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Urban Matrix - First Demand Survey

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Introduction

Urban Matrix (UM) aims to create a knowledge dissemination platform designed to support European local authorities in addressing Sustainable Urban Development (SUD) in all its complexity and many dimensions. The demand survey we have carried out is a key part of Work Package 2, the major objective of which is to:

Develop a methodology to chart the demand of information and support on research results, products, guidelines and methodologies in the field of Sustainable Urban Development coming from European cities.

In what follows we provide the initial analysis of the first of three demand surveys to be carried out during course of the four year Urban Matrix (UM) project. The survey questionnaire is contained in Appendix 1.

The survey, in English, was placed on the UM web site and its presence primarily publicised by e-mail alerts using the EUROCITIES database and partners' networks. We consider the response to be good, particularly as the survey questionnaire was open during the traditional holiday months of July and August. The timing of the survey was determined by the UM timetable; however, in the future we may need to consider whether it makes sense to carry out surveys away from such events.

We received 126 responses from 64 cities in 17 countries across Europe, although it should be noted that certain cities (Amsterdam and Belfast) and countries (The Netherlands and the United Kingdom) were over-represented in the survey. Nevertheless this still represents a good basis from which to begin to analyse the demands of local authorities for knowledge to assist them in developing policies aimed at supporting sustainable urban development. While any survey represents a snap-shot, the current survey will help us to begin to build up a picture of the knowledge demand of local authorities; this will be enhanced by two further demand surveys to be carried out during the course of the UM project.

The questionnaire was divided into five levels (or sections) along the following lines, with the first four levels being mandatory:

Level 1 asked for basic information about the respondent (name, organisation, country, etc) and included an open question about the key driver(s) stimulating local authorities' interest in sustainable urban development.

Level 2, using a series of keywords, sought to identify the particular issues/themes on which knowledge was required.

Level 3 aimed to identify the type of knowledge required (e.g. practice knowledge, research knowledge).

Level 4 asked respondents to identify the general class of knowledge required (e.g. on Sustainable Urban Governance, Sustainable Urban Infrastructure, Sustainable Urban Planning, Sustainable Urban Environment, Sustainable Urban Diversity/Ecology).

Level 5 contained more open questions asking respondents to identify issues/themes absent from level 2, whether they required knowledge on integrating policy areas and finally on what subjects they would like to see the UM project host thematic workshops for knowledge dissemination.

In what follows we will focus on the substantive responses contained in each level.

The Survey Results

Level 1

The survey was open for six weeks and we received 126 responses from 64 cities in 17 countries across Europe (the full list of cities and countries is in Appendix 2); although it should be noted that certain cities (Amsterdam with 20 responses and Belfast with 10 responses) and countries (The Netherlands 26 responses and the United Kingdom 41 responses) were over-represented in the survey. Other countries (such as France, Germany and Italy) were clearly under-represented whilst several countries were completely absent (e.g. Greece and Hungary) and certain areas of Europe (e.g. East Central Europe) appear to be under-represented. This suggests that in future surveys we need to find ways of ensuring that the survey is more widely publicised in these regions and countries. (The issue of language may well be one limiting/exclusionary factor. It is worth pointing out that an examination of the raw data shows a majority of the responses came from countries where English is either a first language or widely spoken, although this is not the case if we remove the multiple responses from two cities.)

The case of East Central Europe is one that may need to be specifically addressed given the challenges facing countries, and their cities, in this region; particularly those that have recently joined the European Union (EU) and are confronted with considerable tasks in implementing those elements of EU laws/directives (the *aquis communautaire*) related to the environment and developing approaches to sustainable urban development. This will also be important in terms of another dimension of the UM project related to the sharing/dissemination of knowledge that already exists – it is important that where local authorities identify ‘gaps in knowledge’ we are able to link them to other local authorities who currently possess knowledge relevant to those apparent ‘gaps in knowledge’. More widely this process will also be relevant to the identification of genuine deficits in knowledge that need to be filled by further research and the development of new practices. Thus by taking a pan-European view we will be able to identify both apparent knowledge gaps that can be filled by disseminating existing knowledge and genuine deficits that need to be filled by new research and, hopefully, influence research and dissemination policies at the EU level in order to address these issues.

