

Urban Agenda for the EU

Partnership on Cultural Heritage

BACKGROUND Note as first reference form the coordinators to be discussed

Cultural heritage has been recognised a topic of EU relevance: 2018 was the first year dedicated to this subject: “*The aim of the European Year of Cultural Heritage is to encourage more people to discover and engage with Europe's cultural heritage, and to reinforce a sense of belonging to a common European space*”¹. Starting from these concepts, the Partnership will identify those actions necessary to develop a common understanding and a common framework for actions to better foster the implementation of appropriate projects in the cultural heritage protection, promotion and creation as a mean to foster sound sustainable qualitative urban processes.

I. Cultural heritage as resource and potential for urban development

European cities and municipalities perform a balancing act: urbanisation on the one hand and depopulation on the other, migration, demographic change, climate change, increasing mobility and growing tourism – these are just a few of the issues that have far-reaching impacts on the city as a human habitat. The consequent changes/transformations in the urban areas impact the natural and the built environment heritage.

As a consequence, Europe is now experiencing a general decline in the quality of the built environment and open landscapes in urban and peri-urban spaces that affect the sense of belonging to a common European area. In this context, preserving the quality of landscape and built environment heritage is not an objective in itself, but it is rather a powerful tool aimed at achieving social, ecological and economic goals. This awareness brings to the knowledge that high quality of natural and built heritage contributes to the formation of more sustainable and inclusive societies, respectful of cultural diversity, social equity and cohesion, individual and community well-being and –last but not least- stronger economic performance and higher quality of life. Awareness of cultural heritage in human settlements should be considered as a priority at local and European level in order to develop new ways to protect and promote our common cultural values and identities.

A systematic, integrated approach that uses the cultural heritage definition as a starting point is required in order to make full use of the social, ecological and economic resources and potential of our urban areas. This includes the physical tangible heritage (such as the protected buildings by law, meaningful urban structures, significant urban landscapes, etc.) as well as the intangible heritage such as the local know-how and cultural identities.

¹ <https://europa.eu/cultural-heritage/about>

The physical as well as the intangible cultural heritage become the cornerstone of the overall project of regeneration of the urban identity. Strengthen the relevance to create and/or to preserve the quality of cultural heritage at local level (in the centre or peri-urban settlements) is actually a mean to promote a sound long-term, sustainable local urban development.

Cities and towns of Europe should be viewed as cultural resources requiring preservation and further development (key issue: conservation - demolition – development). Their potential for sustainable development, in line with the Urban Agenda, has ecological, economic and social relevance. Against this background, the Partnership on Cultural Heritage intends to focus on these three key issues, taking into account interdependencies and transversal issues - such as the multilevel governance - and formulating results with reference to the three pillars of *better regulation*, *better funding* and *better knowledge*.

II. Thematic approaches

Cultural heritage as an ecological resource

The ecological aspect takes into consideration the urban fabric, the landscape, the physical morphology of an urban area. Here, the recognition of the relevance of these aspects is strategic to promote green/brown reconversion of urban sites, the appropriate rehabilitation of run-down neighbourhoods, the appropriate relationship between the urban areas and their rural and peri-urban surroundings and a new social pact for civil cohabitation with the objective of recognising - promoting or creating the identities of the urban milieu.

The capacity to strengthen the value of the natural heritage within urban areas, without creating mechanism of gentrification, is still challenging. Experiences of participatory processes to foster ecological requalification of urban spaces are still fragmented. Sound integrated operations to re/create natural urban ecological areas are not only expensive but also experimental. These operations need resources and the mobilisation of all the actors interested. Moreover, on one hand the rehabilitation of the historical urban fabric is recognised as a proven, “safe”, process, on the other hand the requalification of suburban areas (to enhance the quality of their natural open spaces) still present some challenges (finance is a political process and historical neighbourhoods are funded more easily compared to peripheral areas).

The natural open spaces can be transformed and/or rehabilitated to enhance the quality of an area and to foster its identities. In the framework of the Partnership, it will be strategic to investigate on the appropriate elements and tools that allow urban authorities to interpret the natural open spaces and all the resulting open spaces as an opportunity. Planning these spaces as a whole “urban ecological network”, creating identity-making areas can increase significantly both the ecological response and the resilience of those urban areas, as well as their social inclusion and economic development.

On a buildings scale, it is now recognised that material and energy resources have gone into both the buildings and infrastructure of our cities, and it is important to use these for as long as possible. This is why the preservation and further development of existing stock is the starting point in future-proof urban development. Smart use of existing stock makes a significant contribution to the achievement of national, European and global sustainability goals. In the framework of the partnership, it will be important to examine existing action approaches to assess what makes them successful and what barriers are present, to develop options for improvement and to consider their feasibility in multilevel systems.

