



Mid-term Evaluation of URBACT II

Final Report



Contents

1.0	Introduction	4
1.1	Aims of the evaluation	4
1.2	Background to URBACT II	6
1.2.1	Lessons from URBACT I	6
1.2.2	The URBACT II programme	8
1.2.3	From URBACT I to URBACT II.....	12
1.3	Evaluation Methodology	13
1.4	Structure of Final Report	19
2.0	Operation and Delivery	20
2.1	Partner Working and Involvement	20
2.1.1	Strength of Partnerships.....	22
2.1.2	The Role of the Lead Partner	24
2.1.3	The Role of the Lead Expert.....	25
2.2	URBACT Secretariat.....	26
2.3	Pole Managers	28
2.4	Local Support Groups.....	30
2.4.1	LSG Composition and Representation	30
2.4.2	Meeting Regularity and Structure of LSGs	32
2.4.3	Value and Contribution.....	33
2.4.4	Support for LSG development.....	33
2.5	Local Action Plans	34
2.5.1	Current Status of LAPs.....	34
2.5.2	LAPs as Concrete Project Outputs.....	34
2.5.3	Variation in Content and Approach of LAPs	35
2.5.4	Guidance and Flexibility linked to LAPs	36
2.5.5	Implementation	37
2.5.6	Outputs and Outcomes of LAPs	38
2.6	Communication	39
2.6.1	Usage of the online content.....	39
2.6.2	Perceptions of the online content	40
2.6.3	Other communication and dissemination tools	44
2.6.4	Value of the communication and dissemination tools	44
2.7	Administration	46
2.8	Fast Track Labels	47

2.9	Thematic coverage	48
2.9.1	Thematic Clusters and Thematic Poles	48
2.9.2	Funding allocation	49
2.9.3	Thematic Coverage	51
2.9.4	The economic crisis 'theme'	52
2.10	Indicators	53
	Alternative Indicator suggestions	54
	Indicator Review	54
3.0	Benefits and Achievements of URBACT II	62
3.1	Introduction	62
3.2	Early benefits	62
3.3	Written outputs	66
3.4	Dissemination	67
3.5	Factors affecting achievements	69
3.5.1	Lack of funding to implement and mainstream learning	69
3.5.2	Lack of involvement of 'key stakeholders'	71
3.5.3	Mix of partners too Broad	71
3.6	Added Value of URBACT II over other similar Networks	73
3.6.1	Membership	75
3.6.2	Budget	75
3.6.3	Discussion and practical application	76
4.0	Conclusions	77
4.1	Key conclusions	77
4.2	Recommendations	79

List of tables

Table 2.1	Geographical coverage of URBACT II	20
Table 2.2	Breakdown of projects by Thematic Cluster and Thematic Pole	49
Table 2.3	Distribution and allocation of funding by Thematic Clusters and Thematic Poles	50
Table 2.4	Thematic coverage of URBACT II projects	51
Table 3.1	Added Value of URBACT II	73

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Aims of the evaluation

ECORYS and Old Bell 3 Ltd were commissioned by the URBACT Secretariat to undertake a mid-term evaluation of the URBACT II programme. URBACT II is supported by the European Commission (through DG Regio) and is aimed at promoting the sharing of knowledge between European cities, stimulating the learning and application of good practice on sustainable urban development. URBACT II has so far involved 300 cities in 29 countries and has 5,000 active participants. The programme is part funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and Member and Partner States¹, with a total cost of €68.8 million, of which €53.3 million comes from ERDF. DG Regio is involved partly as a funder but also as an active partner who provides support and advice to some URBACT II projects on policy and funding issues.

The overall aims of the mid-term evaluation as set out in the Schedule of Special Clauses (SSC)² are to:

- evaluate the programme's implementation and overall performance in terms of relevance, effectiveness, impact and results;
- issue proposals with the purpose of improving the implementation of the programme, in particular in the context of the third call for proposals to be launched in December 2011;
- contribute to the discussion and ideas in preparation for the next programming period.

This report is intended to fulfil the first two of these aims with the third element being part of a 'follow-on' study due to be commissioned later.

The mid-term evaluation is an important element of the URBACT II programme's development and life-cycle. It provides an opportunity to both look at what progress has so far been achieved and also understand how to improve and build on elements for the second half of the programmes life. At the centre of the evaluation is a review of whether the programme is on track to achieve its goals and priorities, looking at issues such as the quality of results so far achieved and the benefits and impacts of the programmes actions. The SCC provides further details of the aims of the evaluation but in summary the main 'goals' of the study are as follows:

¹ The partners States (which are not a Member of the EU) are Norway and Switzerland.

² ACSE(2010) Mid-term Evaluation of the URBACT II Programme: Schedule of Special Clauses

Goal 1: Evaluation of the Existing Programme

The key theme of the first goal is focused on assessing the success of the existing URBACT II programme so far in particular looking at:

- **Exchange and Learning:** The main evaluation aim here is to provide an assessment of whether the URBACT II framework (or method) has been effectively implemented by participating projects. The evaluation should consider the application of the URBACT II framework to projects, taking into consideration project creation, partnership working, implementation methods such as the Local Support Groups and the use of experts, URBACT written outputs (including the Local Action Plans) as well as the support of the Secretariat.
- **Capitalisation:** The main issue here is to look at the sharing of learning within and across projects. This element should focus in particular on the role, activity and impact of the three Thematic Pole Managers in improving project quality, producing and disseminating knowledge to other cities- including those outside of URBACT.
- **Communication and Dissemination:** The SSC rightly suggests that the evaluation should consider the effectiveness of the communication and dissemination strategy and associated tools (e.g. website, newsletters etc). The extent to which the message is 'getting out' to various urban development actors is an important aspect to consider as well as how accessible the various URBACT 'products' are (such as case studies).
- **Programme Management and Technical Assistance:** An assessment of programme management systems and structures has been an integral part of the mid-term evaluation. It has been particularly important to review whether the management structure is 'fit for purpose' and the extent to which the Secretariat have ensured the smooth running of the programme but also provided the right support for projects.

Goal 2: Proposals to improve programme implementation and performance

All proposals made for improvement to the programme should clearly link back to the lines of investigation and results of the evaluation under the first goal. Proposals will need to be made in relation to recommendations on programme management and administration, the project creation procedure, communication and dissemination and also how to maximise the impact of projects and the overall programme. Although the core objective of the evaluation is to look back and explore the progress and achievements of the programme to date the evaluation also needs to stimulate thought on improvements for the rest of the programmes life.

1.2 Background to URBACT II

This sub-section provides a brief overview of the origins of URBACT II and summarises the main components of the programme.

1.2.1 Origins of URBACT II

The URBACT II programme stems from over 20 years of pan-European sharing of good practice on urban development linked to initiatives including RECITE, Eurocities, Quartiers en Crise and the URBAN I and II Community Initiatives, as well as URBACT I. The first URBACT programme started as a product of the Urban Community Initiative, made up of URBAN II programmes and URBACT. The Communication establishing URBAN II³ stipulated that individual URBAN programmes should make provision for exchange and dissemination of their experiences and provided an indicative financial allocation of €15 million for identifying good practice and facilitating structured exchange of experience derived from the Urban Pilot Projects (UPPs), URBAN I and URBAN II.

The URBACT I programme was approved in the course of 2002 for a period of four years and with a budget of €28.42 million (of which €18.03 million was ERDF funding). The programme's main instrument was the "Thematic Network" – collaborative projects which brought together cities to exchange experience in particular thematic areas and draw conclusions. Smaller budget allocations were provided for training projects ("Qualification"), studies and "Working groups". Centralised allocations were also made for information dissemination (notably a programme website), co-ordination activities by the programme Secretariat and associated experts and Technical Assistance (essentially programme management and administration).

As such, from the very start, URBACT I became more than just a network of actors involved in URBAN II, but rather a more general EU-level networking and exchange programme in the field of sustainable urban development. This trend was further reinforced, when, in the wake of EU enlargement, cities from the EU-10 new Member States with over 20,000 inhabitants were made eligible to participate from May 2004 onwards.

1.2.1 Lessons from URBACT I

URBACT I was subject to a two-stage mid-term evaluation, undertaken by ECORYS in association with Old Bell 3 Ltd with the first stage being undertaken in late 2003 and an update being produced in 2005. The same team was subsequently engaged by the European Commission to undertake the ex-post evaluation of the URBAN II Community Initiative, including URBACT I, and the final report⁴ of this study also reflects on lessons learnt with regard to the programme. Overall, these evaluations concluded that⁵:

³ Communication from the Commission to the Member States of 28 April 2000 (2000/C 141/04), Articles 14 and 15

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/pdf/expost2006/urbanii/final_report.pdf

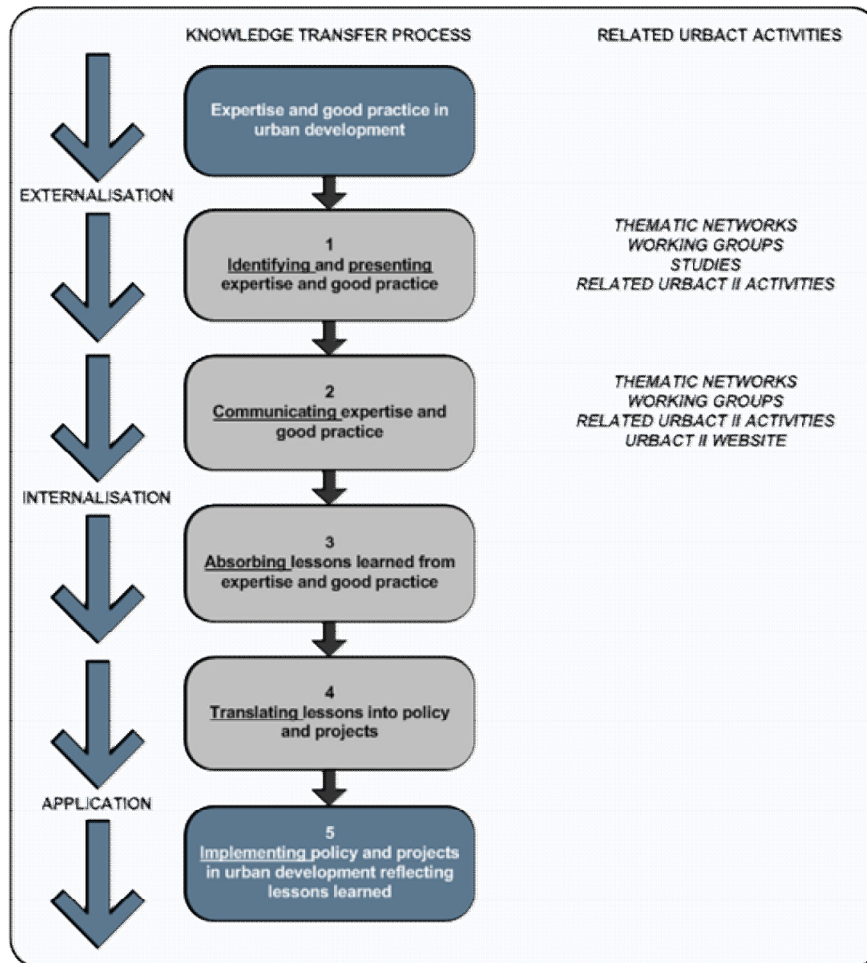
⁵ We present the main salient findings of the evaluation- please refer to the main report for fuller analysis and explanation

- URBACT I had been successful from a “standing start” in engaging with a wide range of cities both in the EU 15 and, from 2004 onwards in the New Member States;
- The Thematic Networks were the largest part of the programme: in total, 28 Networks were supported (more than the 10 - 12 initially expected), involving 274 cities;
- The focus on “good practice” (as opposed to learning from experience whether good or bad) and the relatively high profile of the programme with the European Commission had the tendency to encourage some cities to participate or take the lead in activities as an exercise in municipal self-promotion;
- There appeared to be barriers in terms of translating this individual learning into making policy changes within the participants’ home cities; engagement in the Networks was not necessarily strongly embedded within participating cities, partly due to language issues which meant participation was often determined by linguistic skills rather than the relevance of the individual’s work experience. We concluded that greater efforts were needed to ensure lessons learnt could be applied in practice;
- Related to this, linkages with URBAN II programmes and other EU funded programmes were often limited: there was a case for allowing any city above a certain size to participate in the programme, rather than restrict it (in the case of the EU-15⁶) to cities with experience of the URBAN programme or its predecessors;
- Participation in Network activities appeared to be of greater value than the published outputs of the Networks which were of mixed quality: practitioners tended to take the view that they were unlikely to take the same value from mediated learning through publications than from exchanges they were themselves engaged with;
- The website was a critical tool for the programme but was in the early stages at the time of the evaluations and not really adequate to the information needs of cities;
- There was very strong appreciation for the work of the Programme Secretariat but a perception from those consulted that it was under-resourced.

Figure 1.1 shows a theoretical model of the knowledge transfer process envisaged at being at the heart of the URBACT I and II programmes. The experience of URBACT I suggested more progress had been made in the internalisation of knowledge derived from other participating practitioners than in externalising knowledge in a way which was useful to third parties (not personally participating in the programme) and in applying learning in terms of the policy implementation.

6 Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom

Figure 1.1 Knowledge Transfer Process



Source: ECORYS

1.2.2 The URBACT II programme

The URBACT II programme enables European cities to work together to develop effective and sustainable solutions to key urban challenges. Each URBACT II project brings together between six and twelve cities or other partners to focus on a specific urban issue, such as tapping into the positive potential of young people (MY GENERATION), social housing (SUITE), or helping women back into the labour market (WEED). Like its predecessor, URBACT II aims to:

- Facilitate the exchange of experience and learning among city policy-makers, decision makers and practitioners;
- Widely disseminate the good practices and lessons drawn from the exchanges and ensure the transfer of know-how;
- Assist city policy-makers and practitioners, as well as the managers of Operational Programmes, to define action plans for sustainable urban development.

In short, URBACT II brings together people who are linked to the urban development agenda, encourages them to talk and share good practice and then helps them to use this good practice to improve urban policy and practice. URBACT II has so far funded

37 projects. Of these, 28 (of which 21 were Thematic Networks and seven were Working Groups) resulted from the First Call which took place in December 2007, with the remaining nine projects (all Thematic Networks) funded under the Second Call which took place in June 2009.

The URBACT II programme is structured along two thematic axes.

PRIORITY AXE 1 – Cities, Engines of Growth and Jobs

- Promoting Entrepreneurship
- Improving Innovation and Knowledge Economy
- Employment and Human Capital

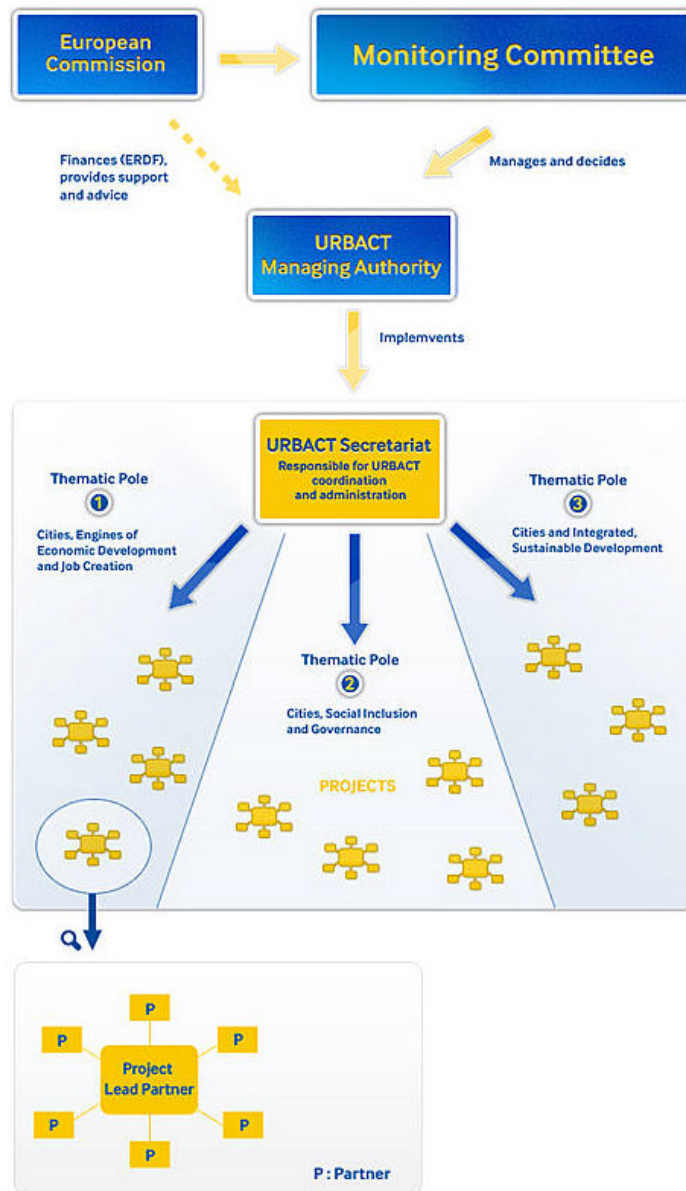
PRIORITY AXE 2 – Attractive and Cohesive Cities

- Integrated development of deprived areas and areas at risk of deprivation
- Inclusion
- Environmental issues
- Governance and Urban Planning

In addition to these two priority axes, URBACT II is also structured along three Thematic Poles: Cities, Engines of Economic Development and Job Creation; Cities, Social Inclusion and Governance; and Cities and Integrated Sustainable Development.

The chart overleaf provides an overview of the structure of the URBACT II programme.

Figure 1.2 URBACT II Programme Structure



Source: www.urbact.eu

In summary, the main components of the programme are as follows:

- A URBACT project can either be a Working Group or a Thematic Network. Both the Thematic Networks and Working Groups assemble cities and other public authorities (regions, operational programme managing authorities, universities, research institutions, etc.) from different participating countries to develop activities to exchange and learn from each other with a focus on a specific issue. The partners organise a series of thematic meetings in which they share their experiences, knowledge and practices to learn what they can from each other and to make their policies more efficient. The key difference is that the Working Groups are smaller than Thematic Networks with smaller budget, smaller number of partners, shorter project timescale. As a result, all of the eight URBACT projects that have finished are Working Groups.

- Every project is assembled under one of nine Thematic Clusters. These clusters link projects that are working on similar or complementary issues. In turn, these clusters are each assembled under one of three Thematic Poles which are the 'pillars' in the process of maximising and sharing project outputs and organising the capitalisation process. Each of these poles has a Thematic Pole Manager who is responsible for coordinating and contributing expert advice to the Pole's activities.
- Each project has a Lead Partner who is responsible for project coordination, implementation and financial management. For Thematic Networks, the Lead Partner must be a city; for Working Groups, the Lead Partner must be a public authority but not necessarily a city.
- Every project has a Lead Expert who supports the project for the entire duration of the programme in terms of content and working methods. Projects can also call on a limited number of Thematic Experts to help with more specialised issues.
- Part of the Lead Experts and Pole Managers' role is to assist in the preparation and facilitation of Transnational Exchange and Learning Seminars / Workshops. These exchanges and learning sessions are normally attended by all project partners and experts and are a chance for groups to share their experiences and progress to-date.
- Seven URBACT II projects have been assigned a Fast Track Label⁷. The European Commission grants this label to certain projects because of their strong links between partners and their Managing Authorities of Operational Programmes, and their capacity to inform its thinking on the future direction of urban development; this enables them to receive specific support and expert advice from the Commission.
- All URBACT II project partners must commit to establishing and leading a Local Support Group (LSG). The LSG assembles the main interested parties and local actors concerned by the specific topic which is the focus for the project and the issues the partner is looking to resolve. They are also responsible for working in partnership with project partners in order to help them to develop their Local Action Plan (LAP). Each partner develops a LAP in order to respond to local urban issues with the hope of increasing the impact of URBACT exchanges on local policies and practises. The involvement of both the LSG and the remaining project partners creates a 'peer review' approach which helps to ensure quality and richness of the plans.

More detailed explanation of the URBACT programme can be found at www.urbact.eu

⁷ The 2 Pilot Fast Track Networks MILE, URBAMECO, and 5 networks: UNIC, OPENCities, Roma-Net, Building Healthy Communities (BHC), REG GOV, CASH and HERO.

1.2.3 From URBACT I to URBACT II

The table below provides a brief comparison between URBACT I and URBACT II.

	URBACT I	URBACT II
Timescale	2002-2006	2007-2013
Budget	€28.42 million	€68.89 million
Number of Projects	28 projects	37 (to date)
Number of Partners	274	700 (target)
European Countries	29	29

The URBACT II programme has clearly been informed by the findings of the URBACT I evaluation and contains some important new elements. In particular:

- There is a strong emphasis on the application of learning from the transnational exchanges in a local context, with the aim of ensuring that the programme does more than simply stimulate the interest and professional development of a small number of individuals participating in the exchanges. In particular, the programme requires participating cities to establish LSGs which in turn are charged with producing LAPs identifying concrete action to take forward as a result of participation in the URBACT II project; a ring-fenced budget of 10% of total costs (equivalent to a maximum of €70,000 for any one project) to support partners in running their ULSG and developing the development of their LAP;
- Reflecting the fact that there is no longer a specific Community Initiative for integrated urban regeneration and the intention to mainstream such interventions in Convergence and Competitiveness Programmes, there is a stronger emphasis on - and ambitious targets for - using mainstream Structural Fund Programmes to operationalise LAPs and thus a focus on engaging with the Managing Authorities of these programmes;
- The programme structure is clearer, with the main instruments for taking forward the knowledge exchange elements concentrated on Thematic Networks and Working Groups but operating within a matrix structure where three operations (exchange and learning; capitalisation; and communication and dissemination) run across the two Priorities of “Cities, the Engines for Growth and Jobs” and “Attractive and Cohesive Cities”);
- Capitalisation through working across Networks and Working Groups has been built in from the start through the operation of three “Thematic Poles” (each led by a Pole Manager) to draw together learning on specific subjects across the programme: these have subsequently been subdivided into nine smaller thematic clusters (Active inclusion; Cultural heritage and city development; Disadvantaged neighbourhoods; Human capital and entrepreneurship; Innovation and creativity; Low carbon urban environments; Metropolitan governance; Port cities; and Quality sustainable living);

- The programme is open to participation by all cities within the EU, though individual Networks are limited in size (to ten cities for Network and eight for Working Groups). There is also a requirement for a strict balance between the representation of cities from Convergence and from Competitiveness Regions respectively;
- Projects are now structured around a two-stage process, with a Development Phase (six months for Thematic Networks and four months for Working Groups) which allows partnerships to develop an in-depth work programme and to ensure the commitment of partner cities/organisations and an Implementation Phase. Progress from the Development Phase is not automatic but depends on the project satisfying the requirements of an External Assessment Panel (which is also critical in informing decisions on accepting projects into the Development Phase) and the programme Monitoring Committee;
- The overall level of resource for the Secretariat has been slightly increased compared to the previous programme, although the Secretariat (which is based in Paris) continues to rely on significant additional funding being provided by the Managing Authority and to using programme resources to fund consultancy support to deliver certain activities (for example, the work of the Pole Managers, or work on dissemination) which might in other circumstances be carried out by the Secretariat itself.

