

15. National urban policies in Europe: does the EU make the difference?

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1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to provide a critical exploration of whether or not there is a common understanding of urban policy within the EU Member States, and if so, what role the European Union (EU) has played in its development over the past 30 years. To address this question, the chapter examines the role of Europeanization in the field of national urban policies, some 20 years after the original formulation of the Europeanization concept. We aim to understand how and to what extent the 30 years of discussion and operationalization of urban policies at the EU level have impacted on the development of national urban policies in different Member States. We examine the EU Urban Agenda as a new and flexible model to address urban challenges within a framework of Integrated Sustainable Urban Development (ISUD) and look more directly at the current and contemporary phase of urban policies promoted by the EU, trying to highlight whether and to what extent the mechanism and tools, as well as the vocabulary and meanings produced under the 2014–2020 EU cohesion framework, are innovating the field and also contributing to reshaping the debate on the role and nature of national urban policies.

2. NATIONAL URBAN POLICIES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EU

The fragility of the EU when it comes to urban and territorial policies has commonly been framed as the result of Member States' opposition to centralizing decision making at a supranational level (see among others Atkinson and Zimmermann 2020). Literature is also available on how the language, jargon and methodology adopted and developed by the EU have been influenced since its origins by specific Member States' traditions or have been crucial in reshaping some Member States' approaches. Furthermore, an interesting stream of

discussion has developed on the hybridization of national and EU approaches, producing something new and unexpected (Doria et al. 2017; Tofarides 2018). Indeed, it is quite hard to map some sort of ‘clustered convergence’ (Radaelli 2004) among the EU Member States or to trace how the process of formulating an EU urban policy has interacted with the development of national traditions and contexts.

The concept of ‘Europeanization’ has been used to understand if the field of urban policy could be one that is ‘more permeable than others to Europe’ (Bulmer and Radaelli 2004), and what the consequences of such permeability would be. Indeed, this still appears to be a pending question. Europeanization helped scholars to acknowledge and study

a process of 1) construction, 2) diffusion and 3) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedure, policy paradigms, styles, ways of doing things, and shared belief and norms, which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process, and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, political structures and public policies. (Radaelli, 2004)

Its later critical formulation, ‘as a problem, not as a solution’ (Radaelli 2004), for its potential to turn from ‘something that can explain’ to ‘something to be explained’ (Radaelli 2004; Gualini 2003), is still particularly attractive when asking ourselves the following: do EU Member States at least share a common understanding of urban policies and the role of the state in this field, if not a shared approach, something which can be considered peculiar to the EU context? Moreover, has the EU debate on urban policies played a role in generating some convergence, if not coherence?

The *Global State of National Urban Policies* elaborated in 2018 by the OECD in the aftermath of the United Nations Habitat III Conference in Quito (UN-Habitat and OECD 2018) provides a unique viewpoint when trying to map the current state of the art of national urban policy in OECD countries, thus allowing also to highlight, if any, a specificity of the EU context, in contrast to other world regions. Reading this report in light of the contributions to this book allows us to develop a more sophisticated understanding of how different countries in the EU have dedicated attention to, designed and implemented national urban policies. Sometimes the picture is contrasting and divergent; this is, of course, due to the different perspectives each author has of the situation, but much can probably be explained by the fact that public policy is a social construction. So far, when trying to describe policies, relying on synthetic facts and figures has proven difficult; instead, we have to dig into complex stories, as the authors of the chapters have done.

3. THE ROLE OF THE STATE IN THE FIELD OF URBAN POLICIES

As Bagnasco and Le Galès argued in 2000, throughout Europe after the two World Wars, the nation states took a dominant role, reducing cities to a mere space of policy implementation defined at the national level (Bagnasco and Le Galès 2000). Nevertheless, if we go back through the post-war history of many EU Member States, we cannot help noticing how a limited number of Member States have been designing and implementing explicit and direct national urban policies. In contrast, in other cases, a new activism and centrality of cities have also been observed almost everywhere in the EU due to decentralization processes and the new opportunities for cities in the EU integration project since its foundation. Between these two positions, the picture is complex.

