Analyzing Eurocities’ role in the Urban Agenda for the EU
Empowering cities in sustainable urban governance

"Trabajo de Fin de Máster"
Máster Universitario en Diplomacia y Organizaciones Internacionales

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Fecha de entrega: 12/05/2023
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CD  City Diplomacy
CEMR  Council of European Municipalities and Regions
CJEU  EU Court of Justice
CoR  Committee of the Regions of the EU
DG  Directorate General
DG REGIO  Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy
DGUM  Directorate General on Urban Matters
EC  European Commission
EEC  European Economic Community
EESC  European Economic and Social Committee
EP  European Parliament
EU  European Union
EUI  European Union Initiative
EUKN  European Urban Knowledge Network
ISUD  Integrated Sustainable Urban Development
MLG  Multi-level governance approach
MS  Member State
MWP  Multiannual Working Programme
NUA  New Urban Agenda
NLC  New Leipzig Charter
SDG  Sustainable Development Goals
TCNs  Transnational City Networks
TFEU  Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
UAEU  Urban Agenda for the EU
UATPG  Urban Agenda Technical Preparatory Body
UDG  Urban Development Group
UN  United Nations
1. INTRODUCTION

Cities have become central actors in the governance process of global urban sustainable agendas. But also in tackling the challenges presented in urban spaces, which are complex, multi-faceted, and cross-sectoral in nature. It is widely acknowledged that sustainable urban development handles ‘wicked’ policy issues and multi-layered problems arising from an increasing urbanization process. Moreover, the sustainability realm in cities and sustainable urban development has gained huge resonance in global governance in recent decades.

The last wave of the so-called urban global age started in the early 2000s, culminating in the United Nations (UN) introduction of Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11) -the urban goal- within the 2030 SDGs Agenda in 2015. And in the New Urban Agenda (NUA) agreement at the UN-Habitat III Conference in 2016. The latter represents the major framework from which principles for governing urban matters globally have emerged. Hence, conditioning the Urban Agenda for the EU (UAEU) launchment in 2016, both in its configuration and on its main principles and objectives.

As scholars have argued, cities have acquired an important role in many pressing environmental and social problems, taking part in the dynamics of global governance1. Some point out that there has been a marketization of the city, considering it an engine of growth and an imaginative entity that guides its actions on the principles of competition2. Cities present the main challenges our societies need to face, at the same time being at the frontline of delivering solutions in a sustainable and resilient manner3.

In the same line the European Commission (EC) in its report “Towards an Urban Agenda” (1997), already pointed out that “the starting point for future urban development must be to recognize the role of the cities as motors for regional, national and European economic progress”4. Transnational city networks (TCNs) have also incorporated this urban rationale provided by the NUA, advocating for sustainable urban governance where cities and local authorities are included. Since the beginning of the new urban age, there has been a huge proliferation of these entities. This phenomenon has become increasingly prominent in the European continent, where cities have demanded a voice in the governance process of the EU, many of them joining TCNs.

Following these transformations, a progressive recognition of the role of cities and their local contexts in the European Union (EU) policymaking has occurred, leading to the UAU established in 2016 in the Pact of Amsterdam. Nevertheless, it must be noted that urban

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policy does not constitute a formal policy of the EU. It has been established through soft law mechanisms and programs having an implicit and informal character. Thereby, consolidating the promotion of an *urban acquis* (urban method) with specific requirements established in projects and financed programs such as the structural and cohesion funds\(^5\).

Eurocities is the TCN chosen for conducting this analysis as it has been one of the major urban authorities influencing EU urban policy strategies, including the structural and cohesion funds. It acts as the interlocutor of their members with EU institutions, exercising knowledge and best practices sharing. It was launched by six major secondary cities in Europe, starting to operate in 1991 with a central office in Brussels and more than 200 cities as members. The UAEU is the latest overarching scheme in which Eurocities has had and is having a fore-front role in its definition and implementation.

The UAEU constitutes enables multi-level and multi-stakeholder participation of cities, the EC, among other EU institutions, Member States (MS), urban authorities, knowledge institutions, and civil society organizations. It seeks to provide solutions on how to improve response to urban challenges. It is a non-binding framework constructed upon the basis of the intergovernmental agreements and declarations of the nowadays European *urban acquis*. It has been renovated recently, in 2021, with the Ljubljana Agreement opening a new page for the Urban Agenda.

This investigation aims to analyze the role of Eurocities’ network in the UAEU. Unveiling the implications this framework has for empowering cities and local entities within the urban governance structure at the EU level.

For this purpose, two main strands of research that dominate the academic debate of city participation in sustainable urban governance are revised. These are the Multi-level Governance approach (MLG) and the City Diplomacy (CD) theoretical scheme. Both have contributed significantly to the understanding of the role cities and local authorities have gained over recent decades. Consequently, this research is based on their principles as the basis to develop a critical analysis of the role Eurocities has had in the UAEU.

All in all, this investigation begins with the aimed objectives and the methodological considerations applied to this research. It follows with the analytical framework in which a literature review gives an overview of the MLG and CD strands of the academy. Besides, a review of the EU’s urban governance is pursued, considering its background and the main frameworks in place. The latter section of this part is devoted to a revision of the role of cities in EU policymaking, introducing the institutional mechanisms and city networks such as Eurocities. Then, the case study part begins. On the one hand, Eurocities and the UAEU scheme are analyzed as separate entities. On the other hand, the last section is devoted to unveiling the participation of Eurocities within this framework.

In the end, some conclusions critically revise Eurocities’ role in the UAEU and how this articulates for increased empowerment of cities in sustainable urban governance. As a last instance, suggestions on future lines of research are given.

A mixed method is used, combining a descriptive-analytical methodology with a qualitative one. The first comprises the utilization of secondary sources for the literature review analysis. Within it a profound revision of the MLG approach and CD is provided, as well as the

academic voices’ description of the EU urban method, the proliferation of city networks, and the inclusion of cities in the EU governance infrastructure. For the empirical part primary sources are used. This is by conducting a critical analysis of official EU documents and, internal Eurocities working papers and publications. Furthermore, a fieldwork investigation was pursued with semi-structured interviews with experts that inform and support the results obtained for the case study. As a last instance, to complement and enhance the understanding of the concrete participation of Eurocities in the UAEU, a reinterpretation of the Policy Cycle of Howlett and Giest model⁶ is delivered.

1.1. Objectives, justification and methodology

The study seeks to contribute to the European governance literature by analyzing sustainable urban governance at the EU level. The area of focus is exemplified by the UAEU, regarded as the culmination of this EU urban acquis evolution. It encompasses the principles of the major urban and territorial cohesion frameworks within the EU sphere. But also, the global urban agendas’ main contributions (SDG 11, the NUA, etc.). It displays its activities with a multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance and implementation structure. Thus, representing a key success in incorporating both the top-down and bottom-up systems of governance. In this regard, TCN as urban authorities, but especially, Eurocities, have been crucial actors involved in the process, elevating cities’ interests and accelerating their participation in this overarching structure.

Therefore, Eurocities is the TCN chosen for this research since it represents the major urban network authority within the EU. It has more than 200 cities as members and decades of experience advocating and influencing EU policy for greater recognition of cities’ role in urban spaces. It acts as an enabling and delivering platform for many significant European urban mechanisms existing today, raising its member cities’ needs and interests in those frameworks. In recent decades, TCN have multiplied, due to the increasing urbanization process and the relevance they have in the issues caused by this phenomenon. For the most part, this has occurred in Europe, where along with the urban age, EU institutions have installed a multi-level governance system in which cities and regions have demanded to have their voices heard. They have united into these associations, from which Eurocities is the principal one, specializing in multiple topics derived from urban governance. In this sense, the UAEU is a frame in which Eurocities has had and is having a fore-front role.

Therefore, to develop a comprehensive analysis of the whole mentioned process, this research aims to answer a general question and two specific questions. The broad question that seeks to answer is:

- To what extent are cities and local entities included in the policy process of sustainable urban governance in the EU?

On the other hand, the specific questions are:

- How did Eurocities participate in the process of definition and implementation of the Urban Agenda for the EU in the initial stage and at the onset of the current second phase?

What are the main obstacles and achievements for the empowerment of cities and local entities in the urban governance structure at the EU level?

To date, much research has been done on the proliferation of TCNs over the recent decades, with academics focusing, as well, on the evolution of urban policy at the EU level. In addition to how the MLG approach affects it, and how CD activities have contributed to it. However, this investigation aims to unveil the concrete role that Eurocities, as a prominent urban network in the EU, has had to advance city participation in the UAEU. This, constitutes a renewed outlook on the debate, using a mixed method that combines descriptive-analytical tools with a qualitative and fieldwork perspective. This method has permitted to conduct a critical analytical revision of secondary sources in the literature review section. But it has also introduced an empirical analysis leaning on primary sources such as EU institutions' official documents and working papers and internal documents of Eurocities. Besides, the results obtained from the fieldwork executed through semi-structured expert interviews have expanded the applicable analysis informing the case study with relevant insights on the topic.

In this sense, the first segment of this investigation revises the background of the governance scheme at the EU level in urban matters by exposing the main strands of theories; the MLG approach and the CD study field. It also presents the evolution of urban policy in the EU, providing an overview of the redefinition of urban policy over the recent years and, the main frameworks and strategies in place for governing urban matters. It also gives a glance at the institutional mechanisms cities have within the EU sphere, incorporating, as well, city networks literature to have a clear picture of the basis of the existence of Eurocities in this context. For this part, secondary sources are used with the academic literature on the mentioned topics, building on the major debates in these fields.

The second section displays a qualitative analysis of the case study of the UAEU and Eurocities network. On the one hand, a subsection is devoted to Eurocities as such, building on its central facets, mission, structure, and organization. But also on its actions towards the enhancement of cities’ presence in urban governing matters at higher levels of the policy process within the EU institutional arrangement. On the other hand, the UAEU framework is introduced in depth, leaning on its main characteristics, from its objectives and scope to its structure and functioning. Following this introductory analysis of Eurocities and the UAEU as separate entities, a comprehensive case study of both is presented. This concluding part encompasses the participation of Eurocities in the process of definition and implementation of the UAEU. Portrayed from the initial stage to the onset of the current second phase of the Urban Agenda. Having regards to the methods used in this part, primary sources are analyzed, using EU institutions' official documents, briefs, assessments, and reports. In addition, Eurocities' internal documents and working papers are examined. This part has also a fieldwork strand since it is informed by semi-structured interviews conducted with experts in the field. Furthermore, the case study analysis that focuses on the role of Eurocities in the UAEU, is conducted following a reinterpretation of the Policy Cycle model of Howlett and Giest7.

The research method of semi-structured interviews within the qualitative analysis was chosen as it is a well-suited option in topics in which field experience has huge importance. Since the case study part aimed to unveil the functioning and the main objectives of Eurocities and the UAEU, as well as the specific participation of this network in the UAEU process, there was a need for information from experts involved in it. Respondents were selected because of their

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7HOWLETT, M., and GIEST, S., op. cit., note 6.
high competence in the case investigated, with the willingness to grasp authoritative opinions providing the research with unknown or relevant information and data. On the other hand, the Policy Cycle model was targeted and reframed in order to better reflect the participation of Eurocities in the UAEU policy process, from its beginning to its later reformulation stage. The actual framework has five stages that have been converted into four to portray a detailed overview of Eurocities' role within the UAEU.

(I) Interviews

Two interviews have been held with the Eurocities’ Policy Advisor on Governance, Pietro Reviglio, and with the Head of Brussels Office of the city of Vienna, Michaela Kauer. Both of them have been and are still involved in the UAEU project, providing very enriching expertise and insights into this complex process from different levels of action. That is from Eurocities' perspective as a European city network having very active participation in the framework as an urban authority. But also from a city, such as Vienna, highly committed to the finalized Housing Partnership and the development of this initiative.

There were semi-structured interviews based on previously sent questions to the interviewees. The aim of this approach was to hold guided conversations around the specific topics that needed to be addressed. Besides, both interviews were recorded with the agreed consent of the participants, and their transcripts are available in the annex of this document along with the questions sent to them.

An interview with the Barcelona City Council responsible for Urban Agenda matters was aimed to be conducted. The idea was to unveil their insights as a secondary city in Europe, founder of Eurocities and involved in the Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees Partnership of the UAEU. However, due to time constraints and the impossibility to allocate a spot on the agenda, the interview was not finally held. A fourth interview was also sought to be pursued with Laura Liger, the Policy Analyst of DG REGIO involved in the UAEU process. Yet, again due to the condensed agenda she has, she was unable to concede an interview.

Even so, the synthesis of the two interviews conducted has provided the research with expert-based and empirical knowledge on the role Eurocities has in the UAEU. But also, a first-hand understanding of how the most successful partnership, the one in Housing, has delivered its action plan and emerged as a key figure in Housing policies at the EU level. These contributions have served to inform the case study analysis with accurate perspectives from experts highly involved in the UAEU and Eurocities. Thus, complementing the official documents and policy analysis reports of Eurocities and the EC.

(II) Applied Policy Cycle Model

For the case study analysis, a theoretical approach based on Howlett and Giest's Policy Cycle model is applied. This model has five stages, namely: agenda setting, policy formulation, decision-making, implementation, and policy evaluation. For this research, the five stages are converted into four which are; agenda-setting, negotiation/decision-making, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. The policy cycle model is reframed to better reflect the role

of Eurocities, as a European cities network, in the UAEU policy process, from its definition to its latest refreshing stage.

The main goal has been to organize Eurocities’ contributions and actions within the UAEU, dividing them into the different stages of the policy process this framework entangles. Therefore, the above-mentioned four phases have constituted the basis of the final analysis that represents the central locus of this research. They have enhanced the comprehension of the participation of Eurocities in the complex organizational structure and functioning of the Urban Agenda. Though, in order to have a better understanding of Eurocities’ role, inputs, and actions, an explicative table defining the different phases has been elaborated.

Overall, this methodology provides a comprehensive analysis of the role Eurocities has within the UAEU scheme and how this can support or help cities and local entities to participate and elevate their interests and necessities to higher levels of governance in the EU structure. Moreover, it gives a broad overview of how strategies for sustainable urban governance are being delivered at the EU level. Tackling how the urban acquis has been expanding and transforming the way in which EU institutions perform with regard to urban policy. Lastly, this research brings an opportunity to identify the participation of Eurocities in the UAEU regarding it as a political entity displaying its activities through a policy cycle lens.

2. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The present study conveys a research and analysis of the evolution of urban governance in the EU, towards a sustainable urban governance scheme with the involvement of different levels of government. Especially, the incorporation of cities in the EU decision-making process regarding urban matters. The involvement of cities and local entities in higher stages of the policy process has been accelerating in recent decades with the proliferation, especially since the 1990s of European transnational networks. Those associations have gained great influence in the EU sphere, both at the advocacy and policymaking levels.

One of the most influential TCNs is Eurocities, which since its beginning in the 1990s has become a key urban authority to elevate its member cities’ interests to European institutions. It began by advocating and defending the interests of big secondary cities and has now been positioned as a major city advocator within the European realm. A clear example of that has been the process of definition and onset of the Urban Agenda for the EU, which represents the culmination of the trends towards an urban global age. After the introduction of SDG 11, focusing on urban matters, and the redefinition of the global priorities on sustainable urban development with the NUA launched in Quito in 2016, global authorities and institutions have reinforced its priorities. Integrated agendas seeking to fight the challenges deriving from the increasing urbanization of our societies have emerged, with the EU being the referent of those new strategies on integrated sustainable urban development.

Having this context in mind, the following section portrays a review of the most important debates and trends of thought on these matters. It shows the hypothesis against which to compare and contrast the empirical findings derived from monitoring data, reports, declarations, and official documents of EU institutions and Eurocities, as well as from the expert interviews conducted within this research. The disciplines reviewed in the academic realm reflect the multidisciplinary and multi-layered nature of the field studied, as they lay
within Social Sciences, Political Geography, European Studies, Public Policy, and Urban Policy. As such, they contribute to this research in a more accurate definition of the main concepts of reference, and in turn, inform the analytical framework focused on Eurocities' role in the UAEU.

Thus, the literature review structure starts with the main political theories explaining multi-level and multi-stakeholder participation in the EU’s urban governance, and the activities of diffusion and diplomacy of cities and urban authorities. Concretely, the theories presented are the MLG approach and the CD strand of research. Then, it continues with an analysis of the EU’s urban governance framework, informing on the evolution of urban policy, the legal scheme in which it is immersed, and the historical background and development that has happened in urban policy at the EU level with the main strategies in place for governing urban matters. As a last instance, the review finalizes with the academic debates on city networks, especially its evolution in Europe with Eurocities being the forefront city network participating within the UAEU scheme and elevating its cities' interest in a wide range of urban issues and challenges.

