

## **Urban Policy Issues and Corresponding Information Needs. European Experiences.**

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### **1. Urban Policy Issues – Urban Priorities**

Urban development becomes more than ever a trans-sectoral and interdisciplinary task. Aspects ranging from city planning, business development, transport, environment, infrastructure and housing to education, health care, social services and economy and financing drive the agenda in cities.

The European Union is one of the most urbanised regions of the World. The cities of Europe are home to a vast majority of the EU population, and host economic development, social and cultural life. Cities face an important concentration of socio-political and environmental challenges, which have to be properly dealt with. At the same time, cities are the prime location for the creation of the knowledge-based society and for the attainment of economic growth and greater social cohesion on the European territory.

EUROCITIES – the network of major European cities – aims at achieving „a European context where cities can be inclusive, prosperous, creative and sustainable with democratic and effective governance, and where all citizens can be provided with opportunities for participation in all aspects of urban life“ ([www.eurocities.org](http://www.eurocities.org)). In order to carry out this mission EUROCITIES and its member cities have identified a limited number of strategic objectives addressing key long-term challenges in relation to five main dimensions of urban policy. These are:

- the social dimension under „the inclusive city“
- the economic dimension under „the prosperous city“
- the environmental dimension under „the sustainable city“
- the cultural dimension under „the creative city“
- the governance dimension under „the participation and cooperation“

The European Union faces a paradigm shift driven by globalisation and the new knowledge economy. This change impacts on everyday life and requires a transformation of Europe’s economy and society. EU Member States agreed to give a focus to improving stagnating economies and increase global competition through their Lisbon Agenda. This Agenda, agreed in March 2000, is a commitment to encourage an economic and social renewal in Europe. It engages Europe to become “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge based economy in the world by 2010, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion”.

The European Union is dependent on the urban system supporting production, services, social and cultural life and research. With the vast majority of European citizens living in urban agglomerations, cities are engines for economic, social and cultural development, and they are the ultimate nodes of the knowledge-based society that the EU is heading toward. Boosting competitiveness of the urban areas would therefore improve citizens’ quality of life, and increase the economic efficiency of Europe as well. At the same time, the urban environment attracts a concentration of major economic, environmental, social and governance challenges.

According to recent comparative research on national urban policies in the European Union (EURICUR and KPMG, 2004), four trends and developments concerning the delivery of national urban policies can clearly be identified. These trends and developments are: the empowerment of cities, partnerships and civic involvement, the increasing efforts to come to a more integrated approach in delivering urban policies and the popularity of area-based policies.

The integration of ethnic minorities and immigrants is increasingly considered a major issue. In a number of the relatively prosperous Western European countries, explicit integration policies are now starting to form a considerable part of national urban policymaking. Another major observation is that national governments in several countries have shifted the emphasis from problem-led policies to economic opportunity-based policies. The awareness of the role major cities play in the competitiveness of regions and countries is growing.

Local governments increasingly recognize that they cannot manage the problems facing their cities alone, or only in collaboration with the private sector. While in West European countries the call for more governance capacity seems to be in the direction of more partnerships with the private sector and local groups of inhabitants, in the ex-socialist countries among the new EU members at least the same call for more capacity is being sent to the state.

The challenges for urban policy in the Helsinki Metropolitan Region is presented in Appendix 1. Much attention is paid to strengthening the knowledge-base and social cohesion. Keeping balance between the economic dimension and social cohesion remains a major challenge.

## **2. Measuring Progress – Follow-up of Urban Policies - Varied Information Needs**

Encouraged by a pilot project carried out 1997-2000, the European Commission – DG Regional Policy, in cooperation with Eurostat, the National Statistical Offices and the cities, launched the Urban Audit, an innovative tool for monitoring quality of life in European cities and their functional urban regions. The Urban Audit presents data on 258 large and medium-size cities covering different fields and including socio-economic aspects, participation in civic life, education and training, environment and culture and leisure. The wealthy data of the Urban Audit are available on the website since autumn 2004 ([www.urbanaudit.org](http://www.urbanaudit.org)).

The Urban Audit is a workable tool for monitoring how cities deliver the Lisbon agenda and related objectives. The centrality of cities in the achievement of the European Union political and societal objectives, stated in the Lisbon Strategy and in the Gothenburg Sustainable Development Strategy, is to be highlighted by research, comparative statistics and indicators. The need for urban research has increased. Practical and usable research findings and information are emphasised. The key question is how to make scientific knowledge available to the policy debate on the future of European cities and how to link scientific research to the needs of cities. Comparative urban research is especially desirable.

