MEMO
To: ECTP-CEU
From: Jan Vogelij
Re: Urban Agenda for the EU

General

The meeting of Member State DGs responsible for Urban Matters was held on April 4 under Maltese EU Presidency in Malta. The content for this meeting has been prepared in the UDG meeting of March 4 (see account of 08/03/2017)
This meeting was mainly dedicated to progress reports of the 12 Thematic Partnerships (see MEMO of 08/03) including approval of the composition of newly starting partnerships.
My accounts concentrate on discussions among the participants, which developed in reaction on the progress reports.

First Malta presented an overview on its planning issues and spatial development challenges.

Discussions

The Commission's DG Regio representative reported about the DG's actions with regard to the Urban Agenda for the EU. The increased importance of the issue is perceived daily. Everybody talks about cooperation and the Thematic Partnership approach resulting from the Dutch initiative, showing enormous dedicated energy among all countries, is broadly recognized as an excellent example.

DGRegio organizes the EU Cities Forum 27 November this year in Rotterdam.

Everybody is invited to engage in the Urban Agenda for the EU through the Futurium website. It is in the air and open for contributions and improvements.

According to the request done in Amsterdam, DGRegio provides the secretariat supportive to all Thematic Partnerships: A two-years framework contract has assigned Ecorys as technical secretariat. They help the coordinators when needed and employ EUKN and Eurocities as sub-contractors.

The Commission representatives tell that they sell the Urban Agenda for the EU activities in all their contacts with other DG's. There is a lot of interest and expectation, so results are needed soon in order to avoid disappointments. Do not wait until results are perfect. They suggest as an example that they talk daily with others about child poverty, without knowing what the Thematic Partnership will report about this subject.

When outputs are available a consultation round is envisaged so that the results are broader embedded.

The intention is to report to the Council of the EU in December. Since the Urban Agenda for the EU was a Council Conclusion, the results of the Thematic Partnership may also result in such highest EU political decision.
The Dutch special envoy suggests issuing already some results of the work in order to influence the EU machinery soon. The earlier influencing the political process, the better.

The Committee of the Regions warns for inventing the wheel. There are so many actions like innovation partnerships; take them on board. Link the partnerships also to the Better Regulation Agenda. Connect with the Regulatory Scrutiny Board to get things already in their heads.

Belgium suggests creating co-ownership through contacts with other policy preparation and review of Territorial Agenda 2020.

Eurocities asks, regarding the envisaged outreach, in how far published results can incorporate comments of the public consultation?

Hungary referring to ECTP-CEU comments in earlier meetings, asks how to avoid the risk of sector approaches instead of integrated approaches?

ECTP-CEU: *Although the Thematic Partnerships approach includes a large achievement in starting vertical cooperation, we are happy with remarks about the risk of sector approaches. Partners are invited to assign sector experts. It is not impossible that this may at the end result in an ideal sector solution for a non-attractive territory with a sub optimal quality of life. Therefore expertise of spatial planners is needed who are experts in integrative approaches. Planners are experienced in balancing often conflicting interests, which are present everywhere. So we recommend explicitly searching for organizational answers to the question how to secure horizontal coordination and involve trained planners.*

The Committee of the Regions organizes a meeting of partnership coordinators with COTER members and members of the European Parliament.

Austria emphasizes that the cross cutting themes require integrative approaches as well as that the different themes must be regarded in combination for their effects on the ground.

The Commission mentions that they have a grouping looking for the integrated effects.

Finland mentions that they organized a National Urban Commission, which is specifically focussing on cross cutting themes.

Belgium emphasizes the importance of considering the cross cutting issues from the start on in the first steps, not as an extra additional issue.

Some issues arising from secific progress reports were:

(Partnership on immigration)
How to blend EU and EIB funding? The problem is between long-term aimed funding and money needed in crisis situations. There is a large need for housing, but no financial support.

(Partnership on Air Quality)
Modelling is extremely difficult because each situation in terms of source of pollution and regulation is different. Each situation should be considered at all levels in combination; vertical and horizontal coordination needed.

(Partnership on Urban Child Poverty)
Discussions in the partnership consisting of actors from many different social contexts require more time.

(Partnership on Housing)
This group concentrates on non-crisis housing for renting and ownership, which is affordable for starters and other vulnerable demanders for housing.

(Partnership on Circular Economy)
This subject is so broad that it requires a comprehensive approach, but practical considerations require some selectivity. It is basically about urban governance.

(Partnership on Jobs and Skills)
Croatia misses concrete requirements for future planning like joint working places, local products markets, flexible distant working etc

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on behalf of the ECTP-CEU
to the Council of the EU meetings
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