1.3 Evaluation Methodology

This sub-section explains our methodology for the mid-term evaluation of URBACT II. We have set out the tasks for the first two phases of the study (i.e. evaluating the existing programme and understanding how it could be improved). The key constituent parts of the evaluation process (including the case studies, interviews and online survey) come together to provide layers of evidence that inform a robust evaluation study. At this stage, we have not explained the methodology for the potential third element of the study relating to feeding in to the next programming period.

The methodology for the study is as follows:

Kick-off meeting

The kick-off meeting for this study took place on the 4th January 2011 and provided the evaluation team and URBACT Secretariat with an opportunity to debate and discuss the overall objectives of the evaluation and refine the methodology set out in the original proposal. The kick-off meeting was attended by the URBACT Secretariat and the Project Director and Project Manager of the evaluation. Following the kick off meeting an Inception Report was produced that set out the main approach and tasks associated with the work.

Selection of case studies

At the kick off meeting, it was decided that the evaluation should focus on ten URBACT II projects for more detailed analysis through case study work. The case studies were intended to provide much of the evidence which the evaluation would be based upon and would allow us to investigate the main elements of the study with a variety of stakeholders attached to each project. The main criteria were as follows:

Type of project: The case studies chosen needed to reflect the mix within the programme between Thematic Networks and Working Groups also taking into account the stage of implementation, first and second call projects and those with a fast track label.

- **Project theme:** The case studies chosen were also representative of the three Thematic Poles and nine Thematic Clusters of the programme.
- **Geography:** In addition, it was also important to use projects from across Europe so that we could attempt to understand URBACT II in the context of different urban development approaches adopted by Member States and partner countries.

The actual selection of projects for case study analysis is as follows:

Project Title	Thematic Pole	Thematic Cluster	Lead Partner Location	Stage	Working Group	Pilot Fast Track	Fast Track Label	2nd Call
Creative Clusters	Cities, Engines of Economic Dev and Job Creation	Innovation and Creativity	Óbidos, Portugal	Implementation	No	No	No	No
UNIC	Cities, Engines of Economic Dev and Job Creation	Innovation and Creativity	Limoges, France	Implementation	No	No	Yes	No
ESIMEC	Cities, Engines of Economic Dev and Job Creation	Human Capital and Entrepreneurship	Basingstoke, UK	Implementation	No	No	No	Yes
Open Cities	Cities, Engines of Economic Dev and Job Creation	Human Capital and Entrepreneurship	Belfast, Northern Ireland	Implementation	No	No	Yes	No
WEED	Cities, Engines of Economic Dev and Job Creation	Human Capital and Entrepreneurship	Celje, Slovenia	Implementation	No	No	No	No

MILE	Cities, Social Inclusion and Governance	Active Inclusion	Venice, Italy	Closed Project	No	Yes	No	No
Roma-Net	Cities, Social Inclusion and Governance	Active Inclusion	Budapest, Hungary	Implementation Phase	No	No	Yes	Yes
Joining Forces	Cities, Social Inclusion and Governance	Metropolitan Governance	Lille, France	Closed Project	Yes	No	No	No
NODUS	Cities, Social Inclusion and Governance	Metropolitan Governance	Catalunya, Spain	Closed Project	Yes	No	No	No
Reg Gov	Cities and Integrated Sustainable Development	Disadvantaged Neighbourhoods	Duisburg, Germany	Implementation Phase	No	No	Yes	No

Source: Ecorys 2011

The chosen projects outlined above are a representative sample of the projects supported by URBACT II. These ten case studies include: at least one project from each of the three thematic poles; an even geographical coverage (in terms of Lead Partner) of nine Member States across Eastern, Western and Central Europe; three closed projects, which includes two working groups and one Pilot Fast Track Network; and two second call projects. However, in order to ensure the broadest possible spread of both Member States and types of Lead Partner, it was only possible for the case studies to cover five of the nine thematic clusters. The table below summarises the total population of projects and compares it with the case study coverage.

	Total Population	Case Study Coverage
Projects	37	10
Thematic Poles	3	3
Thematic Clusters	9	5
Member States	28*	9
Thematic Networks	30	8
Working Groups	7	2
Fast Track Label	7	3
Pilot Fast Track Network	2	1
First Call	28	8
Second Call	9	2
Closed Projects	8	3
Implementation Phase	29	7

Source: Ecorys 2011

*All MS/ PS covered except Luxembourg

Initial review of existing documents, studies and data

This stage involved a rapid review of existing information and data linked to URBACT II activity, most of which was supplied by the URBACT Secretariat or gained from the URBACT II website. The initial assessment was designed to help the evaluators understand the extent to which secondary information could inform the evaluation process. Much of this existing information supplied was useful as context and for understanding the aims and objectives of the programme, as well as the operational functions and programme structure, although most documents lacked discussion or assessment of the early results achieved. The evaluation also undertook a literature review of written outputs or products from project activity. This included a systematic review of 14 LAPs linked to the eight completed URBACT II projects in order to help understand the issues and areas in which project partners hoped to have an impact on urban development policy and practice and also assess the overall quality of these key documents.

Online survey

This task saw us undertake a detailed online survey to capture the views of a range of stakeholders and practitioners linked to URBACT II (Project Leads, partners in Thematic Networks, partners in Working Groups, Pole Managers, Lead Experts and Thematic Experts) who have taken part in the different elements of the URBACT II programme. The aim of the online survey was to develop a 'top line' understanding of key issues which the case study work would explore and test in more detail later in the research. As a stand alone piece of evidence the online survey was limited, but as a first layer of evidence it provided an opportunity for a large number of stakeholders to feed into the evaluation and also helped highlight key issues to explore with other research methods and approaches later on in the process. The survey included sections on:

- the level of understanding of URBACT II;
- how Thematic Networks and Working groups have developed and been implemented;
- perceptions of the URBACT Secretariat and associated support providers (such as Thematic Experts);
- use of communication and dissemination tools and perceptions of their effectiveness;
- perceptions of partnership arrangements;
- areas of impact and issues that potentially undermine impact; and,
- considerations for the future.

In total, 206 responses were received, representing a response rate of approximately 50%.

Interviews with URBACT Secretariat, Managing Authority and Key Stakeholders

Face-to-face interviews with key personnel within the URBACT Secretariat and the Managing Authority were held. These interviews were designed to highlight some of the key issues attached to the way the programme is managed as well as its efficiency, effectiveness and impact which we later tested on in the evaluation process. The individuals we consulted with are as follows:

- URBACT Secretariat (including the Head of Secretariat, the Administration & Coordination Manager, the Finance Manager, the Communication Manager and the Projects and Capitalisation Manager);
- Managing Authority of the URBACT Programme (General Secretary and Head of Europe/International affairs); and,
- The three Pole Managers⁸.

As well as the interviews with the URBACT Secretariat and the Managing Authority we also interviewed, by telephone, a range of stakeholders involved in the strategic direction of URBACT II. These were as follows:

- Members of URBACT's Monitoring Committee (representatives from Belgium, Poland, Germany, Portugal, Greece, Sweden, Czech Republic, Austria and Luxemburg).
- DG Regio (1 representative).

The case studies

As part of the case study research, the evaluation team undertook an in-depth review of materials available on the mini-site for each of the ten sampled projects. Interviews were then conducted with a range of participants within each case study project, including the Lead City and the Lead Expert, as well as an average of 4-5 other participating cities and organisations. Interviews were generally conducted by telephone. In total, 55 interviews were held across the ten projects. Information from this fieldwork was synthesised into a series of internal case-study reports triangulating the views of various stakeholders consulted through the online survey and the various stakeholder interviews.

Constraints and issues connected with the methodology

The methodology used for this study was designed in response to the Schedule of Special Clauses that was published by the URBACT Secretariat, as well as to accommodate a series of issues that it is important to recognise within this report. Specifically these include the fact that:

⁸ These interviews were undertaken by telephone

- the nature of the programme, which is designed to 'transfer knowledge' and 'influence' urban policy development makes an assessment of impact relatively challenging. For example, the 'end' impact of an urban development practitioner 'learning good practice' through URBACT on, for instance, improving city governance and urban leadership can be difficult to measure. It is relatively straight forward to understand whether good practice has been transferred from one person to another and also whether it has been applied (or 'used'), but the 'end' impact of the learning (e.g. the impact of a stronger governance structure in a deprived neighbourhood leading to improvements to employment rates) is more difficult. The evaluation therefore considers impacts but recognises that these will often be immeasurable and based on stakeholders perceptions and opinions;
- as with all mid-term evaluations, there needs to be a realisation that it may be difficult to assess final impacts at this relatively early stage. Again, with the main objective of URBACT in mind, stakeholders will learn some elements of 'good practice' relatively quickly, and in some circumstances apply that learning straight away, but the end impact of that learning will often take time to manifest itself fully;
- the research and final report had to be delivered within a 15 week period, therefore influencing the evaluation methodology in terms of, for example, the amount of time people had to respond to the online survey or the ability of the evaluators to speak to certain stakeholders attached to the projects;
- although monitoring data for each of the projects exists, the nature of the objectives of URBACT projects (to exchange learning and knowledge) do not often lend themselves to 'traditional' monitoring data linked to, for instance, jobs created or businesses supported. This meant the evaluation was not able to use quantitative monitoring data in the same way as other ERDF related studies tend to do;
- partly because of the above point, as well as the desire to consult with as many stakeholders of the URBACT II programme as possible, a detailed online survey was undertaken. This provided us with a quantitative and qualitative evidence about the programme, particularly with respect to stakeholder perceptions of programme effectiveness and to some extent early impacts;
- the budget for the evaluation allowed the study to consult with a relatively large amount of people - approximately 300 in all. However, the budget and the limited timescales did not allow us to consult with stakeholders 'outside' of URBACT (i.e. those not directly involved in an URBACT project or the programme overall). This would perhaps include cities that were not taking part in URBACT projects and those responsible for other similar networks (e.g. Interreg); and,
- the results from the online survey provided the evaluation team with a number of 'headline' findings about the programmes effectiveness and impact, therefore enabling them to undertake the in-depth project case studies from an informed

position, and probe the interviewees about specific issues which had been initially identified through the online survey.

It is worth noting that the methodology for evaluating URBACT II was similar in focus to the approach undertaken in the evaluation of URBACT I. The URBACT I methodology had much smaller samples in both the online survey and the case studies but nevertheless included a mixture of surveys, interviews and desk research to inform its evidence base.

1.4 Structure of Final Report

In the remainder of this report, we first (Chapter 2) consider issues relating to operation and delivery of the URBACT II programme, before turning in Chapter 3 to issues relating to impact and achievements. Finally (Chapter 4) we present our conclusions and recommendations.

2.0 Operation and Delivery

This section of the report sets out the findings of the evaluation in relation to the management, operation and delivery structures linked to URBACT II. It will consider the role of the Secretariat, Lead Partners and Lead Experts, Pole Managers, Local Support Groups and Local Action Plans, examining the strengths and weaknesses of each. It also covers communication and other administration issues related to the programme and its projects.

2.1 Partner Working and Involvement

Before looking at the strengths of partnership working within URBACT II projects, this first sub-section highlights the geographical spread of partners so far involved in URBACT II. The table below shows the Member State (and its population) in which Lead Partners and Project Partners are located illustrating the geographical coverage of the programme by broad country clusters.

Table 2.1 Geographical coverage of URBACT II

Country Cluster ⁹	Country	Population	Countries popn as a % of total EU27 Population (+ Norway & Switzerland)	Clusters popn as a % of total EU27 population (+ Norway & Switzerland)	Number of Project Partners per Country	% of Total Project Partners per Country	% of Project Partners found in Country Cluster	Number of Lead Partners found in Country	Total number of Lead Partners found in Country Cluster
Nordic	Denmark	5,534,738	1.1%	4.8%	3	0.9%	6.4%	0	0
	Finland	5,351,427	1.0%		4	1.1%		0	
	Sweden	9,340,682	1.8%		13	3.8%		0	
	Norway	4,858,199	0.9%		2	0.6%		0	
Continental	Austria	8,275,290	1.6%	37%	8	2.4%	23.8%	3	18
	Belgium	10,839,905	2.1%		8	2.4%		0	
	France	64,716,310	12.6%		27	7.9%		7	
	Germany	81,802,257	15.9%		23	6.7%		7	
	Luxembourg	502,066	0.1%		0	0.0%		0	
	Netherlands	16,574,989	3.2%		13	3.8%		1	
	Switzerland	7,785,806	1.5%		2	0.6%		0	
Anglo-Saxon	Ireland	4,467,854	0.9%	13%	3	0.9%	9.1%	0	5

⁹ Grouping countries into clusters is a good way of seeing the distribution of project partners and Lead Partners across different 'types' of European country. It can help to identify if there are any geographical trends behind where partners are located.

	UK	62,008,048	12.1%		28	8.2%		5	
Central and Eastern Europe	Bulgaria	7,563,710	1.5%	19.8%	7	2%	27%	0	3
	Czech Republic	10,506,813	2.0%		6	1.8%		0	
	Estonia	1,340,127	0.3%		1	0.3%		0	
	Hungary	10,014,324	1.9%		13	3.8%		2	
	Latvia	2,248,374	0.4%		3	0.9%		0	
	Lithuania	3,329,039	0.6%		2	0.6%		0	
	Poland	38,167,329	7.4%		28	8.2%		0	
	Romania	21,462,186	4.2%		25	7.3%		0	
	Slovakia	5,424,925	1.1%		2	0.6%		0	
	Slovenia	2,046,976	0.4%		5	1.5%		1	
Mediterranean	Cyprus	803,147	0.2%	25.4%	2	0.6%	33.7%	0	11
	Greece	11,305,118	2.2%		24	7%		0	
	Italy	60,340,328	11.7%		38	11.1%		7	
	Malta	412,970	0.1%		1	0.3%		0	
	Portugal	10,637,713	2.1%		17	5%		1	
	Spain	45,989,016	9.1%		33	9.7%		3	
Total		513,649,666	100.0%	100.0%	341	100.0%	100.0%	37	37

Source: Ecorys 2011

The above table shows that:

- In total, 28 countries are involved in URBACT II: 26 EU Member States (Luxembourg is not represented) and 2 partner countries (Norway and Switzerland).
- Approximately one third (34%) of project partners are located in Mediterranean countries with Spain and Italy accounting for the biggest proportion; 10% and 11% respectively.
- Central and Eastern European countries are generally well represented: over one quarter (27%) of project partners are located in this area with participation being particularly high in Poland (8%) and Romania (7%). When assessed against the proportion of Europe's total population that are found in Eastern Europe (20% of the EUs population live in Central and Eastern Europe), Central and Eastern Europe partners are slightly over represented in the URBACT programme.
- Unpicking the data shows that the majority of project partners are located in Western Europe countries. Indeed, 43% of partners are located in 5 Member States (Spain,

Italy, France, Germany and the UK). However, as the above table shows, these countries have the largest populations in Europe: indeed 61% of the population of the 28 countries involved in URBACT II reside in these 5 Member States. Therefore the concentration of project partners in Western countries is appropriate in relation to population size.

- Following on from the aforementioned trend, the largest number of Lead Partners are found in Western Member States. 29 of the 37 Lead Partners are found in Spain, Italy, Germany, France and the UK and 3 are from Central and Eastern Europe. However as outlined previously, this is in line with the large differences in population size between the country groups.
- The highest proportion of Lead Partners can be found in Continental Europe (although this is largely attributable to France and Germany, each of which have 7 Lead Partners)
- There are no Lead Partners from any of the 4 Nordic countries, they also have the smallest percentage of project partners of all of the country clusters at 6%. However, as this cluster consists of 5% of the total population of URBACT II countries, they are generally appropriately represented.

2.1.1 Strength of Partnerships

A key reoccurring message coming out of the evaluation was the level of partnership working involved in URBACT II projects, where (in the main) partners genuinely worked well together as one united group. 80% of respondents to the survey said that the strength of their URBACT partnership was either strong or very strong. One of the key findings was that the time spent by partners at transnational meetings and events linked to URBACT II projects was instrumental in helping to develop strong personal relationships between the different partners, and in some cases, the development of longer-term working relationships. Unlike other networks which some partners had been involved in (dealt with later in Chapter 3) the intensity and length of time partners spent with one another (often on a face-to-face basis) helped to galvanise links between the cities. This not only created 'better relationships' but directly helped the exchange of learning and the sharing of good practice. It is also apparent that the partnerships have generally operated within friendly working environments, characterised by strong levels of co-operation.

This finding reflects positively on the partners and experts participating in the URBACT II projects, particularly when considering the range of challenges encountered by a number of organisations in being able to engage in project activities. These include:

- Budget constraints amongst many participating authorities, which restricted the time and resources that the partner representatives could spend on URBACT II activities, particularly in travelling to, and attending the transnational events (this includes obtaining permission to travel from senior people within their organisation).

- Varying degrees of experience amongst different partners in participating in transnational urban development projects. Although the online survey shows that about 60% were also involved in other transnational activities, this meant that 40% of individuals were new to this type of cross border partnership working.
- Language barriers have also restricted the level of input some partners have been able to have in project discussions; however, it is evident that many projects have used English translators to overcome this challenge if needed and (certainly for all those taking part in the evaluation) a good grasp of English appeared to be the rule among partners.
- The project subject areas have not always reflected the priorities of the participating authorities (particularly the managing authorities), which on some occasions led to partners demonstrating a more limited interest and less active engagement, or can limit the extent to which some of the recommended policy actions developed through the project can be implemented. For example, some partners for the Roma-Net project are encountering challenge that the integration of Roma communities in labour market and social/community activities is a lower priority for authorities governed by centre-right political administrations. This issue is dealt with further in Chapter 3 of this report.

However, it is apparent that the format of many URBACT II projects in ensuring that different partners have been required to host the other partners in transnational events has been a critical factor in ensuring their successful engagement. Specifically, the responsibility of hosting these events helped to stimulate strong levels of commitment to the projects, not only from the partners themselves, but also the respective Local Support Group members.

One of the innovative elements of the URBACT II programme is the requirement for project partnerships to have a diversity of partners from both competitiveness and convergence regions. Many other European Commission funded transnational projects do not place such a requirement. The case study findings indicated that many projects had encountered challenges in assembling both the necessary level of partners and also combination of partners. Again, this is dealt with in more detail later in this report.

Notwithstanding this challenge, the evaluation has revealed strong levels of satisfaction with both the number and combination of partners assembled for the projects partnerships from the online survey. For example, 2 in 5 (41%) respondents were totally satisfied with the number of partners involved in the project, and a further 2 in 5 (41%) were satisfied with the number of partners, resulting in a satisfaction rating of 82%. The case studies indicated that projects tended to contain between 7 and 10 partners but also many projects were forced to find new partners as a result of partners pulling out – often due to resource constraints. Many partnerships consist of both city-level authorities and regional-level authorities as partners, although the majority of project partners have been city-level authorities.

Reflecting the satisfaction ratings with the number of partners recruited to participate in the projects, the satisfaction ratings were relatively high for the balance of partners between competitiveness and convergence regions, with 36% indicating total satisfaction and 32% indicating satisfaction, giving an overall satisfaction rating of 68%. The case study findings indicated that for many projects, the number of partners based in competitiveness regions was generally slightly higher than the number from convergence regions. They also indicated that the scoping stages of the projects (normally six months in duration) were critical in ensuring that the necessary combination of partners was recruited to the project, and that if any partners dropped out, sufficient time was available to recruit new ones.

2.1.2 The Role of the Lead Partner

One of the critical factors behind the success of the partnership working arrangements has been the role the lead partner has played in helping to ensure strong levels of participation from the other partners and harmonious working relationships between all partners. Indeed, 2 in 5 (41%) of respondents to the online survey indicated that they were totally satisfied with the working relationship between the lead partner and other project partners, and a further 37% indicated that they were satisfied (giving a total satisfaction rating of 78%).

Lead Partners have taken varying approaches towards ensuring the strong participation of project partners, for example:

- The lead partner for the "JOINING FORCES" project was instrumental in setting the agenda for the transnational meetings by analysing themes the partners expressed the strongest interest in, and developing an agenda that reflected the general consensus amongst all partners.
- The lead partner for the "NODUS" project demonstrated strong flexibility in working with the lead expert to broaden the focus of the project after its inception, when it emerged that the development of tools to link urban renewal and spatial planning did not necessarily reflect the objectives or priorities of all partners, and that a broader project focus was required to ensure the full participation of all partners.
- For the "Creative Clusters" project, the lead partner overcame potential internal capacity constraints by appointing a creative industries 'think tank' to undertake some of the support and administration work, and thereby helping to ensure that the lead partner was able to engage in regular contact with the other project partners to monitor the progression of the LAPs.
- The case studies identified some examples of projects where the Lead Partners had been perceived as being less effective in their role. The Lead Partners with limited experience in participating in similar urban development projects involving transnational partnerships seemed to have experienced more challenges in fulfilling their role as lead partner, and have been less successful in ensuring that positive outcomes emerge for each partner.