There is a need to develop mechanisms for policy monitoring and evaluation. They range from the availability of quantitative and comparative urban data, to participatory and qualitative processes of policy assessment, in addition to local authorities and research institutions' knowledge networks for the exchange of experiences and peer reviews. These mechanisms will serve as an evaluation tool for the identification and implementation of well-targeted urban plans, and for the assessment of the consequences and impacts of different policy options.

Cities benefit from good links with the research community; they get a better knowledge base for policy making. They also get improved channels to communicate research topics of high relevance for society. Urban policy issues provide varied requests for good information and knowledge, mostly including an international dimension too. The request for “good information and knowledge” in this context addresses the researchers and statisticians to be pro-active. They have the opportunity not only to monitor past and present, but to provide the policy-makers with stuff for design of new urban policies, i.e. the rewarding opportunity to participate in shaping the future.

There are examples of investment in strengthening the innovate capacity of cities to improve Quality of Life for their citizens. We may mention the case of Dutch big cities and the research community. Kenniscentrum Grote Steden, a joint initiative of the major cities and the Dutch Government, provides research and development for the major cities. The mission is to provide cities with knowledge on solving problems. In Helsinki, the City of Helsinki, the Ministry of Education and the University of Helsinki have maintained six fixed termed professorships in urban research. Quite recently, this model was further extended. A new agreement reaching from 2004 till 2010 was signed between the City of Helsinki and three more cities in the region, the University of Helsinki, the Helsinki Technical University and the Ministry of Education allowing for nine professorships in urban research. This is a unique opportunity to influence the selection of research topics through a joint research program, to participate in a number of evolving projects, and to benefit from the results. It is also hoped that the urban dimension will become more visible in the university curricula.

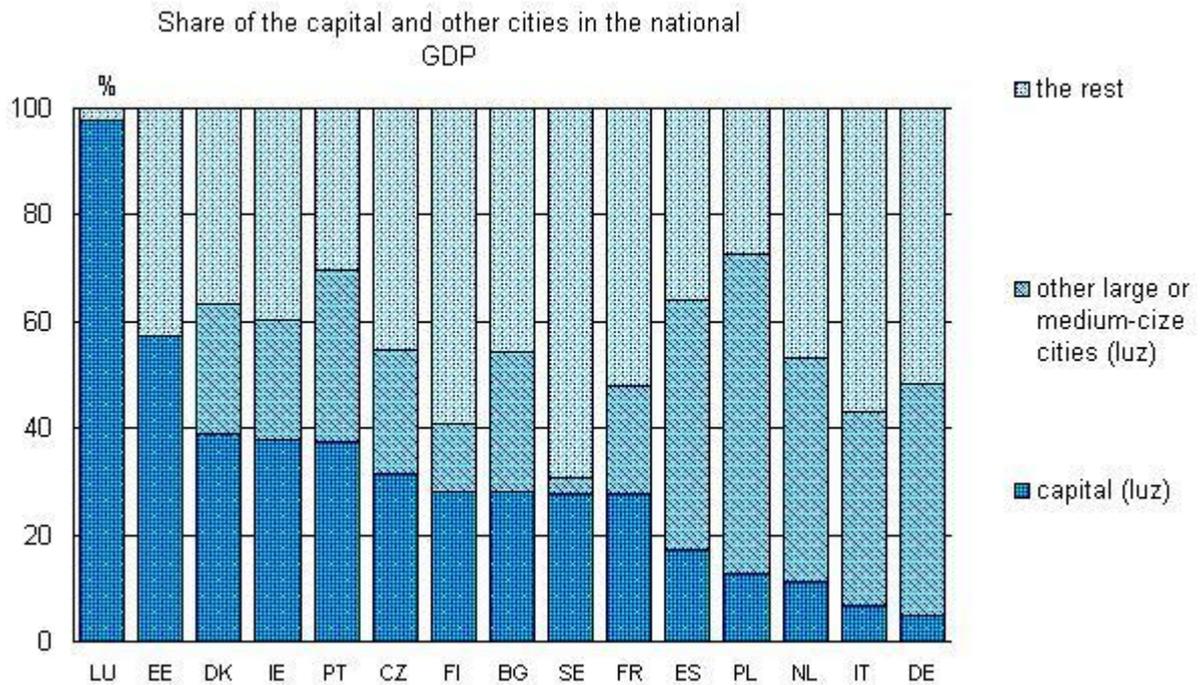
The EUROCITIES Policy Working Group on Urban Research, established in 2001 and constituted by both cities and research institutions, has among its main objectives that of reflecting on how urban oriented research, knowledge dissemination and monitoring systems may improve the policy debate in European cities. Support is provided to research that: features as demand-driven; brings together cities and research institutions; can be easily applied through demonstrations; encompasses the complexity of urban planning and management; and allows for comparative analysis.

