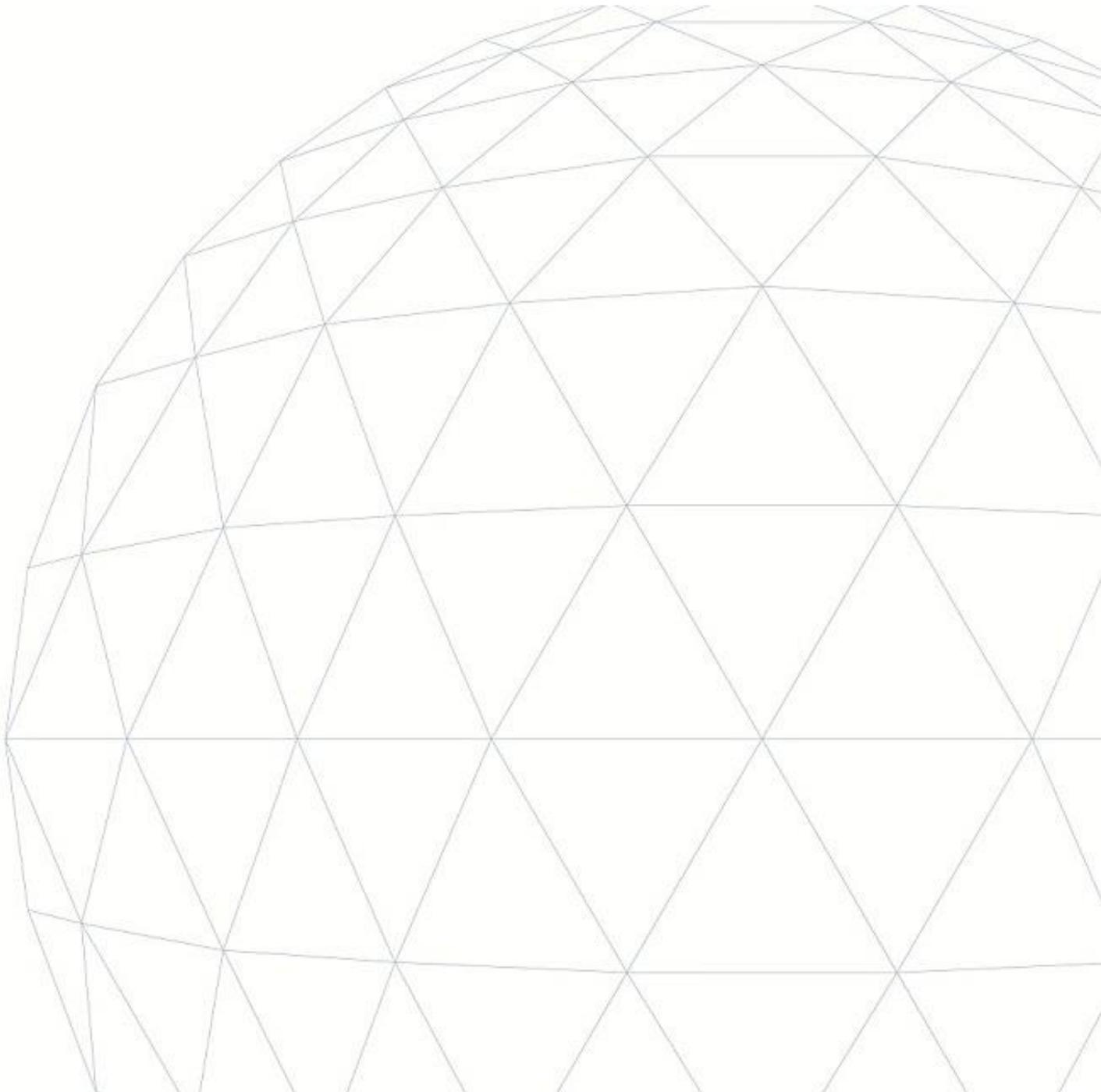




Ex-Ante Evaluation of URBACT III

Draft Final Report- March 2014



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1.0 Introduction

This draft final report summarises the overall observations and recommendations coming from the ex-ante evaluation of URBACT III. It provides an overview of all the comments provided on the draft Operation Programme (OP) for URBACT III up until mid- March 2014 and highlights the main remarks made by the ex-ante evaluators.

European Commission Guidance¹ states that the ex-ante assessment is an iterative process which should inform the development of the OP on an on-going basis rather than simply assessing the final OP document. In line with this guidance, the ex-ante evaluators have been commenting on various draft sections of the OP since October 2013 when early iterations of the emerging document were being produced.