2.1.3 The Role of the Lead Expert

The evaluation has identified that there is a high level of satisfaction with the working relationship between the lead expert and the project partners. Indeed, in the online survey 1 in 3 (34%) respondents indicated that they were totally satisfied with this relationship and a further 2 in 5 (43%) indicated that they were satisfied, giving an overall satisfaction rating of 77%.

In many cases, the specialist expertise of the lead expert in the respective subject area has played a key role in ensuring that the expert actively shaped the design of the project (this includes experience of linking policy and theory with the practical delivery of activities – and, in some cases, expertise in delivering transnational partnership-based projects). Areas where the Lead Experts were considered to have added value include:

- The design of the transnational learning events, both in terms of the range of subjects covered and their format and methods used to ensure that they were interactive (rather than 'death by Powerpoint').
- Spending longer periods of time with partners less experienced in engaging in similar transnational partnerships to ensure that they could make strong contributions to discussions, and present transferrable learning points emerging from their own localities to other partners. In some cases, such as "NODUS", the lead partner undertook visits to those partners with less experience of engaging in similar projects to obtain an understanding of the urban development needs relevant to the areas to help shape the LAP, and scope the ways in which the partners would obtain learning points through participating in project meetings.

Most Lead Experts have had close working relationships with the Lead Partners. The Lead Partners and experts have worked closely together both in the design of project activities, and, in some cases, modification of project activities after project inception. To illustrate the importance of this working relationship, the case studies identified an example of a project where the lead partner and lead expert had not developed such a close working relationship and where tasks were not clearly delegated. This resulted in project activities being delayed, key deliverables and milestones not being communicated to partners, and the lead expert subsequently being changed.

Consultees also tended to state that the quality of outputs produced by the projects (e.g. case studies, good practice guides, baseline studies etc) was better where the expert had played a hands-on role in developing and editing them. Creative Clusters is a strong example of a project where the Lead Expert has fostered a positive working relationship between partners and helped them draft various written outputs to a specific quality threshold. Consultees from this project also reported that the Lead Expert has worked closely with the Communication Officer to "package" the messages coming out of the project and then to disseminate them. The Lead Expert and project partners have participated in 15 events outside of the URBACT II community, including an INTERREG workshop, where the Lead Expert disseminated findings from the project to an audience who were largely unaware that the project existed.

Although it is important that the Lead Expert has thematic expertise, project partners regarded it as equally, if not more, important that they have strong facilitation skills, and use innovative methods to engage and involve all participants in project meetings. This was certainly the case in the Mile project and is the case in the ESIMEC projects, where the Lead Expert played / plays a key role in facilitating knowledge exchanges and communication amongst partners. Rather than providing expert thematic inputs into the projects, the Lead Partner and project partners often preferred to bring in experts for specific issues and meetings on a short term basis. Reinforcing this point, is the fact that a small number of consultees reported that their Lead Expert is "too academic", and while possessing the thematic knowledge has not necessarily been very good at communicating with project partners and involving them in the activity.

However, there are also examples of where the thematic expertise of the Lead Expert has been critical. During the implementation phase of the NODUS project the thematic expertise of the Lead Expert was regarded as "instrumental" in changing the focus of the project to cover a wider range of regeneration issues and to change the importance of the regional level during the course of the project (once it became apparent that the initial concept for the project would not necessarily work in practice).

2.2 URBACT Secretariat

The URBACT Secretariat is generally very well respected by the various stakeholders involved in URBACT II, from the project partners, Lead Experts and Lead Partners, Pole Managers through to Monitoring Committee Members. The reoccurring message coming back from stakeholders was that the Secretariat was generally responsive, helpful and passionate about the programme and worked hard to ensure that a genuinely complex programme was co-ordinated as well as possible. There are a number of key points that are worth highlighting, which are dealt with below.

- **Guidance and Training:** The quality of written and verbal guidance was seen as a strong point of the programme. Compared to URBACT I the guidance was comprehensive in terms of coverage whilst also clear and focused in its nature (particularly the Operating Manual). Lead Partners and project partners in particular were of the view that the guidance issued by the Secretariat had helped to improve the quality of their outputs. The training provided by the Secretariat was also considered to be of a high quality. Overall, the training and guidance that the Secretariat provided is recognised as having promoted 'consistency' within a programme where a common standard is hard to achieve.
- **Partner Perception of Secretariat Support:** The Secretariat was seen in a positive light by the project partners and Lead Experts. From their perspective, the Secretariat had been noted for making a large effort to provide project level support on 'the ground'. In this respect the Secretariat was not perceived as being detached from the project level of the programme. In fact, a high proportion of the Lead Partners and Lead Experts praised the Secretariat as being responsive, often

referring to them by name (rather than 'the Secretariat'). Whilst project level partners would often approach the Secretariat via the Lead Partner, there was still a sense amongst them that the Secretariat was highly visible within the programme. This is an impressive achievement given the size and relative complexity of the programme delivered, and credit should be assigned to the Secretariat for the resources and effort they have clearly put into building relationships with the partners and projects they support.

- **Focus of Support Offered:** For a programme the size of URBACT II, there is inevitably going to be a large resource and emphasis focussed on establishing project systems. It is clear that the Secretariat has been very engaged and committed to the task of initiating and setting up projects. Given the overall number of projects included under the first and second call of URBACT II, this has been a time consuming challenge. However, the quality of input from the Secretariat at this stage has meant that implementation problems have generally been minimised and also prevented further down the line. Despite this, there is a clear need for project support to shift fairly quickly in the programme away from the 'establishment' of projects and support systems and toward ensuring that projects are actually being delivered effectively and that they have a positive outcome. In order to maximise the impact of projects, Secretariat resources should now be more focused on helping partners apply their knowledge and deliver their activities effectively. A case in point was the LAPs, where the Secretariat's support centred on issuing guidance on the role of LAPs and how to develop the documents. However, there could have been more practical support offered to partners around how to improve consultation and dissemination events linked to the LAP or how to overcome key issues such as linking the LAP to funding in a time of public sector austerity. In addition, there would have been value in issuing some advice and guidance to partners where cultural and political issues stood in the way of effective partner participation.
- **Monitoring and Auditing:** A symptomatic issue related to a programme of this size is the amount of time and financial resource that was spent on auditing and monitoring linked to projects that had to be done by the Secretariat. This is to be expected and indeed is recognised as a requirement of the programme. However, the research has shown that these tasks have taken up a large amount of the Secretariat time with auditing activity being burdensome at both Secretariat and Lead Partner level.
- **Financial Reimbursements:** The research process highlighted that the length of time taken for financial reimbursements to be made is a major issue for partners. As with other European programmes, partners entered into URBACT II expecting that there might be a lag time between submitting claims and being reimbursed. However, the consensus was that claims were sometimes taking a year to be processed. The negative impact of this should not be underestimated. A number of partners and Lead Experts in particular did not have the support of an organisation that was able to carry the incurred costs on their behalf. As such, self-employed Lead Experts and public-sector Lead Partners were required to take on the

responsibility of shouldering the financial costs until their financial reimbursements could be made. This threatened the participation and effectiveness of the programme.

Another main issue to consider is the impact of the second project call on the Secretariat. The Monitoring Committee was the main driver behind the second call for projects in late 2009, which added to the pressure on the Secretariat's resources. With an influx of new projects, there was the need to provide additional support and guidelines at the front-end of the project lifespan and again support the projects set up and establishment. Again this meant that the Secretariat's resources have tended to be concentrated on project initiation rather than implementation and suggests that an additional call for projects that was instigated by the Monitoring Committee (only two calls were originally planned for URBACT II) has put a strain on the Secretariat in terms of setting up projects.

There is a key distinction to be made between URBACT I and URBACT II in terms of the Secretariat experience. This was due to the considerable increase in the number of projects overall. Whilst this offered opportunities in terms of the widened scope and impact of the programme, it also meant that the Secretariat did not feel 'close to the action' at project level. In managing a programme with 37 projects, the Secretariat was less able to have a direct insight into the work of individual projects than it had under the first programme. In URBACT I, the Secretariat was often present at meetings of the Thematic Networks, whilst this was impossible with the much larger number of projects under URBACT II. This has meant that in some cases, the Secretariat has not been able to have a good overall understanding of the particular activities and dynamics of particular projects. Importantly, it also means that the Secretariat might not be aware of problems in project delivery, perhaps until it is too far down the line for issues to be addressed easily. Again, restricting the amount of projects (and call for projects) may have helped in this area.

Overall, the quality and quantity of support was high; with three out of four respondents to the online survey stated the support they received from the Secretariat was either 'useful' or 'essential' in terms of the development and implementation of their project. Due mainly to the extra resources that the Secretariat has now got (compared to URBACT I), the whole programme is much more tightly run, and there is more clarity in terms of both guidance and the URBACT 'method'.

2.3 Pole Managers

The Pole Managers were generally seen in a positive light by stakeholders and were considered an important part of the URBACT II support structure. In particular, they brought expertise and co-ordination to each theme and (like the Lead Experts) helped strengthen the quality of projects, both in terms of their development and their outputs. 50% of survey respondents thought that the support they received from the Pole Managers was either essential or useful to their project, with only 6% saying that it was

of no use. The projects reported a range of ways in which Pole Managers had supported them- from helping develop plans for various transnational meetings through to supporting them in technical questions linked to, for instance, migration. Perhaps the most common added value of the Pole Managers was their support in raising the quality of outputs produced by the projects. Their advice on, for example, the development of LAPs or the content of a 'good' case study meant the general standard of URBACT II 'products' was increased, and the programme was able to develop a much more common and equal set of outputs as a consequence.

It seems that the one-to-one advice provided by the Pole Managers was perhaps more helpful to projects than the support provided in group sessions (including the Pole and now cloud meetings¹⁰). Both projects, and to some extent the Pole Managers themselves felt that supporting such a broad range of stakeholders in a single joint session was difficult because of the diversity of partner's skills and knowledge. Pitching the group support at a level which neither excluded the less informed partners but at the same time was not too basic for the more advanced partners was difficult to achieve. As a consequence, the usefulness of the Pole/ cloud meetings were sometimes questioned (they were good for networking but the amount of direct learning taking place was mixed). This point should be noted as the preparation, facilitation and follow through of these meeting took up a consideration amount of time. The one to one support given by Pole Managers was seen as being more helpful as they were able to provide relevant and personalised support at a level which was more appropriate to the stakeholder in question.

Rather like the Secretariat, Pole Managers were seen to have focussed their support so far on establishing or setting up projects and teaching them about the URBACT II 'method' (e.g. what is a LSG, how to develop a strong LAP etc). Less support has so far been given on issues linked to capitalisation and 'applying knowledge'. This is to be expected in the early part of the projects life cycle, but there was a certain amount of 'impatience' (by both projects and the Pole Managers themselves) about quickly shifting the emphasis towards helping projects 'make a difference' (through capitalisation). Pole Managers were originally planning to spend approximately 70-80% of their time on capitalisation issues but in reality estimated that they had spent at least 50-60% on method issues. It was felt that if projects and Pole Managers continued to interact around mainly methodological issues (such as what makes a good LAP and how to establish a strong partnership) then there was a danger that the role of Pole Managers would not be used to its greatest effect.

There were also a number of comments around the fact that Pole Managers had to provide assistance to all projects, regardless of whether the projects wanted or accepted the support. Some Pole Managers felt that a more focused level of support should be given to projects who were turning out to be the 'high flyers' (i.e. those more likely to make the biggest difference or have the largest impact on a certain issue) with those projects that were seen to be slow developers or perhaps who would make only a

¹⁰ Cloud meetings are thematic meetings whereby projects that fall under similar themes come together to exchange knowledge and examples of good practice

small contribution to a certain issue receiving less support from the Pole Managers. This view was not held by all stakeholders and there was an acceptance by most that Pole Managers had to provide a relatively equal level of support to all projects early on - whilst they were establishing themselves. The Pole Managers and the programme overall had a responsibility to provide an equal level of support in the name of fairness. However, on balance it is worth the URBACT Secretariat considering whether a more targeted and focused level of support (in the second half of the programmes life) is more appropriate.

Another issue for consideration relating to the Pole Managers was their work linking projects within the different themes together. There was a mixture of opinions on whether this 'cross fertilization' of projects was working but there was a general agreement amongst those consulted that Pole Managers could do more at programme level to draw out messages, issues and findings at a thematic level. These reoccurring messages on, for instance, cities as engines of economic growth, would make interesting reading in internal communication tools such as the URBACT Tribune (the official programme magazine to facilitate the sharing of good practice and knowledge) as well as to external audiences. This gathering of a broader synthesis of ideas and thoughts from across all projects needs to become a larger part of the Pole Managers role during the second half of the programme.

2.4 Local Support Groups

As already noted, partner participation at the local level is organised around Local Support Groups (LSGs), which gather a range of local stakeholders and city partners together to participate in the project and to support the development of the LAP in each area. The LSG structures were proposed in order to ensure that there was a positive impact of network activities on local policies. Each thematic network partner was required to set up an LSG for the project or use an existing group with a similar or equivalent focus. In 45% of cases the LSGs built on pre-existing partnerships within a particular city. As such, even in some cases where projects represented new thematic areas and ways of working for partners, the LSG structure emerged from city-level partnership arrangements which already existed in one form or another. However, in 55% of cases, LSGs were created specifically for the URBACT II project. Here the creation of LSGs often paved the way for a positive change in organisational culture, for example in Turin (MILE project) through initiating a valuable structure for cross-sector partners to consider policy improvements. The main way in which the LSGs varied from traditional partnerships was that they brought together partners which represented a cross-section of policy interests. In this respect, the LSG presented quite a unique approach in some cities, and a structure which was often not common within city level policy development processes.

2.4.1 LSG Composition and Representation

The LSGs were very varied in terms of their composition, size and nature, depending on the city and project that they applied to. The partners involved ranged from city

municipality representatives, local policy makers, relevant NGOs / agencies, local businesses and academics. The aim was to create a cross-sector and multi-governance group, through promoting participation from public and third sector organisations as well as the private sector. As stated earlier, in many cases, the LSGs brought together partners which had not previously joined together to consider policy developments. For instance, in Umea (WEED), the LSG brought together city partners that had not previously worked in an integrated manner. The local partners appreciated the LSG as a mechanism through which their joint working could be consolidated. They had previously been working in Umea, across overlapping themes and disciplines but never as part of a focused partnership. In Belfast (OPENCities), a range of city council departments participated in the LSG (including the Department of Migration, Department of Finance and the Department of Economy and Learning). This facilitated the emergence of an integrated and cross-policy approach. Some other city partners participating in this project (such as Vienna) adopted a community development approach and involved many of local community representatives in their support group. This meant that the LSG built up a good understanding of the real issues for international populations through its local community engagement work.

An important distinction can be made between those groups which were 'open' to participation from a wide range of local actors, with a fluid membership, and those groups which had a set number of chosen representatives ('closed' groups). For instance the city of Obidos saw value in opening up the LSG to wide participation whilst Vienna (OPENCities) took the opportunity to increase the LSG participation through inviting the University of Vienna, anti-racist groups, academics, and members of the city administration to participate. Whilst this process may have been 'messier' and harder to manage than it would have been with a closed group, it was seen to lead to the following positive benefits:

- There was a greater degree of diversity as part of the LSG which helped to make the group representative of the city population;
- The breadth of knowledge that a widened set of partners brought to the group contributed to the shared learning goals of the projects;
- A wide and fluid participation on the LSG, meant that the number of stakeholders working directly with the project increased – and so the opportunities of disseminating project learning and outcomes via these participants and their wider networks; and,
- A LSG with open membership was more likely to reach key civic policy and funding decision makers in the process, either through their direct involvement or through increasing the public visibility of URBACT II.

On the other hand, the case studies tended to highlight that LSGs with a pre-defined and closed membership were more effective in undertaking the task of LAP development. One such example was the Finnish city of Jyväskylä (Creative Clusters)

whose LSG was comprised of a pre-defined group of six or seven carefully selected partners. With a smaller group of committed partners, LSGs found it more straightforward to allocate responsibilities and focus on completing tasks. Whilst the Lead Expert made efforts to help widen out participation as part of this LSG, the city partner actually felt that this acted to stall the momentum of the partnership. Here the additional members were not able to contribute much time to the partnership and attended on an irregular basis. Rather than acting to spread the division of labour across a wider set of partners, the Lead Partner ended up undertaking the majority of the practical tasks and felt rather unsupported in terms of LAP development.

An effective model was developed under the MILE project which established an LSG comprising of two elements. The first was core Local Action Groups (LAG) which were assembled from 6-8 partners with a high degree of knowledge about the project theme. The second was a wider local network which formed the target group for the programme of local activities that the LAG developed across the course of the project. These included dissemination events and local consultation events for example. This approach meant that the LSG could have a clear focus on undertaking the task of LAP development, whilst also realising the partnership and dissemination benefits of having a widened participant network.

2.4.2 Meeting Regularity and Structure of LSGs

Case study analysis showed that LSGs tended to adopt a relatively formulaic meeting structure, in that partners met on a regular basis to discuss and action progress, especially with respect to LAP development. There was no pattern as to the regularity of LSG meetings across projects, with some groups meeting on a monthly basis whilst others met more infrequently (on one occasion - once in a year). Project Leads considered that partners whose LSG did not meet as regularly were not as effective in exchanging knowledge, learning and in developing a focussed LAP. In Dublin, for example, (OPENCities) the LSG did not meet as regularly as some other groups, which had a bearing on the quality of their action planning process. Here the various stakeholders within the LSG had not maximised the opportunities to pool their collective knowledge and together consider opportunities for policy development.

Those partners involved in the LSG often regarded the cross-sectoral approach as unique, while the dynamic of meetings varied on account of the type and range of actors involved. LSGs differed in terms of their key strengths and contributions to urban development policy making. For instance, as with the LAP, those with university representatives were often strong in their consideration of baseline need and evidence, whilst those with NGOs were often successful in developing the capacity of other organisations involved. The MILE project found that the LSG structure appealed more to those partners interested in local intervention, whereas those keen on learning from international experience appreciated the transnational exchange aspects of the project. These two elements (the local level and the transnational level exchange) were successfully linked under a number of projects which sought to include a member of the LSGs at transnational learning events.

2.4.3 Value and Contribution

Most of those responding to the online survey were of the view that the LSGs played an 'essential' role in the development of LAPs (40%), with an additional 46% stating that the LSG played a useful role in the development of the plans. This shows that LAPs were not seemingly written by an individual (i.e. the Lead Partner for instance). Only 4% of respondents were of the view that the LSG was not useful in terms of LAP development. LSGs were the key mechanism through which project approaches and actions were developed amongst partners. It also follows that the representation and degree of active participation within the LSG had a direct bearing on the LAP outputs.

One of the main achievements of the LSGs is that they brought together a diverse range of city-level partners, who in all likelihood, would not have worked together in the absence of the project. Even where there were difficulties around partner relations and co-operation, the LSGs acted to change the policy making landscape of a city by building the capacity of local partnership networks. This is the case in Obidos (Creative Clusters) where local partner networking has been facilitated through the LSG. In this way, whilst the LSGs were limited in the degree to which they directly levered improvements to urban policy and practice, they acted to precipitate such changes through establishing a strong network of partners.

A key indicator of success is the retention of LSGs within a local area beyond the life of the project. For instance, the MILE project has seen 4 partners formally sustain their LSG beyond the life of the project, with these LSG members still meeting regularly. A further 3 partners have also informally sustained their LSG, therefore LSG members have continued to meet but in other local groups structures that have emerged as a consequence of the MILE project. The Joining Forces project has seen the LSG structure and concept transferred to INTERREG on the basis of its effectiveness in capturing the input from a range of partners. It is difficult to say what proportion of LSGs will be sustained in reality (partly because this was not a question posed during the case study work) but there does seem to be traces of evidence to suggest that not all will finish once URBACT II finishes.

2.4.4 Support for LSG development

The evaluation has revealed that the Secretariat provided a good level of support in setting up and supporting LSG and a LAP development. 59% of survey respondents considered that the advice and guidelines given in this area were helpful whilst a further 21% considered them very helpful.

The evaluation has revealed that a large amount of resource and effort went into running the LSGs. The Lead Partners often experienced many challenges in facilitating effective communication and information sharing. With an overview of individual projects, the Lead Experts were particularly aware of cultural, political and personality issues which presented challenges to the smooth running and effectiveness of the LSGs. Developing and sustaining the LSGs, especially in the context of an economic downturn was a key achievement of the project. Partners generally displayed a high

degree of commitment and participation in the LSG over the course of the project, for which they should be commended.

2.5 Local Action Plans

A key feature of project delivery under URBACT II was the development of LAPs. The requirement for LAP development was introduced for URBACT II, with the documents intended to consolidate the local level learning and proposed actions emerging from participation in projects. Under the programme, each project partner was required to create a LAP. As such, rather than there being an overarching plan to underpin project level activity and action planning, there was a set of LAPs for each project delivered.

2.5.1 Current Status of LAPs

It is generally the case across the programme that partners have made good progress with LAP development. Although few partners have formally completed and submitted their LAPs, most plans have been drafted and are currently awaiting final changes or translation. The online survey revealed that 29% of respondents have submitted their LAP to their Managing Authority, 62% are still working on it, while 9% do not intend to produce one. Of the LAPs that the survey respondents had finalised and submitted to the Managing Authority, 9% of all respondents (or 30% of those who had already submitted their LAP) had received full funding. A slightly higher proportion (12% of respondents overall) had received partial funding, while just over 8% of respondents were waiting for their LAP to be accepted by the Managing Authority.

2.5.2 LAPs as Concrete Project Outputs

The LAPs are an extremely positive addition to the URBACT II programme. The LAPs have both served as a record of the project and partnership discussions and joint learning but also as an action planning mechanism that have created a 'focus' for practical project delivery. In providing a tool for shaping local level actions and aims, LAPs constitute a concrete output of project level activity. Especially where projects had a strong theoretical basis (for example, the OPENCities project), the process of LAP development has helped partners translate conceptual discussions into action based approaches to addressing urban policy challenges. Indeed, in Catalunya, the URBACT II action planning process has focused on enhancing existing regeneration activity (namely, the Urban Regeneration Programme and Spatial Planning Programme) by proposing four targeted actions, including the creation of an analytical group to create an evidence base to help understand the root causes of urban deprivation in the Metropolitan Region of Barcelona and therefore inform future policy development.