With regard to the open text question posed in this section: “What are the key European/National/Regional/Local issues driving your interest in sustainable urban development?” as might be expected there were a very wide range of responses. We found it difficult to identify clear dominant themes, but were able to pick out the following:

- Many respondents did not see there being a ‘single driver’ but referred to a number of interrelated issues and some were explicit about the desire to develop a holistic approach to sustainable urban development.
- A number of core issues, such as sustainable use of resources, energy and climate change, are driving interest in some cities.
- There is strong interest in transport and traffic related issues.
- A range of related issues such as governance, partnership, collaboration and participation do appear to be identified as issues driving the agenda in a number of cities.
- Community cohesion appears to be a driver in a small number of cities.

- Economic development was identified as a driver particularly in relation to sustainable growth and how this is linked to other issues (e.g. how economic and traffic growth are related and the need to break this link, which of course can be related to wider issues such as sustainable use of resources and climate change).

In a few isolated cases other issues such as housing, culture and creative industries were identified as drivers. Regeneration and good design of the built environment and public space were mentioned; and of course some respondents referred to the future of their own city in particular. One could speculate that in former 'socialist countries' questions related to how to deal with the legacy of declining housing estates would be an important factor with regard to use of resources and energy use. However, this would be no more than speculation based upon personal contacts in East Central Europe. But it does remind us that key drivers will vary across Europe from country to country and region to region and we need to bear this in mind.

While there clearly are overarching pan-European, and even global issues (e.g. climate change), that are driving the sustainable urban development agenda for cities, overall the main drivers appear to relate to issues that local authorities see as specifically impacting upon them in their day-to-day operations and their aspirations for future development. There is certainly no clear indication that the SUD agenda is being driven by the EU, although we can speculate that issues imposed on local authorities by higher-level authorities (including the EU) will drive the activities of many of them. But how they respond to these will be determined by the national system of local government, their own local priorities and future plans, and their approaches to sustainable urban development, which according to the responses vary considerably.

Level 2

Here we offered respondents a list of 33 keywords (plus the category of 'other' to enable them to point to missing issues) in order to identify the particular issues on which knowledge is required; we limited them to five responses. However, given that a number of cities posted more than one response, and two cities posed a disproportionate number of responses, we analysed the data in two ways. First of all we ranked the issues on the basis of all responses; secondly we then adjusted the data by treating the multiple responses from individual cities as if they were a single response. Despite this, as the two tables which follow indicate, a surprisingly clear and consistent pattern emerged from both the raw and the adjusted data.

While there are slight variations in the ranking accorded to each keyword the two tables are fairly consistent in their rankings. If we look at the top 10 keywords in each table Public Spaces is the only issue that has a significantly different ranking, Evaluation is in the top 10 for the adjusted data but just outside the top 10 in the raw data. Other changes tend to be much smaller with Energy Management at number 10 in the raw ranking while at number 11 in the adjusted ranking; Eco-friendly transport is at number 12 in the raw ranking and number 7 in the adjusted ranking. A similar pattern can also be seen in the bottom 10. Thus we can be fairly certain that a consistent pattern is shown in these two tables.

LEVEL TWO - KEY WORDS
THE PARTICULAR ISSUES ON WHICH KNOWLEDGE IS REQUIRED

ISSUE	TOTAL
Social Cohesion	44
Regeneration	43
Benchmarking	42
Citizen participation	42
Public Private Partnership	34
Public Spaces	27
Integrated transport systems	26
Compact cities	26
Competitiveness	25
Energy management	24
Urban Air quality	23
Eco-friendly transport	22
Environmental Impact Plans/Assessment	21
Evaluation	19
Education/Awareness raising	19
Waste Management	19
Finance	18
EU	16
Urban Safety	16
Globalisation	14
Local Agenda 21 and other similar initiatives	13
Traffic management	13
Brownfield sites	13
Urban Heritage and Conservation	12
Urban Biodiversity	11
Road pricing/congestion charging	11
Urban sprawl	11
Shrinking Cities	11
New build	11
The role of ICT	8
Building materials	7
Water use	6
Eco-labelling	2

