



SUITE – The Housing Project

Final Conference Brussels

16 March 2011



European Union
European Regional Development Fund

Connecting cities
Building successes





SUITE – THE HOUSING PROJECT

FINAL CONFERENCE –16TH MARCH 2011

SPANISH REPRESENTATION OFFICE IN BRUSSELS

A more sustainable Europe cannot be achieved without including Housing!

The final conference of SUITE The Housing Project (within the European Programme URBACT II) impressively showed the essential role of housing for a sustainable future and a good quality of life for European citizens.

High-grade stakeholders and experts discussed the project's outputs, conclusions and policy recommendation.

These results shall provide a useful input to the current discussion on the future of Cohesion Policy and the Europe 2020 Strategy by fuelling the discussion and shall be followed by a further process of concretion and progress in defining aims and funding schemes.

The conference took place at the Spanish Representation at the EU in Brussels. About 100 persons, from the SUITE network (politicians and administrative level), from URBACT, the European Commission and European institutions, and experts from various fields attended it.



The morning

Concentrated on the theme „**Mutual animation of European exchange and local action – Achieving synergy in housing sustainability!**“, the morning was conceived to explain the project's setting, the work programme, the tools and the main outputs, especially the Local Action Plans from the nine partners in the network.

In his **opening**, **Jan Olbrycht** from URBAN Intergroup (within the European Parliament) stressed the role of housing for community building and the need for good arguments in the discussion of the new programming period of the Structural Funds (later on, this was strongly supported by a whole range of discussants). He also pointed out the positive role of 'action plans' for self-obligation of the actors involved.

Mercedes Rosón, City Councillor of Santiago de Compostela, the Lead partner, and Heidrun Feigelfeld, Lead Expert of the SUITE network, discussed **chances and challenges for cities in an URBACT network and the framework of SUITE**.

Mercedes Rosón expressed the value of the exchange project for policy and administration, being a support for advancing in long-term planning despite the crisis situation, and she underlined the will to continue in the newly established ground.

Heidrun Feigelfeld showed the multi-faceted work in the project to arrive at solutions of 'integrated sustainability in housing'. A step-by-step process of discussing aspects of social, economic and environmental sustainability led to common conclusions and recommendations (presented in the afternoon of the conference). Testing grounds were the Local Action Plans (LAP) each partner had to develop, together with a ULSG URBACT Local Support Group. She introduced the following short presentation of those nine LAP which cover a broad range of issues and activities, from broad housing programmes to innovative pilot projects.

At a '**Market Place of Local Action Plans (LAP)**', the partners, clustered in four groups according to their focus of LAP, presented their main idea, activities and expected results in an informal dialogue with the experts of the network (Heidrun Feigelfeld, Lead Expert and Darinka Czischke, Thematic Expert). This was followed by conclusions and an animated plenary discussion.

The four groups were as follows:

- More than mixing: balanced neighbourhoods and building communities. (Hamburg, Germany; Iasi, Romania; Kraków, Poland)
- 'Improving access to housing: beyond 'business as usual'. (Nantes Métropole, France; Santiago de Compostela, Spain)
- Sustainable housing: thinking 'outside the box'. (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK; Rennes Métropole, France)
- Beyond ecology': holistic effects, with people for people. (Medway, UK; Tallinn, Estonia).

The presenters: Wolfgang Kuehn, Catalina Lucaci, Edward Siatka; Angèle Lafaye, Diego Briega; Neil Munslow; Emmanuelle Monpin, Vincent Jasper, Natalie Neill, (order of contribution).

The partners stressed the added value provided by the SUITE exchange process, by broadening the view, raising confidence in the potential of integrated solutions, promoting their concepts on policy level, and thus accelerating implementation.

In the 'Questions and Answers' session, some more issues, on gentrification, on inner-city regeneration of areas in decline and retrofitting of the housing stock, and on tenancy law were discussed.



