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## **URBACT SUITE**

### **Lead Expert Report on the Finalisation of the Project**

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Project website: [www.urbact.eu/suite](http://www.urbact.eu/suite)

## Executive Summary

Exchange of cities on sustainable urban development can **provide an added value for various levels** - for the project and programme level and for cities outside the programme. But there are also policy levels, territorial levels and levels of stakeholders and people affected who can profit from these activities. Critical comments and evaluation of the outcomes of activities also provide a helpful learning potential.

This report by the Lead Expert of the URBACT SUITE The Housing Project **reflects on the process and** what has been **learnt** in relation to the main issue – integrated sustainability in housing – and in relation to the methods and tools used in the work programme. It is based on the **experience of the Lead Expert**, in one sense subjective, but also on **wide-ranging documentation** of discussion, learning and conclusions from the network and on surveys conducted with the network partners.

The **added value** of European project participation was **confirmed** - it not only proved beneficial for the development of targeted Local Action Plans but also provided useful input for the current local housing policy. The creation of a **balanced network** was successfully achieved and it remained stable and followed its planned structured work programme. All the partners developed **realistic LAPs** and the documentation of the step-by-step progress allowed the final definition of a broad range of **conclusions and recommendations**. Among them there are many on '**good governance**' with a high level of transferability within Europe. **Financial aspects** turned out to be **dominant** among the **challenges** and the use of **ERDF funding for housing issues** would have meant breaking new ground and thus posed some difficulties.

Opportunities for raising **European visibility** have been and are still being used and the project's external 'links' have helped to broaden the horizon and facilitated dissemination. Cooperation with programme level was also positive.

There is not a main or a 'one and only' critique to be pointed out. However, there is **a range of comments**, hints and propositions on what should be reflected and perhaps taken into account for future projects and programme level activities.

**SUITE has prepared the field.** Further projects on various aspects of the broad spectrum of housing would be advisable because innovation has an enormous impact on housing, the stock, new construction and at neighbourhood level.

## **I. Introduction: Why another report on the project results?**

In the initial working programme of SUITE The Housing Project, a so-called 'evaluation report' was listed as one of the final deliveries. This task was assigned to the Lead Expert of the project.

Before starting the draft of this report, I had to ask myself: what is the relevance of such a report, who could learn from its content and to whom should it be addressed?

I have often stressed that **transparency** via monitoring and **an external critical view** via evaluation are crucial (as this is one of the main lessons from many projects). However, since I am one of the people most closely involved with the project it is not for me to undertake a serious evaluation. This is a task for someone in an external position.

However, there is **also a useful role for** the special position of **Lead Expert**. Because of the defined tasks assigned by the URBACT secretariat – internally, in closest cooperation with the LP and the partners, and externally, independent as in a contract with the secretariat and with duties on programme level - there is broad experience of levels related to content, process and methods and tools. Furthermore, to **learn from the network** and to take a step back from time to time in order to improve the project, the two experts asked the network partners for **written feedback** on several occasions. These results are integrated in this report.

The character of this report is 'internal'. Parts could be interesting for other projects and other cities, however, this is a project's self-reflection. Those parts with a broader relevance have already been integrated into the Final Fact Sheet of the SUITE project, written for the URBACT programme level.

After a broader discussion of 'the added value of European project participation', including network-related questions (networking on a European level, creating a network, the network community) and issues related to tools and methods (plus good governance lessons and reflections on comparability and transferability) there is an overview of the level of European visibility achieved and the role of the URBACT Local Support Groups, from the broadest to the most local level. The report concludes with what is obviously one of the most burning issues – the financial aspects and the challenge of access to funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for housing-related issues.

Two further chapters contain some final remarks, the first related to issues (what have we learnt about the challenges and the possibilities to implement integrated sustainability in housing?), the second related to methods (what have we learnt about and from participation in an EU project?). Both parts are based on the above-mentioned results of a survey among SUITE partners (including some tables). To finalise the report, a last chapter looks towards the future, providing some views on 'the end of a project is a starting point for future innovation: a short outlook on integrated sustainability in housing and EU projects and EU funding'.

## II. The added value of a European project participation

A learning process of more than two years in an URBACT network, within the framework of a creative process of mutual influence and animation within the programme, demanding adaptation to a rapidly changing situation in political and economic development, provided a whole range of insights into 'European and local identities', possible win-win-situations and the pitfalls of networking and of linking this experience to implementation on a local or even smaller-scale level. I pick out just some relevant findings here.<sup>1</sup>

### Networking on a European level

Partners **appreciated** the opportunity to **reflect their housing policy** in the mirror of external views, in discussion confronted with critical questions.

