



The Mile project has received funding from the ERDF within the URBACT Programme



## Developing Local Action Plans for the Operational Programmes of the European Union Structural Funds



# Handbook

For Cities and Managing Authorities Engaging in URBACT II Projects

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For Cities and Managing Authorities  
Engaging in URBACT II Projects



This handbook has been written by Yamina Guidoum on behalf of the City of Venice in the framework of the URBACT funded MILE project.

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It can be downloaded from the URBACT website at:  
[www.urbact.eu/mile](http://www.urbact.eu/mile)





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## Foreword

MILE was an extremely positive experience for the city and for the managing authorities that took part. By publishing a handbook on the implementation of the URBACT projects we hope that others will benefit from the lessons learnt during the course of this pilot project.

It is in the very nature of a pilot project to try out new paths, changing direction if necessary, and to transfer the experience acquired – highlighting successes as well as eventual errors made - to others embarking upon that same route.

This experience-sharing also meets the request for capitalisation advanced by the European Commission which we thank, together with the Urbact secretariat, for having given the City of Venice and other partner cities the opportunity to take part in this pilot project.

The MILE project represented a major investment for my city in terms of human resources, an investment that produced interesting results. They included the launch of action-planning processes and significant measures for the involvement of stakeholders as well as coordination with various levels of government (Region and Province in particular). This work will not conclude with the project but will continue in the near future with the implementation of several of the actions in the local action plans developed within the MILE framework.

Within the Municipality of Venice the project acted as a stimulus to begin developing and reinforcing collaboration between the various departments working for the integration of immigrants, in particular between the Social Policies department – Immigration Service, Economic Development department and Educational Policies department, coordinated by the European Policies department.

The success of the MILE project was the result of the input and commitment of all partners and of the competence of the experts who provided us with support in developing contents and methods. We thank them all and hope that we will have the opportunity to repeat these shared experiences in the near future.

I strongly believe in the value-added that European level cooperation can bring to cities, and subsequently to European citizens, and I strongly hope that the European Commission continues to invest in this type of experience.

Luana Zanella,  
Deputy Mayor of Venice for International Relations and European Policies

## I. Introduction

### 1. WHAT IS THIS HANDBOOK ABOUT?

How to design a good transnational exchange programme? How to develop quality action plans? How to ensure the implementation of action plans and maximize their impact at local level? And what is the role of Managing Authorities in all this? These are the main questions facing cities and Managing Authorities (MA) of the European Structural Funds engaging in European URBACT II projects.

This handbook is meant to share practices and approaches drawn from the pilot experience of the Fast Track Network *Managing Migration and Integration at Local level- Cities and Regions (MILE)* in its attempts to address these questions. It does not intend to promote a model for replication, but to be rather a tool for learning and reflection when implementing an URBACT II project, in particular in the thematic area of social inclusion.

MILE is a Fast Track Network of the URBACT thematic pole "**Social inclusion and Governance**". The objective of MILE project is to produce local action plans for managing migration and integration, on the themes of:

- *Enterprise development and support*
- *Active Inclusion for labour market access*
- *Access to Education, Health and Housing services and intercultural dialogue*

The term 'Fast Track Network' means that it aims at bringing best practice ideas *faster* into the mainstream by linking the action plans produced to the finance available in the Operational Programmes of the European Structural Funds.

Different elements combined to ensure successful implementation of the MILE project:

- the use of a **process approach** rather than a blueprint approach
- continuous **evaluation** of the process for learning and taking "rapid adaptive action"<sup>1</sup>
- active **involvement of MAs and Local Support Groups** <sup>2</sup> in all stages of the project
- experts **individualized support** for project partners

1 Korten, D. (1984) Rural development programming: the learning process approach, in Capacities for managing development, The Open University, 2005.

2 Local Support Groups are local key stakeholders concerned by the thematic exchanges implemented within the network and by the cities local action plan to be developed.

## 2. WHAT THE READER WILL FIND IN IT?

The handbook presents what was learnt by doing the MILE project, practical examples and options for:

- consolidating partnership between Cities and Managing Authorities
- developing good practice action plans
- evaluating the work process
- implementing the action plans
- mainstreaming action plans into Structural Funds and local public policy

## 3. TO WHOM IS IT TARGETED?

The handbook is aimed primarily at cities and regions engaging in the URBACT II programme, at MILE project members who will use it to build upon the project's achievements, and to practitioners and policy makers interested in the management of migration and integration.