The UN-Habitat/OECD report starts from the assumption that, despite the crucial emerging role of subnational governments in designing and implementing urban policies inspired by the logic of sustainable development goals agreed at the Quito Conference, national governments' role remains central and should be enhanced. National urban policies are defined as a 'coherent set of decisions derived through a deliberate government-led process of coordinating and rallying various actors for a shared vision and goal that will promote more transformative, productive, inclusive, and resilient urban development for the long term' (UN-Habitat and OECD 2018). The report starts from the policy hypothesis that national urban policies are needed to cope with the most relevant challenges of the contemporary world and that states should take the lead in the field, which means, at least, putting cities and the urban question at the centre of their policy agendas; otherwise, the shared goals of sustainable development will be difficult to achieve. The report, of course, has a strong bias towards national urban policies, which are considered crucial: it is not simply a report on the state of the art, but it aims at fostering a world-wide diffusion of national urban policies.

That said, not surprisingly, only around half of the OECD countries seem to have adopted an explicit national urban policy so far, or have instituted specific agencies dedicated to the design and implementation of national urban policies. Surprisingly enough, European and North American countries (considered under the same heading) present the smallest percentage of explicit national urban policies. 'Explicit' in the OECD lexicon refers to the fact that the state makes explicit mention of the term 'urban', with possible variants, when referring to one of its policies; while the situation in which this reference is limited and implicit rather than explicit (d'Albergo 2010) is defined as 'partial'. This is counterbalanced by the fact that most of these countries in Europe and North America are in the implementation or evaluation phase

when it comes to national urban policies, meaning that there seems to be an advanced level of development of urban policies in these regions, while in a large part of the world, countries are only in the feasibility or design phase.

In this respect, the European continent seems to be relying on a long-term tradition where urban policies are not necessarily an explicit part of national policy. Nevertheless, they are an institutionalized part of the state's actions. This is considered a potential limitation of the state's capacity to produce vertical and horizontal coordination. At the same time, it is observed that there is 'limited oversight of NUP [national urban policy]', 'some multi-level governance' and 'some national agencies' (supranational mainly because of the EU) (UN-Habitat and OECD 2018, 43–44); in other words, federalism and fragmentation of powers seem to pose a crucial threat to the development of national urban policies. From the point of view of policy tools, this fragmentation is reflected in the comprehensive though not coordinated set of tools available, which 'makes NUP less distinct than in other regions'. These tools are mainly 'state–city partnerships', 'some national and many regional frameworks', together with 'extensive spatial planning legislation' (UN-Habitat and OECD 2018, 56). A full range of policies and policy tools interact with the field of urban policies, in direct and indirect ways, on the one hand making it more difficult for the state to have an explicit role, on the other making it necessary to arrange a new set of governance frameworks to design and implement urban policies.

Indeed, the contributions to this book seem to confirm some of these characteristics. All the chapters highlight the role that states still play in urban policies but, at the same time, the limited diffusion of national urban policies. The state remains a crucial actor and gatekeeper to urban policies, but also a weak player. A *crucial actor* because the fragmentation produced by the process of decentralization acts as an obstacle to the overall capacity to deal with the urban question, even more so in a context in which the urban has assumed a regional dimension (see Italy's case, as illustrated by Fedeli). A *gatekeeper* because, despite decentralization, the autonomy of action of cities and regions is, in many cases, still limited by the fiscal relationships between levels of government and the availability of financial resources (see the case of Poland, as illustrated by Żuber, Szmigiel-Rawska and Krukowska). And *weak* because decentralization has narrowed the capacity of states to play a national role overriding other emergent actors (see De Gregorio Hurtado and Sánchez for Spain, but also Demazière and Sykes on France) but also prevailing other established local self-government traditions (see the case of Sweden, as illustrated by Lidström and Hertting).

This is even more true in those countries where the rural has been historically more dominant than the urban, as in Norway (see the chapter by Sandkjær Hanssen), or in some regions of Germany (see the chapter by Heinelt and

Zimmermann) and the UK (see the chapter by Tallon) or in Romania (Stănuș, Pop and Dragoman), where this has limited considerably the importance of the urban in the national policy agenda and the role of the national level. In this respect, the EU has played a role since the 1960s in developing an urban focus (Grazi 2007), showing how processes of urban agglomeration can threaten cohesion and urban development, despite its initial focus on agricultural policies. Contemporary debates in the EU on ‘inner peripheries’, ‘marginal areas’ and ‘left behind places’ have been highly influenced by some of the long-standing Member States like France, but also by the accession of new Member States where these debates on contemporary urban challenges are very relevant in a limited number of cities. At the same time, there are urgent problems to be addressed in non-urban areas. Moreover, the EU debate has been central for some countries in rediscovering the need to address the imbalances and threats to territorial cohesion generated by the contrast between strategic urban areas and inner areas, often characterized by the historic role of small and medium-sized cities forgotten by the national policy agenda (see the Italian case for the development of the Inner Areas Strategy, as described by Fedeli, but also the ubiquitous discussion in the French context reconstructed by Demazière and Sykes).