Especially in times of **crisis**, this helped us not to lose a mid-term and long-term view and encouraged us to keep to maintaining a more sustainable policy beyond momentary crisis management.

It supported the ambition to answer the need for social housing, despite economic and social changes and to focus on structural policies instead of temporary factors.

To cite the Lead Partner: 'Programmes such as URBACT II allowed us to continue exchanging experiences and knowledge about sustainable urban development and, at the same time, to include quick solutions to help navigate the crisis and to establish a different action framework for the future.'

Towards the end of the project, all partners expressed not only benefits for the development of targeted Local Action Plans, but also useful input for their current housing policy. As a crucial point, the **establishment of strong local political support**, confirmed for the longer-term by written commitments, and the definition and inclusion of 'enablers' was defined.<sup>2</sup>

Within the network there was some earlier experience in European project cooperation, within various programmes and on various issues, not always including housing-related topics. No partner had been involved in URBACT I projects, at least not in a project referring to a field somehow connected to housing. Therefore, all partners had to meet the **challenge of becoming familiar** with the programme's goals, structure and requirements, not least to the budget-related necessities. However, one partner (Medway C.) was also involved in another URBACT II project and was even the Lead Partner of the REPAIR network.

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<sup>1</sup> Parts of the following text of the report have also been integrated into the SUITE Final Fact Sheet. The Final Fact Sheets will provide a short comparable overview of each URBACT project. The initiative lies with the URBACT secretariat, the Lead Expert's task is the formulation of the content and the provision of some basic information in cooperation with the Lead Partner. The Final Fact Sheets will be available on the URBACT website.

<sup>2</sup> To learn more about lessons learnt and conclusions see the SUITE Final Report 'A Synthesis of the Local Action Plans of the Partners' ([www.urbact.eu/suite](http://www.urbact.eu/suite)), 'our outputs/Local Action Plans'. To read more about the feedback from the partners on how they benefit from SUITE participation, see chapters III and IV of this paper.

## Creating a network

The establishment of a balanced partnership is a challenging task in the development phase of a network.

According to the URBACT structure, the project had started with a core group of partners (Lead Partner plus four further partners), plus the Lead Expert. **Extending the partnership** to a definitively officially committed group within the six months of phase 1 was indeed demanding. An **early definition of criteria** (aside from the balance of competitive and convergence regions and good coverage of the 'European map') proved to be helpful. One of the criteria was to select cities within a certain **population range** in order to achieve a good level of comparability of policy challenges, interests, solutions and open questions. Another one was to arrive at **a good balance of more detailed questions** starting from the very broad main issue of integrated (social, economic and environmental) sustainability in housing.

At an early stage the aim was to avoid illusions about which questions could be satisfactorily discussed within the network. As a basis, first partners and partners applying to join in the implementation phase were asked to answer referring questions. This **stock-taking** was also part of the task at the partner visits of the Lead Expert (as well as explaining URBACT and the project setting, and promoting project participation at local political level). The **Baseline Study** included comments and comprehensive fact sheets following a precisely structured template and set of questions and graphs on common interests.

Nevertheless, it was **stressful** to arrive at a **final composition** of the network. One committed partner city from Spain (who had provided a well organised lead expert visit and all necessary papers including the fact sheet etc.) had to be excluded because the decision to sign up at political level was made after a deadline had passed. Another partner had to shift to another cooperating partner in the city government due to elections and political changes before the application deadline of the implementation phase. And last but not least, in the first months of this phase 2, another (smaller) partner city withdrew due to, as they explained, "budgetary reasons".

For future projects, a **facility for partner contact and selection** via the URBACT website - a platform, a 'market place' - including basic information such as size of the city, involvement in other projects, level of EU experience, political commitment, managing authorities' commitment and municipal departments involved could provide a good basis.

## The network community

Despite this broader level of learning, the selection of **people** within the (mostly municipal) partner institutions to **manage the project participation and coordinate** the content-related activities (in the European project network, in the municipality and in connection with the ULSG) should be based on a sound set of criteria.

Experience in our network shows that the **best choice** is a person with *sound* knowledge and experience in the field addressed (in our case: housing and urban issues), who is open-minded, in stable employment, well integrated in the administration and with decision-making competence, adequate time for the

project, some insight into European policy and a good level of English language skills. However, we are aware that this sounds like 'bring the Swiss army knife'. Thus, splitting up these skills to two people who cooperate well can bring added value, also for providing continuity.

