Abstract

This paper describes a comprehensive collection of comparable urban statistics (called “Urban Audit”) for 258 European cities for the year 2003. These statistics are available at three different spatial units. Details are given of the spatial and thematic coverage. The author also gives details about a parallel study on perceptions undertaken in 31 EU cities. Plans for 2004 (a collection of historical data) are briefly explained. Some results of the Urban Audit will be given during the presentation.
European Urban Statistics

Background

Some European countries have been heavily urbanised since the Industrial Revolution; in others, the level of urbanisation has increased sharply over the past 50 years. Whether as homes, workplaces or centres of learning, cities accordingly have a major impact on the lives of very many of Europe’s citizens.

Assessing that impact is a prerequisite for any improvements in the quality of urban life, but needs to be based on comparable data. In the past, comparing cities in the European Union was fraught with problems due to differences in data collection methods and definitions across such a geographically vast and culturally varied continent. As a result, it was very difficult to analyse and compare European cities.

The so called “Urban Audit” seeks to solve these problems by providing a comprehensive set of urban indicators covering the various aspects of urban life. The Urban Audit was launched as a joint effort by Eurostat, The EU statistical office, and the Directorate General for Regional Policy of the European Commission and covers 258 large (over 250 000 inhabitants) and medium-sized (between 50 000 and 250 000 inhabitants) cities in the enlarged European Union, Bulgaria and Romania (EU-27). The cities were selected in collaboration with the national statistical offices concerned. The selected cities are geographically dispersed to ensure a representative sample. The combined population of the 258 cities is 107 million inhabitants, covering more than 20% of the EU-27 population. This large sample ensures that the Urban Audit can provide much more reliable information about European cities today than was previously available.

The results we possess by now are available thanks to a major effort by the cities, national statistical offices, Eurostat and Directorate General for Regional Policy.

The data collection for the old Member States (EU-15)\(^1\) was finalised in spring 2004. The data collection for the 69 cities of the new Member States\(^2\) was launched at a later stage (due to the use of a different financing mechanism) and consequently the complete data for these cities will not be available until early 2005. Nevertheless, a large part of these statistics had already become available by May 2004.

In addition, it was felt that the citizen's perception of quality of life within “their” city is very important supplementary information. Perception indicators are the result of opinion polls among a representative random sample of inhabitants of the city in question. The data of the Urban Audit perception survey are the result of such telephone interviews in 31

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\(^1\) Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Finland, Sweden, United Kingdom

\(^2\) Czech Republic, Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia
cities. Part of the EuroBarometer series, these interviews were carried out by GALLUP institutions and covered the 15 EU-Member States during the period 5th to 16th January 2004.

**Content and spatial coverage**

A total of 336 variables are included in the Urban Audit. They cover most aspects of urban life, e.g. demography, housing, health, crime, labour market, income disparity, local administration, educational qualifications, environment, climate, travel patterns, information society and cultural infrastructure. From these raw variables, over 200 indicators were calculated that allow a broad spectrum of analyses.

Of course the coverage of these indicators varies. In particular, environmental and information society data are difficult to collect.

With regard to the spatial coverage of urban data, the Urban Audit aims to provide information at three spatial levels:

- the City, which adopts an administrative definition that reflects local-government responsibilities,
- the Larger Urban Zone, which is an approximation of the functional urban zone centred around the city, and
- the Sub-City District, which is a subdivision of the city according to strict criteria (5000 – 40000 inhabitants in each sub-city district).

In addition, national data on the collected Urban Audit variables and derived indicators was exploited as much as possible, to allow comparisons to be made between cities and the overall national situation.

An exhaustive description of the Urban Audit data collection, including a detailed explanation of the three spatial units used and a definition of the 336 variables that were collected can be found in the Urban Audit methodological handbook. This handbook can be downloaded free of charge from the Eurostat website


**Some fascinating results**

Two characteristics of the Urban Audit data should not be overlooked in any analysis:

- Since the results are based on numerous different data sources, the comparability of these urban statistics is naturally not as good as for other statistics at a higher level of aggregation.
- Frequently the data for certain countries are missing, so that possible conclusions need to be regarded with some caution.

As an example, let us look at the population growth rates (1996 to 2001) of the core cities. In the five-year period analysed this rate of change varies from -15% to + 15%, i.e. considerable changes of the number of inhabitants can be observed. The map shows cities with high growth in red, cities with a more or less stable population in blue and cities with a
decreasing number of inhabitants in green. Data are unfortunately missing for Irish and Greek cities at the moment.

As can be seen, in some countries (the United Kingdom, Italy, Germany and Poland) all three types of growth rates are represented. In Belgium, the capital Brussels grows, while the other cities decline in population. Positive growth rates can be registered in Scandinavian, Spanish and Portuguese cities. In contrast, cities in Austria, Hungary, Romania and the Baltic states had tended to lose population.

In this analysis, it should be taken into account that only population data for “core” cities are used. If large numbers of people move from the centres into the surrounding city region, the town centre may shrink, while the population of the larger urban zone may remain constant or even grow.

More examples of data analysis will be given in the presentation.

**Dissemination of results**

Several dissemination tools for the Urban Audit statistics have been defined:

**The web-site:** The indicators that are calculated from the Urban Audit database will be published on the Urban Audit website in autumn 2004. The site will enable a selection of data for specific indicators and cities. Tools will allow graphs and tables to be created interactively at all three spatial levels and be downloaded free of charge. Maps will be available for viewing.

**NewCronos:** Further access to the Urban Audit data (raw data on the 336 variables and relevant metadata delivered by the National Statistical Offices) has been available since the beginning of May 2004 through Eurostat’s NewCronos database. This database will be made publicly available from 1st October 2004.

**The paper publication:** The analyses of the Urban Audit data will be published in the form of a paper publication. Each city will be described in a standard format of 2 pages with chapters on context information about the city itself and key results with diagrams (quintiles). The book covers EU-15 only. It will have in total about 400 pages and will be published in autumn 2004.

**The methodological handbook:** Yet another document, the Urban Audit Methodological Handbook, provides both the information required by the data suppliers to achieve coherence and comparability of the Urban Audit data, on the one hand, and helps users understand the methods that have been applied in data compilation, and assess the relevance of the data for their own purposes, on the other. It is available in PDF format at the Eurostat web site and can be downloaded free of charge.

**Next steps**

It is planned to finalise the current Urban Audit data collection exercise in 2004. Some key tasks are, however, still underway.

**Data Quality:** As the data came from 258 different cities, comparability of the data is very difficult to achieve. A thorough analysis of all data is therefore being conducted during the
summer and autumn of 2004; should there be any doubt as to the data quality, the data sources are contacted again to check and if necessary improve the data.

**Time-line:** In 2003 and 2004, data was collected for the reference year 2001. It was felt that this data set would be considerably enriched if historic data were also available – thus making it possible to calculate growth rates. A collection of 1991 and 1996 data from all cities has accordingly been organised, but only for a limited number of 80 variables, as this collection of historic data is quite a complicated and difficult task.

**Perception survey:** For contractual reasons, the perception survey in January 2004 could only be done for the old EU-15 Member States. It is planned to have a similar perception survey for the new Member States and the candidate countries in autumn 2004. Within the old Member States, an increase in the number of cities studied is also envisaged.

**Conclusion**

The Urban Audit data collection filled an important gap in the European statistical system. Policy makers, researchers and the citizens had expressed a need for these data for some time. The current data set is a very promising starting point, which already allows very interesting comparisons between European cities. Clearly, further efforts are needed over the coming years to improve data quality, so that urban statistics will be a cornerstone of European statistics in the future.