

Impact evaluation of the URBACT III programme

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Table of Contents

Abbreviations.....	3
1 Introduction	4
2 Executive summary.....	6
3 Methodology outline.....	10
4 Findings from the evaluation questions.....	12
4.1 EQ1: policy management capacity	12
4.1.1 Integration	14
4.1.2 Participation	17
4.1.3 URBACT Local Groups.....	20
4.1.4 Action-learning	23
4.2 EQ2: strategy design improvements	25
4.2.1 Action planning capacity	27
4.2.2 Progress in IAP development and approval.....	29
4.3 EQ3: strategy implementation improvements.....	30
4.3.1 Improved capacity to implement IAPs.....	31
4.3.2 Resourcing and funding	33
4.4 EQ4: URBACT thematic knowledge	36
4.4.1 Level of outreach to indirect beneficiaries.....	37
4.4.2 Increase in knowledge of indirect beneficiaries.....	39
4.4.3 Use of URBACT thematic knowledge	41
4.4.4 Changes at other territorial levels	43
4.5 Other aspects.....	46
4.5.1 Other changes to the capacity of URBACT participating cities	46
4.5.2 External factors	48
5 Conclusions and suggestions.....	50
Annex 1 URBACT III impact pathways	54
Annex 2 List of reviewed documents	55
Annex 3 List of interviewees and focus group participants.....	59
Annex 4 URBACT III impact evaluation bingo	60



Abbreviations

AIR	Annual Implementation Report
APN	Action Planning Networks
APN1	Action Planning Networks of the 1 st call
APN2	Action Planning Networks of the 2 nd call
CEMR	Council of European Municipalities and Regions
CLLD	Community Led Local Development
CS	Closure survey
EQ	Evaluation questions
ESIF	European Structural Investment Funds
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ETC	European Territorial Cooperation
EUI	European Urban Initiative
FEANTSA	European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless
IAP	Integrated Action Plans
IN	Implementation networks
IP	Implementation Plans
ITI	Integrated territorial investments
NUP	National URBACT Point
OP	Operational Programme
SUD	Sustainable urban development
TN	Transfer Networks
TN1	Transfer Networks of the 1 st call
UA	Urban Agenda for the European Union
UIA	Urban Innovative Action
ULG	URBACT Local Groups



1 Introduction

This evaluation has been commissioned by the URBACT Secretariat to assess anticipated and unintended impacts of the URBACT III program. URBACT is an instrument of EU cohesion policy, co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), EU Member States, Norway and Switzerland. It belongs to the family of European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) initiatives, more specifically to its interregional programmes. According to the ETC regulation for 2014-2020, URBACT III should disseminate good practices and expertise while also capitalising on exchanges of experience in relation to sustainable urban development (SUD), including urban-rural linkages. Funding in the 2014-2020 programming period was EUR 96.3 million. The latest report to the programme Monitoring Committee dated 28 November 2022 proves that a full commitment will be attained.

In the 2014-2020 cohesion policy period URBACT III was one of several instruments supporting cities. Relevant ERDF regulation introduced financial support for sustainable urban development through strategies that set out integrated actions to tackle the economic, environmental, climatic, demographic and social challenges affecting urban areas, while considering the need to promote urban-rural links. In addition, Article 7 of the ERDF regulation stipulated that national managing authorities must select operations in consultation with urban authorities. Article 8 facilitated innovative actions in sustainable urban development (UIA) including studies and pilot projects to identify or test new solutions related to SUD at the EU level. Finally, Article 9 established the urban development network (UDN) to promote capacity-building, networking and exchanges of experience between urban authorities implementing SUD strategies and authorities responsible for SUD innovative actions in the area. UDN activities are complementary to those under URBACT III.

At the time of writing this report URBACT III is closing. URBACT IV has been approved and preparations for the first call for networks are underway with a launch planned in January 2023. In the 2021-2027 period the complementary European Urban Initiative (EUI) will involve innovative actions, capacity and knowledge building and support the Urban Agenda for the EU (UA) as well as intergovernmental cooperation on urban matters. This is the context for this evaluation and its conclusions, but the new programming period was not a specific subject of the evaluation.

URBACT III is structured along four programme objectives of which objectives 2 and 3 aim to improve the design and implementation of sustainable urban strategies and action plans in cities. For this URBACT works through transnational networks of cities: Action Planning Networks (APNs), Implementation Networks (INs) and Transfer Networks (TNs). Although their aims are different, their setup is largely the same. They have a 6-month conception phase and a 24-month implementation phase. Each network has a Lead partner, a Lead expert, and Ad hoc experts. It is organised around work packages and has a defined outcome. This is supported by the 1st objective of URBACT III which is to improve the capacity of cities to manage sustainable urban policies and practices in an integrated and participative way. The programme Secretariat provides various capacity-building activities at programme as well as national levels, which may be supported by National URBACT Points (NUP).

Objective 4 is to ensure that practitioners and decision-makers at all levels have increased access to URBACT thematic knowledge and share know-how on all aspects of sustainable urban development. For this, the programme organises capitalisation and communication activities. These can be either programme or network-led and include thematic workstreams (e.g., Affordable housing), thematic seminars/policy labs (the Leipzig Charter), thematic publications, outreach activities, the URBACT



website and the City Festival. These activities are supported by Programme-level experts and Ad hoc capitalisation experts. An overview on how the programme measures link to the programme objectives ensuring its impact is in Annex 1.

The main evaluation questions (EQ) are set out below. They are based on the four URBACT III objectives. The evaluation responds to these questions by measuring the programme's impact where possible and explores mechanisms which can explain the results while also pointing to unintended outcomes and external factors.

- EQ1.** Was URBACT able to improve the capacity of cities to manage sustainable urban policies and practices in an integrated and participative way?
- EQ2.** Was URBACT able to improve the design of sustainable urban strategies and action plans in cities?
- EQ3.** Was URBACT able to improve the implementation of sustainable urban strategies and action plans in cities?
- EQ4.** Do practitioners and decision-makers at all levels (EU, national, regional and local) have increased access to URBACT thematic knowledge and share know-how on all aspects of sustainable urban development in order to improve urban policies?

This report responds to these EQs focusing on URBACT III impact at the level of cities and the changes observed there. The comprehensive analysis highlights that the programme has also had a significant effect at the EU level which is worth mentioning in this introduction. The programme has made a considerable contribution to ETC goals and sustainable urban development in particular. As anticipated, URBACT III has encouraged extensive exchanges of experience between cities in developed and less developed regions as well as regions in transition, ensuring the effectiveness of cohesion policy. Transnational exchanges and learning complemented by external expertise have induced permanent changes in the benefitting cities through improved and integrated governance and new approaches to the management, design and implementation of socially and environmentally responsible urban strategies.

This evaluation report is structured around the four main evaluation questions with an executive summary, methodology outline, findings, conclusions and suggestions. The section on findings (4.) is the most comprehensive part where each EQ has a dedicated sub-section (4.1 - 4.4). These start with a consolidated response to the evaluation question followed by supporting factual and qualitative information in lower-level sections. There is a separate sub-section on unintended results and external factors (4.5) as these are mostly similar for all EQs. The next section - methodology outline (3) offers a more detailed insight into the methodology and precedes the findings.

This report has four annexes: Annex 1 'URBACT III impact pathways', Annex 2 'List of reviewed documents', Annex 3 'List of interviewees and focus group participants' and Annex 4 'URBACT III impact evaluation bingo'.



2 Executive summary

This impact evaluation assesses the effects of the URBACT III programme on its two main target groups, direct and indirect beneficiaries. More than 400 cities have participated in URBACT networks as direct beneficiaries and these are analysed in EQ1, EQ2 and EQ3. EQ4 looks at other practitioners and decision-makers beyond direct beneficiaries and at all levels, i.e., EU, national, regional and local. There could be some 30 000 indirect beneficiaries.

To respond to the four evaluation questions the theory-based evaluation approach asks: 'Did URBACT produce the desired change?', 'Why has the URBACT intervention worked or not?' and 'How has it worked or not?'. This impact evaluation identifies and describes positive changes to sustainable urban policy practices in URBACT cities due to programme activities. It also analyses mechanisms facilitating these changes as well factors fostering or limiting them.

The programme intervention logic is built around the URBACT method with three key concepts: (1) integration, (2) participation and (3) action planning. For this evaluation, each of these concepts was further operationalised into 3-4 elements or aspects. The evaluation looked for evidence of how these aspects have been taken up by beneficiaries and resultant changes. The evaluation is primarily qualitative however, where feasible, it is supported by quantitative data.

The evaluation covers four types of URBACT measures: (1) networks - Action Planning Networks (APN), Implementation Networks (IN) and Transfer Networks (TNs), (2) programme level capacity building activities, (3) programme level capitalisation and communication activities and (4) national level capitalisation and communication activities. The networks and programme-led capacity building activities were the primary focus for EQs 1 to 3, while EQ4 focused on capitalisation and communication. Altogether 70 networks were supported by the programme, of these the 43 APNs are by far the most prominent and well-documented direct beneficiaries. For EQ4, many capitalisation and communication activities were reviewed for output and impact information.

More than 70 programme related documents were reviewed in the first phase of the assignment. These included primary data sources such as written feedback on capacity building activities as well as follow-up studies on network outcomes. In the second phase of the assignment the evaluators sought the first-hand views of stakeholders. This included questions in two URBACT Secretariat feedback surveys, encountering APN direct beneficiaries at the URBACT City Festival in June 2022 as well as holding several individual and group interviews with network representatives, URBACT Monitoring Committee members, strategic partners such as DG REGIO and Urban Innovative Actions, National URBACT Points and other strategic partners and programme experts.

EQ1 verified that URBACT III has succeeded in significantly increasing the capacities of benefiting cities to manage sustainable urban policies and practices in an integrated and participative way. Highlighting the programme impact, at least 200 cities – direct URBACT beneficiaries - have seen notable benefits in their knowledge and capacity. Learning integrated and participative approaches for action planning and mastering tools to facilitate these processes during the URBACT 'journey' was pivotal in many cities. Most direct beneficiaries acknowledge that interactive development planning in their city commenced only after participation in URBACT III activities.



URBACT III and its measures have been the basis for multi-dimensional integration processes in participating cities, however the extent of integration varies by dimensions. Of the four defined dimensions, horizontal integration has improved considerably. There are also positive changes in vertical and resource integration, while territorial integration is much less pronounced.

The capacity for work in a participative way slightly exceeds the change in capacity to work in an integrated manner. URBACT Local Group (ULG) has been an excellent tool to pilot hands-on application of theoretical knowledge acquired via capacity-building activities. It has certainly fostered practical uptake of the URBACT method. Frameworks providing more effective and productive stakeholder engagement for sustainable urban development have been set up and enabled in more than 400 European cities.

The biggest advancement is in action-learning capacity that entails structured peer learning with URBACT III leading to 15 to 20 good practices being improved and adopted by 100 network partners.

ULGs, Transnational Exchange and IAP Review have contributed most to capacity change. Lead expert and Lead partner support have also been effective at the network level. URBACT Toolbox, E-University and written guidance from the URBACT Secretariat also provided effective support at the programme level.

EQ2 inquired about the URBACT ability to improve the design of sustainable urban strategies and action plans in cities. Developing an Integrated Action Plan (IAP) following the URBACT method was the main objective of action planning networks so APN cities and their 'products' (IAPs) best answer this evaluation question. The two rounds of APNs including two follow-up studies show improvements. There has been a notably improvement in the design of sustainable urban strategies and action plans as a result of URBACT, through increased action planning knowledge and capacity.

For many cities, participation in URBACT was fundamental to the quality of sustainable urban strategies and action plans. Over a quarter of the first round of APN cities admit they would not have developed action plans for sustainable urban development without URBACT participation and more than 190 IAPs were developed for the first time. There should be a nine-fold increase in the number of sustainable urban strategies because of URBACT III, which is an impressive result. The plans are not only elaborated, but some 4/5 are either approved or expect to be approved in the very near future. Political validation of the IAPs proves the capacities to design strategies that are integrated, sustainable and in line with the political aims. This can also be attributed to the URBACT programme. Lead partners and experts have a very important role in steering APNs, while friendliness and quality interaction with the programme Secretariat is also much appreciated.

Despite limited and indirect evidence for EQ3 given less support for implementation, URBACT III also improved sustainable urban strategy and action plan implementation in cities. The cities slightly boosted their capacities as shown by two proxies: (1) the advancement of urban strategies and action plans and (2) successful resourcing of plans.

INs and TNs are the only direct beneficiaries of the hands-on URBACT support for implementation of the sustainable urban strategies and action plans. They are satisfied with their URBACT participation, acknowledging the positive impact on personal skills, participative implementation, cooperation at European level, partnerships between local authorities and stakeholders as well as network management.



Follow-up data also suggest that URBACT capacity building activities improved the capabilities of APN cities to implement their IAPs. The APN cities appear to have gained the most due to their greater exposure to the wide range of programme mechanisms.

A brief and general response to EQ4 is positive: yes, practitioners and decision-makers at all levels (EU, national, regional and local) have increased access to URBACT thematic knowledge and share know-how by all aspects of sustainable urban development to improve urban policies. A more specific and nuanced response is constrained by the indefinite size of the indirect beneficiaries as a target group as well as limited data. The following logic was applied to assess the programme impact on change in thematic knowledge for URBACT indirect beneficiaries. First, it is presumed that indirect beneficiaries must know and understand the programme, second, they learn from the thematic knowledge provided by the programme and, third, they use this knowledge, leading to the following conclusions.

URBACT III has consistently reached many urban stakeholders – from 500 to 900 participants in large capitalisation events, more than 9 000 ULG members, 15 000 or more social media followers and 30 000 monthly website visits. The outreach has steadily grown during the programme period. The surveys indicate some 50% of URBACT indirect beneficiaries have only a moderate understanding of the programme at best, but this increases to 80-90% of those participating in major programme events. The URBACT website, newsletter, Good Practice database and Knowledge Hub are highly appreciated knowledge sources. A majority of those increasing their knowledge confirm they also use it or intend to use it in their work. To conclude, on the topic of increased access to URBACT, it must be noted that almost 50% of cities in URBACT III networks were new direct beneficiaries highlighting URBACT's ability to grow its pool of beneficiary cities.

In addition to cities, there are indirect regional, national and European beneficiaries of URBACT. These can influence European or national urban policy and include national ministries responsible for urban or cohesion policy, other ETC programmes, DG REGIO, the Secretariat of Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) and umbrella city organisations such as Eurocities and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR). There is no comparable data for URBACT impact on policies beyond municipalities. However, the programme has considerably affected urban policies in Italy, Poland and Portugal with URBACT methodology adopted at national level. At EU level URBACT methods and experts have supported and facilitated UIA and UDN. The impact on Article 7 cities' sustainable urban development strategies seem mostly indirect as URBACT has increased capacity in many of them. Although the Urban Agenda was an unforeseen event, URBACT III has been instrumental to the success of UA partnerships with its urban knowledge, 'community' of cities, experts and methodology.

Last, but not least the evaluators looked at unintended results of the programme as well as external factors that influenced URBACT III. Direct beneficiaries, but APN cities in particular, acknowledge changes in behaviour and/or approaches in urban planning, e.g., how their city or institution develops and implements sustainable urban strategy. A follow-up study reviewed under this evaluation emphasises less tangible and tacit gains of cities from participation such as inspiration, confidence and working methods. These 'soft' benefits have the same, or higher added value than the knowledge acquired or final IAP. Cities also confirm increased awareness of specific cross-cutting topics. URBACT has reportedly paved the way for more detailed and robust data to inform decisions in policy fields such as, e.g., air quality and carbon emissions. Other unintended results include incorporating the ULG structure and processes in municipal decision making, improved national collaboration as well as political support, abilities and skills to cooperate at the European level. In addition, reinforced civil engagement and



commitment including participatory platforms and budgets developed because of URBACT are also unintended gains.

URBACT cities are consistent when asked about external factors that fostered or limited the changes. The major event is no doubt the COVID19 pandemic, but more generally also global crises. Most second round APN cities indicated that COVID-19 had a strong or very strong impact on their network results. Other factors are changing political priorities and funding environment. Even though these two external factors are well known and difficult to tackle, interviewees want the programme to try harder with the Monitoring Committee ensuring funding is aligned at national level. A fourth factor is national and local context where National URBACT Points are seen important to mitigating national barriers. However, not all of these external factors are negative. The UA was generally seen as a big opportunity for URBACT. Finally, a city's networking environment can amplify, transfer and develop changes initiated by participation in URBACT.

The impact evaluation concludes that the URBACT community has grown considerably during its third-generation programme, enabling multi-faceted changes for cities. The programme intervention has produced expected change with cities building their capacity to manage and design sustainable urban policies and practices. The programme inspires and facilitates change in many ways. Knowledge and capacity for all three key URBACT concepts: (1) integration, (2) participation and (3) action planning has increased with the biggest impact on action-planning process itself rather than its result. Enabling and facilitating ULGs is a major impact of URBACT networks. Moreover, ULGs and the URBACT participatory approach are important place-based means of strengthening local democratic processes. URBACT III has created multiplying effects that spread beyond its actions and target groups. Unintended results provide extra added value to the programme and reinforce its impacts. Increased awareness of cross-cutting topics such as health and gender equality have gained attention in URBACT cities.

The evaluators feel the programme can be enhanced or safeguarded by:

- ensuring greater engagement of the programme and its beneficiaries with urban policymakers at all levels of governance;
- better alignment with the general EU policy discourse including the Green Deal and New European Bauhaus;
- emphasising its 'unique selling points' as well as looking for synergies with other initiatives;
- responding to demand for high-quality advice on resourcing integrated action plans beyond soliciting funds;
- creating synergies between URBACT and EUJ to maximise capacity for supporting sustainable urban development in European cities;
- NUPs extending the URBACT method beyond URBACT cities;
- further empowering community initiatives.



3 Methodology outline

This impact evaluation assesses effects of the URBACT III programme on its two main target groups: (1) direct beneficiaries and (2) indirect beneficiaries. These are also referred to as URBACT cities further in the text. Direct beneficiaries are the more than 400 cities that have participated in the URBACT networks. These are the main object of analysis for EQ1, EQ2 and EQ3. EQ4 covers other possible practitioners and decision-makers beyond direct beneficiaries and at all levels, i.e., EU, national, regional and local. This group of 'indirect beneficiaries' could be up to 30 000 people.

The URBACT cities like to refer to their participation in the programme as a 'journey' and this study reviews their main 'takeaways' from this journey. It identifies and describes positive changes of practices in sustainable urban policies in URBACT cities due to programme activities. Mechanisms facilitating these changes as well factors fostering or limiting them have also been analysed.

This assessment uses a theory-based evaluation approach centring around the theory of change and responding to the question: 'Did intervention work as expected to produce the desired change?'. While the specific objectives of URBACT III are verified by the Annual Implementation Reports, this evaluation focuses on more qualitative insights inquiring 'Why has it worked or not?' and 'How has it worked or not?'. This provides a better understanding of the causal links between programme elements and changes they induce. Such assessment is essential for continued qualitative improvement in the programme, ensuring its constant evolution.

