

## News

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### **URBACT III: a glimpse into the new programme**

24 March 2014

Where are we heading with **URBACT III**? Which are the main features and elements of innovation for the new programming period? Adele Bucella, Finance Manager for URBACT Secretariat and member of the team that is drafting the URBACT III **Operational Programme** answered our questions on the topic.

*Q: Where are we with the design of the new programme and when will we have the first call for proposals under URBACT III?*

A: The first thing to say is that **URBACT III** is the only interregional programme that's had its budget increased by 40%. This demonstrates the renewed importance of the urban issues as part of the new regulatory framework. URBACT III builds, of course, on the success of the previous two programmes, drawing lessons and building and proposing new and improved tools that address the needs of cities. The new budget will be of 74 million euros from ERDF and now we are talking about a menu of tools, rather than just exchange projects which was the case in URBACT II, includes different types of exchange. We will focus on designing policies and strategies, implementing those strategies and then transferring good practices.

In terms of key milestones, work has been ongoing for more than a year now. We've been developing the **Operational Programme**, the document that represents the legal basis that the European Commission approves and that provides the main structure of the Programme for the whole period. We've been working with a group of Member States and Partner States to ensure an open and participative process. The most important milestone so far is that we now have a first version of the Operational Programme, which will hopefully go out for public consultation in early April for a 6-week period. After that, it will be officially submitted to the European Commission in June this year and we are hoping to have approval by the end of the year.

That will allow us to work in parallel on our first call for proposals, which will be consulted with the Member States towards the end of the year, most probably towards December and will be published in early 2015.

In terms of the focus, we want to make sure that we maintain what we're renowned for – the bottom-up approach and listening to cities needs. URBACT III will focus on a small number of themes, including innovation, low carbon, social inclusion and so on. There will be though sufficient room within the programme to allow us to be reactive to the needs and the requests that come directly from cities besides those themes. For the time being, we're looking at least double the number of projects that we've been able to finance in URBACT II.

*Q: Can you please tell us which are the new features of URBACT III?*

A: The programme will be linked to the urban agenda and also to the other tools that are being proposed by the European Commission on urban issues. What we're aiming to do is to clearly address the needs that have been identified by cities, URBACT and non-, during our consultations process. The new menu of tools has been designed to respond to those changing needs.

The core business will remain city transnational exchange but will do that through a variety of tools rather than having simple exchange projects. The first one is the action planning type of networks focusing on designing sustainable urban development strategies. They will be looking at how the exchange of expertise mixed with the use of URBACT method can guarantee an integrated and participative way of designing the strategies at city level. This is very similar to what we do now in URBACT II, but integrating the comments and requests from beneficiaries to improve their efficiency.

The second main tool will be known as implementation networks and are designed as a clear link with the other EC initiatives on urban regeneration, in particular the [Integrated Territorial Investment initiative](#) under Article 7 of the [ERDF Regulation](#). These networks will be opened to all cities that have already developed or designed sustainable urban development strategies whether it be through a previous URBACT project or not. The aim is to look at efficient processes for sharing solutions on how to successfully implement these strategies. So here we are moving from the design into the real work on the ground and we're looking at ways of funding those strategies, monitoring their progress and so on.

And finally, our third type of tool that we're looking to develop in URBACT III is transfer type of network. While in the framework of URBACT II we encouraged cities to identify and study good practices, for URBACT III cities will be called to come forward and try to reuse those good practices, looking at how they can be adapted and transformed and transferred into a new city. These two new initiatives are being tested and evaluated, as part of a series of [pilot projects](#) now on-going under URBACT II, to ensure that what will be delivered will take into consideration the improvements needed by the cities.

Obviously, in the new programming period URBACT will continue the pioneering work in the field of [capitalization and knowledge management](#) done under URBACT II. This activity was something quite new to the ETC programmes in the current programming period and has been significantly developed by our programme. The aim is to reach out through these activities to other cities in the EU, which are not fortunate enough to be part of one of an URBACT networks. We are building knowledge based on what's being done in URBACT networks but also outside of those networks and bringing that to the next level, sharing it amongst cities across the whole of the EU.

Last but not least, the programme has listened to the cities that have already benefited from the programme and we are taking seriously their demands, besides the requests from the Commission, to reduce as much as possible the administrative burden for the beneficiaries. Several ideas have been presented in how we can do that, by simplifying reporting and working closely with other ETC programmes to avoid duplication. Some examples: common reporting formats with other ETC programmes, only one application form for the 2 phases of the networks instead of 2 and many more.

*Q: Considering the general context of prolonged crisis, the cuts in budget for local administrations, why do you think cities should think about joining an URBACT network? How can they concretely benefit from the programme?*

A: I believe this is the key question for many European cities that haven't been involved in URBACT and don't know the benefit of having a unique interactive learning experience. This is something that all cities participating in our activities, be it the networks or the capitalisation activities, consider as what makes the programme stand out among other ETC programmes. We offer tools that enable and equip cities to better deliver their integrated urban strategies. We provide a structured way of learning from each other using the URBACT method, focusing on an integrated participative way of sharing knowledge. We find new and interesting ways of working together, techniques for obtaining the best results from the exchange that takes place among cities. Some examples are around our capacity building activities such as the [National Seminars for Local Support Group Members](#), the [Training Scheme for Elected Representatives](#) or the [Summer Universities](#).

The [URBACT Summer Universities](#) brought together more than 400 participants from cities that work on urban issues and where over a 3-day period we show them a vision on how to operate in an integrated and participative way. This allows participants to be removed from their daily working habits and to enter into really new and innovative ways of working and getting good results. “As a city practitioner, this is a life-changing experience” as some participants of the previous USUs put it!

We also work with other stakeholders, namely through [the scheme](#) that we operated with elected representatives. Obviously we need to work with practitioners but also with decision makers and we need

to make sure that the work that the programme does is understood and appreciated by them. This scheme allowed us to work directly with Mayors and Deputy Mayors in a transnational setting, allowing them to understand the benefits of transnational exchange for their cities. I think that the results from that activity were really interesting and allowed us to work closely with a lot of cities that were not as much involved in URBACT before.

*Q: And when will potential beneficiaries be able to know more about the new programme?*

A: URBACT will be organizing a series of Info Days towards the end of the year. If anyone is interested to learn more about URBACT III, get the inside information and see what can really be achieved by working in URBACT, then it would be a really good place to do it. The Info Days are going to be organized on a national level, so partly in national language. We aim to have a part dedicated to the results of URBACT II networks and capitalization activities with a focus on the country and then to open up to a broader presentation of the future programme and be available to answer questions to new potential beneficiaries. We will be waiting for you!

Read more:

[URBACT Programme 2014-2020 – URBACT website](#)