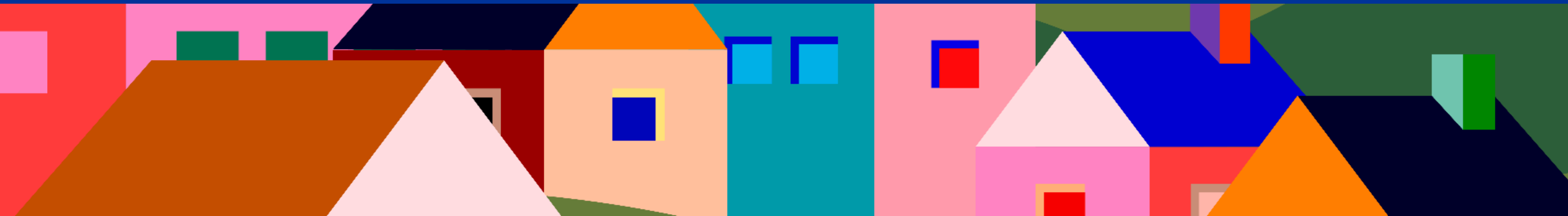


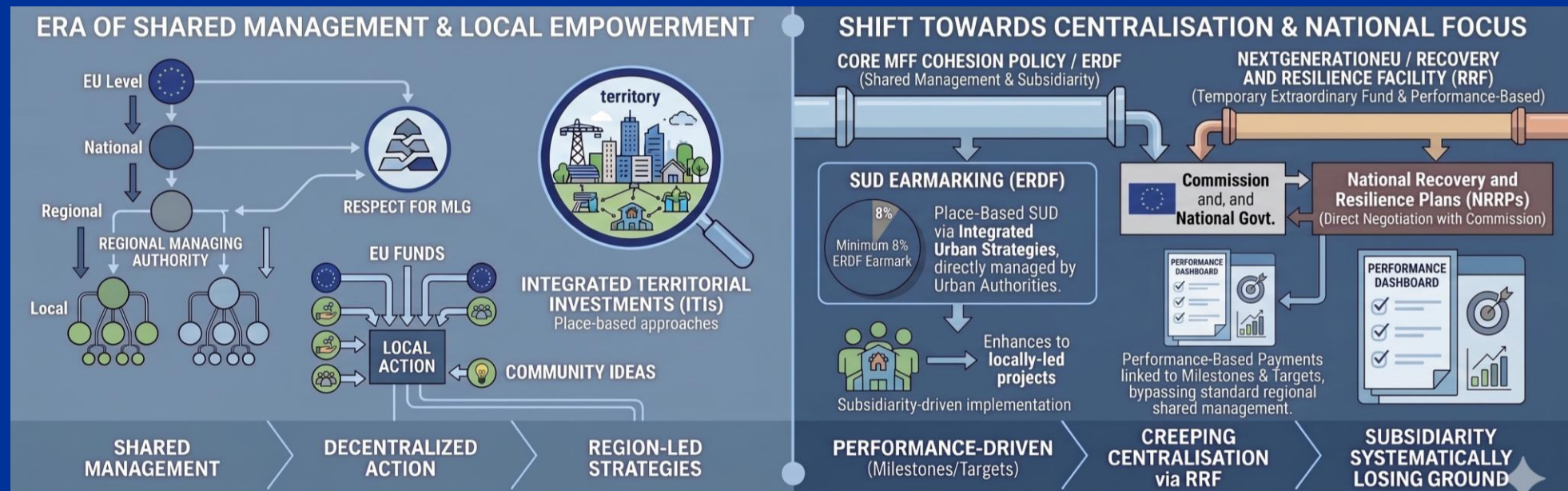
URDICO from a Policymaking Perspective

Benedek Jávor, Head of the Representation of Budapest to the EU

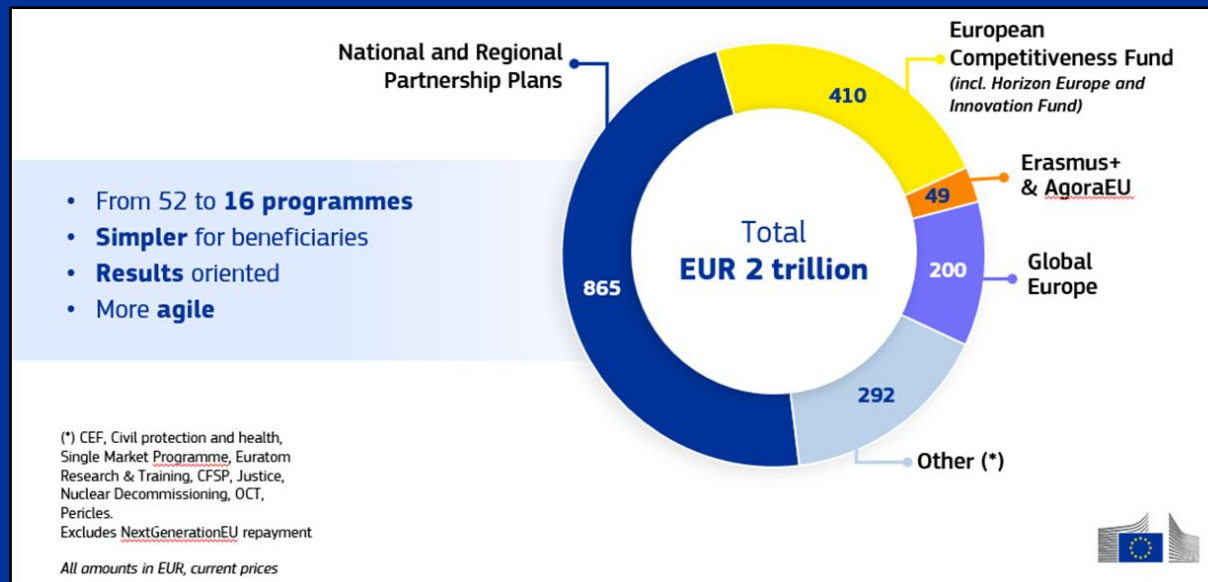


The Evolution of Urban Cohesion: 2014-2020 vs. 2021-2027

- **2014–2020:** Decentralization, respect for MLG, integrated territorial investments (ITIs), and local empowerment.
- **2021–2027:** ERDF with SUD earmarking, but creepy centralization after RRF
- Subsidiarity is systematically losing ground across Europe



The new MFF (2028-2034)