2.1. Multi-level governance approach

The complex landscape of urban policy and strategies definition at the EU level, has been rooted, as many authors argue, in a fragmentation process of governance. Some claim that the urban challenges we are facing need an integrated approach to governance that has to be cross-sectoral and multi-level in nature. The MLG theory has been at the forefront of EU research, throughout the last decades -since the 1990s-, explaining the policymaking and decision-making processes in the EU. For Marks and Hooghe, who represent the main authors in the MLG literature, the emergence of this form of governance can be traced back to the post-1987 Single European Act era, when integration became steadily pronounced finding European solutions to problems that were previously addressed nationally. Hence, many definitions have appeared referring to this theory that includes the participation of different actors, at varied layers of governance.

The intersection between two axes or dimensions, the vertical and the horizontal, has been a key aspect of this MLG account. Thus, portraying the vertical one as the interdependence of governments at different territorial levels or cooperation between tiers of government, while defining the horizontal one as the growing interdependence between public and non-public actors or, between “Brussels” and cities (including their representatives in TCNs and civil society organizations).

Another relevant feature highlighted by MLG scholars is the dispersion of authority, linked to the retreat of the state theory, and the changing governance scheme this phenomenon has produced. This dispersion is regarded in the vertical and horizontal dimensions of MLG, but
also as a “polity-creating” process in European integration, in which nation-states monopolies have become diluted by supranational institutions (the EU) and by the inclusion of sub-state and private actors in the governance scheme\(^1\). Hence, as Caponio puts it “(1) different levels of government are (...) involved; (2) non-governmental actors at different levels are also involved; and (3) the relationships defy existing hierarchies (...) [taking] the form of non-hierarchical networks based on cooperation and consensus building”\(^2\). Following this, other authors argue that the exchange is characterized by dialogue and negotiation and not, hierarchical or command relations, not separating policy-makers from policy-recipients, nor between public and private actors, but combining all actors throughout the policy process\(^3\).

Considering this characterization it can be claimed that TCNs are favored by this new mode of governance in the EU\(^4\), also that it internalizes externalities, reflecting the preferences of cities, creating legitimacy, innovation, and experimentation in the policymaking process\(^5\). According to Marks and Hooghe, there are two types of MLG, type I being more like federal systems and type II lacking a well-defined referent in real life, adding that they usually coexist in the same system\(^6\). Thus, type I represents “multi-task, territorially mutually exclusive jurisdictions in a (...) stable system (...).” and type II is a “specialized, territorially overlapping jurisdictions in a (...) flexible, non-tiered system (...).”\(^7\) Drawing on this distinction, TCNs are conceptualized as follows: within type I as “a channel of participation and involvement in EU affairs of local authorities” and in type II as enabling “local authorities to engage in a variety of policy sectors that cut across different scales” creating new authorities and political spaces\(^8\).

All in all, the EU depicts a system with multiple levels and spheres of governance (European, national, and subnational arenas), from which the Committee of the Regions (CoR) has advocated for coordinated action between these levels respecting the principles of subsidiarity, proportionality, and partnership when implementing EU policies\(^9\). MLG has,
thus, reinforced the shift of modes of governance within the EU, from government to governance\(^\text{22}\).

### 2.2. City Diplomacy: the proliferation of Transnational City Networks

City Diplomacy and city networking have attracted attention since the 1990s, gaining momentum with the European deterritorialization movement of MS internal division and the introduction of the subsidiarity principle and the partnership principle. However, the concept of city diplomacy entered the academic field in the late 2000s serving also as a background to the First World Conference on City Diplomacy in 2008\(^\text{23}\).

The most common definition is regarding CD as “the institutions and processes by which cities, or local governments (...) engage in relations with actors on an international political stage”\(^\text{24}\), advancing their interests, exerting influence, and looking for problem-solving strategies\(^\text{25}\). Traditional diplomatic channels nowadays coexist with newer informal diplomatic strands performed by sub-national actors, being them public or private institutions and organizations. It is argued that these activities result, in many instances, in agreements, collaborations, and cooperation across boundaries\(^\text{26}\) and, that it must be further developed to include non-state actors in decision-making processes to preserve the local interests\(^\text{27}\).

In this context, cities tend to be perceived as engines of growth, being entrepreneurial entities that adopt market-oriented strategies in policymaking and in their discourses aiming to achieve productivity in all their activities. In urban policy, this background is reinforced, guiding cities to join together in TCNs, from which Eurocities is the major example in the EU. The network aims to strengthen local government’s role at the EU level, and it has many of its activities funded by the EC\(^\text{28}\). Thus, Eurocities is a coordination and collaborative platform for cities “to elaborate an alternative project of European integration, counteracting the state-centric structure of the EU”\(^\text{29}\).

Thus, this modern transnationally-oriented foreign policy model aids to learn from the problem-solving strategies of others. It gives the opportunity for cities to participate in the globalization processes due to the dispersion of state power especially in the EU, “building their own subject status in this respect”\(^\text{30}\) and, constituting bilateral relations, city networking, or partnerships with a varied set of actors\(^\text{31}\). In this way, TCNs are deemed as the practice


\(^{26}\) ACUTO, M., and RAYNER, S., op. cit., note 1, p. 1148.

\(^{27}\) van der PLUIJM, R., and MELISSEN, J., op. cit., note 24, p. 33.


\(^{30}\) SURMACZ, B., op. cit., note 25, p. 16-7.

part of this CD ideology or theory. They constitute a vehicle for the collective action of cities in the international sphere, acquiring greater room for actions in all the activities they pursue, namely; marketing strategies lobbying, study visits, exchange of international best practices, etc\textsuperscript{32}.

On the other hand, the paramount importance that cities and urban authorities, such as Eurocities, have been gaining over recent decades is another example of the retreat of the state with fragmentation in global representation and the emergence of new forms of diplomacy (paradiplomacy or international municipalism). These are being exercised by cities and local authorities mostly through TCNs. It is claimed that with the last wave of globalization, at the end of the 20th century, there has been a crisis of the nation-state, with the fragmentation of the global landscape in which it operates and the incorporation of multi-stakeholder and multi-level decision-making processes\textsuperscript{33}. Furthermore, there is a consensus in academia about what this whole process has brought, a “glocalization” of the world. That is the increasing independence of cities with paradiplomatic actions mobilizing responses to global urban issues, re-scaling the configuration of states with a local perspective\textsuperscript{34}.

In the EU sphere, it has been claimed that these changing relationships between local authorities and their respective states have been part of the Europeanization process with a “proliferation and diversification of cities’ international activities in the context of globalization”\textsuperscript{35}. With the establishment of representative offices in Brussels and increasing memberships to TCNs.

All in all, the proliferation of TCNs due to the increasing will of local governments to participate in global political agendas has accelerated in recent decades. Due to the process of globalization since the late 1980s and early 1990s, and the enhanced centrality of sustainable development linked to a rapid urbanization dynamic. The emergence of global sustainable agendas, also for urban spaces, such as the UN SDGs, the Paris Agreement, and the NUA in the Habitat III Conference in 2016 has continued this trend. Cities have been organizing into networks since the early 20th century, seeking international projection and advocating for recognition of their role in global agendas\textsuperscript{36}.


\textsuperscript{33} GARCIA-CHUECA, E., “City Diplomacy in the Postmodern era: Networks flourish, territories wither?”, Rethinking the ecosystem of international city networks: Challenges and opportunities, eds. FERNÁNDEZ DE LOSADA, A., and ABDULLAH, H., Barcelona: CIDOB, 2019, pp. 103-109, p. 103.


\textsuperscript{35} BEAL, V., and PINSON, G., \textit{op. cit.}, note32, p. 303.

\textsuperscript{36} CARDAMA, M., “The emergence of new city platforms on the international stage: The imperative of reconfiguring the ecosystem of networks”, Rethinking the ecosystem of international city networks: Challenges and opportunities, eds. FERNÁNDEZ DE LOSADA, A., and ABDULLAH, H., Barcelona: CIDOB, 2019, pp. 49-56, p. 49.
Even though this is a global trend, the membership of networks since the 1990s depicts a clear Eurocentric focus, signaling the importance of the urban acquis development in the EU, incorporating initiatives in which cities have a role\textsuperscript{37}. In the early 2000s two main drivers enhanced this proliferation of city networking. As Marta Galcerán puts it, those were: “first, the realization that the competing dynamics between the main city networks were rendering them ineffective, and thus the need to overcome such rivalries and forge alliances. And second, the rise of the global environmentalist agenda, which led to the establishment of environment-specific city networks”\textsuperscript{38}. In this sense, the most relevant global networks are United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), ICLEI, and the C40. In the European continent, Eurocities is the main city network, with more than 200 cities as members.

### 2.3. Analysis of the European Union’s urban governance

As it has been mentioned in the sections above, the EU is one of the most advanced mechanisms giving access to sub-state actors and other stakeholders to its urban policy decision-making structure and programs. However, the Treaty of Rome overlooked that cities could have the possibility to interfere in local issues in the European Economic Communities (EEC), it was not until the introduction of the subsidiarity principle in 1992 (Treaty of Maastricht), that local authorities were incorporated into the EEC legal framework\textsuperscript{39}. There has been a huge evolution in this matter, with cities being now part of a specific objective for the Cohesion Policy (2021-20217) new programming period, having the aim of bringing the EU closer to its citizens.

Hence, nowadays it is widely accepted that local authorities participate in some manner in EU regulations and policies, as states or the EU alone are unable to tackle urban challenges, cities are involved in the decision-making process from an earlier stage to have better results\textsuperscript{40}. Throughout recent decades while cities have gained prominence in European urban governance, urban policy is still a formal competence of MS, having territorial cohesion as a shared issue enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty (Art. 5(c)). That is why many scholars have claimed that EU urban policy can be regarded as a set of ‘soft instruments’ and ‘micro policies’ that have an implicit character since the formal competence on this matter lay on national, regional, and local authorities of MS\textsuperscript{41}. Due to these practices, a common methodology, knowledge and EU funded programs have been launched, mostly noted in the EU structural and cohesion funds. An EU urban method or urban acquis has been created within this informal policy development since the 1990s. It has been a policy that has been consolidating although having a lack of EU formal competence in this matter, thus creating a mechanism from which to foster sustainable urban development in MS\textsuperscript{42}. The UAEU can be regarded as


\textsuperscript{39}MOCCA, Elisabetta., op. cit., note 16, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{40}MAMDOUH, V., “The City, the (Member) State, and the European Union”, Urban Geography, Vol. 39, 2018, num. 9, pp. 1435-9, [https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2018.1453453], p. 1436.


\textsuperscript{42}MEDINA, M. G., op. cit., note 5, p. 136.
an innovation of this method in which “a collaborative approach to EU policy-making” has been established.

The main concepts of this EU urban acquis are the partnership strategy, the MLG approach, and an integrated a place-based methodology. With regards to the principle of an integrated approach, which the EU institutions named Integrated Sustainable Urban Development (ISUD), it must be noted that it has been formally included in an official document in the Leipzig Charter (2007), and reaffirmed in successive declarations and publications. It can be defined as the integration of different dimensions of urban life (environmental, economic, social, and cultural) in urban development policies, combining them in all the measures promoted.

Therefore, cities, essentially through TCNs (Eurocities as the referent one), can now influence the EU policymaking by participating in the supranational sphere of decision-making, assisting intergovernmental meetings on urban matters, or giving output to UAEU developments and implementation.

2.3.1. Historical background and development

As expressed in the previous section, it was not until the 1990s that cities were starting to be included in urban policy frameworks at the EU level. In 1989, a reform of Structural Funds and a revision of the Treaty of Rome were finalized, with a focus on economic and social cohesion, launching the first Urban Pilot Projects and the first experimentation communitarian initiatives from the URBAN program. Thus, the EU urban policy began linked to projects and programs funded by structural funds. Nevertheless, within this period the Treaty of Maastricht (1992) and the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) were signed, introducing novelties of utmost importance for urban policy at the EU level. Both treaties introduced a set of principles that should be present in activities concerning spatial planning and urban policy in the EU, consolidating as such a bunch of methods of the European urban acquis. Those were: the subsidiarity principle, public-private collaboration, social cohesion and economic efficiency, sustainable development, and a local action reinforcement.

Afterward, between the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) and the Leipzig Charter Declaration (2007) the consolidation of the urban acquis occurred, moving forward toward the achievement of an EU Urban Agenda. In 1997, the EC published a communication titled “Towards an urban agenda in the European Union” with some objectives specified in 1998 in the report named “Sustainable Urban Development in the European Union: a Framework for Action.” Following these documents, considering that urban policy was developing not as a formal competence of the Union, the EC promoted informal intergovernmental ministerial meetings of MS ministers responsible for urban issues and spatial planning. In these meetings, declarations such as the Lepizig Charter or the later Pact of Amsterdam (2016) were developed.

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41 DE FRantz, M., op. cit., note 41, p. 663.
43 NOFERINI, A., op. cit., note 22, p. 72.
In the 2007-2013 period, significant declarations were approved within the intergovernmental ministerial meetings that had been taking place since 1999. In 2007 the Leipzig Charter was launched, representing a turning point for the assumption on behalf of member states of urban acquis considerations at the EU level. Later on, in the Treaty of Lisbon (2007) territorial cohesion was regarded as a shared competence between MS and the EU, stressing the subsidiarity and appropriateness principles in the division of competences. A few years later, in 2010, the Toledo Declaration was another key instance of the evolution of urban policy toward an EU Urban Agenda. On this occasion, urban and territorial development was linked to territorial cohesion, thus, integrating these aspects into this concept that was conferred as a shared competence between MS and the EU by the Treaty of Lisbon. Then, in 2011, the European Parliament (EP) presented a resolution introducing the urban dimension into cohesion policy, and the Directorate General for Regions was renamed DG Regional and Urban Policy.

Moving to the latest period, from 2014 until the establishment of the UAEU, the latest steps for achieving an EU Urban Agenda were finally articulated. Eurocities, representing one of the main TCNs at the European level published the “Strategic Framework 2014-2020: towards an EU urban agenda for cities”. The EC in July 2014, issued another communication titled “The urban dimension of EU policies – key features of an EU urban agenda”, from which then opened a consultation process that resulted in the conclusions in May 2015 “Results of the public consultation on the key features of an EU urban agenda”.

In this same year, in June, the Riga Declaration was presented providing clear steps towards the final construction of the UAEU. From this point onwards a series of forums, parallel work, and intergovernmental meetings, and informal cooperations were established, as well as consultations on the draft of the Pact of Amsterdam in early 2016, in which MS, the EC, and Eurocities, among other actors and institutions, were involved. Finally, on the 30th May 2016, the Pact of Amsterdam was agreed upon during an intergovernmental meeting, establishing the UAEU.

The following figure clearly illustrates this evolution from the late 1990s until the Pact of Amsterdam in 2016. It shows a clear picture of the urban acquis evolution at the EU level, demonstrating the increasing proliferation of urban accords and strategies.

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50DE FRANTZ, M., op. cit., note 41, p. 659.
52Ibid. p. 49.
54Ibid.
Figure 1: Milestones of the European Union Urban Policy

Source: GONZÁLEZ MEDINA, M., and FEDELI, V. (2015)\textsuperscript{56}.

Overall, the whole process reflects the complex dynamics of a multi-level framework as that, but also the difficulties in place to foster cooperation in an area in which a formal competence for the EU is not in place\textsuperscript{57}.

2.3.2. Overview of the main frameworks for governing urban matters in the EU

The frameworks that exist for governing urban matters in the EU do not lay within a proper formal urban policy. Instead, the EC uses its soft power persuasion through Cohesion Policy and its Structural Funds to incorporate the \textit{urban acquis}, which is not binding, into MS national and regional urban and territorial policies. This strategy is an implicit urban policy that incentives MS and local authorities to create integrated sustainable urban policies in their jurisdictions. As has been mentioned, there is not any legal basis within the EU treaties for urban policy, and, as such, there is not a specific Council configuration for these matters\textsuperscript{58}. However, since 1999 informal intergovernmental meetings of ministers of urban matters and spatial planning have been taking place in every Council Presidency.

Furthermore, since the Treaty of Lisbon (2007) included “territorial cohesion” as a shared competence between MS and the EU (in its article 5 (c)), the urban dimension has been strengthened. That is because Cohesion Policy has incorporated mechanisms in order to

\textsuperscript{56} GONZÁLEZ MEDINA, M., and FEDELI, V., \textit{op. cit.}, note 44, p. 12.

