What is striking as a notable example of policy silos is the fact that the Commission made no attempt to link or indeed to set as eligibility criteria or at least as additional award criteria the fact that a city was a signatory of the pre-existing Covenant of Mayors (so UIA funds could have been used to develop its SECAP), a participant of the Reference Framework of Sustainable Cities or since 2017 the Pact of Amsterdam Urban Partnerships – as all of these instruments (*vid. infra*) are policy development, experimentation, performance and capacity building initiatives that lack specific funding allocations.

Prior to those there has long been URBACT. This programme is part of European Territorial Cooperation (INTERREG) since the 2000-2007 period and it aims to support sustainable integrated urban development across the EU-EEA area by providing capacity for Policy

⁴ Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) No 522/2014 of 11 March 2014 supplementing Regulation (EU) No 1301/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council with regard to the detailed rules concerning the principles for the selection and management of innovative actions in the area of sustainable urban development to be supported by the European Regional Development Fund

⁵ Urban Innovative Actions Joint Technical Secretariat, *Terms of Reference: 1st Call for Proposals Urban Innovative Actions* (European Union Région Nord-Pas de Calais, 2015)

Delivery, improving sustainable policy design, support policy implementation and sharing knowledge by way of transnational exchanges, capacity-building and capitalisation & dissemination with a not irrelevant budget of 96.3m euro for 2014-2027.⁶ In other words the EU has already a capacity and knowledge buildign and sharing instrument for urban areas, one tat is relatively open ended and potentially multi-purpose. However the Commission itself has judged it (alongside ESPON, which has a similar and wider knowledge generating function in support of Territorial, and not merely urban, development) as of lacking critical mass and impact hence the proposed absorption by a new European Urban Initiative for 2021-2027.

Similarly there is a proliferation of EU-funded, or co-financed urban knowledge facilities, often working in isolation with each other: in addition to URBACT and ESPON there is the European Urban Knowledge Network. Furthermore the JPI Urban Europe was created in 2010 to address the global urban challenges of today with the ambition to develop a European research and innovation hub on urban matters and create European solutions by means of coordinated research. It has recently developed its Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda, SRIA 2.0 that will guide the activities and research priorities in the programme until 2026 (Bylund et al. 2019). The EU institutions themselves contribute to this inflation of outfits, for in addition to finance outside research they have developed in the wake of the emergence of the new Urban Agenda in-house expertise notably the JRC Knowledge Centre for Territorial Policies (KCTP) and more recently the JRC developed a new Future of Cities (JRC 2019) report together with the Commission Community of Practice on Cities (CoP-CITIES) and with the ostensive aim to scope the future trends in cities, but crucially to increase the leverage of JRC as policy entrepreneur (and rent seeker) in the ideas shaping future Commission (not just REGIO) in urban policies.

In this point it is important to contextualise that the above initiatives, though led by DG REGIO, were not the only game in town. In addition to the intergovernmental work discussed above there have been other parts of the Commission (DG ENER, DG ICT), and indeed other EU institutions

⁶ URBACT, “European Regional Development Fund 2014 – 2020. European Territorial Cooperation. URBACT III Operational Programme. CCI 2014TC16RFIR003. Adopted by the European Commission, on n 12st December 2014. Version 2 Oct 2015”, 2015.

(such as the European Parliament) trying to push for their own “urban agendas”. These often isolated initiatives while they often constitute dispersion of public goods and resources they had the benefit of stimulating a creative competition across the EU policy landscape.

One such initiatives is **RURBAN** a (failed) attempt to develop a new approach to policies affecting the urban-rural relationship. It never took off the most that managed to achieve was that MEPs were able to include in the 2010 EU budget a small amount to fund a "Preparatory Action", which basically consisted of a series of studies by OECD (2016) and a closing conference. All this despite the undoubted interest of the matter (no less by the Urban Intergroup of the European Parliament who financed it), the active participation of stakeholders in the meetings and the window of opportunity provided by the early stages of drafting of the 2014-2020 Regulations of the Structural Funds 2014-2020 and subsequent guidance to introduce some of the main findings of this preparatory action. It survives in spirit in an unrelated initiative, the TERCET Regulation⁷ itself a translation to EU/Eurostat of the OECD Urban Rural Classification (Brezzi *et al.* 2016). Interestingly, despite fears that the OECD/TERCET urban-rural methodology would be used in the 2021-2027 as to establish demarcation criteria for ERDF (mainly urban) interventions and rural investments in either EAFRD or ERDF itself, this has not (yet, as the Regulations and EU Budget negotiations are ongoing) has not yet happened. It is safe to assume that this can be attributed to policy silos inside the Commission that make it difficult that policy entrepreneurs within the organisation – even as if were EU officials the ones behind the development of this first ever harmonise typology of what is an “city” and what is not- are able to cross-fertilise policy development and investment decisions within the same organisation.