Local level partners were required to work together to develop LAPs, and it is clear from a review of completed LAPs that the process of creating them has acted to provide a strong focus and synthesis for projects. Assembling a range of local stakeholders from across various civic functions and agencies to work on the LAP was a task in itself. In many cities this brought about a ground breaking approach which gave rise to benefits

above and beyond those associated directly linked to the LAP as a document. Under URBACT II, LAPs have been a successful mechanism for leading partners to consider a practical set of solutions to urban policy challenges. One of the main objectives of the URBAMECO Fast Track Pilot Project was to create more favourable conditions for local economic development in order to fight social exclusion in deprived neighbourhoods in the city. In Nea Ionia, for example, a number of goals were set out in the LAP, including the desire to improve the effectiveness of local authority departments by encouraging greater (horizontal and vertical) integration of local interventions across the economic, social and environmental themes.

Whilst there are some questions raised about the effectiveness of LAPs in terms of their deliverability (dealt with later in this section), most partners were supportive of the principle and concept of LAPs. The introduction of LAPs should be recognised as major achievement under the URBACT II programme as the plans serve as a tangible output which acts to crystallise project learning and actions.

2.5.3 Variation in Content and Approach of LAPs

A review of a sample of the LAP's from the completed projects revealed that they vary notably in terms of their approach, content, level of focus, length (from as little as 16 pages to over 200) as well as the set of actions they laid out. For example, some LAPs were more strategic, some project based, some relatively academic, whilst some were more akin to funding applications. The depth of focus for the LAP also varied on account of the partner's stage of development in addressing a particular policy issue.

The degree to which LAPs took on a strategic approach reflected the circumstances and policy making background of the particular city involved. Not all partners had experienced a strategic approach to addressing urban sustainable development in their city prior to their involvement in URBACT II. In this respect, the process of reviewing city needs and challenges to inform the development of sustainable and integrated strategic options was of great benefit to them. A strong example of a more strategic approach being adopted is evident in Eindhoven (Joining Forces), where the main objective of the LAP is to create a spatial vision for the region through the development of a long term spatial programme (Spatial Programme Brainport). The LAP goes on to state that unlike earlier spatial documents for the region, Spatial Programme Brainport differs in that it is more than a "mere policy document" and contains genuine implementable actions. The claim of an evolution in spatial planning policy can undoubtedly be attributed to the involvement of Eindhoven in the Joining Forces project.

Most of the LAPs adopted an evidence-based approach, where some form of problem analysis was included in the introduction to the document. This often reflected the involvement of academic partners within the LSG. For instance, Bilbao (OPENCities) also developed a baseline as part of its approach through partnering with a European Laboratory. Catalunya (NODUS) placed a discreet emphasis on the development of robust deprivation indicators which meant that their urban renewal activities were more focused and effective in addressing need. The most effective LAPs in the eyes of the Lead Experts (for example that linked to the WEED project) was where this appreciation

of local need was partnered with a practical set of actions to address the identified challenges.

Other LAPs have a strong delivery focus. For instance, the Roma-Net has developed an organisational structure to help manage and co-ordinate LAP activities. This has meant that the partners have given thought to the mechanisms through which they hope to implement the identified actions. Whilst some project partners have been concerned with framing their LAP around immediate and short term actions, others have focussed on laying out a longer term strategy for addressing a particular issue. For instance, under the UNIC project, Faenza's LAP contained three short-term actions (with two already completed) whilst Stoke-on-Trent's LAP is focused around a 5 year timeframe.

Some LAPs under the WEED project resembled funding applications in their structure and approach. Whilst this meant that some aspects of strategic action planning were neglected, the LAPs had certainly been developed with deliverability in mind. LAPs which were developed on the basis of pre-existing plans (such as with Dobrich, NODUS) were effective in delivery terms as they reflected the priorities and activities already established in another plan. Whilst this limited the emergence of creative or 'new' initiatives through the LSG discussions, it did mean that there was an increased chance of the LAP receiving funding support, as these aspects had already been considered under the previous plan process. A review of a sample of LAPs from the completed projects indicated that whilst not all of them have yet secured additional funding, a number of them have at least considered funding sources to implement any actions laid out in the plans. Good examples of this level of forward thinking are evident in the EGTC project LAPs, including ones for Lille and Strasbourg, where the challenges, accompanying actions, expected results, timelines, sources of funding and further recommendations are clearly laid out in structured tables.

2.5.4 Guidance and Flexibility linked to LAPs

A main achievement of URBACT II in terms of the LAP process has been the level and nature of programme guidance and requirements given to partners by the Secretariat. 80% of survey respondents considered that the written guidance provided on issues such as the production of a LAP was either very helpful or helpful. This compared to 10% of respondents who considered that the guidance was not helpful. One of the reasons that partners generally have a positive view of the guidelines and requirements for LAP development is that there is no precise mandate set out as to the form and approach the documents should adopt. This meant that relative flexibility was afforded to partners as part of the plan-making process. In the absence of precise stipulations as to the content and style of LAPs, partners were able to adopt the most appropriate approach for their own city circumstances and experience. This was a key success factor, as although some plans have been more effective and action focussed than others, each partnership has benefited from carving out its own response to local policy issues rather than conforming to a one-size fits all action planning approach, which in a programme such as URBACT II would not work. At partner level this flexibility was perceived more positively than amongst Lead Experts and Lead Partners, whose role in

providing support to partners in LAP development might have been made more straightforward if a set formula had been followed in formulating the LAPs.

2.5.5 Implementation

Whilst the documents serve as clear outputs of the partnership project, there is less evidence to suggest that they have so far been effective in helping to deliver project outcomes. Where funding and political support for LAPs has not been forthcoming, implementation has been a weak aspect of the LAP to date. Even where a final version of the LAP has been developed, there are no assurances that the actions in the plans are being delivered - particularly where it lacked the funding or political support necessary for delivery. There is some evidence that the fast-track status of some projects helped the degree to which its initiatives were implemented. For instance, the Limoges partnership within the UNIC project was able to draft its LAP early on in the process and have it approved prior to the official end of the project.

There are a number of barriers which stand in the way of LAPs being implemented. The predominant issue for partners in this respect was where funding had not been secured to enable the contents of the plan to be delivered. Just over 60% of survey respondents revealed that their LAP had not secured funding from any sources other than URBACT II. Furthermore, nearly half of the respondents were of the view that budget cuts at city administration level had undermined the potential for LAP implementation. As a related issue, funding constraints reflecting the global economic downturn clearly affected LAP implementation as 11% of survey respondents considered that their LAP has lost relevance in the context of shifting financial priorities. Here, a number of projects such as WEED which dealt with gender equality issues, were not considered as representing core areas for policy development and funding. In the context of economic hardship, the partners felt that the priority assigned to the project at city council level was sidelined, in favour of supporting already existing core services. These barriers to LAP delivery also mirror wider issues around the impact of URBACT II overall and are therefore dealt with in more detail in the next chapter of the report.

Linked to the above, a main area of concern (particularly in the MILE project) was the limited degree to which the LAPs linked with EU funding opportunities. The intention was that LAPs were linked to good practice project proposals for possible funding from ERDF, ESF or other EU, or National sources of funding. This was not a key feature of many projects – mainly reflecting the failure of the project to involve or lever the interest of Managing Authorities, key policy decision makers or political leaders. There was generally a lack of strategic partners on the LSG's who were able to help partners develop plans aligned with funding opportunities. On the other hand, it sometimes was due to the project timescales not being in alignment with European funding programming periods. In the MILE project, the limited financial resources available through URBACT meant that there was little 'buy in' to the LAP development process by Managing Authorities (as they often did not actively participate in the LSG). At the point at which the LSGs were considering potential funding sources for LAP development, the priorities and timescales of Operational Programmes Structural Funds were usually

already agreed. For some partners it became a “top down” approach whereby LAPs were adapted retrospectively to the funding opportunities available.

The lack of political involvement also posed a barrier to the delivery of LAPs in that the contents of the plan had not necessarily been approved by the city administration or municipal government. In these cases, despite a lengthy process of development and often consultation as part of LAP development, there was the danger that the finalised documents are not sufficiently aligned with civic administration priorities and funding programmes/priorities to be implemented effectively. The involvement of key decision-makers from city municipalities within the LSG therefore constituted good project practice as it helped partners become aware of key implementation issues. At the same time, this ensured that the initiatives and actions identified in the LAP were 'on the radar' of the strategic decision makers at city (and also regional) level. A case in point is the MILE project, which as a fastrack project factored in political involvement from the beginning of the project to ensure that the impact of the LAP could be maximised. This project carefully considered partnership involvement in terms of the impacts for LAP implementation and set out to include key stakeholders significantly influence over local politics. In terms of the LAPs potential to impact upon urban policy and practice, the online survey indicates that 28% of respondents consider that insufficient engagement and interest from elected politicians has undermined the potential of the project. Another 20% were of the view that insufficient engagement and interest from senior officials has impeded progress in this respect.

The limited degree to which the LAPs are seen as implementable and useful tools to promote urban policy development is the main concern arising from the case study research. In the case that cities do not see their LAP used, there is a risk that the credibility of local partners and stakeholders could be negatively affected. A review of a sample of the completed LAPs also found that they do not routinely identify achievable outputs, expected outcomes or allocate tasks to particular partners. This not only undermines the potential for LAPs to have an impact on local urban development policy and practice, but also makes it more difficult to measure the potential impact of them. For example, one of the LAPs that is focussed on addressing long-term unemployment, makes reference to the development of a intermediary labour market model that will attempt to support the unemployed by working in a more (horizontal and vertical) integrated way. While reference is made to particular 'actions' that will be taken forward to stimulate greater vertical integration, for example, no mention is made of outputs from the actions, or who is responsible for delivering them, or what constitutes a measure of success. This therefore largely leaves the LAP as a descriptive, rather than an action based document that could be used to drive forward policy development and practice in the target area.

2.5.6 Outputs and Outcomes of LAPs

There are a number of achievements associated with the LAPs in terms of promoting an action-based approach and providing synthesis and focus to URBACT II projects. However, a wider question has emerged during the course of the case study research

as to the effectiveness of the LAPs as a mechanism for actually improving urban policy and practice. It was common for partners to regard LAPs as a means to an end – for instance, the LAP was often seen as a project output in itself rather than being regarded as a tool for supporting the emergence of city-level policy and practice based on a transnational learning exchange. In this respect, the main research finding was that while LAPs constituted strong project outputs, they were not so successful in contributing to the achievement of outcomes. This was particularly so under the Creative Clusters project, where LAPs were regarded as more for the benefit of URBACT II than for the partners. Here, the city partners were of a view that, despite the benefits of LAP development in terms of 'putting a plan on paper', the process of LAP creation was not the reason they had chosen to participate in the project. The focus of LSGs in some cities became overly focused on LAP creation, rather than on the learning and exchange gained from the practical experience of implementing policies.

Whilst the LAPs have helped to focus partners' attention on action, the actual focus has been planning actions rather than implementing them. As to whether the LAPs and LSGs fostered any improvements in urban policy and practice at the local level, the main contribution identified was that the LSGs and LAPs helped to establish the basis for effective partnership working within local areas. Whilst this has not necessarily had the chance to impact on local policy development to any great extent as yet, the partnerships fostered through LAP development have established a foundation for future improvements of policy development and practice.

2.6 Communication

This sub-section explores the perceptions of URBACT II stakeholders on the main communication and dissemination 'tools' at their disposal; drawing on evidence from the online survey and project case study consultations, as well as our thoughts on these tools.

One of the main aforementioned tools is the URBACT II website, which was designed to serve a number of purposes. For project partners it acts as a source of information during the project application phase, and on an ongoing basis during the project design, development, implementation and dissemination phases. It also acts as a dissemination 'hub' for project partners to upload information and evidence for internal use, and perhaps more importantly external consumption, by practitioners looking for information and good practice on tackling current urban issues.

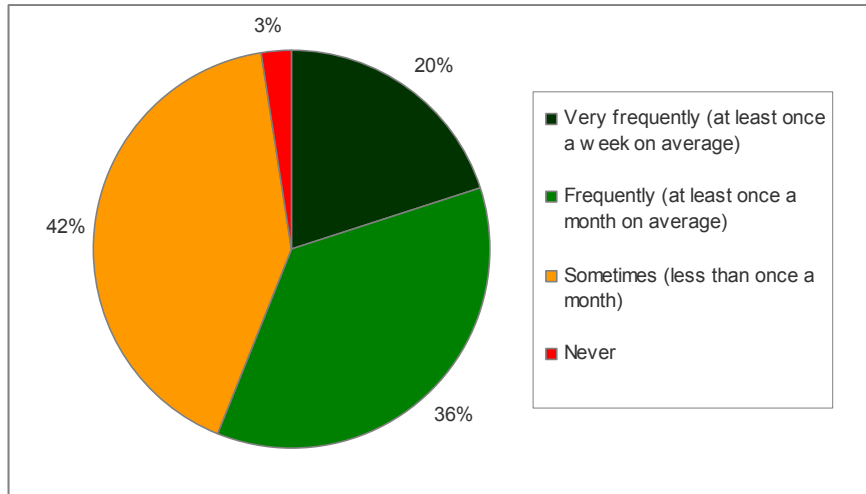
This sub-section also briefly explores a range of other communication and dissemination tools, including National Dissemination Points, Open Events and City Labs and National Conferences.

2.6.1 Usage of the online content

The figure overleaf provides details on how often stakeholders access the URBACT II website. The online survey reveals that one-in-five stakeholders (20%) access the

website on a frequent basis (at least once per week); while a further third (36%) indicated that they use the website on at least a monthly basis. A similar trend emerged with respect to stakeholders accessing the project mini-sites, with over half (53%) of survey respondents stating that they access the online content on a frequent basis (either once per week or once a month).

Figure 2.1 How often respondents use the URBACT II website



Source: Ecorys Online Survey (2011)

2.6.2 Perceptions of the online content

In addition to frequency of use, survey respondents also rated which aspects of the URBACT II website they find most and least useful. The top-three aspects are as follows:

- I. The supporting documents and resources that project partners can download are the most useful aspects of the website, with 87% of respondents rating them as either 'useful' or 'very useful' overall.
- II. Information pages about the aims and objectives of URBACT II are also well regarded, with 87% of respondents rating this aspect of the website as either 'useful' or 'very useful'.
- III. The project mini-sites, which contain a range of information and outputs from the project activities, were the other stand out aspect of the website, with 86% of respondents finding them 'useful' or 'very useful'.

By comparison, the aspects of the website that stakeholders who responded to the survey find least useful are as follows:

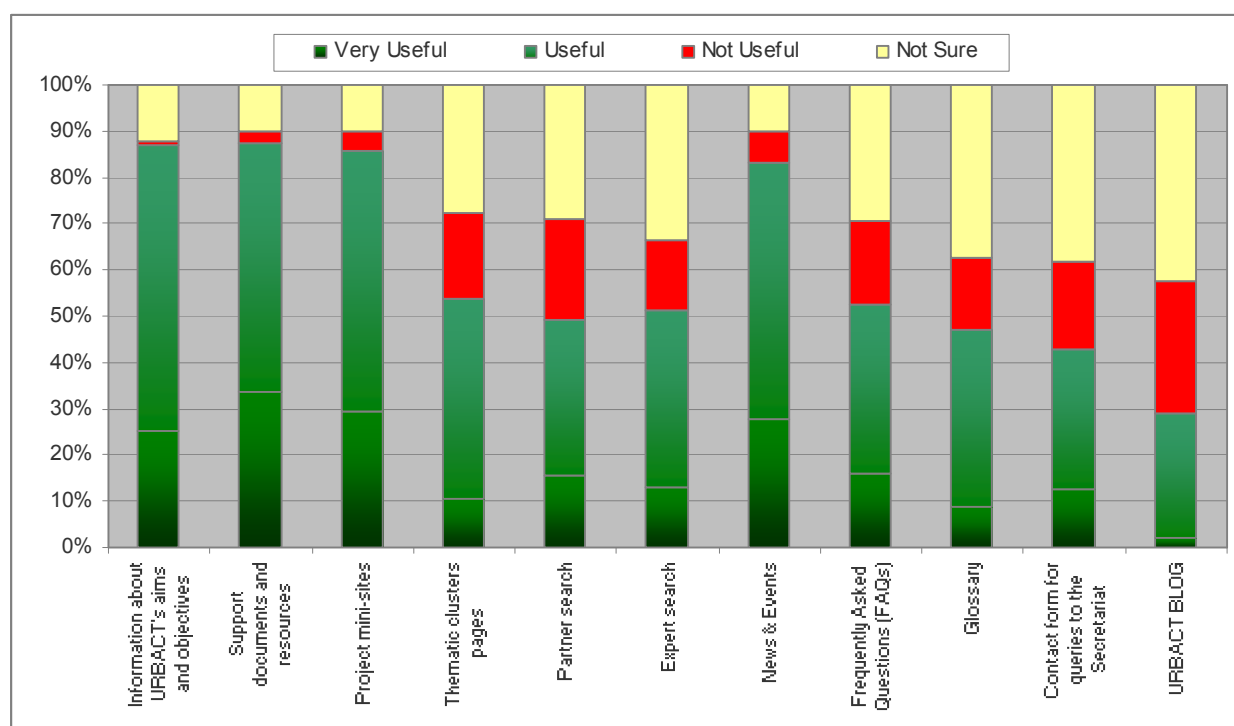
- I. In terms of the URBACT II blog, only 29% of respondents rated it 'useful' or 'very useful'. However, 42% of those who commented on the blog, stated they are unsure about its usefulness, perhaps suggesting that, to date, it is not been very well accessed and utilised by stakeholders.

- II. The contact form for queries to the Secretariat does not appear to have been a particularly well utilised communication tool, with 38% of respondents unable to rate its usefulness (presumably because they had never tried to use it or use other forms of more direct communication with the Secretariat – i.e. email and telephone) and 19% reporting it as 'not useful'.
- III. Similarly, less than half (47%) of respondents reported finding the glossary 'useful' or 'very useful', with 38% 'unsure' about it, and 16% not finding it useful at all.

To some extent, these findings mirror those from the case study consultations, where project partners rated the internal looking aspects of the website more highly (e.g. supporting documents and resources).

However, it must also be borne in mind that survey respondents may well have rated certain aspects of the website poorly because they have not used them (for example, due to a lack of time, or perhaps because the project is not at the dissemination stage), and therefore do not value them as communication and dissemination tools at this particular point of their project's lifecycle.

Figure 2.2 Usefulness of the URBACT II website



Source: Ecorys Online Survey (2011)

The current website is rightly regarded as having evolved considerably when compared to earlier versions of the site (particularly in URBACT I), where criticisms over its user-friendliness, navigability and silo structure were common. In addition, the mid-term evaluation of URBACT I¹¹ stated that there was a lack of evidence of outputs from some of the projects, while the evidence that was available was considered to be of variable in quality and consistency, making it confusing from the point of view of an external user.

Satisfaction levels with the current website are high, potentially meaning that the right balance has been struck, and further 'significant' improvements are not necessary. However, the evaluation has highlighted a number of areas for improvement with respect to the website and mini-sites as communication and dissemination tools. The opinions presented next are based on the perceptions of the stakeholders consulted, and are therefore non-technical and may not necessarily reflect the reality of the situation. Where this is the case, additional comments are provided to caveat stakeholder perceptions about the online content. Some of the key areas for consideration are as follows:

- **An internal tool:** The website, and particularly the project mini-sites, are largely regarded by stakeholders as the main depository for project outputs, which in some senses is a very positive finding. However, concerns were expressed that the website and project mini-sites do not work as well as external communication and dissemination tools. While there is no evidence to suggest this is actually the case (because no external stakeholders were interviewed about the website), stakeholders felt that the website tended to work better as an internal, rather than external tool. For example, the project mini-sites contain a range of internal 'technically' focussed documents such as minutes from meetings, which although useful to project partners (and potentially those from other projects), are perhaps less useful from an external perspective, and therefore sometimes serve to dilute the main impact of more externally helpful resources found on the web.
- **Web innovations:** It is apparent that the website makes effective use of hypermedia content, where graphics, audio, video and hyperlinks intertwine within the web pages. There are also links to the URBACT II website (and various documents) on other urban development networking programmes sites, such as INTERREG IVC, Eurocities and Espon. In the last two years, 62 programme and project related videos have been uploaded on the Dailymotion website. However, it is worth noting a number of comments about potential areas for improvement including:
 - ▶ the navigability of the site, where stakeholders commented that the number of (mouse) 'clicks' that have to be made (to access some of the more useful project outputs on the project mini-sites) is excessive. For example, information on the 'clouds' were seen to be difficult to find and were only easily identified 'if you knew where you were looking'; and,

¹¹ ECOTEC Research and Consulting and Old Bell 3 (2006) Mid-Term Evaluation of the URBACT Programme Report

- ▶ while the website does attempt to build a relationship with visitors by encouraging them up sign-up to newsletters, blogs and social networking sites, such as Facebook (the official URBACT II site has over 800 friends), project partners feel that they should be given more freedom to explore innovative ways to disseminate project findings in a meaningful and accessible way (see the point below).
- **Centralised point of dissemination:** There was also a sense of frustration amongst some consultees that they had been unable (at least initially) to develop their own web based communication and dissemination tools. Some consultees also reported that they had, or were, developing their own project website, whilst also commenting that they are looking to undertake additional activities, such as participation in international seminars, the promotion of findings in the local press and thematic magazines.

It has not been possible (within the parameters of the mid-term evaluation) to explore the extent to which the URBACT II website is being accessed and utilised by non-engaged (external to URBACT II) urban regeneration practitioners. This is an issue we feel could be explored through a separate, small scale study, perhaps including a website visitor survey and technical appraisal of the website. This type of external insight could provide a wealth of information to inform future website innovations, and move it on to the "next level" as some stakeholders put it. Although the evidence assembled lacks an external perspective, one of the survey questions does provide somewhat of a barometer of the level of external awareness of URBACT II aims and objectives.

