



# THE NEW LEIPZIG CHARTER

The transformative power of  
cities for the common good

## **A** **PREAMBLE**

The Leipzig Charter of 2007 has inspired urban policy in Europe and beyond. Its core message to promote integrated and sustainable urban development is as valid today as in 2007. Nowadays though, urgent global challenges such as climate change, the loss of biodiversity, resource scarcity, migration movements, demographic change, pandemics and rapidly changing economies have a direct and local impact on towns and cities throughout Europe. They may also intensify disparities in our societies. In addition, digital technologies are drastically transforming society, creating potential political, social, ecological and economic benefits. However, these technologies also trigger profound new challenges such as the digital divide, lack of privacy, security issues and market dependencies. In response to these challenges the original Leipzig Charter has to be refocussed.

The need for sustainable transformation is underlined by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Sustainable Development Goal 11 which is dedicated to making cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, the New Urban Agenda, the Paris Agreement and the European Commission's Green Deal. The Green Deal aims to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent in the world and Europe as a whole has a strong responsibility as well as the collective ability to achieve this goal. The New Leipzig Charter provides a policy framework to envision and realise these European and global agreements at the urban scale.

**We, the Ministers responsible for urban matters, agree upon** the New Leipzig Charter that emphasises the pursuit of the common good using the transformative power of cities. This includes general welfare, reliable public services of general interest as well as reducing and preventing new forms of social, economic, environmental and territorial inequalities. Our common goal is to safeguard and enhance the quality of life in all European towns and cities and their functional areas. No one should be left behind.

**We point out** that many cities are already taking over responsibility and leading the transformation towards just, green and productive societies. This requires good leadership, solid urban governance and resources. Cities need the full support of all governmental levels and all key actors, both governmental and non-governmental.

**We reaffirm** support for transformation through integrated urban development, with a place-based, multi-level and participatory approach.

**We highlight** the important support from the European Union for integrated urban development including Cohesion Policy and other EU policies, as well as research programmes and initiatives with an urban dimension.

**We acknowledge** that the Urban Agenda for the EU, established by the Pact of Amsterdam, has made an important contribution to a widely appreciated multi-level and multi-stakeholder approach to urban development.

**We emphasise** our support for the objectives of the Territorial Agenda 2030. Along with the New Leipzig Charter this advocates the place-based approach as an overarching principle for all places and policy sectors. The New Leipzig Charter provides guidance on applying the approach in cities and their functional areas. We therefore support strengthened cooperation between and across spatial levels.

## **B** THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF EUROPEAN CITIES

Europe has a wide variety of small, medium-sized and large cities. As part of a polycentric urban system, these are functional areas with varying potentials and challenges. European cities are more than places of densely arranged built structures, they also enable cultural, social, ecologic and economic interaction. Most cities are unique, historically grown centres of outstanding cultural value shaping Europe's urban heritage and the identity of its citizens. Thus, culture is at the core of any sustainable urban development, including the preservation and development of the built and other cultural heritage.

Cities are places of pluralism, creativity and solidarity. Cultural and political traditions have been foundations for the development of cities reflecting democratic rights and values. Cities are also laboratories for new forms of problem-solving and test beds for social innovation.

High-quality, open and safe public spaces function as vibrant urban places, allowing people to interact, exchange and integrate into society. Good urban planning and design should be reinforced to enable compact, socially and economically mixed cities with well-developed infrastructure and a healthy environment and opportunities for identification contributing to the well-being of all. This requires a holistic understanding of high-quality Baukultur as the basis of integrated planning and design processes for every man-made shaping of the built environment in European cities. It also encompasses the management and conversion of existing buildings as well as the design and construction of contemporary buildings, infrastructure and public spaces.

Cities and urban systems need flexibility as well as the ability to respond to external disruptive events and chronic stress. The robustness of cities to cope with changing framework conditions should be supported by an ability to learn from past events and from each other, flexible urban governance for the common good as well as balanced implementation of just, green and productive cities. Predictive and preventive policies, plans and projects should include diverse scenarios to anticipate environmental and climatic challenges and economic risks as well as social transformation and health concerns.

### **B.1** THREE SPATIAL LEVELS OF EUROPEAN CITIES

Today, citizens often interact at different spatial scales in their everyday life. Therefore, measures that focus on local developments should be designed at the appropriate spatial scale. In addition to formal local policies, specific and informal meas-

ures need to be enforced at other levels including neighbourhoods as well as wider functional, regional and metropolitan scales. This requires harmonised coordination of measures implemented at all spatial levels to ensure coherence and to avoid inefficiency.

