EUROPEAN URBAN INITIATIVE

EUI CAPACITY BUILDING REPORT

Integrated approaches to sustainable urban development
4-5 July 2023 in Ljubljana, Slovenia

1. Introduction

Sustainable Urban Development is key to responding to the current challenges cities in Europe face, ranging from climate change and specific demographic processes, the inclusion of migrants and refugees, to the consequences of economic stagnation in terms of job creation and social progress, and the needs and impact of digitalisation. The various dimensions of urban life, with its environmental, economic, social and cultural aspects, are interlinked and can only be properly addressed by an integrated approach to urban transformation. Measures concerning physical urban renewal must be combined with those promoting education, economic development, social inclusion and environmental protection. Strong partnerships are necessary between citizens, civil society, knowledge institutions, industry and various levels of government.

Within this SUD approach, Integrated territorial development (ITD) proposes a holistic way of shaping solutions to territorial challenges regardless of thematic fields or administrative boundaries. The concept is widely recognised and has been at the core of EU urban policies for several decades. The New Leipzig Charter has proposed four key principles that are commonly used as working principles: the cross-sectoral, multi-level governance, place-based, and participatory approaches.

These working principles translate into a methodological approach and lead cities and territories to adopt new ways of designing urban policies. In particular, these principles help incorporate the complexity of conflicting objectives and interlinked challenges. Although the principles of integrated territorial development are not new, cities still face difficulties in effectively implementing ITD.

The "Integrated approaches to sustainable urban development" capacity building event was conceived for urban practitioners seeking to build their capacity on integrated, cross-sectoral, multi-level governance, place-based, and participatory approaches to urban sustainability. The objective of the event was to support urban and regional authorities from small and medium cities within less developed and transition regions to build their capacity for developing an integrated, place-based approach to Sustainable Urban Development (SUD).

The event aimed to:

- Explore the four main principles of integrated territorial development: cross-sectoral, multi-level governance, place-based, and participatory approaches.

- Discuss innovative practices and approaches in Sustainable Urban Development through case studies connected to these approaches as well as to the thematic streams of greening cities, sustainable tourism and digitalisation.

- Help participants conceive pipelines of innovative and integrated SUD projects using Cohesion Policy funds: with a focus on local partnership, coordinating the timeline of project lifecycles, linking projects with wider policy objectives in the city and delivering expected results.

The two-day event included plenary sessions, four workshops and study visits. Participants had the opportunity to complete one of the three parallel full tracks on place-based, integrated approaches to SUD. Each track looked at the four main principles of SUD (cross-sectoral, multi-level governance, place-based, and participatory approaches) through one specific subtheme of SUD: greening cities, sustainable tourism and digitalisation.

Event participation was open to urban authorities, managing authorities and urban practitioners from local stakeholder organisations. In total, 20 European cities participated in the event, alongside three Managing Authorities and intermediate bodies. 70% of the participants came from less developed regions; 13% from regions in transition and 16% from more developed regions. All participants were from small and medium-sized cities[1].

Collection of learning needs and ideas. Photo by Kristina Bursać

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[1] cities whose population is below 500,000 inhabitants

2. Capacity Building program

The capacity building program was developed in order to address, from theoretical and practical points of view, the Sustainable Urban Development concepts and how they may be applied to our cities. In particular, the focus of the event was on three highly relevant topics for the EU policy and funding:

- Digitalisation[2]: this group explored how Digital Transition may provide better public services to citizens, support European cities in exploiting the possibilities of digitalisation and help European businesses to develop new innovations and create new business opportunities for global markets.

- Greening[3]: this group focused on green and blue infrastructure in an urban context and created extensive links to other priority sectors, namely the built environment, sustainable transport, water management and urban agriculture. Additionally, it reflected on biodiversity preservation and adaptation to climate change. Greening efforts should be aligned with the objectives of cities to provide higher well-being to citizens through cleaner air, better inclusiveness and a more aesthetic environment.