\textsuperscript{57} DE SANTIAGO RODRÍGUEZ, E., \textit{op. cit.}, note 53, p. 36.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid, p. 25.
introduce the *urban acquis* strategy of the Union. In the actual programming period (2021-2027) Cohesion Policy has increased until 8% the quantity of ERDF that should be spent in cities to implement integrated sustainable urban strategies, and, has created the European Urban Initiative (EUI) as an overarching scheme for all EU strategies and programs\(^5\). Moreover, the ISUD approach has now the status of a mandatory requisite instead of an optional one\(^6\). All of these shifts are framed within the objective ‘Europe Closer to its Citizens’ which is based on locally-led strategies and sustainable urban development.

Though the paramount framework redefining urban policy in the EU is represented by the UAEU. Since its launching in the Pact of Amsterdam (2016), cities have finally been given formal participation in the EU sphere, enhancing the urban mainstreaming of EU policies by coordinating early on in the decision-making process the final outcome of policies on local authorities, engaging different levels of governance and other stakeholders\(^7\). It constitutes an ‘umbrella’ for all urban initiatives at the EU level, converting urban policy into an integrated stakeholder approach, with a cross-sectoral, multi-level, and transnational nature\(^8\). It also contributes to accomplishing global sustainable agendas (SDGs, NUA, etc.) and the new partnership regulation of the EC established in 2014\(^9\).

Nonetheless, urban policy is constantly having redefinitions and new ways forward, also due to the informal character it has. A New Leipzig Charter (NLC) was adopted in 2020, during the German Presidency of the Council, which “redefined the principles of sustainable urban development in light of current frameworks and challenges” building on the experiences of the UAEU partnerships among other contributions\(^10\). In addition, the European Urban Initiative has been created within Cohesion Policy, seeking to provide support to cities, boosting capacity, knowledge, and innovation that should be transferred and scalable to solutions to urban challenges, while also supporting the UAEU and the intergovernmental cooperation on urban matters\(^11\). Considering all this scheme, the Ljubljana Agreement was signed in 2021 to advance towards a new phase of the UAEU or UAEU 2.0, incorporating the inputs of the assessment conducted in the previous phase, feedback from urban authorities, and the new urban policy guidelines.

### 2.4 Cities in EU policymaking: institutional mechanisms and city networks

Cities can elevate their interest within the EU framework through varied mechanisms within the institutional architecture of the Union. As it has been argued, the EU represents the most advanced political system in terms of acknowledging urban and local authorities' voices in the policy formulation process\(^12\). In the EP TCNs such Eurocities participate in the Intergroup

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\(5\)EUROPEAN COMMISSION. DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR REGIONAL AND URBAN POLICY, *op. cit.*, note 3, p. 48.

\(6\)GONZÁLEZ MEDINA, M., and FEDELI, V., *op. cit.*, note 14, p. 15.

\(7\)MAMADOUH, V., *op. cit.*, note 40, p. 1436; MAMADOUH, V., and van WAGENINGEN, A., *op. cit.*, note 1, p. 18.


\(10\)EUROPEAN COMMISSION. DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR REGIONAL AND URBAN POLICY, *op. cit.*, note 3, p. 9.


\(12\)NOFERINI, A., *op. cit.*, note 22, p. 76.
Urban. With regards to the EC the interaction and exchange are carried out mainly through an institutionalized setting called ‘systematic dialogue’. It is in force since 2004 and opened to TCN and local or regional associations to facilitate access to the EC. Regional and local authorities have some power in the EU sphere in the CoR which acts as the guardian of the subsidiarity principle.

Precisely, the CoR is the main platform from which cities and regions have institutionalized access and representation within the EU structure. In fact, the EU is the most advanced system in the world in terms of local and regional entities’ involvement in the policy-making process. The CoR tasks and functioning are located in articles 300, 305 to 307 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU). It is regarded as the body within the Union, together with national parliaments, acting as the guarding of the subsidiarity principle, granted since the Treaty of Lisbon with legal status in front of the EU Court of Justice (CJEU).

Furthermore, the CoR has consultative functions when the Council and the EC are designing an EU policy that affects local and regional affairs. These two bodies must obligatorily consult the CoR, not necessarily to take its suggestions as binding precepts, but to consider cities’ and regional representatives’ perspectives on the issue. Nevertheless, the importance of this body does not rely explicitly on its consultative functions, but also on its complementary activities. It regularly organizes specific collaborations with TCN and local and regional authorities hosting events, conferences, and meetings in Brussels. Even so, it has a quite fragmented representation with an unequal presence of the most influential cities and regions in the EU.

As a consequence, TCNs are the main vehicle of entrance for cities into the EU policymaking and decision-making sphere. They are defined as “formalized organizations with cities as their members”, connecting “cities directly with each other across national borders, facilitating information exchange, policy coordination and collective action (...)”. Their functions are usually divided into the vertical and the horizontal spheres of the policy process. With regards to the vertical one, competition for funding and lobbying are the key aspects, and for the horizontal one, policy learning and best practices exchange are the crucial aspects.

The phenomenon of TCNs has been proliferating since the early decades of the 20th century, nonetheless, it was not until the 1980s-1990s and the start of the urban age in the 2000s, that its increase has been bigger. During the first period, there were numerous policy changes, and processes of decentralization, while in the second moment, cities had a major role at the international level, being linked to some of the main global agendas.

69NOFERINI, A., op. cit., note 22, p. 74
70Ibid.
73CAPONIO, T., op. cit., note 12, p. 2055.
Eurocities, within this background, embodies a TCN that serves as an instrument for accessing and advancing sustainable urban policy at the EU level. A vehicle for governance considering cities' needs, problems on the ground, and tailor-made solutions or approaches to tackle them. The network was established in 1986 by six European secondary cities (Barcelona, Birmingham, Frankfurt, Lyon, and Milan), starting its formal activities in 1991\(^7\). It functions as a tool of city empowerment acting as a lobbying entity and interlocutor transforming cities’ needs in aggregated common positions, participating in European policy while making it possible\(^6\).

In sum, for many cities TCNs are necessary to acquire an international outlook and visibility, catalyzing their needs to the EU level, and influencing and implementing policies that affect them directly.

3. CASE STUDY: EUROCITIES AND THE URBAN AGENDA FOR THE EU

As has been addressed in the introductory sections of this research, the analytical section is devoted to the case study on the role Eurocities’ has within the UAEU. The following pages are going to present the main characteristics, organizational structure, and functioning of Eurocities and the UAEU. Yet, the first two sections deliver this analysis regarding them as separate institutions. The third part of this case study critically analyses the role Eurocities have had and is having within the UAEU framework, reflecting it through a Policy Cycle model. Hence, portraying the participation in different stages of the governance process.

3.1. Eurocities network as a major driver of city participation in sustainable urban governance

Eurocities is a TCN operating within the framework of Europe, but most importantly, as an association of cities advocating for more recognition of the local level and, for granting them access to EU institutions. That is why it has been defined as a trans-European city network being the main interlocutor between their member cities and upper levels of governance in the EU.

Member cities have access to it on a voluntary basis, acting with coordination activities throughout the organizational structure of the network. Both in a horizontal and vertical manner, having a space for dialogue, capacity-building, knowledge exchange, and a lobbying platform towards EU institutions. This city association represents the interests of big capitals and secondary cities in Europe, allowing them to have direct participation in the EU urban governance process. Therefore, it constitutes an urban interest group with a presence and voice in Brussels, from which member cities benefit having straightforward access to EU dynamics, institutions, and developments.

An example of the incentives that move cities in Europe to join the network was explained by Michaela Kauer, the Head of the Brussels Office of the city of Vienna. She argued that the city decided to become a member of Eurocities for the following reasons:

\(^{7}\)VERHELST, T., *op. cit.*, note 41, p. 79-80.

“We decided to join in 1995 at the time when Austria joined the European Union, so that was a parallel process. Austria joined the European Union and Vienna joined Eurocities. And of course, it was because we clearly said, if we are joining the European Union, this is adding another layer of governance in the things that we need to observe as a city. And how can we be agile on the European level? It is, of course, in the framework of networks. So we did two things. I mean, we've always been a member of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR). We've always been involved in bilateral and multilateral networks, organizations (...). But of joining the EU added a little bit of new content (...). So in fact, you have a new layer in the political-administrative system. And you account for that by joining organizations like Eurocities. Because you think they are a good platform, both for exchange but also for policy influence, and also for project work.”

She also added that the idea was and is to reinforce already existing relationships and to profit from a direct influence on the EU institutions.

Nevertheless, Eurocities is much more than an interest group or lobbying organization for cities. The majority of its initiatives are funded by EC programs and funds. Since the network seeks to embody its action plans and strategies within broader EU strategies, it obtains much of its activities funding from those EU opportunities. It uses its urban expertise, provided by member cities and by its broad experience in sustainable urban development over the years, as a resource for representing cities’ interests.

Thus, Eurocities’ origin, mission, vision, and goals are going to be provided, in order to understand the defining traits of the network. Its organizational structure is also explained to better reflect the institutional working framework of this TCN.

3.1.1. Origin, mission, vision, and goals

Eurocities is a pan-European organization of municipalities, which has also been referred to as a trans-European city network. It was formally funded in 1989, but it did not establish an office or headquarters in Brussels until 1991. This association, constituted under Belgian law, is the result of a pact in the framework of the ‘Cities as Engines for Economic Growth’ conference held in Rotterdam in 1986. In this framework, six big ‘secondary cities’ formed an alliance. These cities were Barcelona, Birmingham, Frankfurt, Lyon, Milan, and Rotterdam. The term secondary cities mean that they are ranked as second cities in the national hierarchy of cities after the capital city. The aim was to create a network, building on previous town twinnings between those cities, that could foster better coordination upon EU-related activities.

Hence, from the beginning, Eurocities was materialized “as an instrument to redress the EU’s failure to develop a coherent policy framework in response to the joint problems European cities [were] facing such as urban deprivation, unemployment, economic recession, aging population, and environmental degradation”. The idea was to exchange information and to elevate cities’ interests into the EU sphere. The purpose was two-fold, to achieve a better consideration for cities in the EU landscape while giving urban expertise to improve the effect of EU urban initiatives in those cities.

Therefore, in 1991, Eurocities was formally structured. The city association was granted with an EU RECITE Programme funding that enable it to establish a Secretariat in Brussels,

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77Interview with Michaela Kauer, undertaken on March 29th 2023.
78PAYRE, R., op. cit., note 76, p. 267.
79NIERDERHAFNER, S., op. cit., note 32, p. 386.
81Ibid, p. 81.
facilitating the urban expertise exchange between those cities and being closer to the EU institutions. From this point onwards, cities start joining the organization, acquiring a broad transnational nature, but based on the European continent. The institutionalization process began, with four of the six founding cities playing a major role in this evolution: Barcelona, Birmingham, Frankfurt, and Lyon.

To date, Eurocities is a network of more than 200 cities in 38 European countries, that represents 130 million people. Over the years has been increasing its membership, revealing itself as a tool for the empowerment and visibility of cities that seek to influence EU policy-making processes, especially those related to sustainable urban development. And, like many other city networks, bases its revenues upon the entrance fees of its members, who have to pay an annual membership fee of approximately 10,000 euros. Formally, the organization has full-rights members (cities of more than 250,000 inhabitants) and associated members (smaller cities with the right to participate in working groups and forums).

All in all, Eurocities is one of the most important lobbying organizations in the EU context, having great benefits from its influence activities and participation in the EU daily-live dynamics. It also provides information and technical expertise to draft legislation or strategies to the EC, since cities know what is technically feasible in respect of specific policy objectives or aims. The TCN is directed by specifically-agreed goals and strategic objectives, which derive from a clear vision and mission established in a joint statement by all the members and the Secretariat. The main principle is to direct participation of the cities in the network’s activities working to ensure a good quality of life for all, as the central vision of the organization. As Pietro Reviglio, Policy Advisor on Governance at Eurocities, explains:

“The main goal, of course, is to make sure that cities are good partners of European institutions, and that they can contribute to the EU priorities. But at the same time, also that the European level understands what are the challenges for cities, what are their needs (...)”

Henceforth, the mission of Eurocities is to strive for a European sphere where cities are real partners with the EU, creating a better future for all European citizens. Moreover, they advocate for the direct inclusion of cities in European decision-making being, at the same time, direct receivers of European funds. As it is mentioned on Eurocities website, the tools to accomplish these objectives are advocacy, representing cities at the EU level, and giving insights by monitoring and reporting back to cities regarding EU developments, funding opportunities or trends that affect them. Furthermore, they facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experiences with a best-practice sharing strategy. Finally, they pursue training activities in order to build the capacity to tackle nowadays and future urban challenges.

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82 HEINELT, H., and NIEDERHAFNER, S., op. cit., note 68, p. 179.
83 PAYRE, R., op. cit., note 76, p. 263.
86 HEINELT, H., and NIEDERHAFNER, S., op. cit., note 68, p. 175.
88 Interview with Pietro Reviglio, undertaken on February 17th 2023.
89 About us. Eurocities website, op. cit., note 84.
With regards to Eurocities’ goals and strategic objectives, this table shows the present crucial aim the organization has set up. Having six main goals and an internal goal within Eurocities. Each goal has specific commitments that are sought to be achieved.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Eurocities’ goals and strategic objectives</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal 1: People take part in an inclusive society</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Fight urban poverty and social exclusion</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Ensure access to adequate and affordable housing</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Facilitate the inclusion of refugees, migrants, ethnic minorities and people with diverse backgrounds</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Ensure quality and inclusive education</td>
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<td>5. Deliver quality public services, accessible to all</td>
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<td>6. Support inclusive local labour markets</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goal 2: People progress in a prosperous local economy</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Stimulate the creation of quality jobs</td>
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<td>2. Manage disruptive economic business models and trends</td>
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<td>3. Promote the attractiveness of cities for people, business and investments</td>
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<td>4. Tackle mismatches in local skills and future needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Support the transition to a circular economy</td>
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<td>6. Strengthen sustainable mobility within and beyond cities</td>
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<td>Goal 3: People move and live in a healthy environment</td>
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<td>1. Promote accessible and clean water</td>
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<td>2. Ensure clean air</td>
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<td>3. Reduce noise pollution</td>
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<td>4. Manage the collection, recycling and reduction of waste</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Promote safe, connected and sustainable urban mobility</td>
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<td>6. Support the transition towards clean fuels and vehicles</td>
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<td>7. Support urban food systems</td>
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<td>Goal 4: People make vibrant and open public spaces</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Enhance cultural policies and spaces for inclusive urban development</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Promote culture as a tool for social sustainability</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Regenerate and design open and inspiring public spaces for and with people</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Enhance green areas and biodiversity in urban planning</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Strengthen safety and security in public spaces</td>
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<td>Goal 5: City governments address global challenges</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Fight climate change and enable the energy transition</td>
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<td>2. Tackle rising inequalities</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Drive digital transformation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goal 6: City governments are fit for the future</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Promote innovative city government and administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Ensure the financial sustainability of cities</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Manage the use of disruptive technologies to transform public services</td>
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<td>4. Strengthen public participation in decision-making</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Explore strategic partnerships and the co-creation of public services</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Promote gender equality and fight all discrimination</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Plan for the cities of the future</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internal Goal: EUROCITIES is run effectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Be the European go-to-network on urban matters</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Develop a productive working relationship with external stakeholders: business, academia and civil society</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Ensure good governance for decision making and activities</td>
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</table>

Source: Own elaboration from Internal Eurocities document Eurocities Working Group workplans 2023 Urban Agenda for the EU. Eurocities Working Group Urban Agenda. [Internal document].

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These goals serve Eurocities as an overarching scheme that guides its participation in activities and programs. An example of that is its involvement in the UAEU which is included for Eurocities in the following areas with its assigned objectives.

- Prosperous cities (circular economy)
- Innovative city governments (metropolitan areas governance)
- Multi-level governance

Thus, the UAEU is a project facilitating the achievement of the goals in every mentioned area, contributing to the general strategic aims of Eurocities.

### 3.1.2. Organizational structure

Eurocities is a network that operates with regard to a strict membership policy, which divides the network into four types of members. On the one side, there are the full members, which represent authorities of cities with an international outlook and at least 250,000 inhabitants. On the other side, a category is devoted to associate members who constitute major cities with a population over 250,000 but that reside outside the EU. The third type of membership is represented by organizations and cities that are not eligible for the other two categories, and can only participate in the forums but not join as official members. Finally, the fourth category is dedicated to business partners or non-profit organizations that provide support to the network and participate in its activities.