- Urban challenges are often more pronounced at the **neighbourhood level**. Some neighbourhoods can reflect social tensions, poverty or environmental stress. Other neighbourhoods are arrival areas for migrants or subject to gentrification, social mobility and a shortage of affordable housing. Specific neighbourhood policies should therefore encourage local commitment for community building and inclusiveness. Neighbourhoods with a multitude of complex socioeconomic challenges need tailor-made policy programmes and funding to stabilise in the long term. In addition, neighbourhoods should be regarded as potential laboratories for innovative approaches covering all fields of urban development.
- **Local authorities** in their individual national context are responsible for local urban development. Decision-makers in local authorities set strategic guidelines and specific operations for the whole city area. They act as a formal link between small scale neighbourhoods and wider functional areas, with a decisive role in stabilising surrounding and wider rural areas. Particular consideration must be given to comparable living conditions for citizens in small and medium-sized towns and cities in shrinking areas.
- Sustainable and resilient urban development takes place within a regional or metropolitan context and relies on a complex network of functional interdependencies and partnerships. This is exemplified by the **functional area** as stated in the Territorial Agenda 2030. In parts this covers a metropolitan area or a combination of other territorial entities. In order to adapt urban policies to people's daily lives, towns and cities need to cooperate and coordinate their policies and instruments with their surrounding suburban and rural areas on policies for housing, commercial areas, mobility, services, green and blue infrastructure, material flows, local and regional food systems and energy supply, among others.

## B.2 THREE DIMENSIONS OF EUROPEAN CITIES

Urban transformation is based on the integration of the social, ecological and economic dimensions of sustainable development.

We, the Ministers, acknowledge that these dimensions are reflected by the transformative power of cities through just, green and productive dimensions. Combined and in a balanced and integrated manner, these dimensions contribute to developing resilient cities that can deal with social, economic and ecological challenges, providing and aiming to guarantee a high quality of life for everyone.

### The just city

The transformative power of cities provides equal opportunities and environmental justice for all, regardless of gender, socioeconomic status, age and origin – leaving

no one behind. A just city provides opportunities for everyone to integrate in society.

All social groups, including the most vulnerable, should have equal access to services of general interest, including education, social services, health care and culture. Adequate, accessible, safe and affordable housing and energy supply should meet the needs of different groups in society, including an ageing and more diverse population, persons with disabilities, young people and families. Socially balanced, mixed and safe urban neighbourhoods promote the integration of all social and ethnic groups and generations. Urban areas with a high percentage of migrants need a comprehensive integration and anti-segregation policy for this.

All citizens should be empowered to acquire new skills and education. This requires affordable and accessible high-quality pre-school and school education, qualification and training for young people, as well as lifelong learning opportunities, in particular for digitalisation and technology.

### **The green city**

The transformative power of cities contributes to combatting global warming and to high environmental quality for air, water, soil and land use. The development of high quality urban environments for all includes adequate access to green and recreational spaces. Climate-neutral energy supply, renewable resources, the implementation of energy efficiency measures, as well as climate-resilient and carbon-neutral buildings will contribute to significantly reducing greenhouse gas emissions and helping European cities adapt to the impacts of climate change. Some European frontrunner cities can already provide a blueprint for a net-zero carbon city today. The transformation requires investments in innovative and efficient technologies as well as fundamental changes to production and consumption, allowing for the establishment of a circular economy which redefines and ensures a sustainable use of resources, while significantly reducing waste and carbon emissions.

Cities are called on to protect and regenerate endangered ecosystems and their species and, to use nature-based solutions where high quality green and blue infrastructure can accommodate extreme weather conditions. Well-designed, managed and connected green and blue areas are a precondition for healthy living environments, adapting to climate change and preserving and developing biodiversity in cities.

Urban transport and mobility systems should be efficient, carbon-neutral, safe and multi-modal. Active and low-carbon forms of mobility and logistics should be promoted including a modal shift to public transport, walking and biking. Public transport should be accessible, affordable, clean, safe and attractive for all. To reduce transport and mobility needs, a polycentric settlement structure should be as compact and dense as possible while supporting multiple uses including housing, retail, production and transport.

## The productive city

The transformative power of cities is based on a diversified economy which provides jobs while ensuring a sound financial base for sustainable urban development. Cities as attractive, innovative and competitive business locations need a skilled workforce, social, technical and logistical infrastructure as well as affordable and accessible space. Ensuring these preconditions, including a favourable innovative environment as well as opportunities for local and regional production should be integral to urban planning.

