



Japan Local Government Centre, London

Monthly Report November 2009 (Germany) - Progress report on the National Urban Development Strategy (Nationale Stadtentwicklungspolitik)

During the German EU Presidency in 2007, a focus of attention was urban policy. Building on previous agreements such as the Urban Acquis (Rotterdam, 2004) and the Bristol Accord of 2005, in May 2007 the EU ministers responsible for urban affairs signed the 'Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities'. This gives the EU a policy explicitly aimed at city development, and each country is taking forward the aims in its own way.

In Germany, it led to the establishment of the 'National Urban Development Strategy/ Nationale Stadtentwicklungspolitik' with material support by the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Development. Under this umbrella, a dialogue between all actors in the field and those interested in what happens in cities has been established – it is not a formalised strategy contained in a single document, but a process which evolves through many projects and meetings. People professionally involved with urban affairs and development, such as politicians, town planners, academics and business people on the one hand, but also those who represent civil society, such as citizen associations, unions, churches, social work bodies and others, are invited to contribute to the discussion.

The City is a continuing process of learning and adapting – and this philosophy will shape the activities conducted under the National Urban Development Strategy. There will be projects, conferences and workshops, which will strive to demonstrate through examples how to fill the idea of the European city with life. The aim is to contribute to fair, co-operative, sustainable and beautiful cities.

Activities are concentrated in six areas:

1 Participative society – active citizens shape their city

Neither the state and the political process, nor industry alone can deal with the current social and urban change processes occurring in the cities. In order to achieve a fair and socially integrated urban society, it is a fundamental requirement that citizens from all walks of life find that their voice is heard in the city. Without engagement by citizens and private initiatives many public projects and well-meaning urban development approaches go nowhere; urban and social development strategies provide a framework which has to be filled with life by private actors. The focal points of such activities are neighbourhoods, informal groups and the broad spectrum of voluntary and

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community organisations. People who engage directly in their immediate living environment not only achieve sustainable social connections within the city, but also give positive meaning to the concept of citizenship. This kind of engagement needs to be reflected in a culture of acknowledgment, which confers status on social and cultural engagement.

Strengthening civil society gives responsibility to those who can best assume it with the aim to put ideas into practice and engage locally.

The National Urban Development Strategy strengthens engagement by citizens for the city and in urban affairs through supporting programmes and projects which demonstrate that engagement in and for the city is modern and forward-looking. Targeted are initiatives in cities and regions which are based on citizen participation and will be implemented in a participatory way.

2 Social city – create chances and maintain cohesion

Cities are formed through social cohesion of their residents. Cities offer chances and challenges equally for participation in society. Cities have long been a symbol of equal chance, of active participation and sharing, in short for integration.

This strength of European cities needs to be developed in a way responsive to the demands of our time. Improving social justice which is a major pillar of society has never been more urgent than today, and in particular the needs of the weak demand attention. The legitimacy of state action depends to a great deal on securing stable social structures and in achieving a balance between freedom and fairness. One of the aims must be to limit spatial segregation in cities.

In order to achieve this goal, an effective social infrastructure is a non-negotiable precondition. This is in particular true for education. Without good education accessible to all there is no social justice. Social capital which is fundamental to urban society is generated in schools – therefore well equipped schools firmly embedded in their neighbourhood hold the key for equipping young people with the necessary academic and social skills. They are an elementary building block in the social integration of immigrants, young people and socially marginalised residents. Again, in this area it is true that social engagement is first and foremost needed in the immediate neighbourhood.

The National Urban Development Strategy participates in the separate urban development programme of the ‘social integrative city’ and applies the integrated approach of spanning different departments (the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is a partner in this programme which is implemented in cooperation with the *Länder* as well as the municipalities) to a wider field of activity. Projects and activities will target the whole city and all different strata of residents. The projects aim to show that participation in society is possible within each area, that polarisation and prejudices can be and have to be

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reduced and that disadvantaged groups can be encouraged to actively engage in solving their problems.

3 Innovative city – the engine of economic development

Cities are the engine of economic development. They are local, regional and international market places, transport hubs, centres of migration and integration, of heterogeneity, of knowledge and a focus of innovation. Transformation of society and industry towards the information and service economy is particularly advanced in cities and conurbations. Future economic, social and environmental changes will first and foremost be experienced in the urban centres.

