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10th ESDN Workshop

Fostering Urban Sustainable Development: Potentials and Challenges for National and European Policy

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Workshop Report



European Sustainable Development Network

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The **European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN)** is an informal network of public administrators and other experts who deal with sustainable development strategies and policies. The network covers all 28 EU Member States, plus other European countries. The ESDN is active in promoting sustainable development and facilitating the exchange of good practices in Europe and gives advice to policy-makers at the European and national level.

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Introduction

The 10th ESDN Workshop, entitled “**Fostering Urban Sustainable Development: Potentials and Challenges for National and European Policy**”, took place in Brussels on 28 January 2014. It was organized by the ESDN in cooperation with the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety and hosted by the Permanent Representation of the Federal Republic of Germany to the European Union. The workshop had the following objectives:

- a) **to facilitate an international exchange** of overarching strategic policy initiatives focusing on urban sustainable development on the UN, EU, Member State and local level, covering environmental issues, regional development, economic and social policy fields;
- b) **to foster networks** of experts in EU, national and local administrations to encourage stronger co-operations and alliances between EU, national and local policies for urban SD; and
- c) **to suggest options** to link policy levels and governance structures for urban SD.

In total, 58 participants from 9 European countries attended the workshop. The workshop sought to provide an orientation for SD policy-makers in the debate around urban sustainable development and future policy options towards sustainable cities. In addition, it brought together actors from different fields to discuss and learn from their respective experiences to develop suggestions to better serve SD objectives. The workshop’s objectives were explored in the following 4 sessions:

- Session 1: Urban sustainable development – city networks and their approaches, structures and governance experiences**
- Session 2: Group work: urban sustainable development and its governance needs**
- Session 3: Global and European frameworks for urban sustainable development**
- Session 4: Plenary discussion: How to foster effective governance for urban SD in Europe?**

The outcomes of the workshop aim to assist for SD policy-makers in the debate around the complex and broad topic of urban sustainable development, with a special focus on the potentials and challenges of a multi-level governance approach to the issue.

Similar to previous ESDN workshops, this event dealt with the themes in different formats: keynote presentations highlighted general issues and key aspects of the workshop theme; interactive group work specified aspects of the workshop theme more in-depth; summaries of the results of the group work were used for immediate reactions and further discussions during the workshop; and, interactive discussion formats throughout the workshop allowed participants to reflect upon issues raised and to develop recommendations.

The full documentation of the 10th ESDN Workshop 2014 can be found at the [ESDN homepage](#) and includes: (i) Workshop Agenda; (ii) Workshop Discussion Paper; (iii) PowerPoint slides of all keynote and other presentations; (iv) Workshop Report; (v) Participant list; and, (vi) a photo documentation of the event.

Opening and orientation



In the opening, **GUIDO PERUZZO** (*Permanent Representation of Germany to the EU in Brussels*) welcomed the workshop participants on behalf of the Permanent Representation of Germany to the EU in Brussels. He stressed the importance of urban SD on the agenda at the international, European and national level. Mr Peruzzo concluded by expressing how strongly Germany considers the issue of urban sustainable development for SD policy-making in general, and argued that the topic is crucial for the policy debates in Germany in the follow-up to Rio+20.

The ESDN co-chair, **WOLFRAM TERTSCHNIG** (*Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management, Austria*) welcomed the workshop participants on behalf of the ESDN Steering Group, and thanked the German Permanent Representation for their hospitality and interest in the workshop topic. He provided a short overview of the main objectives of the ESDN, its work on SD issues in Europe, and its role in connecting national and sub-national levels across Europe on exchanging information and knowledge about SD. He also stressed the importance of cities in the implementation of SD on the ground. An intensive collaboration between the different political levels for achieving SD in Europe is necessary and needs continuous engagement.