### The MILE network

The MILE network started April 2007, ended June 2009 and is made up of the following partners:

#### Partners and Managing Authorities

1. City of Venice and Veneto Region \_\_\_\_\_ Italy
2. District of Charlois (Rotterdam) and City of Rotterdam \_\_\_\_\_ the Netherlands
3. City of Vantaa and Employment and Economic Development Centre for Uusimaa \_\_\_\_\_ Finland
4. City of Turin and Piedmont Region \_\_\_\_\_ Italy
5. City of Timisoara and Ministry of Development, Public Works and Housing \_\_\_\_\_ Romania
6. City of Komotini and Region of eastern Macedonia & Trace \_\_\_\_\_ Greece
7. City of Siville and Dirección General de Fomento del Empleo de la Consejería de Empleo de la Junta de Andalucía \_\_\_\_\_ Spain
8. City of Amadora and Tagus Valley Regional Coordination Commission as Operational Program Regional Funds Managing Authority \_\_\_\_\_ Portugal
9. Municipality of Nea Alikarnassos and Region of Crete \_\_\_\_\_ Greece

## II. Consolidating Cities-Managing Authorities partnership

Taking part in URBACT II projects requires the participation of the European Structural Funds Managing Authorities (MAs) to work together with cities in order to transfer good practice into the Operational Programmes. For this, the mechanisms of cooperation need to be clearly established at the outset of the project. While the role of cities is the production of action plans to address the needs identified in relation to the theme of the project, the contribution of MAs to the action plans is less clear. Defining the role MAs can play in the project, beyond solely financing the action plans and the form that this role will take, is the necessary starting point.

Conditions need to be set to ensure a successful City-MA cooperation. These include:

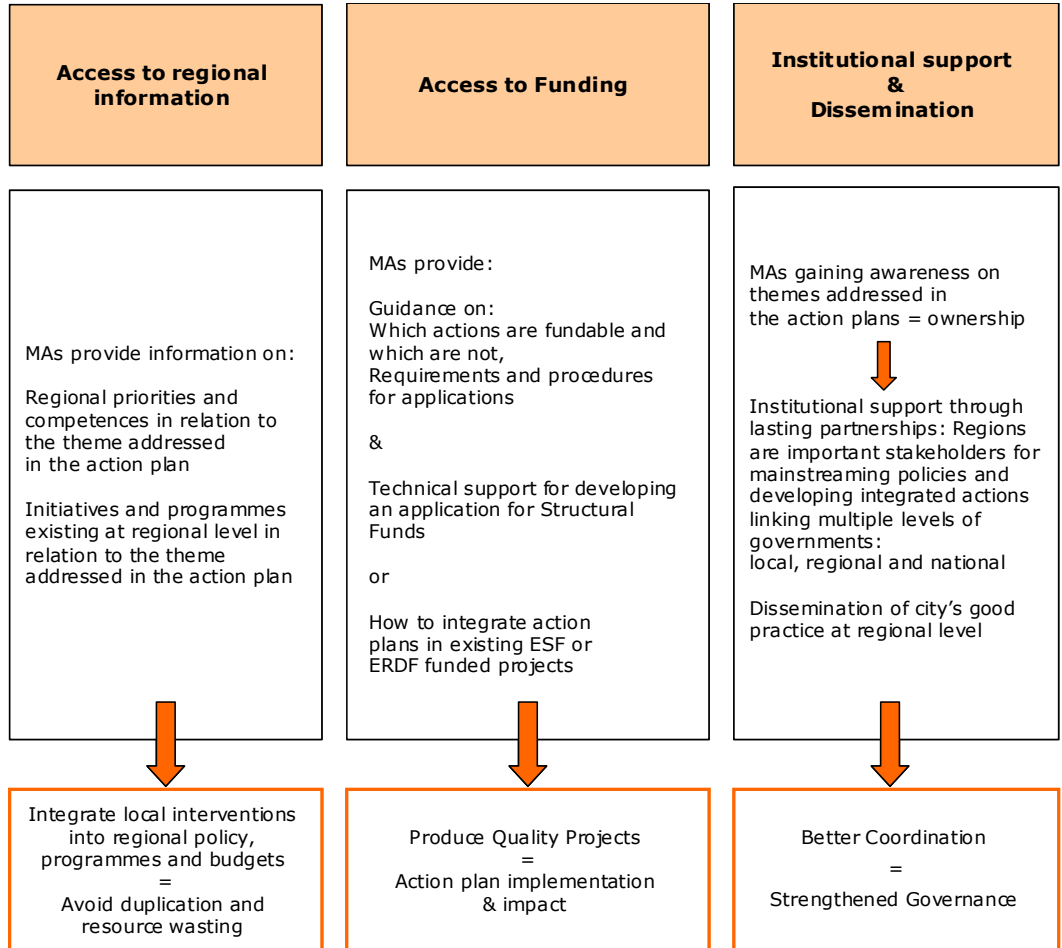
- identifying and understanding the **expectations** of MAs from the project and from the city and vice-versa, and adapting project implementation to meet these expectations
- ensuring that the themes **addressed** in the project are relevant to the priorities of the MAs, and that the MAs have the capacities the theme calls for, so as to be able to provide cities with the necessary support
- ensuring that representatives of the MAs and cities who are participating in the project have the **power to make decisions** and bring about change
- maintaining **active involvement** of MAs in all stages of project activities (local and transnational)