In our network, there was a **broad mix of partners** with regard to fields of work within the city administration, departments or services, but also regarding the territorial level addressed: there were six municipalities, plus two 'Métropoles', French policy and administration bodies for agglomerations with a central main city, plus a UK unitary authority responsible for a group of smaller neighbouring cities. To learn early on about the composition of the network, the competences and the interests of the members, we collected information and showed **comparative tables at an early stage** of the work programme. This provided a good starting point in the partnership relations.

We also learned that one good basis for cooperation in such a project is a **strong commitment** to the project's main objective and the interest to profit from pushing forward innovation at local level, linked with a capacity to 'give and take'. Inspiring commitment and supporting these kinds of 'engines' is crucial for a project's productive atmosphere.

Despite the problems in creating and maintaining a good network (as described above), the partnership finally provided a **good mix** of European cities, not only **in size** (94,000 to 1.8 m. inhabitants, but most partners with a population between 250,000 and 750,000) **and in interests**, but also in the mix of partners from convergence and competitive regions. The number of **partners – nine** – was on the lower end of the scale in current URBACT projects. However, the network (including the Lead Expert and the Thematic Expert) was highly satisfied with this number, which enabled more or less adequate time to dedicate to each partner and their interests and Local Action Plans.

However, there was of course an **overload of needs** within the project work programme, in relation to available time and budget (and, not to forget, in addition to the partners' regular daily work programme on local level). Thus, unfortunately quite a lot of information and discussion had to remain on the surface, and some partners complained that their (more detailed, focused) interests had not been sufficiently met in the project.<sup>3</sup>

Generally, an **acceptable compromise** could be found and the delivery of nine sound Local Action Plans and a whole range of lessons learnt, key messages and recommendations speaks for itself.

### **Tools and methods**

Around the **three thematic focuses** and the intended culmination in a '**synthesis**', it was possible to follow the comprehensive but not overloaded work programme using a structured process of inputs, surveys and feedback reports to the network with thematic workshops and Local Action Plan drafts as a framework. Thus, transparency and mutual inspiration were facilitated.

Each thematic **focus** was **guided** by a group of partners. In a preparatory phase, before the respective thematic workshop or the synthesis meeting, a

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<sup>3</sup> For more on this see chapter III.

**focused questionnaire**, asking for situation, critique, comments, future plans and consideration in the Local Action Plans was mainly developed by the experts and jointly discussed. The results served as an input from the expert(s) for the seminar and as a basis for discussion. After the seminar, the main results were fed back into the network via a **Thematic Report from the expert**. Thus, the topic related-knowledge and findings were condensed from step to step.

A crucial tool has been **access to broad comparative research and up-to-date policy discussion** in housing-related fields provided by organisations active at European level. This was organised by involving another Thematic Expert and integrating several institutions (representing cities, social landlords, tenants, homeless persons) into the network's activities via a 'Board of Counsellors'. It helped to enlarge the horizon in the network. Furthermore, mutual feedback between the project's experts, the partners and the board members led to opportunities to feed project results into the most recent European research and policy debate, including the European Parliament.

The development of the **nine Local Action Plans** also followed a **common grid** of step-by-step concretisation, information to the whole network and feedback by including questions in the surveys, collecting one page short cuts and dedicated workshops at meetings.

The choice of combining the expert work by including **two experts** –'Lead Expert' (H. Feigelfeld) and a Thematic Expert (D. Czischke) responsible for content regarding the 'social' and the 'economic sustainability' focus, but also contributing to the synthesis and to the final conclusions – was a good basis for structured and coordinated work. There was inspiring, committed and **fruitful cooperation** among the experts (although requests for contributions went far beyond resources in terms of time and budget).

### **Good governance lessons**

The final lessons learnt and conclusions show that the **dominant focus** of positive output lay in methodology of planning and in knowledge of good governance. The added value of these results consists in their applicability to a much broader range of municipal policy fields than just housing. They are more widely relevant than merely related to the chosen main objective. Further participation in new projects can build on this experience. <sup>4</sup>

### **Comparability and transferability**

At first there were doubts about whether there could be efficient exchange and cooperation between countries / regions / cities with widely different housing systems in terms of priorities of tenure (tenancy, ownership), the main groups of households addressed by funding schemes, differences in types of housing stock and public responsibilities. Thus, as a starting point there was some discussion concentrated on the meaning and **background of terms** used (for example: starting with the basic term 'social housing' which has a very different meaning in the European Member States, depending on the national or federal system of

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<sup>4</sup> To find out more, see the SUITE Final Report 'A Synthesis of the Local Action Plans of the Partners' on the project website.

housing policy and funding) and of data. Based on this common understanding, the discussion could be carried out on a more advanced level.