The programme intervention logic is built around the URBACT method with three key concepts: (1) integration, (2) participation and (3) action planning. For this evaluation, each of these concepts was further operationalised into 3-4 elements or aspects. The evidence for change was sought from primary and secondary data sources on how these aspects have been taken up by the beneficiaries and what change has been induced. Though the evaluation is primarily qualitative, where feasible it is supported by quantitative data. Complementing abstract information with data ensures greater objectivity and credibility of the evaluation and better highlights the programme impact.

The evaluation covered four types of URBACT measures that are sometimes also referred to as URBACT activities: (1) networks - Action Planning Networks (APNs), Implementation Networks (IN) and Transfer Networks (TNs), (2) programme level capacity building activities (3) programme level capitalisation and communication activities and (4) national level capitalisation and communication activities.

The first step in the evaluation was to review all the recorded programme results – 'quantitative and qualitative' and impacts – 'intended and unintended' through the many feedback surveys and follow-up research. More than 70 documents were reviewed. A full list of these documents is in Annex 2. The document review provided valuable initial information for this evaluation. The biggest information gap was on capitalisation and communication activities at both programme and national levels.

At the interim stage of the research most of the findings stemmed from network and capacity building exercises as the best documented measures. Also, the final report to large extent is based on the network closure survey (CS) results and feedback on the capacity building and communication activities, e.g., APN CS, University and Festival feedback surveys, URBACT stakeholder surveys and similar. These primary data sources are valuable self-assessments that ensure information authenticity, though sometimes they may not be fully objective. Therefore, the evaluation also used secondary data sources



such as follow-up studies on the networks which provide professional views on the network outcomes. The quotes from these studies as well as from the responses to open-ended questions in the surveys and feedback are noted in italics.

The Interim report pointed to additional information needs and in cooperation with the URBACT Secretariat these data gaps were closed. First, the evaluators introduced questions relevant to this evaluation into the planned Closure survey of the 2nd round Action Planning Networks (APN2) and the City Festival 2022 feedback survey. Second, to close the information gap on capitalisation and communication activities the evaluators talked with programme stakeholders and beneficiaries. These talks included individual interviews with network representatives, URBACT Monitoring Committee members, strategic partners such as DG REGIO and Urban Innovative Actions as well as group interviews / small focus group discussions with National URBACT Points, other strategic partners and programme experts. The ten interviews and three smaller focus group discussions involved 20 stakeholders from different organisations. A full list of the stakeholders is in Annex 3. The quotes from these interactions are also in italics.

The evaluators also had a chance to participate in the URBACT City Festival in June 2022 and interacted with programme beneficiaries there. An innovative digital impact evaluation bingo exercise collected impressions from APN2 cities on their URBACT ‘journey’. A total of 25 groups of APN2 cities worked on their own bingo card reflecting on statements with a negative connotation for Integration, Participation, Action-learning, Integrated Action Plans (IAPs), Thematic knowledge and experience or just a random word. The cities were asked to mark representative statements of their remaining challenges in developing sustainable urban strategies. They were not informed that these statements were proxies for bespoke elements. The evaluators quantified the responses. An example of an empty and a filled-in bingo card as well as the table showing the proxy meaning of the statements is in Annex 4. Results of the exercise complement the findings on EQ2 related to strategy design.

To conclude on the methodology the networks and programme-led capacity building activities were the primary focus for EQs 1-3, while EQ4 focused on capitalisation and NUP activities. Altogether 70 networks were supported by the programme. The 43 APNs are by far the most prominent and well-documented direct beneficiaries, so their feedback has considerable weight in the findings for EQs 1-3. The data from 23 TNs and 4 INs was also important to judge specific aspects of the URBACT method. The Sustainable Development Goal and UIA transfer networks are not part of the evaluation. For EQ4, a myriad of capitalisation and communication activities were looked at when information on output and impact was available. Four on-site and one online City Festival and 15 national campuses were valuable sources.

Last, but not least, the theory-based evaluation verifies the theory of change behind the programme and takes into consideration other influencing factors. The final step was contribution analysis with data interpretation and conclusions on the URBACT III impact. Most conclusions stem directly from the data. In less obvious cases, experts made judgements. This has enabled sound and justified suggestions for the future orientation of URBACT interventions.



4 Findings from the evaluation questions

4.1 EQ1: policy management capacity

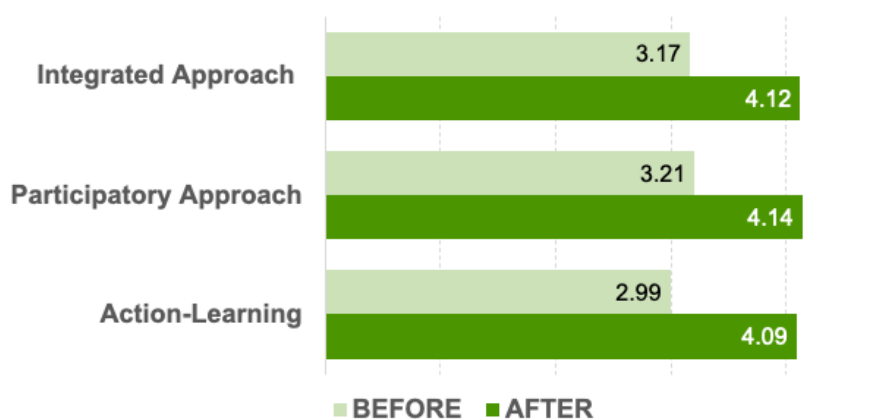
Was URBACT able to improve the capacity of cities to manage sustainable urban policies and practices in an integrated and participative way?

URBACT III has succeeded to significantly increase the capacities of benefiting cities to manage sustainable urban policies and practices. Learning the integrated and participative approaches for action planning and mastering relevant tools to facilitate the processes has been pivotal in many cities. Most participants acknowledge that interactive development planning in their city commenced only after participation in URBACT III activities. Thanks to the programme a prefix ‘CO-...’ has been now added to many processes, such as co-working, co-creating and co-planning for the first time.

A closer look at the capacity building and the programme impact should consider that the URBACT III operational programme noted ‘cities are part of a very fragmented public sector with high levels of hysteresis and path dependency’ (p.20). Hence, there are many and diverse positive outcomes at various levels of interaction, so homogenous findings and conclusions are not easy to determine. One thing is obvious though, the overall professional development happens both at the level of individual staff as well as the organisations as a whole.

The APN2 Closure Survey (APN2 CS) in 2022 asked the networking cities about their capacity change by various aspects. Figure 4-1 below provides an overview of how the cities self-assess change under the three key URBACT concepts. It showcases the response to the EQ in a nutshell. The cities acknowledge a significant shift in their capacities for the elements of the URBACT method highlighting the overall positive programme impact. Insights from other networks are provided later in this sub-section together with a reference to the URBACT mechanisms leading to the change.

Figure 4-1 Average change in capacity of the city/institution by key concept of the URBACT method (self-assessment of the situation before and after URBACT on a sliding scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being ‘weak’ and 5 being ‘excellent’)



Source: Own elaboration based on APN2 CS question 6.4 responses



Reaching the relevant URBACT III specific objective means the programme has left an imprint on many beneficiaries. **At least 200 cities have a significant positive change in their knowledge and capacity** for integrated and participatory approaches to sustainable urban development.

The increase in knowledge and capacities to **work specifically in an integrated manner** has been widely noted. URBACT III and its measures have instigated multi-dimensional integration processes aimed at sustainable urban development, however the extent of integration varies by dimensions. Of the four defined dimensions the horizontal integration stands out. This important steppingstone for sustainable urban development has improved considerably. There has been some progress also in vertical integration and integration of resources, while territorial integration is much less pronounced. There is more information in the sub-section on integration.

Qualifying and quantifying the experienced change in capacity to **work in a participative way**, shows it slightly exceeds the change in capacity to work in an integrated manner. URBACT Local Group (ULG) is an excellent tool to pilot hands-on application of theoretical knowledge acquired via the learning part of the capacity-building activities. It has certainly fostered practical uptake of the URBACT method. **Frameworks for sustainable urban development have been set up and enabled in more than 400 European cities** providing more effective and productive stakeholder engagement. This is described in detail in the sub-sections on participation and ULG.

The change in capacity for **action-learning** has advanced more than integration and participation. The key added value of action-learning is *'structured peer learning in trusted relationships across borders, scales and sectors'*. Inter alia, as described in the sub-section on action-learning **URBACT III has led to 15 to 20 good practices being improved and adopted by 100 network partners**.

APN2 cities assessed some **URBACT measures and mechanisms** for their contribution to change in their capacity. Table 4-1 shows that ULG, Transnational Exchange and IAP Review stand out. This is further analysed in the report.

Table 4-1 The extent to which the URBACT measures have contributed to the change in capacity in integrated action planning and participatory approaches in the city/institution

	No contribution	Low contribution	Average contribution	Significant contribution	Pivotal contribution
URBACT Local Group (ULG)	0%	2%	17%	60%	20%
Transnational Exchange	0%	1%	12%	55%	33%
IAP Review	0%	3%	28%	47%	22%
URBACT Toolbox	2%	5%	26%	46%	22%
Programme Support (e.g. e-University, webinars)	0%	4%	29%	45%	22%
(Digital) City Visits	0%	7%	26%	43%	25%
Expert support	0%	1%	16%	40%	44%
URBACT Training	3%	7%	28%	38%	24%
National URBACT Points (NUPs)	7%	18%	26%	36%	13%
URBACT City Festivals	12%	6%	32%	33%	17%

Source: Own elaboration based on APN2 CS question 6.6 responses

In an earlier mid-term survey reported in AIR 2021 APN2 respondents indicated also that Lead expert and Lead partner support was effective at the network level. Meanwhile, URBACT Toolbox, E-University and written guidance from the URBACT Secretariat provided effective support at the programme level. These views are confirmed by other direct beneficiaries via feedback and interviews, which emphasise expert support and city visits as important mechanisms that have increased their capacity.



The sub-sections below elaborate the above findings in more detail. They take a closer look at the capacity increase through three key URBACT concepts: (1) integration, (2) participation and (3) action-learning. A sub-section has been also devoted to ULG as a measure which is highly valued by direct beneficiaries.

4.1.1 Integration

Integration is undoubtedly a central axis of URBACT and continues this in the 3rd generation programme, i.e., URBACT III. Mastering an integrated approach is widely recognised by direct beneficiaries as one of the main added values of the programme. Networking and other programme-led capacity building activities such as E-University, Summer University and Campus have significantly enhanced capacity in participating cities to work with an integrated approach.

APN cities report a considerable change in their average capacity to apply an integrated approach to urban development after participating in URBACT III, which is an explicit impact of the programme. Many respondents to APN1 CS mention the integrated approach as one of the three best practices they have learned through URBACT networking, improving their ability to address challenges. This has also been confirmed by the interviewed direct beneficiaries. APN2 CS asked respondents to assess the city capacity before and after they participated in the URBACT III by three key concepts. The **capacity for 'Integrated approach to urban development' increased by 0.95 points on a scale 1 to 5** (from 3.17 before to 4.12 after URBACT). See, Figure 4-1 above. Also, the Implementation Network CS analysis concludes *'that URBACT's strongest points are about the integrated approach and the integration of local stakeholders.'* (p.5)

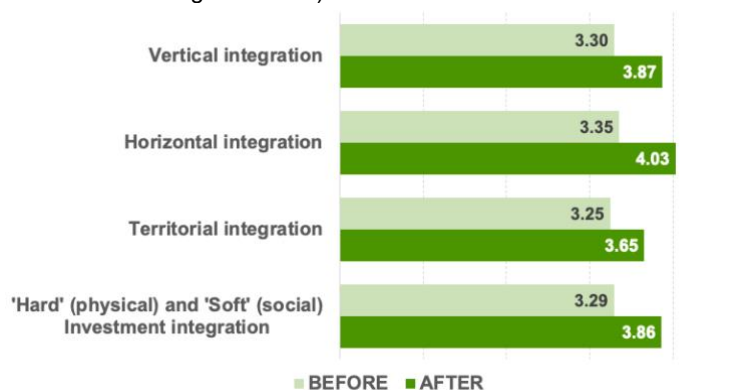
A further qualified analysis of integration is by the following four elements / dimensions as agreed in the inception phase:

- a. Vertical integration between all levels of governments and local players
- b. Horizontal cooperation among policy areas and departments of municipalities
- c. Territorial cooperation between neighbourhoods, nearby municipalities, rural areas and regions.
- d. Balance between hard and soft investments.

APN2 CS asked networking cities about the change in their capacity for the above dimensions before and after URBACT. The results are shown in Figure 4-2 below. Internal or **horizontal integration** is the main change. Also, Figure 4-3 shows the results of another APN2 CS survey question with a slightly different connotation which supports this conclusion. Asked to assess the progress towards integration in their city, horizontal integration was rated highest – 3.5 out of 5 where 3 is satisfactory and 4 significant progress. The Study on Integrated Action Plans (IAP study) in 2019 offers a good explanation: *'The Integrated Action Plans are local in nature ... Many cities are clearly focused on strengthening their local governance processes.'* (p.31)



Figure 4-2 Average change in capacity of the city/institution by the dimensions of integration (self-assessment of the situation before and after URBACT on a sliding scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being 'weak' and 5 being 'excellent')



Source: Own elaboration based on APN2 CS question 6.5 responses

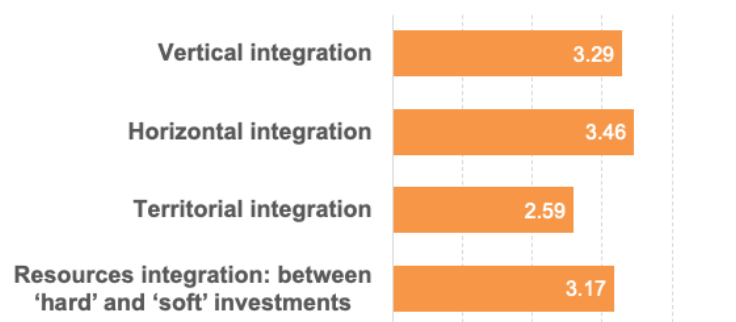
The pronounced impact on horizontal cooperation is also visible in the colour-coded Table 4-2. 17% of the cities consider their capacity to cooperate horizontally within their municipality after the 'URBACT journey' as 'excellent'. Before it was 'excellent' for only 3%.

Table 4-2 Change in capacity of the city/institution by the dimensions of integration (self-assessment of the situation before and after URBACT on a sliding scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being 'weak' and 5 being 'excellent')

	Weak	Somewhat weak	Mediocre	Good	Excellent
Vertical integration	-1%	-10%	-23%	26%	10%
Horizontal integration	-2%	-10%	-25%	20%	17%
Territorial integration	-2%	-8%	-7%	13%	8%
'Hard' and 'Soft' Investment integration	-2%	-11%	-12%	17%	13%
Fund & Resource the Integrated Action Plan	-5%	-10%	-18%	25%	10%

Source: Own elaboration based on the APN2 CS Q 6.5 responses

Figure 4-3 The level of progress towards integration by the cities (self-assessment of the situation before and after URBACT on a sliding scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being 'no progress' and 5 being 'highly significant progress')



Source: Own elaboration based on the APN2 CS question 4.6 responses



Also, most APN1 cities and beneficiaries of the programme-led capacity building activities such as E-University, Summer University and Campus 2019 acknowledge a significant increase in knowledge and capacity in working among policy areas and departments after participating in networks and attending capacity building events.

The effect of URBACT III on horizontal integration is noteworthy. This dimension of integration is a crucial steppingstone for sustainable urban development. The interviews also verified that URBACT very often succeeds in kicking-off relevant strategic processes in their cities that would have otherwise not taken place. For many networking cities URBACT has been pivotal.

Not surprisingly the horizontal dimension of integration also appears as an area where APN2 partner cities experienced the most persistent barriers during IAP development. APN2 CS analysis report notes: *'Key concerns that feature are the familiar silo mentality, recurring trust issues, information flow problems, conflict over priorities and expertise non-alignment. Crucially, silo-breaking activities are claimed to be under-resourced.'* (p.43). This provides pointers to aspects that URBACT needs to address in future capacity-building efforts.

There is less impact on the change in vertical integration between levels of government. While some cities report involving regional as well as national level decision-makers in their urban development processes, the general programme impact stays within the benefitting local authority and the main thematic stakeholders. Among the 'takeaways' the cities mentioned mainly cross-sectoral / cross-departmental cooperation. Higher levels of government are very rarely noted.

The APN2 cities report about 6% of ULG participants were from other tiers of the government and 9% from managing authorities and local public agencies. Nevertheless, they rate progress in vertical integration at 3.26 compared to horizontal integration at 3.5 which is still comparatively high, see Figure 4-3 above. A closer look at the change in capacity suggests that more respondents assess the increase in capacity for vertical integration as 'good' (26%) rather than 'excellent' (10%) leaving considerable room for improvement, see Table 4-2.

The IAP study concludes that *'Generally, the sense from the IAPs was that they were seeking to respond to the national or regional policy context in which they found themselves and were not able to reach the stage of influencing decision-making at higher levels.'* Also, *it will possibly always be difficult within a two-and-a-half year project at city level to influence regional or national policy-making which has their own policy and decision-making cycles'* (p.31).

In addition to several other factors, less vertical integration reflects in the programme's ability to contribute to SUD strategies in the context of the ERDF regulation Article 7. Further development of the programme could bring this integration aspect to the next level by increasing the involvement of national ESIF management authorities in its processes.

Balancing between hard and soft investments is another important integration dimension. The main sources of verification of URBACT III impact on this aspect are IAPs itself. Assessing how effectively they balance the need for both 'hard' (physical/infrastructure) and 'soft' (human capital) investments the IAP study concludes: *'There seems to be a good level of understanding and awareness that physical infrastructure investments alone will not be enough to deliver sustainable urban development. The IAPs*



typically consider and plan 'soft' aspects such as human capital investments, local events, awareness-raising and communication activities alongside any physical investments required.' (p.32)

Also, the recent APN2 CS points to the mix between hard and soft investments as one of a few generalisable traits of IAPs rating progress in 'resources integration' in APN2 cities at 3.17, which is a notable change, see Figure 4-3 above. A closer look at this dimension, however, suggests a slower increase in capacity compared to the other two dimensions, see also Table 4-2. It is notably outpaced by 'Fund & Resource the Integrated Action Plan' to secure funding for IAPs which is briefly analysed in the sub-section 4.1.2.

Territorial integration is the least pronounced in the outcomes of the programme. The IAP study notes *'There is clearly much more focus in URBACT cities on increasing integration within municipal authorities and with local stakeholders than there is on improving coordination and coherence with neighbouring municipalities'* (p.31). This is also true because part of the network activities focused on thematic areas without a strong spatial dimension, e.g., digital communications, procurement and social innovation. As a result, in APN2 CS progress was assessed at 2.6 as shown in Figure 4-3. Hence, programme impact on this specific integration dimension has been limited.