The network has both, top-down and bottom-up, processes inside its organizational structure, with institutionalized defined bodies that enable a coordinated response and functioning of the organization. The bottom-up response articulates aggregated common positions arising from the internal dynamics of the network. Since, as has been mentioned before in this paper, Eurocities incorporates cities’ demands and needs in all its interventions and joint statements. Thematic forums and working groups are the bodies representing these bottom-up dynamics.

On the other hand, the top-down strand of bodies is tasked with informing with activities to member cities on EU-relevant developments, policies, and dynamics. These are the Executive Committee and the permanent Secretariat established in the Brussels office, having a Chief Executive Officer and a Brussels dedicated staff. The Brussels office, through its resolutions and contact meetings, is the body that maintains contact with EU institutions, being in charge of advancing and keeping in touch with urban issues within the EU. Therefore, this central office “organizes the circulation of information and its staff act as interpreters, selecting certain exchanges between cities and turning them into the kind of demands that can be addressed to European institutions.” It also gives advice to Eurocities’ members on administrative and bureaucratic procedures.

Moreover, an important body of the organizational form of Eurocities is the Annual General Meeting. It is one of the central governing frameworks of the network, along with the Executive Committee, the Presidency, and the Chief of the Brussels office and its staff members. This Annual General Meeting takes place every year organized by one of the

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92 PAYRE, R., *op. cit.*, note 76, p. 266.  
member cities, in November, and is always preceded by a conference based on a specific theme. Within this meeting, all members and cities of Eurocities attend (having one vote each) as it represents the highest body of the organization. In this space, the Executive Committee and the President of Eurocities are elected, the latest having the responsibility to embody the external representation of the network.

Consequently, considering this structure, the following figure illustrates in a schematic way the main governing bodies, as well as the horizontal (bottom-up) bodies of Eurocities.

**Figure 2: Eurocities’ organizational structure**


The Executive Committee is elected every three years and is the main governing organ of Eurocities, consisting of 12 members and including a President, a Vice-President, a Secretary and a Treasurer. The body meets twice a year and is guided by the decisions undertaken in the Annual General Meeting for deciding upon the main political directives and financial affairs of the network. It is also the body tasked with the appointment of the Chief Executive Officer, the head of the Brussels office. In addition to the Executive Committee, there are six thematic forums or committees in which cities that are interested can participate. These committees are governed by one city which is elected every three years, in charge of the operational development of the committee and organizing meetings, usually four per year.

In the table below the composition and governance of the present Executive Committee and Forum Chairs of Eurocities is outlined.
Table 2: Composition of Eurocities’ Executive Committee and Forum Chairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Executive Committee</th>
<th>Forum Chairs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Twelve elected cities and their mayors. It is the highest Committee that runs the network.</td>
<td>Six Forum chairs leading the thematic work, are represented by the deputy mayors of the cities in charge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florence, Leipzig, Warsaw, Ghent, Barcelona, Braga, Tallinn, Nantes, Oslo, Rotterdam, Stockholm, and Vienna.</td>
<td>- Culture (Dresden)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Economic Development (Helsinki)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Environment (Porto)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Digital (Barcelona)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Mobility (Toulouse)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Social Affairs (Utrecht)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own elaboration, based on Eurocities website\(^{102}\).

Besides these governing bodies, over 40 or more working groups are set up due to the necessity to meet in smaller spaces than those provided by the thematic committees. They constitute subdivisions of the thematic forums and focus on specific policy issues. The building process is executed by a leading city interested in a topic, that mobilizes partners within a thematic forum and organizes the cooperation of the working group. In these smaller environments, the aim is to exchange good practices and develop expert knowledge. Thereby, they are the central mechanism from which the production of Eurocities’ common policy positions is developed\(^{103}\). The leading city collects a variety of opinions and reconciles views to prepare a working group position paper delivered to the relevant thematic committee\(^{104}\). This is the one deciding to transfer the paper only to members and externals interested in the topic, or if has to be distributed generally passing it to the Executive Committee. In this latter case, a political position paper is usually released on the issue if it concerns important aspects of the European political agenda\(^{105}\). Furthermore, it can be addressed in the Annual General Meeting if deemed as such by the Executive Committee.

Although Eurocities is a TCN in which membership is voluntary and member cities have an important role in elevating political positions, it also has a clearly organized institutional structure. These governing bodies enable the top-down and bottom-up coordinated activities of the network, incorporating its member cities' needs and expertise in all their joint policy positions.

### 3.2. The Urban Agenda for the EU (UAEU)

The UAEU is regarded as the culmination process of this EU urban acquis. The latter represents the integration of cross-sectoral policies affecting urban spaces that have been solidified after decades of urban knowledge and strategy accumulation. Therefore, the UAEU is aimed to be the framework where these cross-sectoral urban policy issues are displayed, creating a space for innovation and urban mainstreaming.

In a broad sense, urban policy, as regarded by the EU, encompasses sustainable development and territorial cohesion. Thus, the UAEU is framed within the premises of the Leipzig Charter (now the New Leipzig Charter), the Territorial Agenda 2030, and the Ljubljana

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\(^{102}\)Executive leadership [Online]. Eurocities webpage. [Accessed February 2022]. Available at: https://eurocities.eu/governance./


\(^{104}\)Ibid.

\(^{105}\)Ibid.
Agreement. All these agreements and declarations are part of the EU urban method mentioned above. Though, the UAEU is designed to go further as it also encompasses the principles of the European Green Deal among other big EU policy frameworks that are not, per se, related to the EU urban strategies. In fact, it is a soft policy mechanism due to its non-binding nature. It is designed not to create unnecessary costs, with the goal to coordinate already existing funds and programs. Moreover, it is based on multi-level and multi-stakeholder partnerships as the main implementation tool, in this way fostering a bottom-up and plural perspective to the governance process. The idea is to enhance urban innovation and peer learning from experiences on the ground, considering urban needs by giving cities a place in EU urban governance.

The introduction of this rationale as a way forward to establish the UAEU in 2016, was portrayed in the Riga Declaration (2015), which highlighted that the UAEU had “to improve the existing legal framework with an urban impact and to use the existing structures instead of creating new ones at the EU level, in order to foster more effective policies in support of sustainable and integrated urban development”\textsuperscript{106}. Furthermore, it established that it should aim “for integrated and place-based policies adaptable to different needs of urban areas and their inhabitants, making the most of the territorial potential across Europe”\textsuperscript{107}. In this regard, it set the ground for the main principles that were later translated into the Pact of Amsterdam (2016), the agreement that gave birth to the UAEU.

For the EU the UAEU is the strategy to comply with international agendas such as the UN SDGs, the Paris Agreement, or the NUA. It has 3 main goals; to set the agenda for cities within the EU, to ensure better coherence in European policies concerning cities, and to ensure that substantive issues which are important for cities are put together\textsuperscript{108}. These objectives are pursued through a variety of cross-cutting issues defined in the Pact of Amsterdam. The following table presents them.

\textsuperscript{107}Ibid.
The framework is, therefore, conceived as a space for urban dialogue and action, building transformations with a pluralist perspective, incorporating all the actors that are willing and that should be involved in the process to ensure an impactful outcome and delivery of partnerships actions. One of the most important outcomes achieved has been the extrapolation of the UAEU configuration to MS, where many national, regional, and local urban agendas have emerged in order to apply the main premises of the consolidated EU urban acquis.

3.2.1. Initial stage: launching and development in the first phase (2016-2021)

The initial stage of the UAEU is characterized by its launching in 2016, the development of the pilot partnerships, and the initiation of new ones considering the priority themes established. Furthermore, the organizational structure and the institutional setting were set up. The end of this period starts with the assessment conducted by the EC in 2020 on the first three years of development. This marks the starting point for the negotiations of the UAEU 2.0 that starts in 2021.

Urban Ministers established the operational framework of the Urban Agenda for the EU in the Pact of Amsterdam, agreed upon in the Informal Ministerial Meeting of EU Ministers on Urban Matters on 30th May 2016. Within this non-binding political document, the objectives and scope of the UAEU were established. Also, partnerships as the key delivery mechanism, as stated in the document, were defined and explained, along with the participation of member states, urban authorities (Eurocities, CEMR), the European Commission, the European Parliament, the European Investment Bank, civil society, knowledge institutions, and business organizations. Furthermore, a ‘Working Programme of the Urban Agenda for the EU’ was released providing an in-depth description of the Operational Framework of the UAEU outlined in the Pact.

In the Pact a list of objectives and pillars of implementation were also provided. As well as the priority themes from which partnerships were going to be created, their working method,
and their desired outputs. With regard to the objectives, this table illustrates the main premises.

**Table 4: Objectives of the Urban Agenda for the EU**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. “(...) to realize the full potential and contribution of Urban Areas towards achieving the objectives of the Union and related national priorities in full respect of subsidiarity and proportionality principles and competences”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. “to establish a more effective integrated and coordinated approach to EU policies and legislation with a potential impact on Urban Areas and also to contribute to territorial cohesion by reducing the socioeconomic gaps observed in urban areas and regions”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. “(...) to enable Urban Authorities to work in a more systematic and coherent way towards achieving overarching goals (...) making EU policy more urban-friendly, effective and efficient”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. “[it]will not create new EU funding sources, unnecessary administrative burden, nor affect the current distribution of legal competences and existing working and decision-making structures and will not transfer competences to the EU level (in accordance with Articles 4 and 5 of the Treaty on European Union)”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Own elaboration, based on *Urban Agenda for the EU ‘Pact of Amsterdam’* (2016)\(^{110}\)

Building on these objectives, the three pillars that were agreed to be followed in all UAEU activities were: Better Regulation, Better Funding and Better Knowledge. The first one seeks to implement in a more effective and coherent way existing EU policies, instruments, and legislations\(^{111}\). The funding one aims at identifying, supporting, integrating, and improving the funding sources to help urban actors access and understand them\(^{112}\). The latter pretends to build a hard base of knowledge on urban issues with an exchange of expertise and best practices\(^{113}\). Furthermore, the guiding principle that should be followed in this process is an integrated sustainable development approach.

Moving on to the thematic partnerships definition and priority topics establishment, it must be reminded that this is the main delivery tool of the UAEU. The one that displays this multi-level and multi-stakeholder nature and integrated approach in its most enlightened manner.

First of all, notwithstanding the multi-level and pluralist character of the UAEU setting, it was established that a partnership can begin only with a member state recommendation. Then, members could join the group (urban authorities such as Eurocities or the CEMR, member states, DGs from the EC, observers, etc.). The duration of each partnership was set up to be of three years in which, in the end, the result should be presented to the governing body of the UAEU (the Directorates General on Urban Matters meeting), and its continuation or termination should be decided by the partners. A proper formal funding source was not

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\(^{112}\) Ibid.

\(^{113}\) Ibid.
established, leaving the partnership members the decision on which EU funding and instruments to use for every specific action. Participation in partnerships was deemed voluntary, having those between 15 and 20 members. General phases and deliverables of partnerships were established in a strict order; stocktaking, preparatory actions (identifying bottlenecks and potentials), defining the objectives and deliverables, implementation of the action plan, and evaluation of the partnership. Regarding these defined phases, Pietro Reviglio mentioned that:

“(…) within the partnership, the coordinator has a strong role. And usually, there are two coordinators. So usually is one city and one member state, but it varies. They meet and they basically agree on a joint action plan. And, of course, there are different discussions about needs, assessments, and things like that. But then there is an action plan with specific actions, that then the partnership members will have to deliver, and different partnership members will lead on different actions. Then each action will have a deliverable. (...) So this is the way that the Urban Agenda partnerships deliver their work.”

For the definition of the priority themes, a list was established based on a survey conducted among Member States and other urban authorities and representatives (Eurocities being one of them). In the Pact, 12 priority themes were finally articulated. Different waves of partnerships were launched from 2016 until 2018, following the Council Presidencies. In this figure, the launching rounds and the thematic partnerships are depicted.

Figure 3: Thematic partnerships launched per Presidency


Among the pilot partnerships, the one devoted to Housing was the most successful. Michaela Kauer explained how important it was for the involvement of affordable housing perspectives, strategies, and the mainstreaming of social housing policies in the EU sphere. She added, that for her the most important thing is that nowadays urban stakeholders and

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115 Interview with Pietro Reviglio, undertaken on February 17th 2023.
117 Interview with Michaela Kauer, undertaken on March 29th 2023.
authorities in Europe have tools and spaces to exchange best practices and obtain information on Housing policies. She claimed that

“everybody's asking for recommendations on good housing policies that we have developed. And if Ukraine is now looking for a recovery program, and what they are going to do on housing when whenever peace is there, again, they are asking for us to consult them. And we are still consulting other cities, cities associations, to do good Housing policy.”

Therefore, this example demonstrates the positive outcomes of partnerships work in the UAEU framework.

Furthermore, in the Pact there was also a call upon the direct involvement of Eurocities, the CEMR, and other Urban authorities to actively participate in the development of the UAEU, especially in partnerships. Yet, the EC was also asked to play an active role in facilitating its implementation within existing budgets and providing technical assistance. On the other hand, the European Parliament (EP) was referred to encourage cooperation between the Committee on Regional Development and the URBAN Intergroup, or other relevant committees within the EP. Finally, the European Investment Bank (EIB) was demanded to promote investments in UAEU projects as well as to provide financial assistance and advice to partnerships.

However, even if there was involvement from EU institutions and bodies, especially from the EC DG REGIO, one of the most important aspects of the UAEU is its governance and organizational structure. These, supposedly, as stated in the Pact, are the bodies facilitating the UAEU entangled, portraying the multi-level and multi-stakeholder meetings outside the partnerships that permit to advance, evaluate, and implement the strategic objectives having regard to the three established pillars. Consequently, the organizational governance structure that was established in the ‘Working Programme of the Urban Agenda for the EU’ within the Pact, is the one illustrated in this figure. But, an important remark that should be borne in mind is that in the original planning, the Urban Agenda Technical Preparatory Group (UATP) was not foreseen. This body was established afterward, as a necessary group to give technical support and expert guidance to the other governing bodies on the institutional structure.

During the Estonian Presidency in 2017, the Directorate General on Urban Matters (DGUM) tasked the Presidency to launch a small group of technical experts to prepare and draft documents for the Urban Development Group (UDG) on the implementation of the UAEU. Thus, the UATP acts as a non-decision-making body providing technical advice and assistance to the Presidency of the Council, the UDG, and the DGUM. It is also worth mentioning that within these governing bodies, the UDG is in charge of partnership management and implementation follow-up.

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118Ibid.
122Ibid, p. 15.
Figure 4: Governance structure of the Urban Agenda for the EU


The DGUM meets once per Presidency, as well as the UDG which is the organ that prepares and informs the meetings of the above-mentioned high-ranking body. With regards to the UATPG, it meets twice per Presidency. These governing bodies are also complemented with a yearly meeting of EU Ministers responsible for Urban Matters and Territorial Cohesion, to assess and advance the intergovernmental cooperation in these matters, also in the UAEU125.

Finally, the Technical Secretariat supports all the partnerships based on a contract managed by DG REGIO, which is actively engaged also in all partnerships and supervises the work of this Secretariat126. This body is conformed by the commissioned entity coordinating it, Econys (an external consultative stakeholder), the European Knowledge Network (EKN), and Eurocities127.

As mentioned at the start of this section, after the framework was set up, the bodies and partnerships began to work on the specific thematic priorities within the action plans. It was not until 2020 that the EC produced an overall Assessment of the first three years of the UAEU development. This document ignited the process toward a renewed project.

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127Ibid.
3.2.2. Present stage: redefinition and setting of renewed priorities (2021-now)

The process of renovation was initiated right after the publication of the Commission’s Assessment document in 2020. It was the start of the roadmap negotiations toward the NLC (November 2020) during the German Presidency and, for the Ljubljana Agreement and its Multiannual Working Programme (MWP) in November 2021 during the Slovenian Presidency. These documents settled the basis for the reshaped UAEU 2.0, which from 2021 onwards was redefined with more targeted priorities, new commitments, and a changed structure. Henceforth, nowadays a transition phase is in place, aiming for the UAEU to deliver efficient results in a timely manner, respecting the competencies and responsibilities of all actors involved. Furthermore, a European Urban Initiative (EUI) has been set up by the EC, as a space to interlink Cohesion funds, urban programs, initiatives, and strategies such as the UAEU and URBACT projects. In this way, a more connected EU urban environment is aimed to be created.