In MILE network, the roles of Managing Authorities included:

- providing cities with information on regional priorities, programmes and initiatives, in relation to the theme of the action plan. Such information allowed the local action plans to be integrated into regional policy, programmes and budgetary decision-making. The result is avoiding duplication and waste of resources and improving governance
- providing cities with guidance on adequate sources of funding existing in the Operational Programmes, and with technical support for developing project applications
- participation in all stages of action plan development (Steering Group Meetings, transnational workshops, peer review exchanges, drafting of local action plans, etc). This increased Managing Authorities awareness of the issues addressed in the action plans and a sense of ownership of said plans. MAs will then provide cities with effective support and disseminate the cities' achievements to other territories

## In practice...

Table 1. Examples of roles of Managing Authorities in the MILE network and achievements:



### III. Developing Good Practice Action Plans

Action Learning methodology used in MILE project proved to be successful because of its suitability for addressing complex problems where there is no clear 'right' solution, as in the case of managing migration and integration, and where there may be a number of different possible ways forward which have to be considered. Action learning is based on the use of questioning: members take turns to 'present' a current problem of practice. Once the presenter outlines the problem the rest of the group help work on this problem through questions to the presenter. The questioning helps clarify and deepen understanding of the problem. It helps challenge assumptions and perspectives held by the presenter and provides a basis for 're-framing' the problem<sup>3</sup>. For each of the three sub-themes of the MILE project (enterprise development, active inclusion and access to key services) a new Action Learning Set (ALS) is created with the end result of producing local action plans. The ALS follows a cycle of transnational exchange workshops, and then development of action plans at local level, followed by a transnational peer review of the local action plans. At the end of each cycle, an evaluation of the process takes place and the results of the evaluation are used to improve and re-adapt the next ALS cycle<sup>4</sup>.

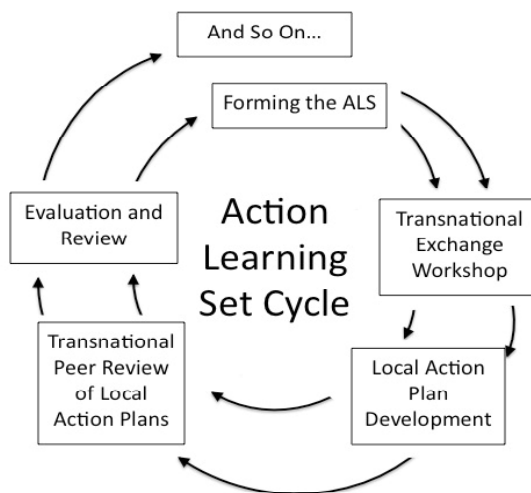


Fig 1. Components of the ALS cycle

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Liz Goold and Dave Harding- Bond UK

<sup>4</sup> Detailed reports of each ALS cycle for the three themes of the MILE project are available in [www.urbact.eu/mile](http://www.urbact.eu/mile)



## 1. FORMING THE ACTION LEARNING SET (ALS)

ALS is composed of a small group of 2 actors per city and 1 actor from the Managing Authorities. They constitute the **core team** which will be in charge of implementing the activities of the ALS cycle and developing the local action plan. For each cycle a new ALS is formed, including new members who are practitioners working on the specific theme addressed in the ALS.

