

# OPENCities May 25<sup>th</sup> 2011

## Final Conference Report



OPEN **Cities**



Connecting cities  
Building successes





## OPENCities May 25<sup>th</sup> 2011 Final Conference Report, *European Economic and Social Committee/Committee of the Regions*

There were over 160 attendees, from all across Europe and farther afield (e.g. South America, Asia, Africa)

### Welcome address, 09.00 -10.00

Chaired by Susan Russam, Chair Local Support Group Belfast, with short speeches by:

**Nicholas Martyn**, Deputy Director-General DG Regio (replacing Dirk Ahner, Director General of DG REGIO); **Rosemary Hilhorst**, British Council Regional Director EU; **Anna Maria Darmanin**, Vice-President EESC; **Gerhard Stahl**, Secretary General of the Committee of the Regions.

Introductory remarks centred on cities being drivers for development now and in the future and thus tie into **Europe 2020** – i.e. in its call for development, innovation and greater activation of the work force. Likewise, openness links well with the **EU Agenda** on smart, sustainable and inclusive growth – i.e. in terms of supporting social inclusion and inclusive labour markets, in supporting the arrival and encouragement of innovation and knowledge skills.

Comments also addressed **challenges** to support for openness in a recession, and the association in some quarters of openness with vulnerability. It was asserted that openness is not guaranteed; rather it is a two-way process, wherein cities and citizens need to make an effort.

**Nicolas Martyn** expressed his approval for *OPENCities Final Report*, in particular quoting:

- Section 2 '*Crisis*': Moreover, if the EU's stated Europe 2020 objectives (high levels of employment, innovation, productivity, social cohesion, smart jobs and mobility) are really going to be achieved – despite the burden of aging demographics and the ravages of the current economic crisis – it is imperative that European cities pursue a vigorous agenda of openness for attracting and creating new opportunity and for activating the full potential of a diverse population.
- Section 5 '*Partners' experience of the project and lessons learnt*'. OPENCities shows what can be done at city level and why it needs to be done at that level; it is at the local level that integration happens, or not. Similarly, it is specific localities that become more or less attractive, where jobs are created



and where concrete development occurs.”

**British Council** representatives underlined the achievements and number of outputs of the project and affirmed its capacity to have a carry on after the Urbact project’s finalization (no mention was made of the British Council’s large-scale cutbacks which will likely undermine their ability to support OPENCities continuation under any BC initiative).

Representatives of the **two Committees** gave brief welcoming and supportive discourses.

### Is city openness important? Why? How can cities become more open?

10.45 -11.30

Session outlining ‘*the concept of openness, why it matters for Europe and its importance throughout the full economic cycle*’ and presenting BAK BASEL’S Openness Monitor and some key findings drawn from it. Followed by Q&A.

**Jan Maarten de Vet**, Director ECORYS-ECOTEC Brussels chaired the session and gave the talk on Openness.

**Marc Bros de Puechredon** and **Andrea Wagner**, of BAK BASEL Economics, presented the Monitor.

The Q&A debated the usefulness of the tool.

Key points arising:

- **Measuring** openness is essential – not only to compare across cities but also over time, i.e. an ‘early warning’ function.
- Openness can be measured – as **demonstrated** by the Open cities monitor
- The importance of knowing what to **use** the monitor for
- The challenge is to better capture the **inclusion** dimension and ‘**sentiment**’.
- The need to explore synergies with **other initiatives/institutions** (e.g. the Urban Perception Survey or the Council of Europe’s activities)

### How can cities become more open: from strategic thinking into Local Action Plans, 12.00 – 13.00

The session presented a range **highlights** from selected OC cities’ LAPs, presented by representatives of participating cities, bringing out transferability, learning points and key challenges.



**Ian Goldring**, OPENCities' Lead Expert, Chaired and moderated

Presentations:

**Belfast** – represented by **Susan Russam**, Chief executive of Gems NI and chairwoman of Belfast's Local Support Group – presented, **Talk IT**, a case of an NGO working with a major local employer.

**Bilbao** – represented by Ms. **Nekane Alonso**, Bilbao's Councillor for Equality Cooperation and Citizenship – presented on Bilbao's **Gender** aware approach to migration policy, addressing issues of reproductive health, domestic violence and other issues specifically concerning women.