The afternoon

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Now concentrated on „**Integrated housing and urban policies – Visions, action and priorities**”, the **Lead Expert Heidrun Feigelfeld and the Thematic Expert Darinka Czischke** opened the discussion via presentations of conclusions from the project and policy recommendations to various levels. In panel and plenary discussions, both European experts and the audience positioned the project findings in the broader context of the current European discussion. Input from the **panel** was provided by Merja Haapakka, Policy officer from DG Regio, Philip Stein, Thematic Pole Manager URBACT and Ivan Tosics from the Metropolitan Research Institute in Budapest.

The **main conclusions** from SUITE, based on six key principles, are brought together in eleven key recommendations, in priority addressed to cities and regions keen to raise the sustainability level in housing and the implementation of good governance.

For good governance, 'integrated' thinking from the beginning, together with a strong local political support, but focussing on one pillar is a good starting point. Sustainability includes building trust over the long-term and daring high initial investments. Securing success needs robust institutional agreements, sound evidence and prospective analysis.

Key fields of action include the maintenance of the physical stock, but also 'soft measures' (services and empowerment). In housing policy, homelessness policies are an integral part. And contribution to EU exchange is strongly promoted by the partnership.

In a nutshell, the main hints can be summarized in a very simple way.

Successful integrated sustainability in housing a question of:

- Numbers – 1+1+1 is more than 3.
- Time – longer term gets the upper hand.
- Evidence – prove the value.
- Extension – think big.
- Mix – find the recipe.
- and Transfer – see the potential.

Further **recommendations**, addressing more widely **city to European levels**, concentrate on a more active role of national housing policy in supporting

cities and the European funding offers. Creation of National Exchange Forums on Housing is suggested.

On a European level, SUITE stresses the need for maximising funding opportunities through the Cohesion Policy and the Europe 2020 Strategy, but in the future within a sound common framework for funding for housing-related activities.

To make the best use of it, coordinated action on regional level, defining priorities and using synergies, is encouraged. One concrete first action should be a conference on 'The relevance of housing in Cohesion Policy and ERDF Funding', and a broad training of 'ambassadors for housing'. Cities have to be supported to get forerunners of sustainable development in housing.

In the **discussions**, those recommendations were strongly supported.

The comments cluster around four main issues: the current policy discussion on a European level, the crucial role of housing, good governance for implementing housing policy and, for good reasons, on finances.

European policy discussion –

At a crucial moment for the European policy discussion, concrete outputs and recommendations regarding housing, based on city level exchange and planning, are useful and should be broadly disseminated.

Crucial role of housing –

The important role of housing in efforts for more sustainability is confirmed, a role which 'goes beyond housing', for a stable living of residents on low income and active communities, but also because of side-effects as provider of employment in the construction field. Employment aspects on the local level should also be integrated in housing programmes.

Emphasis shall be put on a strong role within the New Cohesion Policy and Europe 2020 Strategy, taking into account a big need in retrofitting and the need to balance upcoming housing shortage in many countries and cities.

Not all 'pillars of sustainability' can be met in projects, however 'doors should be kept open' for integrated, long-term solutions.

Cities are key players in urban and housing policies, their 'voices' have to be heard.

Good governance for implementing housing policy –

Multi-level governance is key, especially including the regional level. Integrated plans including housing have to be mandatory on all levels. Fields to be included are defined horizontally and vertically, and confirmed by robust arrangements.

Delivery structures have to be transparent and shall form the basis for future projects at the territorial level.

The essential support required from the EU level goes far beyond funding. It strengthens policies from cities and regions at the national level. And among other things, it can provide useful technical assistance for future-oriented projects.

The importance of a sound housing policy on the national level, both for supporting smaller scale (lower level) housing activities and for strengthening the links to the European Cohesion Policy and funding, is underlined.