ISSUE	@ 1 REPLY PER CITY
Social Cohesion	35
Benchmarking	35
Citizen participation	29
Regeneration	22
Public Private Partnership	22
Integrated transport systems	20
Eco-friendly transport	19
Competitiveness	19
Evaluation	19
Compact cities	18
Energy management	17
Urban Air quality	17
Environmental Impact Plans/Assessment	16
Education/Awareness raising	16
EU	15
Urban Safety	14
Waste Management	14
Finance	14
Public Spaces	13
Local Agenda 21 and other similar initiatives	13
Traffic management	13
Globalisation	12
Urban Heritage and Conservation	12
Urban Biodiversity	10
Road pricing/congestion charging	10
Urban sprawl	9
Shrinking Cities	8
New build	7
The role of ICT	7
Brownfield sites	6
Water use	6
Building materials	5
Eco-labelling	2

What is perhaps surprising is that the top responses in both tables all relate to issues that have been on the European policy agenda for at least a decade and which one could reasonably assume have been widely addressed by national, regional and local authorities and thus generated a large amount of knowledge based on practice (i.e. a sound evidence base). This may indicate that despite the growth of networks of cities across Europe, the increasing use of ICT, the efforts of the EU (through initiatives such as URBAN I and II and URBACT), etc, that currently there is a 'knowledge dissemination deficit' (of course this is one of the assumptions underlying UM). This may also point to another issue related to the question of 'organisational learning' – many local authorities across Europe are involved in a range of innovative projects, however, these often tend to be carried out by specially assembled teams that simply exist for the duration of the project and are then disbanded once the project is concluded. One of the results seems to be that the knowledge produced and the experience gained is not 'mainstreamed' within the local authority and is thus 'lost'.

On the basis of our survey it is not possible to distinguish the European and national dimensions of the problem, but certainly we can say that across Europe there is a 'knowledge gap' that could potentially be filled by better dissemination of existing knowledge. This clearly is something that UM, along with other knowledge dissemination platforms (e.g. EUKN), will need to address during the course of its life and may require better organisation and targeting of knowledge dissemination at European and national levels. However, what remains to be done is to effectively link the demand we have identified with the 'offer knowledge' available. Nor can we simply assume that the presentation of 'paper based (or virtual) knowledge' will be enough to fill the gap.

The survey suggests the following to be the case.

1. There may be a need for more face-to-face interaction (e.g. through workshops) in which those active in the relevant fields are able to share knowledge in a more direct manner (this might be something worth investigating in future surveys in which we could ask respondents for their preferred mode/methods of dissemination).
2. Better targeting of knowledge dissemination may be needed - rather than the somewhat scattergun approach that seems to currently exist where simply 'putting it up on the web' is often assumed to be enough.
3. We may need to investigate 'language barriers' that inhibit access to available knowledge. This is particularly the case given that English tends to be the dominant language of European communication above the national level and of the web, but this may create real problems at the sub-national level (i.e. with reference to local authorities) where for many of those who need access to knowledge the dominance of English may act as a very real barrier.

What is perhaps somewhat surprising is that the responses to the open question about key drivers at Level 1 do not appear to be replicated in these responses, i.e. the key drivers do not exhibit any clear relation to the keywords.

Level 3

At Level 3 we asked respondents to identify the type of knowledge they required, once again we present both the raw data and adjusted data in the table below. Clearly, as one might expect, Practice Knowledge comes out top in both methods of presenting the data. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly in both methods of presenting the data Research Knowledge is second, with Policy Knowledge placed third in the unadjusted data and fourth in the adjusted data while the situation is reversed for Network Knowledge. Where respondents chose to opt for the 'Other' form of knowledge it was knowledge related to 'academic knowledge' that was specifically requested, however, one might reasonably subsume this under Research Knowledge.