Not only are the issues different but also the **points of access** of the various partners (competences, levels addressed, focus, pressing challenges requiring answers and solutions). (See also the comment in 'The Network Community', above.) Providing **overviews via templates** proved helpful as well as defining the differences and analysing which aspects of presented solutions (cases of best practice) are transferable.

One further aspect often does not receive sufficient attention: **the political background**. Support from local policy level for a European project such as SUITE is crucial – not only for developing and implementing plans (such as the obligatory Local Action Plan) but also to get sufficient support during the lifetime of the project, in both phases.

**Both levels** in the participating municipalities (administrative, political) **should be interested** in learning, and not starting with an idea of being 'net payers', more contributing than profiting by learning. Difficult working situations come about if the political level is indifferent, if expectations are wrong (e.g. to get direct funding for project implementation or to get highly specialised input for a focus question) or if there is political change and loss of support. However, as some examples show (in the UK?) - even if external conditions worsen, an EU project may contribute some hope, some background support and some energy for continuation.

### **European visibility**

Aside from the knowledge gained, partners have confirmed that the **visibility** provided by participation in a European programme such as URBACT, reinforced by inclusion into a European level discussion via the Board members, **strengthened acceptance** for participation in the project and possible support for the implementation of the Local Action Plans at local level. This is of special importance because for a long time housing-related issues were seen as the exclusive responsibility of the national level, and even recently housing has increasingly been assigned to municipal responsibility, not least for budget reasons.

Although awareness of the aims and objectives of URBACT was low prior to involvement in the project and in the first periods in some partner cities, we think that it was possible to **increase understanding** and support for European concepts, and this was fed back to local level.

### **URBACT Local Support Groups**

The ULSG members set themselves the challenge of bringing their activities related to a Local Action Plan **into line with their everyday work** and obligations, securing support at policy and decision-making level, reacting to changes of personnel in their own ranks and fitting in with the composition of the ULSG according to the Local Action Plan concretisation. As an example, local experience and routine are widely different in relation to the inclusion of residents or their representatives. Overall however, national and local differences

should not be overestimated. In any case motivated individuals play an important role.

Most of the ULSG **built on existing partnerships** in one way or another. Some integrated parts of existing groups and some took it as a starting point and **enlarged** the partnership according to the further development and focus of the LAP. This proved to be a **good method** to intensify the work and proceed towards an integrated approach. The basis of the ULSG was formed by those directly involved in the project from the city administration, extending to more municipal departments and then to external bodies.

In our case, the **ULSG** brought together a **wide circle of participants**. The main groups to be included were several different city council departments (housing, urban issues, land issues, social issues, housing finance, environment) and similar institutions in the field of 'construction, architecture and housing management and administration', residents' representatives and relevant research fields (urbanism, technology, sociology). While the development of the plan was progressing the circles of participants were repeatedly checked and modified according to new aspects if necessary.

An **early common picture** of the composition of the various ULSGs of partners in the network enabled comparability and provided inspiration for possible further extension. Progress and challenges in the work of the ULSG and in the drafting of the Local Action Plans was made visible not only via discussion at the thematic workshops, but also by a regular integration of relevant questions into the repeated small surveys (see 'tools and methods').

### **Financial aspects in the project**

In an EU URBACT project such as SUITE **financial issues** are addressed on **various levels**. An important level is the process level, i.e. the project funding, the local co-funding, the budget setting, the local work force capacities and financing this work force (in some cases in addition to the project budget). Synergy effects in dissemination, capitalisation and cooperation with other projects are also relevant.

Another level is that of financing future more detailed planning of the Local Action Plan and / or of the implementation of the LAP and its pilot project(s). Thus, local municipal budgets and funding, public private partnership, regional and national funding and, last but not least, European funding questions are addressed.

The SUITE LAPs represent a **broad variety** of financing concepts and solutions. However, the funding type which is most strongly promoted within the URBACT programme, the funding by **ERDF**, has proven to be quite **difficult** to access for the SUITE LAPs related to housing issues. As this is a topical issue and especially relevant in the current phase of the discussion of the future Cohesion Policy it is discussed in an extra chapter below.

Generally, **funding problems** are the most serious problems or weaknesses addressed by the partners in the surveys. There are complaints about a lack of clear route into mainstream 'Structural Funds' programmes. For more on this see chapter III.

## **Funding for housing related issues by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)**

**Possibilities** to receive ERDF funds for plans connected with housing have **developed** very dramatically during the duration of the programme, which means also during the SUITE project period. Overall there are three existing forms of funding (from 2007: for refurbishment, raising energy efficiency and others, in New Member States; from 2009, in all Member States: again for energy efficiency improvement, use of renewable energy in the stock, and finally for housing-related expenditure for marginalised groups). However, they brought no new funds with them but were conceived as a redistribution of existing resources.