Source: Eurocities

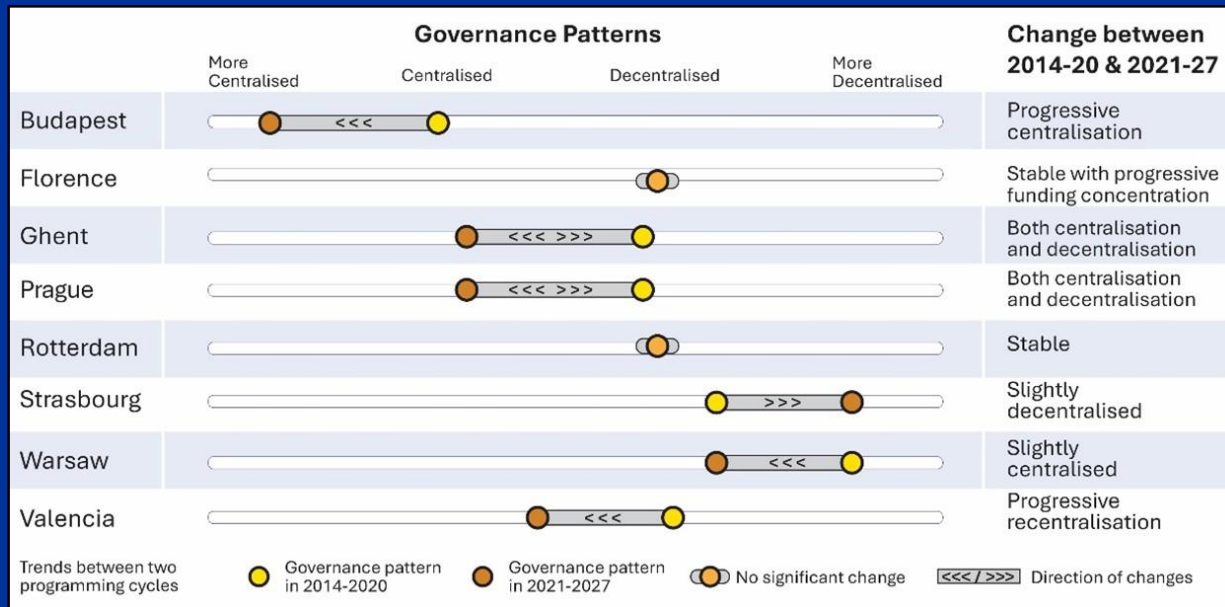
- **16 July 2025:** European Commission proposal for the next MFF
- Drafted through a very centralised process – **National and Regional Partnership Plans (NRPPs)** – simplification?
- MSs should prepare and submit their own NRP Plan: possible to include regional and territorial chapters, but **IT IS NOT A REQUIREMENT**👉
- Participation of local authorities depends on national governments
- **Cities' priorities are left out: no mandatory urban chapter, no earmarking of funding for cities ...**

The relevance of URDICO to the next MFF

- Go beyond political positioning from the cities' perspective: provide **evidence-based arguments** showing why the NRPP concept is problematic and potentially risky for cities
- A diverse, international consortium covering most of Europe geographically – cities with different structures and problems



Main findings



Source: ESPON (2026), URDICO - Urban Dimension of Cohesion Policy and other EU programmes, Final Report.

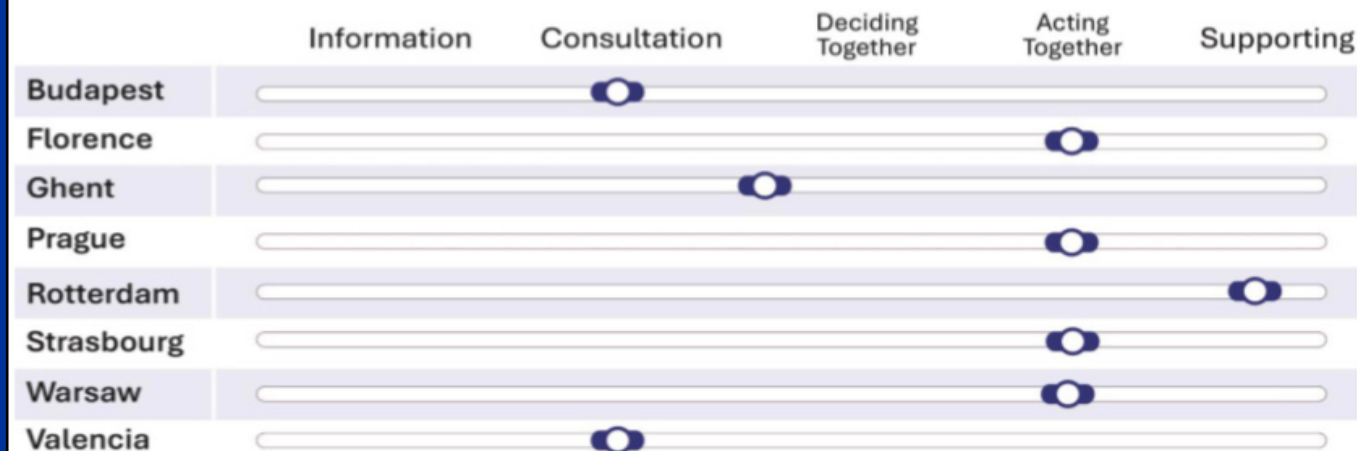
- When cities are directly involved in delivering Cohesion Policy, implementation is usually more effective and contextually appropriate.
- Urban involvement can enhance policy relevance, integration, and territorial impact.
- The **Integrated Territorial Investment (ITI)** proved to be an effective instrument to combine funding from different priorities or programmes.
- The **Functional Urban Area (FUA)** governance is considered of strategic importance to tackle territorial challenges.