There was a question in survey that measured the extent to which people outside of the URBACT 'family' were aware of the programme's aims. This question identified that the level of external awareness of URBACT II is greatest at the City, Municipality or Town level, followed by National Authority level (57% and 50% of respondents respectively felt this way). While the perception is that external awareness is lowest at the Agglomeration (17%) and Province level (18%), and also amongst research bodies (21%). Although based on perceptions alone, this would suggest that a large proportion of urban regeneration practitioners and other interested parties are currently unaware of URBACT II, and are therefore unlikely to be accessing the website or any of the online resources available.

A consultee, who neatly summarised the opinions of others, stated that URBACT II still has a major job to do in finding ways of positioning or marketing the knowledge which it has accumulated so that it can be easily found or accessed (on the internet) when practitioners (who have had no contact with the projects) have a problem which they needed help with. The overarching opinion of a number of consultees, was that while the existing web based communication platforms work on some levels, they still do not match the scale of ambition of URBACT II overall.

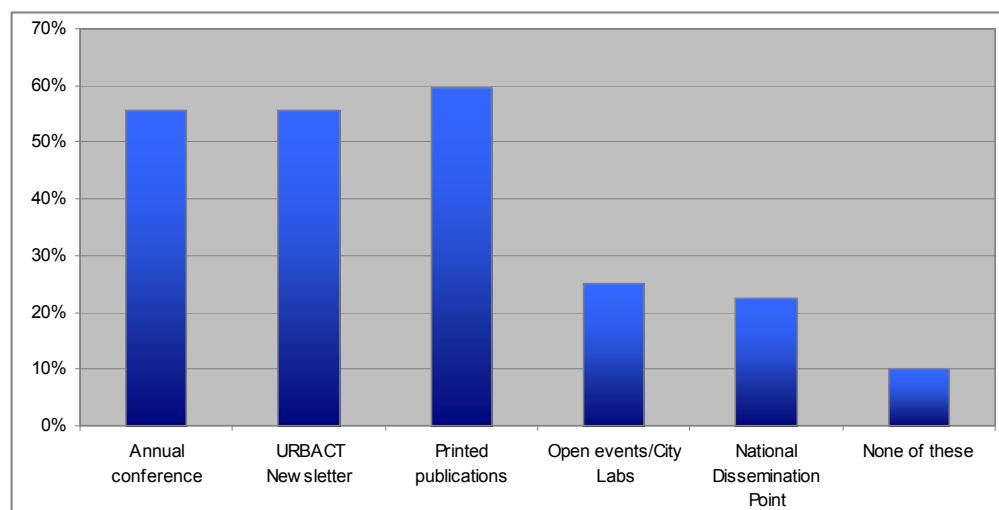
2.6.3 Other communication and dissemination tools

The use of other communication and dissemination tools was also explored through the evaluation. As highlighted in the figure below, information sent to stakeholders, such as printed publications (e.g. good practice case studies) and/or the URBACT II Newsletter are most commonly accessed (60% and 57% of respondents reported accessing these). It is also positive to report that over half of survey respondents (57%) have attended an Annual Conference.

What was also apparent from the online survey is that a much smaller number of respondents reported attending an Open Event, City Lab (25%) or National Dissemination Point (23%). This finding also seems to be substantiated by the case studies, where only a limited number of consultees reported accessing other forms of communication and dissemination; and where 2 consultees purported to have not realised that the National Dissemination Points existed.

However, where stakeholders did access other forms of communication and dissemination, there was often positive feedback, with one project manager claiming that the National Dissemination Point was the only form of contact that they had with the national coordinator in one ministry. Similarly, the Open Events and City Labs were regarded by another stakeholder as being important for making links with other institutions, and stimulating a cluster of academics to come together to discuss urban issues.

Figure 2.3 Other communication and dissemination tools accessed by stakeholders



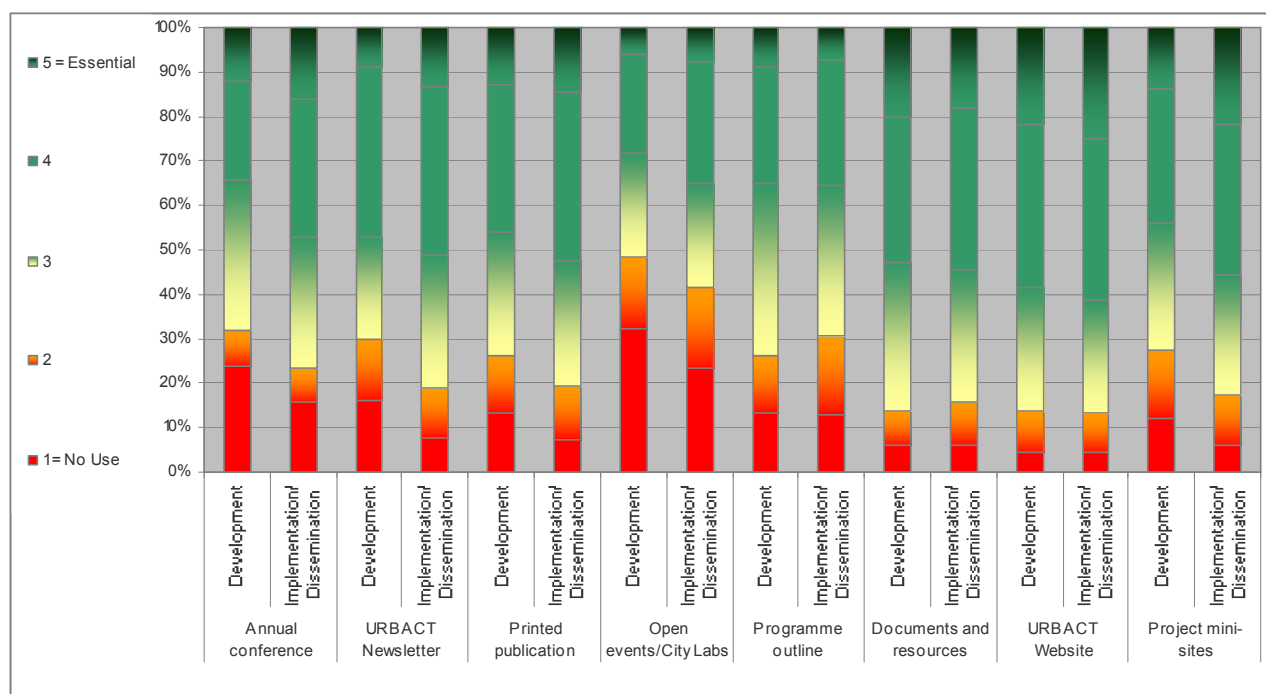
Source: Ecorys Online Survey (2011)

2.6.4 Value of the communication and dissemination tools

The figure below provides details on how useful the communication and dissemination tools available have been during the different project phases (i.e. development, implementation and dissemination).

- The URBACT II website has been the most useful communication and dissemination tool available to projects, with 58% of survey respondents rating it as either 'important' or 'essential' during the project development phase, and 61% during the implementation and dissemination phases.
- The various documents and resources that the URBACT Secretariat has produced have also been of particular importance, with over half of survey respondents (53% and 54% respectively) rating these tools as either 'important' or 'essential' to project development, implementation and dissemination.
- Although not as important as some other tools during the development stage (e.g. the Newsletter and printed publications), the project mini-sites were regarded as being of particular importance during the implementation and dissemination phases. Indeed, 56% of survey respondents rated the mini-sites as either 'important' or 'essential' during the later phases of a project.
- While at the other end of the scale, 48% of survey respondents rated the City Events and City Labs as not being particularly useful (either no use, or of little use) during the development phase of a project, while only 36% reported they had been influential (either important or essential) during the implementation and dissemination phases. However, this is partly explained by the fact that not all projects have been involved in city labs.

Figure 2.4 How useful communication and dissemination tools have been during the different projects phases



Source: Ecorys Online Survey (2011)

2.7 Administration

A common issue identified throughout the evaluation was the level of administrative burden associated with managing and taking part in an URBACT II project. The main issue is the amount of time spent on administration is disproportionate to the size of the projects involvement and the scale of the project overall. Although most evaluations of this nature identify a certain amount of dissatisfaction with the administration linked to EU projects, the scale and strength of comments coming back was significant- and went beyond a simple 'moan' about paperwork. 90% of respondents to the survey noted high levels of administration as a key issue with managing a project. Many of the projects partners who had previous experience of managing EU funds felt that URBACT II was much more onerous in terms of administration than most other similar projects.

The central issue linked to high levels of administration was the financial management of projects - with 58% of respondents to the survey saying it was a significant issue in terms of managing their project, with a further 30% saying it was a slight issue. In particular the level of detail contained within budget headings was felt to be too detailed and attributing relatively small amounts of expenditure to detailed budget headings took up a large amount of time for the Lead Partner. There was a frustration that budget headings were so narrow and a view that broader headings should be developed to allow expenditure to be grouped under wider themes- making it easier and quicker to, for instance, record large amounts of travel and subsistence linked to a single transnational meeting.

Lead Partners tended to either carry out the financial management tasks themselves or use existing finance staff within their organisation. Very few seemed to employ a specific new resource to carry out this task (despite funding being available to do this and the URBACT Secretariat recommending that they consider employing specific staff to carry out this role). This led to two issues. The first was that Project Leads complained about not having adequate financial skills (or capacity) to undertake this task whilst the second was that the existing finance staff did not have a good understanding of the project, or a grasp of transnational working (including language skills).

A common problem for the first call projects was a lack of early training or support on financial management issues- including advice on Presage. There was a recognition that clear advice and forms from the start would have helped projects understand the more complex project management issues; with some partners admitting that they did not appreciate the level of expectations and obligations associated with managing an URBACT II project. However, even when first call projects and stakeholders were trained, the financial procedures linked to URBACT II could have been simplified. It is also interesting to note that second call projects were generally as negative about the financial management of their project - despite clearer and more upfront advice being given to them.

As noted earlier, also linked to financial administration was an issue of slow payments to partners and Lead Experts. Again, this was a very common issue that went beyond a simple passing comment and was seen as something which threatened the participation of various stakeholders in URBACT II projects. This issue was particularly true for smaller cities such as Obidos in Portugal or Faenza in Italy who could not afford to wait long periods of time for reimbursements as well as Lead Experts who were often either self employed or worked for a small business. The delays in payments were mainly seen to come from a backlog of financial paperwork coming as a result of the handover in terms of supporting the programme's administration from the Institut des Villes to ACSE.

2.8 Fast Track Labels

This sub-section draws attention to the similarities and differences between fast track and non-fast track projects. As fast track projects receive extra support from the European Commission to help speed up the process of knowledge transfer and application, it is interesting to examine what bearing, if any, this support has had on project impacts as well as helping the projects to overcome certain barriers in the URBACT II process (i.e. gaining funding). The analysis draws on qualitative results from the case studies as well as quantitative results taken from the online survey.

The results of the online survey were cross tabulated in order to provide comparisons between fast track and non fast track projects with regards to impact and perceived funding barriers. Contrary to what one may have anticipated, the evidence shows that there are little differences between fast track and non fast track projects when it comes to individual-level perceptions of project impact. This pattern was observed across all of the indicators of impact including benefits to the organisation, benefits to the individual and benefits to urban development policy. This trend also followed through to the perceptions of funding as a barrier to impact: approximately 50% of respondents from both fast track and non fast track projects felt that the amount of funding was a slight or significant barrier to the ability to take forward any relevant actions.

However, the online survey results in themselves are not rich enough to draw firm conclusions from by themselves. The case studies present a chance to provide a layer of qualitative evidence to compare fast track and non fast track impacts, particularly as nearly half of the case studies chosen (four out of ten) have the fast track label. It is interesting to note that of the ten concrete examples of direct impact highlighted later in Section 3.2 of the report, four of them have come from fast track projects. This therefore supports the results outlined in the online survey that show that there seem to be no significant differences between fast track and non fast track projects with regards to early impact.

Drawing from the above results, the following conclusions can be made. The results of our basic level analysis highlight that there are little to no real differences in direct or perceived impacts between fast track and non fast track projects. This is perhaps

somewhat disappointing given that they receive more focused support and attention from the European Commission and Managing Authorities than non fast track projects. However, it is likely that the impacts of the project are determined by a whole range of factors other than the fast track label. These factors would include the length of time the project has been running for, the strength of partnership as well as the quality of its outputs. The fast track label will be one of a number of drivers of success but perhaps less of a driver than would have been hoped for.

2.9 Thematic coverage

The evaluation also looked at the thematic coverage of projects that have so far been supported by the URBACT II programme. This was partly to assess the types and nature of what projects have been supported but also understand what themes should be considered in the third call for projects.

2.9.1 Thematic Clusters and Thematic Poles

The results of the analysis of the make-up of the Thematic Clusters and Thematic Poles are as follows:

- There are a fairly even number of projects spread across the three Thematic Poles with a slight bias towards Cities, Social Inclusion and Governance (fifteen projects compared to ten in Cities, Engines of Economic Development and Job Creation).
- The Thematic Clusters consisting of the highest number of projects are the Metropolitan Governance and Human Capital and Entrepreneurship clusters, both of which are made up of six projects. By contrast, Port Cities consists of only one project bringing into question its usefulness as a specific Thematic Cluster.
- Given the prominence of the green agenda across Europe, perhaps the Low Carbon Urban Environments cluster should be expanded (currently it consists of just three projects) and brought more to the forefront of URBACT II activity. The 'green economy' is predicted to be one of (if not the) driver of regional and national economies across Europe and arguably the programme should be doing more to support and facilitate the exchange of good practise in this field.

Table 2.2 Breakdown of projects by Thematic Cluster and Thematic Pole

Thematic Cluster	Number of Projects per Cluster	Thematic Pole	Number of Projects per Pole
Innovation and Creativity	4	Cities, Engines of Economic Development and Job Creation	10
Human Capital and Entrepreneurship	6		
Active Inclusion	5	Cities, Social Inclusion and Governance	15
Quality Sustainable Living	4		
Metropolitan Governance	6		
Disadvantaged Neighbourhoods	5	Cities and Integrated Sustainable Development	12
Low Carbon Urban Environments	3		
Cultural Heritage and City Development	3		
Port Cities	1		
Total	37		37

Source: Ecorys 2011

2.9.2 Funding allocation

Presented below are the findings from the analysis of the distribution of the approved budget for Phase II (implementation phase) across the Thematic Clusters and Poles.

- The Thematic Cluster that had the highest sum of ERDF funded allocated to it was Human Capital and Entrepreneurship that received over €2.8 million. However, this is not surprising given that this cluster is made up of the largest number of projects, five out of six of which are Thematic Networks and are therefore entitled to apply for up to €700,000. By contrast Metropolitan Governance, which also consists of six projects, has only been allocated €1.6 million of ERDF funds as a result of having just two Thematic Networks and four Working Groups. Port Cities has been allocated the lowest amount of ERDF funding but this will be on account of it being made up of just one project.
- In terms of the Thematic Poles, the largest sum of ERDF funding was allocated to the Cities, Social Inclusion and Governance cluster (almost €5.5 million) which equates to almost one million Euros more than Cities, Engines of Economic Development and Job Creation. Nonetheless, despite the differences in absolute figures, each Thematic Pole received an equal proportion of their approved budget from ERDF.
- On average, approximately 73% of project budgets for the implementation phase are allocated by ERDF and there are no stark differences between the Thematic Clusters. Port Cities received the highest proportion of its funding from ERDF (76%) whilst Metropolitan Governance received the lowest (71%).

Table 2.3 Distribution and allocation of funding by Thematic Clusters and Thematic Poles

Thematic Cluster	Approved Budget per Cluster €	Max. ERDF approved per Cluster €	% Budget from ERDF	Thematic Pole	Approved Budget per Pole €	Max. ERDF Approved per Pole €	% Budget from ERDF
Innovation and Creativity	2,504,146.80	1,855,595.20	74%	Cities, Engines of Economic Development and Job Creation	6,274,784.80	4,662,174.60	74%
Human Capital and Entrepreneurship	3,770,638	2,806,579.40	74%				
Active Inclusion	3,095,433	2,239,113.50	72%	Cities, Social Inclusion and Governance	7,492,307.70	5,453,811.80	73%
Quality Sustainable Living	2,149,451	1,611,768.90	75%				
Metropolitan Governance	2,247,423.70	1,602,929.40	71%				
Disadvantaged Neighbourhoods	2,372,101.10	1,758,384.50	74%	Cities and Integrated Sustainable Development	6,839,188.80	5,024,779.80	73%
Low Carbon Urban Environments	1,948,452.80	1,389,612.40	71%				
Cultural Heritage and City Development	1,850,749.60	1,367,141.30	74%				
Port Cities	667,885.37	509,641.63	76%				
Total					20,606,281.30	15,140,766.20	

Source: URBACT II List of Beneficiaries http://urbact.eu/fileadmin/general_library/List_of_beneficiaries_05052011CEAB.pdf

2.9.3 Thematic Coverage

In order to establish whether or not the URBACT II projects are covering a wide and rich enough spectrum of themes, we conducted a basic exercise to group the projects under four broad categories according to what we perceived to be their key area of focus: social, physical, governance and economy. Of course different projects can (and often did) fall into multiple categories and whilst we did our best to identify what we felt the priority theme was, it is important to recognise that this exercise is somewhat subjective. Nevertheless, it is still a useful application that will help to identify some broad trends in the coverage of URBACT II projects.

The results of the analysis of thematic coverage are as follows:

- URBACT II projects are evenly spread across all of the four themes with just a slight bias towards the economy and governance (both of which have a 27% share of projects) compared to social which received 22%.
- As mentioned previously, although we have categorised the projects into four key themes, it is positive to report that the majority of projects do span multiple themes. The programme is unique in the way that, for example, predominantly social projects consider economic, physical and governance related issues as well and these holistic approaches to urban development issues is something that URBACT II can be proud of.
- It is important to acknowledge that when undertaking this thematic coverage research, it was apparent just how well projects sit within their designated Clusters and Poles. All projects were closely linked to their overarching groups and we could see no anomalies in the existing categorisation.

Table 2.4 Thematic coverage of URBACT II projects

Theme	Sub-themes	Number of Projects	% of Total Projects
Economy	Recession, business / SMEs, economic development, innovation	10	27%
Social	Inclusion / exclusion, disadvantaged groups, immigration	8	22%
Physical	Built environment, regeneration, climate change, transport / infrastructure, construction	9	24%
Governance	Policy / practise / governance strategies	10	27%
Total		37	100%

Source: Ecorys 2011

2.9.4 The economic crisis 'theme'

Given that the current global economic crisis will affect the extent to which certain project partners are able to implement various urban development measures and strategies, it is important to understand which URBACT II projects are placing their work in the context of the difficult broader economic climate. In order to do this, we undertook some textual analysis of the project mini-sites and baseline reports to establish how frequently the crisis was acknowledged and how centrally they placed it in their project context.

The findings of this analysis are presented below:

- Whilst the economic crisis is referred to by a number of projects, it is often not a central theme. Although 51% of projects made at least one reference to the 'economic crisis', the 'financial crisis' or the 'recession' in their baseline reports, just 14% of projects referred to it on the homepage of their project mini-sites. Very few projects dedicated even a paragraph of text to placing their project in the context of the economic downturn or discussing how the current economy might affect the outputs / impacts of their proposed work. More often than not, references to the current economic climate were mentioned almost in passing and were often discussed in relation to one particular partner rather than for the project as a whole.
- Arguably, it is understandable, and even necessary, for some projects to place a greater emphasis on the crisis than others particularly for those that were created as a response to issues raised by the financial crisis. The central aim of OP-ACT, for example, is to help small and medium sized businesses overcome the economic crisis and become more resilient and therefore the economics situation will play a central role in their project. It could be argued that in contrast, projects targeting issues that persist regardless of fluctuations in the economic climate (such as health and social exclusion) have less need to make a specific reference to the current crisis.
- Nevertheless, there were very few projects that were designed to 'tackle' or counteract particular affects of the economic crisis, most took account of the situation but didn't plan to specifically address it. As the urban development agenda as a whole is so dependent upon national economies, it is perhaps surprising that not more projects are not making more of an effort to centralise the financial crisis in their plans, including their LAPS.

Recommendations linked to the findings of the thematic coverage are found in section 4 of this report.

2.10 Indicators

In addition to evaluating the progress and impact of the URBACT II programme, the evaluation team was also charged with assessing the extent to which the programme and operational indicators are still 'fit for purpose' and provide a meaningful measure of the programmes success. Having reviewed the current suite of indicators, we have the following four observations:

- **There are too many indicators overall.** There are currently 4 programme, 49 implementation, 8 result and 4 impact level indicators. Whilst it is clearly useful to measure the outputs of the programme, for example, in terms of LAPs produced and participants in LSGs, the overall number of indicators (particularly those related to implementation) is perhaps excessive. For example, 'the number of brochures that are printed' adds little in terms of understanding the real progress and impact of the programme.
- **There is not enough focus on results and impact.** Linked to the above observation, there is potentially an under representation in the number and type of result and impact indicators, therefore meaning that there is less evidence to put forward to measure the end 'success' of the programme. Whilst it is clearly helpful to have indicators that measure activity linked to disseminated for instance, it is perhaps more useful to measure the impact and 'difference' the activity is having on, for instance influencing better urban policy and practice.
- **Some of the indicators are ambiguous and open to interpretation.** It is imperative that an indicator is clearly defined, free from ambiguity, and provides a measure of a programme's success. This is not the case with all of the indicators at present. For example, the 'percentage of OPs modifying their urban policies after the mid term review' is an indicator which has 'high' as its target therefore adding little evidence to help measure the programmes success.
- **Some of the indicators are not quantifiable.** When proposing a suite of indicators a critical question to ask is whether it is possible to measure the indicator in a quantifiable sense. For example, all of the indicators in the OP that have high, medium or low targets against them need to be reviewed to identify whether there is a more appropriate way to measure them. Again, these indicators are quite subjective.