More detailed comments have been made throughout the evaluation process on each of the draft OP sections meaning this report presents a summary of the main observations that have already been fed through to the drafting team authoring various parts of the OP (consisting of the Secretariat and external experts).

The ex-ante evaluation is being undertaken by Ecorys who were commissioned by the URBACT Secretariat in August 2013.

1.1 Aims of the Ex-ante evaluation

Ex-ante evaluations are required by European legislation as part of the process of developing OPs which utilise European Structural and Investment Funds. The ex-ante evaluation of the URBACT III programme is an independent assessment of the emerging OP which ultimately aims to improve the design of the URBACT III programme. The overall aim of the ex-ante evaluation of URBACT III is therefore to enhance the quality of the programme for the 2014-2020 programming period. The external nature of the ex-ante process is important as it provides a critical friend role to those producing the draft OP by providing various comments and recommendations which should be considered throughout the different stages of the OPs development.

The ex-ante evaluation of URBACT III is following guidance from the European Commission on the ex-ante process². This guidance identifies a number of key themes which the ex-ante process needs to address which are summarised below:

- The Programme strategy of URBACT III
- The indicators, monitoring and evaluation used for URBACT III

¹ The Programming Period 2014 – 2020: Monitoring and Evaluation of European Cohesion Policy: ERDF, ESF, Cohesion Fund: Guidance Document on Ex-ante Evaluation, European Commission, 2013

² <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=7858&langId=en>

- The consistency of financial allocations linked to the Programme
- The contribution URBACT III will make to the Europe 2020 strategy³.

The ex-ante evaluation guidance also states that a Strategic Environmental Assessment is required for OPs as part of the process although this is not part of the work of Ecorys.

Between August 2013 and March 2014 the following main tasks have been undertaken by the ex-ante evaluators:

- Provision of detailed written comments on draft sections 1 to 8 using a comments log, as well as a review of the budget simulations provided to Member States to be used to form the basis of section 3 of the OP. The comments log provides detailed commentary on each draft section, provides a set of recommendations for consideration as well providing an opportunity for the drafting team to respond to each comment provided by the ex-ante evaluators. In total 70 detailed comments have so far been provided to the OP drafting team up until March 2014 along with more minor editing comments on sections using track changes.
- Attendance at a series of meetings in Paris with those within the drafting team developing various sections of the OP to both observe and provide comment on discussions and key points attached to the emerging OP. The ex-ante evaluators have also attended a number of JPWG meetings, a consultation event for EU level stakeholders to gain their views and inputs into the new URBACT programme as well as meetings between the URBACT Secretariat and DG Regio at the European Commission which again discussed various aspects of the emerging OP.
- Development of a consultation with both city networks across the EU as well as a selection of organisations supported through URBACT II projects. The aim of this consultation was to collect and analyse the views and opinions of external people on the emerging URBACT III programme and further inform the ex-ante evaluator's views on the draft OP. This consultation was undertaken in January and February 2014 and a total of 18 stakeholders provided written feedback to a series of questions posed. It is proposed that the outcomes of this consultation is annexed as part of the final report.

One final ex-ante report will be produced as part of this process that will go as an Annex to the main OP document submitted to the Commission. However, this final report which will be produced in May, is unlikely to include any major comments as it is envisaged that

³ The ex-ante guidance also states a need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment although this is not part of the study requirements as set out in the original invitation to tender.

all key comments that the ex-ante process has highlighted would have already been dealt with in the final draft of the OP being submitted to the Commission in June. It will therefore partly be an account of the ex-ante evaluation process.

1.2 Content of this report

This report provides a summary of all the comments provided to the drafting team between October 2013 and March 2014. **Please note that the comments provided for Sections 1 and 2 have already been considered by the drafting team meaning these comments are included in the latest draft of the OP** (dated 21st February 2014). The comments provided for the first two sections of the OP have been included in this report to show the nature of the observations made through the ex-ante evaluation process. The drafting team are currently dealing with comments on Sections 4 onwards to be incorporated into the next draft of the OP.

2.0 Comments on Section 1: Strategy for the cooperation programme's contribution to the Union Strategy for Smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and the achievement of economic, social and territorial cohesion

The main aim of Section 1 of the OP is to look at how the URBACT III's programme strategy is contributing to the delivery of the Unions strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and to the achievement of economic, social and territorial cohesion. It also provides an evidence base to help identify the need for the URBACT III programme including an explanation of the key urban issues that need to be tackled.