JÖRG MAYER-RIES (*Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety, Germany*) welcomed the participants on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety Federal. He stressed the importance of urban SD governance and described the workshop objectives by exploring the meaning, the linkages and the challenges of urban SD among the national, the European, the international and the local level. In this context, he referred to an international meeting at UN level in New York he recently attended that focused on the role of cities in light of the further development of the post-2015 agenda. He pointed out that

cities will represent 70-80% of human population and that cities already are and further will be an important actor on social and environmental issues. He argued that the national, regional and international levels should all be considered as necessary for addressing urban SD issues: the multi-

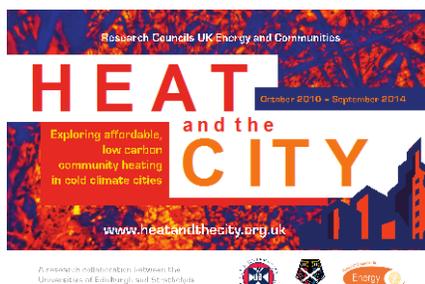
level governance and the cooperation among levels are crucial in his view, and need to be further improved and developed. Finally, he provided several questions with the purpose of offering reflection points to the participants, such as: What is urban SD about? What is the integrative approach that needs to be taken? What governance structures should, therefore, be developed? How is research moving forward? What is the role of the SDGs discussions on urban SD?

JANETTE WEBB (*Institute of Governance, School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh, UK*) keynoted on urban SD with the intention of providing participants with a common understanding of the main issue of the topic. Firstly, she provided brief introductory information about cities and urbanisation processes. She stressed the role of cities as very intensive and resource-consuming actors. She argued that an accelerating process of urbanisation and sub-urbanisation is in place, such as, for instance, the fact that China planned 400 cities in the next 20 years. She continued arguing that, historically, processes like those mentioned meant accelerating resource consumption: a ‘business as usual’ scenario was likely to mean (i) Increasingly unstable climate; (ii) more inequality; and, (iii) violent conflict. Ms Webb then portrayed the situation in Europe where action seemed to be slow: 1) Continuing subsidies for fossil fuels (IEA); 2) consumption footprints are increasing; 3) poor record on energy efficiency; 4) financial investments not prioritising resilience; and 5) EU dropped 2030 binding renewables and energy efficiency targets for Member States. She continued by arguing that financial investment prioritises were still following carbon intensive projects and gave the examples of – among others – deep water drilling for oil, shale gas, or tar sands.



She then addressed the governance challenges for urban sustainable development that, ultimately, are related to scarcity of resources, to build urban resilience against environmental change and disasters, financial debts, and ecological debts that seem to be of secondary importance versus a continuous search for consumer-led growth. In this light, Ms Webb presented a “Social Science Perspective on Governance” that analyses the role of diversity, complexity and different political values in addressing collective action dilemmas, while it considers the range of public and private

agents and resources involved. Furthermore, this perspective takes into consideration a cycle of four main elements: (a) Mode of coordinating economic, political and social spheres; (b) partially-stabilised coalitions; (c) regulating allocation of resources; and (d) framing and addressing collective action problems. Therefore, she argued for reflexive and multi-level governance to be applied for sustainable cities. Finally, she



presented several results and considerations from the research programme “Heat and the City”, which examines the development of sustainable, low carbon heating in urban areas.

After this keynote speech, a lively *Q&A session* was held in a plenary setting. One participant asked



Ms Webb to clarify her key message to the plenary. Ms Webb replied by stressing the importance of properly embedding the SD perspective into the calculation of financial estimates of a municipality, especially emphasising the need for including long-term value into those calculations. Whilst affirming the focus on the multilevel governance aspects of urban sustainable development, another participant asked for some examples of involving sub-city levels, such as districts and coalitions. Ms. Webb referred to the example in her keynote about the ‘coalitions of the willing’ about working together with



different levels for urban SD.

Session 1: Urban sustainable development – city networks and their approaches, structures and governance experiences

After the welcome addresses, the overview on the workshop's objectives and the keynote on urban SD policy and governance issues in the opening session, **Session 1** comprised five brief keynote presentations of city networks. The PPT slides of some of these keynotes can be found in the [10th ESDN workshop section](#) of the ESDN homepage.