**Dusseldorf** – represented by **Stefanie Bolton**, project manager for Düsseldorf for OPENCities, Office of Economic development, department for international affairs – presented on their **Welcome Centre** for migrants, which built on learning from successful local antecedents and which benefitted from wide and diverse stakeholder involvement. The Centre is still resolving its funding and the city is this preparing a 'pitch' strategy aimed at potential private sponsors.

**Sofia** – represented by **Nikolay Stoynev**, elected Member of the Sofia City Council and Chairman of the Committee on Economic Policy and Municipal Property – presented on the '**Business Forum**', which brings private/public collaboration from a more ad hoc, case-by-case system, to a new and permanent ongoing structure for public-private dialogue. The case is one of a very significant qualitative change in a fast emerging economy.

**Vienna** – represented by **Horak Clemens**, OPENCities Project Coordinator, Department of Urban Development, Vienna – presented on '**Centrope**', to do with how Vienna is building on its access to the talents, skills and opportunities found in neighbouring countries, regions and cities in what is emerging as a Central European joined up single space (dubbed 'Centrope').

**Cardiff** and **Dublin** presented together – represented by **Jonathan Day**, who directed the OPENCities project **Peter Finnegan**, director of Dublin's Office of International Relations Research – on quite different approaches to **surveys**. The two approaches were different in focus and scale, though both were inexpensive and thus highly transferable, in addition to sharing the viewpoint that to understand openness one must engage and consult.

Jonathan Day also made the argument that An Open city is also an **honest city**, i.e. that concerns, anxieties and negative aspects of migration should be discussed openly and not glossed over by any misguided political correctness.

The Chair's **conclusions** focused on:



- i) How a **variety** of approaches to openness are possible (in terms of scale, way of working, budgets – very micro to macro – areas of concern: Business dialogue, gender issues, public perception and so on).
- ii) The relative predominance of inclusion centred actions and the need for more work to be done in joining up policies of **inclusion, place promotion** and **economic development** – and making people understand how they are linked.
- iii) The need for pro-openness efforts to engage with the concerns and **negative** repercussions of openness.

Among the issues raised were those of developing on the gender policy so as to include awareness of sexual orientation related concerns (e.g. issues concerning gay, lesbian and transgender groups), and the usage of OPENCities as a promotional tool for participating cities.

[The importance of strong city leadership for openness and long term success,](#)  
14.00 -14.30

**Richard Barnes**, Deputy Mayor of London asserted London's commitment to openness as essential to its ambitions as a key world city. He discussed the city's use of the Olympics as part of this strategy but also stressed the need for small-scale practical measures to making places and institution open to new groups (e.g. providing women's toilets in traditionally male environments).

[Looking to the Future, 14.30 -14.45](#)

**Jean-Loup Drubigny**, Head of URBACT Secretariat, presented on the new priorities/challenges for URBACT, in particular the upcoming third Urbact call, which will be oriented largely by the EU 2020 agenda.

[Panel debate on Local leadership. Are OPENCities the only way forward?,](#)  
15.15 – 16.45

Panel discussion, moderated by **Oliver Freeman**, Anglo-Swiss Intercultural Management Consultant, with questions and input from the audience – particularly those elected officials present.

Panel members:

**Eric Byrne**, Dublin Deputy Mayor



**Klaus Werner-Lobo**, Vienna City Council

**John McGrillen**, Belfast Director of Development

**Rodney Berman**, Leader Cardiff Council

Questions and discussion dealt with:

- Is it possible to be **too open**? What are the challenges to openness?
- Ideological and geographic **divisions** in terms of attitudes to foreigners (particularly in the case of Vienna vs. Austria as a whole).
- How openness is reconsidered after the **economic crisis** and how public opinion is affected by the crisis – so called ‘desolidarisation’. With observable resentment against being ‘too welcome’.
- The **diversity of the impact** of crisis, which is economic (particularly in terms of youth unemployment) but also psychological (e.g. loss of consumer and business confidence in the Netherlands).
- Some cities have recently begun to generate **emigration** (e.g. Dublin), whereas others are confronted with **returning migrants** (e.g. Poznan)
- Public funding for local policies has been affected and further **budget cuts** are still expected

#### Conference conclusions, 16.45 – 17.30

**Jan Maarten de Vet**, Director ECORYS-ECOTEC Brussels, reviewed and highlighted key themes and observations that arose throughout the day. His summary of the day’s discussions has contributed to the contents of this report.