The NLC, launched on November 30th, 2020, during the Informal Ministerial meeting of EU Ministers of Urban Matters, considers the UAEU as the key vehicle or mechanism from which to implement the principles agreed in the renewed Charter. It stands as a crucial document to restate the principles of sustainable urban development, adapting them to the renewed frameworks and challenges in this field\textsuperscript{128}. It is for this reason that it is informed and inspired by the Urban Agenda experiences. But also by its multi-level, multi-stakeholder governance and implementation method through partnerships, including those principles into the overarching frame of urban matters and spatial planning that the NLC represents. The integrated approach and the link of the EU Cohesion Policy with the main premises of the SDGs are included as well. The document has annexed implementing guidelines for the NLC, seeking to connect the ambitions of all urban strategies and programs within the Union. Reinforcing also the role of the UAEU in the whole policymaking and decision-making process.

Besides, demands voiced by Eurocities were included in the Charter and translated into the Implementing Document. The goal was to create a real impact from the work done in the UAEU partnerships. Most importantly, to design a framework in which a proper mainstreaming of UAEU outputs, innovations, and experiences could be achieved. Thus, the document also specifies that the new EUI has to interlink the outcomes of the UAEU with urban-related Cohesion policy programs and beyond, such as Horizon projects, or the URBACT community\textsuperscript{129}.

Consequently, as has been mentioned, with the launching of the NLC in 2020, the basis for the UAEU reshaping phase was established. After a year of negotiations, discussions, and inputs to the Portuguese and the Slovenian Presidencies, the Ljubljana Agreement was finally articulated in the Intergovernmental Ministerial meeting of EU Ministers of Urban Matters in November 2021. It represents the result of a roadmap negotiation process in which not only the EC or member states were involved, but also urban authorities had a remarked role. That is the case of Eurocities, which participated actively, as is going to be shown in the following

\textsuperscript{128}EUROPEAN COMMISSION. DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR REGIONAL AND URBAN POLICY.,\textit{op. cit.}, note 3, p. 9.

\textsuperscript{129}EUROPEAN COMMISSION. DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR REGIONAL AND URBAN POLICY.,\textit{op. cit.}, note 3, p. 26.
sections of this paper. Moreover, in addition, a MWP for the development of the future UAEU 2.0 was included in the final document.

The Ljubljana Agreement is a political document that seeks to increase the effectiveness of the UAEU, considering the founding principles of the Pact of Amsterdam, but also of the NLC\textsuperscript{130}. It advocates for more technical support and legal advice through a new Secretariat for the Urban Agenda, as well as to better target and connect the priority themes encapsulated in partnerships to link them with the EU policy cycle\textsuperscript{131}. Having regards to the inputs and recommendations voiced during the negotiation phase of the document, and the Assessment of the EC, the weaknesses identified are translated into new commitments. In this sense, a need for Better Regulation is highlighted, as well as an uneven involvement of partners in the previous phase, advocating for a higher implication of other EC DGs and Member States in partnerships. In the MWP, a way to reinforce the Better Regulation strand is incorporated with the obligation to produce an \textit{ex-ante} assessment of potential new partnerships to identify concrete actions to deliver and propose a more targeted Action Plan. This was an aspect demanded by Eurocities, that seeks to make partnerships more efficient and more impact-driven.

Hence, also taking into account partnerships, in the document it is established that the 14 previous partnerships remain relevant, with two of them still finalizing the delivery of their proposed actions. Yet, there are still active partnerships that deliver on a voluntary basis, such as the one on migration and procurement. Having regards to this, the MWP adds 4 new themes to the list of priority themes “on the basis of co-creative process lead together by the Slovenian Presidency, Eurocities, CEMR, CoR, and other urban stakeholders”\textsuperscript{132}. Eurocities was the main advocator for these new themes, which are: Sustainable Tourism, Greening Cities, Food, and Cities of Equality. Thereby, the recommendation set up in the Ljubljana Agreement is that the previous partnerships and their outcomes, expertise, and innovations should still be relevant for this next phase. At the same time, new thematic focuses should be delivered to address the current challenges that cities are facing.

On the other hand, as it has been anticipated, a EUI has been also launched by the EC within the framework of the urban side of the Cohesion Policy for the 2021-2027 period. The idea is to overcome the problem of cities lacking the means and resources to deal with urban problems. But this time, by connecting EU urban initiatives in the Union and giving direct support to the UAEU partnerships to bring them the possibility to deliver their results. The legal basis of the EUI is found in Article 12 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 of the EP and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on the ERDF and on the Cohesion Fund. As it is established the initiative should enhance integrated and pluralist approaches to sustainable urban development\textsuperscript{133} and “to offer coherent support to cities to overcome the current fragmented

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{130}EUROCITIES, 12 January 2022. \textit{Brief Urban Agenda 2.0, op. cit.}, note 125, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{131}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{132}Multianual Working Programme For The Urban Agenda For The EU - The Next Generation. Agreed at the Informal Meeting of Ministers responsible for Urban Matters on 26 November 2021 in Brdo pri Kranju, Slovenia. Available at: https://www.urbanagenda.urban-initiative.eu/sites/default/files/2022-10/multianual_working_programme_uaeu_2022_2026.pdf, p. VIII.
\textsuperscript{133}EUROPEAN COMMISSION. DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR REGIONAL AND URBAN POLICY., \textit{op. cit.}, note 3, p. 26.
\end{flushright}
landscape of manifold initiatives, programs, and instruments in support of cities under Cohesion policy. Its configuration and structure are exemplified in the coming figure.

Figure 5: Main elements of the EUI intervention logic

As it is illustrated in the figure, the initiative includes two strands. Strand A supports innovative actions, and Strand B supports capacity and knowledge building, territorial impact assessments, and policy development and communication. It is precisely in this strand that support for the UAEU is given. It is thought to be mainly on strategic orientations on parameters, operational choices, and available resources under this initiative. All the orientations will consider the principles of the NLC and its Implementation document.

When it comes to the governance structure, two bodies are established: a Steering Group and a Supervisory Board. The Steering Committee is composed of a multi-level and multi-stakeholder form, with representatives of EU institutions, city associations, observers, and the technical entrusted entity for the initiative. As such, Eurocities will also be present in this directing group, providing strategic advice and being a consultative body and reference body within the initiative.

In sum, the present phase of the UAEU, also denominated as the 2.0 stage, constitutes a reassessment of the previous one. It consolidates the framework by aiming to enhance some aspects and incorporating new commitments and supportive bodies. At the end of the current EU cycle (2021-2027), another evaluation will be pursued on the new priority themes and the

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135 Ibid.
137 Ibid.
implementation of their actions. Thus, even if an improvement in the overall delivery of the initiative is aimed, we will have to wait to see the actual results.

The following section will present a more detailed explanation of the role Eurocities has had in the UAEU from its onset until the present stage.

4. CASE STUDY: THE ANALYSIS

As mentioned in the previous segments of this paper, Eurocities participates in the governance structure of the UAEU, being one of the key instigators of the UAEU since the beginning, from the preparatory works before the Pact of Amsterdam to nowadays reshaping strategy towards a UAEU 2.0. It is and has been the major TCN acting as an urban intermediary authority among its member cities and the higher levels of the UAEU structure. Besides, Eurocities’ President and representatives of its Urban Governance Team have engaged in agenda-setting, negotiation, and implementation activities of the UAEU, both providing input and feedback to the process in the governance bodies and, being members of all the partnerships within the UAEU.

In sum, Eurocities have always wished for this overarching framework to be settled in the EU, to advance towards a real involvement of cities and local authorities in urban policy-making at the EU level. Not only as receivers but as instigators of policy change. This is by applying a multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance process that seeks to incorporate the pressing needs in urban spaces towards the achievement of sustainable urban innovations. By using horizontal and vertical integrated methods, recognizing the place-based approach, incorporating spatial aspects, and, building on urban experiences of cross-sectoral policies. Hence, the UAEU is regarded by Eurocities as a way to influence European policies and processes, but also as a mechanism to implement these processes locally, enshrining the EU urban acquis into all urban actions. The main aim for Eurocities is to create a space in which intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder dialogue is in place for urban matters. A space where all actors are considered, and where integration and coordination of the whole mechanisms, Cohesion policy, and strategies of the EU urban policy is achieved.

For the purpose of identifying the detailed participation of Eurocities in the UAEU a theoretical form is used. Concretely, a reinterpretation of the Policy Cycle of Howlett and Giest model\(^\text{138}\). This framework has five stages, namely; agenda-setting, policy formulation, decision-making, implementation, and policy evaluation. For this research, the five stages are converted into four which are; agenda-setting, negotiation/decision-making, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. The policy cycle model is reframed to better reflect the role of Eurocities in the UAEU policy process, from its definition to its latest refreshing stage.

In the model referred to above, agenda-setting is the first stage in the governance process, in which there is an identification of the problem to be solved and inputs on further solutions are being put forward. Regarding the phases of policy formulation and decision-making, these are the instances in which a range of policy options are evaluated excluding infeasible choices, and ranking them to decide the favoring ones. Then, there is a negotiating procedure where a defined plan is adopted and agreed upon. Finally, policy implementation refers to the actions that put these agreed decisions into effect, concluding with the policy evaluation stage

\(^{138}\)HOWLETT, M., and GIEST, S., op. cit., note 6.
in which a monitoring process starts. This latter phase seeks to reframe the course of action in light of the results and experiences obtained from the policy actions pursued. Taking into account the mentioned model, the four stages presented in this case study encapsulate this rhetoric, by having the agenda-setting stage, the negotiation/decision-making procedure comprising the policy formulation and decision-making stages, and finally the implementation phase and the monitoring and evaluation process as last instance.

**Table 3: Reframing of the Howlett and Giest Policy-Cycle model**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agenda-setting</th>
<th>The first stage in the policy process. When the problem to be solved is identified and a variety of solutions are put forward by the participating actors.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negotiation/Decision-making</td>
<td>The instances in which a range of policy options are revised excluding infeasible options and, evaluating them to decide the favored one. It also includes the negotiating procedure when a defined plan is finally agreed upon and adopted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>In this phase actions are launched to put the agreed decisions into effect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring and evaluation</td>
<td>Refer to the reframing of the course of action in light of the results obtained within the policy process. Those results are the outcome of a monitoring process that finishes in an evaluation stage.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own illustration, based on the Howlett and Giest Policy-Cycle model definitions.

**4.1. Agenda-setting**

This phase in the context of Eurocities’ participation in the UAEU is understood as the preparatory works for its outset, and afterward, the advocacy conducted by the network throughout the first stage of the UAEU.

The UAEU was finally articulated for the impetus of the Dutch government, as in 2016 the Presidency of the Council was held by that Member State. Though, the Netherlands previously implemented a National Urban Agenda (*AgendaStad*) in 2015. This framework had the principles of multi-level and multi-stakeholder participation, as well as an integrated policy approach through city deals (very alike to UAEU partnerships). Therefore, when they finally achieved the Presidency, they get to finally launch the UAEU, building on huge support from Eurocities as a prominent advocate of it. The network had been in close contact with the Dutch government, especially the Ministry for Kingdom Affairs, since the beginning. They helped to develop the main principles, ideas, and objectives for the Pact of Amsterdam to be designed. As Pietro Reviglio argues:

“(...) the Urban Agenda started from the impetus of the Dutch government. We have been in close contact with the Dutch government at the beginning of the Urban Agenda to develop the principles, the ideas, the objectives, and so on and so forth. And so when the Pact of Amsterdam was signed and adopted by the different member states, we were there from the beginning, trying to bring the city’s perspective in these old discussions about multi-level governance.”

Hence, Eurocities actively participated in the preparatory works for the UAEU to be realized. Not only with the Dutch government but also in previous years claiming that a holistic,

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139Interview with Pietro Reviglio, undertaken on February 17th 2023.
participatory, and multi-level approach, including cities, was the most effective way to tackle urban issues. Most importantly, to develop a transition to sustainable urban development.

On the other side, the strategic position Eurocities held in the UAEU governance and institutional framing provide the network with a great platform for the inclusion of its claims and proposals. Concretely, it is inside all the governing bodies of the UAEU, both the political ones and operational and technical ones. Those are the DGUM, the UDG, the UATPG, and the Technical Secretariat. Therefore, it participates in the preparatory discussions from the bottom bodies to the higher ones. At the same time of giving support from the Technical Secretariat to partnerships work in the pursuance of their action plans. Now, within the renewed phase it has also a place in the EUI Secretariat, coordinating all the urban initiatives in this framework and giving support to the UAEU from this external point.

As has been explained in earlier sections, Eurocities constructed its advocate activities and inputs, throughout the whole UAEU onset and later development, from its member cities' demands. The coordination structure it has within the organization permits Eurocities to grasp from the Working Group on Urban Agenda, the main suggestions cities want to include in the UAEU framework. In this way, the inclusion of cities' views is achieved. Thus, Eurocities creates a space in which member cities very involved in the Urban Agenda can push their experiences and recommendations forward, for the network to elevate them at higher levels of the UAEU governance structure.

Furthermore, considering that Eurocities is present in the whole UAEU structure and development, it has also had a crucial advocator and agenda-setting role in putting forward inputs and recommendations for the UAEU 2.0 phase. It has been a key actor in the negotiations process towards the Ljubljana Agreement. These inputs will be further developed in the monitoring and evaluation section of this analysis.

4.2. Negotiation/Decision-making

The negotiation or decision-making process is the stage in which a variety of potential actions and options are considered and a final choice is decided. In this regard, Eurocities has been one of the most active actors in terms of participation in the discussion spaces of the UAEU. This role is of utmost importance for two main reasons. First of all, it has been and is immersed in the evaluation and decision-making governing frame of the Urban Agenda. Secondly, it has been a key participant in the founding principles of the Pact of Amsterdam and in the renewed priorities of the Ljubljana Agreement and its Multiannual Working Programme.

Considering the exact characteristics of the negotiation and usual activities of the UAEU bodies, a more accurate definition is going to be provided from the bottom-most technical body to the top-deciding one. That will give a clear overview of the role Eurocities has had within the decision-making procedure of the Urban Agenda.

On the one hand, the UATPG is the advisory and most technical body of the UAEU. It consists of a multidisciplinary small group of urban experts that prepare the agenda for the UDG meetings. It is the one deciding the priority themes that must be elevated to the other meetings. Consequently, it is a key organism that guides every technical decision, giving advice on the way to follow the development of the Urban Agenda. An example of the participation of Eurocities in the UATPG is seen in the development of the Ljubljana
Agreement on the following statement of the Eurocities Brief on the UAEU 2.0 (January 2022):

“Eurocities had a crucial role in the process that led to the definition of the Ljubljana Agreement. We contributed to all the intergovernmental discussions and had a key role in the Urban Agenda Technical Preparatory Group. This smaller group of experts discussed how to improve governance and delivery mechanisms, and how to select themes relevant and workable for all parties involved.”

On the other hand, the UDG discusses the orientation papers of partnerships and their progress on the ongoing actions. It does so leaning on UATPG suggestions and guidelines. The difference is that this is a much broader group than the latter. All heads of units of Member States’ ministries on urban matters are present, as well as representatives from the EU institutions involved (EC DG REGIO, the CoR, the EP, the EESC, etc.). This group also provides guiding assistance to the DGUM meeting, which is the higher body of the UAEU. The DGUM meeting is composed of the same members as the UDG but there is also the presence of the Council Presidency as co-chair with the EC representative. This is the steering group in which coordination, monitoring, and evaluating activities are pursued. But is also in charge of the selection of members of partnerships and of providing holistic feedback on the UAEU strategic objectives and priorities.

Lastly, Eurocities has also a seat in the yearly Informal meeting of Ministers responsible for Urban Matters and Territorial Cohesion. Eurocities’ President is invited to this meeting as a representative of the most influential TCN in Europe on urban matters. Hence, it is a space in which clear feedback and inputs of the whole UAEU development are given participating in discussions on the matter with high-ranking officials. In addition, to the Urban Agenda situation evaluation, there is a broad overview beyond, debating on other EU urban frameworks in place and in future paths for the cooperation on urban matters at the EU level.

4.3. Implementation

The implementation phase is the one devoted to putting previously-agreed actions, objectives, and roadmaps into effect. In the case of the UAEU, as and has been mentioned in this paper, the main delivery mechanism is thematic partnerships based on agreed priority themes. Within this process the role of Eurocities has been utterly prominent since the network was involved in all the partnerships, being an active member, promoting understanding between the parties, acting as an intermediary urban authority, and, bringing urban expertise and capacity-building activities to every partnership.