Although the above four observations are made, it has to be acknowledge that it is challenging to identify a suite of indicators that are truly reflective of the impact of a programme such as URBACT II. The very nature of the programme means that it plays an 'influencing' rather than 'direct' role in modifying urban development policy and practice-measuring 'influence' and 'impact' is difficult to achieve. Therefore whilst it is eminently possible to monitor certain outputs from the programme, such as LAPs produced, it is more problematic when looking to pin down the impact of an action plan on broader policy and practice in any sort of a tangible way. This is not to say that we should not attempt to quantify

the results and impacts of the programme but must accept that such indicator measures of success are sometimes subjective and based on stakeholder opinions rather than 'hard' facts (for example, such as a reduction in unemployment or creation of new businesses as a direct consequence of an URBACT II project).

In light of the above, we strongly advise that, due to the difficulty in measuring and understanding the impacts and results of URBACT II projects that a **bespoke survey** is produced that provides specific information to feed into the new indicator set. The survey would be done either internally (by the Secretariat) or externally and be designed to provide stronger and more robust figures to use. The survey would be sent out to URBACT projects annually who would be asked to complete a relatively simple on-line survey- with most questions related to understanding the outcomes of their activities. The table overleaf provides the questions which the survey would cover.

2.10.1 Alternative Indicator suggestions

Clearly not all of the existing indicators need to be refined or replaced. By way of a guide, indicators such as 'number of LAPs produced', 'number of LSGs' and 'number of participants from non member states and non accessions states' clearly fit well with the SMART¹ criteria, and therefore should be retained in the opinion of the evaluators.

It is important that any revisions made to the existing indicators or any additional ones added go through a carefully considered process. The SMART principles provide a basis for undertaking such an assessment of the existing and any new indicators. We have reviewed the existing indicators based on the SMART principles and suggest the following:

- 29 existing indicators should remain the same (retained);
- 20 existing indicators should be refined; and,
- 16 existing indicators should be removed.

The detailed assessment of each indicator as well as alternative new indicators is found below.

2.10.2 Indicator Review

The following table lists the current programme and operational indicators used as measures of success for the URBACT II programme. The evaluation team has undertaken an initial assessment of these indicators, and have highlighted in green, those indicators that it believes should be retained, in amber, those indicators that should be reviewed and/or refined further to make them more appropriate, and in red, those indicators that should, in the opinion of the evaluators, be removed or potentially replaced with a new indicator.

¹ Indicators should be: **Strategic** (i.e. they should link back to the original programme logic); **Measurable** (i.e. it is imperative that the indicators have numeric values, even where based on subjective, qualitative evidence); **Achievable** (i.e. the targets set need to be realistic); **Relevant** (i.e. the indicators need to add value and provide a meaningful measure of the programmes success); and finally, **Time-bound** (i.e. they should be updated at appropriate intervals to provide a measure of progress over the life of the programme).

Table 2.5 Original and potential replacement indicators

Original Indicators	Target	Comments	Potential Replacement Indicators
Programme Level Indicators			
Indicator			
Degree of impact on sustainable integrated urban development policies through URBACT interventions (measured high, medium or low)	High	This indicator needs to be more clearly expressed as it is ambiguous, and it is not clear what it is adding. A new indicator could be sourced	The percentage of stakeholders reporting that URBACT activities have improved local urban development policies and strategies
Total number of exchange meetings held between city policy makers and practitioners	376	This indicator should be removed because it is ambiguous and it is not clear what it is adding. because it is ambiguous and it is not clear what it is adding.	
8 Total number of dissemination actions undertaken in the lifetime of the programme	172	This indicator should be removed because it is ambiguous and it is not clear what it is adding. because it is ambiguous and it is not clear what it is adding.	
Total number of action plans developed on sustainable development of urban areas selected for structural fund programmes	345	This indicator needs to be more clearly expressed as it is ambiguous (i.e. is this Local Action Plans?). It also needs to be signed off by the Operational Programmes to ensure quality control and maximise its level of influence. We therefore suggest that a percentage threshold is set of say 75% of Local Action Plans signed off rather than using an actual figure.	The percentage of LAP signed off by the Operational Programme
Operation 1 Exchange and Learning Implementation Indicators			
Number of thematic network applications submitted	60	This indicator should be retained	

Number of Thematic Networks created (approved)	39	This indicator should be retained	
Number of working group applications submitted	25	This indicator should be retained	
Number of Working Groups Created (approved)	15	This indicator should be retained	
Number of Seminars / Working Meetings	300	This indicator should be removed because it is ambiguous and it is not clear what it is adding.	
Number of thematic reports produced	54	This indicator should be removed because it is ambiguous and it is not clear what it is adding.	
Number of Local Action Plans produced	440	All Local Support Groups should produce a Local Action Plan (therefore the target for this should be 100%)	
Number of Local Support Groups	540	All project partners should form a Local Support Group (therefore the target for this should be 100%)	
TOTAL Number of participants to Local Support Groups	3.3	This indicator could be refined so that it can be used as a measure to compare whether projects have more or less participants than on average.	Average number of participating partners per Local Support Group
Male	1700	This should be changed to percentage	50% Male
Female	1600	This should be changed to percentage	50% Female
Number of Participating Partners	520	This indicator needs to be more clearly expressed, as it is ambiguous, and it is not clear what it is adding.	
Number of Countries Participating	29	This indicator should be retained	
TOTAL Number of Thematic experts used	110	This indicator should be retained	
Male	70	This should be changed to percentage	50% Male
Female	40	This should be changed to percentage	50% Female
Number of participants from non member states and non accession states	5	This should be changed to a percentage figure and a minimum threshold should be set.	Percentage of participants from non member states and non accession states
Number of themes covered	7	This indicator should be removed because it is ambiguous and it is not clear what it is adding.	

Result Indicators	Target	Comments	Potential Replacement Indicators
Number of Local Action Plans implemented	300	This indicator should be retained	
Number of Local Action Plans implemented with ERDF or ESF funding	150	This indicator should be refined so that it provides results on Local Action Plans implemented securing funding from any source (rather than just ERDF or ESF). It should also be percentage rather than a number and a minimum threshold should be set.	Percentage of Local Action Plans implemented securing external funding
Number of webspace visits for Thematic Networks and Working Groups (annual average)	132,000	This indicator should be removed because it is ambiguous and it is not clear what it is adding.	
Impact Indicators	Target	Comments	Potential Replacement Indicators
Percentage of Operational Programmes modifying their urban policies after the mid term review	30%	This indicator is good, however, it may be more appropriate to gather the evidence through an annual stakeholder survey.	Percentage of Operational Programmes modifying their urban policies after the mid term review as a consequence of URBACT activities.
Operation 2 Capitalisation			
Implementation Indicators			
Number of thematic units created	7	This indicator should be retained	
Number of Seminars / Working Meetings	21	This indicator should be retained	
Number of people concerned	210	This indicator needs to be made less ambiguous	Number of people taking part in seminars and working meetings
Number of thematic dossiers completed	15	This indicator should be removed because it is ambiguous and it is not clear what it is adding.	
Number of studies produced	5	This indicator should be removed because it is ambiguous and it is not clear what it is adding.	
Number of Countries Participating to Fast Track Networks	29	This indicator should be retained	
TOTAL Number of Thematic experts used by FTN	2 per project	This indicator should be removed because it is ambiguous and it is not clear what it is adding.	
Male	50%	This indicator should be retained	
Female	50%	This indicator should be retained	

Number of local action plans developed for Fast Track Networks	10 per project	This indicator should be retained	
Number of local action plans implemented with ERDF and (or) ESF	50	This indicator is a result and should be moved from the implementation table to the result table. This indicator should also be refined so that it provides results on Local Action Plans implemented securing funding from any source (rather than just ERDF or ESF). It should also be percentage rather than a number and a minimum threshold should be set.	Percentage of Local Action Plans implemented securing external funding
Result Indicators	Target	Comments	Potential Replacement Indicators
Number of thematic documents downloaded (annually)	500	This indicator should be removed because it is ambiguous and it is not clear what it is adding.	
Number of thematic dossier website visits (annual)	1500	This indicator should be removed because it is ambiguous and it is not clear what it is adding.	
Impact Indicators	Target	Comments	Potential Replacement Indicators
Percentage of Operational Programmes concerned by Fast Track Networks modifying their urban policies after the mid term review	40%	This indicator is good, however, it may be more appropriate to gather the evidence through an annual stakeholder survey.	Percentage of Operational Programmes concerned by Fast Track Networks modifying their urban policies after the mid term review as a consequence of URBACT activities.
Operation 3 Communication and Dissemination	Target	Comments	Potential Replacement Indicators
Implementation Indicators			
Number of Internet Pages created	20000	This indicator should be removed because it is ambiguous and it is not clear what it is adding. A replacement one should be developed looking at usage and usefulness of the website (rather than how many pages have been created). A minimum threshold target should also be set.	Percentage of stakeholders accessing the website at least once per month Percentage of the stakeholders who find the website useful.
Number of Newsletters created	84	This indicator should be removed because it is ambiguous and it is not clear what it is adding. A replacement one should be added that focuses on usefulness rather than number created. A	Percentage of stakeholders who find the Newsletters useful

		minimum threshold target should also be set.	
Number of newsletters disseminated	1 million	This indicator should be removed because it is ambiguous and it is not clear what it is adding.	
Number of Brochures created (edited not number printed)	14	This indicator should be removed because it is ambiguous and it is not clear what it is adding. A replacement one should be added that focuses on usefulness rather than number created. A minimum threshold target should also be set.	Percentage of stakeholders who find the Brochures useful
Number of brochures printed	140,000	This indicator should be removed because it is ambiguous and it is not clear what it is adding.	
Number of Partnership agreements established	10	This indicator should be retained	
Number of Dissemination Events organised	56	This indicator should be retained	
Number of thematic regional conferences organised	42	This indicator should be retained	
Number of Dissemination Points created	24	This indicator should be retained	
TOTAL Estimated number of participants in Annual Conference and Thematic Regional Conferences (average per event)	150	This indicator should be retained	
Male	80	This should be changed to percentage	50% Male
Female	70	This should be changed to percentage	50% Female
Number of external events with URBACT presence (stand etc)	30	This indicator should be retained	
Result Indicators	Target	Comments	Potential Replacement Indicators
Number of articles / appearances published in press or other media	550	This indicator is good but needs to be modified, for example, it should have a timeframe, such as articles published per month or year.	Number of articles published in the press or other media per year
Number of web visits (per month)	15000	This indicator should be retained	
% of decision makers present at Annual Conference	25%	This indicator should be removed because it is ambiguous and it is not clear what it is adding.	

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Impact Indicators	Target	Comments	Potential Replacement Indicators
Level of dissemination of the concept of urban integrated policy (through qualitative enquiries)	High	This indicator needs to be more clearly expressed as it is ambiguous, and it is not clear what it is adding. This indicator could be gathered through an annual stakeholder survey.	<p>The percentage of stakeholders reporting that URBACT activities have improved local urban development projects on the ground</p> <p>The percentage of stakeholders reporting that URBACT activities have improved local urban development policies and strategies</p> <p>The percentage of stakeholders reporting that URBACT activities have improved the personal knowledge of practitioners</p>
g Level of awareness of elected representatives / policy makers / practitioners (through qualitative enquiries)	High	This indicator needs to be more clearly expressed as it is ambiguous, and it is not clear what it is adding. This indicator could be gathered through an annual stakeholder survey.	<p>The percentage of stakeholders reporting that URBACT activities have improved the local management, governance and co-ordination of urban development activities</p> <p>The percentage of stakeholders reporting that URBACT activities have improved cross-sector working and cooperation within the local administration dealing with urban development</p> <p>The percentage of stakeholders reporting that URBACT activities have improved multi-level governance structures</p>
Priority Axe 4 Technical Assistance Implementation Indicators	Target	Comments	Potential Replacement Indicators
Number of Monitoring Committee meetings organized	27	This indicator should be retained	
Number of Lead Partner meetings organized	14	This indicator should be retained	
Number of thematic expert meetings organized	7	This indicator should be retained	
Number of financial control group meetings organized	7	This indicator should be retained	
Number of Annual Implementation reports produced	7	This indicator should be retained	

Level of satisfaction amongst Lead Partners	High	This indicator needs to be more clearly expressed as it is ambiguous, and it is not clear what it is adding. This indicator could be gathered through an annual survey, where a threshold should be set of say 75% satisfied.	Level of satisfaction amongst project partners with Lead Partners during the project development phase.
			Level of satisfaction amongst project partners with Lead Partners during the project implementation phase.
Level of satisfaction amongst Thematic Experts	High	This indicator needs to be more clearly expressed as it is ambiguous, and it is not clear what it is adding. This indicator could be gathered through an annual survey, where a threshold should be set of say 75% satisfied.	Level of satisfaction amongst project partners with Thematic Experts during the project development phase.
			Level of satisfaction amongst project partners with Thematic Experts during the project implementation phase.

Source: Ecorys 2011

3.0 Benefits and Achievements of URBACT II

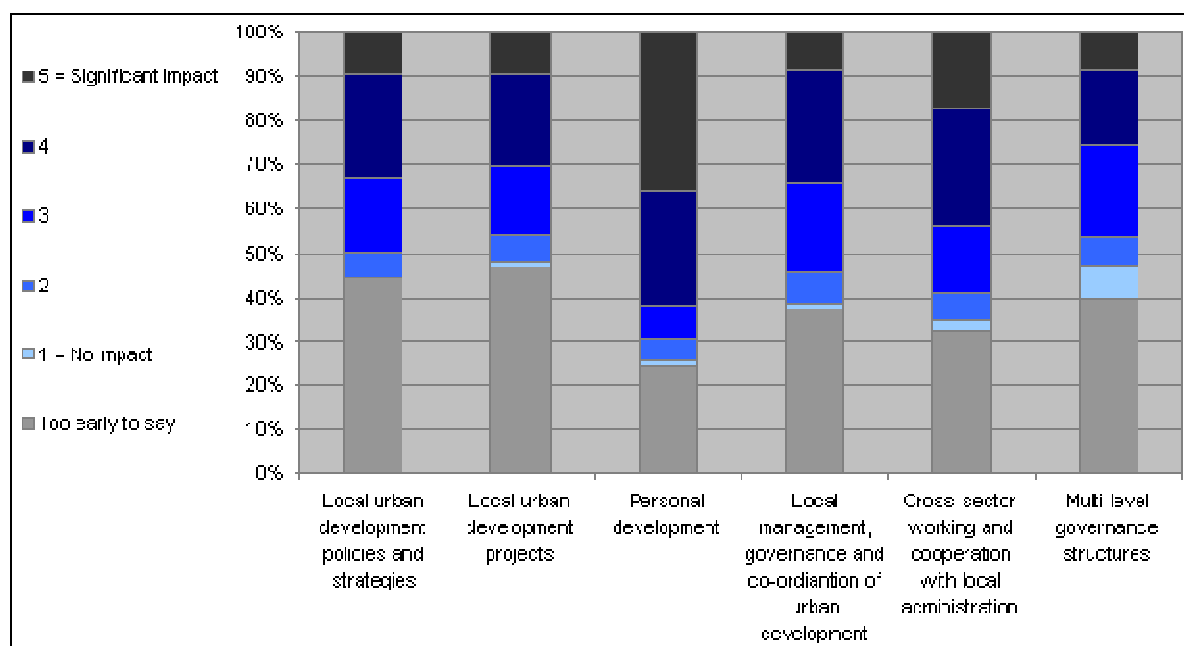
3.1 Introduction

This section sets out the early achievements of URBACT II, focusing on the work of URBACT II projects supported by the programme. It will look at what projects have so far achieved and also highlight issues that are hampering the progress and achievements of URBACT II which should be considered when planning the third call for projects. This section also deals with the early impact of URBACT, remembering the issues identified in section 1 which highlighted the difficulty of measuring and identifying the tangible 'end impact' of URBACT projects, particularly at this mid-term point.

3.2 Early benefits

The process of evaluating the programme has revealed a number of positive findings with respect to the types of benefits created by projects so far. The figure below shows the results of the online survey on the question of the early benefits which being involved in a URBACT project has brought to stakeholders.

Figure 3.1 The early impacts of URBACT II projects



Source: Ecorys Online Survey (2011)

It is worth initially noting that a relatively large number of stakeholders said it was too early to be looking at impact. This is not surprising, as many projects have only been delivering for a short period of time- much of which has been taken up establishing the project, developing the relationships and partnerships and setting up various systems. About 30-40% of respondents to the survey said 'it was too early to tell' when asked to

comment on impact and many of the case studies stated that it is perhaps unrealistic at this early stage to expect to be able to see the full impact that URBACT is having 'on the ground'. Indeed, Delft of the UNIC project believes that it will be 4-8 years before the results of their work become truly visible.

Not surprisingly, the highest level of early impact is linked to URBACT improving the personal knowledge of stakeholders directly involved in projects. However, about 1 in 3 stakeholders also stated that URBACT had improved urban 'methods'- helping to improve management, co-ordination and governance issues linked to the delivery and implementation of urban development activity. 30% also stated that URBACT had directly improved urban development projects and programmes.

Moving away from the results of the on-line survey, the analysis of the case studies reveals a more in-depth understanding of benefits and early impacts. The case studies generally provided a lack of 'hard' evidence to demonstrate that URBACT II has had a direct impact on local, regional or national urban development policy and practice. There are many examples (dealt with later) of how URBACT II projects are helping stakeholders work 'better' and 'differently', but when it came to providing direct evidence of how new working practices stimulated through URBACT were changing a policy or practice then examples were harder to find. When stakeholders were pressed to provide an illustration of how their participation in an URBACT project had impacted on policy and practice they tended to say one of three things:

- **Influence rather than direct impact on urban development:** in many cases URBACT II projects 'inform' or 'influence' policy and practice rather than directly change it. Outputs linked to projects such as good practice case studies, research papers and publications feed into debates on, for example, health, migration and transport issues but have not directly changed these policies by themselves. The process through which urban development activities are developed and evolve, stem from a complex set of political, economic and social drivers that URBACT II can part influence but not solely change.
- **It is difficult to measure the end impact or result of activities:** a common response to the question of impact coming from the case studies was the intangible benefits which URBACT II produced- measuring the impact of 'the application of learning' was acknowledge as challenging. It is clearly too ambitious (especially at this point) to attribute a sharing of good practice from an URBACT II funded project, leading to a change of policy or practice and then in turn a change in, for instance, health levels or levels of entrepreneurialism within a city. For example, although the ESIMeC project had an overall objective to 'reduce unemployment' – almost all of the stakeholders interviewed noted that it was almost impossible to identify whether any changes in local unemployment rates are directly or indirectly attributable to the existence of the project.
- **Outputs rather than outcomes:** although obviously not an 'impact', the written material produced by projects was identified by many consultees as such when

discussing evidence of impacts. For Creative Clusters, one of their main aims was to 'create a body of knowledge that did not exist previously': it is then in the hands of the stakeholders and organisations to utilise this information. Many explained the written materials developed as their main 'impact' but few were able to describe what the outcomes of, for example, a good practice publication has been. To a certain extent, this is to be expected as it is again too early to tell what the full impact will be as many of these documents have only just been produced. However, it does suggest that stakeholders may view the end impact of their work as the existence of a document rather than what is done with the document and how it is used. Again, producing a document is an output rather than an impact of URBACT and should only be viewed in this way by project stakeholders.

Despite these strong reasons for not highlighting specific examples of more direct early impacts, there were still a broad range of examples of tangible benefits linked to URBACT II. The examples set out below therefore provide illustrations of benefits coming from URBACT II rather than direct impacts. Nevertheless, they still provide evidence of the positive difference URBACT activity is having on policy and practice in participating cities.

- For the NODUS project, there was considerable transferring of good practice between partners on the subject of spatial planning. Katowice in Poland was a partner who identified a clear example of transferring learning from URBACT II to urban policy and practice. The project helped practitioners understand the importance of a range of urban methods; from linking together physical and economic regeneration departments (in an integrated way), through to developing more evidence to inform the development of a strategy and also effective methods of involving local residents on key renewal priorities. Again, the end impact or outcomes of these new approaches in Katowice have yet to show themselves but the benefits has been a noticeable shift in the approach the city takes to urban development.
- In the OPENCities project, Poznan in Poland derived a significant amount of good practice around developing a web-site to support and communicate with in-migrants in the urban area. Bilbao had already developed a similar web-site that has multi-lingual elements to it designed to help recent migrants access services and understand which organisations to contact in terms of, for example, their health, housing and employment needs. Poznan took great interest in this web-based tool and is now developing similar provision drawing on this Spanish good practice.
- The M.I.L.E project worked across nine cities to stimulate further thinking and action around migration in and out of urban areas. A number of good practice ideas have been shared among partners and there were examples of good practice projects from one city directly influencing urban development practice in another partner. For example, the Finnish partner proposed a project in their LAP which aimed to tackle social exclusion among young migrants of ethnic origin (linked to music and in particular a Youth Orchestra - Generation Orchestra). This project has both been

introduced as good practice within Finland but has also been integrated into the Lisbon Regional Development Programme in Portugal meaning the concept is likely to be rolled out across the city.

- For the NODUS project the Spanish partner of Catalunya developed a set of indicators for measuring deprivation within the city- learning from other partners in the project who had already established a deprivation monitoring system. The new system will be used by the local authority in Catalunya as part of a broader regeneration strategy and help strengthen the city's Urban Renewal Programme for 2010-2014, particularly in terms of targeting funding and activity on smaller geographical scales.
- In REG GOV, Poland, Hungary and Romania were all new to the concept of bottom-up planning and the benefits of involving local stakeholders in understanding problems and needs of neighbourhoods and developing an inclusive approach to urban development strategies. Partners in all of these Member States were seen to embrace these 'new practices' and integrate them into the working practices of their organisation, particularly around designing neighbourhood renewal strategies at the local level. The REG GOV project also saw German partners apply useful experience from their partners in Central and Eastern Europe on techniques of integrating Roma minorities to cope with a sudden influx of Roma migrants.