### **3. Measuring the Performance of Cities**

The combined population of the 258 Urban Audit cities is 107 million inhabitants, covering more than 20 % of the entire EU27 population. Analysis of the Urban Audit data may answer questions such as: what are the population dynamics? How big challenges derive from the aging population? The knowledge based society is appearing strongly in cities, in which ways? What can be said about the attractiveness of cities as business environment? More questions could be raised.

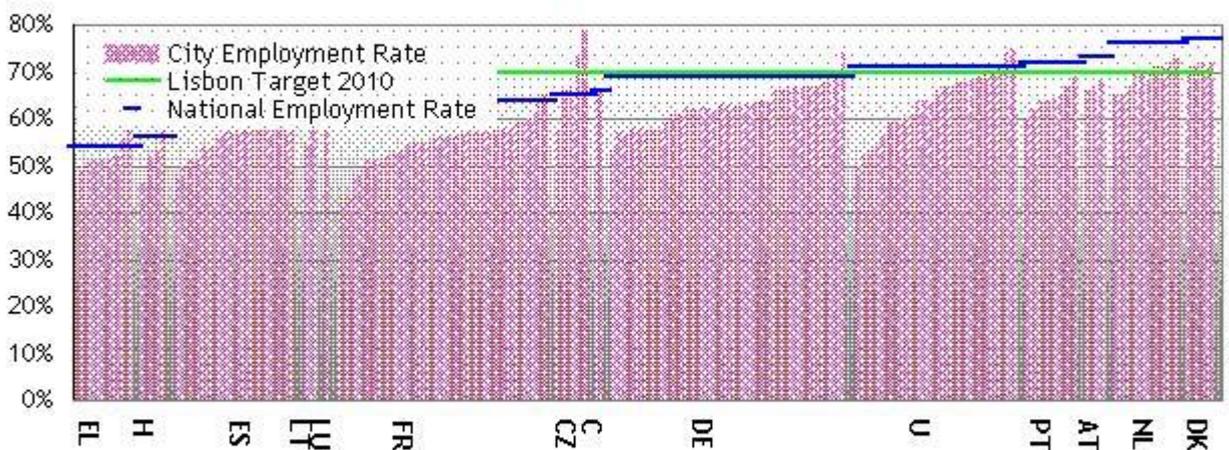
The EUROCITIES Working Group on Urban Research has worked on the Urban Audit –data together with DG Regional Policy and Eurostat, and found the following key findings in the frame of the so called Lisbon strategy. Benchmarking means that your city, region or country may gain benefits such as: improve effectiveness; accelerate and manage change; set goals; achieve breakthroughs and innovations; understand top-performances; and make better-informed decisions.

From an economic perspective, cities and urban areas are engines for the generation of growth in the national context. This is clearly shown by the following graph, presenting the share of capital and other cities in the national Gross Domestic Product. The information presented in this graph gives weight to the argument that many of the economic objectives agreed upon in the Lisbon Agenda will only be achieved in cities across Europe.



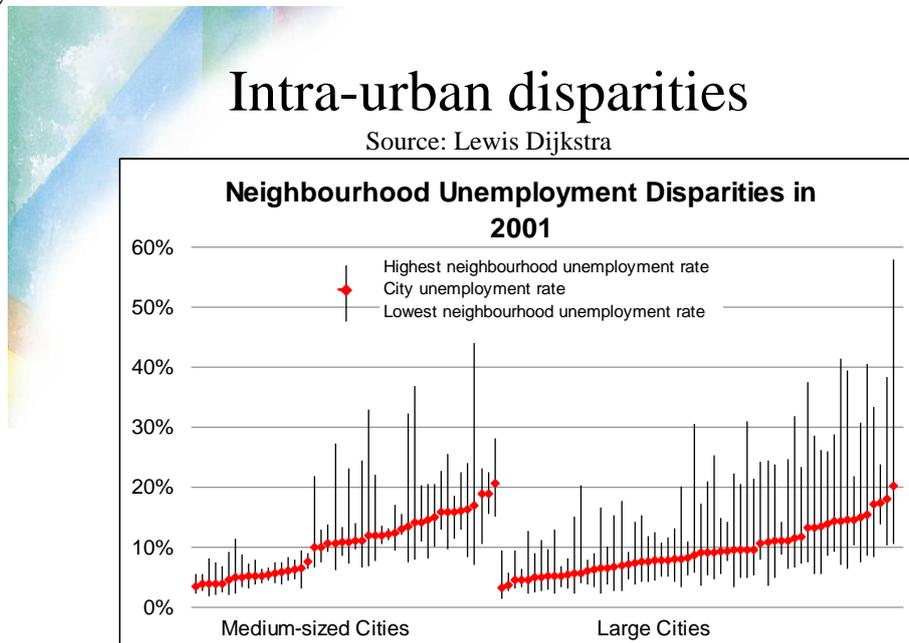
An additional indicator to measure the relative economic weight of cities and urban areas is the share of national GVA generated in cities. The Gross Value Added (GVA) per capita is a rough indicator both for the productivity and the income level of an area. Normally the economic structure and performance of a country is closely related to that of its major metropolises. In most European countries typically 30-40 % of the national GVA is produced in the capital region and other major metropolises. The gap between large cities and the country with respect to the GVA per capita tends to be wider in high income than in lower income countries. Thus, the richer the country, the wider the gap between its large cities and the national average.