Identified as OPENCities **achievements**:

- A better **understanding** of Openness by experts and citizens: Openness CAN now be understood by many citizens and translated to day-to-day life (E.g. the project reached 40,000 school children, 300,000 visitors, 10 million radio listeners)
- **Local Action Plans** being submitted and ready to go ahead

Identified as key **messages** from partner city experience and conference discussion:

- Openness is **multi-faceted**: Integration, internationalisation and innovation



- An Open city is also an **honest** city
- Openness requires an **open mind** – to diversity in all of its aspects
- Project experience shows that integrating **economic and social** considerations *is* possible (Belfast/Talk IT, Vienna/Centrepe)
- The importance of involving and creating **ownership** for partners (private and public) to achieve funding and sustainability
- Partners can often be **closest to the target** group – (Belfast/Talk IT, Dusseldorf/Welcome Centre)
- Be specific to the **needs of particular target groups** and their concerns (Bilbao/Gender project)
- Project experience (Cardiff/Dublin) shows that you can be successful with **limited resources**: a. Be practical, b. Do something new, c. Work in partnership, d. Work with international populations, e. Focus on outcomes
- **Link to broader** ambitions and policies (e.g. the Sophia Cultural Capital campaign)

#### Concerning **Openness policy**:

- Changing national contexts (i.e. **economic crises**) that put a brake on migration, hurting cities and their policies (e.g. London, Vienna)
- **Economic and social** policies need to go hand in hand: equality and diversity are bottom-line policies for businesses too (diversity = innovation!)
- Instruments include the use of **dedicated organisations**, platforms/fora (e.g. London 2012 Equality and Diversity Forum)
- The need to overcome very **practical** barriers (e.g. women's toilets at the fire brigade)
- There is a **wide range** of policy fields to be orchestrated: 1) language training; 2) housing; 3) employment; 4) skills and enterprise; 5) health; 6) community safety; 7) community development and participation (e.g. London, Dusseldorf)
- **Procurement** is a powerful tool to drive forward diversification and openness policies

- **Leadership** is essential: promoting openness requires strong shoulders and a thick skin (London)
- The need to engage with the **media** – and to draw up specific strategies (e.g. the ‘Anti-rumour network’ in Barcelona)

#### Future of **work on Openness**:

- What was not discussed: the importance of migration for an **ageing** society – openness policies will have to remain
- Cities involved are committed to continuing to use the **OPENCities brand**, though there is a need to **disseminate** results
- There is a need to be rigorous and to monitor and measure Openness **over time** (need to demonstrate impacts!)
- **Execution** of the Local Action Plans will remain a challenge – leadership and funding are important
- There is a need to engage with (political) **leadership** throughout the project, as it takes time to build political commitment – URBACT can help here too

#### Regarding the functioning of **urban networks**:

- International **cooperation is always hard** work – it is up to you to keep cooperation going (social networking?)
- There is a large number of **urban networks already** – and their complementarity is not always clear
- There is an opportunity to ‘**mainstream**’ openness in these networks (e.g. in candidacies for European Cultural Capitals)
- There is a need for cities to be **strategic and selective**: What is their specific aim? How can such networks be used as a tool?
- There is a need to make a **concrete impact** - for ‘facts’ more than word
- There is a need to involve **elected officials** (to grow commitment and future funding)

#### Concerning future **urban policy**:



- **Learning** on urban policy exchange is an evolving process – with still ‘a world to win’
- There is a continuing need to **disseminate** good practices – to higher numbers
- The next URBACT call is going to focus on: support to **Local Support Groups**; partnership with **Managing Authorities**; support to elaboration of **Local Action Plans**; Specific support to **elected representatives**
- A new programme on urban policy exchange is coming for **2014 – 2020**

[Reception & OPENCities Faces exhibition visit, 15.30](#)

Received by **Anna Maria Darmanin**, Vice-President EESC, and **Mark Baumfield**, OPENCities Project Director, who both gave short speeches on openness and the themes of OPENCities.



## URBACT II

URBACT is a European exchange and learning programme promoting sustainable urban development.

It enables cities to work together to develop solutions to major urban challenges, reaffirming the key role they play in facing increasingly complex societal challenges. It helps them to develop pragmatic solutions that are new and sustainable, and that integrate economic, social and environmental dimensions. It enables cities to share good practices and lessons learned with all professionals involved in urban policy throughout Europe. URBACT is 300 cities, 29 countries, and 5,000 active participants. URBACT is co-financed by the ERDF Funds and the Member States.

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