Another prime example, alongside the Dutch-led Pact of Amsterdam of intergovernmental policy activism in urban policy is the **Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities** launched by the Marseille Declaration⁸ and has been financed since then by the French Government. The RFSC is thus more than a decade old and its primary function is to develop a single format to formulate and evaluate the development and implementation of sustainable policies in cities.

⁷ Regulation (EU) 2017/2391 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 December 2017 amending Regulation (EC) No 1059/2003 as regards the territorial typologies (Tercet), *OJ L 350, 29.12.2017, p. 1–6*

⁸ French EU Presidency, *La ville durable et solidaire. Déclaration finale des ministres en charge dudéveloppement urbain, 25 novembre 2008* .

This required not only the development of the criteria, but also a computer application and data base that was tested by governments and participating cities (Feleki *et al.* 2018). However, while the initiative still exists thanks to the support of the French government, never got a spill over effect (not many participants) to take his internalisation in Member States or EU level. (though the European Parliament ERDF negotiation position for the 2021-2027 period does propose that the RFSC, as well as indeed the localization of SDGs could be financed by the Sustainable Urban Development 6% earmark of ERDF in each Member State).

Within the Commission, REGIO has had over the last decade increased competitors from other quarters, such as the **Covenant of Mayors**.⁹ The EU Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy (it was initially only on energy and later also included climate adaptation) has since its launch in 2008 over 7000 signatories whereby municipalities (not necessarily cities nor necessarily having a mayor, as it is common in Northern Europe) agree to develop an Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan where it commits to exceed the existing 2020 and indeed 2030 energy and climate targets. It has now expanded well beyond the EU to worldwide since 2016 – covering 57 countries. It does not have funds but its Covenant of Mayors Office provides capacity building support. Though not exclusively urban it is mainly so, and with its limitation it nevertheless introduces a top-down and bottom up sustainability governance interface and international external validated of local performance (Heyvaert 2013).

An additional factor that spurred the Commission to develop its Cities for Tomorrow proposal (the antecessor of the EU Urban Agenda-Pact of Amsterdam) was the emergence, almost at the same time as the Covenant of Mayors, of the new initiative of Smart Cities, eventually known as the **Smart Cities and Communities Initiative**, which was formalised in 2011 by the *Smart Cities and Communities Initiative European Innovation Partnership*¹⁰. The objective of this

⁹ European Commission, "Press release.EU Covenant of Mayors and Compact largest launch of Mayors Global Coalition of Cities Committed to fighting climate change", Brussels, June 22, 2016, press release, IP / 16/2247. Also vid. "Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities" URL: www.rsfc.eu

¹⁰ European Commission, *Communication from the Commission. Smart Cities and Communities- European Innovation Partnership*, Brussels, 12 July 2012. C (2012) 4701 Final

initiative is to finance innovative and integrated projects in energy, transport and ICT (Ahvenniemi et al. 2017).

Smart City initiatives are widespread yet unevenly across EU28 and often isolated measures to tackling a range of emerging problems associated with urbanisation. “Therefore, measuring success at city level is complicated by the relative immaturity of most Smart City initiatives and the difficulty of linking initiatives to particular socio-economic issues or a particular system within a city.” (RAND *et al.* 2014). A further issue is the fact that just with ISO there is an interest from the big technological players in developing Smart City standards and policies that can eventually be a new public procurement market.¹¹

Neither the modest size of the Smart Cities and Communities Initiative, about 300 million Euros per year,¹² nor the nature of the project, similar to the failed initiative from DG REGIO *Regions for Economic Change*¹³, was a source of concern for REGIO. The main threat for them was not just the greater visibility for many of its traditional *customers* but these new initiatives of two other Directorates General of the Commission. Indeed, the fundamental problem was that these two new initiatives brought with them a new multilevel governance dynamic whereby cities directly engage with the Commission and in so doing these initiatives were, and are, being actively supported by key technological and business players. Thus the reinvigorated urban activism by REGIO must also be seen under that context.

Sustainable Urban Development Funding

Last but not least while the vast majority of EU funds in cities is not the focus of this contribution it is useful to dwell on those specifically urban programmes (both in terms of

¹¹ A notable critical view is that of Anthony Townsend, *Smart Cities: Big Data, Civic Hackers, and the Quest for a New Utopia* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company 2013), xii.

For a more sober assessment *vid.* E. Mozorov, “Ciudades y ciudadanos inteligentes”, *El País*, 30 de agosto de 2014.