In his speech, **ADAM SZOLYAK** (*DG Energy, European Commission*) described the **Covenant of Mayors** from the European Commission perspective as an initiative that needed to be seen in light of the Europe 2020 strategy and the so-called '20-20-20 targets' of the climate and energy package. The Covenant of Mayors, as he explained, is not a city network as such, but represents the mainstream European movement involving local and regional authorities that voluntarily commit themselves to increasing energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy sources on their territories. Mr Szolyak stressed the role of the Covenant of Mayors as a mobilisation and dissemination platform



towards the 20-20-20 targets, together with the important feature of capacity building, which has an emphasis on long-term and integrated planning, and is about reconciling long-term and short-term initiatives with a focus on municipalities. In this light, he explained that the Covenant aims at municipalities regardless of their size (from large to small) while focusing very much on energy, which contains aspects of SD (i.e. wellbeing, economic opportunities). In his perspective, the Covenant also represented a reconciliation initiative for the three features of SD. Among its objectives, the Covenant of Mayors helps municipalities in understanding the right priorities on which they base their vision and supports the planning phase in which action plans and strategies are embedded.



In her presentation, **ANGELIKA POTH-MÖGELE** (*Council of European Municipalities and Regions, CEMR*) firstly explained that **CEMR** does not have individual membership but, as a major stakeholder organisation, represents 57 national associations from 41 European countries. Ms Poth-Mögele then described CEMR's work organisation which, since 2012, mainly follows two pillars (*lobbying* and *knowledge*) and five themes: 1) Democracy, citizenship and enlargement; 2) resource efficiency, climate and environment; 3) economic, social and territorial cohesion; 4) local and regional governments as employers and service providers; and 5) partnership, cooperation and world affairs. Furthermore, she

described that CEMR is covering the three pillars of SD issues, and the governance aspect as a sort of horizontal element, especially looking at democracy, citizenship and enlargement. She, then, stressed how CEMR's work is promoting an integrated approach: they aim to not deal with issues in isolation, but to identify and highlight the connection between different policies (e.g. mobility, air quality, noise, eco-design). Additionally, she mentioned CEMR's attention towards mid-term or long-term perspectives, and towards the global dimension. After highlighting CEMR's good collaboration with European institutions and other city networks and platforms, she closed her speech with concrete examples on successful governance to achieve urban SD/sustainable cities, such as the cooperation with the Reference Framework for European Sustainable Cities on supporting SD in urban areas or the promotion of the 'Governance in Partnership' concept.

MICHAEL KLINKENBERG (*Eurocities*), at first, presented the **Eurocities** Network, which was founded in 1986 and represents cities of over 250,000 inhabitants: they have 130 full members in 35 countries, representing 130 million citizens. As he explained, the network, which includes most of the European capital cities, provides a direct link to cities and has three main functions: a) to offer a dialogue with EU institutions; b) to provide a space for sharing and improving knowledge between cities; and, c) to facilitate collaborative projects among cities. The network works along six main areas, called 'forums', ranging from mobility to social affairs.



After providing some examples on how the network benefits its members, Mr Klinkenberg offered three main insights for successful governance for urban SD: First, he mentioned the importance of taking an integrated approach to urban issues that are able to combine actions on more aspects of sustainability. Secondly, he portrayed an example on the work done on urban air quality with the intention of highlighting the need for multi-level governance approaches. Finally, he showed the case for raising awareness among cities through good practices examples that facilitate action and help other cities to replicate valuable solutions.

In his presentation, **STEFAN KUHN** (*ICLEI-Europe*) reflected on the role of **ICLEI** as a network that, specializing on sustainable development, was able to have an impact as 'a concerted mass' of cities. Secondly, he highlighted that ICLEI represents a movement of cities with the purpose of inspiring each other. He then introduced several different actions and initiatives that ICLEI runs, for instance, on Local Agenda 21, sustainable procurement and climate adaptation at city level. Mr Kuhn underlined the positive cooperation between ICLEI, other city networks, and European institutions. Furthermore, he mentioned that ICLEI-Europe is



currently cooperating with the Sustainable Cities platform and facilitates the European Roundtable for local sustainability. Finally, he offered three key insights on successful governance for urban SD: Firstly, he argued that sustainable cities require a 'changed management' to being able to take on an integrative sustainable approach. Secondly, cities should form partnerships with local national institutions (i.e. universities and economic actors). Lastly, he argued for cities to concentrate on multi-level governance and become enablers of initiatives that involve a multitude of levels.