For the WEED project, Amiens developed a number of new initiatives as a direct consequence of their involvement in URBACT. For example, they had developed a programme to reduce the amount of gender stereotyping within the region - introducing it at an early stage within schools in order to educate young people before they left school. The city had also developed a new Forum that provided a city wide support mechanism to support women in finding a job and which also developed projects to support women with childcare when they eventually found employment. All of these ideas were 'learnt' through working with their URBACT partners.

In OPENCities, Vienna, Bilbao and Poznan shared a range of good practice activities linked to managing a large amount of new migrants coming into urban neighbourhoods and how to 'prepare' services for expected large influxes of new populations. Sofia and Nitra have learnt from these cities and feel more 'aware' of what to expect and how to deal with new migrant groups and also how to ensure that city services, policies and employers are geared up to cope with more diverse populations.

Again, in the NODUS project Amsterdam indicated that they had gained valuable insight on how to prioritise urban renewal funding by visiting and working with cities (including Katowice) found in convergence regions who had traditionally had limited national funding to spend on urban development issues. Amsterdam learnt how to target resources better and how to become more efficient through prioritising projects and target groups and generally having to restrict its budgets on the urban development agenda in line with diminishing public sector resources.

In JOINING FORCES, members of one LSG had never sat round the table before due to (in part) the rivalries between the different local authorities that make up the metropolitan area. The simple fact that the LSG had to meet and had to encourage 'partnership working' led to individuals working together for the first time in a multi-disciplinary way. The end outcome of this new way of working has yet to show itself but this in itself was seen by many as a key early benefit of the project.

Although the above examples show relatively direct benefits on urban policy and practice, much of them demonstrate how URBACT II projects are developing new ways of working and new 'methods', 'practices' and 'ways of doing' urban development as opposed to establishing more concrete projects in their own right. Much of the early benefits of URBACT II therefore relate to teaching people 'how' to approach urban development issues in relation to, for example, working from the bottom up, the value of evidence driven policy, targeting regeneration activity and the importance of working in an holistic way. This is an important benefit in its own right but it is interesting, at this moment of the programme, to note a fairly limited amount of evidence of project partners directly transferring (or 'copying') a project idea.

3.3 Written outputs

As stated earlier, much of the early benefits of URBACT II has been through the production of and dissemination of good practice - particularly in the written format. It is therefore important to both assess the quality of the outputs produced so far as well as the extent to which they are being disseminated and in turn 'used'. The evaluation team have assessed a range of outputs linked to URBACT II projects, gained mainly from the website but also through a small number of documents sent by the Project Leads of the ten case study projects. The actual nature of the written outputs so far produced varied from case study reports, research documents, various publications and 'think pieces' right through to more internal documents such as the minutes of meetings and records of various debates among partners.

It is no surprise that the quality of written outputs so far produced by URBACT II is very varied. However, the generally overall quality of them can be seen as being good - with only a few that seem to be poorly produced. They are generally 'fact rich' in that they provide strong information on project ideas, concepts, and themes in enough depth to be interesting and informative. They are also generally 'readable' and produced in a way that generally encourages people to carry on reading it. This is certainly not the case in all of the documents assessed but there has clearly been a lot of work put in to producing most of the written documents and the case studies in particular are a strong element of the written outputs so far produced.

It is perhaps true to say that the quantity of written outputs that are directly helpful for urban development practitioners (outside of the project) is relatively low. Although there are a lot of written outputs on most of the project mini websites, many are often internal documents linked to project meetings and delivery as opposed to good practice ideas

and tools which can be utilised by those linked to the urban development agenda external to URBACT II. This is partly explained by the fact that some projects are only just coming to a stage where they are able to produce 'findings' from their joint working 'that will be useful to the outside world'.

It is also worth noting that the written outputs so far produced relate more to explaining good practice in urban development than producing tools including, for instance, frameworks, diagnostic instruments, guidance manuals and assessment toolkits. The nature of the outputs therefore 'explain' or 'record' good practice rather than giving stakeholders practical tools which they can pick up and use in some way. Of course, producing some form of 'toolkit' is often a lot harder than producing, for instance, a case study but perhaps further work needs to be done to encourage projects to produce more usable and tangible outputs that practitioners can actually 'use rather than read'. Having said this, it is worth noting that many of the projects are planning to produce some form of tool as part of their project.

Another issue for consideration when looking at the written outputs produced by projects so far is the broad nature of some of their content, and the fact that many are perhaps too general to be truly helpful for most practitioners. There is a difficult balance to be struck between having written outputs that are broad enough that they appeal to a large group of practitioners and can be easily digested (but potentially provide little in-depth insight into an issue) on the one hand or on the other, are specific (and in-depth), so that they appeal to a particular set of practitioners (but run the risk of being so narrow that they become largely irrelevant to the majority). Although not necessarily a criticism, it is worth highlighting that the scales are currently tipped in favour of case studies that have taken the broader approach, and therefore the programme as a whole would benefit from having a set of more tightly defined (and in-depth) written outputs (e.g. instead of 'stimulating enterprise in cities' being the main subject of a case study, it should be focused on 'stimulating enterprise amongst women, or ethnic minority groups' for instance).

Despite these issues for consideration, the quality threshold for the written outputs has risen under URBACT II (when compared to URBACT I), which clearly represents a positive step forward. Achieving a common good quality set of outputs across a programme such as URBACT II is difficult (perhaps impossible) because of the large amount of authors and stakeholders who are involved in the production of such documents. However, as noted in Chapter 2, support from the Lead Experts and Pole Managers has been particularly important in 'raising the bar' with respect to quality.

3.4 Dissemination

This sub-section looks at the level of dissemination which has happened within URBACT II so far, particularly looking at the how the written outputs covered above have been shared and 'diffused' in to the wider urban development agenda.

When asked to explain how the outputs linked to projects have been disseminated many of the stakeholders said that they were yet to start that process (mainly because outputs had only recently been produced and the effort has been around developing them as opposed to sharing them). Dissemination was the 'next key task' for many. Many simply said that dissemination hadn't started because 'they had nothing really useful to disseminate as yet'. Projects also planned a big push on their dissemination during the end of project event- again when they felt that they would have something useful to disseminate and when they were able to involve a wider and more external group of stakeholders.

However, most projects tended to be relatively weak when questioned about dissemination- many felt that the fact that written documents were on the website meant that it was 'being disseminated'. Of course the web site is a very important tool but there was sometimes a lack of proactive plans to go beyond this single method. Many people relied heavily on the URBACT II website for present or future dissemination plans without thinking more broadly about other routes of communication. Projects noted that they were printing certain written outputs but again lacked detailed plans about who they would send it to, how it would be used and who their primary audience was for the document. Many said that documents were being disseminated to partners so that they could 'share it among their networks', but again this was as far as their plans went.

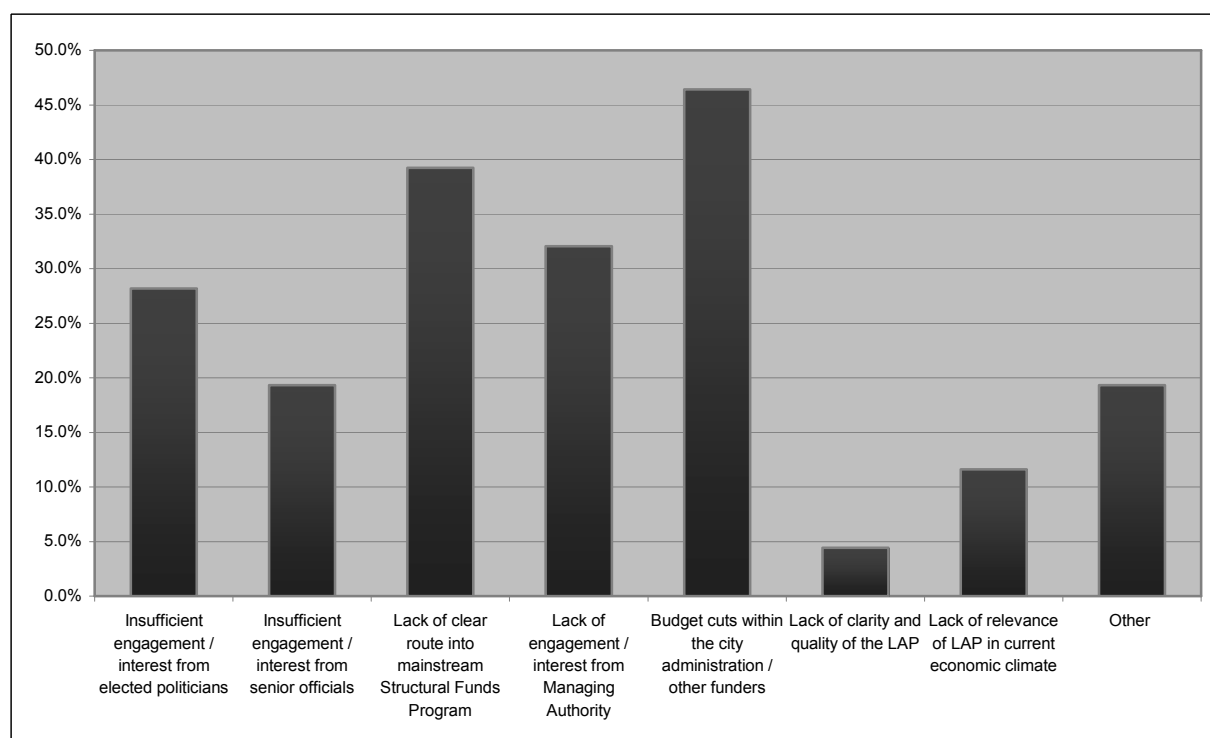
However, perhaps the key finding on the subject of dissemination was that many felt talking with stakeholders, presenting at conferences and general 'networking' was much more effective as a dissemination tool than the written word. OPENCities was a good example of this; although the project has produced a number of highly interesting written documents they were mainly focussed on dissemination through partners and the Lead Expert talking at various conferences and taking part in various debates and other 'urban development networks'. The OPENCities project benefited from having a Lead Expert who is a prominent speaker at a wide range of events and conferences and who acted as the 'mouthpiece' for the project. In the Creative Clusters project, there were a number of partners who have focussed on dissemination through verbal rather than written means. For instance Mizil has been invited to speak by the emerging creative sector conference in Romania and the Finnish partner has been invited to international conferences including one in Norway on culture and wellness. These dissemination methods were thought to be much more effective than the written word and got over the issue identified by many that people don't always have time to read documents.

In reality, a mixture of written and verbal dissemination tools are required but the evaluation has found that projects have so far been more focused on producing their outputs as opposed to sharing them. It has also found that a focus on written dissemination needs to be thought through as perhaps the best dissemination tools are the URBACT II partners themselves.

3.5 Factors affecting achievements

This sub-section highlights key issues affecting the achievements of URBACT II, looking at barriers which are undermining the potential for projects to influence the wider urban development agenda. Again, the issues covered here are particularly relevant for the third call of projects. The graph below shows the results of the online survey and highlights the main barriers to achievements identified by respondents.

Figure 3.2 Barriers affecting the achievements of URBACT II Projects



Source: Ecorys Online Survey (2011)

Although the evaluation identified a range of factors that have affected the achievements of URBACT II there are three key overarching issues that are worth focusing on.

3.5.1 Lack of funding to implement and mainstream learning

A clear and major hurdle to overcome for URBACT II projects relates to securing funding to take forward ideas and actions that have been generated. About half of projects in the online survey stated that a barrier to impact was a lack of funding—particularly linked to bringing activities contained in the LAP to fruition. A review of the evaluation evidence reveals five key issues around this point:

- **An unclear route to funding:** at present there is not a clear route from the project to possible funding streams to help implement actions in LAPs. Four of the case studies mentioned, in hindsight, that more thought should have been given to the priorities of the funders before developing their projects (rather than establishing the project and then looking for funding opportunities). Many thought that although their

projects were of interest to funders, some were divorced from the key themes which national and European funding pots were looking to support, notably related to themes of innovation and research and development and entrepreneurialism. Although this would perhaps have meant that projects became 'funding led' it would have ensured they were more aligned with the priorities of various funding agencies.

- **A general reduction in funding to support urban development projects:** a simple but very significant barrier to impact was a large fall in funding available to support projects linked to urban development. Many projects mentioned the financial crisis and in particular the state of public sector finances as a key reason why their project would not have an impact or come to fruition. All but one of the case studies mentioned that organisations who they would traditionally approach for urban development funding were either cutting back or, more drastically, closing down. For instance, the UK partner involved in the UNIC project stated that Regional Development Agencies who would have traditionally funded parts of their LAP were being abolished by the Government to save public money. The lack of public sector finance also affected stakeholders ability to be involved in URBACT II, with project leaders and partners sometimes struggling to justify the time or budget spent on URBACT II. In a few instances project partners had either lost their jobs or were at risk of becoming redundant over the next year.
- **The financial crisis:** an obvious but significant barrier is the financial crisis, which has led funders to focus on more mainstream urban development projects, rather than the more 'explorative ideas' coming out of URBACT II projects. For instance, for the Creative Clusters project, the Mizil partner said that funders were not willing to take risks with 'new' projects that some may describe as 'softer' urban development projects that were more unconventional.
- **A lack of synchronicity between programmes:** Another clear message emerging from the evaluation with respect to funding is that the timing of URBACT II and the Structural Funds is not synchronised. The 2007– 2013 Programmes were already fully committed (especially in competitiveness regions) meaning second call projects in particular tended to struggle to link in with this potential funding opportunity. In some Member States and partners it was also clear that the Competitiveness Programmes had scant or no reference to urban development issues, despite the intention of mainstreaming the delivery of urban regeneration. Although it was never the intention that projects should only look to EU funding to implement their ideas, the reduction of public spending at the local or national funding meant that alignment to EU funds is very important.
- **Risk of demotivating and alienating local partners:** there is a clear risk in that having engaged with a wide range of organisations including community and citizens groups in developing LAPs, there is a serious danger of demotivating and alienating these groups if the LAP process is not seen to result in any positive action because of a lack of route to funding.

3.5.2 Lack of involvement of 'key stakeholders'

A second common issue undermining the impact of URBACT II projects was the lack of key stakeholder involvement in their partnership or LSG. Those projects which had a clear link to a Managing Authority were those who were both more confident of securing funding and also felt more able to influence urban development policy and practice. However, a general issue coming up in the majority of projects was a lack of close interaction and involvement with decision makers. 1 in 5 stated that they had insufficient engagement and interest from senior officials and about 1 in 3 said that their project had insufficient interest from elected Members.

Even those projects that had a representative from a Managing Authority often mentioned that the individual involved was not necessarily the right person who could influence funding or policy decisions. Projects that did manage to link up with Managing Authorities often mentioned a lack of real understanding and 'passion' for the project shown by the Managing Authority. Representatives of Managing Authorities attended meetings but both themselves and the Lead Partner were sometimes unsure of their role and how best to become truly engaged ('doing the project 'to' rather than 'with' Managing Authorities').

As well as URBACT II projects stating a lack of connection with Managing Authorities, they also stated that other important stakeholders were often missing- in particular elected members. There are some extremely good examples of key public sector figures becoming properly engaged with the project, such as in the case of Obidos (Creative Clusters) where the Deputy Mayor was personally involved in the work and ensured that their staff were fully aware of the learning coming out of the project. However, these sorts of examples tended to be in the minority with most unable to stimulate elected members from becoming truly engaged with the URBACT II project. Again, this was perceived to directly affect the impact of the project and its ability to secure funding or influence mainstream urban policy and practice.

Interestingly, it seems that smaller cities which have been involved in URBACT II have been more able to engage with senior figures within their organisation than their larger counterparts. Again Obidos is an example of a small city authority which has seen personal involvement of senior figures in the URBACT II project who are directly involved in budget and strategic decision making within their organisation. Although this only came out in one case study, for the larger City Authorities some stakeholders complained about the 'gap' between themselves and the key decision makers and that their organisations were involved in a very large number of urban development programmes- the URBACT II project being seen as only a small 'relatively minor' one.

3.5.3 Mix of partners too Broad

Another key issue seemingly affecting the impact of URBACT II projects seems to be the broad nature of partners involved in URBACT II projects. Interestingly, the diversity of partners contained in any one project was sometimes seen as a strength but also as a weakness. On the positive side was the fact that URBACT II projects should always

have a mix of 'learning' and 'teaching' partners- with some organisations giving more than others in terms of good practice. One of the key debates surrounding the impact of URBACT II is the extent to which the transnational exchange and learning activities from one city to another, which usually has very large differences is possible. A number of partners expressed concerns that the diversity of partners, whilst culturally rich and interesting, limits the extent to which this process of transferability can take place. For example in the NODUS project, the diversity of partners meant that the transnational exchange and learning events was sometimes limited into a series of case studies and information sharing sessions rather than into the development of instruments to address common urban issues- mainly because the instruments would only work in certain situations. REG GOV also attributed the vast differences in starting points of the cities as the reason why many of their transnational exchange and learning meetings had struggled to move beyond the sharing of good practice to its actual implementation. This point was particularly true in relation to the requirement to have new and old Member States in every project.

However, whilst national disparities may hinder the extent to which project partners can directly apply particular practices from other Member States, many partners stated that it is possible to transfer 'approaches' and 'principles' from projects from one cultural and institutional context to another. There was a feeling that it would be impossible to directly 'copy' projects but there were always opportunities to draw out learning points that could be applied elsewhere- no matter how different the local context was. This point links back to the issue about 'impact' mainly being around 'ways of working'.

However, shared experience is not always a prerequisite to the successful transfer of good practice particularly in regard to the exchanges that have taken place between competitiveness and convergence regions. In the WEED project, convergence regions – with the help of the competitiveness cities – have developed LAPs that will form the basis of establishing new and innovative services for helping women and in places, this has underpinned a step forward in policy approaches. However this is not a one-sided process of exchange; competitiveness cities have reported that they have learnt a lot from their interactions with convergence regions. A key example is the Amsterdam project partner in NODUS who indicated that they had gained some valuable insights on prioritising urban renewal areas through their visits to the cities in convergence regions. Not only did it raise their awareness of the extent of socio-economic problems faced by these areas and subsequent renewal requirements, it also promoted the exchange of ideas on how to prioritise urban renewal in a locality when resources are scarce. Amsterdam viewed these as key learning points given the recent government austerity measures and the subsequent shortage of finance available to fund such measures.

Nonetheless, some partners felt that matching an equal number of convergence and competitiveness cities was not an effective way of structuring the partnerships. Some members of the OPENCities partnership felt that whilst convergence partners stood to learn a lot about working with transnational partners on European projects, they did normally have a long way to catch up in terms of understanding how to share learning and structure strategic policy development. They felt that this hampered the progress of

the project and meant that the learning amongst partners was more to do with 'how to participate within a project' or 'how to set about integrated urban development' rather than specifically around city openness and competitiveness.

3.6 Added Value of URBACT II over other similar Networks

This sub-section concludes this part of the report by assessing how URBACT II differs from other similar networks linked to promoting the sharing of good practice on urban development. Results from the online survey show that 52% of respondents are involved with another urban development or city network aside from URBACT II and in many cases, respondents cited that they were a part of at least three additional networks. The table below provides an overview of the key networks which project partners were involved in addition to URBACT II and highlights the key differences that exist between each. It presents an overview of the functions, geographies and memberships of the five most commonly named European urban networks as well as the added value of URBACT II to them.

Table 3.1 Added Value of URBACT II

Network	Geography	Membership	Budget	Function
ESPON	The 27 EU Member States and Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway and Switzerland	Calls for proposals are open to public bodies and bodies governed by public law as well as private bodies	Total budget is €45 million (part-financed at the level of 75% by the ERDF, the rest comes from 31 participating countries)	The mission of ESPON 2013 is to support policy development in relation to the aim of territorial cohesion and a harmonious development of the European territory by providing comparable information and revealing territorial capital potentials for development of regions. Similar geographical coverage however it has more of an academic and scientific approach than URBACT II.
EUROCITIES	36 countries from across Europe	Over 140 local governments of large cities. Different types of membership. (1) Full membership for EU and EEA cities with 250,000 or more inhabitants or of regional importance; (2) Associate memberships for non-EU and non-EEA cities fulfilling above criteria; (3) Associate partners for smaller cities and towns; (4) Associate business partners	(...)	Eurocities aims to shape the opinions of stakeholders in Brussels to ultimately shift legislation in a way that helps city governments address the EUs strategic challenges at a local level. Three key policies priorities are: climate, recovery and inclusion Broad geographical coverage and focus on transnational exchange and learning events but unlike URBACT II, types of partners are restricted. Focuses much more on policy and campaigning to raise public awareness.
Eurotowns	21 towns and cities across Europe	Open to European settlements with a population of 50,000 to 250,000. All members should play a lead role within their region or sub-region and be actively committed to Europe. Should be a maximum of 8 members from any EU country and a maximum of 4 members from candidate countries (non-EU countries should not exceed	Members must all pay fixed annual subscription fee of €3,500	The mission of Eurotowns is to develop a network of vibrant, inclusive and sustainable medium sized cities which will act as a catalyst for urban innovation, creativity and growth. Policy areas: lifelong learning, knowledge economy, sustainable transport, social inclusion and the physical environment. Involves smaller entities and on a smaller scale than URBACT II. Both

		25% total membership)		work towards implementing the Lisbon-Gothenburg Strategy.
European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN)	15 Member States: BE, CY, CZ, DK, FR, HU, LU, NL, PL, RO, SE, UK	EUKN is the prime network for urban policy makers, practitioners and researchers throughout Europe.	(...)	<p>The key objective of EUKN is to enhance the knowledge and expertise on urban development throughout Europe, bridging urban policy, research and practise. EURO CITIES, the URBACT Programme, ESPON and the European Commission also support EUKN, making EUKN a Europe-wide supported network.</p> <p>URBACT II supports EUKN. This network focuses on the exchange of knowledge, particularly on a virtual level, and they produce a lot of publications. More informal than URBACT II but less focus on practical application.</p>
INTERREG IVC	The 27 Member States and Norway and Switzerland	Regional and local public authorities. Partnerships must include at least 1 partner from each of the 4 Information Point areas (N S W E Europe) and at least 1 of the 12 most recent EU MS.	Total ERDF budget for 2007-2013 is €302 million	<p>Overall objective is to improve the effectiveness of regional policies and instruments. It provides funding for interregional cooperation across Europe particular in the areas of innovation and the knowledge economy, environment and risk prevention. Not primarily dedicated to implementation, core activities should be related to the exchange of experiences at policy level.</p> <p>Similar geography to URBACT II, big budget and is made up of similar components (e.g. fast tract networks). But there is a less varied range of project partners and LAPs are not mandatory.</p>

Source: Ecorys 2011

The most frequently mentioned networks which URBACT II partners were involved in were INTERREG (29%) and EURO CITIES (16%). Whilst INTERREG programme, there were several others (including IVB and IIIC) and a number of respondents did not specify what particular programme they were a part of. To avoid any confusion – and because the fabrics of the programme are fundamentally similar – INTERREG will be discussed here as a singular entity. EUKN, ESPON and Eurotowns were also amongst the most mentioned; even so, less than 5% of the respondents involved in URBACT II stated that they participated in these networks. The majority of respondents noted that they were part of a wide range of either national or sub-European urban networks (such as the Union of Baltic Cities and the German-Austrian Urban Network). As a result of these differing geographies, they are not on a comparable scale with URBACT II so they will not be discussed in any further detail.