- Sustainable tourism[4]: this group looked into the need for a balance between economic, social, cultural, and environmental sustainability in order to protect the welfare of locals and tourists alike, respect the natural and cultural environment and ensure the socio-economic development and competitiveness of destinations and businesses through an integrated and holistic policy approach.

The thematic groups' learning trajectories were organised around a series of short inputs by the designated experts, followed by moderated discussions as well as group work. This workshop structure was conceived to both provide participants with findings of the Integrated Territorial Development study[5] of UIA projects and principles of the integrated approach as well as to engage them in conversations and exchange of experiences among them. The original structure of presentations and workshops sessions was regularly revisited and adjusted by the experts, responding to emerging needs and interests of the participants.

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[2] EU Urban Agenda report on Digital Transition:
https://www.urbanagenda.urban-initiative.eu/partnerships/digital-transition

[3] EU Urban Agenda on Greening Cities:
https://www.urbanagenda.urban-initiative.eu/partnerships/greening-cities

[4] EU Urban Agenda on Sustainable Tourism:
https://www.urbanagenda.urban-initiative.eu/partnerships/sustainable-tourism

[5] Integrated Territorial Development study:
https://www.uia-initiative.eu/en/operational-challenges/integrated-development-action

The groups followed the common methodology established for the event across the different thematic groups, leading participants through the principles of cross-sectoral, multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance, place-based and participatory approaches. The workshop presentations are available on the EUI website[6].

Participants of the session included public officers from cities and managing authorities (regions), as well as NGOs supporting municipalities or developing tourism services in cooperation with municipalities. All participants were interested in applying for the next round of UIA calls with a focus on greening cities or sustainable tourism.

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[6] Presentations available on the EUI website:
https://www.urban-initiative.eu/events/supporting-integrated-approaches-sustainable-urban-development

Cross-sectoral approach module

"The cross-sectoral approach to urban strategies refers to the need to overcome the 'siloed' structure of sectorally divided functions which characterises public organisations, in order to tackle multi- dimensional challenges. The goal of the approach is to ensure coherence in policy-making principles and objectives across policy areas, and to ensure actors relating to different sectors cooperate to create policies."

Handbook of Sustainable Urban Development Strategies, JRC[7]

Cross-sectoral theme mapping workshop. Photo by Levente Polyak

Cross sectoral approaches are fundamental in order to establish a strategy and project which may be strongly embedded in the administration and within the stakeholder environment.

Some topics may be more spontaneously seen as cross-sectoral: in fact, it is hard, maybe impossible, to think of a sector that could not be affected by **digitalisation** or would have no

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[7] Joint Research Centre handbook: https://urban.jrc.ec.europa.eu/urbanstrategies/introduction

potential digital aspect. This includes policy sectors commonly represented by a specific department such as urban planning, transport, education, culture, tourism etc. It also applies to 'sectors' which may cut across departments such as gender, disability, greening or governance. Throughout the sessions, it emerged how digitalisation can be tackled both as the core issue of an integrated approach (e.g. through a digitalisation strategy / action plan / project) or introduced as an aspect of integration (cross-cutting topic) in other plans or strategies (e.g. digitalisation within a mobility strategy or a waste management strategy). In fact, integration needs to be deliberately thought out in the co-design phase, as it emerged both from the case studies presented as well as from the direct experience of workshop participants, cross-sectoral integration is a conscious decision and process starting from the very beginning of the project concept development. For this reason, a key figure in this process is the facilitator who has the capacity of working across sectors, who is reliable and independent from any specific agenda. Whilst such incentives do not need investments, they require a clear political vision, more top-down, as well as a softer cooperation structure amongst civil servants, in a more bottom-up manner.

When looking at how to implement **greening** strategies, it clearly emerges how they are connected not only to a wide range of environmental issues, such as water, soil and air quality, but also to cultural elements, in terms of awareness, and economic elements, such as in the case of food production and distribution. Therefore it is important that greening strategies are not limited to different departments within an administration but require cross sectoral partnerships. In many cases these partnerships can build on part experiences: past European projects or large-scale competitions may have generated local collaborations that can serve as a basis for new partnerships. Furthermore, in some sectors, which might be very fragmented due to the presence of many small operators, it is advisable to involve umbrella organisations. Hence, it is fundamental to make sure to develop a stakeholder mapping process to ensure the involvement of all key players.

