



Cities need to link up to effectively address social, economic and environmental challenges

Many cities in Europe are confronted with a complex, mutually reinforcing combination of socio-economic and environmental problems, leading to a spiral of decline. It is essential to ensure that knowledge is available about developments determining the economic and social strength of urban areas and how this strength can help to uplift deprived urban areas. From an environmental perspectives, at a first glance, urban areas form a threat to environmental sustainability. With a majority of human activity concentrated in cities, many environmental issues occur most strongly and firstly in cities.

Within Europe, strong cities are vitally important for sustainable economic development and social cohesion within our societies. Cities offer many opportunities and chances for sustainable growth and development. Now that Europe is becoming increasingly urbanised, it is essential to ensure that knowledge – both practical and scientific – becomes available about developments determining the economic, social and environmental strength of cities. Such information is often only available to a limited extent and fragmentarily and, what is more, frequently in a language and form out of line with the needs existing in our cities. The European Urban Knowledge Network addresses these challenges.

We live in an increasingly urbanised world. Most of the world population, and more than 80 per cent of Europeans live in urban regions. By 2015, this will also apply to the majority of people in the developing world. The high level of urbanisation within Europe implies there is a strong urban dimension to many of the EU's social, economic and environmental problems.

Throughout Europe, severe social and economic urban problems are accumulating in specific urban areas – deprived urban areas. The effects of social and economic problems are felt most strongly here. A most striking example is of course the social situation and civil unrest in the French suburbs in Autumn 2005. In addition to France, all over Europe states face challenges from declining inner city or peripheral neighbourhoods. The social and income mix in these areas is typically eroded. Common features of households in deprived neighbourhoods – relating to incomes and expenditure patterns and lack of access to information networks, and other sources that could change household circumstances in the short term – exacerbate problems for residents and affect the reputation of these areas and the city as a whole.

Many environmental problems are experienced on a larger scale. Problems of air quality, green house gas emissions, noise pollution and energy inefficiency are not restricted to specific neighbourhoods or even cities. However, its causes and its solutions can be found in large part in Europe's urban territory. Cities are where many environmental problems are concentrated. The environmental challenges facing cities have significant consequences for human health, the quality of life of urban citizens and the economic performance of the cities themselves. Environmental, social and economic issues are thus closely interrelated.¹

The European Commission has made addressing social, economic and environmental issues central in all of its policy efforts. The EU Sustainable Development Strategy, a result of the European Council meeting in Gothenburg in 2001, and the Lisbon Strategy of 2000 aiming to make the European the most competitive economy in the world by 2010, are to be realised concurrently. The Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment outlines the importance of action on the urban level when dealing with environmental concerns. When it comes to implementing the Lisbon Strategy, it is becoming more and more commonplace to involve local actors more directly, however, there is still a world to win in this respect.

The continuing competitiveness and sustainable development in Europe will depend on the success or failure of networks of cities and towns in adopting more holistic approaches to urban planning and management. However, towns and cities rarely possess the required knowledge or capacity to

¹ COM(2005) 718 - Communication from the commission to the council and the European Parliament on Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment

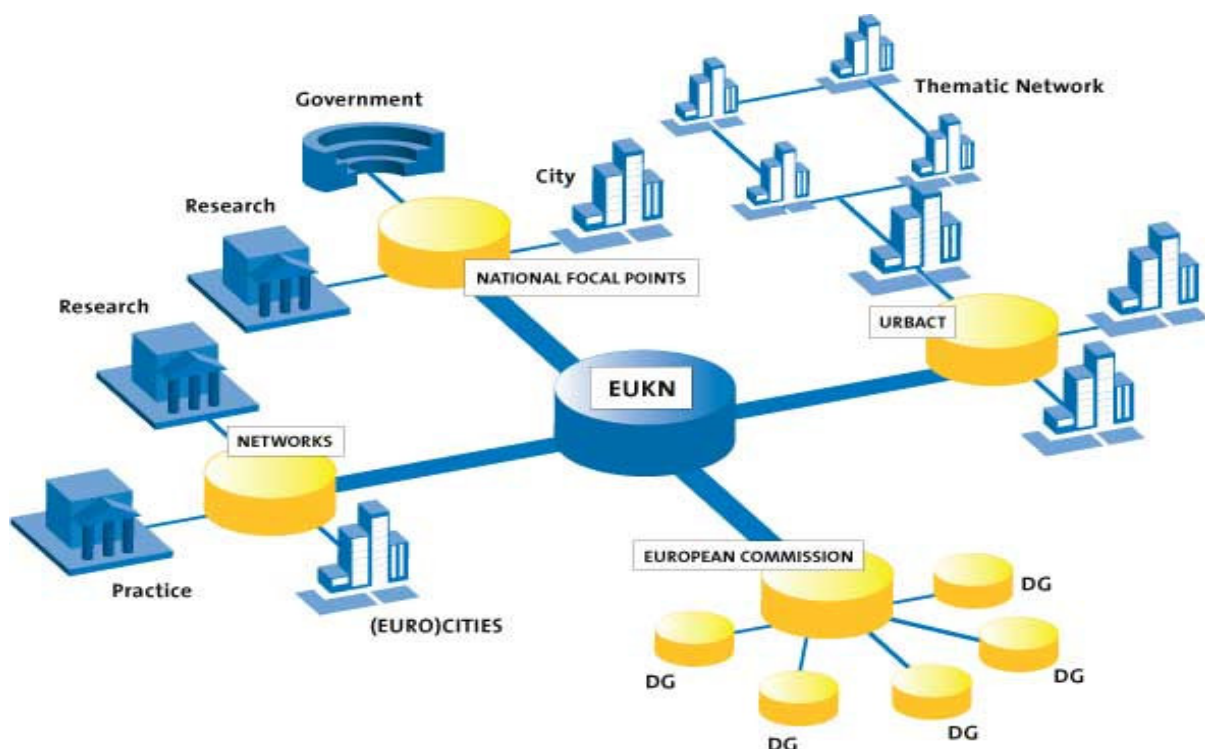


develop and implement policies that address social, economic and environmental issues in an integrated way, even though their role is central in the implementation of both the EU Sustainable Development Strategy and the Lisbon Agenda. There is undeniably a necessity for cities to share successful policies and practices in reference to the integrated approach, and to communicate what policies and projects have not been successful and why.

European Urban Knowledge Network

Several EU Presidencies have acknowledged this need for better communication and networking between city governments. The Lille Action Programme, adopted during the French EU Presidency of 2000, eventually resulted in the establishment of URBACT, a Community programme that exchanges experience between European cities that have been involved in the EU's URBAN Programmes. The Dutch EU Presidency of 2004 saw the establishment of the European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN). Broader in scope than the URBACT network, the pilot stage of the EUKN project has been completed successfully in the 2005-2007 period.

EUKN is a decentralised knowledge network. It is a bottom-up initiative of fifteen EU Member States. Sharing of knowledge and city-to-city learning are central in this network. The EUKN Secretariat, based in The Hague in the Netherlands, is responsible for the day to day management of the network. Each one of the fifteen participating member states has established a National Focal Point (NFP) charged with setting up and managing a national network of stakeholders, including city governments, national government departments, universities and research institutes. The bottom-up approach enables EUKN to work demand driven: through its regular contacts with the National Focal Points the EUKN Secretariat is informed on the existing demand for knowledge in its participating member states and is thus able to provide its users with targeted information.



The authoritative body within the EUKN organisation is the Steering Group in which representatives from the national governments from all participating member states are seated. The Steering Group is chaired by the Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, which holds the managing authority. The Knowledge Managers Group is chaired by the EUKN Secretariat, and is comprised of representatives of all the NFPs. Since EUKN was a bottom-up initiative, largely funded by the