In addition to traditional industries, many other economic sectors are shifting more and more towards a digital, service-oriented and low-carbon economy built on a knowledge-based society and cultural industries. Small-scale businesses, low-emission-manufacturing and urban agriculture can be stimulated to re-integrate production into cities and urban areas, enabling and promoting new forms of mixed-use neighbourhoods.

The retail sector in European cities is changing as a result of an increasing digitalisation in commerce. Staple goods and especially food, however, should be accessible locally to offer a good quality of life and to counterbalance the adverse effects of demographic change. Transforming central urban areas into attractive multifunctional spaces provides new opportunities for urban development through mixed use for living, working and recreation, where manufacturing, retail and services are found alongside housing, hospitality and leisure.

**Digitalisation** is a major transformative, cross-sectoral trend affecting all dimensions of sustainable urban development. In many ways it offers an opportunity for urban transformation. Digital solutions can deliver innovative and high-quality services to the public and businesses. These include smart urban mobility, energy efficiency, sustainable housing, public services, retail, supply of daily goods and civic-led governance. At the same time digitalisation can trigger a further spatial and social divide with risks to the protection of privacy. Digitalisation needs to be shaped in an environmentally sustainable, inclusive and fair manner. In a broader picture, European digital sovereignty is key to the future competitiveness of the EU. Cities, with their power to scale up digital solutions and to adapt them to local conditions can significantly contribute to this goal.

## **C** KEY PRINCIPLES OF GOOD URBAN GOVERNANCE

The key working principles in the 2007 Leipzig Charter are still valid. However, they need to be updated in view of today's global challenges and implemented by all those involved in urban development.

**We, the Ministers, acknowledge** that a balanced, integrated transformation of cities and regions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and objectives of the European Union's Green Deal, will only be successful if both governmental and non-governmental actors from all levels and sectors work together, agreeing on strategic principles. These principles also shape basic elements that further develop and im-

plement the Urban Agenda for the EU as well as the urban and territorial dimensions of EU Cohesion Policy. We emphasise our support for the Territorial Agenda 2030 which is based on a shared understanding of the key principles for good governance.

### **Urban policy for the common good**

Public authorities should act in the interest of public welfare, providing services and infrastructure for the common good. These should be inclusive, affordable, safe and accessible for all, including the weakest and most vulnerable groups in society, particularly those who live in towns and cities in shrinking and remote areas. This should cover health care, social services, education, cultural services, housing, water and energy supply, waste management, public transport, digital networks and information systems. Furthermore, the quality of public spaces including green and blue infrastructure as well as the preservation and revitalisation of built cultural heritage are important. Therefore, the skills and capacities of all urban stakeholders should be strengthened with strategies and tools for their empowerment. Good urban governance can balance public and private interests with market mechanisms.

### **Integrated approach**

All areas of urban policy have to be coordinated in a spatial, sectoral and temporal manner. The integrated approach relies on simultaneous and fair consideration of all concerns and interests relevant to urban development. Therefore, it should pool and balance different, partly conflicting, interests as well as the mutual effects of different interventions. Cities need to establish integrated and sustainable urban development strategies and assure their implementation for the city as a whole, from its functional areas to its neighbourhoods.

### **Participation and co-creation**

The integrated approach requires the involvement of the general public as well as social, economic and other stakeholders in order to consider their concerns and knowledge. Public participation in urban development processes should engage all urban actors, which also strengthens local democracy. Wherever possible, citizens should have a say in processes that impact their daily lives. New forms of participation should be encouraged and improved, including co-creation and co-design in cooperation with inhabitants, civil society networks, community organisations and private enterprises. Experimenting with new forms of participation can help cities manage conflicting interests, share responsibilities and find innovative solutions while also reshaping and maintaining urban spaces and forming new alliances to create integrated city spaces. Public participation is central to the successful delivery of a high quality built environment.

### **Multi-level governance**

Every governmental level – local, regional, metropolitan, national, European and global – has a specific responsibility for the future of our cities based on the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. Complex challenges should be jointly tackled by all levels of urban and spatial policy. This requires the cooperation of all societal actors,

including civil society and the private sector. As recommended by the Pact of Amsterdam and the New Urban Agenda, vertical and horizontal multi-level and multi-stakeholder cooperation, both bottom-up and top-down, is key to good urban governance.