Tourism was identified by participants as a potential development path for cities and regions losing youth to larger cities and developing new forms of identification with the city. Discussions about the challenges and potentials of **sustainable and responsible tourism** highlighted the need for linking different sectors in order to fight over-tourism: a cross-sectoral approach is crucial in diversifying destinations and tourism services or in creating more joint activities for tourists and locals. This approach is facilitated by the establishment of cross-sectoral structures, operating transversely through different themes or fields of expertise. Such cross-sectoral structures may be internal to administrations, like inter-departmental offices embedded in municipalities and therefore with a better access to information and politicians. In turn, external agencies or public companies can be more agile in decision-making, more flexible with procurement rules and more connected to outside actors. Despite their differences, all of these models imply a political will to develop synergies as well as adequate processes and resources to ensure the successful implementation of cross-sectoral strategies and actions.

Multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance module

"Every governmental level – local, regional, metropolitan, national, European and global – has a specific responsibility for the future of our cities based on the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. Complex challenges should be jointly tackled by all levels of urban and spatial policy. This requires the cooperation of all societal actors, including civil society and the private sector. As recommended by the Pact of Amsterdam and the New Urban Agenda, vertical and horizontal multi-level and multi-stakeholder cooperation, both bottom-up and top-down, is key to good urban governance."

The New Leipzig Charter[8]

Stakeholder mapping exercise. Photo by Kristina Bursać

Multi-level governance is a key factor of all themes addressed at the Ljubljana event. While everyone agrees on the importance of cooperation between local, regional, national and EU levels, there are often missing competences to effectively connect these levels in terms of

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[8] New Leipzig Charter:
https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/brochure/new_leipzig_charter/new_leipzig_charter_en.pdf

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complementary funding and the management or technical accompaniment of infrastructure development.

In addition to 'standard' requirements for horizontal and vertical partnerships, **digitalisation** needs to particularly consider whether there may be potential for specific efficiency gains from cross-departmental coordination. For example, in cases where two departments are planning and investing in new digital solutions which could possibly be combined e.g. into one platform or tool. It is important at the very least to share plans and experiences in the development of digital projects – including those which have not worked due to the relatively high risks of failing to deliver hoped-for gains (e.g. platforms that do not work, are not user friendly or that residents simply do not use). Efficiencies can also be explored vertically. An example was discussed from Slovenia where multiple cities were developing a digital mobility solution with the same provider, but rather than conducting this in a coordinated way through an association of cities, each city was paying for its own solution in parallel. This was partly because each city felt it needed something unique, but may not have been the case if more time had been taken to review and compare real needs. The inclusion of specific digital expertise within partnership approaches to digitalisation is also particularly important – many solutions will be beyond the technical understanding of policymakers/administrators. At the same time, care needs to be taken if and when the digital advisors also have an interest in selling their products to the city authority. Similarly, the approach to working with big tech firms can be delicate and some cities are more comfortable than others in partnering with big (American) firms. At the same time, cities that refuse to work with big tech can find themselves wasting money on solutions that cannot compete.

When looking into **greening** initiatives carried out through multi-level partnerships, it is evident that these partnerships are also connected to the cross-sectoral approach addressed in the previous chapter. In fact, the case studies shared with participants demonstrate that not only do different governance levels interact because of jurisdiction and political pressure, but also that different partnerships activate different governance interactions. For example when looking at food markets in Rome[9] and throughout Europe, it is evident that the improvement of short food chain distribution through local food markets requires the involvement of a great diversity of actors. For example, in Rome, food markets are managed by local districts, owned by the central City Council and following regional law on commerce. Furthermore, food markets are an opportunity for local producers to sell their agricultural products, therefore involving a chain of public and private stakeholders, but also a place for cultural and social involvement, therefore involving neighbourhood associations as well as relevant municipal departments.