### Employment in Cities and Member States



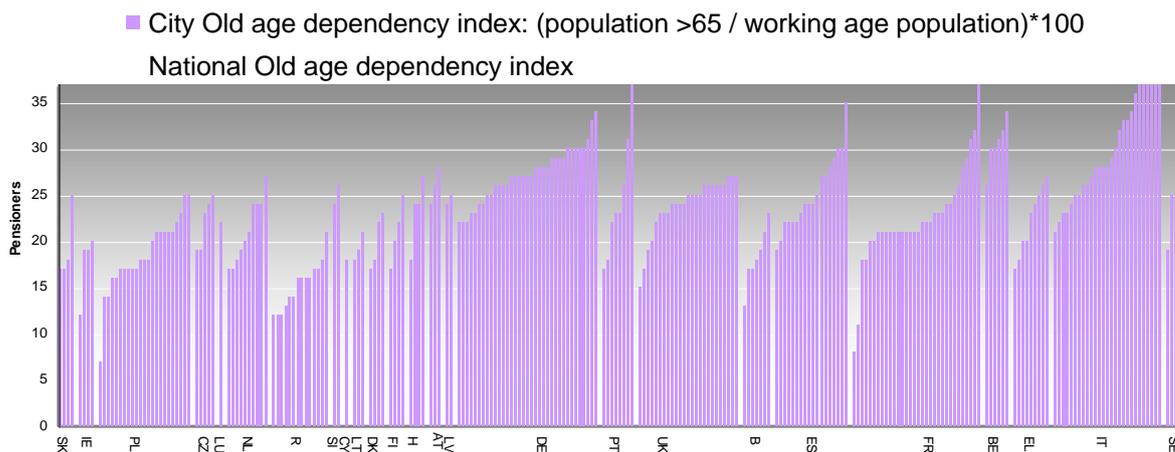
With regard to employment, the Lisbon agenda set specific targets to be achieved by 2010. The general employment rate in Europe should rise from 61% in 2000 to 67% by 2005, and approach 70% by 2010.

Large disparities of unemployment between neighbourhoods within a city can be found in every country.



The aging population is a factor that has to be taken into account in the development of sustainable policies for health, employment, and social welfare. The unfavourable scores for old age dependency is a challenge in most European countries and cities, but more remarkable so in the new EU member countries.

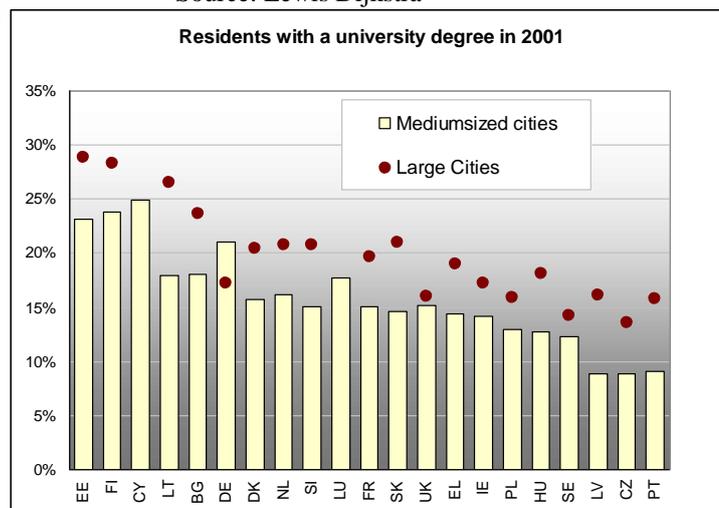
**Pensioners per 100 Working-age Residents in 2001**



Cities with a high quality of life and good job opportunities attract people with a higher education degree. The results of the Urban Audit clearly demonstrate the preference for urban living of the higher educated.

# University Degree

Source: Lewis Dijkstra



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## Appendix 1

### Challenges for Urban Policy in the Helsinki Metropolitan Region