1. ALS members need to have **solid knowledge** of the specific theme addressed
2. ALS members need to have the **power for decision-making**
3. ALS members change according to the theme to be addressed in each ALS cycle, and consequently need to be briefed at the beginning of each cycle through an **induction pack** containing information on:
  - project **aims** and **activities**
  - the **needs identified** in the baseline study<sup>5</sup> in relation to the specific theme addressed in the ALS in which they are participating
  - the **Policy framework** and related debates, **Financial** and **Legal** instruments at EU level in relation to the theme addressed in the ALS
  - a clear description of the **methodology of work** of the cycle

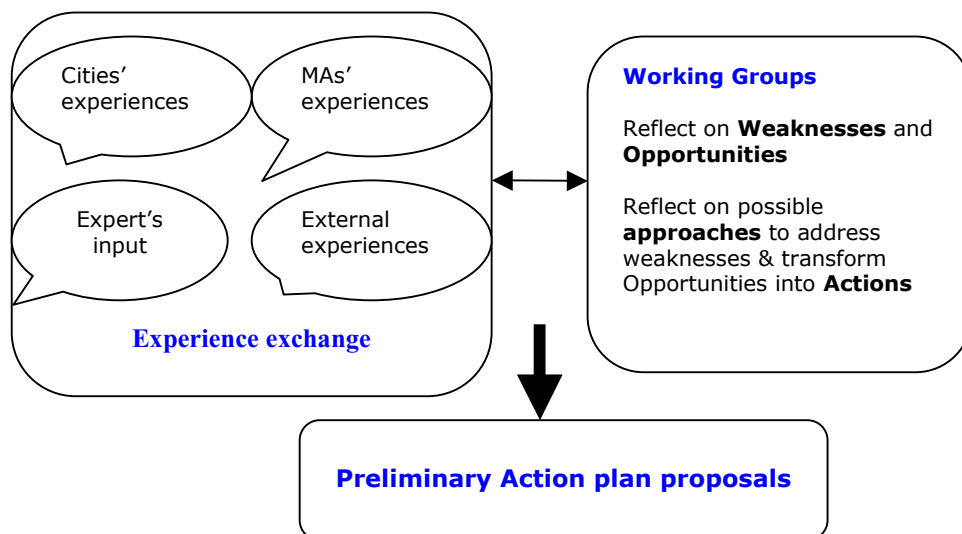
## 2. PLANNING TRANSNATIONAL EXCHANGE WORKSHOPS

Transnational workshops are the place where cities and Managing Authorities exchange experiences and lessons drawn from the analysis of these experiences and policies implemented locally. Experiences external to the network are also useful. This exchange will form the basis for reflection on weaknesses and opportunities identified in each city and on possible approaches to address them. The result of such reflection is a preliminary action plan proposal.

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<sup>5</sup> A baseline study is undertaken in the preparation phase of the URBACT II projects to identify the local problems cities want to tackle through the project

Fig. 2. Components of transnational exchange workshops



For a successful transnational exchange:

1. Working Groups (WG) are the cornerstone of the workshop where the exchange of knowledge acquired from the experiences of cities and MAs is put in practice. That is why:
  - enough time should be allocated to the WG (minimum 3 hours)
  - WGs need to be planned methodically and with specific techniques to achieve the expected outcomes
  - the role of facilitators in the WG is crucial: they need to have expertise in group dynamics combined with sufficient knowledge on the themes addressed
  - it is important that the experiences of cities and MAs are presented in a structured way, to allow for comparison by means of a common template
2. Overall, enough time should be allocated for discussions and debates during the transnational workshops, instead of mere presentations

### 3. DEVELOPING LOCAL ACTION PLANS

Some steps need to be undertaken for the preparation of the local action plans. While the transnational exchange workshop allowed for preliminary ideas of action plans to be formulated; these need to be worked on at local level with a wider group of key stakeholders called Local Support Groups (LSG).

It is the LSG then, with the support of the project's expert, that will elaborate the action plan. The action plan is then reviewed by peers in a final transnational workshop.

