



Evaluation Summary

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1. Overview of the evaluation work

The URBACT III Evaluation Plan was approved in November 2015. It outlined two programme level evaluations both of which were undertaken as planned.

The first undertaken over a period of 23 months (February 2018 – December 2019) focused on programme implementation. This evaluation reviewed the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of the programme activities. The evaluation methodology consisted of desk-based research to review the processes and procedures in place as well as primary research including questionnaires to key stakeholders and beneficiaries.

The second evaluation was undertaken over a one-year period (October 2021 – October 2022) and focused on programme impact. This evaluation provided a qualitative overview of the impact of the programme on its two main target audiences (direct beneficiaries and other urban players). The evaluation considered the four specific objectives of the programme and the corresponding result indicators. The evaluation methodology included four evaluation questions all of which were reviewed through desk-based research of over 70 programme documents. The second phase of the evaluation sought first hand views of programme beneficiaries and stakeholders through questionnaires and interviews.

The total cost of these evaluations is 60.000€ paid through the Technical Assistance budget.

In terms of lessons learnt concerning the implementation of these evaluations a small number of points can be listed:

- The importance of suitable monitoring systems with easily accessible data
- The importance of having well defined indicators
- The importance of not only relying on project reporting data which is often too late to allow any changes to be made when necessary (on going data collection is necessary)
- The potential risks linked to using self-assessment data
- The importance of testimonials from beneficiaries to understand the intangible impact of a programme which is primarily about exchange and learning

Finally, it should be noted that in addition to the official programme evaluations, URBACT has undertaken a series of independent studies and consultations. This methodology of ongoing review of activities is good practice which allows improvements to be made during the programme lifetime. These studies are carried out in order to ensure that the offer made to cities by the URBACT programme remains relevant and responds to their changing needs. Some examples of such studies are listed below:

1. Network Follow up Study
2. Integrated Action Plan Studies
3. Transfer Study
4. National URBACT Point and National Practice Transfer Initiative Study
5. Small Scale Actions Study
6. Close survey analysis (each call for proposals)
7. Capacity Building event evaluations
8. Various stakeholder surveys

2. Findings by priority axis in relation to result & output indicators

Priority axis	IP	Findings of evaluation and comments	Related output indicators (1)	Related result indicators (2)	Actions taken (3) (optional)	Identifier(s) of evaluation (4)
PA1		The likelihood that the Programme will achieve its targets and complete successfully is considered as high. Regarding the Programme's performance against output and result indicator targets, the Evaluation concludes that the achievement rates are very good and already often exceeded.	All	All		EVAL 1
		The processes and procedures of the URBACT III Programme are in excellent alignment with the Thematic Objectives of the Cohesion Policy.	All	All		EVAL 1
		The programme intervention has produced expected change with cities building their capacity to manage and design sustainable urban policies and practices.	All	All		EVAL 2
		The overall Programme target to support 70 city networks is currently achieved. However, there is a small risk that a very small number of the current Phase 1 APN2 networks might not progress into Phase 2 in view of the past experience with the other three network operations.	7	//	Actually, by end 2022 the programme supported 83 networks.	EVAL 1
		The target value for Integrated action plans developed is achieved	6	2		EVAL 1 EVAL 2
		The quality of the capacity building activities and materials and their impact on learning and development of skills are perceived as very high and effective in creating lasting change.	10 11	//		EVAL 1
		URBACT is understood as a Knowledge Hub, however the idea might benefit from a clearer definition and a dedicated action plan for an effective delivery and more detailed approach including the resources required and how the Knowledge Hub will be promoted to reach its wide target audience.	x	1 4	Focus on 5 priority topics in developing the knowledge hub.	EVAL 1
		At least 200 cities – direct URBACT beneficiaries - have seen notable benefits in their knowledge and capacity.	10	1		EVAL 1

Priority axis	IP	Findings of evaluation and comments	Related output indicators (1)	Related result indicators (2)	Actions taken (3) (optional)	Identifier(s) of evaluation (4)
		Frameworks providing more effective and productive stakeholder engagement for sustainable urban development have been set up and enabled in more than 400 European cities.	9	3		EVAL 1 EVAL 1
		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.	8	2		EVAL 1
		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	6	3		EVAL 2
		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	11	4		EVAL 2
		Consider increasing the delivery of support by NUPs so that a larger number of ULG members can learn / build capacities and be assisted in their own language.			URBACT Campus was used as a test to respond to this finding	EVAL 1
		Ensure NUPs communicate results effectively with relevant regional and national associations / bodies, including Managing Authorities.			NUP training provided	EVAL 1
		Foster thematic clustering of networks for capitalisation			Done through the Knowledge Hub work but only partially	EVAL 1
		Improve the website section on ‘library’.			Done as part of the new website design	EVAL 1

