



Urban Matrix, Demand Surveys Summary report

Urban Matrix aims to create a knowledge dissemination platform to support European local authorities in addressing sustainable urban development. As part of this work, three demand surveys have been carried out. This is a summary of the overall findings of these three surveys, carried out in 2006, 2007 and 2008.



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THE URBAN MATRIX SURVEYS

THE PROJECT: Supported by the European Union's Sixth Framework Programme, Urban Matrix (UM) was established to create a knowledge dissemination platform designed to support European local authorities in addressing sustainable urban development (SUD). UM has developed within a wider context that allocates cities a key role in Europe's economic, social and political development¹ and responds to concerns about a 'dissemination deficit' which limits effective action on SUD. The project, led by Eurocities, has been developed with a number of European cities as key partners: Amsterdam, Helsinki, Seville, Malmo, Belfast, San Sebastian, Palermo, Stockholm and Sheffield. Also in the partnership are the Cities Research Centre at the University of the West of England and GHK Consulting.

THE ANNUAL SURVEYS: Three annual surveys in 2006, 2007 & 2008 have enabled UM to identify knowledge gaps that may limit effective action on sustainability. The surveys, in English, have been placed on the UM web site and publicised by a variety of methods such as e-mail alerts, using the EUROCITIES database and partners' networks. Surveys have included questions about the key driver(s) stimulating local authorities' interest in SUD, their knowledge needs and knowledge access preferences; and questions on particular topics (e.g. social cohesion). The project has drawn on survey findings to select priority themes (four each year) on which to focus its information collection and workshops. Themes already covered in this way have included urban renewal, citizen participation, energy efficiency and urban transport.

In total, in all three surveys, responses were received from 89 cities and 23 countries in all regions of Europe.

Survey 1:	2006	126 responses	64 cities	17 countries
Survey 2:	2007	62 responses	54 cities,	21 countries
Survey 3:	2008	62 responses	49 cities	21 countries

WHAT DRIVES INTEREST IN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT?

Level 1 of each survey has included an open question about the **key driver(s)** of interest in SUD. The persistent themes which emerge in all three surveys include:

- **Integrated approaches to sustainable development.** Cities have broad concerns for sustainability and responses have emphasised the connections between issues and the need for a holistic approach
- **The sustainable use of resources, energy; climate change.** A wide range of environmental concerns were raised by respondents and

¹ See for example Lisbon-Gothenburg Agenda, Rotterdam *Urban Aquis*, the Bristol Accord, the Leipzig Charter and the "Final statement by the ministers in charge of urban development" during the French EU Presidency of 2008.

some referred directly to climate change; of course, this issue may underpin other drivers, even when it is not explicitly mentioned.

- **Transport and traffic.** There has been a particularly strong interest in traffic and transport issues in all surveys, in responses concerned with issues including traffic congestion and its negative effects, reductions in CO2 emissions and sustainable /eco friendly alternatives to the car.
- **Sustainable economic growth, urban change, the urban environment, urban regeneration.** Cities reported dealing with the impact of urban change – whether growth or decline; with the related issues of urban regeneration and economic development; and with many aspects of the urban environment.
- **Disadvantage, migration and social cohesion.** This appears to be an issue of growing concern for cities – in the 2008 survey fourteen cities referred to issues such as integration, segregation, exclusion and social cohesion.

WHAT DO CITIES WANT TO KNOW?

In each survey, respondents were asked to select from a list of keywords to indicate those areas where knowledge was needed to support their work on SUD. The following keywords indicating knowledge needs were chosen by more than 20 respondents in 2006 and more than ten in each of the 2007 and 2008 surveys:

- **Public-Private Partnerships**
- **Citizen participation**
- **Eco-friendly transport**
- **Benchmarking**
- **Integrated transport systems**
- **Social Cohesion**
- **Regeneration**
- **Competitiveness**

HOW CAN KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION BE SHARED?

In all surveys, practice knowledge was the most sought after type of knowledge and the web the most popular source – in spite of some complaints that internet information was sometimes out of date, unreliable, too technical, or failed to offer a critical analysis. A wide variety of websites are frequently used to access a wide range of information – respondents showed a strong interest in case study material but also look to the internet for policy information/guidance on specific topics, research studies, news and information about events and contacts/experts. (Indeed some respondents complained about information overload.) Those who used the Matrix website found it to be helpful and generally user-friendly, although the numbers were small. Personal interaction was also important to respondents. Many reported attending conferences and workshops, preferring mid-size events (20-50 participants); practical case studies and networking opportunities are particularly valued.

In the 2007 survey respondents were asked about the knowledge exchange systems used within their organisations. While many gave examples of different ways of sharing information, some (22) said there were no systems in place, which may well have implications for forms of dissemination which rely on such systems for cascading / sharing information. Efficient and effective information sharing within city authorities must be seen as a basic prerequisite for developing an integrated approach to SUD, but it seems there may still be some way to go before the barriers to information sharing are overcome in many European cities.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING: Partnership working is widely recognised as a significant issue and the 2008 survey therefore looked at this in more detail, asking respondents which local stakeholders they considered it most important to work with in developing SUD policies / action. In the light of comments in survey two, on internal arrangements for information sharing, it was interesting to find that internal communication was emphasised. Work with other public organisations was also seen as important by many, but, in spite of strong interest elsewhere in the surveys in public private partnerships, few saw the private sector, or local residents, as their most important partners. These responses suggest that while local authorities have taken on board much of the wider European rhetoric about partnership and engaging with citizens there is still some way to go before such working relationships are achieved in practice. When it came to knowledge support in this field, some emphasised public participation while for others stakeholder involvement and managing the partnership process appeared to be the central concerns.

CONCLUSION

The surveys suggest that there are a number of persistent themes of concern to cities and that a knowledge 'dissemination deficit' persists in relation to these, which calls for a well-targeted and flexible response. UM has offered such a response. The surveys in particular have provided a valuable opportunity to:

- explore issues in depth;
- inform the project's other activities and increase their relevance; and
- make connections with practitioners, based on their concerns.

However, UM, like most similar projects is time-limited and other initiatives such as EUKN and URBACT or network organisations like EUROCITIES do not specifically focus on sustainable urban development. As Urban Matrix comes to an end, it appears to leave a gap. Arguably what would be required is an initiative centred on the knowledge and skills vital to sustainable urban development. Equally importantly, such an initiative would need to be clearly and firmly linked to other existing long term urban knowledge dissemination initiatives in order to prevent unnecessary duplication of effort and use of resources and to exploit synergies between them.

Detailed and summary reports on each of the three surveys are available at <http://www.urban-matrix.net>