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Ever since its first opinion on the European Metropolitan Areas in 2004, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) has actively supported and appealed for European initiatives in favour of the development and integration of urban areas across the European Union.

It gives me great pleasure to introduce this brochure. Its aim is to present the key points of the opinions adopted by the EESC over the past decade on urban governance and urban policy issues which illustrate well the evolution as well as the current state of European urban policy. The focus of European urban policies, and as a consequence the essence of the EESC opinions, have changed over time. The main message of the early opinions focused on the identification of the "urban space" civil and economic actors use for their socio-economic interactions, on the importance of adapting governance to these functional regions which form major economic areas and labour markets, as well as on making urban policies more relevant on the European policy agenda. As urban policies have developed, the emphasis is now on more effective governance including better involvement of civil society stakeholders and on the setting up of future directions for urban policy which, given the growing number of people and of major challenges in urban areas, is evidently gaining more and more importance.

In the view of the EESC, it is necessary to reassess the role of cities and urban areas and to ensure their adaptability to new challenges. It is important to make greater use of the resources of cities and their regional systems, to exploit the economic and social advantages of multi-level governance and to promote territorial and urban coordination of various sectoral policies.

Joost van Iersel
EUROPEAN METROPOLITAN AREAS: SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS FOR EUROPE’S FUTURE

Own-initiative opinion

Key points:

The EESC stresses that it is in the interests of the Union that:

- the metropolitan areas\(^1\) in the 25 EU Member States should be defined;
- a set of relevant data on such areas should be produced annually;
- the main Lisbon Strategy indicators should be evaluated for these areas;
- clusters of activity with high value added should be identified within these areas;
- the Commission should report regularly on the socio-economic situation of metropolitan areas and their ranking.

Producing such information and making it available for all should:

- contribute towards the recognition of metropolitan areas and provide more in-depth knowledge of their social, economic and environmental situation;
- make it easier to assess the strengths and weaknesses of these areas on a European scale;
- improve the definition and implementation of both European and national policies, adapting them to the specific characteristics of these areas;
- provide local and regional authorities with an assessment of the competitive ranking of their areas on a European scale. Today such assessments are either non-existent or drawn up at huge expense on the basis of incomplete information;
- enrich the debate on European regional policy by facilitating dialogue between all the parties concerned on the basis of objective information;
- provide the private sector with information which could prove useful when defining business strategies.

The EESC believes it is essential for a "metropolitan areas" unit to be set up within Eurostat, which would be responsible for producing the aforementioned data each year.

Full details of the opinion here

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\(^1\) A ‘metropolitan area’ in the EESC’s early opinions is defined as a region made up of a central core – either an individual town or an urban agglomeration; and a periphery – a group of neighbouring municipalities from which a significant number of residents commute to the central core every day. Metropolitan areas are thus functional regions forming major economic areas and labour markets. Metropolitan areas in this definition cover areas and socio-economic situations that do not coincide with the European regional administrative entities defined in the somewhat rigid NUTS system of regions as used for official purposes by Eurostat and the European institutions.
EUROPEAN METROPOLITAN AREAS: SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS FOR EUROPE'S FUTURE

Own-initiative opinion as a follow-up on the opinion of the same title in 2004

Key points:

This opinion is the follow-up to the opinion on "Metropolitan Areas: socio-economic implications for Europe's future" (see page 3). The two opinions form a consistent whole.

Over the last fifty years, Europe has been changing and globalisation is accelerating the process, with substantial consequences for Europe's centres of gravity, i.e. its metropolitan areas\(^2\). It is these areas that are best equipped to respond to these challenges and make the most of the opportunities they present.

The EESC is of the opinion that a better structured debate on and between metropolitan areas in Europe should contribute to stimulate these regions to implement themselves successfully the Lisbon-Gothenburg agenda which also might be revealed in the National Reforms Programmes.

The EESC once again draws attention to the absence of comparable socio-economic and environmental data on metropolitan areas at EU level. It considers that since this should be addressed at EU and national levels, the economic, social and environmental performances of European metropolitan regions must be monitored annually in order to broaden our knowledge on each of their situations and enable the relevant metropolitan areas to take action.

The EESC is convinced of the need for a policy decision by the Commission tasking Eurostat with producing reliable and comparable data on all EU metropolitan areas annually and providing it with additional funds to carry out its new task.

Full details of the opinion here

\(^2\) Ibid.
TOWARDS BALANCED DEVELOPMENT OF THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Exploratory opinion of the French Presidency of the EU Council

Key points:

The EESC is supporting the basic ideas laid down in the Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities and the Territorial Agenda of the European Union. The EESC notes that a number of DGs of the Commission and European Programmes and Agencies increasingly address opportunities and challenges in the urban environment, often referring to the Lisbon Agenda. A Green paper on territorial cohesion is expected in the autumn of 2008.

The EESC recommends the establishment of an EU High Level Group on "Urban Development and Sustainability”.

In cooperation with the Commission – the Interservice Group Urban Affairs – such High Level Group may contribute to a more effective and targeted European debate on cities, amongst others by setting a prospective agenda, a list of relevant issues for cities, metropolitan areas and governments.

Full details of the opinion here
METROPOLITAN AREAS AND REGION-CITIES IN EUROPE 2020

Own-initiative opinion

Key points:

The EESC welcomes the increasing acknowledgment of metropolitan developments in Europe by the European institutions – Council, Commission, European Parliament and Committee of the Regions – in the framework of the Territorial Agenda 2020. This rising priority is in line with the consistent views of the Committee, as expressed over the last decade.