*(a) How to mobilise the Local Support Group (LSG)?*

One of the crucial issues Action Learning Set members face is broadening the ALS, in order to involve key stakeholders, thus forming a Local Support Group (LSG) which will be involved in the elaboration of the local action plan. Two important issues that need to be addressed at the outset are i) how to mobilize the members of the LSG and ii) how to ensure their effective –not merely symbolic – participation in the project and, in particular, in the development of local action plans.

A way forward is to raise the interest of relevant stakeholders in participating in a transnational network by highlighting the following short-term and long-term benefits that they and their institutions will gain when taking part in the URBACT network.

*Table 2. Added-value of participating in Transnational URBACT II networks*

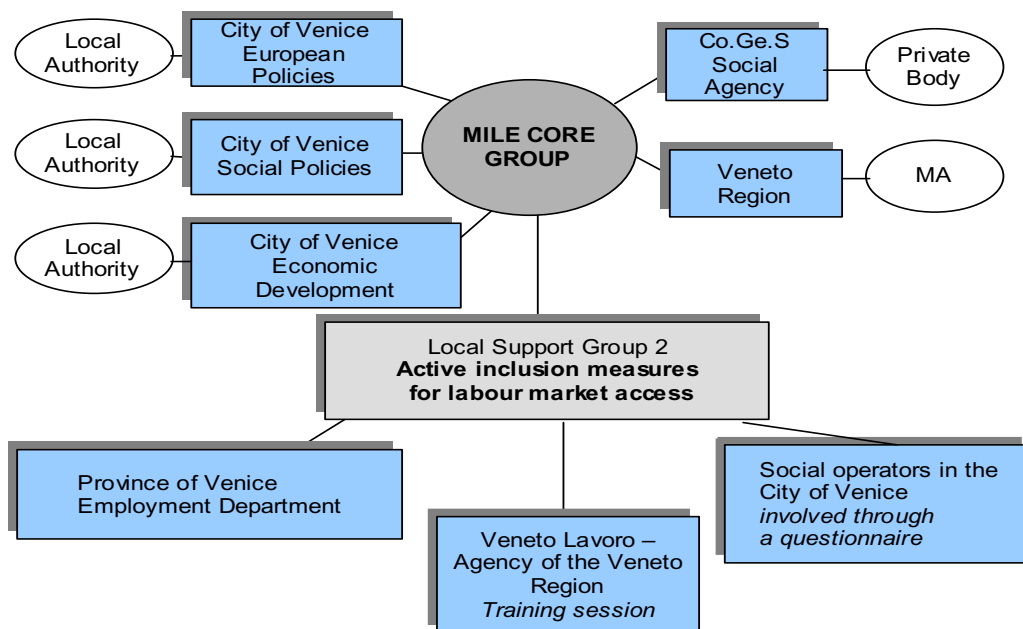
<b>Benefits for the <i>institutions</i></b>	<b>Benefits for <i>individual participants</i></b>
<p>Strategic and long-term:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• participating in European networks and building contacts in other Member States that open up possibilities for future co-operation</li> <li>• Better awareness and understanding of relevant European policy developments</li> </ul> <p>Operational and short-term:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• accessing new ideas, and sharing and discussing one's own ideas in a wider context</li> <li>• using international experience and expertise to test and improve existing materials and methods, and to develop new products</li> <li>• contacts with new partners, political allies, and technical collaborators</li> <li>• acquiring new skills and competences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• extending personal experience, language, communication and other skills and gaining a wider European perspective</li> <li>• extending sources of information and contacts</li> <li>• participating in transnational workshops moderated by experts from all over Europe</li> </ul>

Source: *EQUAL Guide on transnational Co-operation 2004-2008*

In addition, involving different levels of governments in the Local Support Group allows a better coordination of policy and resources and the integration of the project themes into other policy domains. Effective participation of the LSG can happen when a participative process and inclusive decision-making mechanisms are put in place – otherwise the team risks ending up as just a passive audience.

### In practice...

*Fig 3. An example of a Local Support Group working on the theme of active inclusion in the city of Venice: the LSG included different levels of government (municipality, province, region) and different city departments (European policies, Social policies, Economic development, Employment) for a better coordination of policies.*



*(b) The importance of the thematic expert's individualized support for developing action plans*

MILE experience showed that an individualized support and coaching tailored to the context and needs of each LSG need to be provided by the expert for the production of a good action plan.

