

# EU Agenda for 'Cities of the Future'

**W**e all have seen images of the Earth at night from space. The blaze of billions of lightbulbs, broadcasting from our urban centres, illustrates the dense urban network. A sight both beautiful and telling of our increasingly urban existence. Currently, over 70% of Europe's population lives in cities. This is forecast to increase to over 80% by the middle of the century.

By **Carlos Moedas**, European Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation

In his book *Urban Express*, Swedish economist and writer, Kjell Anders Nordström argues that cities rather than nations are the new power houses. The exponential rise of city populations is producing experiential knowledge: the kind of knowledge that comes from contact with a wide range of cultures, traditions, systems and ideas. Knowledge that can't be taught in a classroom, but that is vital for innovation. According to Nordström, cities have the supreme advantage of bringing both taught knowledge and experiential knowledge into the same space. If cities are set to become more powerful, more relevant, the question then is: how can we improve the quality of life for everyone living in urban areas without increasing the burden on our planet, while adapting to people's changing needs? Part of the solution has to be innovation.

## Cities as open innovation ecosystems

Cities can be re-designed – cities can evolve – according to the needs identified their inhabitants, rather than designed by a privileged few. Cities can benefit greatly from open innovation ecosystems. Communities interacting and networked across all walks of life: digital and physical. We need to make sure we ask our fellow citizens these kinds of questions. And then we need to make sure we listen to them! In December 2014, an article entitled *If women built cities, what would our urban landscape look like?* published in the *Guardian*, began trending. The article concluded: "Nowhere in the world has a city been conceived and constructed along the lines that [...] women planners would like." That's incredible when you think about it. I imagine no city has ever been conceived the way nature would like either. Or the way children would like. Or the way a single father would like. Or the way a scientist would like.

We are moving towards high-tech digital cities. Nowadays, there's an app to order your morning coffee. To check what time your bus will arrive. To reserve a co-working space. To pay your bills. To book a place to stay for the night. Technology is moving quickly, but so is human behaviour and human expectations with it. Our cities have to be

just as fast at adapting to the needs of people and to the needs of an environment increasingly under strain. We are lucky that 30 years of transnational EU research on sustainable urban development has financed hundreds of projects. Creating a wealth of knowledge and inspiring ideas. European research and innovation are, quite simply, the best way to imagine, test and provide solutions. The best way to make increased urban living a way to pool our resources, rather than deplete them.

## 21st century urban challenges

In line with President Juncker's plans, European research and innovation will help the EU Urban Agenda for 'Cities of the Future' to succeed: bringing together scientists, planners, businesses and city-dwellers to solve 21st century urban challenges. And it is our cities and regions who will conduct that research and innovation!

Both Commissioner Crețu and I want to get Horizon 2020 and the European Structural and Investment Funds working in tandem, so your regions have more opportunities to foster home-grown talent and ideas! Jane Jacobs, the brilliant author of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, describes life on the sidewalk as: "An intricate ballet, in which individual dancers [...] all have distinctive parts, which miraculously reinforce each other and compose an orderly whole."

My ambition is to continuously support the efforts of European cities as innovation hubs. This is a long-term commitment that I cannot deliver alone. This can only be delivered with the Committee of the Regions on board. So let's use research and innovation to build cities as nature would have them and as their people would imagine them! Let's reimagine what progress and prosperity look like!



European Commissioner Carlos Moedas addressing the 113th Plenary Session of the CoR

# EU Urban Agenda: “Commission proposal needed in 2016”, says Bas Verkerk

“**W**e wholeheartedly welcome the European Parliament vote on 9 September in favour of the timely launch of an EU Urban Agenda. The adopted report takes on board all key requests formulated by local and regional representatives in relation to identifying clear and shared objectives on sustainable urban development, to be achieved by better coordinating all EU policies impacting on cities”, commented the rapporteur of European Committee of the Regions on the Urban Agenda, Bas Verkerk, Mayor of Delft (NL/ALDE) adding that: “Now we expect that the Commission includes a proper proposal in its work programme 2016”.

Mr Verkerk has stressed how “the intense cooperation among the CoR and the European Parliament allowed to set a clear path to move ahead after more than 20 years of resolutions and debates”. The CoR has been calling upon the European Commission to present an integrated Urban Agenda for the EU since the adoption of Mr Verkerk opinion at June 2014 plenary. Significant progress was made in the past months

also thanks to the CoR cooperation with the Latvian Presidency, who was particularly attentive to this issue. “The Urban Agenda should now be drafted in close cooperation with European cities” said the rapporteur, adding that: “This involvement should ensure a balanced approach to challenges such as the establishment of functional regions and agglomerations and the renewing of the relationship between local government and society”.

The main CoR input that were taken on board by MEPs focus on multi-level governance, on the involvement of decentralised levels of government in the impact assessments of new policies, the need to develop new indicators alongside GDP as well as to collect adequate data to assess urban areas more accurately; the need to respect the Code of Conduct on Partnership when implementing programmes and projects supported by EU funding and, more specifically, the need for greater involvement of towns and cities in implementing structural funds programmes. ■



Bas Verkerk, Mayor of Delft

## OPEN DAYS goes urban!

**I**n line with the widely discussed EU Urban Agenda and continuing with the CITIES Forum held for the second time by the European Commission’s Regional and Urban Policy DG last June, the OPEN urban DAY acts as a platform for practitioners, officials and experts from all over Europe interested in the urban dimension of EU policies. It is the perfect occasion for urban stakeholders at local, national and European level to exchange, debate and network about future challenges for European cities. To get participants inspired, this series of different events and interactive workshops is organised in different buildings in the Brussels “Canal Area”, a newly redesigned urban space. This industrial zone in transformation offers numerous opportunities for investment, innovation and ambitious projects in all fields. The authorities in Brussels have increased investments to provide a favourable environment for residents, businesses and visitors, with the support of the European Structural and Investment Funds. The OPEN urban DAY will be about exchanging and networking but also exploring, understanding and learning. The participants have the opportunity to visit some interesting projects, examples of good practices to tackle challenges faced by urban areas across Europe.