To conclude on integration, **multi-dimensional processes for sustainable urban development are instigated in cities with horizontal integration being the most pronounced.** Territorial integration is so far the least developed. APN2 CS can be considered as an overall URBACT III programme closing survey and recognises that *'Intriguingly, integration is often more widely interpreted than the definition used by URBACT. In this context, hard-soft investment integration and vertical integration are basically absent in comments.'* (p.43). Integration as an URBACT aspect has room to adjust and develop a common understanding, while investment and resourcing should be treated as a separate concept.

4.1.2 Participation

Participation is the second of the three URBACT key concepts. During inception phase the concept of participation was operationalised as follows to enable a more qualified evaluation:

- a. participative processes, co-design, multi-level dialogue
- b. leading a local multi-stakeholder group
- c. URBACT Local Groups (ULGs).

This section describes the first two of the above elements of participation in more detail. It also takes on-board an aspect of funding and resourcing the Integrated Action Plan because valuable feedback has been collected worthy of reporting. URBACT Local Groups have a dedicated sub-section following this one. ULG is a method and a valuable mechanism that deserves separate analysis.

The increase in capacity and knowledge to work in a participative way stands out in the broad palette of outcomes from URBACT support measures for direct beneficiaries. Programme-led capacity building activities such as E-University, Summer University and Campus have notably enhanced the ability of URBACT cities to work with a participatory approach. Feedback from these measures evidence a concrete increase in knowledge and experience of 'working in a participatory way' for beneficiaries. The extent of actual change may differ from event to event but it is always positive with at least 20% of participants (in most cases many more) acknowledging increased knowledge because of URBACT III.



It must be noted that URBACT III direct beneficiaries have assessed the **increase in capacity to work in a participative way slightly higher than working with an integrated approach**. This is reflected in the feedback from capacity-building activities as well as the APN closure surveys. The two URBACT aspects of integration and participation should not be compared directly. However, presumably due to ULGs, which are very concrete, the participatory approach could be easier to perceive and attain while integration with its several dimensions is much more challenging. This also manifests in the programme outcomes. While multi-dimensional integration processes have seen moderate improvements rolling out mainly horizontally, operational aspects of participatory processes seem to be well advanced, as seen in Figure 4-4 below.

Figure 4-4 Average change in capacity of the city/institution by the dimensions of participation (self-assessment of the situation before and after URBACT on a sliding scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being 'weak' and 5 being 'excellent')



Source: Own elaboration based on the APN2 CS question 6.5 responses

Via ULGs the cities have had opportunities to put the acquired knowledge into practice, increasing their capacity and skills to work in a participative way by engaging stakeholders into sustainable urban development processes. Describing the experienced change in capacities due to using the participatory approach in their local government one APN2 city representative nails it in responding to an open-ended question: *'forcing us to do participatory meetings allowed us to gain practice in engaging in internal cross-departmental meetings, and in facilitating meetings with groups of external stakeholders.'* (APN2 CS question 11.1).

Table 4-3 Change in capacity of the city/institution by dimensions of participation (self-assessment of the situation before and after URBACT on a sliding scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being 'weak' and 5 being 'excellent')

	Weak	Somewhat weak	Mediocre	Good	Excellent
Manage participative and co-design processes	-3%	-17%	-26%	32%	14%
Leading a local multi-stakeholder group	-2%	-18%	-25%	25%	21%
Fund & Resource the Integrated Action Plan	-5%	-10%	-18%	25%	10%

Source: Own elaboration based on the APN2 CS question 6.5 responses

The same self-assessment data presented in a form of table (see Table 4-3 above) show that the overall average capacity of APN2 **to manage participative and co-design processes** has increased by 32% (from 'mediocre' to 'good') which is by far the biggest increase of the URBACT aspects analysed in this



report. URBACT III has significantly increased capacity for almost half the direct beneficiaries, who rated the capacity increase to 'good' and 'excellent'.

This has also been verified by interviews where respondents spoke highly of the tools and mechanisms they were given for their collaborative processes. An interviewee noted that thanks to URBACT now every interaction of the municipality with stakeholders can be characterised with a prefix 'CO-' in its title, such as co-working, co-creating, co-planning, etc. is. This statement is strongly backed by the APN1 and APN2 CS findings.

The increase in capacity to manage participative and co-design processes is a significant impact of URBACT III that is widely acknowledged not only by city representatives, but also by national strategic partners during interviews and focus groups. Admittedly this has been especially important in countries without longstanding traditions of democratic processes and citizen engagement. Participants in one focus group agreed that the impact of URBACT and the approaches it promotes reaches beyond the cities and plain sustainable urban development. It is seen as an **important place-based means to support strengthening, reinforcing and showcasing local democratic processes**, which is increasingly important in the current geopolitical situation.

21% of APN2 CS respondents assessed their capacity to **lead a local multi-stakeholder group** after URBACT as '**excellent**', while another 25% said '**good**'. Most E-University 2020 participants who provided feedback rated their knowledge on 'leading a local multi-stakeholder group' with 55% 'good' (4) and 16% 'very good' (5). Responses to open-ended questions show that URBACT III has had a considerable effect. There is a commitment from many respondents to apply URBACT tools in their everyday multi-level stakeholder cooperation without further hesitation. Some already reported their actual use. There is evidence of increased knowledge and capacity for this aspect also among APN1 partner cities.

The programme's impact on participation has been as well observed in TN and IN participating cities. 85% of TN CS respondents considered their URBACT experience **had an impact on 'personal skills and capacities around participative working methods'** within their teams. The same number of partners found this experience has 'improved partnerships between the local authority and other stakeholders'. The next most common responses were 'personal knowledge and skills relating to network management' followed closely by 'understanding of cross-sectoral working and the integrated approach'.

As for concrete and specific tools that have enabled the introduction of a participative approach, direct URBACT beneficiaries often refer to the OPERA method, problem tree and stakeholder mapping. Also, creative workshops and peer reviews were mentioned though to a lesser extent.

Initially **funding and resourcing the Integrated Action Plan** was not included in the URBACT concept of participation. Recent findings validate evaluators' opinions that this aspect together with the aspect of balancing between hard and soft investments analysed in sub-section 4.1.1 deserve its own specific niche or concept in the URBACT method. The APN2 CS shows a slight self-assessed increase in the capacity of the cities for funding and resourcing IAP – 25% becoming 'good' and 10% 'excellent', see Table 4-3. There is no other data to verify the increase. However, a focus group member – a representative of Barnsley municipality in the UK noted that participation in several URBACT activities and investing enabled the Barnsley municipality to leverage some EUR 0.5 million into GBP 50 million (> EUR 57 million) of complementary public and private investment. This is a notable return on public investment



and serves as a good example for the URBACT community on how various public and private initiatives can be geared.

To conclude, **participation in URBACT III enhanced collaborative capacities in most cities enabling more effective and productive stakeholder engagement. Considerably improved communication with stakeholders and a supporting environment** was often mentioned as a clear benefit of the participatory approach that is crucial for sustainable urban development. *'A transparent two-way communication ensures legitimacy and effectiveness of the IAP'* concludes an APN representative.

It must be noted that some URBACT cities continued to develop and introduce the participatory approach in their municipalities by establishing more permanent and committed forms of participation and integration such as citizens platforms and participatory budgets. Several networking cities, e.g., Heerlen (NL) and Dubrovnik (HR) established and reinforced participatory budgeting which is a very advanced form of democratic public governance. This is a result beyond URBACT III immediate objectives but complements the programme goals with a longer lasting effect.

Supporting a broader spread and uptake of 'next level participatory approaches' such as participatory platforms and budgets could be a focus in the next programming period. This could use momentum and avoid stakeholders becoming disillusioned with their participation failing to result in acknowledgeable outcomes. 'Too long and too one-sided engagement' without reciprocal gains may result in decreased enthusiasm for future participation. This refers not only to introducing participatory budgets or platforms but also any other means of empowering community initiatives from their development to completion *'to show that a collaboratively designed project can be realistic and implementable'* as stated in a response to an open-ended question about URBACT added value.

4.1.3 URBACT Local Groups

Enabling and facilitating 'partnership working between local authority and stakeholders' is one of the most prominent positive impacts of URBACT networks. It has reinforced both integration and participation under the programme. **URBACT Local Groups have been a practical tool** in many partner cities **providing the necessary framework for sustainable urban development.** The IAP study concludes that: *'ULGs have done a lot to strengthen stakeholder integration in URBACT cities. For many cities, this has represented a major change of approach and working philosophy that promises to deliver important, long-term improvements in local governance.'* (p.28).

Some 75% of ULGs were completely new local working groups. Existing ULGs were formerly Community Led Local Development (CLLD) groups or participated in URBACT. As summarised in one interview: *'an ULG consisting of university, regional stakeholders, research institutes, other people was set up for the URBACT network. Even though some contacts were already there within the network the meetings became more structured.'*



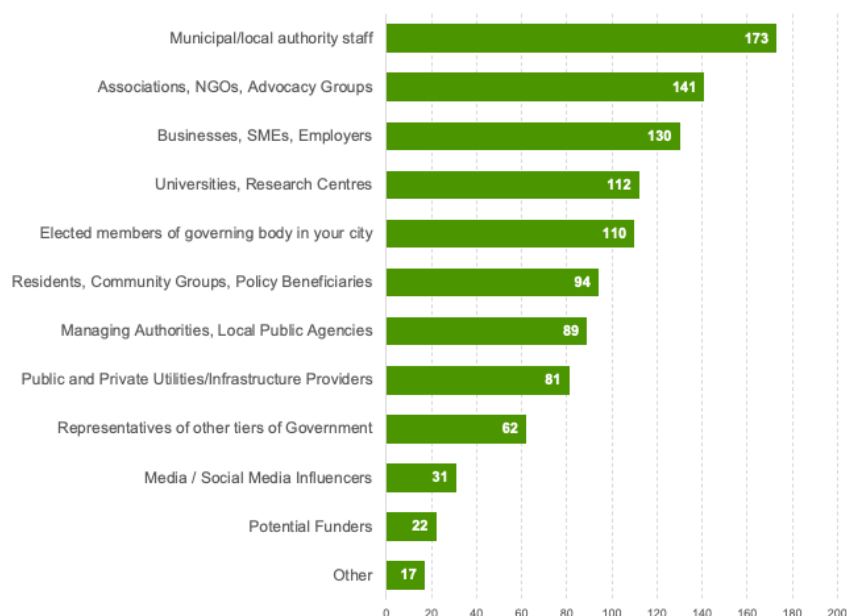
Table 4-4 ULG characteristics from the network closure surveys

Network	Number of networks	Number of cities	Total number of ULG participants	Average size of ULG	Female members	Female members %	ULG to be continued %*
APN1	20	205	3680	18	9	50	97
APN2	23	195	3080	17	8	47	42
TN	23	158	1795	15	9	60	43
IN	4	37	545	15	9,5	63	81
TOTAL	70	419	9100	16		55	

Source: Own elaboration based on URBACT III programme data *A slightly different formulation of the survey questions does not allow a full-fledged comparison; however, it outlines a trend.

Most networks had up to 20 ULG members. There was an almost equal gender balance with a slight female dominance. The stakeholder groups in ULG were 'city/local authority staff', 'associations, NGOs' and 'businesses, SMEs, private', 'universities, research centres' utilities', 'residents, community groups', 'local public agencies', 'representatives of other tiers of government' and 'Managing Authorities for European Structural and Investment Funds'. Please, see Figure 4-5.

Figure 4-5 Institutions in APN2 ULGs



Source: Own elaboration based on the APN2 CS question 3.6 responses

'The work in the ULGs has also created a collaborative environment that results in an improvement of the relationships between the municipality and the city stakeholders' as noted by one APN2 respondent. In many cases this is verified by other feedback, **ULGs ensured a genuine stakeholder buy-in to the search for sustainable solutions.** However, the IAP study points to room for improvement in the composition of ULGs *'good stakeholder mapping and ensuring that the full range of stakeholder perspectives is represented on the ULG remains a challenge.'* (p.29).



On ULGs, the AIR 2021 pinpoints Lead experts and Lead partners, input from external contributors and exchanges with cities within the network as the most effective contributors to knowledge improvement. At the same time establishing and running ULGs, especially newly created ones, encountered many challenges. These included digital engagement, political support and stakeholders having other priorities. Nevertheless, most of the network cities acknowledge **significant and even pivotal contributions of the ULGs to the change in their capacity for integrated action planning and participatory approaches**. ULGs, followed by transnational exchange and expert support, had the highest added value also in the first round of APNs. Peer review and intermediary actions were valued less.

Many respondents report that the **ULGs will continue** in some form after the network activities. This should broaden the range of stakeholder perspectives and gear them towards the most suitable sustainable urban governance models. Almost all APN1 partner cities and 42% of APN2 partner cities report that their network ULGs will most likely continue to work together.

Involvement of ULG in the implementation and monitoring of the IAP is considered important by many cities. Some ULGs will be split into more thematic groups. Other cities say that formal ULGs will cease to exist, but informal cooperation will continue. *'WhatsApp channel is still active'*, said one interviewee. One APN1 partner has proposed that URBACT in its future calls could recommend extending the ULG working period beyond the network's official duration.

Also, TN cities have acknowledged a significant contribution of ULGs to the success of their transfer network. 86% of Project partners and 57% of Lead partners have rated the contribution of their ULG to improved Good Practice as either 4 or 5 (the highest score). For some Lead partners, ULGs would continue to have regular meetings (often quarterly). It was recognised that Good Practice needed continued evolution and improvement, for which ULG is responsible. Project partners are considering turning ULGs into more formal committees focused not only on the existing issue, but also on wider urban development.

Most IN partners assess the contribution of their ULG members to strategy implementation as either 4 or 5 (where 5 is excellent).

Concluding on ULGs the IAP study notes that: *'Many ULGs clearly benefited from the work of the URBACT summer university, the ULSG toolkit and other tools provided by URBACT (such as the problem tree and OPERA). It will always be the case that some ULGs are better than others. There is an ongoing need to continue to build local capacity in creating, mobilising and animating ULGs and sharing some of the best practice examples from across URBACT cities.'* (p.29)

The already mentioned participatory budget as well as other means of empowering the community create increased commitment from potential stakeholders to join and remain in a ULG. This has been also verified by a network representative who said that the participatory budget has turned out to be a very stimulating mechanism in the city to retain ULG activities and as a result the participatory approach has extended beyond the URBACT network.

To sum up the ULG findings, they have been noticeably operational and highly appreciated by the direct beneficiaries of all three types of networks. In most cases the ULGs were established from scratch, and many will outlast URBACT III which is an important residual value of the programme. **Frameworks for sustainable urban development have been set up and enabled in more than 400 European cities.**



4.1.4 Action-learning

Action-learning is the third URBACT concept described as working with peers across the policy cycle in planning, implementation, and evaluation. During the inception of the evaluation, the concept of action-learning was further operationalised as follows:

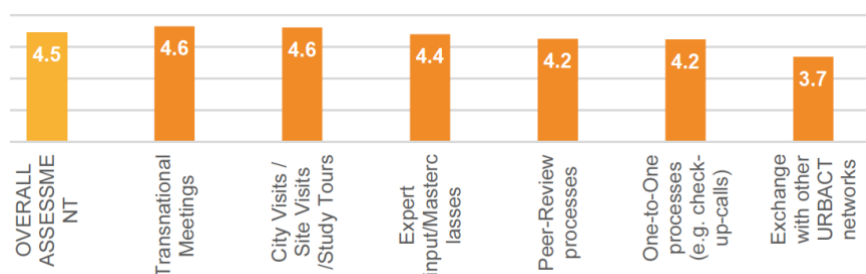
- a. transnational exchange and learning by doing
- b. Good Practice and its transfer as an URBACT measure where working with peers is the main component to reach TN intervention goals
- c. project management as an aspect in the programme's specific objective 1.

Action-learning has had the greatest positive change compared to the other two concepts, namely, integrated and participatory approaches, see Figure 4-1. APN2 cities assessed the change in 'action-learning' from 2.99 points before URBACT to 4.09 on a scale 1 to 5.

APN2 CS also delved into several specific elements representing the **transnational exchange and learning** and obtained a useful overview of this very broad aspect. The results summarised in the APN2 CS Analysis report are: *'Central to URBACTs value proposition is the fostering of effective methods of Transnational Learning and Exchange. The survey respondents also recognised this benefit for the latest APN round and provided, overall, very good feedback on transnational co-learning practices such as Transnational Meetings and Peer-Review Processes. This feedback is even more remarkable given the disruptions and adjustment pressure that came with the COVID-19 pandemic.'* (p.18). Figure 4-6 provides an overview of how the APN2 cities assess the usefulness of key aspects of action-learning. With the average overall assessment being 4.5, the Transnational Meetings and City Visits/Site Visits/Study tours were rated the highest – 4.6. These are followed by Expert input/Masterclasses.

For Peer Reviews and One-to-One processes the APN2 CS Analysis report sums up cities' responses to the open question about its added value: *'the key added value could be best described as the strategic facilitation of structured peer learning in trusted relationships across borders, scales and sectors'*. (p.55)

Figure 4-6 Usefulness of key aspects of transnational exchange and learning (average across all APNs) (rating on a sliding scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being 'very poor' and 5 being 'very good')



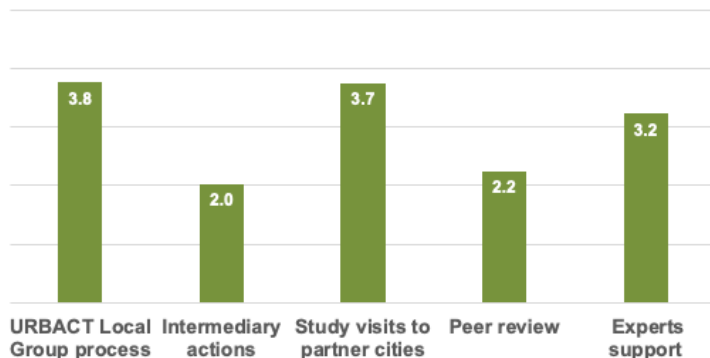
Source: APN2 CS Analysis Report, question 2.4, URBACT Secretariat.

The APN1 beneficiaries were asked to assess the importance of a few URBACT aspects for developing their IAP including **two elements of transnational exchange and learning**: (1) 'Study visits to partner cities' and (2) 'Peer review'. Figure 4-7 below shows the average ratings from 1 (less important) to 5 (more important) in cities' improved effectiveness addressing the thematic topic. 'Study visits to partner



cities' as an essential part of transnational exchange and learning was rated at 3.7 after the ULGs. 'Expert support' is also assessed as relatively important, while the 'peer review' was only 2.2 because it is not widely used, as explained in responses to the open-ended questions.

Figure 4-7 The added value for developing an IAP (rating on a sliding scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being 'less important' and 5 being 'more important')



Source: Own elaboration based on the APN1 CS Q 6.12 responses

Confirming the positive effects for APN1 cities, the IAP study describes transnational exchange and learning as '*actions that have been demonstrably informed or inspired by practices from other cities*'. It points to the diverse benefits: '*It seems clear that all the cities and networks benefitted from transnational exchange and learning provided for by URBACT. But what is also clear is that both the way they benefit and the extent to which this is presented and visible in the final IAP vary significantly.*' (p.29).