Priority axis	IP	Findings of evaluation and comments	Related output indicators (1)	Related result indicators (2)	Actions taken (3) (optional)	Identifier(s) of evaluation (4)
		Consider single topic capacity building by webinars			Done during the pandemic	EVAL 1
PA2		Allow for prompt and easy access to MC Dossiers and event information to keep all delivery agents up-to date.			Established a shared collaborative space for MC	EVAL 1
		Involve the Monitoring Committee more in the decision-finding process by developing a more hands-on approach			Interactive sessions organised during MC meetings	EVAL 1

3. General conclusions

The Implementation Evaluation draws the overall conclusion that the existing processes and procedures are relevant, effective and efficient to ensure a successful implementation of the Programme. On the basis of the existing processes and procedures in place, the likelihood that the Programme will achieve its targets and complete successfully is considered as high. The bridging function of URBACT between local and European levels is very effective.

The review of financial progress against budget allocations concludes that progress is good and sufficient resources are there to complete the Programme successfully.

In addition, the up-date of progress data showed that URBACT III is successful in effectively addressing key ambitions with regard to the up-take of the Programme. While maintaining a good and effective mix and diversity of cities and urban themes.

Mid-term the evaluation shown that the majority (58%) of funded cities are located in 'less developed' and 'transition' regions of Europe. Also, the majority (59%) of funded cities are newcomers to URBACT III. The largest single size group (27%) of URBACT cities is 'very small cities' with less than 50,000 citizens.

The areas of improvement relate mostly to those implementation mechanisms and processes that represent a slight vulnerability to the Programme in achieving its full potential. This is related to improvement of monitoring processes of all city's performances, enhance communication between the different actors and more strategic orientation of the capitalisation activities.

All of these recommendations were communicated to the Monitoring Committee along with an action plan for how to address them. As a result, a number of changes were made to internal procedures.

The Impact evaluation shows 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.

More than 400 cities have participated in URBACT networks as direct beneficiaries. In addition, the programme reached out to an estimated 30 000 indirect beneficiaries, practitioners and decision-makers beyond direct beneficiaries and at all levels, i.e., EU, national, regional and local.

At least 200 cities – direct URBACT beneficiaries - have seen notable benefits in their knowledge and capacity.

URBACT Local Group (ULG) has been an excellent tool to pilot hands-on application of theoretical knowledge acquired via capacity-building activities.

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.

The evaluation concluded that 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.

URBACT III and its measures have successfully instigated multi-dimensional integration processes aimed at sustainable urban development. However, the extent of integration varies by dimensions. 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.

For many cities, participation in URBACT was fundamental to the quality of sustainable urban strategies and action plans. The plans are not only elaborated, but some 4/5 are either approved or expect to be approved in the very near future.

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 programme capacity to deliver.

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.

The evaluation findings also show that 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.

Also, among direct beneficiaries there is a clear demand for high-quality advice on resourcing IAPs. This should go beyond plain soliciting of funds but include smart and innovative solutions acquired and shared transnationally.

Given the 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.

The evaluation concludes that URBACT has led to expected change in European cities linked to capacity building and design of sustainable urban policies and practices but it has also created multiplying effects spreading beyond its actions and target groups. One example of this is the increased awareness of key topics like health and gender in EU cities thanks to URBACT capitalisation work

Annex: Evaluations undertaken in respect of the OP concerned

List all the evaluations by publication date, with the most recent first. All evaluations covering the OP even if covering other OPs should be reported.

Identifier	Brief description of measures/intervention subject of evaluation	Title	Fund(s) concerned by the eval.	TOs	Link to report
Eval. 1	To assess the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation processes & procedures	Implementation Evaluation of the URBACT III Programme	ERDF	TO11	Link
Eval. 2	To assess anticipated and unintended impacts of the URBACT III programme on the direct and indirect beneficiaries	Impact Evaluation of the URBACT III Programme	ERDF	TO11	Link