It can be seen that all three Structural Funds can by all means be drawn upon for the implementation of various aspects of SUITE's LAPs. They have also been discussed in the project and, as provided for in the structure of URBACT projects, efforts are being made to set up contact to the regional or national authorities managing these funds, the 'Managing Authorities'.

However, our short experience has shown that for numerous reasons **access** to application for such funds for LAPs **could not be established** (except in one city, Tallinn). These include the novelty of the material for all participants (also for Managing Authorities in the relevant regions), the sometimes lacking relationship to the Operational Programmes, difficulties in definition, contact problems, a lack of national co-financing possibilities and the advanced point in time of the funding period.

On the other hand, since all the plans have at least a **medium-term horizon**, there are opportunities to be well prepared to apply for funds in the **next funding period**. It is therefore all the more important, also for the SUITE network, to establish a clearly structured future Cohesion Policy which accounts for the importance of housing in its integration in urban developments and which recognises components of housing which go beyond national borders into a common European responsibility and which provides relevant funds.

In the future, new procedures and tools for early, close cooperation of cities with Managing Authorities, as noted in the recommendations, should lead to strong **pro-active, low-threshold projects** also beyond the URBACT programme.<sup>5</sup>

In the final conference of SUITE in March, a whole **range of recommendations** to EU level, including **addressing ERDF funding**, were presented by the project team. There was strong support for these ideas and theses from the attending high grade stakeholders, including people from the EU Commission DG Regio, thus we hope that our voices will also be heard among others supporting continuation and improvement of funding for sustainable quality in housing.

**More information** on successful use of EU funding in the housing field was provided at the CECODHAS Housing Europe Conference on 'Key Role of Structural Funds for a Sustainable Energy Future in the EU' in Cardiff and a vivid discussion on the promotion of this funding showed strong support from the broad range of stakeholders from all over Europe attending this conference.

After the SUITE project finalisation in July 2011, **further transfer** of information, knowledge and ideas is **planned**, on initiative of the ongoing

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<sup>5</sup> This comment on ERDF funding for housing was also integrated in the SUITE Final Report 'A Synthesis of the Local Action Plans of the Partners' chapter 'Local Action Plans – an overview by the Lead Expert.'. See website.

URBACT II CASH project (Cities Action for Sustainable Housing). The Lead expert of SUITE is invited to contribute to the URBACT-CASH thematic seminar on 'Financial instruments and engineering' in Frankfurt in September 2011.

### **III. Some final issue-related remarks:**

#### **What have we learnt about the challenges and the possibilities to implement integrated sustainability in housing?**

All findings, lessons learnt, conclusions, key messages and recommendations are compiled in the SUITE report. Thus, just a few additional comments from the network partners and **answers to survey questions** are included here. The first part brings together comments on the issues addressed, on the impact on housing policy and on the integration in Local Action Plans. (The second part, chapter IV, will address comments on the process of the project, on methods and tools.)

All analyses are based on the answers of the nine partners to questions integrated in the so called 'Fourth inquiry', which served as a basis for the project's work reporting on the second half of 2010.

The answers to questions regarding the **added value of the SUITE project** show some differences.

While the majority of the partners stated that the project 'provides sufficient added value **to** the (local) **housing policy**', the **positive answers** regarding an 'added value **for** the creation of a **LAP**' were even better – a high proportion answered 'yes, much'.

*(See below Table I, Did the project SUITE provide an added value for your future housing policy?)*

*And Table II. Did the project SUITE provide an added value for the creation of a LAP?)*

Almost all partners confirm that they **received useful inspiration** from the SUITE process. As well as the general debate on integrated measures they mainly refer to various cases of good practice which were presented and discussed in thematic workshops (see the listed 'Open Answers' after the table).

*(See below Table III, For your housing policy, and for your LAP, did you get some useful inspiration?)*

To **understand the background** of some more negative answers to those three questions it should be taken into account that some partners already have a highly developed housing policy, thus this impact was smaller than for others. Early on some partners concentrated on a very specific topic which they wanted to elaborate in the LAP, based on drafts already developed before SUITE. Thus, the SUITE impact was not estimated as being that high. One partner defined a very precise and quite technical question (related to an innovative draft project) on low-cost construction. It was clear very early that this question would not be satisfactorily answered by the network. Some (the LE, the LP) provided 'external information' but generally the input was not strong.

(More discussion of the impact on the local housing policy had already been described in the earlier surveys on social, economic and environmental sustainability in housing.)