IN and TN cities also assess **working with peers** relatively highly. The IN CS mentions 'transnational exchange' and 'peer learning' as a useful URBACT experience for the networking cities. In TN CS 'peer learning' is mentioned as a key URBACT benefit along with 'URBACT tools', 'new EU connections' and 'great ideas'.

Good Practice is the main element in TN and its transfer is the anticipated change due to URBACT intervention. The TN CS contains information about how much Good Practice was transferred and improved via the networks. Most of the Project partners (101 of 130) had '*either fully adapted and transferred the good practice or had come very close to it*'. 2/3 of the Lead partners (16 of 23) stated that '*they had seen a marked improvement in their Good Practice as a result of participating in a Transfer Network.*' (p.10). **URBACT III has made an impact on improving and adopting 15 to 20 good practices among at least 100 network partners.**

89% of TN CS cities affirm that the capacity of their city to manage sustainable urban policies has improved as a result of participating in the programme. The TN CS analysis concludes that '*the Transfer Networks were successful in transferring Good Practices and in furthering the URBACT Method.*' (p.14), which is another important impact of the URBACT III programme.

The 38 project partners which reported complete Good Practice adaptation and transfer elaborated on what facilitated the process. The TN CS analysis 2021 sums up the responses. '*Some of them referred to the well-defined URBACT structure and methodology, which provided an effective framework for their activities. Some specific tools, like the Learning Logs, were singled out as having been especially useful.*



The modularisation approach, common to many networks, was also cited as being a factor in these cities' success'. (p.23) 'Others underlined the key role of the Lead Partner and Lead Expert in facilitating and supporting the process.' 'For those partners who came close to full-scale adaptation and transfer, two consistent barriers were the pandemic and lack of time – sometimes combined.' (p.24) Lack of time and the scale and complexity of the Good Practice was cited as a factor by cities which only partially adopted it.

Last, but not least, a capacity that URBACT direct beneficiaries have improved is **an increase in project management knowledge and skills**. A lot of cities report improved project management capacities, also from capacity-building activities such as E-University, Summer University and Campus.

In the APN1 CS, 32 of 205 respondents mention project management as a concrete change showcasing URBACT added value in their city alongside the participatory approach, integrated action planning, knowledge and capacity building. *'Participation in the URBACT network is contributing to professional development of our staff also in terms of project management'*.

The APN2 CS asked networking cities to assess their capacity to ensure efficient project management. The average change in capacity is lower than the change in other aspects of the capacity – increasing by only 0.4 on a scale of 1 to 5 - from 3.7 points before URBACT to 4.1 (question 6.5). Only 24% report an improvement to 'good' (4) and 'excellent' (5). However, if the project management capacities of cities before URBACT were higher than for the other aspects there would be little room for improvement.

The APN2 CS also identified barriers to action-learning. Among these, the so called, structural barriers such as insufficient and/or changing political support dominate. Another type is a contingent barrier which varies from 'resistance to change', to COVID-19 which was without doubt one of the most significant external factors affecting programme impact. Please see the sub-section on external factors.

Overall, the interviewees conclude that URBACT has a considerable benefit for cities managing sustainable urban development as such. A notable positive effect is an improved overall approach as well as more administrative and project capacity.

4.2 EQ2: strategy design improvements

Was URBACT able to improve the design of sustainable urban strategies and action plans in cities?

Developing an Integrated Action Plan following the URBACT method was the main objective of APN cities. Hence, the APN cities are best placed to judge their change in capacity. APN cities as well as their 'products' (IAPs) have been profoundly analysed for plan preparation as well as the result, i.e., the plans themselves and their fate. Analysis of feedback and the two follow-up studies offer a positive response to this evaluation question.

The APN cities have the most extensive URBACT impact, being the most engaged beneficiaries in terms of time and intensity of the support they received. The IAPs are a tangible outcome of their URBACT 'journey' which is the best and most objective evidence of their improved capacity while feedback surveys could have some inbuilt bias. Both APN follow-up studies report that **the cities have notably improved**



the design of sustainable urban strategies and action plans. They acknowledge the URBACT impact through increased knowledge and capacity in action planning. According to the IAP study *'the IAPs show cities being able to develop more integrated approaches to sustainable urban development, particularly the local forms of integration (stakeholders, sectors, local spatial dimensions).'*' (p.46) An interviewee pointed out *'we would not have had that specific and thought through action plan without URBACT compared to what we have now. It also would not be as anchored into the municipality and stakeholders.'*

Attainment of URBACT III specific objective 2 suggests the programme has left an imprint on an increasing number of beneficiaries. A rough estimate evidence that at least 370 cities have *'designed integrated strategies and action plans for sustainable urban development drawing on EU good practice'*. For many cities participation in URBACT was fundamental to the level and quality of design for sustainable urban strategies and action plans. Over a quarter of the APN1 cities admit they would not have developed action plans for sustainable urban development without URBACT participation. Inspired by the URBACT method in the first round of **APNs more than 190 IAPs were developed for the first time.** It is not known how many 'first-timers' there were in the APN2 cities, though it could be close to those for APN1. This would mean **a nine-fold increase in the number of sustainable urban strategies** can be expected as a result of URBACT III, which is an impressive result.

The plans are not only elaborated, but also become effective. 88% of the APN1 city IAPs have been approved by their respective municipalities and 78% of the APN2 cities are either already approved or expect to be approved in the near future. Political validation of the IAPs proves the cities' capacities to design strategies that are integrated and sustainable as well as in line with the political aims. This can also be attributed to the URBACT programme impact.

The result of IAPs being developed with the URBACT method is that significant sustainable urban development processes have been rolled out in the benefitting cities. Initiating such processes is as important as immediate results. The feedback highlights that APN cities are open to adopt and introduce new and innovative ways and approaches for strategy design. **Lead partners and experts have a very important role in steering APNs.** The APN networking cities also appreciate friendliness and quality interaction with the programme Secretariat.

In addition to the regular mid-term and closure surveys, APN2 cities also experienced a completely new and more interactive means of evaluation developed for the URBACT City Festival 2022. The innovative digital impact evaluation bingo exercise collected indirect self-assessment data on the remaining challenges for these cities using the URBACT method. As a result, *Urban Strategies* was the most common element on APN2 participant bingo cards, followed by *Participation*, *Integrated* and *Action Learning*. Statements linked to *Knowledge* were selected least. Within *Urban Strategies* the statement most often included was *'Where is the money?'* followed by *'Politics...'* which clearly indicate that **funding and political support are the biggest challenges for many cities.** Other statements mentioned frequently were *'Site-visits, please'* and *SUD* (both under the category *'others'*) as well as *'If only we saw results'*, *'They are so different'* and *'Participation trouble'*. **APN2 cities rate site-visits highly** (and might have had fewer due to COVID-19), still find the concept of Sustainable Urban Development confusing, would like to see more and quicker results for their actions, and continue facing challenges in working across departments and with stakeholder groups.

The sections below elaborate on the findings and take a closer look at the capacity increase for action planning and advancement in putting action plans into effect. The presumption is that programme impact is stronger when the IAP or its parts make it through to implementation.



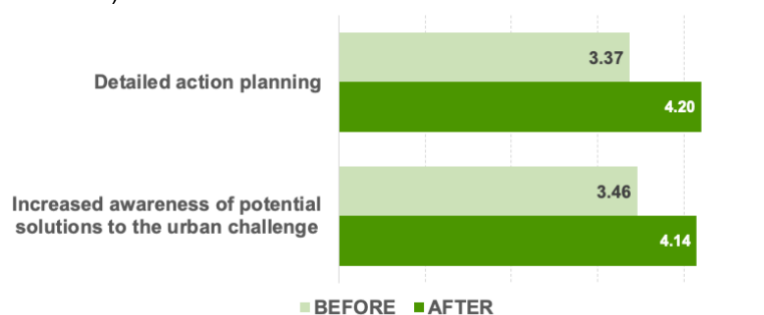
4.2.1 Action planning capacity

A process leading to an Integrated Action Plan is ‘a quintessential URBACT output’ as noted in the APN2 CS Analysis Report (p.24). Hence, IAPs and their quality are valuable evidence to assess the impact of URBACT intervention. In 2019 the IAP study reviewed 205 IAPs produced by the first round of 20 APNs under URBACT III. It is a very good source of information on the change in capacity of networking cities for **action planning** as a process. Similar analysis is currently underway also for APN2.

The feedback after other URBACT activities also provides insights into the change in knowledge and capacity for action planning in the benefitting cities. For example, most participants of E-University 2020 rated their new knowledge on **action planning as ‘good’ (40%) and ‘very good’ (38%)**. 78% of APN1 CS respondents acknowledged ‘**personal skills and capacities in participative action planning**’ as one of the few takeaways from their URBACT experience.

APN2 CS asked the networking cities on changes in their capacity for action planning after URBACT and changes in their awareness of potential solutions to urban challenges, see Figure 4-8 below.

Figure 4-8 Average change in capacity of the city/institution in action planning (self-assessment of the situation before and after URBACT on a sliding scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being ‘weak’ and 5 being ‘excellent’)



Source: Own elaboration based on the APN2 CS question 6.5 responses

Almost half the APN2 cities report an increase in their capacities for detailed action planning (26% ‘good’ and 22% ‘excellent’), see Table 4-5 below. Though fewer respondents acknowledge more awareness of potential solutions to urban challenges, the capacity has increased notably. So URBACT improves capabilities in cities by enhancing the skills of participants.

Table 4-5 Change in capacity of the city/institution in action planning

(self-assessment of the situation before and after URBACT on a sliding scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being ‘weak’ and 5 being ‘excellent’)

	Weak	Somewhat weak	Mediocre	Good	Excellent
Detailed action planning	-2%	-10%	-36%	26%	22%
Increased awareness of potential solutions to the urban challenge	-1%	-10%	-22%	16%	21%

Source: Own elaboration based on the APN2 CS question 6.5 data responses

APN2 CS inquired about the importance of individual steps in the IAP process to find the ‘**most important has been the task of clearly defining actions**’, followed by *accurate problem definition, setting the right*



objectives and creating a commonly shared vision, concluding that *'the focus on actions is no surprise'* (p.24).

Many network respondents appreciate their new URBACT expertise. In APN1 CS 70% of respondents **assess URBACT expert support as 'very useful' or 'useful'**. Only 4% as 'not useful'. 'Gaining access to expertise' was the 'most important' aspect for participating in APN, while 'Learning about the URBACT Methodology' and 'Gaining access to additional funding' had lower ratings. Lead and Programme experts are also highly appreciated.

The IAP study identifies several insights about URBACT impact on increased capacities in **detailed action planning**, such as:

- *'172 of the IAPs (84%) clearly set out actions to be implemented. Furthermore 90 (44%) of the IAPs set out – to some extent - at least five of the six additional elements of action planning detail identified (timings, responsibilities, costings, funding, monitoring and risk assessment).'* (p.41)
- *'Actions are needs-based, i.e., actions respond to real needs based on a sound shared understanding of the local context, challenges and opportunities'* (p.28)
- *'The cities had identified results they wanted to achieve and monitoring indicators and/or processes to track progress towards them'* (p.11)
- *'Cities seem to face a tension between providing a broader action plan (more integrated) and a deeper action plan (more detailed actions)'* (p.7)

The IAP study concludes that *'even where actions are not yet defined in the greatest detail, these [URBACT] approaches will support cities in their medium to long-term processes of implementing their learning and desired actions from the URBACT networks'* (p.11). By designing IAPs **relevant sustainable urban development processes are being initiated in the municipalities**. As with the interviews, the IAP study recognises the **importance of the action planning process over its ultimate result**, the IAP. This underlines that the beneficial impact of participation in the programme irrespective of the immediate quality of its output: *'for many cities, the process of developing the IAP is even more valuable, in terms of transforming cross-departmental cooperation, local stakeholder involvement, understanding of thematic challenges and possible integrated solutions.'* (p.7)

The IAP study notes the importance of **network support** and **peer review** with other European cities as well as access to **external expertise** and **Lead experts**, in particular **high value support to the cities**. The interviewing process revealed that the varied level of IAPs could depend on how keen the Lead experts were in using the URBACT method.

The study also shows numerous examples where cities directly used tools and methods provided or suggested by URBACT (including the USLG toolkit, Problem Tree and OPERA). The URBACT Networks Follow-up Study concludes that the **programme contributed effectively by providing methodology, expertise, network support, transnational experience and a basic budget for designing the plan**. Additionally, there was support from the URBACT Secretariat, Knowledge-Hub as well as tools and methods provided by the capacity-building activities, such as the URBACT Summer University. The APN2 CS Analysis suggests that URBACT is famous for *'the comprehensive methodological support and the many examples of written guidance really make a difference'* (p.37). Interviewees also emphasise that during the pandemic, digitalisation support was timely and efficient.



The Small-Scale Actions (SSA) introduced for the 2nd round of APNs were **appreciated by the networking cities**. They enabled action planning activities to be complemented by additional data search, citizen engagement, awareness raising, outreach, monitoring, learning, piloting and similar activities. As one interviewee reflected: *‘a specific workshop for stakeholders was a success and this approach is now replicated in other neighbourhoods. ‘Asking citizens first’ in contrast to first develop a plan by technical experts, is new. First civil servants in the municipality were afraid of this new way of working, but when they saw results through the small-scale actions, they turned and changed their mind’*. In a way the SSA was a sandbox that allowed cities to experiment with the new approaches and, hence, had an impact on the IAP. Another interviewee opined that *‘SSA was very successful but needs to be more integrated. There should be more flexibility also given in terms of funding. At the same time, be careful. If networks become too interested in SSAs, the IAP might lose its importance.’*

The URBACT Networks Follow-up study in 2021 offers a view on the 83 APN1 cities after three years of network activities. The survey was specifically designed for the study and concluded that the most important support for the cities is the URBACT methodology for developing an Integrated Action Plan. *‘Most cities reported that this has led to the adoption of new ways of working - such as more comprehensive, participatory and collaborative approaches being implemented at local level, improved Sustainable Urban Strategies, which are also at the core of the Urban Development Network’* (p.29).

The URBACT Networks Follow-up study assessed how much participants attributed their achievements to their experience with URBACT by asking if their city would have increased know how and capacities without the URBACT experience. **‘A majority of responding APN cities (71%) attributed some degree of achievements to their experience with URBACT. Over a quarter (28% of respondents) stated that their cities would not have gained any of their achievements without URBACT participation. Only a very small minority (1%) claimed that they had achieved the same skills and plans also without participating in URBACT.’** (p.30) The decisive role of URBACT was also widely acknowledged during the interviews and the focus group.

URBACT has induced new and innovative ways of working with action planning in the benefitting cities. **URBACT has a decisive role in sustainable urban development in most cities**, while over a quarter of them admit that they would not have gained any of their achievements without URBACT participation. Beneficiaries appreciate most types of support mechanisms, but expertise and written guidance, in particular.

4.2.2 Progress in IAP development and approval

Only 18 of the 205 APN1 cities had an IAP before their participation in the URBACT network, 38 had an action plan, but it was not integrated. Almost 2/3 or 154 did not have any plan. **More than 190 IAPs were developed for the first time which is an immense impact of the programme.** The IAPs were designed using the URBACT method rolling out relevant sustainable urban development processes. This evaluation agrees with the IAP study that initiating processes is as significant as producing immediate results.

This evaluation looked at how many IAPs have been adopted and how many are being implemented to show the sustainability and robustness of the programme impact. Data from the APN1 CS show that **66% of 135 APN1 cities have approved or will soon approve IAPs.** The remaining 34% do not know if the plan will be approved.



There were 18 APN1 cities with an integrated plan before URBACT, now 172 cities say they have already approved or will soon approve one, an increase of 157 cities. **URBACT had achieved an almost nine-fold increase.** Notwithstanding the content and quality, which are not part of this study, this is impressive.

The URBACT Networks Follow-up Study which surveyed the APN1 cities three years after APN1 closure states: *'88% of the cities that answered the question indicated that their IAP had been approved by the Municipality or Council Committee or signed off by the Mayor.'* (p.14) This shows significant progress since at the time of the APN1 CS only 21% of IAPs had been approved and confirms that **the valuable process has also had a useful outcome.**

Next to approval of the IAP by the city council, another good proxy for the impact and robustness of the URBACT processes is the funding or resources provided for the plan. This shows a city's capacity to implement the IAP. Based on the APN1 CS results the IAP study concludes that half the benefitting cities managed to *'at least partially secured funds for the implementation of the IAP with more than half of this funding coming from the city's own or other local resources.'* *'In 31 cases, funding had already been secured from the ERDF or ESF, with an average grant of nearly 620 000 EUR.'* (p.11)

There is no information on how many APN2 networking cities did not have an IAP before URBACT, but in the APN2 CS 29 of 179 (16%) respondents said their IAPs were fully approved before closure of the network. 34 plans were being approved at the time of survey while another 77 were confident the plans would be approved. Altogether 140 IPAs (78%) are expected to be implemented showing that URBACT has provided capacity also for at least 2/3 of the APN2 cities to design IAPs.

The URBACT method of sustainable urban development inspired a great majority of new IAPs. Most of the plans have also been approved by the city councils and partly secured funding. In addition to the quantitative insights, the processes have been initiated in municipalities, which is as significant or even more important than producing immediate results.

4.3 EQ3: strategy implementation improvements

Was URBACT able to improve the implementation of sustainable urban strategies and action plans in cities?

Even though the evidence for this evaluation question is much more limited and indirect compared to the previous two EQs, overall, the response is positive. Thanks to URBACT III the cities have boosted their capacity to implement sustainable urban strategies and action plans to certain extent. Below are findings supporting the response to this EQ. These are broken down into two indicators or proxies that indicate a change in implementation ability: (1) data proving the advancement of urban strategies and action plans and (2) success in resourcing the plans.

Hands-on URBACT support for implementation of the sustainable urban strategies and action plans was available only for IN and TN cities. Though the intensity of support was lower for these networks their feedback provides valuable insights. Follow-up data suggest that URBACT capacity building activities also improved the capabilities of APN cities to implement their IAPs. The APN cities appear to have gained the most due to their exposure to the wide range of programme mechanisms already highlighted in previous sections.



36 cities participating in the four URBACT Implementation Networks could improve their capacity to implement sustainable urban strategies and action plans by engaging in transnational networks. Reflecting on specific objective 3, the URBACT AIR 2021 states that 66% of the IN cities '*demonstrated high performance in regard to implementation of integrated strategies/ action plans for urban development, along three key dimensions: integration, participation and project management*'. This was up from 38% which was a baseline indicator. However, this quantitative measurement does not review the quality of change in these cities.

The URBACT Networks Follow-up Study analysed how the IN cities progressed with their Implementation plans and the APN1 cities with their IAPs. The study elaborates on positive effects that APN1 and IN cities experienced from participating in URBACT III. It identified factors that either fostered or impeded the overall process with a specific focus on how cities resourced their planned activities. EU cohesion policy and the extent to which European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) have been solicited for APN and IN plans has been of particular interest. The study investigated '*how well did the URBACT Method, capacity building, know-how and wider networks were instrumental to successfully implement the Plans.*' (p.7) by surveying APN and IN cities. Of 205 APN and 36 IN cities, 83 APN and 18 IN cities responded. The survey brings in a lot of useful information, including on the most important programme support as well as the attribution of the participants' achievements to their experience with URBACT. Hence the study is a major source to review this EQ. More than **70% of APN1 cities attribute some of their respective achievements to their experience with URBACT**. In addition to the direct impact on their capacity to implement sustainable urban strategies and action plans, the cities also note other lasting effects on their behavioural and soft capacities.

