



Sustainable communities: a step towards Eden

Delivery on the EU Member States' 2005 Bristol Accord to share best practice in building sustainable communities has been disappointingly slow, yet "we don't have time to learn slowly", agreed participants in a public hearing at the European Parliament on 2 May.

"Sustainable communities are not Eden, but a step towards it. How do we move from theory to practice?" asked MEP Ambroise Guellec (EPP-ED, FR). Bringing together the economic, social and environmental policies needed to build sustainable communities takes time, said Prof. John Schutt (Leeds Metropolitan University, UK), adding that whereas the Bristol Accord was about "capacity-building", the EU informal ministerial summit in Leipzig (24 May) will be about "sharpening the focus" of sustainable communities policy.

To share best practice effectively, Member States must do more than just supply case studies to the European Urban Knowledge Network (12 have yet to join¹), and some of the newer Member States will need help, said Prof. Schutt, adding that accelerating progress on transport and housing, and on "managing the public realm" were key issues.

Sustainable communities indicators need to be developed by Eurostat and the Commission's Regional Policy DG, in line with the Bristol Accord, but also by Member States themselves, to measure sustainability in fine-grained fashion at local level, said Prof. Schutt.

Recommendations for improving sustainability indicators and sharing experience more widely are set out in *"The Possibilities for Success of the Sustainable Communities Approach and its Implementation"* (Volume I: Study, p. xi), as presented by Prof. Schutt.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/organes/regi/regi_20070502_0900.htm

"Panevėžys" project

The use of EU funding to refurbish social housing prompted several questions from MEPs about the "environment and governance for the city" case study presented by Vitas Matuzas, Mayor of Panevėžys (Lithuania). Mr Matuzas explained that in Panevėžys, if a community decides to refurbish a building, some funding (up to 50%) can be provided by the state - so far, about 9% of citizens have benefited from this, he said.

The Panevėžys project includes a ring-road, designed 8 years ago to avoid built-up areas but now attracting industrial parks, and 90 km of cycle track, publicised through an "I love my bike" campaign to which Mayor Matuzas and the local bishop belong.

¹ Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Sweden.

"Tour et taxis"

The lack of a new transport link to Brussels city centre has bedevilled "Tour et taxis", a 30-hectare riverfront redevelopment project presented by CEO Michel de Bièvre.

Existing links are saturated, and this project, which already has 1,000 tenants in refurbished customs buildings and a growing reputation for arts and trade fairs, needs a cross-canal connection (bridge or monorail) to the north station, 900 metres away, said Mr Bievre, who complained that a four-year delay in "getting approval" for the link had eaten into his company's profits.

Mr de Bièvre stressed the need to ensure that projects meet market needs. "Attracting money for private projects is no problem if you have a decent product and can hold out a prospect of profit", he said.

EIB loans

The European Investment Bank lent € 40 billion in 2006, much of it to projects within cities, said its representative Mr Gianni Carbonara. The EIB finances social housing when it's part of an urban regeneration project that meets sustainable development criteria - and the EIB always looks at the background urban development plan, he said.

The EIB plans to tailor lending to support investment in "best practice sustainable urban transformation", and this entails networking, to combine the EIB's financial engineering expertise with local knowledge, he said, adding that the "JESSICA" task force, an integrated team of planners and financial experts should be in place by the end of the year.

Regional Development Committee meeting documents

Regional Development Committee

Contact:

Andrew Boreham
Press Room Unit

: region-press@europarl.eu.int



: (32-2) 284 2319 (BXL)