For the individualized support to be effective, the thematic expert needs to:

- acquire a good understanding of the local contexts, needs and specificities and local working processes
- focus his/her support on the practical process of constructing an action plan: how to formulate objectives, how to formulate activities, how to set indicators, and so on. That is – how to write a good project proposal, following the steps of project development cycle
- build an individual dossier for each Local Support Group, containing a selection of case studies, articles, methodologies and techniques that are relevant to the action plan idea. These resources should be accompanied by a clear explanation from the expert, regarding their suitability and potential transferability to the LSG action plan idea and to local context

In addition:

- using a common template for the presentation of the final action plans proved to be useful for keeping focus on the essential elements that make a good action plan (*Table 3*)
- using the logical framework analysis matrix proved to be a good tool for planning action plan proposals

*(c) Elements of a good action plan*

*Table 3. The structure of a good action plan should the following elements*

**1. Action plan title**

**2. Problem analysis**

- Analysis of the demand in relation to the theme of the action plan
- Analysis of the problem addressed in the action plan

**3. Overall aim of the action plan**

**4. Specific objectives**

**5. Main target group(s)**

**6. Activities to be undertaken**

**7. Methodology**

- The approach and methodology used in your action plan
- Is the project methodology appropriate for achieving the objectives?



### 8. Complementarity with other interventions

- How does the action plan link to already existing services in your city?
- How does the action plan link to the Operational Programmes under ESF or ERDF?

### 9. Added value

- What is the added value of the proposed intervention?

### 10. Equal opportunities

- How the action plan contributes to promoting equality between men and women within the target group(s)?

### 11. Innovative character

- To what extent is the proposal based on good practice developed elsewhere (good practice from inside or outside the partnership)?

### 12. Financial and non-financial resources required

- How much funding does your proposal require?
- Can it be built on already existing services or projects?
- Would it be eligible for other local, national or European funding?
- Would it be eligible for ESF and/or ERDF funding?

### 13. Timetable for implementation

*What types of actions can be considered as action plans?*

Examples from MILE project include:

- developing **partnership mechanisms** between different departments in the city for a better policy coordination, avoiding duplication and working towards integrated strategies
- developing new pilot projects or replicating and disseminating **pilot projects** that proved to be successful in the past
- customizing existing **mainstream services** to the needs of migrants and developing outreach strategies
- creating **new services**, such as a business support office
- using the local action plan to implement an existing programme in the city

*(d) Peer review of Local Action Plans*

*Action Learning* continues beyond simply writing the action plans at local level. It is important that these are reviewed by transnational peers as well. The aim is that exchange takes place in this phase as well, so that partners take

advantage of the experience of their peers and also of the questioning and comments by their peers that require re-framing certain aspects of the action plan. Synergies are also created during this phase, giving birth to bilateral transnational activities among peers, which will last beyond the life of the project.

What worked well in MILE for local action plans peer review:

- specific transnational workshops were planned for presentation and peer review of action plans
- prior to the workshop, summaries of the local action plans are circulated among the participants
- during the workshop, local action plans are grouped in clusters according to the topic addressed in the action plan or to the target group or to the type of action, etc. to allow for comparison but also for complementarity
- action plans are reviewed in the clusters: each partner presents the local action plan, the rest of the cluster help reviewing the action plan by presenting their viewpoints in the form of questions and comments to the presenter. The presenter takes back the ideas and comments received from peers to introduce changes in and finalize the local action plan
- the role of facilitators of the clusters is crucial. It is their job to stimulate the debate and help participants formulate questions and comments and to ensure active contribution of all participants
- the exchange is not limited to the clusters, partners who are interested in other clusters are also invited to make questions and provide comments to other action plans
- it is important that the peer review workshop is structured so that interaction and learning among peers is maximized

## IV. Evaluating and reviewing the process

An essential element of the Action Learning Cycle used in MILE project is continuous evaluation of the process. Evaluation means putting the needs of MILE network members first and continuously adapting project implementation according to these needs so that genuine exchange and learning happen and quality action plans are produced. In practice, at the end of each ALS cycle, the components of the cycle are evaluated (*Fig.1*). The results of the evaluation are then used to readapt the next ALS cycle, and so on.