TABLE I:

**Did the project SUITE provide an added value for your future housing policy?**

	1. Hamburg	2. Iasi	3. Krakow	4. Medway C.	5. Nantes M.	6. Newcastle	7. Rennes M.	8. Santiago	9. Tallinn
Yes, much								X	X
Yes, sufficient	X	X	X	X		X			
Yes. A bit					X		X		
No									

Legend: x Positive answer from the partner

Source: Fourth inquiry among the partners, for the activity report on the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2010, January 2011.

TABLE II:

**Did the project SUITE provide an added value for the creation of a LAP?**

	1. Hamburg	2. Iasi	3. Krakow	4. Medway C.	5. Nantes M.	6. Newcastle	7. Rennes M.	8. Santiago	9. Tallinn
Yes, much	X	X						X	(X)
Yes, sufficient			X			X	X		
Yes. A bit				X	X				
No									

Legend: x Positive answer from the partner  
(x) Answer not 100% clear

Source: Fourth inquiry among the partners, for the activity report on the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2010, January 2011.

TABLE III:

**For your housing policy, and for your LAP, did you get some useful inspiration?**

	1. Hamburg	2. Iasi	3. Krakow	4. Medway C.	5. Nantes M.	6. Newcastle	7. Rennes M.	8. Santiago	9. Tallinn
'Got useful inspiration':									
Yes	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
No							X		

Source: Fourth inquiry among the partners, for the activity report on the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2010, January 2011.

**Open answers****Useful inspirations - (Describe, if you want to share)**

*Facilitated debate* around alignment of affordable housing, social mix and reducing housing costs through environmental improvements. (Newcastle u.T.)

The development of the *council housing* in Santiago de Compostela shows us that investing money in council housing is possible & right. (Krakow)

Rachel Britt found the Hamburg meeting inspirational, particularly the *Welt Quartier* and Hamburg's Mapping and Modelling exercises. This has put Rachel's strategic planning on the 'right track'. (Medway C.)

Newcastle's *policy on follow up* beside the actual physical housing need. (Santiago de C., LP)

Some questions were also posed related to the **weaknesses of the project**. Interestingly, all partners who answered this part of the questionnaire referred to content and implementation related issues – on **issues of finance and funding**. They also provided some interesting **suggestions** on how to solve these weaknesses.

Generally, the difficulties in accessing sufficient funding for housing-related measures on local level, but also on EU level (including Local Action Plans) were addressed (see 'Open Answers' below).

Suggestions were made to provide funding for pilot projects directly within the URBACT programme (obviously from partners with difficulties in accessing ERDF funding via their national or regional OPs). The one and only partner who succeeded in gaining access to ERDF (Tallinn) would have appreciated to get funding for more focused expertise in those financial matters.

Solutions suggested for the local level referred to public-private partnership or a local centre for advice and mediation.

There were very few answers referring to the design of the project and the work programme. These will be mentioned in the next chapter.

**Open answers****Main weaknesses of the project at this stage and suggestions to solve the weaknesses**

(January 2011, after all meetings, in the LAP finalisation phase):

No funds for Practical Outcomes such as Pilot Projects.

Suggestion: URBACT Programme should consider increasing project budgets by adding the opportunity for Pilot Projects. This could be achieved by reducing the level of expenses relating to Thematic Expertise. (Medway C.)

The scale of the task is very difficult to achieve in the current financial climate. We started off with an ambitious scheme that maybe difficult to deliver however the process of exploring this influences other areas of activity.

Suggestion: Rigorous testing of initial proposals at the stage of joining the project. (Newcastle u.T.)

The main challenge for the project is the funding.

Suggestion: looking into possible funding methods, at local, national and European level. (Santiago de C., LP)

1. Lack of money for council housing, 2. Low engagement of MA.

Suggestion: foundation of a Public Integration Centre. (Krakow)

Difficulty in the trans-disciplinary implementation to use EU funding

Suggestion: inclusion of new experts (Tallinn)

Suggestion: work with developers to spread affordable housing. (Nantes M.)

**IV. Some final method-related remarks:****What have we learnt about and from participation in an EU project?**

Obviously, there are benefits that may have resulted from the involvement in transnational exchange and learning seminars and meetings. When asked about the '**strengths**' of the project the partners listed the **main structure** of the SUITE concept and work programme. As this was the case close to the end of the project lifetime, this was a re-assuring result.

However, the partners were 'reassured' by what they learnt from the SUITE exchange process. Almost all declared that they were '**on a good course**' in their housing policy and in the development of the LAP shortly before finalisation.