Resourcing and funding of the IAPs is another proxy for potential change in implementation capacity. Many of the networking cities secured funds for their IAPs and other related strategies indicating they should successfully implement them and have sufficient capacity, including due to their participation in URBACT III. Most funding comes from own local resources followed by regional and national ones. Though ESIF are high on the list, though more traction between URBACT and managing authorities could have been expected.

Whereas implementation has been mainly considered in the light of securing the funding, the APN2 CS signals that the availability of the human resources should also not be overlooked as a crucial determinant for IAP implementation. The APN2 cities have mentioned human resources as the most important aspect of the IAP resourcing. Even though most cities claim to have secured funds for IAP implementation **a lack of people and skills now often constitute a formidable barrier to successful local interventions**. Capacity building has been described in the sub-chapter on EQ1 as very much dependant on individuals, this is now up to the cities to ensure 'soft' investments are aligned.

The two sub-sections below elaborate on the findings that support the positive response to the EQ.

4.3.1 Improved capacity to implement IAPs

The Networks Follow-up Study concludes that: '*A majority of responding [APN1] cities (71%) attributed some degree of achievements to their experience with URBACT. At the same time, over a quarter (28% of respondents) stated that their cities would not have gained any of their achievements without URBACT participation. Only a very small minority (1%) claimed that they had achieved the same skills and plans also without participating in URBACT*' (p.29). For IN cities: '*A solid majority of URBACT IN cities (78%,*



14 out of 19) claim to have gained some of the achievements without URBACT. The survey further indicates that four cities would have not gained any achievement and only one city would have gained all the achievements without the support of URBACT' (p.45).

In addition to the increased capacities and achievements in raising funding to implement the IAPs, the study further notes that APN1 'cities referred to **other types of positive lasting impact - behavioural and soft capacities** - that resulted from their URBACT experience. This included:

- the capacity of cities to 'implement activities [...] because of activating local community and decision makers.'
- the capacity and willingness of cities to further build on IAP actions in the development of 'follow up project was decided' as well as 'URBACT Action Plan being integrated in their next Development Programmes' and City strategies' (p.29).

IN cities were supported for implementation of their plans and strategies, though for APN1 only the IAP planning (design) was supported. It appears that with the new knowledge and skills as well as access to tools after more URBACT III support, APNs also improved their abilities to implement the plans.

According to the AIR 2021 (p.8) IN cities confronted several issues such as a lack of political support, project timescales, a lack of funding and the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, **most IN cities were satisfied with their URBACT participation**. 26 of 37 (70%) assessed the URBACT added value for their Implementation Plans with the two highest scores - 4 or 5. Asked about their experience in the closure survey the cities acknowledge the positive impact mainly on personal skills and capacities in participative implementation and cooperation at European level. The other two most common points were partnership working between local authority and stakeholders as well as personal knowledge and skills in network management. The least mentioned was integrating sectors related to urban development. This is different from APNs who stressed horizontal integration as a useful takeaway from URBACT III. The IN CS analysis explains that this type of network has been more of a pilot than a real capacity-building network.

The APN1 CS states that 80% of the cities already started implementing actions in their IAP before the network closed, while some 78% had implemented up to 25% of their IAPs. Though this is a one-off snapshot, it shows the cities had the capacity to commence implementation of their IAPs and these capacities to certain extent have been enhanced and reinforced by the URBACT programme.

The most important conclusions for this EQ come from the URBACT Networks Follow-up Study that looks at the APN1 and IN networks from a certain time distance. In 2021, three years after their closure the APN1 cities should be implementing their IAPs and thus have many insights on the process. The study reports that: 'When asked about what they considered was the most important support of URBACT that helped them in the implementation of their IAP, **almost all [APN1] respondent cities were very positive about their experience with the Programme and the support they received**' (p.20). This suggests that the APN cities are positively affected by URBACT even if the support is not directly related to implementing their strategies or action plans. URBACT knowledge and skills appear to be applicable for strategy delivery.

A respondent to the URBACT Networks Follow-up Study question 'What do you consider was the most important support of URBACT that helped you in the implementation of your Action Plan?' said: 'I would say that URBACT does not help in the implementation of the Integrated Action Plan rather than with the identification of challenges and the design of a good strategy to overcome them and have a common



vision, shared with the relevant stakeholders, of what the city will be in the future'. The respondent wishes that URBACT would also support IAP implementation.

The same follow-up study also reviews the progress of the cities in implementing their sustainable development strategies or action plans. Presumably such progress may evidence some URBACT impact. *'Results from the cities' surveys show that across both the Action Planning and Implementation Networks, a large majority of cities (an average of 85% across APN and IN) have made significant progress towards getting their Integrated Action Plans and Operational Implementation Plans approved and implemented. Whilst this varies to some degrees, the findings are clear that cities are actively pursuing the implementation of their Plans'* (p.60).

The contributions of **Lead experts, Ad-hoc expertise and URBACT tools for ULG are among the most common responses** to the question 'What do you consider was the most important support of URBACT that helped you in the implementation of your Action Plan?' mentioned by the APN1 cities. This confirms that some networking cities found the knowledge and skills they acquired while designing their plans also useful for implementation even though most implementation happened after their URBACT 'journey'.

In the IN CS the importance of expertise was noted in 11 answers out of 35. The survey analysis concludes: *'The Lead Experts played an important part in the dynamic of the network itself in the sense that they had a role in understanding and making partners understand the expectations and results of the Implementation Plan and the Operational Implementation Framework.'* (p.7)

Even though the URBACT III impact on the capacity to implement sustainable development strategies or action plans has been less and more indirect than on the capacity to manage and design them, the actions and measures for specific objectives 1 and 2 are also indirectly relevant for implementation. URBACT III has had considerable direct impact on IN cities, and an indirect impact on APN1 cities.

4.3.2 Resourcing and funding

This sub-section looks at how effective URBACT direct beneficiaries are in soliciting funds to implement their plans. The evaluation covers the main sources of funding with a focus on alignment with ESIF and other EU programmes mainly by reviewing the two rounds of APN actions.

The APN1 CS shows that almost half the APN1 cities (48%) had secured funding for their IAPs by the end of the networking activity, i.e., spring 2018. Three years later the URBACT Networks Follow-up Study surveyed the APN1 cities again. A representative sample of the cities participated and **'a majority of respondents (83%) indicated that they had fully (12%) or partially (72%) secured funding'**. (p.17) indicating an increase in resourcing their IAPs.

The URBACT Networks Follow-up Study notes **'most cities stated that they received funding by local (46 out of 83 cities), regional (19 cities) and national (21 cities) sources. European programmes are also an important source of funding for URBACT cities, with 21 cities having received ERDF, 10 cities ESF and 10 cities INTERREG funding'** (p.21). *'When looking specifically at mainstream ESIF (Operational Programmes), all ESIF funding received by APN cities, over half was represented by ERDF (58%), a good quarter by ESF (26%), 11% by the Cohesion Fund, and the smallest share originated from the Cohesion Fund (5%)'* (p.21).



An interesting insight from the study is that of the 9% of IAPs that were already fully implemented, a third were implemented without securing any funding. Those probably used other resources such as existing human resources, physical spaces, etc. A respondent said: *'Actions did not require additional funding to implement - mainly internal staff resources required'. This indicates that in these cases URBACT participation has led to a qualitative change of behaviour and/or approaches in urban planning rather than additional financial investment in project activity'* (p.21).

As for IN *'most cities stated that they received a mix of funding by local (15), regional (five) and national sources (four). Six cities received ERDF and three ESF. Reference is also made to funds received by Urban Innovative Action, INTERREG and Erasmus Programmes (two cities each). Horizon 2020 is mentioned in the case of one city. Applications were sent by two cities for Cohesion Fund and European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development respectively. 5 responding cities did not apply for any form of EU funding, 4 of which have financed their IPs with domestic funding'* (p.36).

The APN2 CS reviewed resourcing and funding in more detail. On average EUR 52 million of investments are needed to implement each IAP and 123 of the 179 respondents (69%) are optimistic or very confident about securing funds for their actions. Own municipal resources are the most relevant source of funding followed by other national government resources/programmes.

ESIF and other EU programmes are third and fourth by importance. According to the APN2 CS Analysis report *'almost three quarters of respondents will try to make use of European funding programmes or have already done so. On top of the list is - unsurprisingly - the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). ... Other frequently approached funders are the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Cohesion Fund. Agriculturally and Maritime-related funding takes up a much smaller piece of the envisaged funding contributions from a European level'* (p.29). 109 of 179 respondent cities acknowledged contacts with their national managing authorities.

Difficulties in aligning the designed strategies developed by URBACT networks with the ESIF framework are addressed in the IAP study which assesses challenges when soliciting funding. Cities report external factors such as a shift in the city's strategic priorities and funding framework as obstacles to full-fledged implementation of IAPs. One notable finding is: *'The results show that a majority of APN cities (71%) fully agreed or agreed to some extent that the EU funding environment did not fit the IAP aims. This is despite the fact that 66% of respondents felt that the EU strategic priorities fit the IAP aims well. With regards to this latter statement, it is worth noting that the strategic alignment of Networks with the objectives of the European cohesion policy is a key requirement of the URBACT calls. While the IAPs were in line with the strategic priorities, the funding environment was not (indicating that either relevant funds were already depleted (i.e. end of programming period of Operational Programmes) or that the COVID pandemic or other external factors impacted on changed priorities'* (p.25). This emphasises the need for continued dialogue with regional / national managing authorities to ensure continuous alignment. In an ideal case such a dialogue would be part of vertical integration as stipulated in the URBACT concept.

Respondents and interviewees offer various proposals for improved traction between URBACT and managing authorities. For one institutional interviewee the responsibility lays with URBACT Monitoring Committee members to ensure coordination at national level between URBACT and EU funding programmes. Of the national Campus participants, 79% would like further help from their NUPs to link their project to other financial sources. One interviewee suggested since IAPs are elaborated following the URBACT method of integrated and participatory approach this should be recognised in funding criteria



by receiving additional points or a fast-track treatment in project selection. Other interviewees expect a bigger role for the European Urban Initiative in the 2021-2027 period.

URBACT III has invested in tools for funding that are now part of the URBACT toolbox. To increase implementation ability, respondents suggest resourcing is tackled earlier in the IAP process. This very much resonates with an earlier observation of this evaluation that being incorporated into the URBACT aspect of integration investments and funding are somewhat overlooked.

Resourcing is, however, not just about financing as the APN2 CS and its analysis notes. For funding respondents often think of financial resources. The APN2 CS broadened the inquiry by asking also about the importance of resourcing mechanisms. Here the most important are human resources – 4.6 on a scale of 1 (not important) to 5 (very important). The CS analysis concludes that ***‘Beyond money the lack of people and skills now often constitute a formidable barrier for successfully planning and implementing local interventions’*** (p.28). This suggests that resourcing sustainable urban strategies and plans is not only about plain soliciting of funding, but also considering other resources. Human resources, in particular deserve a special focus.

Last, but not least the TN CS provides useful information on funding, inquiring the participating cities about external, domestic and EU Funding. TN direct beneficiaries were asked whether they sought external funding to continue with the transfer and improvement process. *‘86 cities (56%) stated that they had not sought any funds. Of the 67 TN cities that had sought funding, 49 were successful (73%). A similar percentage of cities had sought domestic funds (54%), with these coming largely through local and national governments. In terms of EU Funds, a much smaller percentage (23%) had sought regional development, social, and cohesion funding to continue their transfer activities’* (p. 11).

There is not much information on other types of funding beyond the cities’ own resources and EU funding for all types of networks. In the APN1 CS only 13% of the cities mentioned ‘private sector partnership’ suggesting they are limited in searching additional sources. However, it could also be their mindset that only looks at traditional ‘lower hanging fruits’. URBACT has already gained a reputation as being at the forefront of bold ideas. It could further develop innovative approaches for resourcing and funding also based on best practices, such as pooling complementary public and private investments via participatory budgeting or the example that Barnsley municipality provided in subsection in 4.1.1. Beyond funding, a different approach to public procurement could create local social, economic, and environmental benefits and potentially advance part of the IAPs.

There is an emerging need from URBACT direct beneficiaries for support on resourcing that would be a broader topic including also increased coordination and embedding with ESIF. Strengthening URBACT support for resourcing would allow the cities to improve their capacities to implement sustainable development plans and strategies that they elaborate via networks. Resourcing should go beyond just soliciting funds but include smart and innovative solutions acquired and shared transnationally.



4.4 EQ4: URBACT thematic knowledge

Do practitioners and decision-makers at all levels (EU, national, regional and local) have increased access to URBACT thematic knowledge and share know-how on all aspects of sustainable urban development in order to improve urban policies?

Limited data mean it is complicated to estimate how much URBACT knowledge is used in practice, especially by indirect beneficiaries. The following logic has been applied to assess the programme impact on change in thematic knowledge for URBACT indirect beneficiaries. It is presumed that the beneficiaries know the programme before they can learn from the thematic knowledge provided by the programme. As a result, the response to this question is overall positive by various elements as is described in the below section.

URBACT III has consistently reached a large group of urban stakeholders – from 500 to 900 participants at large capitalisation events, more than 9 000 ULG members, 15 000 or more social media followers and 30 000 monthly website visits. The outreach has steadily grown during the programme period. The successful digital switch in reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic led to more participants including twice as many at the City Festival in 2021. The outreach through NUPs varies by Member State.

Interestingly, the general surveys show around 50% of URBACT stakeholders have only a moderate understanding of the programme at best, but major events such as City Festivals increase this understanding. Consistently, 80-90% of participants indicate they gained a better understanding of the programme, increased their thematic knowledge, and learned about good urban practices from capitalisation activities. **The URBACT website and newsletter are the most highly appreciated communication tools. The Good Practice database and Knowledge Hub are also highly rated.**

As a second step an indirect beneficiary can apply the new knowledge to improve their policies. In surveys and feedback questionnaires **40 to 100% of respondents say they used or will use the new knowledge.** The digital trainings offered by URBACT III were much appreciated, and the skills and tools are being used in practice. Individuals appear to be very important to inducing change in an organisation and it often takes time. Findings point to a ‘snowball’ effect where small URBACT actions lead to big results in the longer term.

There is no comparable data of the URBACT impact on policies at other governance levels. However, the programme has had a considerable effect on urban policies in Italy, Poland and Portugal with the take up of URBACT methodology at national level. At the EU level URBACT methods and experts have supported and facilitated the UIA and UDN. The impact on SUD strategies from Article 7 cities appear mostly indirect in the sense that URBACT has increased the capacity of many of them.

Although the UA can be considered as an unforeseen event, URBACT III has proved to be instrumental to the success of UA partnerships with its urban knowledge, ‘community’ of cities, experts, and methodology.

As a third and final step, if the indirect beneficiary is a city, its representatives can decide to be more active in the programme by becoming a direct beneficiary of an URBACT network and learn even more. **Almost 50% of cities in URBACT III networks were new direct beneficiaries of the programme.** This is a clear sign of URBACT III being able to grow its pool of beneficiary cities.



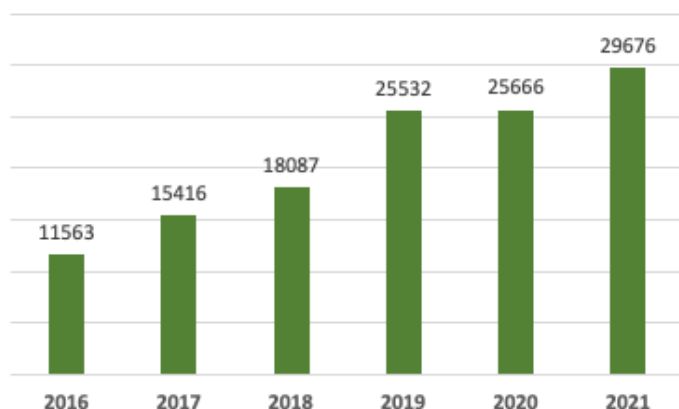
The following sub-sections explore the evidence for each of the three steps above and look for impact at city as well as national and EU levels, with particular attention on URBACT impact on the UA for the EU.

4.4.1 Level of outreach to indirect beneficiaries

A quantitative estimate of the URBACT programme outreach is an ambitious task. However, an approximation can be made based on URBACT website analytics and social media followers as well as stakeholder surveys and information on participation in URBACT City Festivals.

The number of URBACT website visitors and online community members indicates the potential interest in the programme. There was an increase in access to the URBACT knowledge and tools. **In 2021 the URBACT website had an average of 30 000 unique visits per month which is a 150% increase on the 2016 monthly average**, see Figure 4-9.

Figure 4-9 Average monthly URBACT website page views



Source: Own elaboration of website statistics

The increase in social media interactions is equally impressive. On 6 October 2022 URBACT had 14 763 LinkedIn followers, around 15 000 Facebook followers and 17 700 Twitter followers. The AIR 2021 and the URBACT Digital Communications Annual Report (July 2020 – June 2021) show annual growth of 33% for LinkedIn. This provides a rough idea of how many people are interested in the programme and presumably are also reached by it.

The programme outreach does not appear to be equal across Europe. The website has dedicated pages in national languages, maintained by the NUPs. The 2021 Study on National URBACT points (NUP study) shows there is a large variation in page views relative to the number of people speaking the language. The Italian-language page attracts the most views, over 6 000 in 2020. Relative to the number of language speakers Latvia, Slovenia and Estonia reached more people while the UK, Germany, Austria, France and Luxemburg scored much lower.

Indirect beneficiaries are sent regular stakeholder surveys and asked for feedback when they participate in URBACT City Festivals. Of the 1 124 respondents to the 2018 URBACT stakeholder survey more than 60% represent local administrations (city, municipality, district, organised agglomeration, metropolitan area), 12% regional and national authorities, 13% university or research centres and consulting



companies, close to 2% represent EU programmes and organisations and 11% identified themselves as 'others'. The responses reveal **there are always new participants and respondents**. The City Festivals in 2017, 2018 and 2022 had between 450 and 500 participants and there were 1 000 to 1 500 respondents to the stakeholder surveys. Up to the mid-term of the programme about 50% of respondents appear to be 'newcomers', i.e., were not previously involved in the programme activities and had very little knowledge. This decreased in the second half of the programme. The 2018 City Festival had 214 'newcomers' of the 496 participants and at the 2022 City Festival 20% of the 477 participants were not part of the programme.

A good indication on the potential number of URBACT practitioners and decision-makers is also their interest in the capitalisation activities of the programme. For example, 60% of the 1 200 participants in the URBACT/EUI 'Right to housing' conferences had never been involved with URBACT or UIA. Of 597 participants in the 'Strategic procurement' online course 70% were not involved in the URBACT programme according to the Evaluation Report in April 2021.