### Place-based approach

Places should be regarded as reference points for an integrated horizontal and vertical approach. Urban strategies and urban funding instruments should be based on sound analysis of the specific local situation, especially potential benefits and risks, stakeholders and restrictions, while following place-based development. This will enable endogenous urban transformation and reduce local socioeconomic inequalities. Appropriate formal and informal instruments should cover all spatial levels, from neighbourhoods to local authorities and wider functional areas including the metropolitan level.

## **D** EMPOWERING CITIES TO TRANSFORM

Local authorities are closest to citizens and in touch with their daily life and needs. Cities are responsible for allocating public services that enable citizens to exercise their fundamental rights and to participate in society. Cities are also responsible for balancing differing, sometimes conflicting aspects and interests. This gives local authorities a crucial role in guaranteeing and representing the overall public interest.

**We, the Ministers, stress** the importance of cities being capable of unlocking their transformative power, of dynamically responding to rapidly changing conditions, and of providing a high quality of life. Support from the European, national and regional levels is needed to ensure cities can find local solutions to global challenges.

### **D.1 STRENGTHENING URBAN GOVERNANCE TO ENSURE THE COMMON GOOD**

Cities need:

- **Legal framework conditions** at all administrative and political levels based on the partnership principle and embedded in a multi-level governance system;
- **Investment capacities** generated through their own income, allocations from national and regional levels, as well as specific EU-, national and regional funding programmes;
- **Adequately skilled employees** who are continuously trained and qualified in order to keep up with future challenges as well as wider technological and societal trends. Local authorities should also be able to integrate various sectoral policies and plans as well as promote and moderate complex, participatory and bottom-up processes;
- **The steerability and shaping of** infrastructure, public services and public welfare. This includes services for health, social care, education, culture, water and energy supply, waste management, public transport, digital networks, information systems and public spaces as well as green and blue infrastructure. In addition,



the provision of safe, healthy, affordable, well-designed and adequate housing is essential for all urban policies.

**We, the Ministers, stress** that solid urban governance aiming for the common good is necessary to transform all cities into just, green and productive urban systems. Politicians and administrations at all levels are therefore encouraged to provide financial and legal framework conditions under the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality and in respect of budgetary regulations, that support the following fields of action:

### **D.1.1 Active and strategic land policy and land use planning**

Space is limited in many cities, which often leads to conflicting interests. Local authorities need to apply sustainable, transparent and equitable land use planning and land policies, including local authority land ownership and control. In order to ensure resilient and long-term development, local authorities need to take into account strategic and future developments and risks. Key elements to achieve this are:

- Polycentric settlement structures with appropriate compactness and density in urban and rural areas with optimal connections within cities to minimise distances between housing, work, leisure, education, local shops and services. This should minimise traffic and mobility needs within and between cities, combatting urban sprawl and reducing traffic areas;
- Fostering the cooperation beyond administrative and national borders and coordination of spatial planning in functional urban areas, taking into account urban-rural linkages, in order to prevent as well as contain urban sprawl;
- Reducing land take, prioritising the renewal and complex regeneration of urban areas, including brownfield redevelopment, to limit soil sealing;
- Land use should balance urban density by favouring green and blue infrastructure, to increase urban biodiversity and enable climate-neutral, resilient and environmentally sound urban development as well as improved air quality;
- Design and management of safe and accessible public spaces providing healthy living environments for all citizens;
- Sufficient areas for adequate, safe, well designed and affordable housing to ensure vibrant and socially mixed neighbourhoods, avoiding speculative land policy;
- Mixed-use urban spaces to promote new forms of production and economic activity in a green, creative, service-based economy.

### **D1.2 Actively shaping digital transformation**

Today, the digitalisation of processes and their management in cities including massive, rapidly growing data flows is key to integrated urban development. Digitalisation is never an end in itself. Local authorities, as part of the public sector, should drive solution-driven technology based on public needs. To ensure no one is left behind, digital transformation and the collaboration needed to implement this should be based on common human values – such as inclusiveness, human-centeredness and transparency as well as in accordance with international law, including human rights law. Cities should be able to shape the digital transformation by:

- Developing and implementing integrated and inclusive smart city strategies for the common good, including impact assessments with awareness of long-term effects.
- Improving decision making and digital public services. Data should be used for the common good, with ethical and socially responsible access, use, sharing and management. At the same time, this data usage should be carefully weighed against privacy issues.
- Implementing comprehensive, powerful and resilient public data infrastructure and governance. Cities should have access to data relevant to public tasks.
- Promoting lifelong learning tools to empower citizens and public administrations, fostering digital skills and ensuring digital cohesion.
- Digital solutions can – particularly in times of crisis – safeguard and boost local authorities’ capacity to act.

