

Cities and climate change: limitations and opportunities for action

Through its Cohesion policy, the European Commission is supporting the integrated approach to urban development as a key element for sustainable development. Based on previous positive experience with the URBAN Community initiatives, Member States of the European Union have decided to earmark substantial part of their ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) allocation to support urban development in the 2007-2013 programming period. Around €10 billion has thus been earmarked for investment in integrated urban development. For the first time in the history of European regional policy, all cities are potential beneficiaries.

Climate change has also become a major objective of EU Regional Policy. Corinne Hermant-de Callataÿ, who is part of the Urban Development Unit in the Directorate General for Regional Policy, will highlight the importance of ensuring climate change strategies as part of more holistic approaches to urban development or regeneration rather than of purely sectoral approaches which may be detrimental to other dimensions of city life. For the 2007-2013 period, €16 billion has been earmarked for direct investments for climate change, while investments that impact indirectly on climate change account for another €31.7 billion. One can therefore measure the potential of linking investment in urban development and direct or indirect investment in climate change which will amount to €48 billion.

Cities have a fundamental role to play in addressing climate change which is causing dramatic shifts in the global eco-system. Energy consumption in urban areas – mostly in transport and housing – is responsible for a large share of CO₂ emissions in the atmosphere. The urban way of life is highlighted, as part of the problem, but at the same time there are more and more actions undertaken at urban level, as part of the solution towards a green and compact city. Cities are key actors in this respect and there is a whole set of measures which can be taken at urban level.

However, one needs to take into account the complexity of some of the issues at stake.

1. There is no individual rationality to live within a dense city rather than a greener neighbourhood outside the city, as the latter may offer more space to live in and a better quality of life. Though density appears as a "must" with respect to climate change, new findings from research show that, in some very large cities, people who live in the core city are in some cases more mobile than the ones that live in the peri-urban areas [PUGA/MEEDDAT: *Ville durable, points d'accord et controverses dans la recherche*, Paris, mars 2009]. This pleads for a compromise to be found between a "compact city" and a "green city". It also obliges to analyse consumption behaviours and to advertise new models, which are much more based on "proximity".
2. The analysis of demographic trends shows that there is a large percentage of "singles" and "retired people" in cities and that more should be done with a view to a family-friendly environment if cities want to attract households with young children. However, when such location factors largely depend on the housing stock and on the availability of "good housing at an affordable price", good policy depends upon a number of factors.
3. Functional mixity appears as an important asset. The model of a "dense city" where working and housing areas are combined. It supposedly facilitates a quick access to work and to education for everyone. However, within a given family, various mobility patterns will necessarily be observed. In addition, the ones who live in a given area are not necessarily the ones who work in this area. Then cities have to analyse the various situations.

4. Trade-off have to be negotiated between investments which may have a return either in the short-term or in the long-term. This is not only a difficult issue for decision-makers but for individuals, who are requested to change their way of life in order to remedy problems which will arise in the medium or long term.
5. Individuals are also more and more asked to "think globally" and to act consequently. With the effects of the financial and economic crisis, the globalisation of the economy is felt as a threat, which does not favour this kind of behaviour. This questions the possibility for cities as "learning cities" to foster a global awareness of these issues. It should not lead to put the blame on consumers or raise a "feeling of guiltiness" but it would lead to more positive approaches, based on the possible virtues of solidarity for the next generation to come

There are a number of factors which may act as limitations or opportunities according to cities concerned: funding; cities and towns' competence; multi-level governance; public/private partnerships; decisions of individuals.

As a preliminary conclusion to this complex set of issues, Corinne Hermant-de Callataÿ will mention some of the areas in which European funding may have a leverage effect on urban policies, including the network of cities which has been launched by the Commission through the "*Covenant of Mayors*" [<http://www.eumayors.eu>] which now involves more than 600 cities. Cities commit themselves to go beyond the objective set by the climate action and renewable energy package, which has been proposed by the European Commission in January 2008 and on which the European Parliament and Council reached an agreement in December 2008 [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/climat/climate_action.htm].

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