Why Local Autonomy Matters

- **Direct Control:** Cities deliver more efficient, context-appropriate green and social transitions.
- **The Bottleneck:** Centralized allocation leads to strategic mismatch and bureaucratic delays.
- **The Warning:** Top-down management alienates local citizens from EU outcomes.

Figure 4.4

Cities' Participation in the EU Cohesion Policy programming



Source: author's own elaboration.

Source: ESPON (2026), URDICO - Urban Dimension of Cohesion Policy and other EU programmes, Final Report.

Conclusions

The examples of URDICO show that cities are capable of taking direct responsibilities, like Managing Authority or Intermediate Body roles.

The essential factors for the effective role of cities in Cohesion Policy delivery:

Strong partnership and continuous engagement: stronger role in the design and implementation of EU CP

Effective multilevel and collaborative governance

Clear and stable funding perspectives: urban earmarking, direct funding, fit-for-purpose instruments

Decentralisation, constructive political cooperation

Place-based approach and flexibility in EU CP management



Recommendations for the EU

Mandatory Co-Design	Legally enforce the partnership principle between states and cities.
Direct Access	Scale up direct , centralized EU funding channels to municipalities.
Indicator Reform	Move beyond GDP/capita to measure localized metropolitan inequalities .
Smart Conditionalties	Decouple national rule-of-law sanctions from local final beneficiaries .
Protected Management	Redirect frozen national funds to be managed directly by the EU or independent bodies .
PO5 Ringfencing	Guarantee a mandatory minimum share for local territorial development.

Shaping the next MFF (2028-34)



Drafted ~50 amendments
based on the findings of
URDICO

Defending the Partnership Principle, Multi-Level Governance, subsidiarity, and the decentralization of fund management.

Advocating for direct funds, mandatory urban ring-fencing, and safeguarding mechanisms to codify urban challenges as a structural priority.



Consultations with rapporteurs, shadows, and political groups, securing successful text inclusions in the EP Interim Report.



Advocacy & Alliance-Building

Securing the Commission's Backing:

Direct meetings with European Commission EVP Raffaele Fitto

Influencing Legislative Materials:

Data was officially integrated into the European Parliament BUDG committee briefing and used to shape the EESC opinion on the new EU Cities Agenda.

Direct Member State Engagement:

Presented comparative territorial results directly to the EU's Directors-General for Urban Matters (DGUM) in Cyprus.

Cross-Party Political Advocacy:

Mayors coordinated lobbying across EPP, S&D, and Renew MEPs within the EP Urban Forum

Media & Public Dissemination:

Issued multiple articles across prominent press outlets and municipal platforms

High-Level Event:

An MEP-hosted public event at the European Parliament on 30 June 2026 with the participation of EPP, S&D, Greens and Renew.

Future Prospects



European Parliament

backs stronger Partnership Principle and MLG, and supports more Direct Funding



Commission

is interested in the Safeguarding Mechanism, but pushes for RRF-style centralisation of funds



Council

in general favour of centralisation
15 October 2026: EUCO – MFF negobox

- Future of the European Urban Initiative is unknown
- **Bottom line:** Parliament is a strong ally, but trialogues will be challenging
- **The proposal is currently under consideration by the European Parliament and the Council.**



ESPON



Co-funded by
the European Union
Interreg

Thank you!

For more information visit us at:
www.espon.eu