The majority of partners clearly stated their belief that URBACT II adds value to the work of existing trans-European networks and that the programme has many unique characteristics that limit the amount of duplication with other networks and fora. There were some however that felt that URBACT II replicated too many features of other European networks and that in fact the programme could learn some valuable lessons

from how different networks operate. Outlined below are the some of the key topics of the added value versus duplication debate.

3.6.1 Membership

Perhaps the most unique feature of URBACT II is the diversity of its membership. The programme prides itself in being a very inclusive network that encourages involvement not only from government ministers but also from individuals working at grassroots levels. In contrast, project partners from ESIMeC identified that participants in EUKN and EUROcities are from a far narrower social milieu – predominantly academic and scientific professions – and as a result, the programmes are somewhat ‘top heavy’. In addition, European networks (such as INTERREG) are typically managed by Regional Authorities; URBACT II is therefore unique in that it is run by cities. As a result, project participants (particularly from NODUS) cited that compared to other international cooperation programmes, URBACT II performed very favourably. However, not all partners agreed with this notion.

One of the suggested limitations of other trans-European urban development programmes is that they are characterised by high levels of involvement from Western European nations with high levels of experience in delivering urban renewal programmes and limited engagement from Central and Eastern European nations. URBACT II is therefore considered to add significant value in the sense that it facilitates the exchange of good practise and transferable lessons in urban renewal between Western Europe and Central and Eastern Europe. Whilst URBACT II may not involve as many different countries as EUROcities, the diversity of individuals involved is considered to be far more representative of the European demographic as a whole.

3.6.2 Budget

One of the key areas of the URBACT II programme was the size of the budget and it was in this area that projects – such as UNIC – felt the programme fell short of its European counterparts. Project partners argued that the URBACT II budget is too low, particularly in comparison to INTERREG. It was felt by a member of the M.I.L.E. partnership that the size and flexibility of INTERREG’s budget means that they are able to deliver more results and implement ‘real measures’.

However, whilst INTERREG does have a far more substantial budget, there is more to URBACT II than just finances and this was a notion strongly supported by the majority of project partners. Some individuals actually felt that increasing URBACT II’s budget to projects would be detrimental to the programme as people would get involved for all of the ‘wrong reasons’. Some members of ESIMeC expressed concerns that the programme would attract ‘rent-seeker’ partners who are fuelled by financial incentives rather than the drive to participate in the transnational exchange and learning activities that lie at the heart of URBACT II. Having a lower budget helps to ensure the recruitment of high calibre participants who are all motivated by the opportunity to contribute to urban development in their locality.

3.6.3 Discussion and practical application

Some partners perceive the lack of practical application in URBACT II to be not only a result of a low budget but also due to the way that the programme operates. Some Monitoring Committee members noted that whilst networks such as EUKN and EUROCITIES consist of a much narrower social milieu (predominantly academics and scientists) than URBACT II, it does help to facilitate rich and deep discussions; far richer than the discussions had at URBACT II's transnational exchange and learning events. Particularly in EUROCITIES, the deep discussions and the heavy involvement of academics means that they tend to produce far more publications than URBACT II. These documents can be easily found and downloaded through their website thus helping to ensure the dissemination of outputs, case studies and good practise to a wider audience.

However, there is a significant counterargument to the notion that URBACT II is an 'all talk no action' programme and that is the LAPs. In no other comparable European urban development network is it mandatory for projects to produce a LAP. Whilst EUROCITIES may involve rich discussions, the programme lacks any process to transform these ideas into practises. Even INTERREG, the programme that is most closely aligned with URBACT II, does not have to produce any documentation on how they will implement measures on the ground: without this in place, there is nothing to help guide project partners in the application of proposed measures and projects may lose their focus. A project partner in JOINING FORCES stated that they will not only be transferring the practise of LAPs across to the INTERREG project that they are a part of; they will implement an LSG too. The success of these two key features of URBACT II, LAPs and LSGs, emphasises that there is more to the programme than just money; and most of it is far more valuable.

Overall, the majority respondents firmly felt that URBACT II added something unique to the existing crop of European urban development networks. The perceptions of the duplications of URBACT II with other urban development and city networks varied greatly from project to project and served as a reminder that opinions of the programme's added value are largely dependent upon personal experience as well the type of project that individuals are involved in.

It is also important to note that whilst there are clearly some instances of overlap between URBACT II and other urban development and city networks, it does not have to be detrimental to the programme and indeed there are opportunities for project partners to take advantage of any duplication. Involvement with other networks can help to boost the reputation of URBACT II, particularly when project partners are asked to speak at international conferences. Networks can also learn a lot from each other and help support and promote each other's development; for example ESPON, EUROCITIES and URBACT II are all registered supporters of EUKN.

4.0 Conclusions

This final section considers the general overarching conclusions to the study and provides recommendations for the remainder of the URBACT II programme and in particular the third call for projects.

4.1 Key conclusions

The main messages which come out of the mid-term evaluation of the URBACT II programme are as follows:

Strong Evolution from URBACT I

The first key conclusion is that URBACT II has moved on and evolved significantly from URBACT I. Although the second iteration of URBACT has kept the same main goal as the first (promoting the transfer of urban development knowledge and good practice) much has changed in the programmes implementation and process issues. The changes taking place from URBACT I to URBACT II have been relatively bold and ambitious changes linked to, for instance, the introduction of Local Support Groups and Local Action Plans. In particular, the evaluation has shown that, compared to URBACT I, the second programme has stronger and more defined implementation structures linked to, for instance, the use of Project Experts, Thematic Experts, clearer project guidance, a better website and the use of instruments to encourage stakeholders to 'apply' their learning. The combination of these new or improved elements to the URBACT delivery structures have all helped to greatly strengthen the programme overall. However, the benefits and difference that these new implementation methods have made on the end impact of URBACT is less clear at present and this will be an important aspect to study for further evaluations linked to the programme.

Recognising the importance of the 'application' of learning

Compared to URBACT 1, URBACT II actively encourages stakeholders to 'use' their learning and has become more ambitious in promoting learning at the local level (through the LSGs) and encouraging stakeholders to become more action orientated (through the use of LAPs). To some extent, URBACT I assumed that knowledge sharing would occur and be transferred from the individual to the organisation and then into policy. URBACT II has put structures in place to actively stimulate the true knowledge transfer from URBACT activities into the urban development agenda. Both the LAPs and the LSGs could have been viewed by many as a largely paper-based exercise - another box that stakeholders needed to tick. But in practice, although not universally praised, these new additions to the URBACT 'method' have been generally well received by project stakeholders - although the nature and strength of both the LAPs and the LSGs do vary across the programme. Stakeholders generally recognise the importance and need for LSGs and LAPs within URBACT II and accept their value in

making the overall programme more focused on using the good practice they have learnt both at the local, city and national level.

Positive benefits – particularly to promote the urban 'method'

The evaluation has found that the early benefits and achievements of URBACT II projects have been generally positive. In particular, the evidence shows a number of practical ways in which URBACT has helped stimulate new 'ways' and 'methods' of working in European cities. For example, the programme has helped practitioners think about the value of a bottom up approach, the importance of cross thematic working and the importance of partnership working. Interesting, there is less evidence at the moment to show an abundance of direct transferring of actual projects ideas – 'copying' an intervention in Budapest and transferring it to Glasgow for instance. To some extent, this is to be expected as there are disparities among (and even within) cities which make it difficult for the direct transfer of a project from one city to another. However, this does seem to highlight that URBACT II is perhaps more important in promoting urban 'methods' rather than urban 'projects' (i.e. helping practitioners to understand 'how' to do things rather than 'what' to do).

Managing expectations around the 'end' impact

On the issue of impact, the evaluation has found that it is often too early to see impact manifesting itself in relation to better urban development policies and practices and then, in turn, improved urban areas. The evaluation has tended to find that projects have started to produce generally strong 'good practice' literature and tools and that 'knowledge transfer' between practitioners is indeed happening, important pre-requisites to impact. The evaluation also found a number of examples in the case study projects of how new knowledge from URBACT II has been applied, but as yet these examples do not provide hard evidence of the end outcome of this knowledge application process. The expectations around measuring the impact of URBACT II should be managed carefully. As this report suggests, knowledge learnt through URBACT II can indeed influence the way urban development practitioners approach and tackle certain problems within their cities. However, to expect that this new knowledge gained through URBACT II becomes a principle driver in, for instance, reducing urban unemployment or increasing female entrepreneurialism in a city is perhaps a step too far. The impact of URBACT II should therefore be seen in terms of it raising awareness and influencing Europe's urban development practitioners rather than it directly tackling and solving issues on the ground.

Challenging time for Europe's cities and therefore URBACT projects

A key finding from the evaluation is that the URBACT II programme and its projects are working in a challenging time for the urban development agenda. The main barriers to progress and impact of URBACT projects are often related to external factors outside of the programme's control. In particular, the decline in public sector funding opportunities will impact at a number of levels. The public policy context has moved on significantly

since the launch of URBACT II and this will impact on the remainder of this programming period and also beyond. For many public organisations, continued funding is the central issue with significant pressures on budgets and not just in those countries (including Ireland, Greece and Portugal) at the centre of the current EU financial crisis. The need to cut public funding to reduce national deficits is paramount in all countries. The evaluation has found that the lack of funding is placing the implementation of the LAPs and other URBACT 'ideas' into question – and risks undermining the enthusiasm and participation which has been built up in many of the LSPs. In simple terms, financial constraints have also impacted on partnership working (networking involving travel is an obvious target for cuts) but going forward cuts in urban development activity more widely will make it more difficult to transfer lessons learnt through URBACT into new urban development activity. This issue will remain the largest challenge for all projects supported by URBACT II during the remainder of its life.

Time for implementation and dissemination

The evaluation has also found that the URBACT II programme is at a critical time of its life. Much effort has been put into developing strong implementation structures at programme level, establishing project level partnerships, organising and attending transnational meetings, establishing Local Support Groups and producing Local Action Plans. Focus now needs to be made in relation to the application, implementation and dissemination of this body of good practice which the URBACT II programme has and will create. It will be important during the second half of the programme to ensure that this process happens and to focus support to new and existing projects along these lines. If the application process can happen then URBACT will no doubt be a valuable component to the European urban development agenda. At a time when innovative and new ways of working in urban areas are needed - where cities are facing increasing problems but also seeing significant reductions in their finances - a programme which promotes and shares new ways of working will have a critical role. With this in mind, we believe that there is a strong case for giving serious consideration to developing an URBACT III as a tool to help urban practitioners to experience and share new ways of working into 2014 and beyond.

4.2 Recommendations

This sub-section highlights 15 key recommendations that should be considered by the Monitoring Committee and the Secretariat in terms of the third call for projects and in relation to dealing with some of the key issues which this evaluation has highlighted.

Recommendation 1: Now is a critical time for strong dissemination activity to ensure that the lessons and messages from the URBACT projects are shared and embedded into European urban development policy and practice. Poor dissemination will mean that the 'influence' of URBACT beyond those directly involved in the programme and its projects will be limited. More work needs to be done at the thematic and programme level to draw together 'bigger' messages coming collectively from the Thematic Poles or

groups of projects. It is at project level where most dissemination seems to be occurring but it needs to be recognised that URBACT should work at the thematic and programme level to collect wider messages on, for example, governing cities or how to ensure cities can become more successful as engines of economic growth. The publication on the economic crisis was an excellent example of how URBACT as a whole can harness its internal networks, gather together higher level messages and produce key overarching messages at a level beyond simply a single project or single issue. More work should be done, particularly by the Thematic Pole Managers to gather and disseminate these higher level learning points from individual projects that are likely to have broader appeal at a higher level.

Recommendation 2: The dissemination plans of projects should be clearer on 'who' they are planning to target. The evaluation found a general 'commitment' to disseminate but a lack of clarity in relation to who they should be sharing ideas and lessons with. More clarity needs to be given to the target audience of projects - is it policy makers at a national level, those responsible for city development, funders in charge of a particular urban development financial resource, politicians, or 'front line' staff at project level?. Having more defined plans on the nature and characteristics of those who each project wishes to influence will help to shape and inform the content and overall usefulness of the dissemination literature and tools being produced. Dissemination should be at the forefront of projects plans rather than done as an afterthought once the project has finished. Support should therefore be given to existing projects in this area but also made a condition for funding for all new projects coming from the third call.

Recommendation 3: Where applicable, projects should be encouraged to produce more 'tools' for urban development practitioners - rather than just focusing on writing general literature that 'describes' how something is working within a particular local context. If the dissemination outputs of projects were linked to developing practical tools that helped practitioners to deal with certain urban problems then the usefulness and application of 'ideas' is likely to be greater. These tools could vary enormously depending on the nature of the project but, by way of explanation, could include a tool to structure consultation with target groups, a tool to understand how to target resources more effectively within a city, a tool to understand the impact of an intervention or a tool to ensure better multi-agency working on a particular issue. URBACT would therefore be more successful in 'equipping' urban development stakeholders and assisting them in the actual application of good practice.

Recommendation 4: The dissemination plans of projects should value the importance of verbal dissemination through networking and presentations rather than just producing a written dissemination output. Producing a written good practice document and hoping that 'the right' people read it assumes that people have time to digest and act upon it. Of course, written dissemination literature is important but some of the most successful dissemination activities of projects have come from partners presenting at conferences or holding meetings with decision makers to explain certain good practice face to face. In many instances the 'lessons learnt' from URBACT projects are relatively complex

and 'teaching' people verbally through presentations/ meeting/ events etc is often more effective and powerful than explaining something in a written format. It would be worthwhile to consider ways in which the Programme could provide limited financial support to former participants in URBACT projects to take part in relevant conferences or meetings in other member states.

Recommendation 5: A relatively straightforward but important issue identified in the evaluation was the bureaucratic financial administration process (particularly those associated with payments) linked to URBACT that was having a significant impact on participation in the programme. There is no doubt that projects will need to continue to be monitored and audited and that proper processes are in place to receive and accept payments. However, the complexity and timescales linked to the financial administration needs to be considered carefully, including basic issues around the budget headings being too detailed for project partners. The evaluation has identified the ramifications of the administration problem but the Secretariat need to properly address how to overcome this issue. Very clear guidance to new projects funded under the third call to encourage them to simplify the budgetary structure of the project as far as is compatible with audit requirements would do something to ease the pressure on both lead partners and the secretariat. It should not be ignored or simply accepted and should become a priority in order to ensure the smooth running of URBACT II.

Recommendation 6: The evaluation has provided examples of how knowledge and good practice from URBACT projects is being shared among participating projects but has also identified that the true impact of URBACT does not manifest itself properly until a practitioner has used or applied their learning. It is important to 'educate' project stakeholders more about the importance of their project having an end impact on actual policy and practice. The evaluation has found that many stakeholders referred to certain written outputs as the main 'impacts' of their projects without thinking about what the outcomes of a good practice document is likely to be. It is recommended that project stakeholders are reminded that knowledge and good practice needs to be 'used' before an impact can occur and not to be satisfied with the end outcome of a project simply being a selection of written documents. This message needs to be instilled in project guidance as well as the support which Pole Managers and Experts are providing to projects.

Recommendation 7: Following on from the previous point, it is also recommended that projects are encouraged to undertake a short self evaluation around the impact of their project. This evaluation would require projects to assess and report on the impact of their project and highlight how and when knowledge learnt through URBACT is being applied within participating cities. This will not only encourage project stakeholders to actually apply their knowledge, but would also help the evaluators to highlight specific examples of how learning from an URBACT project is being used. It is recommended that this self evaluation would be relatively short and light touch and be focussed on providing the main qualitative and descriptive impacts and outcomes of their project.

Recommendation 8: As would be expected, this evaluation has shown that the quality of projects varies. Some projects are likely to provide extremely interesting and innovative good practice that resonates relatively strongly on the European urban development agenda, whilst others are perhaps likely to give limited added value overall. At present, most projects have received a generally equal amount of support from Pole Managers regardless of their ambition or appetite for support. It is worth considering whether better performing projects are provided with more targeted and intensive support from the Pole Managers so that they are able to fulfil their ambitions more fully. Projects with less ambition and potential would therefore receive more limited support.

Recommendation 9: The amount of resources it takes to establish and run an URBACT project is significant. A large proportion of time spent by the Secretariat, the Pole Managers and Lead Experts during the first half of the programmes life have been around the set up and establishment of project and the development of mechanisms such as the LAP and the LSG. A previous recommendation supports the idea that more resources should be spent on helping (existing) projects implement and disseminate their learning. Care needs to be taken with the third call for projects in mind not to 'burden' the project support structure with tasks linked to setting up more new projects which will detract from the key task of supporting existing projects to maximise their impact. The third call for projects is now fixed but it is suggested that a smaller number of larger projects are supported in order to reduce the amount of guidance that is needed and so that the support structure can focus on impact rather than process issues.

Recommendation 10: A key finding from this evaluation is that Local Action Plans often lack a clear route to funding and that a lack of resources to implement the content of the LAP is a large barrier to impact. 'How to fund' actions contained in the LAP was often a concern after the document was produced. An important balance needs to be made between ensuring the LAP is not simply funding 'led' but also ensuring that it links directly into the priorities of key funding organisations. Ensuring projects have Managing Authorities or other funders as part of their partnership is obviously key, but also ensuring that stakeholders meet with funders before rather than after the project is developed is also vitally important and something which partners have often not done.

Recommendation 11: In light of reducing public sector budgets, it is recommended that URBACT and LAPs in particular should move away from developing actions that put forward 'expensive' solutions to local urban development issues (e.g. developing a new centre for enterprise, trying to replicate a new science park). This evaluation has found that URBACT has been particularly successful in teaching practitioners new ways and methods of working. If the focus of LAPs were more on influencing and 'bending' the way city stakeholders approach urban problems (for instance, showing how to target resources better or become more efficient) then the actual implementation of these actions tend not to require large amounts of resources to succeed. Changing the

way urban practitioners design and implement projects can often have large impacts on the ground and may often take a change in process that in itself may cost very little.

Recommendation 12: The evaluation has found that the economic crisis is a consideration by many projects but it is not as pronounced as perhaps expected. Projects recognise the economic crisis but are not always focused on addressing it and tackling the challenges it brings to, for instance, port cities or the Roma population. As already noted, the urban development agenda is fast changing and the challenge for all cities is often about developing and implementing projects with less public resources - often with more innovation. There is obviously a significant amount of good practice and knowledge on urban development but less on urban development at a time of severe public sector spending cuts. If the next call for projects has the economic crisis as a central theme, then the overall added value and relevance of URBACT becomes much greater (as a vehicle for developing and sharing knowledge and solutions to European cities in a time of public and private sector funding cuts). This means the themes would revolve around the issues of efficiency and effectiveness (i.e. doing things in European cities better but with fewer resources) and prioritise innovative projects which aim to tackle (rather than just consider) the current economic crisis.

Recommendation 13: Linked to the above, it is recommended to consider a larger emphasis on the green agenda as a theme for the next call for projects. At present there are only three key projects in the first two calls which have a central element linked to the environment. Considering the green agenda is recognised by many as being both a significant threat to urban areas but also a significant economic opportunity then more emphasis should be put on this field in the second half of the programme. Again, this would help to ensure the URBACT programme's relevance and usefulness in terms of tackling emerging issues.

Recommendation 14: In the third call for projects, it would be helpful to seek to readdress the balance of the location of Lead Partners to incorporate a broader geography with more New Member States leading projects (whilst at the same time recognising that projects involving New Member States should not be included for the sake of readdressing this imbalance). By encouraging the involvement of more Nordic, Central and Eastern European Member States, the URBACT II message will spread to a wider audience and the programme will all become more inclusive. There are recognised issues amongst some of involving New Member States in projects (especially as leads)- linked mainly to the differences in knowledge and capabilities. However, a large proportion of Cohesion funding overall is targeted at these countries and their capacity, through vehicles such as URBACT, need to be built in order to ensure funding is spent effectively and efficiently. Indeed, LAPs developed in these New Member States are more likely (compared to those in Western Europe) to gain funding because of the increase in funds such as ERDF flowing into the countries. URBACT, partly through the third call, needs to play its part in ensuring that practitioners in these Member States are supported in the urban development field.

Recommendation 15: To provide support for the development, in principle, of an URBACT III programme with its shape and content partly being formed by this evaluation. If the principle of mainstreaming of urban regeneration in Structural Funds programmes is to be continued post-2014, then the URBACT Monitoring Committee needs to urge the Commission to ensure that Structural Fund programmes make appropriate provision for urban regeneration good practice and learning within them. If an URBACT III programme is taken forward, there should also be reference to URBACT as a potential seed bed of urban regeneration proposals within mainstream programming documents. The potential of a bespoke programme such as URBACT III that sits alongside mainstream programmes and builds up urban development capacity especially in central and eastern European Member States and improves practice overall is high. There is significant scope to take the lessons learnt from URBACT I and II and apply them to the urban strand of a new ERDF initiative which inevitably is going to be weighted towards countries with less experience of urban development.