Developing **sustainable tourism** processes in cities also requires effective multi-level governance whether in the case of connecting municipalities like the 2023 European Capital of Culture season in Veszprém-Balaton – or connecting city districts around heritage assets like

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[9] New life to markets project:
https://cooperativecity.org/product/il-rilancio-dei-mercati-spazio-pubblico-servizi-comunitari-ed-economia-circolare/

Ecomuseo Casilino[10] in East Rome. Coordinating cooperation at the regional, inter-municipal or public-community levels has been pronounced as a key factor of success in the promotion of tourism services, taking shape in a variety of forms. For instance, a committee in Pula decides about the programming of the Roman amphitheatre, taking into account the opinions of residents, businesses and cultural organisations. Cultural councils in various cities bring together professionals of culture to create joint actions in the field of tourism as well. Local business associations and neighbourhood councils, in turn, can be influential actors in discussing tourism licences and other permissions in an area.

Place-based approach module

"Places should be regarded as reference points for an integrated horizontal and vertical approach. Urban strategies and urban funding instruments should be based on sound analysis of the specific local situation, especially potential benefits and risks, stakeholders and restrictions, while following place-based development. This will enable endogenous urban transformation and reduce local socioeconomic inequalities. Appropriate formal and informal instruments should cover all spatial levels, from neighbourhoods to local authorities and wider functional areas including the metropolitan level."

The New Leipzig Charter[11]

Site visit exploring sustainable urban planning principles in Ljubljana. Photo by Daniela Patti

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[10] See:
https://cooperativecity.org/2019/04/18/ecomuseo-casilino-an-open-air-museum-in-the-eastern-periphery-of-rome/

[11] New Leipzig Charter:
https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/brochure/new_leipzig_charter/new_leipzig_charter_en.pdf

In order to delve into implementations of a place-based approach, a number of site visits were organised in Ljubljana. The visits enabled participants to explore the ways in which the Ljubljana Municipality used a place-based approach to address issues of digitalisation, greening and sustainable tourism. Given their international composition, an overall consideration by site visit participants has been that each place is unique with its own challenges, culture, organisations and potential. For this reason, projects with a place-based approach have to be carefully adapted to their specific setting and this can only be done by engaging meaningfully with local groups. For complex projects, this approach requires an understanding of what has been done before, what worked and what did not, and a good overview of the organisations and enterprises that are present in the given context. In early stages of such projects, project teams need to take on a listening role to best understand how the project can work.

The scale of the area of intervention should be selected to bring policies together in an integrated approach and to maximise impact while taking account of other relevant factors. Place-based considerations are typically more relevant to the application – rather than the development of new **digital** solutions, which are often flexible enough to be adapted and tailored to specific locations. One consideration though is that investment in new digital solutions may require sufficient scale to warrant the investment. More local solutions can be based on (adaptation of) off-the-shelf solutions. Overall, approaches to addressing localised challenges should – as with sectoral approaches – always consider whether digitalisation can bring added value to traditional approaches.

When using the place-based approach at neighbourhood level, consider what is the best spatial scale for different types of support. Often the neighbourhood level is chosen because of the concentration of problems and available resources in the given area. However, it does not automatically mean that all territorial investments should be at this scale. This consideration emerged strongly from the **sustainable tourism** tour, as participants discussed the transformation of the city centre and its impacts on the broader city, with many areas rather isolated from the centre.

The **greening** site visits were looking into projects carried out in Ljubljana, investigating the importance of interconnected green spaces and their beneficial impacts, for example on bees. A great level of detail was provided on the city's wealth of large existing forest areas, though these forests suffer from fragmented ownership. Clearly it is harder to make progress on high quality forestry management with private owners who may be reluctant to invest when the commercial returns are minimal. From this discussion, it emerged that granular and timely territorialised data is necessary for the place-based approach, in order to analyse and foresee or prevent developments.