Finance and Funding –

Prevention of affordability problems of all kind remains the basic concern in the housing field. Thus, its role for inclusion and fight against poverty is very clear. However, measures in other 'fields of sustainability' also have positive co-effects on affordability, as f.e. the investment in energy efficiency which also has a direct impact on the 'purse of households', by lowering energy bills. Generally, affordable housing enlarges the consumption capacity of residents and thus has got a big impact on the wider economy.

EU funding remains crucial for innovative housing measures, thus funding for housing should be continued in the New Funding Period of ERDF. The regulatory framework then should be clearer and more enabling than at the moment.

Further involvement of the private sector in financing, going beyond current programs as JESSICA, should be considered. At the conference,

a broader discussion arose around questions of better conditions for long-term financing of housing and the role of the financial markets, innovative financing forms (new social entrepreneurial approaches, ethical real estate funds etc.), guarantees, changes in the tax systems, incentives and more.



To **round up**, Jean-Loup Drubigny (Head of URBACT secretariat) and Angelika Poth-Moegele (Council of European Municipalities and Regions) discussed the “**mutual impact of social housing policy and cohesion policy, the role of cities, and the added value from European exchange projects**”.

Poth-Moegele, from the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, agreed to the importance of housing, to many of the SUITE recommendations and the need for allies. 'Cohesion Policy goes far beyond the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy'. At the moment, there is an urgency to mobilise members and stakeholders to bring the housing issue into the agenda, too, which it being a social question that should be integrated in Cohesion Policy.

She proposed to link URBACT and SUITE knowledge and housing related recommendations to the 'Reference Framework for European Sustainable Cities (RFSC)' of the European Union.

However, there is also a link to the questions of the Single Market, the Competition issue and the 'Social Services of General Interest', which haven't yet been sufficiently solved.

The focus of the intervention from **Drubigny**, URBACT, lay on the urgency to inscribe also housing policy in the governance of the territory, the broader administrative and regional development units and the functional areas. He promotes changes in paradigms and in thinking.

Regarding SUITE, he stressed the extra-ordinary diversity both of the urban and housing situation in the partner cities, and of the key issues and solutions chosen for the Local Action Plans.

Dissemination will play a strong role in URBACT activities, as well as further projects.

End of summer 2011, URBACT will offer a 'Summer University' in Kraków, Poland, for the broad range of actors involved in URBACT Local Support Groups, on new forms of local policy. And in December 2011, URBACT will launch another call for URBACT projects.

Final notes and closing

CECODHAS Housing Europe announces a conference on 'The key role of Structural Funds for Sustainable Energy in the EU' on 9 June 2011 in Cardiff, Wales, UK.

The Lead Partner closed the conference with an optimistic view on success in housing sustainability and a continuation in working in European partnerships.

The SUITE network is keen to act as an 'ambassador' for integrated sustainability in housing in the coming months and in the future.

The Lead partner City Council of Santiago de Compostela, Spain; the European Federation of social, cooperative and public housing CECODHAS/Housing Europe, plus the Lead and the Thematic expert of the project had been in charge of the conference concept, preparation and organisation.

We thank all contributors, URBACT Secretariat, the Urban Intergroup of the European Parliament and the Spanish Representation at the EU in Brussels for supporting this final conference.

The published report 'SUITE The Housing Project – Social and Urban Inclusion Through Housing. A synthesis of the Local Action Plans of the partners.' and more information on the conference agenda can

be downloaded from the mini-website of the network at the URBACT homepage:

<http://urbact.eu/en/projects/quality-sustainable-living/suite/our-outputs/>



CONTACTS

FOR THE NETWORK:

- Heidrun Feigelfeld
Lead Expert, Vienna
hf@srz-gmbh.com
- Belén Mendoza
Lead Partner, Santiago de Compostela
bmendozac@santiagodecompostela.org

MORE INFO ON THE PROJECT:

www.urbact.eu/suite

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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 181 cities, 29 countries, and 5,000 active participants

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