# purple

## peri-urban regions platform Europe

## PURPLE responses to questions of the consultation on 'The urban dimension of EU policies – key features of an EU Urban Agenda'

1. What are the main rationales for an EU urban agenda? Where can EU action bring most added value? What elements of urban development would benefit from a more concerted approach between different sectors and levels of governance?

**Rationales:**
- Recognition that 'urban' policy as not just policy for cities.
- Recognition of the essential interdependencies between different sorts of territory – urban, peri-urban, rural, remote.
- Better understanding of the positives and negatives around urban development to maximise the benefits, replicate good practice and avoid repeating the same mistakes.
- Achieving more sustainable urban development, including limiting the urban footprint.

**EU added value:**
- Managing the debate and input at a broader level so it is not dominated by a city-centred view but takes in all kinds of urban territorial development and the associated impacts.
- Capitalising on an opportunity to look at good practice in multi-functional land use and transfer of good practice.
- Developing an up to date and integrated policy approach.

**'More concerted approach':**

Any urban agenda should include a consideration of urban impacts on surrounding/nearby territories and vice versa. There is a perception of urban importance and even dominance over other territorial needs. This is seen in policy programmes and funding arrangements and should be questioned and resisted. Cities must not just grow 'at any cost'. They are increasingly part of complex systems (polycentric), where a wider peri-urban area provides essential support and resources which enable cities to function and succeed. An urban agenda will have to recognize the relationships between cities and towns and the adjacent/surrounding peri-urban areas which contribute to the quality of life of the cities and the health and well-being of their citizens by supplying direct products and services (food, clean water) but also essential ecosystem services, which improve the quality of life and health of urban residents. This interdependence is often not managed as a truly balanced relationship. Old mistakes are being repeated.

The complexity of multi-layered governance must also be recognised in a way that steers clear of value judgements and assumptions about the relative importance of the approaches taken by different governance structures of different sizes. There is considerable existing good practice, particularly in the more densely occupied areas of the EU which should be applied more widely.

Similarly the active involvement of a wide range of stakeholders is key – even where their interests are seemingly at odds with each other. Again there are many complexities but there is considerable good practice to build upon.

> 2.   Should an EU urban agenda focus on a limited number of urban challenges? Or, should an EU urban agenda provide a general framework to focus attention on the urban dimension of EU policies across the board, strengthening coordination between sectoral policies, city, national and EU actors?

A general framework is a much more sensible approach given the complexity and diversity of EU development. In practice the sorts of challenges that are normally thought about overlap and impact one upon the other so to look at some, but not all, is a problematic starting point. Policy coordination is essential, and should include inter alia consideration of food production and distribution, environmental protection, transport infrastructure, energy production and distribution, water and waste management, climate change impacts. Many of the supporting resources for Europe's cities are provided by the nearby peri-urban areas, which also furnish urban populations with open space for recreation, and urban business with a labour pool and series of infrastructure systems.

Indeed, **the 7th Environment Action Programme (EAP)**[1] - *Living well, within the limits of our planet* - that will be guiding European environment policy until 2020 clearly mentions the peri-urban challenges within its Priority objective 8: To enhance the sustainability of the Union's cities:

*(30) The Union is densely populated, and over 70 % of its citizens live in urban <u>and peri-urban areas</u> and face specific environmental and climate-related challenges.*

*(90) The Union is densely populated and by 2020, 80 % of its population is likely to live in urban <u>and peri-urban areas</u>. […] The environmental impacts of cities also spread well beyond their physical limits, as they rely heavily on peri-urban and rural regions to meet demand for food, energy, space and resources, and to manage waste.*

> 3.   Is the European model of urban development as expressed in "Cities of Tomorrow" a sufficient basis to take the work on the EU urban agenda further?

'Cities of Tomorrow' provides a good basis insofar as it clearly recognises the peri-urban dimension and the imperative to move beyond any old-fashioned urban-rural typology.  It sets out a clear picture of the challenges (Page VI) and is realistic about the need for a wider debate and for input from more than just cities[2]. Indeed it contains the following strong assertions:

- "**The new urban reality is characterised by peri-urban development**. New relationships between the core city and its surroundings are developing […] In older industrial countries **the peri-urban is a zone of social and economic restructuring**: in the EU growth zones, and

---

[1] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013D1386&from=EN

[2] **"Cities of tomorrow: challenges, visions, ways forward"**

most of the developing world, **the peri-urban is often a zone of rapid and chaotic urban sprawl**. In both situations, **it is clear that the peri-urban is not just an in-between fringe**; rather it is a new and distinct kind of multi-functional territory.

- **Many people are settling in peri-urban areas** because they can find better quality housing with more living surface per capita. […] Out-migration from the city centre to the peri-urban areas may also result from a demand for a greener, more attractive and family-friendly environment.
- Sustainable mobility includes several dimensions and components: […] **peri-urban networks that need to be planned within the context of overall land-use and spatial development**
- **The interplay between urban centres and their surrounding regional rural space is a serious challenge**, **together with the resilience and vulnerability of the natural resources in that peri-urban space**. Large cities need vast hinterlands, and conflicts over resources and their use may arise with other cities or agricultural users. Ecosystems may come under pressure by the over-intensive and weakly regulated use of the soil, by demographic or market pressures e.g. intensive agro-food production for a global market rather than for a shorter producer–consumer circuit with diversified local production.

The peri-urban specificities are also highlighted in the five **"Thematic issue papers"** accompanying this report[3].