### 1. WHY EVALUATE?

Evaluation was the cornerstone of the success of MILE project. The exercise was meant to:

- identify **obstacles** and **constraints** in project implementation and possible ways out
- be **participative**: involving all stakeholders, cities and Managing Authorities, in order to increase motivation to participate in planning and implementing next activities
- base project planning and implementation on the **needs of cities and MAs**
- get participants to **debate among themselves** difficulties met in implementation at the local level and exchange solutions
- **readapt** methods and procedures
- produce **quality** exchange programme and action plans

### 2. WHAT TO EVALUATE?

Evaluation concerns assessing main components of the URBACT II projects:

- the transnational exchange programme
- the mobilisation of managing authorities and local key stakeholders in the design of the action plans
- the methodology of work and support provided by the expert for the development of the action plans

### Involvement of key stakeholders in the development of the action plans

- *ALS formation*: obstacles and constraints encountered in recruiting and maintaining active involvement of ALS members in the project and how to overcome them

- *Managing authorities participation*: obstacles and constraints cities encounter to involve the MA actively in the project, and how to strengthen MA participation
- *Forming the Local Support Group*: obstacles and constraints in actively involving local key stakeholders in the elaboration of the action plans and how to overcome them

### **Transnational exchange programme and Peer presentation workshop to assess if genuine learning and exchange is taking place in the network**

- relevance of case studies selected for presentation of cities and MA local experiences
- relevance of external case studies for cities and MA priorities
- relevance of Expert's input on the theme
- performance of the Working Groups (*see Fig.2. above*)
- methods used for the peer review of local action plans

### **Coaching and support provided by the expert for action plan development**

It is essential to assess if, and to what degree, the expectations of the Local Support Groups, regarding the support provided by the project's expert, are fulfilled. The objective is to constantly improve this support and understand the specific needs of the LSG till quality action plans are produced. MILE evaluation consisted in assessing:

- the usefulness of individual resources and dossiers provided by the expert to the LSGs
- the usefulness of expert's guidance provided to LSGs
- communication between LSGs and experts
- effectiveness of the means used to deliver coaching and support: teleconferences, telephones, emails, websites, etc

### **3. HOW IS IT EVALUATED?**

Evaluation sessions took place at the end of each Action Learning Set cycle, after the peer presentation workshop when closing the cycle.

#### **Participants**

Evaluation was planned so that it involved cities and managing authorities – ALS members and the wider LSG – who participated in the activities of the entire ALS cycle, and in particular in the elaboration of the local action plans.

## Techniques

A combination of structured questionnaires and focus groups proved to be a good tool for the evaluation exercise. Both focused on the project components outlined above.

- the **structured questionnaire** allowed for individual reflection and the collection of written in-depth information. Participants were invited to spend 20 mn at the start of the evaluation session to fill in the questionnaire
- the Focus groups allowed for discussions and debate to be generated among participants, and brought to the fore a variety of issues not foreseen in the focus group schedule. In this session obstacles are discussed, but also ways forward are suggested. A skilled facilitator is key for the success of the evaluation. The sessions last 1h30 for a group of 10 to 15 participants

In addition to the questionnaire and the focus groups, informal feedbacks and discussions throughout the course of the project were also a means for evaluation.

## V. Options for mainstreaming action plans into structural funds and local public policy

The learning acquired in the transnational exchange activities and the materialization of this learning through the production and implementation of action plans are the means by which good practice is transferred into Structural Fund Operational Programmes, and mainstreamed into relevant public policy.

Experience of the MILE project showed that applying for ESF and ERDF funds is not the only way available for implementing the action plans. These plans can also be implemented using local financial and non-financial resources, by for instance integrating the action plan in mainstream services already available in the city, or in already existing projects funded by the Structural Funds, that are under implementation in the city. In addition, beyond the single Local Action Plans, good practice ideas acquired in the course of the project can be transferred directly into policy formulation.