In summary, Ecorys provided the following key comments on the draft section 1 in October 2013⁴. **Please note that these comments provided in October have all been dealt with in further iterations of the OP.**

- 1 There was a need for a short summary explanation in the section on how URBACT III will actually contribute to Europe 2020. The text in the early draft explained what Europe 2020 was but then stopped short of talking about URBACT III's contribution to the strategy being realised. It was suggested that a short summary was provided on how the programme will help the strategy to be realised (focussing on URBACT III providing a mechanism for stakeholders to get involved in developing and implementing urban policy, stimulating the transfer of new and innovative ideas that directly helped deliver smart, sustainable and inclusive growth within Europe).
- 2 There was no mention of other European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) programmes aimed at stimulating the exchange of learning in the early draft of section 1. Although the draft OP is obviously focussed on URBACT itself, it would be useful to acknowledge that the programme does not work in isolation on helping cities, regions and Member States link up with one another and transfer knowledge. It was suggested that reference to these other instruments was included and that it was made clear that URBACT III would be part of a wider ETC framework. This would include INTERREG but also other city networks working at Member State level.
- 3 More clarity was needed to explain the target group of URBACT III (ie individuals rather than cities per se and also its focus on certain types of individuals such as city managers, city teams, elected representatives and other urban stakeholders). The early draft section was unclear in terms of 'who' or 'what' the main beneficiaries

⁴ Detailed comments on each paragraph of draft sections were provided through the *comment log*.

of the programme were and it was suggested that more text was provided on this issue.

- 4 More emphasis could have been given in the early draft of section 1 on how important cities are to the whole Member State. The early draft section on the overall need for URBACT III could be strengthened if more information was put on how cities are a key part of the economic performance of Member States and that they therefore need to be a key part of the EU policy agenda.
- 5 There was a need to link the thematic challenges facing cities which is highlighted in the draft section with the work of URBACT III (ie to clarify that the challenges explained in the text will be directly addressed by URBACT). The draft section stated the thematic challenges facing cities relatively well but did not then go on to state and summarise what URBACT will do to help tackle them.
- 6 There was a need to provide a number of key statistics to explain more about how cities have been affected by the recession. It was suggested that the section would benefit from figures (gained from Eurostat) to demonstrate the effects of the economic recession on cities and to highlight that city populations have particularly suffered from poor economic performance across Europe. This would again help demonstrate the underlying need for URBACT III.
- 7 If available, there is a need to provide any quantifiable evidence of the need for URBACT in terms of tackling identified weaknesses in the skills, knowledge, and capacity of urban development stakeholders. It was therefore suggested that statistics gleaned from work that URBACT I or II has done with participating cities is used to highlight why programmes such as URBACT III are needed to raise the capacity of city managers/ urban stakeholders.

All of the key points highlighted above on the first drafts of Section 1 were considered by the URBACT Secretariat who altered text accordingly in further drafts of the first section.

The following main comments were suggested in January for the latest draft of Section 1⁵: **Please note that these comments provided in January have all been dealt with in further iterations of the OP.**

- 8 In the section on URBACT III's contribution to Europe 2020 (page 3) it was further recommended that a statement around the importance of cities in helping reach Europe2020 targets was included in this text. Statistics (from Eurostat) on the proportion of GDP and/ or jobs of Member States that are found in their cities or the proportion of greenhouse emissions which urban areas are responsible for would

⁵ Latest draft from late January 2014.

further strengthen the case for a programme that is specifically focussed on urban issues. Then targets relating to Europe2020 (i.e. 75% of the 20-64 year olds to be employed or reduce greenhouse emissions by 20%) would become more relevant to the section and the programme overall.

- 9 The Commission OP guidance⁶ states that Section 1 needs to explain the 'missing links in cross boarder infrastructure'. It was suggested that a short piece of text is included in Section 1 briefly referencing existing city networks at national and EU level and how URBACT III will fill certain gaps and failures in supporting cities transfer knowledge. It was suggested that a short piece of text is also included on the situation 'without an URBACT III' (ie cities would not transfer or share knowledge, city managers would work in isolation, stakeholders across Europe would develop weaker urban strategies etc). This would help the reader to understand the 'missing links' and gaps more easily.
- 10 It was also suggested that needs 1 and 3 are too similar ('1. cities need to enhance their capacity to develop and implement integrated urban policies' and '3. Cities need support for implementation of their integrated urban strategies and actions'). These two needs should be slightly reworked to differentiate them more.
- 11 The four main areas of need set out on pages 12 to 14 of the draft section are strong but could be further strengthened by more specific information on the capacity deficiencies of different types of stakeholders, types of cities and types of Member States. Even if there is no quantifiable data on skills levels at these different levels, a short commentary recognising the different needs of stakeholders found in small/ large cities, in newer/ older Member States and the differences between elected representatives and Local Authorities would enrich this section.