Due to the COVID pandemic and associated travel restrictions the 2021 URBACT City Festival was organised online. The digital meeting place enabled more participation. Instead of the usual 450-500 participants more than 1 260 people registered for the event and 880 connected to at least one session. The attendees spent an average of eight hours connected to the platform. The web conferences on 'Cities engaging in the right to housing' initiative were attended by more than 1 200 people from 38 countries. Most participants were city authorities, institutional organisations, NGOs and academics.

There is structural cooperation with other interregional Interreg programmes, Interact, ESPON and Interreg Europe. Notably in the joint European Week of Regions and Cities workshops. According to one interviewee cooperation with European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and Eurocities is part of the success of the programme. Another interviewee notes that URBACT did not have structural cooperation with other EU programmes mentioned in the URBACT III Programme such as the Smart Cities Stakeholder Platform, European Innovation Partnership on Smart Cities and Communities, Green Digital Charter, Horizon 2020, the Covenant of Mayors, CIVITAS or JPI Urban Europe.

Another group that can be considered as **a good proxy for URBACT III practitioners and decision-makers** combining both direct and indirect beneficiaries **are the ULG members** of networking cities. In the ULGs indirect beneficiaries undoubtedly learn about URBACT and presumably also access its thematic knowledge. **More than 9 000 stakeholders** of sustainable urban development are estimated **within the ULGs** of APN, IN and TN combined, see Table 4-4 in sub-section 4.1.3. Interviewees mention that some stakeholders are harder to reach, especially elected politicians and managing authorities. Still, for the 2022 City Festival 31 elected city representatives made up 7% of registrations. Some 89 managing authorities and local public agencies or a bit less than 3% are reportedly among the 3 080 APN2 ULG stakeholders, which is a minor representation.

The URBACT III target group of potential indirect beneficiaries is largely municipal civil servants in cities not yet part of URBACT networks. Since most of the bigger European cities already participate, reaching new cities often means smaller municipalities where English might be an issue. National URBACT Points have an important role in covering these cities. According to the interviews with national stakeholders (NUP or Monitoring Committee members) the national context usually explains the achieved level of outreach. In general, Member States with many well-funded national initiatives for cities see URBACT's English language application procedure as cumbersome. As URBACT has 'only'



knowledge and capacity-building to offer this can put the programme at a disadvantage in comparison to EU programmes that provide funds for investments. Furthermore, national or local priorities may determine the interest. When a national programme focusses on a specific theme, URBACT knowledge and thematic examples become highly relevant. That is, e.g., the case for green infrastructure in Croatia, climate adaptation in Portugal or deprived neighbourhoods in France. 'Digital fatigue' after several months of mostly online meetings due to COVID restrictions, was also mentioned as a possible explanation for lower attendance than initially hoped for, e.g., in the case of TechPlace capitalisation activities.

New cities in URBACT III networks are another proxy for the programme's capacity to reach beyond long-time URBACT beneficiaries. According to the URBACT Secretariat (PowerPoint presentation to the programme Monitoring Committee dated 1 October 2021), 48% of URBACT III partners were newcomers. Also, the URBACT Networks Follow-up Study debunked the perception that '*URBACT is a small, closed community, involving always the same cities*' by noting that '*In respect of attracting new cities to URBACT, the Implementation Evaluation conducted in 2019 shows that across all four network calls the majority (59%) of participating cities were newcomers. As such, the perception held by some stakeholders that URBACT funds a high number of repeat cities cannot be validated*' (p.57). Almost 90% of 2022 City Festival feedback respondents not previously part of URBACT felt encouraged or even very encouraged to apply for an URBACT call. This shows continuous interest of new participants in the programme.

4.4.2 Increase in knowledge of indirect beneficiaries

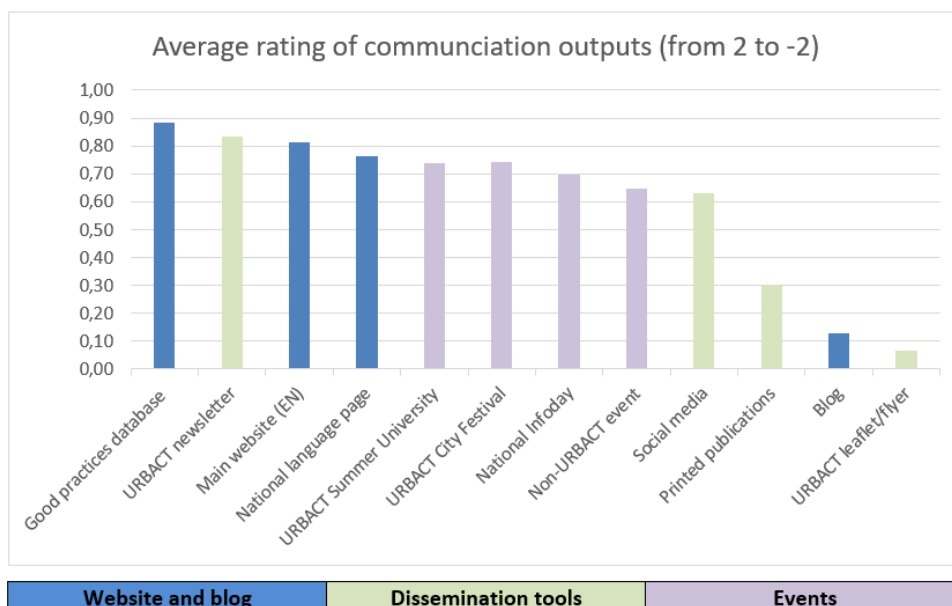
The 2018 and 2020 URBACT stakeholder surveys show that some **50% of respondents 'do not know, have basic or moderate understanding' of how URBACT works. There is evidence that URBACT activities are effectively clarifying the role of the programme.** Of the participants in the 2017 and 2022 City Festivals that were not yet involved in URBACT 80-90% indicate they gained a 'better' (score 4) or even a 'much better understanding' (score 5). Most participants feel they increased their general knowledge as well as knowledge of urban practices in other European cities a lot.

Apart from the City Festivals little other feedback on URBACT events concern learning outcomes. Of the URBACT/EUI 'Right to housing' conference participants 92% of respondents found the web conferences to be very useful. On the 'Strategic procurement' online course more than 90% of respondents felt the overall content of the course was useful or very useful and 75% that their learning outcomes and expectations were met.

The URBACT stakeholder surveys of 2018 and 2020 contain data about the information channels. The Good Practice database, part of the main website, was rated highest followed by the URBACT newsletter and websites in English and national languages, see Figure 4-10. The blog, publications and leaflets/flyers are the least appreciated. Notably, the URBACT toolbox was not mentioned as a separate option in these surveys because it did not yet exist.



Figure 4-10 Average rating of communication outputs in the 2020 Stakeholder Survey



Source: URBACT Digital Communications Annual Report July 2020 – June 2021.

The URBACT website is organised around urban topics. URBACT Knowledge Hub webpages enable users to see specific outputs from capitalisation projects (e.g., videos, animations and publications). This goes beyond the other urban topic pages that provide information as articles on good practices and networks. The top two most visited thematic landing pages in 2021 were the Knowledge Hub pages on Strategic Procurement and Gender Equal Cities.

The importance of communication in national languages to reach target groups in Member States is underlined by one of the most read articles in 2021 being in Italian and posted by the Italian NUP.

Aspects such as reading time and ratings for parts of activities might also provide indications of what is most useful. In the E-University 2020 the highest rated activities were City Voices and the Mayor’s question time.

Interviewee opinions on the URBACT website vary. One interviewee characterises the website as very professional with easy access to thematic information, especially the Good practice database and the URBACT tools section. One focus group, however, is less positive saying there is too much information which makes navigation confusing for newcomers. One capitalisation project also mentioned the importance of Basecamp. Not because the tool is considered particularly powerful, but because it is a stable feature for knowledge sharing. One interviewee mentions the unintended effect that the URBACT professional and business-like communication is sometimes not associated with EU Cohesion policy.

It is also noted that communication campaigns and sustained promotion are necessary to reach indirect beneficiaries with capitalisation activities, if not they ‘fizzle out’ even though much useful information and many tools are available, such as the ‘Remaking the city’ capitalisation activity.

A wide sample of URBACT indirect beneficiaries is reached, though at least some of them are not very familiar with what the programme does. However, this **understanding increases after participation in**



capitalisation activities. In general, 80-90% of participants say they learn a lot from these activities. Judging from the site visits the Good practice database and the Knowledge Hub are considered particularly useful by URBACT III indirect beneficiaries.

4.4.3 Use of URBACT thematic knowledge

Judging whether indirect beneficiaries have used URBACT III knowledge is very difficult. The programme indicator for this question found there were consistently more than the programme target of 400. This was estimated by counting indirect beneficiaries who indicated in stakeholder surveys that they had read URBACT publications and used URBACT knowledge in their work.

In feedback surveys of URBACT capitalisation events in which both direct and indirect beneficiaries participate, there is additional information on whether participants intend to use their new knowledge and whether they already did so in the past. In the 2018 City Festival 91% of respondents indicated they would use the acquired knowledge. In the 2022 City Festival this was even 99%. The feedback survey for that festival asked whether respondents had already implemented URBACT thematic knowledge back home and 63% replied positively. In the 2020 Stakeholder survey 42% did not answer this question, implying they did not use URBACT material in their work. Of the respondents that did reply the biggest group acknowledged they used the materials to improve their professional knowledge and understanding of urban development issues. The second biggest use is to inform colleagues about URBACT practices related to their area of expertise. Just over 10% of respondents indicate that their organisation used the material to improve or change their way of working, e.g., approaches or practices in implementing their activities. A similar group mentioned using thematic materials and good practices in their local policies.

Table 4-6 Use of URBACT knowledge by 2018 Stakeholder survey respondents

	Respondents	Percentage
Improve my professional knowledge	480	43%
Improve or change our way of working	127	11%
Use these thematic materials and good practices in our own local policies	126	11%
Inform some colleagues about URBACT practices	289	26%
Other	42	4%
No Answer	469	42%

Source: Summary of the 2018 URBACT stakeholder survey.

These replies are consistent with replies from the 2022 City Festival participants using URBACT knowledge not only in their ongoing URBACT projects and ULG activities, but also in non-URBACT projects in their city or in national projects and to change the way their city works. The reasons for not using URBACT knowledge were lack of time, different priorities or being unfamiliar with the available resources. Intentions to use URBACT knowledge in the future are similar, ranging from informing others and applying ideas (e.g. the doughnut economy, earth cycle) to ongoing URBACT projects, other city policies or as encouragement to apply for other URBACT projects.

Almost all URBACT measures are mentioned as useful in feedback surveys or interviews: site visits, thematic sessions, expert support, toolbox, URBACT method, etc.



Many interviewees note **the professional way the URBACT programme switched transnational activities online due to COVID-19 travel restrictions**. *'COVID could have stopped transnational networking entirely'* according to one interviewee. The shift has been possible through swift and effective capacity building of network partners and successful organisation of a digital City Festival and E-University. According to the same interviewee this has had an unintended effect as in the next programming period 80% of activities could take place online, reducing the carbon footprint of the programme. The box below explains the work in 2021 on digital capacity building as described in the AIR 2021 with 100% of participants confirming they use the new skills and tools in practice.

To follow up on the work in 2020 to build beneficiary capacities for digital exchange and learning, in 2021 the network partners were invited to join online sessions to compensate for fewer in-person meetings. These sessions were proposed as part of the work of the Digital Support Experts group.

The online sessions were organised as 'Digital Friday breakfasts' every Friday morning in February-March 2021 from 10h00 to 11h00 with the following focuses:

- 12/02 - How to run and facilitate Interactive digital meetings? (webinar)
- 19/02 - Using Mentimeter in meetings (hands-on session)
- 19/02 - Using Miro (hands-on session)
- 26/02 - How to run a creative digital workshop? (webinar)
- 05/03 - Preparing Agendas for digital meetings (hands-on session)
- 05/03 - Using Google Docs & Sheets for collaboration (hands-on session)
- 12/03 - Maintaining the interest of stakeholders/ Managing digital fatigue (webinar)
- 19/03 - Using Mentimeter for asynchronous interactions (hands-on session)
- 19/03 - Using digital icebreakers (hands-on session)

The three webinar sessions attracted 323 participants from 125 cities in 27 countries - 23 EU (Member States + Norway), the UK, Uganda and Mozambique. In addition, each of the six 'hands-on' sessions was attended by 35 to 60 people looking to develop their digital skills. 92% of respondents to the follow-up survey said the sessions had been useful and 100% reported they are using the new tools. It seems the short one-hour online format on Friday mornings was really appreciated by participants (AIR 2021).

Many interviewees stress **the personal learning and development journey** they made **thanks to URBACT activities**. This was not only for city civil servants, but also URBACT experts with several becoming change agents in their own municipality. However, several interviewees mention the critical step from individual to institutional learning, i.e., changing how the institution works. Several national representatives point to change in cities which participated in URBACT III. This is often related to new ways of doing things and using a more participatory or 'democratic' way of developing urban policy. Cities now co-create their policies and reach out to stakeholders that were not included in policymaking before. URBACT *'pushes cities out of their comfort zones'* is how one interviewee put it. It is mentioned, however, that many younger European democracies do not have a strong tradition in this participatory work and that changes need time. One interviewee went as far as saying that *'URBACT is the most democratic programme in Europe where a small city from the East can teach something to a big city in West'*.

One interviewee stressed that capacity-building and capitalisation are two sides of the same coin. Often cities taking part in a capitalisation activity have a 'penny-dropping moment' where participants realise things can be done differently when they discuss a theme that is often referred to in very general terms with practical examples, such as gender equality. In the UA partnership on poverty partnership one capitalisation activity was local pacts which brought together cities dealing with deprived neighbourhoods. That could explain why another interviewee noted *'many capitalisation activities trigger local activities.'*



External factors that can influence the use of acquired knowledge include changing political priorities that can sometimes stop projects or reforms. Another is resistance to change from vested interests in the city or national administration (e.g., fear of unknown consequences of citizen participation). But it is also mentioned that change is not always clearly visible. First, changing how cities work is often a long-term process that might start small in a single project and be gradually adopted by other city departments. Furthermore, URBACT is focused on soft skills and networking between stakeholders. Human connections can thus result in important changes or investments later, but it is not always clear what exactly was the ‘trigger’ for this change. City civil servants are exposed to many national or international knowledge and capacity-building initiatives. Some international ones are the OECD, Urban Innovative Actions and Horizon 2020. Other interviewees point to a snowball effect where learning that started with URBACT is amplified and build on in other networks (e.g., Eurocities) and with other EU funded projects such as Horizon 2020.

In summary, it is difficult to estimate how much URBACT knowledge is used in practice but, **40 to 100 % of respondents intended to use URBACT knowledge**. More than 60% of City Festival 2022 survey respondents said they had already used URBACT knowledge. Individuals are very important to inducing change in an organisation and it takes time before changes materialise. Findings point to a ‘snowball’ effect where small URBACT actions can lead to big results in the longer term.

4.4.4 Changes at other territorial levels

In addition to cities, there are indirect regional, national and European beneficiaries of the URBACT programme that can influence European or national urban policy indirectly improving the capacity to design and implement urban strategies of direct URBACT beneficiaries. These include national ministries responsible for urban policy or cohesion policy, other ETC programmes, DG REGIO, the Secretariat of UIAs and umbrella city organisations such as Eurocities or CEMR.

National level

NUPs are considered by several stakeholders to be **an important link to the national level**, especially where language and national context differ between countries. There is no structured information on how these links are made, but interviews and focus groups shed some light on this. In several Member States there is a liaison group at national level between ministries responsible for URBACT or NUPs and other ministries responsible for financing urban policies. In Portugal, for example, a group involving managing authority representatives has been established to facilitate synergies between URBACT results and mainstream ESIF programmes. In Germany there is a national urban policy working group promoting cooperation between the federal state, regions and city associations. Here URBACT outputs are regularly discussed, the NUP is invited to the meeting, and links are made between national urban policy and URBACT.

Interviews, focus group discussions and presentations during the European Week of Regions and Cities 2022 indicate that the URBACT method has affected national urban policy in a few Member States. Below are a few examples.

In Poland the Ministry for Regional Development has set up the Cities Partnership Initiative. Unofficially this is referred to as the ‘Polish URBACT Programme’. Like URBACT this programme facilitates discussion and cooperation among cities (3 networks of 10 cities each) on a certain thematic topic with a



concrete output expected. The themes are inspired by the Leipzig Charter and the UA and pertinent to Poland. Participating cities make an action plan, and consequently an 'improvement plan' with suggestions for national Polish urban policy.

Similarly, the Association of Polish Cities also runs 'Experience exchange networks' as part of a bigger project for cities. These networks consist of groups of cities (7 networks of about 20 cities) that work on a specific topic such as urban greening or energy transformation. No output is required, but there are professional facilitators or 'Lead experts' in the URBACT terminology. This is a multiplicative effect of URBACT III.

Italy is another example of potential multiplication with a national network inspired by URBACT being considered. It will be supported by a Technical Secretariat and topics will be similar to UA partnership topics. This network will focus on implementation and be supported by guidelines, common procedures, sharing applications, etc. Having the UA, UIA, urban dimension of national ERDF/ESF programmes and URBACT in the same ministry is considered to be highly synergetic.

Another example is Portugal's Circular Cities Initiative. Designed as the urban component of a national circular economy strategy, it addresses Portugal's challenge for many smaller cities with a language barrier to participate in EU programmes like URBACT. Portugal's national initiative uses almost the entire URBACT methodology of networks, lead cities, experts, capacity building activities, etc. Notably URBACT cities and URBACT experts are part of the initiative. The main difference is that there is a predefined thematic focus.

EU-level impact

Finally, there is evidence URBACT III also has an impact at EU level. First, there are the three urban measures created by the ERDF regulation - Articles 7, 8 and 9. Secondly, URBACT III has also contributed to the Leipzig Charter and the UA.

By end of the programme, **URBACT III has contributed greatly to Urban Innovative Actions (Article 8 ERDF)**, particularly through joint capitalisation activities as well as by setting up a UIA Transfer Mechanism where elements of UIA projects are transferred to other cities. Joint capitalisation activities by projects were independently developed under URBACT and UIA. Though such activities usually benefited from the complementary city knowledge and expertise of both initiatives, URBACT contributed greatly with its vast experience and accumulated knowledge. The entire process centred around core URBACT values such as integration and participation. According to an interviewee URBACT has been a source of inspiration for UIA. Both how the transfer networks were organised, as well as for operational aspects such as monitoring, evaluation and mutual learning processes of the cities using external experts. Its contribution has evidently been an important steppingstone for upscaling UIA and facilitating cooperation between the two initiatives.

The Urban Development Network established by Article 9 organised many national or multi-national events for Articles 7 or 8 cities. An overview of these mainly one- or two-day workshops is available on the [DG REGIO website](#). **A main link between URBACT III and UDN were the URBACT experts that contributed to UDN events** with their knowledge and hands-on experience of SUD processes at the city level. Dedicated presentations for Article 7 cities were made at UDN events encouraging them to join the



programme. Synergies were facilitated by the same desk officer at DG REGIO being responsible for both URBACT and UDN.