Despite these problematic circumstances, it is noticeable that some Member States are making a tremendous effort to move beyond traditional and established governance frameworks. There are different ways in which this is happening, from the Dutch case of trying to perform a ‘facilitative role in stimulating urban policy innovations aimed at major societal challenges’ described by Denters, to the French model based on the central role of the state in promoting multi-level agreements, as described by Demazière and Sykes. On the contrary, Ireland seems to be experiencing a process of re-centralization, as discussed by Russell and Williams. This is probably not an isolated case, since recent literature has highlighted the return of national governments as agents in the field of urban policies in the last decade, which is also sometimes a result of the role assigned to the national level in the process of implementing EU policies. Of course, these efforts are very challenging. In particular, states still seem to be getting into deep difficulties as they try to move beyond an established tradition of sectoral policies and established levels of self-government (see the Swedish case again, as described by Lidström and Hertting).

Looking at the EU debate and pilot actions on the Urban Agenda, we can find evidence of the above-mentioned processes. They both mirror this effort and try to foster it, providing, more and more in recent times, principles of integrated action and multi-level governance aimed at addressing the necessity of more effective policy frameworks. In this sense, we find several synergies between EU and national action. Some national governments have extensively referred to the EU in order to find appropriate solutions to their problems.

This is the case in Spain with Integrated Sustainable Urban Development, as described by De Gregorio Hurtado and Sánchez. This is also true for the innovative governance frameworks which have aimed at advancing the capacity of action at the local level, such as the Urban Innovative Actions, but also the series of intergovernmental deals going beyond traditional boundaries, such as integrated territorial initiatives or the Interreg projects, to mention just some of the attempts to emphasize the territorial focus of public action. Italy, together with Spain, Portugal and Poland, have mostly taken advantage of these opportunities to challenge the established governance frameworks. Moreover, some national governments have taken the lead in introducing such innovations in the EU debate and have been able to combine the opportunities offered by the EU debate with the necessity of finding (more) space for national urban policies in their own country. This is the role played by the Toledo Declaration in Spain according to De Gregorio Hurtado and Sánchez, as well as by the Pact of Amsterdam in the Dutch context, as suggested by Denters.

4. DEVELOPING A COMMON UNDERSTANDING: TOPICS AND APPROACHES

From the thematic point of view, according to the UN-Habitat/OECD report, the EU and North America share a more explicit focus on economic development in their national urban policies, followed by a focus on spatial structure and sustainability, and then on human development, with only a small part on climate resilience. The most developed thematic priorities seem to relate to ‘balanced national and regional development, sometimes restraining the growth of major cities; promoting sustainable urban growth; urban renewal strategies; cities as engines of economic competitiveness and productivity’, while ‘aging population, stagnating demography, and deindustrialization’ are identified as the most shared challenges (UN-Habitat and OECD 2018, 38). In many cases, the policy priorities seem to be ‘urban renewal, social cohesion and integration’ (UN-Habitat and OECD 2018, 57).

In this perspective, the cases collected in this book show the permeability of national contexts to the EU debate and the mobility of policy ideas between the Member States. During the 1990s, the EU recognized the need to fight inequalities at the neighbourhood level and imbalanced development at the regional level, taking a lead from the French and UK approaches. More recently, the integrated sustainable approach has filtered through to the EU debate, and the EU in particular has been the vector of such an approach in the new Member States. Based on a new green deal, the new cohesion policy cycle again seems highly influential in this respect. We could easily conclude that from the rhetoric point of view, the EU has been highly influential in shaping the policy agenda priorities. Nevertheless, almost every case in this volume shows signs

of a restless national debate on what the priorities of national urban policies should be (see the Italian debate, as described by Fedeli, as well as the French case, described by Demazière and Sykes).