¹² From 2013 its budget increased from € 81 Million to € 365 Million
http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-12-760_en.htm

¹³ Communication from the Commission of 8 November 2006 *Regions for economic change*. COM (2006) 675.

investment and in terms of capacity building) that have been in operation in previous and particularly present programming period and the likely trends for the 2021-2027 programming period currently under negotiation. Well over €16bn are currently being invested in EU urban development initiatives financed under the EU Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF).

Given that the URBAN mainstreaming in the 2007-2014 period did not work the Commission proposed that for the 2014-2020 period Member States are now obliged to earmark at least 5% of their national ERDF allocation (under the Investment for Jobs and Growth goal) to support **integrated sustainable urban development strategies** where urban authorities shall be designated as Intermediate Bodies responsible for at least tasks relating to the selection of operations. for at least tasks relating to the selection of operations. (Pazos-Vidal 2019). The centrepiece of the provision that set this up Article 7 ERDF is the existence of **integrated sustainable urban strategies**, addressing economic, environmental, climate, demographic and social challenges (European Commission 2015).¹⁴ It is as such the largest urban development scheme in place in Europe, in some Member States the only one instrument that exist covering the entire MS focused specifically in urban matters – as with the governance of cohesion policy (Bache 1998) that introduce an externally sourced methodology of multilevel ,partnership and medium term investment planning otherwise absent in many Member States, the new Sustainable Urban Development fills the gap of domestic urban policies, e.g. paradigmatic case of Spain, where it is known as EDUSI (de Gregorio Hurtado 2018)

Though this allocation is not lack without criticism (de Bruijn 2017), notably due to the arbitrary of the internal allocation of funds as well as the preparation of the integrated sustainable urban strategies it certainly generated a sufficiently robust consistency for sustainable urban development to continue for the 2021-2027 period. So much that for the 2021-2027 period the Commission is proposing to move from 5% to 6% of ERDF for Sustainable Urban Development (Article 9.2 new ERDF/CF) “in the form of community-led local development, integrated territorial investments or another territorial tool under [Policy Objective] PO5. This new Policy Objective is one of the five that replaced (for the ERDF/CF and ESF 2021-2027) the 11

¹⁴ European Commission “Guidance for Member States on Integrated Sustainable Urban Development (Article 7 ERDF Regulation)”, 2015 pp 4-5.

Thematic Objectives of the Common Strategic Framework that brought together the priorities of the five ESIF for the 2014-2020 period. PO 5 is thus the successor of Charter I, Part II of CPR that introduced the notion, inherited from the Barca Report, of Integrated Territorial Development, ITI and CLLD (Pazos-Vidal 2014; 2019).

More specifically sustainable Urban Development in 2021-2027 (*new ERDF/CF Art. 9*) Integrated territorial development targeting urban areas, to more effectively tackle the economic, environmental, climate, demographic and social challenges affecting urban areas, including functional urban areas, whereby concerns all investments under PO5 specific objective 1 (per definition for urban areas) as well as all investments under PO1-4 (smarter, greener, more connected and social Europe, respectively) territorial instruments (ITI, CLLD) when targeting urban areas.

The Parliament (Cozzolino Report)¹⁵ is keen to increase it to 10%, even if Council is closer to the Commission proposal but eliminating the references to CLLD or ITI. According to the Commission own figures (Regio Open Data) more than 9% (EUR 32 billion) of Cohesion Policy funds to integrated territorial development. Specifically around 8% (EUR 16,5 billion) of ERDF to sustainable urban development, that is well beyond the present and likely future earmarking.

The draft ERDF/CF 2021-2027 proposes in its article 10 a new **European Urban Initiative** aimed at providing , support to capacity building, support to innovative actions and support to knowledge, policy development and communication. In short it proposes to subsume existing Innovative Urban Actions, URBACT (part of INTERREG and financed by ERDF), the Urban Development Network and interestingly the Urban Agenda for the EU partnerships (currently led by REGIO but contracted out). It is notable that it recognize the present “highly fragmented governance structure and stakeholders’ representation” and the need to “strengthen integrated and participatory approaches to sustainable urban development and provide a stronger link to relevant EU policies, and in particular, cohesion policy investments.” (European Commission

¹⁵ European Parliament, “European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Cohesion Fund 2021–2027”, Strasbourg, 27th March 2019. 2018/0197(COD)

2019). Furthermore, and very much reflecting the concerns about silo approaches that is the leitmotiv of this contribution, it goes on to admit that

“The current initiatives (during the 2014-2020 programming period) reflect a highly fragmented governance structure and representation for the different stakeholders. Therefore, the steer of urban matters at EU level remains partial, without involving cities directly and multiplying fora of cooperation. Analysing the governance of URBACT, UIA, Urban Agenda for the EU (UAEU) intergovernmental cooperation (Urban Development Group (UDG) Directors General in Urban Matters (DGUM)) and the Urban Development Network (UDN): The EUI governance should provide a decision making and implementation mechanism that enables the delivery of the synergies described in the intervention logic.”¹⁶