Cultural heritage as an economic resource

Urban Heritage is "the historical stratification of cultural and natural values, which extends beyond the notion of 'historical centre' or 'ensemble' to include the broader urban context and its geographical location" (UNESCO, 2011).

The UNESCO recommendation represents a fundamental moment of reflection for the search for a new approach in the management of the city and its heritage (tangible and intangible), on the modalities of involvement of local actors, on the integration between disciplinary sectors and on the promotion of a model of sustainable socio-economic development. The role of the Urban Cultural Heritage as an economic resource for local development should be acquired as an essential element for civil cohabitation (the wellbeing of citizens), to support and consolidate the processes of economic growth of a community.

Creativity & smart specialisation based on the enhancement of the local know how (the local way of producing, building, living) increase collaborative approaches to develop products, to accelerate markets, to identify synergies, widen and expand industrial interest and private investments. Therefore, creativity & smart specialisation may help to build open, inclusive and pluralistic societies based on knowledge and local know-how.

On the scale of existing stocks it is now clear how investments in this sector make a great contribution to local and regional value creation. They also are characterised by long-lasting value retention, making this an optimal use for both public and private funds. Jobs at varying levels of qualification, characterised by a high degree of individual identification with the profession, are necessary to be promoted and implemented.

Cultural heritage as a social resource

Over the course of history and today, the cultural heritage of cities has been relevant for social change processes. People identify with the cultural heritage of a city, not only those citizens living a place, but in general². The sense of belonging for a place can be based

² This has been always true—for example- see the spontaneous movement of important European artists and citizen created last century to protect the Maison du Pople of Horta in Bruxelles or Les Halles in Paris from demolition.

around historical architectural buildings, as well as around the urban environment and fabric of a place, or around other immaterial elements of a social milieu.

Public cultural heritage management and quality condition of neighbourhoods also affects the sense of belonging of citizen as well as their affection to Public Authorities and the State. Besides, the capacity of the management of the cultural heritage and its condition (if referred to the tangible heritage) or its quality (if referred to the intangible ones, such as the offer of cultural events) is directly linked to individuals' sense of place and belonging which has an impact on the respect of public spaces, therefore on security, criminality, social behaviour, etc.

The planning and the design of cities are essential to the social sustainability and it concerns the movement of diverse groups of urban citizen (in or out) from and to different neighbourhoods. Urban design governance matters in the field of democracy, equity, sustainability, etc.

As a result, it is now more and more important to enable inclusive processes to define cultural heritage and the identities of a place in a collective and participatory manner. One of these practices is related to the definition and the rehabilitation of common goods for social and cultural activities. In these cases, citizen can outline to the Public Sector those public spaces or buildings that are not used, but that constitute a common value for their community or that are recognised as being part of the identity of an urban area. Subsequently, the Urban Public Authority can create processes of multilevel governance for the identity-making rehabilitations of spaces or buildings, enabling their collective management and use of socio-economic and cultural importance.

The capacity of urban public authority to enable such processes is not to be given for granted. These processes are not easy. Ongoing practices vary greatly and are still fragmented. Nevertheless, such processes allow for new cultural heritages sites to be promoted - not only those sites already recognized and listed, but also those ones that are of some importance for a specific area and/or a community. In so doing, these processes can create new form of social and economic opportunities for the sustainable development of local areas; they are based on self-regulatory tool and multilevel governance mechanisms.

Cultural heritage as a governance and planning resource

Planning is not just a technical tool, but rather a political issue (as an example, it may create or avoid social conflicts, it may led to gentrification or not, etc). Due the dedicated 2018 year and other projects (such as the HO2020 ones), Members States are now discussing the importance of the quality of the built environment (i.e. redefining European criteria for cultural heritage interventions, fostering adaptive reuse, capacity building and financial mechanisms to ensure the quality of spaces, etc) exploring the relevance of planning processes.

Despite each urban area in the world has its own character, there is a common European approach to urban transformation: the role of Public Sector and the relevance of the urban planning, regulatory tools and soft instruments are common elements at European level. Among these common approaches, we can mention: i) the role of the Public in the planning management of urban/territorial changes; ii) the presence of public sectors and public welfare; iii) the expectation of the citizens from the Public sectors and the State; iv) the share of common social and cultural principles; v) the attention to the historical places and to the *milieu*....

Starting from these concepts, we can further develop a common understanding and a common framework (better regulation) that would better foster the implementation of appropriate actions in the field of rehabilitating and/or creating the quality, the uniqueness and the identities of our urban areas.