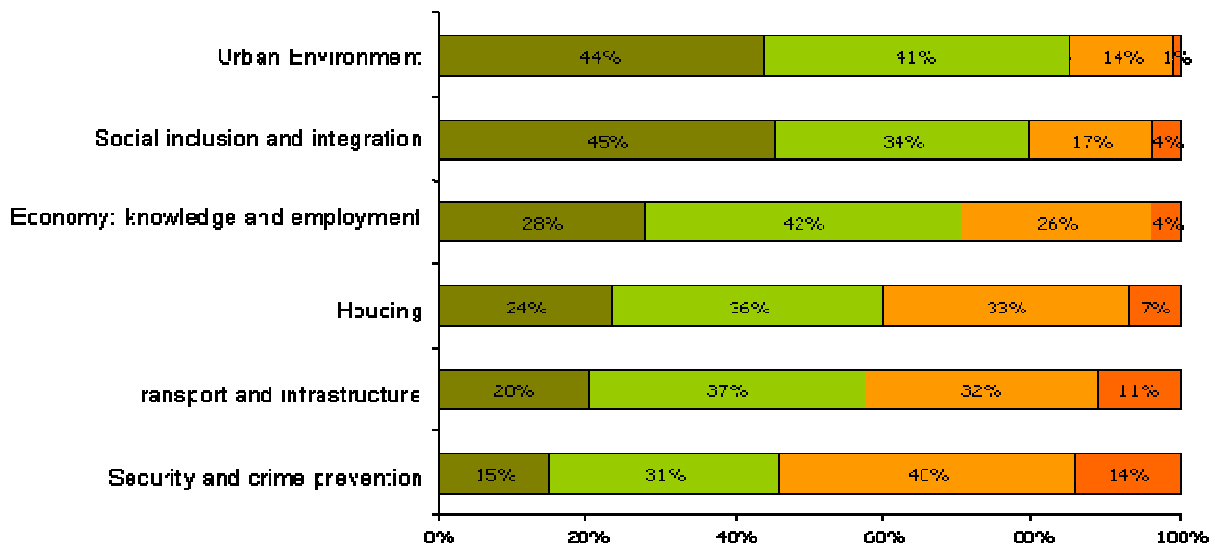


participating Member States, decision making in both the Steering Group as the Knowledge Managers Group is based upon consensus. This has not hampered the network’s decisiveness, since all EUKN members share the sense of urgency for the dissemination of practical and scientific knowledge between cities.

A main feature of the network is the creation of a massive e-library, containing validated knowledge of relevance to all urban professionals. All NFPs supply knowledge derived from the national networks to the EUKN e-library. This free-to-use online resource already contains over 3,000 validated documents on local projects, policies and relevant scientific studies. All topics in the EUKN e-library are in essence related to the social, economic and sustainable development of Europe’s cities. The e-library covers six broad policy themes:

- social inclusion & integration;
- housing;
- transport & infrastructure;
- urban environment;
- economy, knowledge & employment;
- security & crime prevention.

EUKN has reached many concrete results during its pilot stage. Through its research desk, EUKN has directly served many urban professionals with practical knowledge and brought together knowledge suppliers and those in search of scientific knowledge and practical experience. EUKN has organised several meetings, both international and national, to spread knowledge and to forge links between urban professionals, institutions and thematic disciplines. This year, the EUKN web portal and e-library will be visited more than 450,000 times by its European users. By monitoring the actions of its users EUKN has been able to develop a clear picture of the kind of knowledge that they are looking for. For example, when it comes to the knowledge themes, ‘urban environment’ and ‘social inclusion & integration’ are most visited and deemed most important by Europe’s urban professionals.



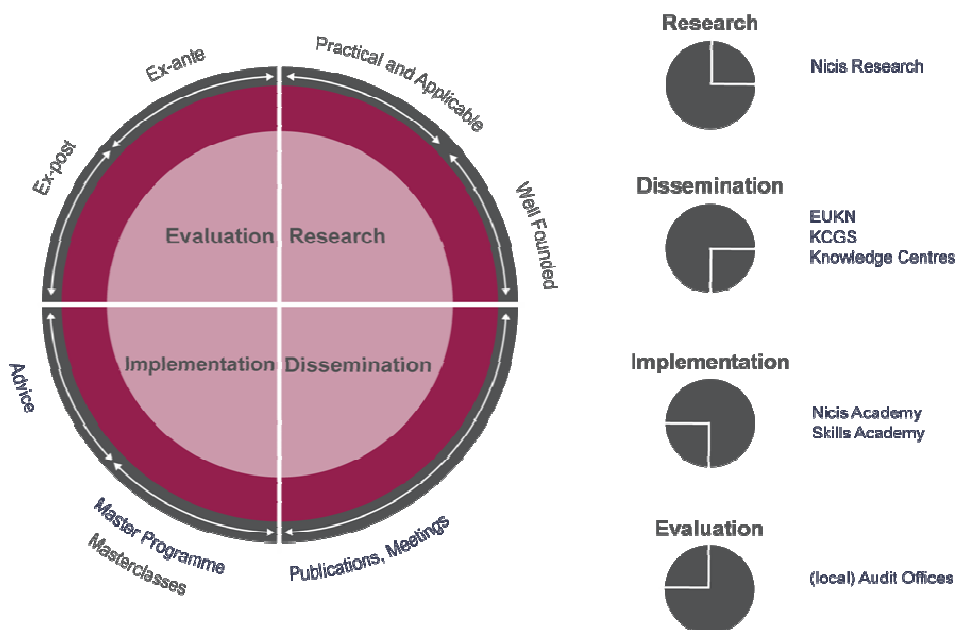
EUKN: from ‘dissemination only’ to the ‘knowledge cycle’

During the EUKN pilot phase, the European focus on the role of cities urban areas has increased over time. The British EU Presidency of 2005 had a strong focus on sustainable communities and skills and capacity building. The Bristol Accord of December 2005 led to the establishment of the Academy for Sustainable Communities (ASC), an institution that encourages the development of skills needed by urban professionals in the shaping of sustainable communities through an integrated policy approach. ASC is now an official partner in EUKN; skills and capacity building is added as a seventh theme in the EUKN e-library.