Of course, there were also some issues and **barriers** which could have undermined the impact of the exchange but generally it was possible to deal with them in a positive way. A **methodological weakness** addressed – and the network was aware of this challenge from the beginning and discussed it at the workshops – was the **broad issue addressed** in the project: all three pillars of sustainability and even a resulting synergy towards integrated solutions. However, as the partner commented in the proposed solution, there would then have been a different network and the project would have had a different character. **In retrospect** we think that broad access was **helpful for the majority** of the partners as it enabled the integration of quite different starting positions, questions raised and solutions. Of course, this required more general access to the topics addressed. However, in the end a **common understanding** was developed that **integrated solutions are achievable** and that there are different ways to arrive at them – which was the aim of the project.

Also here, referring to the 'on a good course' answers, it is helpful to understand the **background** – Tallinn, who was pessimistic, was struggling for ERDF funding at the time. In the end, Tallinn proved to be the most successful among the partners in applying for ERDF funds, but they complain about the difficulties in accessing this funding.

*(See below List of the 'open answers' to the survey question; Main strengths of the project at this stage, and Main weaknesses.. and suggestions to solve ..; plus Table IV. Are you re-assured that you are on a 'good course' (i.e. January 2011, after all meetings, in the LAP finalisation phase)).*

### **Open answers**

#### **Main strengths of the project at this stage:**

Exchange programme. (Krakow)

Sharing best practice. (Medway C.)

The project is very concrete and realistic. (Santiago de C., LP)

Links with the housing policy and needs in Nantes Métropole.

Staff availability, financial availability, political support. (Tallinn)

The SUITE project allowed to activate the decision to experiment. (Rennes M.)

#### **Main weaknesses of the project at this stage and suggestions to solve the weaknesses (method):**

The subject of the SUITE project was too vast and therefore, insufficiently uniform among the European members.

Suggestion: We should have worked on a more precise subject with fewer European partners. (Rennes M.)

Mainly technical work (at this stage) (Nantes M.)

TABLE IV:

#### **Are you re-assured that you are on a 'good course'?**

	1. Hamburg	2. Iasi	3. Krakow	4. Medway C.	5. Nantes M.	6. Newcastle	7. Rennes M.	8. Santiago	9. Tallinn
Yes	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
No									X

Source: Fourth inquiry among the partners, for the activity report on the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2010, January 2011.

Some more '**methodological issues**' to address:

***External links of the project -***

There was both a satisfactory external impact of the SUITE project, on various levels, and helpful input from external partners into the project.

The project benefited from the inclusion of broader **European frameworks** in connection with 'housing and urban issues' via a so-called 'board of counsellors' (inviting cooperation from EUROCITIES housing and homelessness working group, FEANTSA European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless and IUT International Union of Tenants, which resulted in better access to relevant information, promotion of the project, some contributions for the partners, raising the level of awareness of the European framework within the network and cooperation in dissemination activities.

CECODHAS Housing Europe also contributed in a role as external expert, providing information and access, and as co-organiser of the final conference in Brussels. There was a common interest especially in collecting information and experience on ERDF funding for housing.

Furthermore, a broad range of **stakeholders** from the European level were integrated in the final conference in Brussels, as contributors, participants in discussions or as guests.

Thus, the SUITE project was able to promote its policy recommendations on a broader level and can, hopefully, influence further housing policy.

Many members of the **SUITE network** also used opportunities to promote SUITE and its findings on a local to European level. For example, the Lead Partner, who is also participating in other European programmes beyond URBACT, presented SUITE several times at meetings of the Atlantic Arc Cities.

The Lead **Expert** and the Thematic Expert presented and discussed SUITE findings at various events such as European lectures, conference contributions, panel discussions etc..

However, not all opportunities have been used by the partners, often caused by a lack of work capacity outside their main field of work. Thus, the dissemination and capitalisation level of SUITE remained moderate.

***The added value of URBACT offers and activities -***

At the URBACT programme level, support from the **programme secretariat** was well used to clarify priorities or open questions and to get feedback on the project's activities. In this respect, not only the email and phone contact, but also the Thematic Pole meetings were helpful.

The **Thematic Pole**, respectively 'Cloud' meetings developed over time, with more opportunities to discuss issues related to content and to exchange more deeply with other members of the 'Cloud'. The small number of group members in the 'quality sustainable living' Cloud enlarged the quality of the exchange. The Pole Manager (in our case: Philip Stein) provided holistic and sensible support at and between the meetings. It was clearly shown that the role of a Thematic Pole Manager can be designed in a way which is quite helpful and stimulating for the networks.

