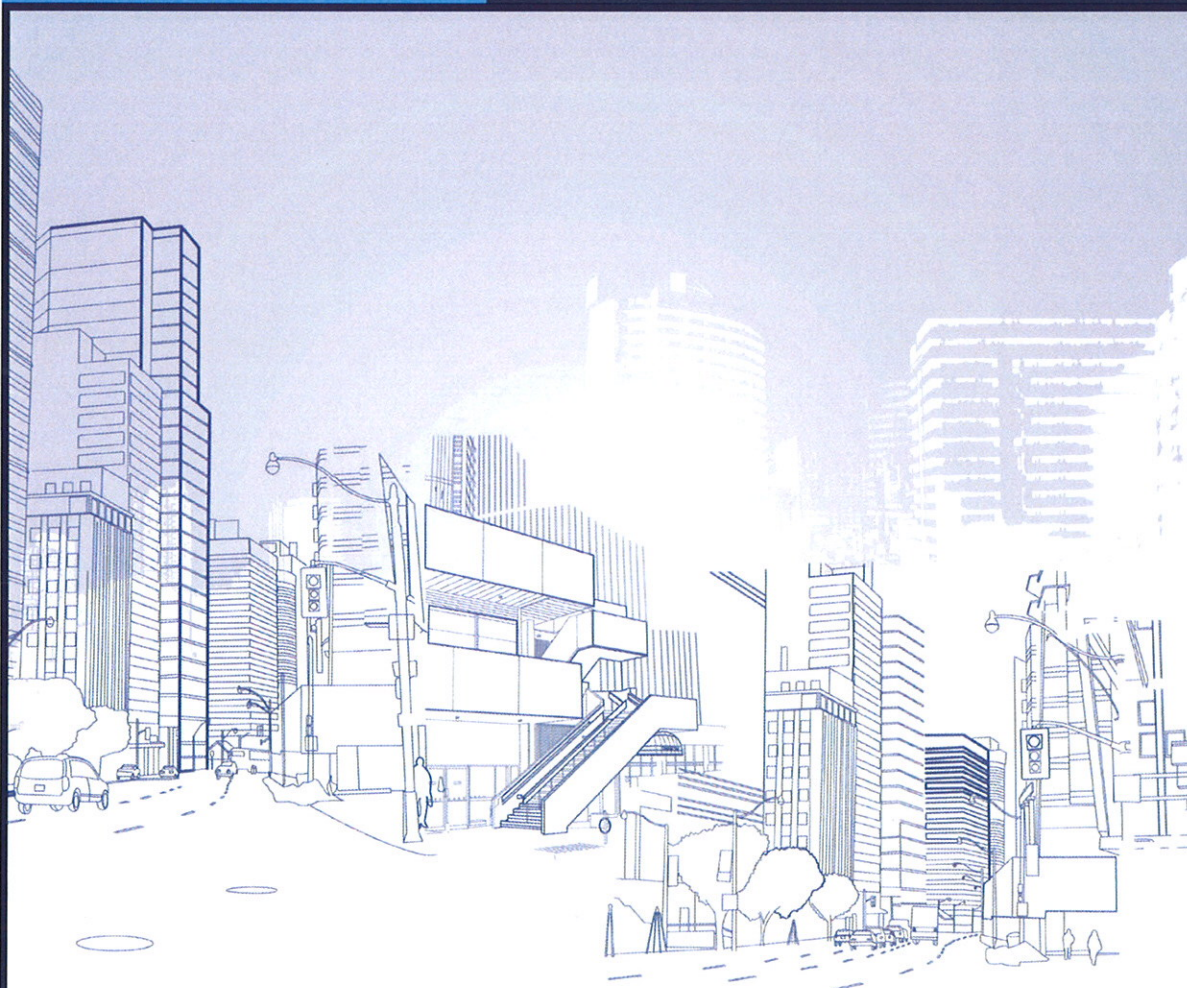


# NEW EUROPE



# URBANISATION

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# Sustainable urban regeneration

A key contribution to high quality built environment and adaptation strategies of European cities, lever for economic growth and social cohesion

By Antonio Borghi

*"Cities are key players in the fight against climate change and the main challenge to test our capacity to adapt. Energy consumption in urban areas – mostly in transport and housing – is responsible for a large share of CO2 emissions and at the same time emission per person is much lower in urban areas compared to non-urban areas. The density of urban areas allows for more energy-efficient forms of housing, transport and service provision. Consequently, measures to address climate change may be more efficient and cost-effective in big and compact cities than in less densely built space."*

## CO2 REDUCTION and CLIMATE ADAPTATION

The building sector accounts for 40% of the total energy use and for 36% of Europe's CO2 emissions. It generates 9% of the total EU 27 GDP and 8 % of the total employment. Since the EU aims at reductions in domestic greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions of 80% by 2050 (compared to 1990 level), the building stock – in particular the housing sector – plays a major role in achieving the 20-20-20 strategic targets. Without consequently exploiting the huge savings potential attributed to the building stock, the EU will certainly miss its GHG reduction targets, but there are many other advantages in reducing the environmental footprint of buildings that should be carefully considered.

