



Rotterdam Conference Conclusions

EUKN International Conference

Rotterdam, the Netherlands

22-23 September 2008

Europe is a city: seventy-five per cent of all Europeans live in urban areas. They are responsible for over eighty per cent of all economic activity. Europe's success depends on the success of its cities. Within the European city, opportunity and prosperity are not equally distributed. Every European urban area contains neighbourhoods, districts, streets that are more or less deprived. These areas generally exhibit a combination of several problems that are mutually reinforcing.

Within Europe, throughout each level of government, there is an emerging consensus on the importance of cities for competitiveness and sustainable development. Several EU Member States now have explicit urban policies. Consecutive EU Presidencies have stressed importance of cities for social, economic and sustainable development, in particular the 'Lille Action Programme' (Lille, 2000), the 'Urban Acquis' (Rotterdam, 2004) and the 'Bristol Accord' (Bristol, 2005). With the adoption of the Leipzig Charter during the 2007 German EU Presidency a general European urban policy framework is emerging. The current French EU Presidency will see an informal ministerial meeting on urban policy, the upcoming Swedish EU Presidency of 2009 will organise a high level conference on sustainable urban development.

All these policy documents communicate a strong commitment to strengthen Europe's cities. In order to successfully implement these policies in day-to-day practice, existing knowledge and experience must be available to everyone involved in urban development. To this end, the European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN) has been established.

EUKN is an intergovernmental network of sixteen EU member states. EUKN's primary aim is to benefit European collaboration and to contribute to the social, environmental and economic success of European cities through the exchange of relevant and validated urban knowledge, solutions and experience. EUKN is a central hub in disseminating effective urban policies, facilitating city-to-city learning.

On 22-23 September 2008 the EUKN International Conference *Cities of Opportunity – the urban promise of upward mobility* took place in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. The conference was organised





in partnership with the City of Rotterdam, the Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations and Nicis Institute. Below you will find the main outcomes of this conference, the Rotterdam Conclusions.

Conclusions on the uplifting of deprived urban areas

The view of deprived urban areas as being merely problematic is not in line with reality. These areas hold an enormous potential for socioeconomic development and fulfil valuable functions within the larger urban system. In order to capitalise on this potential, and to offer opportunities to inhabitants of such areas, it is important to link these areas closer to the urban area as a whole, and to empower their inhabitants to participate in the wider urban system. The development of deprived urban areas can not be separated from the personal development of their inhabitants and their opportunities for upward social mobility. Uplifting deprived urban areas is not a top-down exercise. In order to truly incorporate the experiences of inhabitants and meet their needs, local governments must enable citizens to participate in the decision making process. Responsive local governance is key to successful urban development.

Though a focus on deprived urban areas is indispensable, one should not ignore the interconnections between deprived urban areas and the wider urban system. Basic services such as public transport, street cleaning, education and policing should be provided on a sufficient level throughout the entire urban area. In deprived urban areas it is at least as important to keep the middle class involved in the process of renewal as it is to focus policy attention on the very poor. Cities are a source of diversity and dynamism. Policies should combine these diverse elements of the city. The problem is not diversity, it is the people who are trying to avoid the diversity of the city. However, (local) government can promote the mixing of social groups, but should respect individual choices and allow for great diversity in this respect.

Conclusions on deprived urban areas and climate change

Climate change is one of the big challenges of our time. The need for action in this field is widely understood and supported throughout our society. Cities are indispensable partners in addressing the challenges posed by climate change and environmental sustainability. The necessary adaptation of cities to climate change must be made in combination with the study of the social impact of such adaptation, particularly for the least-favoured populations.

Actions aimed at climate change and environmental sustainability offer opportunities for socioeconomic development within deprived urban areas, and vice versa. Large gains in energy





efficiency can be made by applying sustainable construction methods when upgrading the housing stock in deprived urban areas. Sustainably upgrading the housing stock creates a demand in “green collar” jobs, offering employment opportunities to inhabitants of deprived urban areas. The issue of climate change offers opportunities to rally public and private investment in deprived urban areas by offering possibilities for high profile corporate social responsibility.

In order to support the future development of deprived urban areas, and to ensure opportunities for their inhabitants, EUKN will maintain and enlarge its free-to-use and easily accessible database with knowledge on urban policies, good practices and relevant research, to inspire and educate urban professionals. EUKN will continue to link urban professionals in order to encourage transnational exchange of knowledge on urban issues. EUKN will dedicate a section of its European portal website to showcase all knowledge that has become available as a result of the EUKN International Conference in Rotterdam.