The Lead Expert tried to feed back some of the meeting results to the network members, however the feeling of being 'members of the URBACT family' predominantly remained restricted to the LP and LE level. Some opportunities to 'break these borders' were the attendance at project meetings of people from the URBACT secretariat which was appreciated by the network. Enabling the Thematic Expert and a SUITE partner to participate at a thematic meeting was also good.

Other meeting points were the **Annual Conferences**. However, not so many people from SUITE partner cities attended as it was to be covered by the municipal budget and there were not that many municipal political leaders who were keen to join the URBACT EU level and to learn more. Mainly the Lead Partner was very active in this field. Furthermore, the URBACT Local Support Group summer university will provide a level for approaching the EU level and for further learning. However, only few members of SUITE ULSG registered for this event.

For the Lead Expert, the above-mentioned URBACT activities were good opportunities to **learn more about other projects**, thus widening the perspective and profiting from exchange (e.g. she was invited to events from three other projects, HOPUS, BHC and CoNet) and getting a sort of 'benchmark' for own activities.

**URBACT dissemination and capitalisation** activities were used by SUITE, e.g. the contribution to the Crisis Report (which, as a synergy, provided good insight for the network and its issue, and two partner cities, Tallinn and Newcastle, were among those reported on in the booklet) and the 'case study', which deepened the information about good practice in one of the partner cities (Newcastle Pathways Services). However, a lot of work was invested (by the LE, the partner, the TE) but it is not clear if there was any additional visibility and added value after publishing the paper on the URBACT website.

Linked to the Annual Conferences, the LE also used the **URBACT Tribune** for discussing questions related to the SUITE issue (and also the TE is still planning to do so), some cases from network cities were included and these results were fed back into the project.

The **mini-website** for the project, provided by URBACT, was filled by SUITE step by step, this was a learning process, also hampered by some changes of personnel in the team, but in the end, all outputs achieved good visibility.

The LP, the LE and the TE also used the good opportunities to feed information about events related to SUITE and / or the housing issue into the URBACT website, via the 'News' or the 'Newsletters'. There are still some papers 'in the pipeline', with information about events used for dissemination and their results.

**At the end** of the project we are currently in an **important phase for dissemination** and transfer of experience after the final publications and the final conference, as conclusions and recommendations have been defined and there is a lot of experience on URBACT issues. The URBACT secretariat is enabling additional activities by covering travel expenses and fees (via an extended contract). However, the LE has to carry out such tasks free of charge for dissemination which is not directly organised via the secretariat.

However, on the whole the strong emphasis of URBACT on dissemination and

capitalisation is to be welcomed (in comparison to the lack of strategies in other EU programmes). This applies equally to the concept of including a Lead Expert and Thematic Expert(s) in the networks, the obligatory delivery of a Local Action Plan and particularly the involvement of Local Support Groups.

#### **V. The end of a project is a starting point for future innovation: a short outlook on integrated sustainability in housing and EU projects / EU funding:**

The most promising results from SUITE is that **providing integrated sustainability** in housing is not an empty phrase or hopeful dream but is already **proving to be feasible at local level**, initiated and supported by municipalities.

However, **financing** projects and the availability of various funding opportunities remains **crucial**, and the important role of future ERDF funding extended to projects with links to the housing sector has been strongly stressed by the SUITE project and also broadly explained in this paper.

Some partners in the network have expressed their interest to participate in **further projects**, within URBACT or in another context.<sup>6</sup> There are ongoing projects within URBACT related to the **housing issue**, such as CASH, and there are European umbrella organisations further expressing their interest in housing-related projects. Also other major cities in Europe have signalled interest in projects linking the housing and the urban field and others may be inspired to join. Based on some experience in the use of ERDF, later access to these means will be easier.

For the upcoming **last call** from URBACT II more projects building on the SUITE findings will perhaps be proposed. They will now probably be more focused as the 'basics' have already been discussed and they may include 'experienced' and/or new partner cities. Furthermore, we would support another period of URBACT – URBACT III.

The LE will contribute recommendations and propositions based on the network experience at the URBACT autumn meeting, regarding both the ongoing 'young URBACT projects' and the URBACT secretariat for an update of the URBACT framework for the next groups of projects from 2012.

Despite all challenges linked with the 'work in progress' of implementation of URBACT II, **participation was worthwhile** and we would like to thank the dedicated SUITE network partners for their strong commitment and the URBACT programme level team for their intensive work, their open ears, their ambition and their great dedication on behalf of the European cities.

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<sup>6</sup> The Fifth and final SUITE inquiry includes questions referring to interest in further projects. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to collect a sufficient number of these answers in time to include an analysis in this paper.