KNOWLEDGE TYPES	TOTAL	@ ONE PER CITY
RESEARCH	64	41
PRACTICE	100	53
POLICY	59	34
NETWORK	44	37

Taken overall the results suggest that there is strong support for the dissemination of knowledge relating to existing practice ('best practice') as well as for continued 'primary research' and 'policy orientated research' (we did not distinguish between the two in the questionnaire) related to sustainable urban development. Again the issue is how to effectively and efficiently disseminate this knowledge.

Level 4

CLASSES OF KNOWLEDGE	TOTAL	@ ONE PER CITY
Sustainable Urban Governance	48	31
Sustainable Urban Infrastructure	30	23
Sustainable Spatial Planning	37	26
Sustainable Built Environment	26	15
Sustainable Urban Diversity/Ecology	10	7

At Level 4 we asked respondents to identify the 'Class of Knowledge' related to sustainable urban development they required (see table below). Once again we present the data in a raw and adjusted form with the rankings in both forms remaining unchanged. Urban Governance came out top, followed by Spatial Planning, Urban Infrastructure, Built Environment and finally Urban Diversity/Ecology. Perhaps it should come as no surprise that Urban Governance came out top as this may be seen as relating to processes issues – i.e. how to link together the diverse and often fragmented substantive policies and organisation engaged in delivering those policies in order to create a holistic approach to sustainable urban development. Nor should we ignore the possibility that the lines of demarcation between Urban Infrastructure, Spatial Planning and Built Environment are somewhat blurred in some people's minds and that there is some overlap between these categories. For instance transport while clearly relating to Urban Infrastructure is

also related to Spatial Planning; similarly Built Environment in terms of the design aspect may also overlap with Spatial Planning. We also offered respondents a fifth category of Other, and here, while there were a range of responses, it is not unreasonable to group many of these together under the heading of sustainable economic development/competitiveness. Given the current emphasis on urban competitiveness across Europe this should come as no surprise.

Level 5

At Level 5 (where answers were not mandatory) we asked respondents to provide us with information on a number of issues:

- 1) Whether respondents required knowledge/information on themes that were not covered by keywords;
- 2) Whether respondents required knowledge/information on integrating policy areas; and
- 3) On what issues respondents would like to see UM provide thematic workshops around Europe.

With regard to Question 1 - knowledge/information on themes that were not covered by keywords – the 27 responses we received were very diverse and often highly specific. It was not possible to identify any general trends; and most issues referred to here were also mentioned in other parts of the survey.

As regards Question 2 - knowledge/information on integrating policy areas - we received 35 responses; once again these were very diverse. Nevertheless this is an indication that the importance of an integrated approach to sustainable urban development is widely recognised and needs supporting. It is perhaps no accident that next year's German Presidency is carrying out a study on Integrated Urban Development.

With regard to Question 3 - On what issues respondents would like to see UM provide thematic workshops - we again received a wide range of responses, but these responses perhaps allow us to begin to identify a range of general issues that could be used to organise thematic workshops. There were a large number of responses, which seems to suggest an encouraging level of interest in the workshop approach. On our reading of the responses (and taking into account the responses to Question 2) it would seem that the following could be the general focus for thematic workshops:

- 1) Sustainable Urban Transport
- 2) Integrating Policy Sectors to support sustainable urban development¹
- 3) Citizen/public participation in sustainable urban development
- 4) Spatial Planning and sustainable urban development²

However, given the emphasis on practice knowledge, and our earlier suggestion that in the past knowledge dissemination has not always been effective, it would seem important to ensure that the Thematic Workshops have a concrete focus and represent genuinely transferable examples of best practice and 'how to do it' in way that attendees can take home with them.

¹ Given that the German Presidency in the first half of 2007 is preparing a study on "Integrated Urban Development" and is currently collecting case study material on best practice to support this study it might be worth proposing holding a joint workshop.

² The German Presidency will also present 'A Territorial Agenda for the EU', one of the aims of which is to mobilise the potentials of European regions and cities for sustainable economic growth and employment. Again there may be opportunities for collaboration.