⁶ Fiche 1B- Draft model for the cooperation programme under the European territorial cooperation goal (Version 2 – 28 June 2013)

3.0 Comments on Section 2: Description of Priority Axis

Section 2 of the OP describes which priority axis URBACT III will focus on as well as the specific objectives corresponding to the investment priority and the expected results that are foreseen.

In summary, Ecorys provided the following key comments on the draft section 2 in November 2013. **Please note that these comments provided in November have all been dealt with in further iterations of the OP.**

- 12 There was a need to define what 'improved quality' means as this term is used throughout Section 2 when referring to the goals of URBACT III (e.g *improving the quality of strategies*). There was a need to clarify what an 'improved quality' urban strategy would look like (i.e. being more relevant to need, containing more innovative actions, being better evidenced?). It was recommended that a short piece of text helping the reader of the section to understand this reoccurring term would strengthen the section overall.
- 13 In the section which deals with *programme specific result indicators* the sources of data used to evidence the achievement of targets could also include evaluations of URBACT III projects. To truly understand whether indicators such as 'new practices being transferred' or 'cities more able to respond to changing circumstances' are being achieved then evaluation work will need to be undertaken. It was therefore suggested that this source is included in some of the tables.
- 14 When developing the objectives and results of URBACT III there is a need to ensure that these two terms are not mixed up or confused. For example, the result of 'practitioners having better access to knowledge and know how on sustainable urban development' is more of an objective and needs to be changed to reflect what will actually result in practitioners having better knowledge and know how (i.e. this will lead to improved urban development policies or help ensure stronger city administrations etc).
- 15 There is assumption throughout Section 2 that the reader knows the URBACT programme relatively well as it uses terms such as LAPs, LSGs, capitalisation and communication with little explanation about what these terms are. A brief definition of these URBACT specific terms is required or more generic terms produced so that a stakeholder unfamiliar to URBACT can easily relate to the OP.
- 16 Section 2.A.2 which deals with 'Actions to be supported under the investment priority' needs to be reworked to clarify what the proposed actions of the URBACT III programme actually are. It was suggested that this section is restructured. The use of a short description and bullet points under the action sections do not give the

reader enough detail and understanding about the actions being supported. The bullets under each action are also quite repetitive which may lead the reader to feel that each action is too similar. Without a better description of each individual action the reader may not understand the key differences between different actions – ie the difference between action planning networks, transfer networks, implementation networks. Although in reality there are distinct differences between these networks, this section needs to be revised to make them clearer and make them more distinctive.

All of the key points highlighted above on the first drafts of Section 2 were considered by the URBACT Secretariat who altered text accordingly in further drafts of this section.

The following additional comments were suggested to the draft of Section 2 reviewed in January. **Please note that these comments provided in January have all been dealt with in further iterations of the OP:**

- 17 It was suggested that the text at the beginning of the section is changed so that the reader is quickly able to understand the different objectives of URBACT III- and the results of each objectives. Giving a short introduction would help the section flow better and increase the understanding of the reader to the objectives being proposed as well as the 'programme logic' attached to URBACT III.
- 18 It was suggested that text is included in Section 2 to explain what EU cities will be like as a consequence of URBACT III helping them to produce 'better quality' strategies or helping them support 'stronger more informed city managers' (ie what are the outcomes of a 'better quality strategy' remembering that the strategy is not an end in itself). At the moment, the text stops short of explaining what the potential benefits of URBACT III will actually mean for cities and urban populations. For instance, a better strategy could lead to a city attracting more funding to help tackle key urban problems, that better projects are developed to help cities address economic decline, that communities in EU cities are more involved in designing solutions to address urban decline. Thus the end outcomes of the URBACT III programme needs to be explained slightly more clearly in order to strengthen the intervention logic found in the OP.
- 19 It was recommended that more space is given to explain how URBACT III will deal with the issue of the implementation of LAPs. Building on the above point, the end goal of URBACT III should not be the production of a series of LAPs but rather that these action plans will be implemented and ideas and activities mainstreamed into urban policy and practice. There should therefore be a short piece of text put into Section 2 which explains a focus on helping and encouraging projects to implement LAPs and in turn mainstream ideas, source extra funding etc.