At least half the cities in URBACT networks were Article 7 cities benefiting greatly from exchanges among peers, support from capacity-building measures, learning and sharing best practices and other programme activities. However, this evaluation has found no evidence of a direct link between URBACT measures and the implementation of sustainable urban development strategies from Article 7 cities on the [STRAT-Board site](#) of the EC Joint Research Centre. Nevertheless, Article 7 cities are significantly represented among programme beneficiaries, so findings and conclusions of URBACT's impact on increased capacities of cities should equally apply to Article 7 cities.

The launch of the Urban Agenda for the EU in 2015 with its multi-level partnerships of cities, regions, national authorities and EU institutions, was a key external event for URBACT III. The UA was decided when URBACT III was already operational. Hence the programme documents did not foresee any specific contribution. Nevertheless, almost all interviewees pointed to the crucial role URBACT III played in its success. **URBACT contributed to nearly all fourteen UA partnerships with experts and staff**, even though at the beginning the UA was not viewed positively by the programme and URBACT had only an 'observer' role. One quantitative way to estimate how far URBACT thematic knowledge has been taken up by the partnerships is to look at references made to URBACT knowledge or projects in a series of articles based on the 14 UA partnerships. Nine out of ten articles published on the UA [website](#) in 2021 refer to URBACT examples.

The interviewees underline various reasons for this contribution. Alongside Eurocities, URBACT was the only visible city representative in the partnerships. **URBACT could quickly tap into a wider network of more than 500 cities. This 'community' of cities helped to enlarge the partnerships.** The programme was able to 'lobby' URBACT cities to take part in UA partnerships and bring their expertise. One interviewee pinpoints that participation in URBACT gave cities confidence to be active in the partnerships. The programme could also mobilise its pool of experts to take part in UA partnerships, sometimes in a leading role. These experts brought the needs of cities they had been working with as well as expertise of the URBACT methodology. Often URBACT input was key to providing concrete examples of urban challenges that other levels of government were not aware of.

According to the interviewees this engagement had virtuous effects. URBACT's presence led to an increased awareness of the programme among non-URBACT cities and other organisations in the partnerships. In the partnership on housing the URBACT expert introduced an important new stakeholder to the partnership, the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) which thus came into contact with the programme. Several cities in the UA Circular economy partnership later applied for an URBACT network, changing from being indirect to direct beneficiaries of the programme. According to one interviewee representing a Member State, **the multi-level UA partnerships facilitated URBACT's impact on EU policies with an urban dimension.** This was also confirmed by an expert in one of the partnerships.

URBACT III also supported partnerships with capitalisation activities. One example is the Local Pact developed in the Urban poverty partnership. This brought together cities dealing with deprived neighbourhoods. According to one interviewee this was inspired by the French 'Contrat de villes' and aimed at influencing the new iteration of this policy by helping cities to combine deprived neighbourhood development with cohesion policy tools, such as integrated territorial investments (ITI) and CLLD.



Despite this overall message of success some interviewees indicated that URBACT could have supported the UA more if structural support were assured from the start of the programme. Now there was a lack of capacity in the Secretariat that meant most support was through external experts. One interviewee pointed to a lack of coordination between stakeholders with a role in the UA: UIAs, URBACT and the European Commission. This may be why there were limited links between the UA partnership on housing and the Affordable Housing capitalisation activity from URBACT and UIA.

URBACT was also involved in the New Leipzig Charter by organising four City Labs that addressed four overarching topics of the charter. The Leipzig Charter is a policy document on sustainable urban development in Europe. **Building on the URBACT ‘community’ the programme reached out to many cities disseminating the core concept of the Leipzig Charter - an integrated participatory development.** One interviewee noted that during consultation with national and EU level policymakers, direct input from cities was of utmost importance.

With a seat at the expert level Urban Development Group and its high-level policy making group of Director-Generals on Urban Matters, **URBACT is also involved in policy making for European urban initiatives such as the UA and the Leipzig Charter.** Here the interviewees are divided. One Member State interviewee highlights the positive role of URBACT in bringing urban knowledge to the table. An institutional interviewee argues that URBACT is overstepping its mandate in this regard, since only Eurocities and CEMR officially represent cities.

Although there is no information on URBACT’s impact in all Member States, at least in Poland, Italy and Portugal national networks of cities have been set up which are heavily inspired by URBACT. At EU level URBACT methods and experts have supported and facilitated the UIA and UDN. **The impact on SUD strategies from Article 7 cities appear mostly indirect as URBACT has increased the capacity of many Article 7 cities.** Although the UA was an unforeseen event, URBACT has been instrumental to the success of the UA partnerships with its urban knowledge, ‘community’ of cities, experts and proven methodology.

4.5 Other aspects

This section includes findings of positive impacts on other aspects that cities have experienced and describes external factors that influenced URBACT III.

4.5.1 Other changes to the capacity of URBACT participating cities

Asked about other changes due to participation in URBACT III beneficiaries mention changes in behaviour and/or approaches in urban planning which can be considered as an immediate unintended result of their URBACT learning journey. Stakeholder views were collected in a dedicated question in the APN2 CS. A notable number of cities - **42% of APN2 CS respondents acknowledged that their participation in URBACT III has induced other changes in how their city or institution develops and implements sustainable urban strategy.** The sub-section below is structured by findings from the APN2 CS and its analysis report. Insights from other studies as well as interviews and focus groups have also been used.

The URBACT Networks Follow-up Study notes **a certain behavioural change as a result of URBACT participation.** The IAP study points to **less tangible and tacit gains** which it calls ‘soft’ benefits and



deems them to have the same, or higher added value than the acquired knowledge or final IAP. ‘... *many of the other (and ‘softer’) benefits of transnational exchange (inspiration, ways of working etc.)*’ (p.29). Though some interviewees emphasise that URBACT brings change at a personal level, many also acknowledge that cities often completely change how they work. One example is the consolidation of several sectoral strategies. APN CS cities note a more holistic approach to urban development and applying URBACT methodology also to other policy fields and cooperation projects. URBACT has helped to change attitudes towards proactivity, dialogue and cooperation. Participation in URBACT stipulates ‘out of the box’ thinking and ‘non-classic’ ways of working in some cities. This changes the mindset of municipal civil servants and even policymakers leading to ‘*improved overall planning and a more comprehensive approach to the way of setting up the work.*’ There is an awareness and even mainstreaming of novel or unfamiliar policy approaches and methods which are subsequently incorporated into municipal toolboxes.

Civil engagement and commitment are being reinforced by allowing citizens’ perspectives to be incorporated into municipal decision-making processes. Stakeholders have become more aware of shared responsibility and mutual trust is being built. ‘*Although the municipality represents a special societal interest, the municipality can actually also act as an equal stakeholder among the others. This helps to build trust and to work more constructively towards results.*’ Also, establishing participatory platforms and budgets can be considered as indirect and unintended result of the URBACT III programme that will have a longer lasting effect.

Cities confirm **increased awareness of specific cross-cutting topics**. Some note, for example, how health has become important in urban planning policy and acknowledge: ‘*we never took health as a starting point for urban planning before. Now we are more aware that health should be the most important objective in urban development*’. Other aspects that have gained increased attention are climate change and gender equality. URBACT has reportedly paved the way for more detailed and robust data to inform decisions in policy fields such as air quality and carbon emissions.

Cities are pleased with **increased attention to the efforts** they have made so far. Some interviewees point to this as an unintended and pleasant result: ‘*the magnitude of the interest that people had in our project. All the attention that we got. We work with gender equality for already 15 years, but suddenly we get in the spotlight from national and international stakeholders. URBACT has been a really important steppingstone to showcase what we do*’ and ‘*there is a renewed attention to our city as well as other old mining cities*’. A positive unexpected side effect of an increased attention is easier access to additional funding noted by one of the interviewees.

A significant finding is the active **incorporation of the ULG structure and processes in municipal decision making**. Transforming ULGs into permanent consultation groups with stakeholders to continue defining sustainable development strategies is mentioned as something that was not always envisaged when starting the URBACT ‘journey’. Many respondents happily report **improved collaboration at national level and ensured political support** as a pleasant unintended result of their participation in the programme. Unfortunately, several beneficiaries lost political support, which was an external factor that limited changes in their cities.

Abilities and skills to cooperate at the European level is an aspect where cities’ capacities have increased because of URBACT, as acknowledged in most feedback surveys. For example, in the APN1 CS and IN CS ‘cooperation on the European level’ was the second most popular of nine predefined



responses to the question 'Do you consider that your experience in an URBACT network has had a positive impact on the following?'. More than 80% of respondents were positive. Also, TN CS mentions this result among other unintended results similar to those described above.

This is an important result that is probably not that unexpected. The beneficiaries mention **increased interest in European co-operation and learning, becoming more familiar with European programmes and international knowledge**. The URBACT Networks Follow-up Study also elaborates on exposure to European transnational exchange by concluding: '*The main aspects that were identified as having lasting positive impact were mainly soft elements. Cities rated highest the improvement of their image as a European player and their increased level of confidence in accessing EU funding*' (p.62).

The IAP study reports '*Confirmed plans for future project applications and/or spin-off activities in the thematic field of their APN include a significant number of potential additional URBACT networks, INTERREG projects and Horizon2020 applications*' (p.12). It has also notes other benefits for APN1 cities that could be considered as unintended results such as:

- *increasing their thematic understanding and identification of potential integrated solutions*
- *transforming their approach to governance*
- *improving their use of existing resources.*

Last, but not least is the feeling of belonging to a bigger community of cities that provides support, boosting confidence and providing inspiration.

4.5.2 External factors

This sub-section looks at external factors that might have influenced programme results positively or negatively. The URBACT cities are consistent when asked about the external factors that fostered or limited the changes. The major event is no doubt the COVID19 pandemic. Other factors that complete the top-3 are changing political priorities and the funding environment. A fourth factor relates to national and local context. However, not all external factors are negative. The UA was generally seen as a big opportunity for URBACT. Finally, also the networking environment of the individual city is important. The following paragraphs address these factors one by one.

URBACT III impact has been affected by global crises. Most notably the **COVID-19 pandemic**, but also the war in Ukraine and the ensuing refugee flow, earthquakes and droughts are also mentioned. Of the APN2 cities 60% indicated that COVID-19 had a strong or very strong impact on their network results. Most affected was stakeholder engagement, followed by disrupted project timelines, Small Scale Actions and IAP processes. There was also less exchange between networks, despite strong efforts to stay connected digitally. Normally there would have been more cross-network exchange, for example at in-person universities. Not only did COVID-19 force projects to restructure and rethink how partners could still meet, but ULG members in some cities did not have laptops and could not easily meet digitally, highlighting the differences between URBACT cities and their capacities. It also affected resources and priorities. As one interviewee put it: '*It was difficult to get politicians to think of anything else but COVID*'.

However, the programme adapted by quickly building up digital capacity in the cities which now provides new opportunities to work in a hybrid and more climate neutral way. Admittedly there was a steep digital learning curve during COVID-19 within the URBACT community. The digitalisation of major outreach



events also made it possible to attract more people eliminating the limits of physical location. Although digital fatigue might impact the outreach of such digital events in the future.

Political support is crucial for the success of networking projects. In democracies new elections can mean **a change in political direction** that might affect the previous priority given to the URBACT IAP process or the political will to participate in URBACT networks. This is not always negative. Some interviewees mention local **political leadership as a main determinant**. Also, external events such as COVID-19 can change priorities. According to one interviewee few politicians are actively involved. They only come when a signature is required. Among interviewees there is a general agreement that reaching politicians is difficult, but the programme should try more. The programme should highlight the importance of political support from the start by inviting mayors to participate in activities and make sure they can interact with each other. The end of a network phase might also be a good moment for visibility when the best city examples are showcased.

Although the data on implementation paint a mixed picture, **lack of funding and human resources** are very often mentioned as barriers to successful implementation. Only recently has the URBACT toolbox been enriched with tools related to funding. Other than tools and skills, interviewees point to the difficulty of engaging with national managing authorities of European funds. According to an interviewee from a European institution, URBACT Monitoring Committee members, as national authorities responsible for the programme, should do much more to ensure the link to nationally managed ESIF funding. Italy might be a good example where URBACT is closely integrated with a national EU funding programme for cities. Others suggest that the European Urban Initiative can play a stronger role in this and the next programming period.

The **national and local context** is another determinant. This can include changes in project management, local rules and procedures that hold things up, language skills, the national political context that can either be favourable to URBACT co-operation or not. The transfer of good practices is impacted by differences in the local context. Language and national specificities were reasons for Portugal, Poland and Italy to set up national URBACT-like city networks. In general, NUPs could perhaps help mitigate these local barriers to success.

As mentioned before, the **UA was an external factor**. More broadly this relates to the increased attention on cities as key enablers of societal change leading to a leverage of EU level support measures and programmes for cities. **URBACT III has played a constructive role in the UA** which has resulted in its increased visibility among urban stakeholders, more direct influence at EU urban policy level as well as new partners and beneficiary cities. However, new initiatives like the EUI also raise questions about the complementarity of initiatives.

Finally, for many cities URBACT is not the only European programme they participate in. Members of Eurocities use on average four EU funding programmes at a given time to implement their urban strategy. All these projects, funds and network connections can help amplify, transfer and develop changes set in motion by their participation in URBACT.



5 Conclusions and suggestions

1. The URBACT community has grown during its third-generation programme reaching out to some 30 000 stakeholders. Almost half the URBACT III cities were new, and knowledge was increasingly accessed. URBACT III enabled **multi-faceted changes** to cities. At least 200 saw a **significant increase in their knowledge** of integrated and participatory approaches to sustainable urban development. Cities have **notably increased their capacity** to manage and design sustainable urban policies and practices. For many the programme has been a game changer. There has been a **change in behaviour**. Above all URBACT III cities emphasise **inspiration for change** as a crucial impact through transnational networking and a feeling of **belonging to a bigger change-driven community**.
2. The well-defined programme structure and methodology induces changes in **knowledge and capacity for all three key URBACT concepts** - (1) integration, (2) participation and (3) action planning. While the URBACT method ultimately leads to developing an integrated action plan, **the biggest impact for cities has been on the action-planning process itself rather than its result**. The URBACT support 'package' is constantly being updated and adjusted to the ever-changing needs of cities so it can effectively handle almost any urban issue. The friendly and attractive manner of the URBACT approach and innovativeness of its tools makes it appealing for uptake and trial.
3. URBACT III and its measures have **succeeded instigating multi-dimensional integration processes** aimed at sustainable urban development. However, the extent of integration varies by dimensions. Not all aspects of the URBACT method are being taken up equally. **Horizontal integration** as a crucial starting point for sustainable urban development in local authorities **has seen the most significant increase in capacity**. Vertical and territorial integration were less prominent in URBACT III. 'Urban-rural links' and 'functional urban areas' are important concepts in cohesion policy defining a need for vertical integration between managing and urban authorities.
4. Thanks to the URBACT Local Groups the increase in capacity to work in a participative way was acknowledged to be slightly higher than the increase in working in an integrated way. **Enabling and facilitating ULGs is one of the most prominent positive impacts of URBACT networks** that has reinforced integration and participation under the programme. **ULGs are a practical tool** in partner cities **providing the necessary frameworks for change**. Many are being transformed into permanent stakeholder consultation groups that continue defining sustainable development strategies in URBACT cities after the networks finish. Stakeholder engagement has become more effective compared to the situation before the URBACT 'journey'.
5. ULGs and the URBACT participatory approach at large are **important place-based means strengthening, reinforcing and showcasing local democratic processes** in societies. URBACT as one of the most democratic EU programmes supplies cities with know-how and tools for grass-roots societal processes. The bottom-up approach and trust building as well as equal opportunities for cities, despite their size and geography is much more than a mechanism. It is an ideology **boosting the confidence and self-awareness of local actors** which is especially important in EU Member States with younger or more fragile democracies.
6. URBACT III has created **multiplying effects that spread beyond its actions and target groups**. This comes to the fore at city level where URBACT actions are often described as a springboard or **steppingstone that produces a snowball effect and triggers larger process**. Thanks to participation in the programme, many cities gained confidence to initiate their own local processes, share the experience, connect to other European cities, participate in other EU initiatives, and access



other EU funding programmes. With its effective communication and capitalisation activities, proven methodology of peer learning and capacity building, urban knowledge, 'community' of cities and experienced experts, URBACT has been able to induce these **multiplying effects also at national and EU level**. Notable examples are the UA, the New Leipzig Charter and URBACT inspired city networks in Portugal, Italy and Poland.

7. **A growing number of new and often smaller cities** with reduced capacity, **the need to sustain capitalisation activities** for an enduring impact and **an increasing number of EU level urban initiatives** for which URBACT could provide knowledge and expertise, **put a strain on the URBACT Secretariat** and pool of experts. This might not be sustainable in the long term.
8. URBACT communication and the website are perceived as professional with a strong 'brand', the URBACT method is effective and the bottom-up approach in theme-setting is democratic and appreciated by cities. The reverse of the coin is that the **link with EU-level policies and priorities is less visible** for stakeholders. URBACT as a part of the cohesion policy 'package' for cities is not so obvious from the website, the URBACT method is in line with but does not clearly reference the SUD principles from the 2014-2020 ERDF regulation and overarching EU policy priorities are not clearly visible. Even though this is more perception than an actual disconnect, it entails the **risk of slowly drifting away from the main EU policy discourse** and could partly explain the difficult traction of IAPs with managing authorities.
9. With URBACT III, **cities benefit in many ways beyond the programme's immediate goals**. Unintended results provide **an extra layer of added value to the programme** and reinforce its impacts. Beyond behavioural change and strengthening democratic processes, **raised awareness of cross-cutting topics** such as health or gender equality have **increased attention to URBACT cities and in some cases improved collaboration at national level**. Thanks to URBACT, cities gain **confidence to share their experience, connect to other cities**, participate in other EU initiatives, and access EU funding programmes.
10. **The main external factor for the programme was no doubt the COVID-19 pandemic**. Even though there were several negative impacts on the networking activities of cities, URBACT could quickly increase the digital skills of cities and find innovative solutions for a hybrid way of working which also helps the programme become carbon neutral. **Other external factors were politics, funding and the national context** where the impact on the programme was often perceived as negative.

Building on these conclusions, below are suggestions the evaluators feel can enhance the impact of the programme or safeguard its impact in the future. Some suggestions refer to weaker spots in the four EQs. A second set of suggestions goes beyond this framework and takes into account also the broader urban policy environment in which URBACT operates.

1. URBACT could strengthen its impact by consistently ensuring a **greater engagement** of the programme and its beneficiaries **with urban policymakers at all levels of governance**. Better recognition of the programme and links with key decision-makers relevant for implementation of the sustainable urban development strategies and plans is of particular importance.
 - 1.1. URBACT should continuously highlight the **importance of political support at city level**. Dedicated activities for elected representatives should be considered. These could be appealing events linked to URBACT networks and other activities such as site visits or high-level events at the end of a network phase. This would allow mayors to interact with each other, showcase successes in their own cities and learn about best practices in the other countries as well as the approach to sustainable urban development offered by URBACT.