TERESA DORFNER (German Council for Sustainable Development) in her keynote presented the German Council for Sustainable Development and its work for a **network of German mayors** who are particularly committed to SD in their municipalities. She explained that the network has started in 2010 with the intention of including and engaging municipalities to have an impact on urban sustainability and an influence on the German sustainable development strategy. On the one hand, the network aims to foster dialogue between different political levels. On the other hand, as it includes the mayors of municipalities, it tries to be a flexible and fast

network in parallel with 'slower' formal institutional structure. The network provides a platform for several activities: work on common positions and strategies, discussions among mayors, creating a dialogue with government representatives for connecting the municipality level with the state level, having ad-hoc meetings, producing papers, and facilitating the coordination among mayors. Finally, she argued for the awareness raising aspect of the network that helps sustainability to be more visible, not only within municipalities, and also promotes it all over Germany.

Panel Discussion with representatives of city networks



After these five presentations, the panel discussion with the city network representatives was kicked off by the question: *Are cities hungry for connecting, exchanging and learning insights or are only a few engaged?*

Mr SZOLYAK argued that the voluntary approach of cities

committing to the Covenant of Mayors showed that cities are very hungry in this sense. However, he recognised that, the Covenant of Mayors being an initiative promoted by the EU Commission, this represents also a push and incentive to participate in it. **Ms POTH-MÖGELE** highlighted the necessity

to integrate all relevant players, hence, to find a balance between local levels, such as cities, and rural areas.

The moderator then asked *whether the development of a governance process was a priority for municipalities*. **Mr KUHN** argued that the style of governing in cities has dramatically changed over the last 40 years. In his view, local governance was becoming more transparent and local governments have the need to justify their decisions and actions towards the local residents. He, therefore, argued that currently more cooperation with many stakeholders was necessary. Furthermore, he also mentioned the problem of funding, which increased the need for cities to start partnerships, especially with the business world. **Ms DORFNER** added that, in her view, it is crucial to engage with and include frontrunners in urban SD activities. Finally, **Mr SZOLYAK** emphasized the role of citizens as they represent an important ‘watchdog’ function that keeps all mayors accountable to the public.

The moderator asked the panellists about *the provision of the supporting infrastructure and capacity building initiatives or whether there was a need for these structures to been put in place?* **Mr KLINKENBERG** argued for guiding, engaging and reaching out to cities, especially with the intention of informing and sharing their experiences. **Ms POTH-MÖGELE** added that cities had the responsibility to respond to their needs and organise their processes, and, therefore, to take decisions through democratically elected players who own a mandate. However, she stressed that cities also need to be taken accountable and responsible for their initiatives. **Mr KUHN** highlighted that the formation of the supporting infrastructure was in effect similar to an iterative ‘ping-pong’ and balanced process among front-runners and slow-runners, in which cooperation with pioneer cities seemed to be necessary.

Other questions were then raised from the audience to the panellists. Firstly, participants asked about the role of the Committee of the Regions in urban SD. Secondly, it was asked whether the city networks were reluctant of a European top-down steering process or if such a process is seen a useful. In accordance with this point, the concepts of subsidiarity and autonomy on local issues were mentioned.

Mr SZOLYAK emphasised that since the Covenant of Mayors was voluntary, no interference on subsidiarity principles was expected. He stressed that the new financial framework included more funds for the empowerment of the local level. **Ms POTH-MÖGELE** commented that after the economic and financial crises, CEMR’s members are still struggling and, therefore, are not in favour on more top-down legislation from the EU level, rather they would appreciate a period of consolidation of the current regulatory framework. **Mr KLINKENBERG** stressed that the real question was not about having continuously new and additional legislation, but rather having a regulatory framework that is able to solve local problems.

Session 2: Group work: urban sustainable development and its governance needs

In this session, participants split into working groups to reflect and discuss about the question:

“What are important insights and drivers for successful governance on urban SD/sustainable cities?”