It is also clear how the area-based approach and, more recently, the place-based approach debate has been influential for national urban policies in the EU, although it remains far from being able to fulfil the EU's expectations and policy objectives, as De Gregorio Hurtado and Sánchez explain in the Spanish case and Heinelt and Zimmermann in the German case. In some other cases, these concepts have become pillars in public policy debate (as in the Italian case, as reconstructed by Fedeli). Something similar has also happened for the role of public participation, which has been widely experimented with all over the EU. However, it has only achieved limited results, often finding little application in practice (see the case of Slovakia by Finka and Husár).

Indeed, as the chapters explain well, one of the most complex transversal challenges that national urban policies try to deal with is the 'creation of a collaborative multi-level governance system', as clearly suggested by De Gregorio Hurtado and Sánchez in their chapter dedicated to Spain. However, the challenge is evident in most countries, so much so that sometimes this seems to be the real issue at stake in national urban policies: the city is a complex transcalar process, difficult to address by sectoral policies, which indeed remain at the forefront of state action. Many of our chapters dedicate space to sectoral policies that still count for much in the state action model and produce urban policies indirectly, the city remaining the stage of different sectoral actors and problems.

5. TYPOLOGIES OF NATIONAL URBAN POLICIES IN THE EU

We lack a comparative analysis of all the EU Member States' national urban policies since the publication in 1997 of the EU spatial planning compendium (which was more a comparative study on the spatial planning systems rather than on urban policies). The preliminary work carried out by the OECD in 2017, under the series national urban policies, offers some insights into how EU Member States are faring under this broad umbrella term. In particular, according to the OECD report, it is possible to distinguish between different typologies of national-level engagement in urban policy.

The first is *explicit national urban policies* (see in particular the case of Belgium or France, with a long-standing tradition of urban policies and often dedicated ministries and national agencies). A sub-category of this one is those Member States where the presence of a national urban policy seems to be more recent and mostly related to the new focus on the urban dimension promoted and financially supported by the recent cycles of cohesion policy.

This is the case of the Czech Republic and Estonia, but also Spain recently, Italy in the 1990s, and Poland (as reconstructed by Žuber, Szmigiel-Rawska and Krukowska) and Slovakia (presented by Finka and Husár).

Even though, seen from a distance, this first family of Member States with explicit urban policies can be identified, this book's contributions show how difficult it is to isolate cases of explicit and direct national urban policies. What is more, even when this looks feasible, these policies are still lacking coherence and a strategic vision (see, in particular, the discussion on the Italian debate and the Polish and Irish cases, which provide three different examples). From this perspective, we could argue that the EU debate has not been able to impact, foster and feed the capacity to deliver a strategic approach, apart from in a few cases, like the Spanish one, according to De Gregorio Hurtado and Sánchez. Despite decades of efforts, much direct national urban policy remains unable to look strategically at cities and to help them to address their problems and to fully exploit their role in supporting their countries and the EU (again, see the case of Spain). Nevertheless, in some of these cases, the effects have been fascinating, having opened appropriate spaces for an overall reflection on the urban dimension and urban policies. This is the case of Portugal, as described by Teles, Romeiro and Moreno Pires.

The second family is the largest and is composed of those countries that officially have no explicit and direct national urban policies. Beside Italy, the OECD report (2017) mentions Austria, Denmark and Greece (the latter three not covered in this book). However, many of these states have a national spatial strategy (Denmark, but also Ireland) or national programmes with specific tools to directly support urban renewal and urban development (Italy), or several indirect policies dealing with the urban dimension (see Romania as described by Stănuş, Pop and Dragoman). There is no Ministry dedicated to urban policies in any of these cases, even if there have been attempts to institute such a dedicated policy competence. Sometimes there are or have been interministerial committees. This situation seems to be gradually disappearing in today's EU. As the book's chapters show, many states are investing in cities and the urban question, partly because of the EU's cohesion policy framework. Nevertheless, this apparent convergence seems very slow, and it is hard to imagine a quick and coherent shift towards explicit national urban policies.