This crucial role in the implementation process of the UAEU has been recognized in the EC Assessment of 2020. It is mentioned that “umbrella organizations such as Eurocities (...) have substantially contributed to the overall functioning and implementation of the UAEU” both at the governance or coordination levels and at the operational level. Eurocities’ broad experience in urban matters and the possession of “extensive experience with coordinating pan-European networks of partners” is highlighted to justify and enhance the role of an ‘umbrella organization’ such as Eurocities in the delivery part of the UAEU.

Since the start it has embraced an active role in all the thematic partnerships, but not only the organization as such, but also its member cities most of them in charge of the coordination or

141EUROPEAN COMMISSION. DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR REGIONAL AND URBAN POLICY., op. cit., note 116, p. 47.
142Ibid.
co-coordination positions or being agile members of them. This is mentioned in the UAEU Eurocities Key Message Internal Document of March 26th, 2021 arguing that:

“Our cities have contributed [within partnerships] with substantial human resources, expertise and outreach activities to bring an urban dimension to key issues of EU policies.”

Eurocities and its member cities (especially those involved in the Working Group on Urban Agenda) have held leading positions also in specific concrete actions to improve the delivery of every objective within the Action Plans. They have helped to create synergies between participants and stakeholders in these transnational groupings with a plurality of actors of different levels of governance and varied backgrounds.

Yet, another key implementation contribution within the framework of the UAEU has been given by Eurocities in the Technical Secretariat. As explained in previous sections, this body bases its activities on a contract defined by DG REGIO. This sets the rules in which its members have to support partnerships of the UAEU and give technical and legal advice to all the governing bodies of the UAEU. This body is composed of an experienced urban consultancy firm, Ecorys, commissioned as the body coordinating the secretariat of Eurocities and the EKN as expert and knowledge parties of it. An example of the key activities undertaken by this Secretariat are the ex-ante assessments for the new thematic partnerships or, reports in specific matters required for the positive delivery of partnerships’ actions.

On that account, Eurocities holds another key position in the whole implementation and functioning structure of the UAEU. Due to its presence in every partnership and also in the Technical Secretariat, it can be regarded as the most active TCN in the Urban Agenda development.

4.4. Monitoring and evaluation

The monitoring and evaluation phase in this analysis focuses on the reshaping of the UAEU introducing new priorities and remodeling the whole structure to improve it. This new phase has been based on a complex process comprised of many meetings and negotiations within the UAEU governing bodies. In this exercise, Eurocities has been a key participant, bringing forward inputs and monitoring the results of the Ljubljana Agreement at the end.

This part of the analysis is based mainly on the empirical information obtained from the interview with Pietro Reviglio and from the revision of Eurocities’ internal documents.

Regarding the path before the Ljubljana Agreement, it was a co-creation process between all the actors involved in the UAEU. Inputs and ideas from monitoring reports and experiences lived in the previous phase were put forward in a complex and long negotiating procedure. This process was led by the Council Presidencies, the Portuguese, and the Slovenian. Eurocities bases all its contributions on the discussions held in the network’s Working Group on the Urban Agenda, accommodating in this way its member cities' suggestions into higher spheres of governance.


144 The internal documents of Eurocities have been obtained with the previous consent of the network, having access through the online site for member cities. The access has been granted by Terrassa’s City Council profile.
The main objectives that Eurocities wanted to translate into the Ljubljana Agreement were: to maintain the multi-level and multi-stakeholder nature of the Urban Agenda, incorporate cities as equal partners, set the ground for a more impactful Urban Agenda improving support and partners’ involvement and, a more targeted approach to new thematic partnerships. Furthermore, 4 priority themes were proposed to create potential partnerships that could deliver a more impact-driven mission responding to clear urban needs. For this latter issue, a set of explorative proposals on the themes were drafted in a cooperative process between Eurocities, the Slovenian Presidency, the CEMR, and the EKN. The themes identified were Sustainable Tourism, Greening Cities, Food, and Cities of Equality.

However, the most detailed inputs on the design of the Ljubljana Agreement's main priorities were put forward by Eurocities in two documents. Those are the “Eurocities’ Working Group on Urban Agenda Key Messages” of March 26th, 2021, to the Portuguese Presidency, and the “Eurocities’ Inputs on the Portuguese Presidency Proposal: Roadmap to the Ljubljana Agreement”. An account of the networks’ demands is summarized in the following table.

Table 4: Eurocities’ inputs for the Ljubljana Agreement

| Governance | - Replace the current UATPG with a Steering Group for the Urban Agenda. It should oversee workflow and strategic and programmatic issues for the Urban Agenda, acting as a preparatory group for the UDG and DGUM.  
| Priority Themes and Delivery Modes | - While the partnership-instrument remains an important and efficient method, more flexible forms of MLG modes can be envisaged, such as ad-hoc groups on certain issues.  
- An ex-ante assessment should be undertaken when deciding on the launching of new thematic partnerships.  
- Apply a Linkage Matrix System, based on EC priorities, Council agenda and the NLC.  
- Any stakeholder should be able to initiate or propose to launch a thematic partnership. |
| Implementation and Support | - More stable and dedicated support and delivery structures and procedures.  
- The result from the assessment of previous Partnerships should be considered when designing needs for the implementation and support.  
- A brief survey to UAEU coordinators/action leaders should be conducted to see into strengths and weaknesses of the support structure in the 14 first partnerships.  
- Discuss how national government and related structures can support and complement on some of the tasks attributed to the technical secretariat and commit to strong involvement. |
| External Coherence, Alignment, and Linkages | - For each thematic partnership, the linkage to current thematic EU policies is a precondition. |

146Explorative Proposals for an UAEU Thematic Partnership under the Ljubljana Agreement. Slovenian Presidency, Eurocities, CEMR and EUKN. [Internal document].
- The UAEU should be connected to EU policy-cycles and EU instruments that are potentially relevant to the issue of MLG.
- In the legislative process, an urban/regional impact assessment should become a standard procedure.
- All relevant alignments to EU-programmes or EU-funded programmes should be addressed in each Action Plan of each new partnership.
- Beyond the EU sphere, partnerships should seek a stronger link with national urban strategies as well as promote dissemination and alignment of the results of the Urban Agenda to cities that are not directly involved in the process.
- Discuss how to mainstream urban matters across EU policy areas and EC DGs, especially in the context of the EU Green Deal.

Source: Own elaboration, from Eurocities’ internal documents⁴⁷.

These inputs were given to the Presidencies and put forward in the DGUM Input Papers of the Portuguese Presidency. Those were the result of a co-creative process aimed at reflecting the proposals and debates on the questions formulated in the scoping paper “UAEU Roadmap to Ljubljana”. They were validated by the UDG on March 24th, 2021. These discussions were held in the space of the UATP from which Eurocities is a participant.

On the other hand, from the internal perspective of Eurocities, the Working Group on Urban Agenda prepares every year a Workplan document in which the objectives for the upcoming year are set up. Besides, the way to achieve them is specified, as well as the main achievements of the previous year. From the 2022 document, the successes of 2021 can be obtained. Those were:

- Contributed to the successful adoption of a forward-looking Ljubljana Agreement which is in line with cities’ needs on the ground, sets the ground for the post-2020 urban agenda, and recognizes Eurocities role.
- Contributed to the prioritization of new themes that are strongly aligned with cities’ needs.
- Facilitated a dialogue between cities involved in the various partnerships and helped capitalizing their work and mainstream it in various EU initiatives.⁴⁸

In the same line, the Workplan document for 2023 considered that the main achievements of 2022 were:

- Contributed to the roll-out of new themes – sustainable tourism and greening cities - that are strongly aligned with cities needs.
- Contributed to the Eurocities position on the future of the Urban Agenda and the roll-out of the European Urban Initiative.⁴⁹

Finally, in 2022, Eurocities launched an internal report titled “General Assessment of the Ljubljana Agreement”. In this document, the strong/positive points and the weaker points from Eurocities’ perspective of the final Agreement can be identified. In the upcoming table, there is a summary of them.

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⁴⁸Towards the Ljubljana Agreement on the Urban Agenda for the EU: A contribution and key messages from the Working Group Urban Agenda of EUROCITIES. op. cit., note 143.
⁴⁹Ibid.
### Table 5: Eurocities’ General Assessment of the Ljubljana Agreement

| Positive Points | - The Better Regulation pillar will be strengthened by providing for expertise support to the Partnerships and other forms of cooperation. Specifically for better alignment with the regulatory landscape and policy cycles.  
| - While addressing the Better Funding pillar the UAEU will focus on building capacity, increasing technical expertise and knowledge for local, regional and national authorities with regard to the better uptake and combination of different funding and also financing instruments.  
| - The participation from sectoral DGs of the European Commission and relevant national or regional ministries is crucial and is ensured, *inter alia* by involving them in the set-up and work of the Partnerships and other forms of cooperation.  
| - New themes should be aligned with the New Leipzig Charter principles and dimensions (the just, green and productive city and the transformative power of cities for the common good); EU policy and global priorities and initiatives (European Green Deal, European Pillar of Social Rights, European Digital Strategy, the Renovation Wave, Cohesion policy, 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, New Urban Agenda, etc.), and based on the identified needs of cities via bottom-up approaches.  
| - A balanced composition of Partnerships must continue to be ensured, in terms of geographical and institutional balance, between representatives of the Commission, Member States, urban areas and other stakeholders, and the size of urban areas.  
| - The aim of the EAA is to help interpret and focus the scope of multi-level cooperation, flag issues to be tackled in the context of the UAEU pillars, recommend the form of the UAEU multi-level cooperation for its exploration and outlining the framework conditions to be met for its successful implementation (e.g. commitment of EC DGs). |

| Negative Points | - The role of UATPG and how it overlaps with DGUM; the composition of UATPG favoring strongly MS .  
| - The role of the secretariat (and resources) to be divided between the Urban Agenda and intergovernmental cooperation, which might result in less resources for cities.  
| - A more explicit reference to the Linkage Matrix proposal.  
| - A maybe too strong emphasis on small and medium cities (could be much shorter point).  
| - Not very clear about cities can feed bottom-up to new partnership themes (beyond via UATPG). |

**Source:** Own elaboration, from Eurocities’ internal documents\(^{150}\).

This summary of the assessment shows how Eurocities is quite satisfied with the final version of the Ljubljana Agreement. Overall there are much stronger points than weaker points, denoting that most of the inputs given by Eurocities in the roadmap process towards the

\(^{150}\)1st General Assessment Ljubljana Agreement. Eurocities Working Group Urban Agenda. [Internal document]
Agreement were finally translated into it. Consequently, the participation of the network in the whole monitoring and evaluation process of the first phase of the UAEU is significant.

5. CONCLUSION

The emergence of global agendas toward the achievement of sustainable and more resilient urban spaces and communities has accelerated the presence of cities and their associations in high levels of governance. Ranging from the SDGs in 2015, with the incorporation of the urban goal (SDG 11), to the launching of the NUA in 2016 at the Habitat III Conference, a global consensus has been created on the role cities need to take to achieve sustainable urban development. Cities are regarded as sites in which many of the problems that need to be tackled are generated, but also as engines of growth and vectors of change capable of overcoming and finding solutions to those issues. A prominent trend of academic research has advocated for pluralist governance processes in which bottom-up and integrated place-based perspectives are incorporated.

With the advent of this new urban age, TCNs have suffered a prominent proliferation, having a greater expansion in the European continent. Cities and regions have claimed access into the EU decision-making structures, to have a voice in issues that affect them directly. They have united into networks that serve as platforms to make a significant impact and generate the recognition of cities by EU institutions. The most prominent of these urban networks in the EU context is Eurocities, with more than 200 city members, acting as an enabling channel for cities to elevate their interests.

Two main strands of research have dominated the academic debate on the involvement of cities and local authorities in the governance of sustainable urban development. These are the MLG approach and the CD perspective. Both claim that cities have internationalized their activities searching for funding and opportunities that improve their visibility and enable them to implement sustainable urban strategies. This phenomenon has been mainly studied in Europe since the EU represents the most advanced system in terms of the incorporation of cities, regions, and TCN into their policy processes. The CoR is the clearest example of that, being an EU institution representing cities and regions.

Even though, there is also a broad consensus arguing that cities are still not fully represented in the EU sphere. They advocate for better recognition of their proposals and for the raising of their interests in those spaces. So, To what extent are cities and local entities included in the policy process of sustainable urban governance in the EU?

The EC uses its soft power persuasion through Cohesion and Structural Funds to incorporate the urban acquis conception, which is not binding as such, into MS national and regional urban and territorial policies. Progressively it has been introducing conditions and requirements into the ERDF program and new structures derived from Cohesion Policy that has served as an incentive to create integrated sustainable urban strategies. A clear example is the incorporation of the principle ‘Europe Closer to its Citizens’ as an objective of the Cohesion Policy framework for the programming period 2021-2027. It aims to foster integrated sustainable urban development serving as an overarching goal that must be followed in the initiatives for Cohesion Policy implementation.
However, in this regard, the most important advancements in the EU towards sustainable urban governance in which cities are involved, have occurred within the yearly informal intergovernmental meetings of the Council. There, the ministers for Urban Matters agreed on political declarations incorporating the principles of horizontally and vertically integrating methods, with multi-level and multi-stakeholder systems of governance. They also advocated for the realization of an EU Urban Agenda that was finally articulated in 2016 in the Pact of Amsterdam. Cities were recognized as receivers but also as instigators of policy change by making Partnerships the main tool of implementation of the UAEU.

One of the most important outcomes achieved by the UAEU has been the extrapolation of this scheme configuration to MS, where many national, regional, and local urban agendas have emerged in order to apply the main premises of the consolidated EU urban acquis. But, How did Eurocities participate in the process of definition and implementation of the Urban Agenda for the EU in the initial stage and at the onset of the current second phase?

Eurocities serves as an urban acquis facilitator to provide their members (cities of different sizes) with the necessary opportunities and resources to participate and benefit from these urban initiatives that the EC is developing. It has a voluntary membership configuration that favors coordination and exchange, with specialized working groups that transfer their knowledge to the network. It combines a top-down and bottom-up organizational structure that helps to exchange information between cities and higher levels of the network. But it has also a Brussels office that works to bypass EU institutions' inputs to cities, acting as an interlocutor with upper levels of governance within the EU sphere. As the case study has shown, Eurocities participated in the UAEU in the four stages of the Policy Cycle: agenda-setting, negotiation/decision-making, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. The network firmly advocated for the Urban Agenda in the informal intergovernmental meetings, from the Leipzig Charter (2007) to the Riga Declaration (2015). Along with the Dutch Presidency of the Union, it was one of the main actors introducing recommendations and inputs for the onset of the UAEU in 2016. It was also one of the signing parties of the final agreement. Furthermore, Eurocities had a sit in all the governing bodies of the framework, as well as in the Technical Secretariat and in the UATPG. Besides, it was a member of all the partnerships, having different roles and giving advice and support to the partners within them. Thus, it was the only urban authority with a presence in the overall structure of the whole process, having the capacity to influence all the stages of it.

With regards to the renewed UAEU 2.0, the Internal documents and Working Papers of the network have provided clear guidance of the inputs and contributions forwarded to the Portuguese and the Slovenian Presidencies. It was a key member of the preparatory works towards the NLC (2020), the Ljubljana Agreement (2021), and its MWP. The results have outlined that many inputs were articulated in the final agreed documents and, that Eurocities had a prominent role in the definition of the UAEU, from its outset to its new phase.

Overall, the UAEU first phase has been regarded as a success in many aspects, but the roadmap preparation toward the new UAEU 2.0 demonstrated some flaws that should be improved. Then, What are the main obstacles and achievements for the empowerment of cities and local entities in the urban governance structure at the EU level?

The UAEU is assessed as a clear advance in terms of the involvement of urban authorities and cities in the EU urban acquis. Even if it is a non-binding agreement due to the fact that urban policy is not a full competence of the EU, the innovations and projects derived from it benefit from the funds and programs of the EC. Therefore, in the UAEU sustainable urban
governance is incentivized, creating a real impact on the ground by providing a space in which cities participation and multi-stakeholder involvement are enhanced in a multi-level governance framework. This environment enables greater outputs from Partnerships due to the fact that urban authorities such as Eurocities are supporting the whole system, as well as for the clear organizational structure it has. As a consequence, this Urban Agenda initiative within the EU sphere improves policy integration in urban issues, comprising an actual sustainable urban development that considers cities as necessary actors to innovate and promote change in urban spaces.