III. Objectives of the partnership

Partnerships of the Urban Agenda are requested to identify those relevant bottlenecks that prevent Urban Authorities to implement their policies and programmes so to reach the expected results. The idea is to work to enable accelerating the implementations of European objective in urban areas. Once identified the bottlenecks, members of a Partnership are asked to give suggestions defining those relevant Actions to overcome the selected bottlenecks working in the following three areas:

1. *Better regulation*

Actions under this chapter are meant to revise existing EU regulation or proposing new ones (such as block grants) so to facilitate the implementation of Urban Authorities. The EU legislation should better reflect urban needs, practices and responsibilities. Proposals should be design to minimize administrative burdens for Urban Authorities.

2. *Better funding*

The challenge is to improve the funding opportunities for urban authorities and national authorities to better develop instruments devoted to cultural heritage and investments aware of the urban local identities across all EU policies.

3. *Better knowledge (base and knowledge exchange)*

Reliable data are an important key for showing the diversity of structures and tasks of urban authorities and for evidence-based policy-making. Reliable data are also necessary for monitoring and evaluating implemented solutions. These processes help provide tailor-made solutions to major challenges. There are already many examples of solutions for handling

cultural heritage and existing building stock in urban areas, but it is still challenging to share these information and transfer them to other urban areas in Europe.

IV. Working process

Actions/topics taken into consideration in the partnership must have:

- urban relevance, being a subject of urban competence or having an impact at urban level;
- EU demonstrated need (problem faced by a substantial number of Member States and cities) and visible impact on legislative, financial and factual issues;
- European character, this is to say being an action (and a bottleneck) recognized relevant by all the members of the Partnership and with the following elements:
 - a general scope: The implementation of the proposed action does not depend on a single national administration;
 - an added value: The action is actually more effective and efficient if carried out with a multilevel governance process at European level;
 - a real feasibility: The action must be operational and enforceable; Partnership should first finalize what is necessary for this purpose (ie legislative checks, technical studies, etc.);
 - a novelty character: The action must not contain "recycled" elements (ie proposals already elaborated elsewhere or activities that would be implemented in any case).

Questions to all partners:

According to your experiences and competences and in consideration of a common understanding of Cultural heritage as a resource and high potential for urban development - which are possible concrete topics/actions to deal with in the partnership?

Please, define:

- **relevant topics (ecological/environmental, social, economic, governance, etc) that you consider important on the basis of your background experiences and competences**
- **those bottlenecks in the economic, social, environmental, governmental processes that prevent the enhancement of a sound sustainable rehabilitation of urban areas or other problems/bottlenecks that you would like to take into consideration**
- **expectations from this Partnerships: what do you want to achieve, which is your main concerns you want to tackle and have it solved, are you ready to become an Action Leader and to manage a sub-group of members, etc.**

ANNEX I NOTA BENE:

The Partnership should focus on some field specification in order to remain within the urban heritage topics. The outputs of the Partnership are the actions. While designing these actions, please take into consideration the following (if agreed):

- Localization: the focus is the urban settlements and their spatial identities (both urban and peri-urban). Avoid actions outside the urban spaces scope (for example the immaterial networks of intangible cultural elements, such as libraries, theatre and performing arts whereas not directly linked to the urban authority competences).
- Time (past, present, future): do not take into consideration only the historical and declared heritages, since urban identity is made also by stratifications of more recent and contemporary elements; urban spaces without identity could even be improved by starting an inclusive process of new identities creation;
- Thematic: enhancing urban heritage should not be intended only as the preservation of a monument or a group of relevant buildings, but a process of enhancing the tangible and intangible quality of urban areas and their identities (strengthening the relationship between communities with their own urban space).
- Integration: since we are dealing with the Urban Agenda, the actions should be aimed to bring together physical preservation, culture promotion, economic development, sustainability and social innovation.

ANNEX II - DEFINITION

The definition of Urban Cultural Heritage may vary in scale from a manufacture, a single monument, a single museum, to the urban landscape or the urban fabric as a whole. The definition may vary according to the interest or perspective – it may include also all the immaterial and intangible heritage, such as the local know-how, the creative industries, a specific production capacity, etc.

Physical tangible	Built heritage (i.e. the fabric of human settlements as well as the historical buildings, Townscapes, Archaeological remains, etc.);
	Natural heritage (i.e. the landscapes, coasts and shorelines, agricultural heritage, etc.);
Immaterial intangible	Local know-how (i.e. the way to produce and live, the innovative smart specialisation strategies and all the elements representative of a specific community in a recognizable place).