At first, each table was asked to discuss the main question and then draft one key insight for successful governance on urban SD to be finally shared with the other working groups in a plenary setting. The WGs drafted seven key insights that were accompanied by a short explanation for each of them. The results are summarised in the following box:

Key insights for successful governance on urban SD

- Regional coordination & cooperation are important
- Change management → local leadership & driving multipurpose solutions
- Support to cities for integrated approach
- Long-term local vision / broad consensus / identification
- Governance in partnerships + leadership at all levels
- Trust and openness between all players
- Subsidiarity driven by sustainability criteria

Session 3: Global and European frameworks for urban sustainable development

Session 3 comprised five brief keynote speeches on different frameworks for urban SD on the global and the European level. The keynoters were also asked to reflect on (i) the role of cities as crucial actors for SD, (ii) what each of represented global/European had to offer for cities in order to achieve urban SD, and (iii) suggestions to achieve good collaborations between the different political levels for urban SD. The keynotes were then followed by a discussion among the five speakers and the participants.

FRÉDÉRIC VALLIER (*Council of European Municipalities and Regions, CEMR*) introduced the **Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments for the post-2015 development agenda in Habitat III**. The Taskforce is a group composed of representatives of local government associations committed to raising the level of presence of local and regional governments in the international development agenda and, particularly, in assuring that the views of territorial governments are reflected in the post-2015 and Habitat III process. Mr Vallier then mentioned briefly the history of the involvement of cities within the UN sustainable development agenda, starting from the Rio Conference in 1992, where, he said, mayors were invited for the first time to be part of the process. He then stressed that the creation of the mentioned Global Taskforce has the goal to bring in the voice of cities and to campaign for an urban SDG. Although not sure if the EU will support the campaign for an urban SDG, he expressed the intention of the Taskforce to partner up with the EU.



PAUL TIMMERS (*DG Communications Networks, Content and Technology - European Commission*) talked from the perspective of DG CONNECT, which is responsible for developing the policy framework to ensure that digital technologies improve sustainability in general, including energy security and resource utilisation. He described the objectives of the **European Innovation Partnership Smart Cities and Communities**, stressing the important part of information technology in this context. Mr. Timmers then explained the role of this EIP in accelerating full deployment of solutions that will help answering the challenges for energy and climate: cities, he said, will be crucial for winning over these challenges. In so doing, the Smart Cities and Communities EIP aims at (i) getting cities and the private sector to commit together

to advancing forward, (ii) co-funding for demonstration projects (via existing instruments), (iii) formulating European policy action on key bottlenecks, and (iv) coordinating existing portfolio of city initiatives. He emphasised that DG CONNECT was also looking for solutions to make cities better involved and informed. Finally, he highlighted that the new European Research and Innovation programme, Horizon 2020, presented great potential for research and innovation projects on smart cities.

ROBERT DONKERS (DG Environment, European Commission)

presented a number of **policy strategies and support for cities provided by DG Environment**.

Firstly, he emphasised the importance of the recently adopted 7th Environment Action Programme (EAP), which includes one objective on sustainable cities: Priority Objective 8 “*To enhance the sustainability of EU cities*”. This objective refers to the importance of cities in the context of an increasing population in urban areas and, hence, is closely connected to quality of life issues such as drinking-water quality, CO₂ emissions or the provision of infrastructure. Secondly, he argued that DG Environment is addressing several issues following a number of different modalities and means, especially by trying to bring together the diversity of concerns through discussion and by facilitating frameworks. He then listed several interesting potential actions from the viewpoint of the European level: (a) better coordination between different pieces of legislation; (b) building on existing initiatives and networks; (c) facilitating the sharing of best practice; (d) improving the knowledge base; (e) developing environmental performance criteria; and, (f) better information on EU funding possibilities.



CORINNE HERMANT-DE CALLATAY (DG Regional and Urban Policy, European Commission)

presented the perspective on European frameworks for urban sustainable development from the viewpoint of the **DG Regional and Urban Policy and their support for cities on sustainable development issues**.