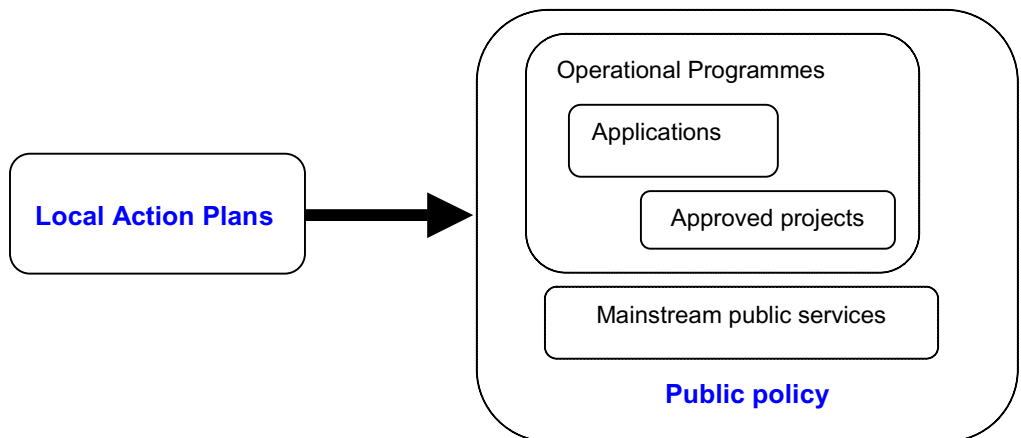


Fig.4. Options for mainstreaming LAPs into public policy

## In practice...

- Vantaa's action plan (Finland) on active inclusion in the labour market consisted in integrating the activities of the action plan in an **already existing ESF funded project, the TARMO project**. The action plan set out to ensure that the needs of migrants were fully addressed through the TARMO project. The project is a key local measure for tackling unemployment in Vantaa, involving job coaching, vocational work placements, subsidised employment and intermediate labour market opportunities  
<http://urbact.eu/fileadmin/damwithcat/mile/LAP%20%20Vantaa.pdf>
- an action plan produced by the city of Seville (Spain), on the theme of enterprise development and support, consisted of **customizing a municipal business support service** *Sevilla Emprendedora*, with the objective of reaching out to potential migrant entrepreneurs and providing them with efficient business support taking into consideration their specific needs. To do this, the municipal service readapted its approach, its communication culture and tools, and trained its business advisors. Implementing the action plan to customize this mainstream service did not require the deployment of considerable funds. The city used local funds, and partially funds from an existing ESF funded project (REDES) which was under implementation in the territory  
[http://urbact.eu/fileadmin/damwithcat/mile/LAP\\_Sevilla.pdf](http://urbact.eu/fileadmin/damwithcat/mile/LAP_Sevilla.pdf)
- the action plan of Vantaa on enterprise development and support managed to **directly influence the formulation of migration integration policy** by introducing an important provision, that of opening up public tenders to migrant enterprises in the recently approved municipal *Vantaa Integration Programme 2009-2013*

It is important to plan **political support** of the Local Action Plan at the beginning of its elaboration. This will guarantee a significant impact of the LAP. Cities should ask for official validation of the LAP by their politicians and by including the LAP, or part of it, in official city planning documents. Actions that can sustain this political support include organizing meetings with the mayor or deputy mayors to present the LAP and to organise a press conference to disseminate the LAP to the wider public.

## VI. Conclusions

The 24 local action plans produced in MILE project have created an impact at local level, in terms of:

- **rethinking the provision of services** to migrants and ethnic minorities and undertaking the necessary organisational changes to adapt these services
- **building the capacities** of cities to intervene in the management of migration and integration, and **transferring the knowledge** acquired in the MILE process to local policies, programmes and actors
- **scaling-up** local action plans to policy level and integrating them into mainstream services
- raising **awareness** and **access** of cities to the Operational Programmes of the European Structural Funds
- securing funding through the Operational Programmes of the Structural Funds in order to guarantee **implementation** of the local action plans, as a path to **affecting migration and integration policy**

Most importantly, the process contributed in creating enduring partnerships, **vertically** between different levels of government as well as **horizontally** with sister departments and municipalities, thus strengthening **governance**.

However more impact could have been achieved if partnerships between Managing Authorities of the partner countries were created. URBACT II projects can be an important opportunity for enhancing the institutional capacity of Managing Authorities to evaluate the effectiveness of the projects funded by the Structural Funds, and hence ensure that Structural Funds are making a difference and are used effectively for sustainable development, not to merely finance one-off projects which influence ends with the ending of the funds.

This can be done by consolidating MA-MA partnerships through horizontal transfer of good practice and tools between regions. The MILE project concentrated on vertical cities-Managing Authorities cooperation, but experience showed that horizontal MA-MA cooperation could have had an added value to both cities and MAs, as well as the entire URBACT II programme and fast track initiative. It is important that future URBACT II projects plan exchange and learning activities specifically for the Managing Authorities participating in the projects and that these activities be linked to building their capacities for evaluating effectiveness of the use of Structural Funds.