The European Parliament (Cozzolino Report) goes even further, proposing that the new EUI would also provide capacity building for elected members, finance Territorial Impact Assessments, link with the European Network for Rural Development (thus, realising the unfinished business of RURBAN and providing additional links with *Smart Villages* (also a new proposal in Article 11a Cozzolino Report – *vid. Pazos-Vidal 2019*)¹⁷ and, crucially support the roll out of the “the reference framework on sustainable cities, the territorial agenda of the European Union and the adjustment of the UN Sustainable Development Goals to the local level circumstances.”¹⁸. Crucially this consistency and one-stop-shop support is what has been severely lacking so far in the existing EU policy and funding framework for urban areas.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Pazos-Vidal, Serafin. “Reto Demográfico”, *Agenda Pública*, 7 April 2019. Available in: <http://agendapublica.elpais.com/reto-demografico/>

¹⁸ *Vid. Supra* note 14.

Roles	Cities	Member States	European Commission	Management
URBACT (shared management)	Not represented	Strategy steering. Management by one Member State	Supervision	Managing authority – secretariat CGET
Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) (Indirect management)	Not represented	Not represented	Management	Entrusted entity Secretariat
Urban Agenda of the EU (UAEU) (Intergovernmental process, direct management of administration)	Represented by CEMR and cities network	Supervision	Management	EC - Framework contract
Urban Development Network (UDN) (direct management)	Not represented	Not represented	Management	EC - Framework contract
EUI based on the Commission proposal (Indirect management)	Strategy steering	Strategy steering	Strategy steering and management	Entrusted entity Secretariat

However, and in a proof that silo approaches are not exclusively the result of internal Commission divisions but a reflection of diverse policy communities neither the Council nor the Parliament (Arimont Report) are keen to entrust the Commission with managing (or contract out) a single facility to support urban development – preferring in the case of ESPON and URBACT to return to INTERREG and thus to shared management.

If confirmed, at the end of ongoing negotiations the chop-sliced landscape for supporting sustainable urban development would bear a strong resemblance with the Commission failed plans for a boosted up Urban Development Network in the 2014-2020 period (Pazos-Vidal 2014).

CONCLUSION

This contribution has tried to scope the various “new urban agendas” (global, European, EU; public, private, both; investment, knowledge, performance; top down, bottom up or both) that are currently at play. Not an easy task as just as with the “Europe of the Regions” in the late 80s to early 2000s (Anwen 2008), international urban agendas are the flavour of the month and indeed

of the decade. We have attempted to provide an overview highlighting where possible the areas of overlap, the obvious gaps, the inconsistencies, the areas of cooperation but most commonly of competition among policy entrepreneurs and, in some occasions, obvious potential conflicts of interest.

An obvious subtext of this contribution is the implicit preference for integrated, or at least interoperable urban initiatives that do have a modicum of public accountability. While this is clearly a normative standpoint it should also be critically assessed.

Does it makes sense that at some point there is an European, and indeed worldwide standard on sustainable urban development, one integrated World Urban Agenda rather than the piecemeal approach that, even without getting down to the national and subnational level, exists at the moment?

It would be clearly unwelcome. The example of ISO is a clear one on the risk of over-harmonisation and of principal-agent problems (Jensen and Mecking 1976) by trusting upon not necessarily accountable “technicians” what it is a matter of policy choice without a “right” answer: there are but many equally valid models of sustainable cities. As Carpotti *et. al.* (2017) rightly highlight when talking about the New Urban Agenda and SDG 11 we should avoid the “risky critical fetishization of the role of ‘experts’ in global urban policy. Provided, as Huete Garcia (2019)¹⁹ affirms, the differences from the various agendas can be understood in terms the contextual differences between them so that in essence they do not reflect lack coherence and can complement each other, such diversity is welcome.

A *sensu contrario*, however, the excessive fragmentation of competing urban agendas, instruments and policies is unhelpful. Even practitioners and researchers find difficult to apprehend this mushrooming of very similar instruments to the point that it is becoming unwieldy. While admitting, as mentioned above, that diversity of instruments is necessary to avoid a homogenized approach to urban policy, and that it is understandable from the point of

¹⁹ Unpublished work. The author is grateful for professor Maria Angeles Huete Garcia (UPO, Spain) for her insights into her forthcoming publication

view of maximization of utility that each organisation pushes its own agenda, the risks of such proliferation is that the new Urban Agenda(s) run the same fate as now long peaked the "Europe of the Regions" paradigm.

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