Firstly, she mentioned several points on a shared European view on the importance of cities for SD as: 1) places of advanced social progress; 2) platforms for democracy, cultural dialogue and diversity; 3) places of green, ecological or environmental regeneration; and 4) places of attraction and engines of economic growth. Ms. Herman-de Callatay then introduced some challenges for SD at the urban level, such as economic decline or the increase of income disparities. Afterwards, she concentrated on what DG Regional and Urban Policy is offering for cities in order to achieve urban SD. She mentioned that a

large share of the ERDF funding was addressed to cities. In accordance, she pointed out three facts: firstly, every Member State was now obliged to devote at least 5% of total investments under ERDF towards integrated sustainable urban development. Secondly, she stressed that it was estimated that nearly half of future funding was spent in urban areas in one way or another. Thirdly, she explained that large investments of ERDF investments were directed to ICT, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and the low-carbon economy. In addition, she argued that several EU policies were dealing with the urban dimension. Finally, she reflected on the governance aspect and concentrated on how to achieve a good collaboration between the different political levels for urban SD. In this context, she suggested the adoption of an 'integrated territorial approach' within new governance frameworks, new ways of working across sectoral boundaries, with a wider set of partners, including citizens, that would focus on long-term shared diagnoses and objectives.

DELPHINE GAUDART (*Ministry of Territorial Equality and Housing, France*) presented the **Reference Framework for European Sustainable Cities (RFSC)** as a toolkit for an integrated approach. Firstly, she described the RFSC as an online toolkit designed to help cities promote and enhance their work on integrated sustainable development. Secondly, she explained that the RFSC represents a joint initiative of the Member States, the European Commission and European organisations of local governments. Thirdly, she also described the RFSC as a common space and language for cities interested in learning from each other, while respecting the diversity of local priorities.



Discussions with workshop participants

The keynotes were then followed by a discussion among the five speakers and the workshop participants.



Several questions were raised by the participants. Firstly, the panellists were asked to comment on the role of ‘territorial’ programmes, such as the INTERACT Programme that supports territorial cooperation between regions of the EU. **Ms HERMANT-DE CALLATAY**



commented that these programmes proved to be very successful in practice and supported many local initiatives. Then, **Mr VALLIER** mentioned that there were many programmes that had an important role. He also referred to the “twinning” movement, which started twinning municipalities from small towns to big cities. Then, participants mentioned that a process is required to understand if all these initiatives, programmes, and organisations



complement each other.. Finally, participants referred to the importance of impact assessments of funded projects in order to learn for future occasions. In their final comments, the panellists highlighted the necessity to involve more citizens and open dialogues, to use evidence-based policymaking, and to follow a long-term vision.



Session 4 – Plenary discussion: How to foster effective governance for urban sustainable development?

In Session 4, participants were invited to work in groups to reflect about the questions: “*What needs to be done at the European, National, and Local level to foster effective governance for urban SD?*”. They were asked to write their responses on coloured moderation cards and to report their results back to the plenary.



After discussions within the mentioned working-groups setting, each table produced several ideas that were then clustered under

four different headings: ‘European’, ‘National’, ‘City/Region’, and ‘Other’. In the following boxes, we report on the outcomes for each heading:

At the European level

- Engage in an agenda setting process around common regional issues, providing data and sharing experiences;
- Increase complementarity of EU mechanisms and tools;
- Renewed EU SDS should reframe the urban sustainable development challenge (and many others);
- Agenda for urban issues needed on the EU level.

At the National level

- Allow local and regional authorities better access to EU decision making (e.g. on new legislation);
- Supportive framework for regional cooperation instead of negative local authorities competition;
- Inform, facilitate, enable;
- No duties without funding – more money for sustainable investment (from school to infrastructure).

At the City/Regional level

- Enable structures for sustainable living (e.g. community housing);
- Foster collaboration in the region, maximise use of available tools;
- Rural-urban partnerships; peri-urban/urban for integrated territorial development.

Other issues on effective governance for urban SD

- Engage in the urban and governance dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) debate;
- Prudent public-private partnerships.

Conclusions and next steps

JÖRG MAYER-RIES and **WOLFRAM TERTSCHNIG** thanked the participants for the open and fruitful discussions. Both remarked that many important questions on how the different political levels can better collaborate for SD, in general, and urban SD, in particular, were debated during the workshop. The ESDN, with this workshop and an ESDN Quarterly Report on the same topic, has been trying to provide a platform for debate on urban SD that, hopefully, will foster new avenues for cooperation and exchange.



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