A third group coalesces around the fact that in many EU Member States there is a diffuse use of multi-scalar contracts, based on collaboration between the local, the regional and the national level and several sectoral policies which invest in cities, often in a strategic and explicit manner (see for example the Finnish case according to the OECD). This is probably one of the directions in which more convergence is noticeable: the cases of the Netherlands, the UK, France, and Italy and Spain to a certain extent, show clear evidence of this effort towards the development of a new governance approach. Nevertheless,

the logic behind these different innovations and the stories of their success show discontinuities and disconnections, pitfalls and contradictions. Despite the positive intentions of the national government when it comes to reinventing its role, much is still to be done in this direction. What is more, in some cases, the role of the national government as gatekeeper is still influential, and sometimes even growing.

In a small number of cases, national urban policies are more a policy framework based on principles than a coherent set of actions (see, for example, Germany, as described by Heinelt and Zimmermann), but with so few examples the impact of this model seems unclear and difficult to discuss or explain. Nevertheless, this is an interesting pathway to overcome sectoral, fragmented and extraordinary policies, but it still seems to lack the effectiveness and legitimacy needed to address the urban question.

6. EUROPEANIZATION UNDER A NEW LENS

All in all, what can be extracted from the cases collected here creates a tricky paradox from the lens of Europeanization. While the literature has focused intensely on EU urban policies' weakness due to the strong reluctance of Member States to devolve this competence, we would argue that this is only part of the story. Indeed, the status of national urban policies per se is somewhat contested at the national level in many Member States.

The difficulties the EU has experienced in entering this policy field could be considered partly the consequence of the fragile status of urban policies in national agendas and not just the result of the resistance of national governments to share the competence in this area. The nation states, in other words, are still *de facto* the most important protagonists in this debate. It is still the case that in many of them the question as to whether or not urban policies deserve an explicit national policy framework and direct action remains open. In this sense, on the one hand we should stop blaming the EU for its limited capacity to have an impact on this field. On the other hand, we have new relevant insights on using the concept of Europeanization in the urban policy field, whether variegated or not (Carpenter et al. 2020). In other words, Europeanization can be used to explore the still open question: do we need an urban policy led by a national level, or not? And if so, what kind of policy?

A second conclusion is that, although the EU's role has been explicit at certain points, so far the EU has only had an impact in a relatively indirect and fragmented way on national traditions and policy cultures. It has not consistently managed to move national governments to design and implement national urban policies frameworks (see the case of Italy), even if in some cases it has acted as a lever (see the cases of the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal and Poland, with all their differences). Nor has it been able to prevent the local dismantling

of quite advanced and developed existing policy frameworks (see the UK or the French context). Nevertheless, when reading the cases, one cannot help noticing convergences, recurrences and similar rhetoric and argumentations. In this respect, there is nothing new or unexpected when saying that the EU's role so far has been more relevant in terms of working on the software rather than on the hardware. Rather than working directly on the polity dimension, in focusing on the methodological dimension of the 'how' the EU has been able to feed the debate and support innovation spaces.

In this respect, it is interesting to discuss whether, after years of debate on a possible EU Urban Agenda seen as a clear action plan for cities, the recent process leading to the Pact of Amsterdam has given light to something that completely reshapes the perspective on Europeanization. While in the late 1990s, following the publication of the EU compendium on spatial planning, we could have expected the possibility of aligning different countries within a common methodological framework generated by EU experts and policy-makers, the recent EU Urban Agenda places emphasis on thematic partnerships and indicates the need for transcalar coalitions that feed the policy debate beyond national boundaries. This seems to be a crucial challenge to the established idea of Europeanization as a process that goes from the EU to national contexts and back. Indeed, the impact of this new approach still seems to be implicit in national urban policy elaboration, where the role of national states remains more oriented to providing an overall framework to local problems rather than addressing the urban question strategically and in a transcalar dimension. We will discuss this in the next section.

7. THE EU URBAN AGENDA: A NEW POLICY MOBILITY MODEL?

Since the mid-1990s, there have been ongoing discussions about the importance of cities for the EU's broader objectives and increasing recognition of EU policy's potential role in influencing national and local urban agendas. Although the EU has no formal competence in urban policy issues, written declarations first appeared in the late 1990s linking the EU to the urban development role. The first document setting out these ideas was the European Commission's roadmap 'Towards an Urban Agenda in the European Union' (CEC 1997), which was closely followed by a framework for action to promote sustainable urban development (CEC 1998), the first European-level document to set out the fundamental principles of a European approach to urban policy (Carpenter 2011). In the following decades, various charters were issued on the so-called 'Urban Acquis', the principles of European urban development (EU Ministers 2004; CEC 2011; 2014a), along with numerous other declarations of intent concerning EU urban futures (EU Ministers 2007; 2010), but few

concrete outcomes have materialized until recently. It had been a long time coming, close on 20 years, but in June 2016 EU Ministers responsible for Urban Affairs signed an agreement, the ‘Pact of Amsterdam’, setting out for the first time a common ‘Urban Agenda for the EU’ (EU Ministers 2016), for the future development of European cities (Fedeli et al. 2020).