The German EU Presidency of the first half of 2007 brought forward the Leipzig Charter. The Charter is a step towards an agenda for a 'European large cities policy'. By adopting the Leipzig Charter, the ministers have committed themselves to discuss how the urban dimension can be integrated into national, regional and local policy in their own countries. The importance of cities was once again and now even stronger politically emphasized at a European level. In Leipzig, the European ministers also discussed the future of EUKN. The ministers decided to end the successful pilot project phase in order to continue the network on a more permanent basis. Under the agreements made in Leipzig EUKN is financially sustained until the end of 2009. A further geographical extension of the network is also intended. In Leipzig it was stated that EUKN should eventually cover all 27 EU Member States.

EUKN has moved up a gear as well. In the pilot phase, the main activity of the network was dissemination of knowledge. EUKN's main role was that of 'knowledge broker' – the network made available existing knowledge to meet the specific knowledge demands of its users. However, EUKN intends to take a wider range of activities to serve its users even better with targeted and demand-driven knowledge. In partnership with other European organisations, EUKN is to develop along the lines of a knowledge model developed by Nicis Institute, the Dutch research institute for cities. Nicis is the initiator of EUKN and the host organisation for the international EUKN Secretariat.



From its position as a well grounded, decentralised and demand driven knowledge network, EUKN has come in the position to identify gaps in the existing knowledge base. Therefore, again from the bottom-up, several of the EUKN members are now setting up a new branch of the network: EUKN Research. EUKN Research will systematically map the knowledge gaps and commission and support research efforts in order to supply knowledge to fill these gaps. A first impression of what can be expected from EUKN Research is the study "The role of physical measures in improving deprived urban areas"² commissioned by the 2007 German EU Presidency. The study was managed and partially conducted by the EUKN Secretariat and the NFPs in cooperation with local researchers. Furthermore, through Nicis, EUKN is one of the main partners in URBAN-NET, the European Research Area Network on urban sustainability. Besides Nicis's participation in URBAN-NET, the Institute is the driving force behind another ERA-Net proposal – DUALIFT – that will look into the

² Wassenberg, F., Van Meer, A., Van Kempen, R. (2007). *Strategies for upgrading the physical environment in deprived urban areas - Examples of good practice in Europe*. The study can be downloaded free of charge on the [EUKN website](#).



socio-economic uplifting of deprived urban areas and its inhabitants. By focusing on the socio-economic aspects of cities, DUALIFT will complete URBAN-NET – which focuses on the physical and environmental aspects of city development.

Together with ASC, EUKN seeks to further implement the skills agenda. This marks a first step towards the creation of a European Academy for urban professionals. This academy could assist policy makers and practitioners in developing the skills to successfully create and implement integrated policy approaches to sustainable urban development. A first two-day training course in Brussels is scheduled for 2008.

For successful policy evaluation, there is a strong need for both qualitative as quantitative data on cities. EUKN therefore strongly supports developing quantitative data on cities and subsequent benchmarks and evaluations, such as provided in the *State of the European Cities (2007)*³ by Ecorys and the *State of the English Cities (2006)*⁴ by Professor Michael Parkinson.

As a last development, EUKN intends to strengthen its position as a 'network of networks'. Connecting knowledge networks in the field of urban policy is one of EUKN's key objectives in the coming period. A strategic partnership with URBACT is in the making. Closer cooperation with other relevant networks – amongst which are the Council of Europe, the European Spatial Planning Observatory Network (ESPON), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Social Housing Observatory (CECODHAS) – is on the way.

Cities are at the centre stage of the implementation and realisation of Europe's policy objectives of the Lisbon and Gothenburg Agenda. The future of our societies and the quality of life of our inhabitants largely depend on the success of our cities. EUKN provides the knowledge and the linkages between urban professionals to effectively address the social, economic and environmental challenges that cities face simultaneously.

³ The State of the European Cities can be downloaded from the [EUKN website](#).

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