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## A thematic strategy on the urban environment

Elio Manti

With the Communication from Commission to the Council and the European Parliament relative on Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment, COM (2005) 718 11 January 2006, the European Commission has defined a reference frame for environmental policies and for sustainable development in European urban areas. Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment is one of the seven thematic strategies expected by the 6th Environment Action Programme (2).

The Strategy remarks that the integrated approach to the urban environmental management realized by adopting strategic action plans is the one which allows better performance. It strongly advises local authorities to adopt appropriate measures to further a wide recourse to integrated management. Due to the environmental importance of transport and urban mobility, the Strategy exhorts local authorities to elaborate and enact sustainable urban transport plans. In 2006, the European Commission will publish a set of technical guidance on concerning integrated environmental management and sustainable urban transport plans.

The Strategy wants to implement the quality of the urban environment, making cities more attractive and healthier places to live, work and invest in, and reduce adverse environmental impact of cities. However, limiting the Strategy action field to the effective implementation of the environmental legislation and to the management of strictly-environmental aspects seems like to be very reductive. The installation of the Strategy instruments can represent a

chance to rethink to the city's governance model, by implementing their sustainable development orientation.

The Strategy, in conjunction with the Declaration on guiding principles for sustainable development and the Bristol Accord, reshapes the reference frame for urban policies, strengthening the links between environmental, economic and social aspects of development. On 16-17 June 2005, the European Council approved the *Declaration on guiding principles for sustainable development* containing the key objectives and the guiding principles which will serve as basis for the new sustainable development strategy. The Declaration divides more specifically the founding principles of the sustainable development and describes them as merit contents, and as method, decisional process.

The Communication underlines how environmental, economic and social dimensions are strictly integrated in urban areas and explicitly refers to the contents of the Bristol Accord's *Sustainable Communities*, subscribed by the Union Ministers on December 2005. The Accord has been supported by the United Kingdom and concerns the approach that local and national governments should have for creating sustainable communities defined as places where people can live and work, today and in the future.

Communities that can steadily manage social, economic and environmental problematic by satisfying the needs of present and future generations and by respecting those of other communities are called 'Sustainable Communities'. The Commission kindly suggests local authorities to adopt necessary measures to ensure the recourse to the urban environmental

integrated management and encourages regional and national authorities to support this process.

About the urban environmental integrated management, Strategy has adopted the directions elaborated by Working Group on 'Urban Environmental Management Plans and Systems' in order to investigate and provide advises concerning the elements of the Urban Environmental Management Plan and the Urban Environmental Management System. The Plan is a strategic document that defines short, medium and long-term environmental objectives and policies for an urban area. It establishes a clear vision, a general strategy and an action plan, aimed towards the achievements of objectives and targets, and defines the action execution times.

The Urban Environmental Management Plan is defined and realized on the strength of participatory and intersector approach; covers a 15 to 20 year period, with re-examination every 4-5 years; the final decision on objectives and targets belongs to the competent authorities; is based on a reporting procedure to inform citizens and stakeholders; foresees the evaluation process.

Concerning the application area and the realization responsibilities of the Plan, the Working Group has introduced the *functional area* concept which allows to think about urban areas rather than administrative boundary. The urban areas' approach opens the problem of the cooperation between local authorities, which have to recognize adequate procedures in order to share principles, objectives, ways and shapes of intervention. After establishing the Plan purpose, application area and contents, it is necessary to proceed with its realization through an

Environmental Management System. In this regard, there are several systems and tools actually adopted in the European urban areas to implement the Urban Environmental Management Plan and the environmental policies on urban areas, such as EMAS, ISO 14001, Eco-Budget and CLEAR. The Communication recommends local authorities to elaborate Sustainable Urban Transport Plans. To identify the contents and the definition, adoption and realization procedures of such plans, the Communication refers to the work made by the Working Group on 'Sustainable Urban Transport Plans'. Similarity between Mobility Urban Plan and Sustainable Environmental Transport Plan, Art. 22 L. 340/2000 establishes the Mobility Urban Plans "in order to satisfy public mobility needs, ensure acoustic and atmospheric pollution-level breaking-down, energy-consumption reduction, road-transport and transport-safety level augmentation, minimize the individual use of the private car and reduce traffic congestion, increase transport capacity, increase citizen percentage transported by public systems with car pooling and car sharing solutions and reduce urban area overcrowding phenomena". It is to understand how and in which measure the Mobility Urban Plan can represent the tool that generates Strategy's provisions on sustainable mobility and transports. In realizing the Strategy, the European Union will have to: support member states and local authorities in promoting best practices and in spreading them; encourage network constitution and exchange of experience between cities; offer a financial support for environmental-priority investment; develop guidelines; establish

national focal points for city support.

A relevant part of support activities of the European Union can involve best practices' exchange and selection.

The Commission is going to evaluate the opportunity to activate a "European framework programme for the exchange of experience on the urban development" in the field of Cohesion Policy suggested for 2007 to 2013 period beginning from the experience that it is performing with the European Urban Knowledge Network project. The Commission undertakes to study a thematic portal feasibility/viability addressed to local authorities. Another relevant field regarding the Strategy propagation is the formation activity.