Cities and towns must therefore be strengthened in their role as places where people live and work. Within the urban economy a stronger link between creative and innovative research as well as production and marketing is necessary, and the National Urban Development Strategy aims to contribute to cities' and city region's ability to act as incubators of economic development and achieve tailor-made solutions to current and future economic challenges. Not only must talent, tolerance and technologies be nurtured, but cities and towns must strive to create an open and communicative environment, in which innovation and creativity is not only supported when it is already successful, but also in its early stages. Therefore, it is also necessary to have the courage to experiment.

4 Sustainable city – climate change and global responsibility for tomorrow

The requirement for sustainable development strategies is particularly acute in the cities. Demand in primary energy is concentrated on the cities and their suburbs, therefore climate change measures have to start from here. The global responsibility we all have for climate change has to be converted into tangible measures at all geographical levels.

For a long time the environment-damaging effects on life quality and health were not taken enough into account. However urban compact patterns of settlement typically found in European cities offer ideal conditions for energy-saving measures as well as the increased use of renewable energy sources, in contrast to settlement patterns in suburban and scattered settlement forms with low population density. By minimising transport distances urban structures are advantageous regarding energy and resource efficiency.

Safeguarding natural resources is not only a survival strategy, but also a necessary approach for cities. Leading a healthy life with access to open spaces while being involved in public life is central to the quality of life in cities. These aspects are also central to a city's attractiveness – only if cities offer a high-quality green environment can they compete with suburban locations.

Climate protection is currently at the centre of the debate. The necessary approaches and projects to 'change the city in accord with the demands of climate change' will have a profound impact on the physical appearance of

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cities and how life is lived in them. Discussing healthy cities however we also need to include such topics as public transport, high-quality open spaces and sport and fitness.

The National Urban Development Strategy takes up the current discussion on energy efficiency and renewable energy. The aim is to support exemplary projects for a clean, sustainable and healthy city. Again in this field, cooperation with citizens, businesses and voluntary and community organisations is vital.

5 Built environment – the beautiful city

Urban identity manifests itself strongly where the built environment is closely aligned to people and their requirements. Only people who like their house and where they live will take an interest in the wellbeing, opinions and problems of their neighbours. A positive attitude towards issues of origin, self-confidence and social acceptance are nurtured by a high quality, diverse and well-cared for environment which boasts unique and well-designed buildings and open spaces.

Public spaces provide a locus for social processes and at the same time are their expression; they are places of communication and affirmation of urban life for the actively engaged citizenry. Attractive streets and places encourage communication and social interaction. They stabilise the inner city areas and build a connection with symbolic values. Therefore the approach to historical buildings must include an appreciation for historical values as well as recognise contemporary needs and solutions, and in doing so exercise a stabilising cultural influence. Such a policy will build bridges between past, present and future of a city.

The National Urban Development Strategy puts a high emphasis on good building as well as the approaches of 'building culture' in all its projects. It is not about specific 'lighthouse architecture' only; improving the building culture means first and foremost to establish a coherent quality in design and implementation within all projects and programmes. Building culture includes planning culture, and both belong firmly within the remit of the National Urban Development Strategy.

6 Regional connections – the region is the future of the city

Good urban development aims to make politics work for the whole of society. Corner stones are transparency, efficiency, social responsibility, participation by private enterprise and community and voluntary organisations alike.

The city can only fulfil its tasks as an engine for growth and innovation if it perceives itself as part of a region. In turn, the dynamic of change of our cities and regions can only be successful if actors from the spheres of government, business and the voluntary and community sector co-operate fully. In particular, better coordination at the regional level is urgently needed. More and more problems – be it climate protection, transport, settlement expansion

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or development of urban centres – can only be solved meaningfully at the regional level.

Regional cooperation is not a given. Such cooperation has to prove itself against already established and partly successful rival ways of doing things and will therefore be most successfully used in topics and strategies which demonstrate an added regional value. The National Urban Development Strategy will support projects and measures which will introduce regional partnerships into urban development, practise new and hands-on approaches to cooperation and point the way to the factors necessary to successfully develop future regions.

Europe needs strong cities – and the National Urban Development Strategy aims to help German cities to achieve this goal.

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