In his speech on 'Cities of Tomorrow' in Warsaw on 24 October 2011 at the Conference on "Effective instruments for territorial development", Johannes HAHN, Commissioner for Regional Policy stated that "*another interesting conclusion is that administrative boundaries of cities no longer reflect the reality of urban development – urban sprawl and deeper links to the cities' hinterland call for more flexible administrative structures*"[4].

'Cities of Tomorrow' also states that European cities should be places of green, ecological and environmental innovation and attractive places. Therefore, the European territorial development of urban areas should be accompanied by a high level of environmental protection and environmental quality in and around the cities.

> **4.     How can urban stakeholders better contribute to the policy development and implementation processes at EU level? Do cities need to be more involved in policymaking at regional, national and EU level? How?**

'Urban stakeholders' should be an inclusive term to enable the widest range of regional and local expertise to contribute experience, and help avoid any tendency to reinvent the wheel. Many hold a stake in what happens in and is done by cities – way beyond those people and businesses based there.

Regarding stakeholders, existing peri-urban areas are obvious exemplars of experience (positive and negative) and knowledge, and need to be involved.  Too strong a focus on core city issues alone risks promoting these to the detriment of other territories (particularly the immediate peri-urban areas which are particularly vulnerable to potential negative impacts). Cities are one element in complex territorial systems and other territorial stakeholders should therefore always be involved in an inclusive policymaking dialogue alongside them.

Cities are, and have long been, a strong voice in policy discussions at all levels. That is quite right, but the principle extends to the peri-urban and the rural as well – any attempt to treat

---

[3] 1) Urban social challenges; 2) Urban economic challenges 3)  Urban environmental challenges4) Urban governance challenges 5 ) Mapping of urban foresights. See.
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/conferences/citiesoftomorrow/index_en.cfm
[4] http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/hahn/headlines/speeches/pdf/24102011_investing_europe_cities.pdf

any in isolation, or worse still, to give an unequal voice to one over the others will detract from the quality of the policymaking process.

The preparatory action RURBAN (Partnership for sustainable urban-rural development)[5] agreed by the European Parliament and managed by the European Commission clearly showed the potential role of urban-rural partnership for improving regional competitiveness and multilevel governance, and the importance of achieving better cooperation between different actors, including peri-urban stakeholders in developing and implementing urban-rural initiatives.

The OECD study "Rural-Urban Partnerships: An Integrated Approach to Economic Development"[6] published in 2013 confirmed how "urban and rural areas are interconnected" and urged decision makers at all levels to think "beyond the rural-urban dichotomy"

> 5.   What are the best ways to support a stronger urban and territorial knowledge base and exchange of experience? What specific elements of the knowledge base need to be strengthened in order to better support policymaking?

A recognition of the more complex, interdependent and multi-functional aspects of territories is needed in any urban agenda. Extensive areas of EU territory are now peri-urban - a mix of both urban and rural. This is typical of the more developed parts but is also spreading quickly across the less developed and newer Member States. This is not a new phenomenon, yet it is missing from or ignored in much territorial policy which has traditionally split under 'urban' and 'rural' headings.

The territorial knowledge base would benefit from a **peri-urban audit** to highlight the resources, assets and potential of these areas whilst exposing threats and vulnerabilities.  It would inform the development of tailor-made policies for more environmentally sensitive and sustainable solutions to complex and often interdependent or competing challenges including planning for transport and other infrastructure, establishment of new distribution chains, management of finite resources and responses to climate change.

At the same time future policies must catch up with **changes in lifestyles and working patterns** largely stimulated by technology advances, which mean that individual citizens are increasingly empowered to live their own versions of an urban or a rural lifestyle – or a mix of both!  Such behavioural trends need to be understood and taken into account in territorial planning and management.

> 6.   What should be the roles of the local, regional, national and EU levels in the definition, development and implementation of an EU urban agenda?

PURPLE would hope to see a wider and more an inclusive debate that looks beyond a city focus alone.  There are many versions of 'urban' across Europe.  Cities, towns, villages, ribbon

---

[5] http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/what/cohesion/urban_rural/index_en.cfm.

[6]     http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/urban-rural-and-regional-development/rural-urban-partnerships_9789264204812-en

development, suburban housing estates, business parks, transport hubs and interchanges including airports, university/research/hospital complexes etc are all different physical manifestations of what is understood by 'urban'.

Many localities are being rapidly transformed by urban expansion and this is a particular challenge for local and regional governance. This may be a spread of housing into previously undeveloped areas, or more mixed development involving logistics centres, industrial parks, 'out of town' shopping centres etc. This in turn has an impact on land values and is a factor which contributes to loss of viable agricultural land close to cities. Providing connectivity, infrastructure and services for sustainable growth and balanced development in these peri-urban areas is a complex challenge which requires really joined up thinking and an approach which does not simply look at urban policy from the city's point of view.

We suggest it is therefore particularly important for regional and local government beyond cities to be involved in urban policy development and implementation. It is highly relevant to them, not least because they plan for and directly administer many essential services and resources from which cities directly benefit, but are also legally responsible for spatial planning and have a direct responsibility to citizens through both elected politicians and statutory public service supply.

Their established knowledge and well rooted experience in these matters means that they can contribute substantially to the success of Europe's urban agenda and, along with their European co-operation platforms, they should be invited to play an active part.

---

**Response of the PURPLE network, the voice of peri-urban regions since 2004.**

**www.purple-eu.org**

---