## SOCIAL INCLUSION and QUALITY OF LIFE

As highlighted in the Cities of Tomorrow report, "Energy efficiency in buildings is directly related to social inclusion and the alleviation of energy poverty. [...] 90% of social housing consists of buildings in need of refurbishment. These buildings often have low energy efficiency with many tenants living in fuel poverty. Better energy efficiency is key to alleviating the poverty of the most vulnerable, while increasing the quality of life for all citizens. Cities are faced with the challenge of upgrading existing housing stock and finding the most adequate solutions, while knowing that systems will evolve. Solutions, therefore, need to be flexible, cost-effective and sustainable. Energy efficiency may play a particular role in cities of EU-12 Member States where there are still a number of large housing estates with very high energy consumption. In some countries, flats have been privatised, resulting in a lack of effective collective management and very few or no resources for renovation."

## SUSTAINABLE LAND USE MANAGEMENT and SOIL SEALING REDUCTION

The EU shall concretely support the



At the heart of the EU, Brussels is a fast changing city justifying urban regeneration.

adoption of sustainable land use management plans at national and local level. The European compact city is not only our greatest cultural asset, but also the only way to a safe and healthy built environment. Reducing soil sealing and urban sprawl is imperative for urban adaptation to climate change, to develop safety strategies in case of natural hazards and human caused catastrophes. CO2 emissions alike, soil sealing is a major indicator of the sustainability degree of urban and territorial policies and must become a concrete driver of sustainable urban regeneration at European level. Therefore the guidelines to limit, mitigate and compensate soil sealing, published in April 2012 by the Commission should be consistently embedded in EU urban dimension of cohesion policies.

## HERITAGE CONSERVATION and GREEN INNOVATION

European Cities of tomorrow are places of green, ecological or environmental regeneration, but we should also make sure that "the heritage and architectural value of historic buildings and public spaces is exploited together with the development and improvement of the urban scene, landscape and place, and where local residents identify themselves with the urban environment. [...] Cities have to build on their past to prepare the future. Some cities build on their specific traditions of production, on their architectural or cultural heritage as well as on their local and regional knowledge base. The specific attractiveness of a given city has to be seen in the context of a forward-looking scenario as an element of a broader urban transition."

## GROWTH AND JOBS

During a Hearing at the EU Parliament in 2009 Dr. Edmundo Werna explained the huge economic and employment potential of the building renovation and restoration sector: "The restoration of buildings, roads and other elements of the built environment with heritage value is a labour-intensive type of activity. Therefore, it has high employment content. Experience has shown that for the same level of investment in local construction, the use of labour-based technologies can create between two and four times more employment. In addition, the use of labour-intensive methods promotes small and medium enterprises, causes the drop of foreign exchange requirements by 50% to 60%, decreases overall cost by 10 to 30%, and reduces environmental impacts. It also implies the increased use of associated local resources."

## FINANCIAL TOOLS and REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

The recast Energy Performance of Buildings Directive has introduced a strong focus on the existing building stock, encouraging the member states to support refurbishments and set higher energy standards for buildings undergoing renovation. "The rate of building renovation needs to be increased, as the existing building stock represents the single biggest potential sector for energy savings. Moreover, buildings are crucial to achieving the EU objective of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 80- 95% by 2050 compared to 1990."

From the financial point of view it is important to note that a very large share of energy savings potential can be achieved at

"negative costs". Some of them may even produce buildings capable to produce more energy than they need, becoming part of the urban smart grid, but the greatest challenge is energy upgrading of the existing building stock at urban level: lowering energy demand, increasing energy efficiency and integrating renewable energies production at the scale of the urban fabric.

## 3x20 STRATEGY and EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUNDS

Supporting investment in energy efficiency and renewable energies will be among the top priorities of the next programming period 2014-2020. According to the draft regulations published in late 2011 "in more developed and transition regions, at least 80% of ERDF resources at national level should be allocated to energy efficiency and renewables, innovation and SME support, of which at least 20 % should be allocated to energy efficiency and renewables. Less developed regions will have a broader range of investment priorities to choose from, reflecting their wider development needs. But they will have to devote at least 50 % of ERDF resources to energy efficiency and renewables, innovation and SME support". Cities have to be prepared to this challenge, strengthening their territorial cohesion policies and sustainable urban development framework plans a.o. to take advantage of the 5 % of ERDF resources earmarked for sustainable urban development

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