## D.2 ENSURING ADEQUATE POLICIES AND FUNDING FOR CITIES

Local authorities need an enabling framework including all levels of government and relevant stakeholders to achieve these goals. EU, national and regional regulations should support the implementation of integrated urban policies for the common good and catalyse urban transformation, respecting the subsidiarity principle and in line with the competences of each level.

### D.2.1 Powerful national urban policy framework and funding

The Leipzig Charter of 2007 and the New Urban Agenda state that national and regional urban policies should be strengthened to empower cities and contribute to consistent implementation of sustainable urban development at local level.

**We, the Ministers, agree** to foster – within our responsibilities and capacities and in respect of budgetary regulations - the continuation and establishment of national or regional urban policies in order to:

- **enable exchanges** of experiences and knowledge between cities and other stakeholders at regional, national, transnational and EU levels to strengthen the capacity to implement integrated and sustainable urban development strategies;
- **act as platforms** for dialogue between urban and all other partners to ensure multi-level governance through different means, including multi-level partnerships;
- **support the development or reallocation of national or regional funding programmes** for significant urban challenges and facilitate co-financing by European Funds as important instruments to enable integrated and sustainable urban development strategies and projects.
- **provide incentives for innovation** and experimental projects that address current and future challenges in sustainable urban development.

## D.2.2 Coherent EU regulation and funding instruments

**The Urban Agenda for the EU**, launched in 2016 by the Pact of Amsterdam, started a pivotal multi-level governance process to enhance the position of cities in legislation and policymaking. We highly value the work of the multi-level Partnerships with the objectives of Better Regulation, Better Funding and Better Knowledge. Their work has contributed to increased coherence in the EU regulatory framework on urban topics and to improving EU policy development with an urban dimension. This includes refining and adjusting funding instruments as well as enhancing the common knowledge base on urban issues in Europe. The Urban Agenda for the EU is a major process to support European institutions, Member States, regional and local authorities and functional areas of all sizes to implement the strategic principles of the Leipzig Charter.

**We, the Ministers, therefore agree** to continue, reinforce and improve the Urban Agenda for the EU as a process built on the partnership principle and in full compliance with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality in a multi-level governance approach. In addition, we call upon European institutions to take into account, where relevant, the implications and consequences of EU regulations and directives related to urban areas in their Impact Assessments and to actively engage local and regional stakeholders in consultations on new and existing EU legislation.

**Funding, financial instruments and EU-programmes concerning urban issues** provided by European institutions play a valuable role for urban policy in European cities and consequently need to maintain a strong urban dimension. Among other EU-programmes, advisory support and financial instruments, Cohesion Policy is key to implementing integrated and sustainable urban development strategies and place-based approaches for local and regional urban projects. These programmes should stimulate, with the help of the European Urban Initiative, integrated, innovative and participatory approaches in sustainable urban development, promote socio-economic and territorial cohesion, support polycentric settlement structures and bring the EU closer to citizens.

**The vertical and horizontal exchange of knowledge** and expertise among all multi-level governance stakeholders should be continued and strengthened. EU-funded urban development, research and development cooperation programmes, networks and initiatives can contribute to this idea. This enables learning from good practices and innovative approaches as well as key working principles and instruments. The Urban Agenda for the EU offers an exchange platform for European, national, regional and local urban stakeholders.

**We, the Ministers, encourage** the European institutions, Member and partner States as well as regional and local authorities to foster the coherent coordination of methods and objectives between European programmes and initiatives such as the Urban Agenda for the EU, URBACT, the European Urban Initiative including its Innovative Actions and Cohesion Policy programmes.

## **E** CLOSING APPEAL

**We, the Ministers, are convinced** that the New Leipzig Charter provides a strong framework for good and sustainable urban governance. It emphasises the transformative power of cities for the common good through key principles, key dimensions and specific fields of action.

**We call upon** EU institutions, Member and partner States, as well as local and regional authorities and urban stakeholders at all governance levels for their commitment and contribution to put the agreed framework into practice through European, national, regional and local initiatives and programmes.

**We therefore endorse** the document “Implementing the New Leipzig Charter through Multi-level Governance: Next Steps for the Urban Agenda for the EU” which operationalises and links on equal footing the strategic principles of the New Leipzig Charter with continuation of the Urban Agenda for the EU.

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Images by  
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