

Future benefits of current investments - enriching the statistical information supply on cities

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Key words: Urban Audit, cities, regional

In the European Union 3 out of 4 citizens live in a settlement with more than 5,000 inhabitants. So the majority of Europeans live in urban settlements. Cities do not only concentrate people, but they also concentrate workplaces, schools at all levels, cultural facilities, etc. However, there are also less favourable characteristics of urban life, like traffic congestion, pollution, unemployment, social exclusion, etc. Improving the attractiveness of regions and cities is one of the priorities targeted by the renewed Lisbon strategy and the Community Strategic Guidelines on Cohesion for 2007-2013. Quality of life is crucial in attracting and retaining a skilled labour force, businesses, students, tourists and most of all residents in a city. In order to elaborate, implement and evaluate policies related to these urban issues relevant, reliable and comparable data is needed.

In 2008 as part of the preparatory work for the next Urban Audit¹ Eurostat and the Directorate-General for Regional Policy consulted several stakeholders of the project to find out their data needs. These stakeholders included several Directorate-Generals (DGs) of the European Commission, like DG Environment, DG Health; DG Enterprise; DG Transport; DG Employment; colleagues from National Statistical Institutes and from Eurostat, like the team for waste statistics, the team for water indicators, and the team for cultural indicators. Also the European Environment Agency played an active role in this consultation. Based on their input a so called "wish list" was drafted which gives a thorough overview of data demand in the field of urban statistics. The feasibility of collecting these figures was discussed with experts. We categorized the proposed new indicators according to data availability and policy relevance. There were several indicators with high policy relevance and low data availability. The challenge for the future is to find new methods and new data sources to collect these figures.

The recent technological developments provide new possibilities in this respect. One of the data sources to be used in the future is the Urban Atlas. The Urban Atlas will be created using satellite images and will provide a high resolution land use/cover data on Urban Audit cities. Indicators like accessibility to green areas could be calculated following a harmonized definition for all European cities. After the initial investments updates are expected to be less costly and supply information urban development, especially on urban sprawl.

Another possibility is to link existing data sources with the use of Geographical Information Systems: for example calculating air quality indicators for cities using the data from air quality monitoring stations. The prerequisite of this computation is the availability of validated geographical reference database for cities. The initial development of such a database needs investment: time, capital and human resources.

¹ The Urban Audit data collection provides information on the different aspects of the quality of urban life in Europe's cities. It is the result of a joint effort by the participating cities, the Statistical Offices belonging to the European Statistical System and the European Commission's Directorate General for Regional Policy. The Urban Audit pilot project was launched in 1998 which was followed by a full scale Urban Audit covering Member States and candidate countries in 2003/2004. The second full scale Urban Audit was executed in 2006/2007 covering 321 cities from the European Union.