Participatory approach module

"The integrated approach requires the involvement of the general public as well as social, economic and other stakeholders in order to consider their concerns and knowledge. Public participation in urban development processes should engage all urban actors, which also strengthens local democracy. Wherever possible, citizens should have a say in processes that impact their daily lives. New forms of participation should be encouraged and improved, including co-creation and co-design in cooperation with inhabitants, civil society networks, community organisations and private enterprises. Experimenting with new forms of participation can help cities manage conflicting interests, share responsibilities and find innovative solutions while also reshaping and maintaining urban spaces and forming new alliances to create integrated city spaces."

The New Leipzig Charter[12]

Eutropian Role-playing game. Photo by Levente Polyak

[12] New Leipzig Charter:
https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/brochure/new_leipzig_charter/new_leipzig_charter_en.pdf

Participation of citizens and the involvement of the general public is perhaps the most important principle of integrated territorial development. In the session focusing on participation, participants were introduced to various frameworks to assess participation, with a focus on Sherry Arnstein's Ladder of Participation[13] and the International Association for Public Participation's Spectrum of Public Participation.[14] The dynamics of participation was demonstrated to participants with the help of a role-playing game[15], which allowed participants to impersonate a local stakeholder in a participatory process related to a challenge on digitalisation, greening or sustainable tourism.

Levels of citizen engagement and participation need to take account of citizen understanding of **digitalisation** and related issues. Many people struggle to understand the complexity of solutions and implications, for example, in terms of privacy of personal data and can therefore reject good ideas for the wrong reasons. On the one hand, it is important to understand and reflect on people's reluctance or antipathy towards a particular solution e.g. digital barriers. On the other hand, digital education is important to help people understand how digital solutions work and how they can help. Thus citizen education is important even though this comes low on the ladder of participation. Citizen participation in terms of user testing and feedback can be particularly useful with digital solutions – perhaps more than co-designing digital solutions themselves. However, an issue which came up with regard to the presentation of the PSILifestyle project[16] (a personalised carbon footprint calculator) was that: it is one thing getting people to use the app in testing, but participants were dubious about whether people would actually download and use the app of their own accord without any incentive.

In the interactive role-playing session, **greening cities** stream participants were tasked with developing a sports facility that had a strong greening component. This ruled out simple monocultures like grass football pitches. Participants found that listening to such a variety of roles was a useful exercise to understand the multiplicity of voices emerging in a participatory situation. The game generated a number of interesting questions, for example about the ongoing maintenance of trees that have been planted and the responsibilities related to such maintenance. As the Prato Urban Jungle UIA project demonstrates, participation is rarely straight-forward and consultations do not always go according to plan: residents of a social housing estate expressed their priorities as investment in new heating systems rather than growing a vertical jungle.

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[13] See https://organizingengagement.org/models/ladder-of-citizen-participation/

[14] See https://organizingengagement.org/models/spectrum-of-public-participation/

[15] Eutropian's role-playing game:
https://cooperativecity.org/2021/03/12/gamification-and-new-scenarios-for-digital-participation-tools-and-methods/

[16] PSILifestyle project: https://pslifestyle.eu/

The **sustainable tourism** stream highlighted the participatory experience of the UIA project DARE in Ravenna[17] with a focus on its virtuous communication, outreach as well as citizen involvement methodologies. In the role-playing session – inspired by the site visits and the experiences of their respective cities – participants identified three key themes: 1) reconciling tourists and locals (housing prices, noise, services); 2) finding a balance between pedestrian spaces and parking needs; 3) creating infrastructure for tourists with kids and elaborated a series of actions leading towards these goals. The result of the game was a set of actions serving as potential interfaces between tourists and locals, creating the possibility of channelling tourism revenues into local services and infrastructure (for example creating activities in green areas that are suitable for both tourists and locals). The session – encouraging participants to identify with different roles and interests around an urban conflict – allowed previously less active participants to get more involved and have their voices heard.

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[17] DARE project: https://uia-initiative.eu/en/uia-cities/ravenna

3. How to build a project pipeline

Why a pipeline of projects is needed

It is only through delivering batches of projects that integrated approaches can be achieved in the territory concerned. The notion of a project pipeline is a metaphor for both the volume and the flow of projects. The pipeline implies a timescale being added to the cross-sectoral mix of projects and their geographical locations. For example, one project such as business incubation might require the completion of building the incubation centre before it can start.