The EESC advocates an imaginative approach to a 21st century urban renaissance and resilient and competitive metropolitan areas. Economic, social, environmental and territorial trends, as well as depressed financial prospects, urgently demand a coherent EU Urban Agenda, closely linked with Europe 2020.

The EESC believes that well-balanced and robust metropolitan areas, stimulated in the framework of Europe 2020, will develop as spearheads of future developments, each with their own identity and characteristics. They will also have a positive macro-economic impact for Europe. Policies on metropolitan developments should run parallel with a focus on reducing regional disparities.

The EESC recommends the establishment of a High Level Group (HLG) or Task Force on metropolitan developments alongside the Commission’s existing Interservice Group on Urban Development. Such a Task Force should be interdisciplinary and embrace a variety of representatives from Member States, MAs, public and private stakeholders, and civil society.

Metropolitan development in Europe is well under way. The EESC is convinced that a future oriented EU Platform – Task Force and Interservice Group – can function as a catalyst in steering the debate on ongoing processes, in defining top-down and bottom-up approaches, in encouraging regional/local authorities and civil society to develop appropriate models, in promoting interconnections, and in supporting cross-border initiatives.

A Europe 2020 Urban Agenda would also require increased monitoring of the Commission concerning issues that are directly related to cities and metropolitan areas. This means that cities and metropolitan areas, including stakeholders and civil society, must be accepted as co-actors in implementing policies and EU programmes.

Full details of the opinion here

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3 Ibid.
COMMUNITY LED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT AS A TOOL OF COHESION POLICY 2014-2020 FOR LOCAL, RURAL, URBAN AND PERI-URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Exploratory opinion at the request of the Greek Council presidency

Key points:

Community led local development (CLLD) is a dedicated tool for use at sub-regional level and thus complements other development support at local level. It constitutes a combination of representative and participatory democracy: an instrument that representatives of public administrations can use to collaborate in partnership with organised civil society and the public.

CLLD provides long-term growth through effective use of European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) with a view to new jobs and businesses and with the stress on community-led activities in climate change and sustainability in line with the Europe 2020 strategy.

The EESC is in favour of all EU Member States using this instrument over time, while applying the principle of partnership and pooling best practice. Community Led Local Development is intended to help the public develop their municipalities in a meaningful and sustainable way. Through CLLD they can take part directly in improving the quality of life in their communities: this is about real inclusive growth with visible outcomes at local level.

The EESC considers it absolutely essential to stick to the basic principles of the CLLD method. Properly balanced partnerships that involve the local community must be a pre-condition for getting grants.

The EESC suggests that a new name for CLLD is considered – an attractive acronym that would be a rallying cry for all those involved.

Full details of the opinion here
AN EU URBAN AGENDA – STRENGTHENING THE URBAN DIMENSION OF EU POLICYMAKING FOR A MORE EFFECTIVE DELIVERY OF EUROPE 2020

Key points:

The EESC believes that:

- The new European Commission, which recently took office, and the guidelines it has issued on "A new start for Europe" will have a significant impact on the development of cities and urban areas.
- It is necessary to reassess the role of cities and urban areas, and to ensure that it is better adapted to the tasks at hand. Making greater use of the resources of cities and their regional systems, exploiting the economic and social advantages of multi-level governance and promoting territorial and urban coordination of various sectoral policies could generate considerable added value.
- It is important, timely and essential to draw up an urban agenda and to turn this into a fully-fledged European policy in order to address current shortcomings. With a view to laying the foundations for the urban agenda, a strategy for the European urban network should also be developed.
- The "high-level" consultative body, which has members from all 28 EU Member States, and which was set up to strengthen the governance of the macro-regional strategies, could take on the chief role in overseeing coordinated, partnership-based governance of the urban policy.
- The European Commission should develop the management skills needed to perform the duties associated with the coordinated implementation of the proposed urban policy and its monitoring and evaluation activities. The objective would also be to devise a consistent and effective European urban agenda extending to 2050.

Full details of the opinion [here](#)
FUTURE OF THE EU URBAN AGENDA SEEN FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Exploratory opinion at the request of the Dutch Council presidency

Key points:
The EESC welcomes the EU Urban Agenda (EU UA), the Dutch Presidency’s initiative which will directly influence the lives of the 80% of EU citizens forecast to be living in towns and cities by 2050.

The EESC underlines that:
- it is important to ensure that civil society organisations will be equal partners in discussions and implementation of the EU UA;
- local strategies developed by local partnerships with knowledge of the local situation are the best way to effectively implement recommendations from the EU level;
- cities need a mechanism for strengthening citizens. Only a self-confident and strong community will be able to deal with the challenges that are emerging. Therefore the EESC recommends including "Urban Communities and Citizens Participation" as a new cross-cutting theme in the EU UA;
- it is essential that all regions of the EU are equally included (especially in southern and eastern Europe);
- the EU UA must recognise the relationships between cities and towns and the adjacent/surrounding peri-urban areas which contribute to urban quality of life;
- the EU UA should not be in conflict with or limit the development of rural areas;
- it is necessary to ensure that measures to improve the situation in one area do not have an adverse effect on another area;
- policy areas where the EU does not have competency, such as social matters, should also be included.

Full details of the opinion here