The Pact of Amsterdam sets out an innovative approach to urban development at the EU level. Rather than presenting a blueprint for urban development, the ‘Urban Agenda for the EU’ sets out a novel working method to bring together multi-level, multi-sectoral and multi-Member State stakeholders in thematic partnerships to address 12 specific challenges related to urban development with the EU. The aim is to develop action plans for each theme related to better regulation, funding and knowledge and put in place pilot innovative actions that test out some of the proposals (Mamadouh 2018).

One of the critical foundations of the ‘Urban Agenda for the EU’ is the notion of a shared understanding of the basic principles that underpin urban development. Despite the different national contexts and varied trajectories that cities have taken across the 28 (now 27) Member States, the ‘Urban Agenda for the EU’ reiterates the cornerstone of the EU’s approach to urban development, as set out in the European Commission’s *Cities of Tomorrow* (CEC 2011). As this position paper states, ‘there is, in fact, an explicit European model of urban development’ (CEC 2011, 5), which embeds the principles of an integrated approach to urban development, together with a multi-level partnership approach to governance at both horizontal and vertical levels. As the European Commission notes: ‘Measures concerning physical urban renewal should be combined with measures promoting education, economic development, social inclusion, and environmental protection. The development of *strong partnerships* involving local citizens, civil society, the local economy, and the various government levels is an indispensable element’ (CEC 2014b, 2; italics added).

It is this partnership element that has been implemented in the ‘Urban Agenda for the EU’, through what Potjer and Hajer (2017, 2) frame as ‘experimental learning’, and this represents the most interesting element of innovation. A series of 12 thematic partnerships bring together public and private stakeholders, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the European Commission, with up to 20 actors working together over three years, initially drawing up an action plan, and then implementing concrete initiatives to pilot innovative approaches to identified challenges. Potjer and Hajer (2017) identify three central principles for the partnerships: the ‘local principle’, identifying cities as the critical locus for addressing European challenges; the ‘horizontal principle’, sharing urban challenges and solutions across different stakeholders; and the ‘vertical principle’, recognizing the roles of all three levels of government (local, national and EU) for effective governance at the urban level. This ‘experimentalist governance’ model (Sabel and Zeitlin 2008)

provides an alternative approach to informing policy, which creates space for promising innovative approaches to urban challenges and new structures for these initiatives to be implemented.

Evidence from research into the partnerships' workings suggests that implementing the Urban Agenda for the EU represents a significant achievement, providing an innovative model for open governance. However, some suggest that its visibility and prominence could be improved (Korthals Altes and Haffner 2019). Purkarthofer (2019) argues that the structured approach adopted across the partnerships provided a useful framework to develop targeted pilot interventions. Impacts were achieved through an informal approach involving 'soft' mechanisms such as knowledge transfer and framing messages for key stakeholders across different levels of government and different sectors (public, private and civil society). However, in some cases, Member State actors' involvement was 'problematic' given their a priori access and influence through more formal mechanisms (Potjer et al. 2018, 18; Purkarthofer 2019). As Armondi (2020) argues, the 'soft' mechanisms of the Urban Agenda represent a powerful legitimization of new urban sovereignty that the EU endorses, which counters some of the more nationalistic and Eurosceptic voices that have gained prominence since the global financial crisis.

The Urban Agenda for the EU offered an innovative addition to approaches that address Europe's urban issues. The lessons going forward from this experience in multi-level governance could feed into a valuable evolution of the method, in response to the ongoing challenges facing towns and cities throughout the EU. This participative form of multi-level cooperation has been shown to effectively bring different voices to the table to develop innovative initiatives, and with the current challenges that many cities are facing, this partnership model may prove invaluable in addressing some of the EU's most critical urban problems in the future.

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