- 1.2. At the national level there is a **need for greater traction between city sustainable urban development processes and ESIF programming and management**. The role of URBACT Monitoring Committee members and NUPs in ensuring coordination at national level should increase. Managing authorities could be a more explicit target for outreach activities and vertical integration under the URBACT method could highlight the involvement of national managing authorities in sustainable urban development processes.
2. To counter a perception that URBACT is ‘doing its own thing’ the programme should more visibly **align with the general EU policy discourse on, for example, the Green Deal or the New European Bauhaus**. These priorities as well as the role of URBACT in EU cohesion policy could receive more attention at capacity-building and capitalisation events. URBACT cities could be incentivised to consider topical EU policy themes in their network proposals without forsaking the bottom-up approach in theme selection. **The URBACT concept and method** are very mature and effective but **should be regularly checked, updated and aligned with new cohesion policy priorities and terminology**. This includes aligning with the [Handbook on Sustainable Urban Development](#) co-produced by DG REGIO and the JRC. In the changing policy environment, URBACT communication activities and structural partnerships should have a bigger focus on EU-level urban initiatives (e.g., JPI Urban Europe, Covenant of Mayors, etc) where potential and indirect beneficiaries can benefit from URBACT methods, knowledge and examples. Several of these suggestions have already been taken onboard in the URBACT IV [programme](#) and the redesign of the URBACT [website](#).
3. With increasing EU level initiatives for cities, it is important for URBACT **to position itself and define its ‘unique selling points’** in this landscape as well as **look for synergies with other initiatives**. URBACT networks are grass-root and democratically organised, where cities can peer-learn and benefit from high-quality capacity building over an extended period of time. The evaluators suggest **that training ever more cities in sustainable urban development through city networks should remain the core of the programme**. The fact that URBACT is part of EU cohesion policy also sets it apart from other city networks and should be highlighted more. This link implies funding support for well-designed strategies. URBACT should be able to deliver on this or risk not living up to expectations from participating cities.
4. Among direct (and presumably also indirect) beneficiaries there is a clear **demand for high-quality advice on resourcing IAPs**. This goes beyond plain soliciting of funds but includes **smart and innovative solutions acquired and shared transnationally**. Implementation abilities could be increased by concentrating on resourcing earlier in the IAP process and treating it as a stand-alone concept along with the other three URBACT key concepts: (1) integration, (2) participation and (3) action planning. Resourcing should continue broadening its focus outside the narrow investment and funding perspective to consider other types of resources, particularly, human resources and public procurement. Strengthening URBACT support for resourcing would allow cities to improve their capacity to implement sustainable development plans and strategies. It could possibly also enable better coordination and embed programme outcomes into other EU funding programmes.
5. Given limited capacity in the URBACT Secretariat and newly created capacity at the European Urban Initiative which also supports capacity building and knowledge management, **synergies should be created between URBACT and EUI**. For example, a clear division of tasks to support the UA could be agreed. As Poland, Portugal and Italy show, there is **also considerable scope for NUPs to be an effective national vehicle for extending the URBACT method beyond URBACT cities** and linking it to national urban policy and financing. These national examples can inspire other NUPs and

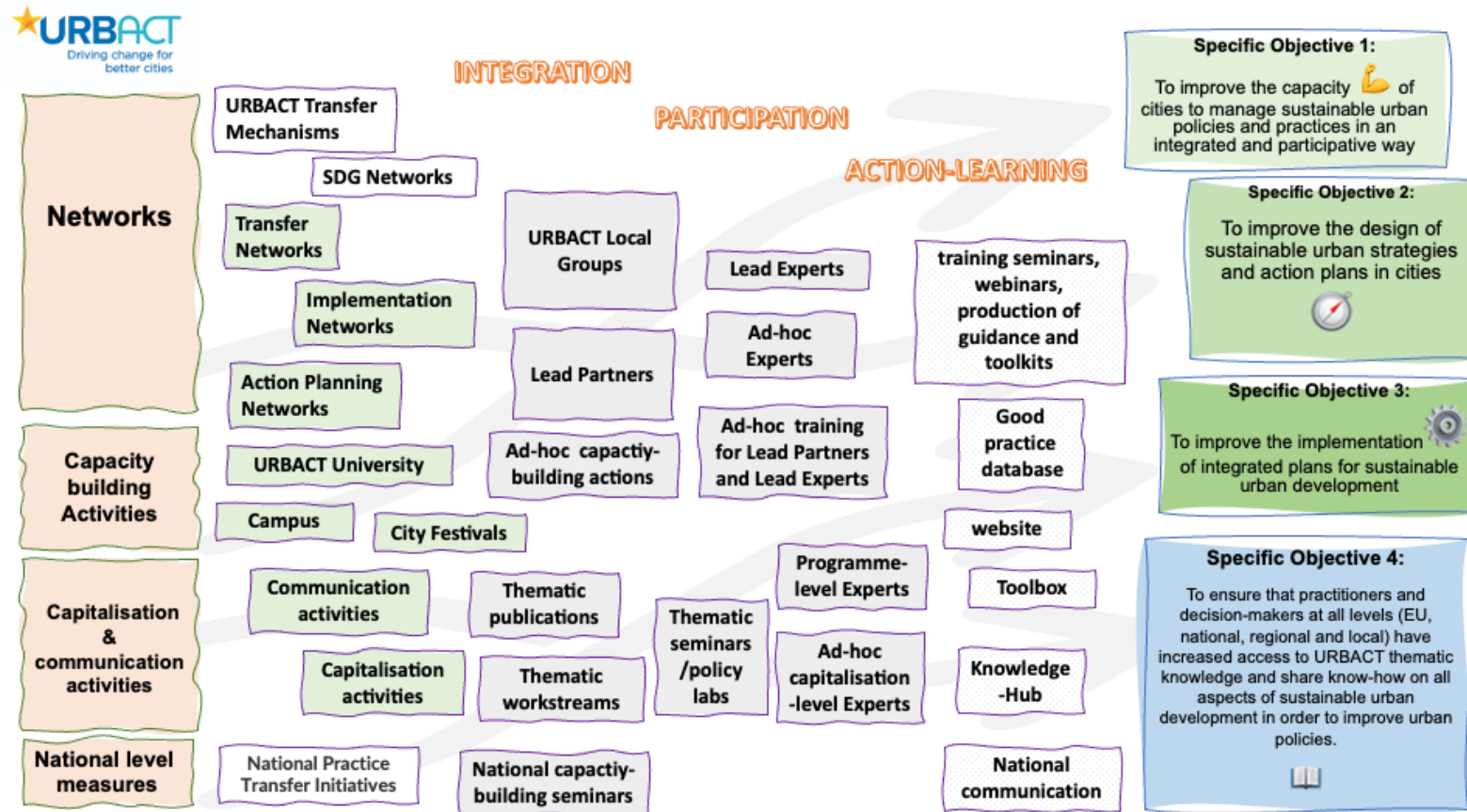


should be supported by Monitoring Committee members. Joining forces with national contact points from the EUI may increase the impact of NUPs.

6. There is an ongoing need to **continue building local capacity** to create, mobilise, and animate ULGs. URBACT could **empower community initiatives** ensuring increased support over the whole policy cycle, from strategy development to its implementation. This could be done by stimulating 'next level participatory approaches' such as participatory platforms and budgets and small-scale actions to test solutions. This builds on the momentum of URBACT III and avoids stakeholders becoming disillusioned when their participation does not produce tangible results. URBACT could also consider encouraging cities to extend ULGs beyond the network's official duration by requiring, for example, that ULGs continue to function a certain time period after the networking activities are terminated.



Annex 1 URBACT III impact pathways





Annex 2 List of reviewed documents

Nr	Reference	Comment
	Capitalisation	
1.	URBACT secretariat, <i>Item 04a Update on capitalisation</i> , URBACT III MC, 2nd June 2017, Malta	Describes general approach
2.	URBACT secretariat, <i>Item 04a Update on Capitalisation</i> , URBACT III MC, 25-26th June 2019, Alba Iulia, Romania	Summary of actions
3.	URBACT secretariat, <i>Annex 01 Capitalisation Action Fiche</i> , URBACT III MC, June 2019	Describes actions
4.	URBACT secretariat, <i>Annex 02 Capitalisation Action Fiche</i> , URBACT III MC, 25-26 June 2019, Alba Iulia, Romania	Describes actions
5.	URBACT secretariat, <i>Annex 03 Capitalisation Action Fiche</i> , URBACT III MC, 25-26 June 2019, Alba Iulia, Romania	Output of action
6.	URBACT secretariat, <i>Annex 04 Capitalisation Action Fiche</i> , URBACT III MC, 25-26 June, Alba Iulia, Romania	Output of action
7.	URBACT secretariat, <i>Annex 05 Capitalisation Action Fiche</i> , URBACT III MC, 25-26 June, Alba Iulia, Romania	Describes members and outcome of action
8.	URBACT secretariat, <i>Annex 06 Capitalisation Action Fiche</i> , URBACT III MC, 25-26 June, Alba Iulia, Romania	Information on city labs
9.	URBACT secretariat, <i>Annex 07 Capitalisation Action Fiche</i> , URBACT III MC, 25-26 June, Alba Iulia, Romania	Describes members and outcome of action
10.	URBACT secretariat, <i>Annex 08 Capitalisation Action Fiche</i> , URBACT III MC, 25-26 June, Alba Iulia, Romania	Describes outcome of action
11.	URBACT secretariat, <i>Annex 09 Capitalisation Action Fiche</i> , URBACT III MC, 25-26 June, Alba Iulia, Romania	Describes members and outcome of action
12.	Nuala Morgan, <i>Capitalisation Action 2019 – 2020: annex 10 vitality of small cities in Europe</i> , Monitoring Committee, 4 June 2019	Description of action
13.	URBACT secretariat, <i>Item 04a Update on Capitalisation</i> , URBACT III MC, 11th November 2020, Online	Knowledge Hub Activity overview
14.	URBACT, <i>URBACT online course on strategic procurement, Evaluation Report</i> , April 2021	Data from survey on impact
15.	URBACT, <i>TechPlace 2020 Review of pilot meet-up events and looking ahead to future options</i>	Outcome of actions
16.	URBACT, <i>UIA-URBACT debrief and evaluation</i> , Draft version 30 June 2021	Data from survey
	Communication	
17.	Evaluation responses City Festival 2017, Tallinn	Raw survey data
18.	URBACT, URBACT City Festival, 3-5 October, Tallinn, Estonia	Presentation with results of survey



19.	City Festival 2018 evaluation and statistics	Raw survey data
20.	E40, URBACT Digital Communications Annual Report, July 2020 – June 2021	Website statistics and summary Stakeholder survey 2020
21.	NUP baseline results summary	Summary of survey data
22.	URBACT Stakeholder Survey 2018	Raw survey data
23.	URBACT secretariat, Survey on the URBACT programme 2018	Summary of survey results
24.	URBACT Stakeholder Survey 2020	Raw survey data
25.	Summary URBACT stakeholder survey 2020	Summary of survey results
26.	URBACT secretariat, <i>Item 05 Update on Communication & Partnerships</i> , URBACT III MC, 9th March 2021, Online	Overview activities
27.	URBACT secretariat, <i>Item 05a Update on Communication & Partnerships</i> , URBACT III MC, 1st October 2021 Maribor, Slovenia	Survey results of URBACT City Festival 2021 + overview national events
28.	URBACT secretariat, Communication strategy and implementation for URBACT III	Monitoring and evaluation of communication strategy
29.	URBACT secretariat, <i>Cities In Action Stories Of Change</i> , December 2018, Paris, France	Many examples of change
30.	URBACT secretariat, <i>Good Practice Transfer Why Not In My City?</i> , June 2021, Paris, France	Impact of transfer networks + examples of change.
31.	URBACT City Festival 2022, Survey responses	Raw survey data
32.	URBACT secretariat, <i>Item 05a Update on Communication</i> , URBACT III MC, 4th april 2018, Sofia, Bulgaria	Data on communication
	Capacity building	
33.	URBACT Campus survey participants	Raw survey data
34.	URBACT Campus survey and trainers	Raw survey data
35.	URBACT secretariat, Feedback Report On Urbact Campus Delivery & Results	Analysis of survey results
36.	URBACT secretariat, <i>update on capacity building</i> , URBACT III MC, 26 June 2019, Alba Iulia, Romania	Powerpoint with Feedback report figures
37.	URBACT E-University 2020 Feedback survey	Raw survey data
38.	URBACT E-University Feedback Survey summary report	Automated summary report of survey results
39.	URBACT secretariat, Feedback Report On Urbact E-University Delivery & Results, November 2020	Summary report of survey results
40.	URBACT secretariat, E-University stats for MC, November 2020	Statistics on activities
41.	URBACT secretariat, <i>Item 03 Update on Capacity Building</i> , URBACT III MC, 11th November 2020, Online	Update on activities
42.	URBACT secretariat, update on capacity building, URBACT III MC, November 2020	Powerpoint with results from E-university survey



43.	URBACT Summer University 2016 ex-post survey	Raw survey data
44.	URBACT secretariat, <i>Item 03b Report back on URBACT Summer University 2016</i> , URBACT III MC, 5th October 2016, Bratislava	Info on ex-ante survey
45.	URBACT secretariat, extract Annual Implementation Report 2016, p36-p44	Info on ex-ante survey
46.	URBACT Summer University 2016 follow-up survey 2018	Raw survey data
47.	URBACT Summer University 2016 panel results	Results of respondents that replied to the 3 surveys
48.	URBACT secretariat, extract Annual Implementation Report 2017, p39-p43	Results of respondents that replied to the 3 surveys + analysis
49.	Corbat Y. Crowley E. Karamarkos K., <i>Study On National Urbact Points</i> , 2nd August 2021	Contains info on NUP activities and URBACT Stakeholder survey 2020
	Programme documents	
50.	URBACT secretariat, <i>Urbact III stats</i> , URBACT III MC, 01 October 2021, Maribor, Slovenia	PowerPoint with data on new cities
51.	URBACT secretariat, <i>Item 07a Budget update</i> , URBACT III MC, 28 November 2022, Brno, Czechia	Financial data of URBACT III programme
52.	URBACT secretariat, Background Information For 2019 Annual Implementation Report, 28 September 2020	Overview of capitalisation activities + state of play programme indicators
53.	URBACT secretariat, Background information for 2021 annual implementation report, 10 May 2022	Overview of capitalisation activities + state of play programme indicators
54.	URBACT programme, <i>Urbact III Operational Programme, Version May 2018</i>	Legal basis
55.	European Union, Regulation (EU) No 1299/2013 (Interreg), 17 December 2013	Legal basis
56.	European Union, Regulation (EU) No 1301/2013 (European Regional Development Fund), 17 December 2013	Legal basis
57.	European Union, Regulation (EU) No 2021/1059 (Interreg), 24 June 2021	Legal basis
58.	European Union, Regulation (EU) No 2021/1060 (Common Provisions), 24 June 2021	Legal basis
59.	European Union, Regulation (EU) No 2021/1058 (European Regional Development Fund), 24 June 2021	Legal basis
	Networks	
60.	URBACT secretariat, Guidelines to produce an Integrated Action Plan, January 2017	Guidelines
61.	APN Closure survey 2018	Raw survey results
62.	URBACT secretariat, APN Closure survey 2018 analysis	Analysis of survey data
63.	URBACT Secretariat, <i>Update on Action Planning Networks</i> , URBACT III MC, 4 December 2018, Graz	Graphs on outcome APN survey
64.	E40, <i>Study On Integrated Action Plans (IAP Study) Urbact Action Planning Networks</i> , Final Report, July 2019	Study with links to URBACT measures and external factors



65.	Cugnet M., Trenker-Fraser R., Garzillo C., <i>Urbact Networks Follow-Up Study</i> , Final Report, March 2021	Study with links to URBACT measures and external factors
66.	Implementation networks closure survey 2019	Raw survey data
67.	URBACT secretariat, Implementation Networks Closure survey results analysis	Analysis of survey data
68.	Transfer Networks closure survey 2021	Raw survey data
69.	URBACT secretariat, Transfer Networks closure survey 2021 statistical analysis	Analysis of survey data with many graphs
70.	Baqueriza-Jackson M., <i>Transfer Study</i> , Final Report, December 2020	Barriers and success factors
71.	URBACT secretariat, Closure survey analysis Urbact Transfer Networks Call 1	Summary and analysis of the survey
72.	URBACT secretariat, APN2 Closure Survey Analysis Report, August 2022	Summary and analysis of the survey



Annex 3 List of interviewees and focus group participants

The table below gives an overview of the people that were interviewed or have taken part in the three online focus group meetings in the framework of this URBACT III impact evaluation.

Name	Affiliation	Date
Interviewees		
Tilman Buchholz	German MC member	14 June 2022
Fernando Rosa	Portuguese MC member	14 June 2022
Amelie Cousin	UIA secretariat	15 June 2022
Eddie Adams	Programme expert	15 June 2022
Yvette Petit	City of Heerlen	15 June 2022
Linda Gustafsson	City of Umea	28 June 2022
Marcelline Bonneau	Programme expert	28 June 2022
Sabrina Abdi	URBACT MA	30 June 2022
Ieva Kalniņa	City of Riga	7 July 2022
Thomas de Béthune	DG REGIO	16 September 2022
Laura Liger	DG REGIO	16 September 2022
Focus group participants		
Tracey Johnson	City of Barnsley	22 September 2022
Marko Ercegovic	NUP Croatia	22 September 2022
Ivan Tosics	Programme expert	28 September 2022
Jaimie Just	CEMR	28 September 2022
Aldo Vargas	NUP Poland	28 September 2022
Sandra Gizdulich	Italian National Governmental Agency for the Territorial Cohesion	28 September 2022
Laura Colini	Programme expert	6 October 2022
Matthew Baqueriza-Jackson	Programme expert	6 October 2022
Anja De Cunto	Eurocities	6 October 2022



Annex 4 URBACT III impact evaluation bingo



CATEGORIES		STATEMENTS	CATEGORIES		STATEMENTS
Integration			IAPs/ urban strategies		
1	Vertical integration	Delephobia	13	Participative action planning	What plan?
2	Horizontal integration	Jargon, jargon	14	IAP implementation	If only we saw results
3	Territorial integration	Neighbours never join!	15	Political engagement	Politics...
4	Spatial integration	Imperfect spatial fit	16	Funding	Where is the money?
5	Resources integration	Hard and soft don't match	Thematic knowledge and experience		
Participation			17	Understanding URBACT	Complicated URBACT
6	Participatory approach	Participation trouble	18	Thematic knowledge	I still have no clue
7	ULG	Too many stakeholders	19	URBACT method	URBACT method?
8	Leading a local multi-stakeholder group	They never listen	20	Inspiration	Boring...
Action-learning			Other		
9	Transnational exchange	They are so different	21	Other	SUD
10	Good practice / solutions	Inventing the wheel again...	22	Other	Long speeches...
11	Experts support	Know-it-all experts	23	Other	Site-visits, please!
12	Project management	Red tape	24	Other	Great show
			25	Other	When is dinner?



Avec la participation de





← Clean Bingo Card on smartphone

Zoom on bingo card with proxis selected and bingo played