However, this framework presents some limitations that are aimed to be corrected in the next phase of the UAEU that started after the Ljubljana Agreement in 2021. These were identified by the main actors involved in the process that elevated many inputs to improve these deficiencies. They advocated for a real interconnection between urban programs, policies, and initiatives at the EU level. In addition to better guidance for cities to know how to access them or, to actually acknowledge them, building a more direct access to those funds and strategies for UAEU partnerships outputs. Stakeholders working in the roadmap towards a renewed phase, mostly Eurocities, claimed that DG REGIO was the only Directorate within the EC that was actually assisting and accompanying the whole process. A real cohesion is not in place between all EU urban policies of the different DGs of the EC, thereby, undermining the efficiency and overall delivery of the UAEU results. This latter statement is, even after the reform of the Urban Agenda, represented in the EUI. Albeit in its configuration the initiative sought to be an umbrella shell that unified the EU urban policies, initiatives, strategies, programs, and funds, it ended up being controlled by DG REGIO once again. Henceforth, the involvement of other DGs and, thus, a real integration of policies toward sustainable urban development in the EU is still a highly complex matter.

The non-voluntary character of the UAEU makes it more of a compromise from national governments and EU institutions towards cities' preferences and outputs, than a real policymaking change. Since urban policy is not a single EU competence, effective and efficient action in this field is difficult to accomplish in the nowadays system as it is structured.

Even so, the UAEU is regarded as a clear success because it comprises the main principles of the global urban agendas, adding new layers of innovation in sustainable urban governance, it also presents deficits that must be amended. The EU is one of the most advanced systems in the world in terms of city participation and the inclusion of regional and local actors in the policymaking process. Yet, it is not still a place in which these entities have gained full representation and power. TCNs have contributed to this visibility, and are the main platforms for cities to gain international projection and raise their demands to higher levels of governance.

Considering that this investigation has been limited in time and scope, the upcoming suggestions do not seek to resolve the whole process deficiencies but to contribute to the future of this innovative framework of governance within the EU.

On the one hand, there should be a more direct way and integration of all urban programs and initiatives within the EU, but also between DG’s in the EC, that should communicate, interact and participate between them to avoid overlaps or incoherences. DG REGIO cannot be the only real DG involved in the UAEU. If an integrated sustainable urban development is sought, a real integration of political fields has to occur also at the upper levels to be effective and finally implemented. On the other hand, improved direct access to funds and financing
possibilities for the UAEU projects, as well as for EU cities initiatives, should be established. The EUI seems to address this problem, but as has been mentioned it is not still the overarching framework it was aimed to be. Thus, coming results must be monitored and evaluated to ameliorate this scheme.

It must be noted that the CoR is the most institutionalized space of the Union in which cities and regions can have a straightforward influence upon EU institutions. Still, it has a mere consultative role when territorial or urban matters are affected by policies of the Council, the EP, and the EC. A Treaties reform would be necessary to enhance this role as a binding one. But it is a non-feasible convoluted process at the moment, due to the lack of accord in the integration of urban policy into the EU full competencies realm. Subsequently, frameworks such as the UAEU should progress and continue in the EU urban governance. They are the only way to unite stakeholders and governments from different levels and fields, contributing towards sustainable urban environments in Europe.

Further lines of research could deep on the assessment of the renovated UAEU, and if the incorporations of Eurocities demands have been successful enough to move towards resilient and sustainable urban spaces in the EU’s territory. Concretely, in terms of policy alignment and multi-level and multi-stakeholder involvement to create actual integrated actions and initiatives. Thus, fostering impact on regulation and changing the mindset when governing urban issues within the Union.
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7. ANNEX

7.1. Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews with Pietro Reviglio, who is in charge of the Urban Agenda matters within Eurocities and, to Michaela Kauer, who is the Head of the Brussels Office of the city of Vienna. A background of my research and questions that would be addressed in the interview was sent to them beforehand. The aim was to have a guided conversation about the participation of Eurocities within the UAEU framework. These served as major contributions to incorporate, both, Eurocities’ official perspective, and Vienna's perspective as a city highly involved in the network and in the UAEU.

Interview with Mr. Pietro Reviglio, conducted on February 17th 2023, online

The first interviewee is Mr. Pietro Reviglio, an Italian Governance Advisor at Eurocities network. He is strongly implicated in the UAEU governance process, participating in Eurocities’ Working Group on the Urban Agenda meetings and, in the Secretariat of the network. Furthermore, he is present in all the key meetings of the UAEU governing bodies and technical preparatory groups. Therefore, having a strong position and knowledge in the Urban Agenda development and implementation.

Questionnaire

- What is Eurocities and what are its main priorities and goals? What is your role within the organization?

- What was the involvement of Eurocities at the beginning of the UAEU design process and what has been the evolution of its role within this framework over the years?

- What is the organizational governance structure of the UAEU? How is Eurocities participating in it?

- What are, from Eurocities' point of view, the main strengths of the UAEU? And, the main weaknesses until the 2021 launching of the new phase?

- Why are the Ljubljana Agreement and the Multiannual Working Programme important? How has Eurocities contributed to the final version of these documents?

- In your declarations as an organization you always mention the importance of policy integration and coherence, especially in urban matters. Also, that multi-level and multi-stakeholder engagement is key to success in this framework.
  
  ○ How is Eurocities pushing to implement a bottom-up approach, maintaining the multi-level and multi-stakeholder nature of the UAEU, and therefore empowering cities in this context?

  ○ Why do you argue it is important to take on this approach and to incorporate cities into the urban discussion?

- Moving into partnerships, which are at the core of the UAEU, how are roles distributed in partnerships, and what is the role of Eurocities within them?
Where are we at with the Urban Agenda, what should we expect from the next phase? Which actions are being developed and how Eurocities is participating in them?

Would Eurocities strive to, at some point, achieve a binding status of the UAEU outcomes? Or, is it better to maintain the voluntary commitment in order to engage more participation and the involvement of all levels of governance?

How is the UAEU connected to the policy cycle at the EU level? To what extent is the UAEU integrated into EU urban programs and investments?

- In which ways is Eurocities pushing for its outcomes to be incorporated into urban policies and programs at the EU level?

Transcript

Ana: Okay, first, I wanted to know from your perspective that you're inside the organization. What is Eurocities? What are its main priorities and goals?

Mr. Pietro Reviglio: (...) I guess you know a bit about Eurocities. But to really simplify Eurocities, of course, is the major network of European cities with more than 200 cities, mostly middle size, and big size cities. And we're basically the platform of cities in Europe. We do a lot of things to connect cities and to help them on specific, let's say, capacity buildings and things like that we have a lot of working groups helping cities on that. (...) We are the political platform and their voice here in Brussels [of cities]. So we do a lot of advocacy, a lot of interest representations in Brussels. And, we give out the mayors and local politicians the opportunity to meet and exchange on common challenges. So we also tried to promote the European vision and model for urban development. And increasingly, also Eurocities has been involved in many projects, European projects, also implementing specific innovations and changes on the ground, in cities. So we also promote, let's say, innovation, in cities in this sense. The main goal, of course, is to make sure that cities are good partners of European institutions, and that they can contribute to the EU priorities. But at the same time, also that the European level understands what are the challenges for cities, what are the needs, and this is really much of course, connected also to the urban agenda, but we will go on that later on.

But the overall framework for Eurocities is to promote a better quality of life in cities. That's the mission, that's Eurocities.

In Eurocities, I work on governance issues. I'm a policy advisor and governance, which means many things. It's a very transversal and horizontal position. (...) I represent Eurocities in many of the expert groups, and in multi-level processes, where cities have a seat at the table (...) this is in the context of the urban agenda, but also in the context of different expert groups that there are on the Cohesion Funds, and also other expert groups related to the European Urban Initiative, which is this new program for cities. I work more specifically on Cohesion Funds. On how funding reaches cities. I also work a bit on metropolitan areas governance, and on urban planning so we have a working group dedicated to that. (...) I also did say support a bit, maybe on the broader level, our Executive Committee of politicians with briefings and their speaking points when they go to speak in the European meetings and events.

Ana: Okay, thank you so much. So, now moving to the Urban Agenda. I wanted to know, what was the involvement of Eurocities at the beginning, like how was the design process and what has been the evolution of Eurocities within the Urban Agenda. I'm aware that it is a key
piece within this framework because you were involved also in the beginning, but I wanted to know more deeply how this process has been.

Mr. Pietro Reviglio: As you probably read the Urban Agenda started from the impetus of the Dutch government. We have been in close contact with the Dutch government at the beginning of the Urban Agenda to develop the principles, the ideas, the objectives, and so on and so forth. And so when the Pact of Amsterdam was signed and adopted by the different member states, we were there from the beginning, trying to bring the city's perspective in these old discussions about multi-level governance. (...) We are there in the governance of the Urban Agenda in the sense that as you might have read, of course, this is a multi-level and multi-stakeholder process. Let's say that the member states, the Commission, and the cities, all should be more or less equal in this process. The reality of things is, of course, that member states are 27. So, of course, the balance is a bit on the member states, we will go more into that. But in general, we are in the bodies that promote the Urban Agenda and make sure that it's working well, and so on. Both at the strategic level but also at operational level.

So there are different bodies. (...) In the Urban Agenda, there is the Urban Agenda Technical Preparatory Group (UATPG), which is more of an informal body. Mostly, a few of the member states, the Commission, and the stakeholders' organizations, like Eurocities or the CEMR. And this is really to prevent the meetings and to have more impressions and discussions also about the Urban Development Group (UDG) meetings. That is where all the stakeholders meet at the technical level, to discuss how things are going with the Urban Agenda, different partnerships with different problems in terms of governance, and the different support systems that we need for the Urban Agenda (...). Then there is the Director General for urban matters level, which is more about the directors from those member states, and departments from the Ministry. But very often I have to be really honest, it's the same people from the UDG. So there is not much of a change in terms of the agenda, and people. (...) And then I think it's during the Pact of Amsterdam but also in the Ljubljana Agreement that we should have every three presidencies an informal ministerial meeting. So this will be the structure of the bodies that govern the Urban Agenda.

Then the partnerships are a different story (...). The partnerships, as you might have seen, I don't know how many actors can be in the end, but it's a fact something that 20 organizations are in order of our emphasis. So it's usually, of course, a few ministries from the member states, quite a lot of cities. And then the Commission, usually the DG REGIO. But also, increasingly we have pushed for the involvement of more departments that are more experts on the topic of the partnership. And then there is Eurocities in all the partnerships actually, and also other stakeholder organizations. Yet, this is supported by a secretariat of the Urban Agenda, which now there is a new secretariat that is part of this European Urban Initiative. And they provide operational support to the Urban Agenda partnerships. (...)

The reality is that we're focused a lot of our energies on this UDG and these intergovernmental bodies in the past few years because the Urban Agenda was closing and the partnerships we were closing. But the reality is that these bodies should not focus on the process of the Urban Agenda. But in principle, they should monitor the implementation of the different partnerships so that the core of the Urban Agenda is the partnerships. Of course, it's not these bodies that talk and talk.

Now we have revised a bit the structure. So before the partnership starts, there is already an ex-ante assessment, which is basically a report from researchers that, of course, with involvement and the inputs of all the community already puts a framework of possible directions for the partnerships and good entry points to make the partnership successful.
On the basis of these, within the partnership, the coordinator has a strong role. And usually, there are two coordinators. So usually is one city and one member state, but it varies. They meet and they basically agree on a joint action plan. And, of course, there are different discussions about needs, assessments, and things like that. But then there is an action plan with specific actions, that then the partnership members will have to deliver, and different partnership members will lead on different actions. Then each action will have a deliverable. (...) So this is the way that the Urban Agenda partnerships deliver their work.

Ana: Okay, thank you. So now, moving to the Ljubljana Agreement and with the Multiannual Working Program… How Eurocities has contributed to the final versions of these documents? What were your main inputs? What were your main thoughts on the strengths that you think the Urban Agenda has that had to be continued, and also the weaknesses? The things that you thought had to be improved and included in those new documents or way forward?

Mr. Pietro Reviglio: The Ljubljana Agreement was a big process. A lot of meetings. Even before the Ljubljana Agreement, we did a lot of expert work to understand the strengths and then discuss the different points of view on the future of the Urban Agenda. So we had, let's say, a co-creation process, led by the different EU presidencies. I forgot to mention that each presidency leads these meetings and the agenda of these meetings. So there was a lot of work promoted by especially the Portuguese and the Slovenians to really co-create and try to think about a good way of making the Urban Agenda evolve, basically.

So we were there and we put forward many things. The list is long. So first, I mean, the Ljubljana Agreement is important, because if you don't have it in the paper, it doesn't exist. It's basically the document that everyone refers to when a different thing is proposed. For instance, now that a secretariat of the Urban Agenda needs to be put in place, the Commission needs to follow the indications of the Ljubljana Agreement. And when the new partnerships are now starting, they need to follow the indications of the Ljubljana Agreement. So it is an important document.

The Multiannual Working Program was an effort to also give a bit of a programmatic approach to the Urban Agenda. (...) But yeah, the Ljubljana Agreement is important. We highlighted many of the things that our members have highlighted.

To be also clear, we have in Eurocities, a dedicated Working Group on the Urban Agenda, where we have the city experts. Many of them that were involved in previous partnerships, or they understand the Urban Agenda very well, then advise us and help us develop the positions of Eurocities on this. We don't just go and say what we want from the Secretariat, it's really bottom-up and based on their inputs.

So, in the Ljubljana Agreement, we basically were pushing to have stronger secretarial support. That is not just focusing on organizing meetings, but also helping strategically the partnerships to deliver, go providing a bit of technical and legal support, and also to the cities to know what is the entry point. And also to make sure that we are aligned with the European policy cycle, and that we know where are the opportunities or not (...). We were very much pushing for a stronger involvement of other DGs in the Commission because often we did not achieve the impact we wanted because the departments of the Commission were not following. It was just the DG REGIO mostly.

In the same vein, the involvement of member states was a bit difficult, so reiterating the participation of all the parties to ensure that there is a greater impact, and also to ensure a better impact. That's why we have started this ex-ante assessment. We wanted to make sure that partnerships focus on things that are more concrete and achievable in the current political context at the European level. I mean, there are some issues that are very problematic for
cities. But if there is no political opportunity to then change those things, and deliver it, we need to be aware at least of data and maybe push certain things that are more lower-hanging fruit issues. That doesn't mean that the if there is a problematic issue, the Urban Agenda should not try to make proposals, even if it's more long-term. But we need to have a balance. Because if we have just a very ambitious request that is detached from the reality of things, we will create frustrations and false expectations also, with the cities and all the parties that are involved.

Ana: Yes, I wanted to ask you why you think is important this bottom-up approach, the multi-level, multi-stakeholder nature of the Urban Agenda. But you have also mentioned it. Because if you don't take into account cities, their needs, or their realities, you cannot create a proper change on the ground. Also, what you have mentioned, we have to involve not only DG REGIO, or these actors that have been involved since the start, but also, if we want to integrate or cohesion all the policies, we need many actors involved. At different levels, right? Like, I think that's what I grabbed from your intervention.

Mr. Pietro Reviglio: It's a very good point. And just for your information now there are two new partnerships that are starting. One on Sustainable Tourism and one on Greeing Cities. Then there will be two other ones on Equalities in the City and Food. And we [Eurocities] have proposed those themes. We had a big discussion, both internally as Eurocities with the Secretariat, and also with the working group Urban Agenda, about what could be interesting themes that could work in the current context of revitalizing the Urban Agenda. And so we propose these partnerships, and we prepare the background document and the background ideas for this. Then, the ex-ante assessment report is based on that. So there is, let's say, a strong role of cities promoting the Urban Agenda, the themes of the Urban Agenda, so that’s a clear example. It’s quite important to mention it.
Then there is also one aspect that I think it's important to highlight here. In the context of the Ljubljana Agreement, we also discussed a lot of how the Urban Agenda relates to other EU urban initiatives. Because the Urban Agenda, let's say in 2016, was the new game in town, and was the new thing that anyone was interested in and was motivated about, and we thought it could have been a game changer. The reality is that we missed a set of successes. In some cases, we actually keep sampling in other matters, things that were developed were put in a drawer and never read again. So we wanted to make sure that the Urban Agenda is also better connected with other EU initiatives in the future. The basic point here is that the Urban Agenda has been too much owned only by DG REGIO. Without the involvement of other DGs. These other DGs have created their own initiatives for cities, there is not really a dialogue. It's a bit of a problem.
So at the moment, we are thinking about how could we mainstream, the Urban Agenda principles, for instance, in these other initiatives that have been started by other DGs? So going beyond the Urban Agenda. But also how can we make sure that all these urban initiatives are better connected and better coordinated?