Practical recommendations to achieve this

The most important thing is to have an action plan for implementing the strategy that contains all the relevant projects to be implemented in the territory during the period of the strategy (normally the programme period). The action plan is the project manager's version of the pipeline. This action plan needs to list proposed start and finish dates for each project, the budget, the policy area, the geographical location and any dependencies to other projects in the same area as well as assumptions and risks. Project managers need to be aware of critical paths in the timeline. Most importantly, they need to carefully manage external factors outside the control of the city administration such as environmental permits from agencies or higher levels of government, procurement, and state aid that can delay projects and throw out coordination efforts.

How this is done through ITI

Behind an Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI) strategy[18] there is a batch of indicative projects that the cities are thinking of implementing. Here the problem can be to achieve coherence as in multi-municipality formats there needs to be a selection system that is fair to the participating municipalities. This may not deliver a coherent set of projects in either time or space. In this sense, the presentations from Utrecht where the city has its own ITI within the wider province and perhaps the Finnish 20 city approach is more straightforward than that in the 40 municipalities making up the functional urban area of the Brno ITI. Ljubljana competed with 10 other cities in the last programme and with 11 in the current period.

URBACT integrated action plans are slightly different in that they normally start from a particular theme and are not funded. The challenge for cities in a network is to produce a credible action plan in which the projects are capable of being funded. One key aspect focused on by speaker Ed Thorpe is the need to develop part of the plan in detail when it would be unrealistic to expect the whole plan to be realised in the medium term.

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[18] Further information on Integrated Territorial Investment:
https://www.uia-initiative.eu/en/news/integrated-territorial-development-action

4. Conclusions

For a capacity building on Sustainable Urban Development (SUD) to be useful and successful, it is essential for cities to learn from one another and to see concretely the impacts of the projects, discussing them with the local players that develop them. For this reason, it was essential to develop a curriculum that combined a conceptual framework as well as hands-on practical activities, such as collective mapping, site visits and role-playing games.

It clearly emerged that Sustainable Urban Development elements are strictly interconnected to one another, therefore some of the main learnings are:

1. Integration needs to be deliberately thought out in the co-design phase and can be further increased in a stepwise progression during implementation. Therefore, to be effective you need to set clear and tangible targets for each policy objective and communicate them.

2. We need to build on a specific momentum to bring partners together towards a shared goal, building on earlier initiatives, practices, partnerships and visions, potentially establishing new organisational interfaces for cooperation;

3. It is important to identify the right scale of intervention during the application phase. A key challenge is to replicate in the same city or elsewhere a project which is developed upon place-based conditions. In order to make the replication successful, it might be necessary to anticipate, shape and govern external factors which have an effect on the place-based approach.

Useful information

EUI Capacity building

These capacity building activities supported by the European Urban Initiative provide follow-up opportunities for urban authorities to further explore the challenges and solutions identified in this capacity building event. City-to-city exchanges can be requested by any urban authority allowing them to visit or host a visit from one or two other urban authorities in different EU Member States along with their stakeholders. Urban authorities implementing CLLD strategies (in line with article 11 of the ERDF regulation) can apply to participate in a peer review, allowing them to receive targeted recommendations on their specific guiding questions from up to three peers from different EU Member States.

www.urban-initiative.eu/capacity-building

The URBACT Toolbox

Provides tools and materials for designing and implementing integrated and participatory actions in your city. Discover guidance, tools, templates, prompts, explainers and much more to find your way when tackling urban challenges. The Toolbox is organised into the five stages of the action-planning cycle and the crosscutting actions of engaging stakeholders and sharing knowledge. Aligned with the URBACT Method, it draws from capacity-building activities. This means that as responses to urban challenges are updated, city-makers can expect to find new tools on this page – stay tuned!

https://urbact.eu/toolbox-home

Paper production from alien plant species during the site visit in Ljubljana. Photo by Kristina Bursać