Ana: That was exactly something that I wanted to ask you. Because I read and saw that there's this new European Urban Initiative, and that it seemed to be connected well, to connect the Urban Agenda and the European urban initiatives. That is what was before these Urban Innovative Actions, right? But, I don't really get how this can be connected. Like, I don't really know how Urban Agenda actions or proposals are going to be translated to this framework or how they are going to be related to each other.
Mr. Pietro Reviglio: It's a very good question. The European Urban Initiative is not the game changer but it brings together things that were already present in the past period together in a more coherent way, let's say. So the Urban Agenda links with the European Union Initiative. For instance, the innovative actions of the European Urban Initiative will be connected somehow with the findings of the Urban Agenda partnerships. (...) There is a clear link there. Also, the intention is for the European Urban Initiative to connect the Urban Agenda partnerships with their capacity-building program. And so maybe adding some events, some peer learning activities for cities, on themes that are related to the Urban Agenda. And then the very important part is the link between the European Urban Initiative and Cohesion policy. The urban dimension of Cohesion policy. The idea is to promote the results of the Urban Agenda partnerships, but it's a bit of wishful thinking, in reality, to make that happen.

It's good to keep in mind that the European Urban Initiative brings together different things that were already present in the context of DG REGIO and Cohesion policy. However, it's not the umbrella initiative that we hoped for. Because as you might know, for instance, the Mission on Climate Neutral and Smart Cities works independently from the European Urban Initiative. There is the Covenant of Mayors that works independently, there is the Green Cities accord that works independently. There is the Living in the EU that works independently. There is the European Green Capital. So there are so many things and the European Urban Initiative is one of those things, and it doesn't have the ambition to be the umbrella for everything, which it's a bit of a problem. But it's the reality of things. It's the problems of politics between the different departments of the Commission and the lack of strong leadership on urban matters. That's the problem.

Ana: Okay, so to finish, I wanted to note two things. What can we expect from this next phase of the Urban Agenda? What do you think is important to be improved regarding the last phase? Also, as Eurocities, would you in some way, strive to, at some point, achieve a binding status of this Urban Agendas outcomes? To maybe have more coherence between the outcomes of the Urban Agenda and, maybe have real change on the ground with Cohesion Funds or programs from the Commission?

Mr. Pietro Reviglio: To be really honest, for us, it's to keep the Urban Agenda alive. This is our main objective because there is not the same momentum. There is a bit of skepticism about the ability of the Urban Agenda to promote what it wants to promote. That's why we chose new themes for partnerships that are relevant to the policy cycle. And we hope that they will succeed somehow. What we expect is to make sure that the Urban Agenda is stronger. But then we also want to see how we can further mainstream, the multi-level and multi-stakeholder principles of the Urban Agenda in other EU initiatives. (...) How can we bring the same thinking to those initiatives, so that there is already a governance framework that is recognizable and works well? That's what we are aiming for. We are aiming for stronger, let's say political ownership of the Urban Agenda. More support not just from DG REGIO, but from the whole Commission. That's what we would try to do.

In terms of the binding status of the outcomes, I mean, would be nice, of course, to be more impact-driven, and when you probably refer to binding outcomes is trying to have an impact on the legislations, the regulations, and the local implementation. Of course, that's the objective. But, as you might know, urban development is still a competence, that is not at the European level. So we cannot, from the European level impose things. So this multi-level governance needs to be maintained. (...) But still, we want to be sure that in the different parts of the legislative process, we can input what the agenda findings are, and we can make sure.
that these are read by the policymakers and the politicians so that these are relevant. That’s what we will try to do, hopefully, let's see.

Ana: Okay, thank you so much. I'm gonna stop the recording now.

Interview with Mrs. Michaela Kauer, conducted on March 29th 2023, online

The second interviewee is Michaela Kauer, who is the Head of the Brussels Office of the city of Vienna. She has a long-standing career in the public sector, focusing on urban policy and housing. On behalf of its position, she also acts as the representation of Vienna in the Eurocities’ Executive Committee, as well as being a Member of the Working Group in Urban Agenda. Moreover, she has also worked as the co-coordinator of the finalized Housing Partnership of the UAEU.

Questionnaire

- Why did Vienna decide to join Eurocities?
- What are the main benefits for a European capital city, such as Vienna, of being a member of Eurocities? In terms of working groups participation, events and forums, the elevation of interests at the EU level, etc.
- Regarding the Urban Agenda for the EU, Vienna was a city coordinator in one of the concluded pilot partnerships, dedicated to Housing.
  - How was the process from the preparation and negotiation of the partnership, to its outset, development, and conclusion?
  - In which ways did Eurocities participate and help Vienna within this process and within the partnership to bring forward its ideas and urban knowledge as a city?
- To conclude, what role do you think has Eurocities in the Urban Agenda for the EU? In which ways do you think cities benefit from it?

Transcript

Ana: Okay, so first of all, why did Vienna decide to join Eurocities? What was the main goal?

Mrs. Michaela Kauer: I mean, in fact, we decided to join in 1995 at the time when Austria joined the European Union, so that was a parallel process. Austria joined the European Union and Vienna joined Eurocities. And of course, it was because we clearly said, if we are joining the European Union, this is adding another layer of governance in the things that we need to observe as a city. And how can we be agile on the European level? It is, of course, in the framework of networks. So we did two things. I mean, we've always been a member of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR). We've always been involved in bilateral and multilateral networks, organizations (...). I mean, throughout the years, that was a big tradition. But joining the EU added a little bit of a new content, of course, and this is what we did. So in fact, you have a new layer in the political-administrative system. And you
account for that by joining organizations like Eurocities. Because you think they are a good platform, both for exchange but also for policy influence, and also for project work.

Ana: Okay, thank you so much. So what do you think are the main benefits for European capital cities such as Vienna, of being a member of Eurocities? In terms of the working groups, it provides, participation in events, forums, etc.

Mrs. Michaela Kauer: I mean, we are, I think, one of the most active members of the network, we are close to all of the 40-something working groups, and we are present in all fora. We are a long-standing member of the Executive Committee. So I think that for us, it's been quite natural to integrate into the net. As you know, Austria is a rich country, Vienna is a rich city, so we're not going for a lot of money, for instance. We are going for European Social Fund money, we are going a lot for Horizon programs. So that's an end we are running these multilateral programs Central European Impact, and the transnational programs with Hungary, Slovakia, etc. Here, I think we add another layer again to the work we've been doing already. It was to reinforce already existing relationships.

(...) Vienna is the only big city in Austria, I mean, really, there is no other city that has more than 1 million, and we are close to 2 million now in a few years. So if we want to compare ourselves with anyone, we have to go beyond the borders. The next one is Bratislava. (...) So for us, it's not really a question of doing this as a capital city but doing it in general as a city with partners which are more alike. So for us, it's learning from each other, and reinforcing already existing working relationships. Of course, also, that's a big issue. That has always been a big issue. For me, Ana, is using the platform Eurocities offers to influence EU politics. We've been doing this from the beginning. In the 90s, you may know that there has been a big liberalization wave in Europe, which was also targeting public transport a lot. In some countries this went very bad, like think of the UK. But of course that was a big danger also for the European cities To liberalize the public transport systems and we were fighting against this. We did it on all levels that we could apply. But we also use Eurocities of course to do that. (..)

Another example is, of course, housing. But another example is a lot of things around the social fabric of Europe, where we think we can contribute much more as cities because we also have to live with the consequences of any crisis. So we would also like to have a say when designing policy around that.

Ana: Thank you so much also for the examples because it illustrates better what are the benefits. So, regarding the Urban Agenda for the EU, Vienna was a city coordinator in one of the concrete pilot partnerships dedicated to housing. And so I wanted to know more about the process from the preparation and negotiation of the partnership to then its outset, development, and conclusion. And also in which ways Eurocities participated and helped Vienna within the process to bring forward ideas and its urban knowledge about this issue. Because I think Vienna had a lot of things going on around housing before participating in the partnership.

Mrs. Michaela Kauer: In fact, it must have been like 2015. We were at that time, very much in the lead of the Working Group Housing in Eurocities. We were at the lead of the Working Group Urban Agenda. And we were on the Executive Committee. So we had like three very strong positions in the network already as a city with different people. And that was kind of recognized by a lot of people. So I mean, I can tell you the little box. I was at a conference, I was desperately looking for coffee. And then I met with a colleague from the Dutch Ministry
for Kingdom Affairs, which is also responsible for Urban. And the colleague from the European Commission, who was then at the time responsible to deal with Urban things. We did not talk about Urban Agenda that much back in 2015. But they're coming to me and said, you know, we have this crazy idea. I mean, I knew that, that we're going to have an Urban Agenda for the EU, we are going to have partnerships, and there should be one on housing. Would you think, consider being one of the coordinators? And then I have to ask my mayor, and then asked my mayor, and then he said, yes, of course. So and I mean, it was a little bit like that. But what of course, we knew, because we were in the loop of housing policies. We had started a big lobbying activity around issues related to housing back in 2012. Our then Mayor, Michael Häupl, set off a resolution of the mayor's asking for a change in the state aid rules regarding housing. (...) We also said we need better investment conditions with regard to the European Semester. So the whole economic governance, Stability and Growth pact, etc. So we were already very much recognized as experts or as advocates for cities when it comes to housing. (...) We started already way before we had the partnership to build a network of houses equity, like the affordable housing community, on the EU level. Way before the Housing Partnership was set up, a few months earlier, we already organized a seminar in Brussels or a workshop with all the stakeholders to explore what would be the main topics that should be discussed in such a partnership. And that was, again, of course, a real clue. Because that was really the way we got a lot of credibility and visibility. Of course, the Commission was involved, the Committee of the Regions, etc. A lot of experts, member states level, city level and you'll see they were involved from the beginning.

**Ana:** Okay, thank you so much. I found it also really interesting how everything started for the coordinating position. So just to conclude about this topic, what role do you think has Eurocities within the Urban Agenda? In which ways do you think it really benefits that Eurocities is in there?

**Mrs. Michaela Kauer:** I think there are, at least, two answers to your question. One thing is that, of course, Eurocities is sitting on the table when it comes to discussing these all member states level in the Urban Development Group and in the Urban Technical Preparatory Group for Directors Generals for Urban matters. So that's already one big thing. There is a working group on the Urban Agenda. And typically, they would like to inform the cities we're interested in about what's going on member states level, the European Parliament level, and other levels. Indeed, of course, the first phase of the Urban Agenda is over. And with the Ljubljana Agreement, we started the next phase. Two new partnerships have been set up, and two more are going to be set up. And, of course, it will be a bit different, but in reality, it will be the same exercise. I mean, going for better knowledge, better funding, and better legislation. And Eurocities' role here was also to ask to see these interests proposed, what are the main challenges? What are the main bottlenecks? What could be the chances for cities, if we deal with a new topic? What are the topics that we want to have in general? I mean, we had 14 partnerships in the first phase. And I think, in a way, they were already very good. I think we covered nearly everything that has to do with life in cities. And we developed the catalog of proposals of all the action plans, we must stand it like 160 actions in total. (...) I think that we can tick the box on everyone in a certain way. I mean, we did not get, you know, the 100%, but we got a lot. We were the most successful partnership *(the Housing partnership).* I can prove this because there is no other partnership that managed to be mentioned, by a ministerial meeting in the
intergovernmental fields. I was the expert consulting the French presidency before they had the informal ministerial meeting on housing on March 22. So I was the expert on behalf of the partnership, of course, that was sitting in the hearing of the European Parliament Committee for Employment and Social Affairs when we did discuss the Initiative Report on Housing. It was a Vienna person, a member of the Committee of the Regions, who put forward a motion for instance, on short-term holiday rentals in the Committee of the Regions. (...) So we did all the institutional things. And even when you today move for the Commission, adopted, I mean, the New European Bauhaus, okay, nice to have. But we have an Affordable Housing Initiative. We have, you know, a Horizon project that goes for a neighborhood-based approach in urban development, including housing. We have more awareness about short-term holiday rentals, money laundering, and gentrification than ever. We have a lot of Parliamentary Search Service, Joint Research Center, etc. All of these think tanks and knowledge bases of European institutions are dealing with the topic. (...) So I think with regard to this, we've been a really successful partnership. Because you know, you have to be proud of…

**Ana:** No, but I can tell this is all true, because wherever you go and you look for Urban Agenda matters, or when there's always this point in the Housing Partnership is one of the most successful ones. Really because also in my interview with Pietro from Eurocities. And I told him: Okay, so can you tell me who I might interview to talk about the partnerships and cities? And he told me you have to interview for sure Vienna. It was like that.

**Mrs. Michaela Kauer:** Yes! So in fact, I think we managed to get this all across. So when I was in Turin in mid-March, there was a Cities Forum of the EU. (...) And so there everybody was coming to me. (...) Nobody believes that we stopped. I mean, we had like this three years of work, which we organized, I think very well. And very self-confident. Yeah, we didn't really ask for help from the Commission. (...) So after three years, we delivered the action plan. And then we saw that we need to have more time to do the advocacy. And that took us another three years. (...) Then, I said: Listen, guys, we asked for an Informal Ministerial Meeting on Housing at the EU level, we ticked the box of all the actions and recommendations we are there, and this is the last thing we did to get all the things that we wanted. I mean, everybody's asking for recommendations on good housing policies that we have developed. And if Ukraine is now looking for a recovery program, and what they are going to do on housing when whenever peace is there, again, they are asking for us to consult them. And we are still consulting other cities, cities associations, to do good Housing policy. (...) So I'm really happy about that.

**Ana:** Yes, you know, I was also wondering, why did you finish the partnership, but now I kind of understand. If everything was kind of achieved, and now people know who to contact, city councils at most who want to know more about housing policy. So I just know that Vienna can help me and everything that surrounds it. I think that's a good way to conclude something because now you know who to contact and who to get information with.

**Mrs. Michaela Kauer:** Yeah, it's good. And I think, in fact, there were a lot of spin-offs. I mean, Vienna has a strong housing system, you know that. But I mean, when we were doing all of this on a new level, they also started to do a very nice website in English [www.socialhousing.wien](http://www.socialhousing.wien), if you go for that, and they present the whole system. They have also exhibitions in English and French going around the world on the Vienna model of Social Housing. So we are constantly asked for that.
And I mean, just to be very blunt here, the only thing that you can solve the housing crisis is state intervention, very strong state intervention in all of the fields. Because you need land, so secure a building ground. You can do this with different measures, but securing land and having control of land is one thing. You need to have money for the investment. And you have to keep in mind that the main core money is not coming from real estate investors, but it's coming from the people who are paying for that. So there is an economic argument for participation. You need to have, of course, a sound system that can rely on a stable governance framework, (...) housing for the common good. So it's clear, like in Portugal, they have the right to housing in the Constitution. But many countries don't have the legal framework to do that, and to allow cities to do something. So you have that you need a stable framework, you need, of course, to account for vulnerable groups and problems with speculation and diversification (...) and gentrification. And you have to have also, I would say, and that's, again, the will to create not only healthy flats, and accessible and affordable flats, you need to have the will to create neighborhoods that are livable, gender-sensitive in the way we use them, and in the way we move there. And in many cases, also, it's an issue of safety. So all of that put together, and then you have the Vienna model in a nutshell. This means that you just come to carry people with your model, it's you take it in a holistic way. And you need to have the will to intervene in the market because the market never delivers what people need. So the market is not functioning. That's why we need to have the measures, the legislation, and the funding to do it.

Ana: Yeah, that's I think, the main point, the will, the political will to do it. In Barcelona, for example, housing is really present in all the policies but there is also this lack of political will from the state. If the state doesn't permit something, then Barcelona can not do it. And I talk about Barcelona when I can talk about other cities. So I think it's quite important because it's about the people who live there, the surroundings and safety, all that you have explained. So yeah, I think it's a great partnership.

Mrs. Michaela Kauer: If you look at my website (www.michaelakauer.at), there is also an article about what the EU has to deliver on housing now, which I published earlier, but I think it's very valid. (...) You will find a bit of the legacy of the partnership.

Ana: Thank you. I will read it for sure.

Mrs. Michaela Kauer: Okay. So the Housing family is coming to Barcelona for the International Social Housing Festival. So if you're interested in housing go for that.

Ana: Thank you so much. And thank you also, for explaining me in this plain way everything. I think it was very interesting. Because I really want to know the insight from the cities' point of view not just Eurocities, the Commission, or the official documents, but what really happened.