- 20 The latest draft of Section 2 would benefit from slightly more detail on the proposed actions being put forward by URBACT III so that the reader can ‘picture’ what practical activities URBACT III will support and encourage. For instance, when referring to the ‘Summer University’ some text explaining what the university is (how many days, how many beneficiaries are likely to attend, examples of the proposed focus of sessions etc) would further strengthen the section.
- 21 There are times when LAPs should not be the only indicator to measure the achievement of certain results. For instance, in Objective 2 (*To improve the design of sustainable urban policies in cities*) both indicators should relate to improving urban strategies rather than just trying to improve LAPs. It is therefore suggested that these indicators should also include the aim of improving other strategies linked to urban issues.
- 22 This section still tends to use terms such as Local Action Plans which again assumes that the reader understands what these are. It is suggested a short description of a LAP is included when describing the actions.
- 23 The latest set of 4 Objectives are clear and easy to understand. There are a few minor changes to suggest:
- a. That ID Result in Objective 2 includes ‘Cities have designed integrated and sustainable urban policies drawing on EU good practice through participating in URBACT III’
 - b. On objective 2: it states URBACT will fill the ‘gap’ but it is not clear what gap this refers to meaning a short explanation needs to be given.

4.0 Comments on Section 3: The financial plan of the cooperation programme

This section of the draft OP will provide the financial plan for the URBACT III programme. It will include the sources of funding for the programme, a breakdown of funding by year and also by priority axis. The URBACT Secretariat has been working with Member States and the European Commission to gain agreement on the final financial allocations that will appear in the OP (including the ex-ante contributions). As such, the main agreements around the figures appearing in Section 3 of the OP have not been agreed or finalised. However, the ex-ante evaluators can comment on the draft budget simulations being proposed by the Managing Authority/ Secretariat.

The Secretariat has usefully provided four budget simulations to help inform discussion and debate among the Member States. These budget simulations are split into three areas - exchange, Technical Assistance (TA) and 'other'. Observations about these are as follows:

24 In the ex-ante evaluators view, the 'other' category is critical to the success of the URBACT III programme and therefore should be allocated a reasonable amount of the overall budget- ideally in line with simulation 2 or 4 (42-44%). Overall this category is important for the dissemination, communication and capitalisation elements of the URBACT III programme. These elements which include funding for the Summer University, National Training Schemes and URBACT National Dissemination Points (NDPs) are deemed important to the general success of URBACT III as they ensure that knowledge is actually shared and transferred. An area of development for previous URBACT programmes and projects (highlighted in various evaluations of both URBACT I and II) is the lack of transfer of activities, good practice and ideas from city to city. The challenge previous URBACT projects have had is therefore around 'externalising' and transferring knowledge which means dissemination will be critical. Without many of the items found under the 'other' category, there is a concern that URBACT III may well generate ideas and good practice but not stimulate the transfer of them into mainstreamed urban policy and practice. The ex-ante evaluators also note that the end beneficiaries of the 'other' categories are essentially cities and urban stakeholders. For instance, the work of the NDPs, the lead experts, the National training scheme, the website and the Summer University will all be focussed directly or indirectly on supporting cities and should not be seen as 'administration' at the programme level. This again means the 'other' category becomes more relevant and important. This point and the one made above therefore means that the ex-ante evaluator sees the second or forth simulation as being most advantageous.

- 25 It is also noted that there is only a small difference in the 'other' category between URBACT II and URBACT III allocations (if budget simulation 4 was agreed upon). For a programme of nearly 100 million euros this increase is relatively small.
- 26 The ex-ante evaluators also note that the TA allocation for URBACT III is proposed to be 8 million euros (an increase from URBACT II). The ex-ante evaluators are generally in agreement with an increase in the TA budget because of the following reasons:
- a. There is an increased responsibility for the Secretariat from URBACT II to URBACT III. The additional activities which the Secretariat will need to undertake include supporting an increase in the volume of projects, managing a programme with higher levels of funding than URBACT II as well as higher levels of administration linked to more demanding auditing requirements. On the latter point, it is understood that the number of projects to be audited will increase for URBACT III because of the introduction of a new methodology and different sample sizes. Because many of the projects which URBACT III will support will be classed as 'major projects' they will automatically be selected for audit. It is understood that the audit costs will be three times more for URBACT II than URBACT III which will again have ramifications for the overall TA budget.
 - b. Previous evaluations of the URBACT I and II programmes⁷ have all noted the importance of the Secretariat being properly resourced and that the overall effectiveness of the programme is linked to the work of the Secretariat. For example, the work the Secretariat carries out supporting projects with capitalisation, helping projects with dissemination and also ensuring good quality 'outputs' from projects (e.g. reports, LAPs etc) are all important but resource intensive activities. This on-going support is generally more intensive than other similar programmes and has been generally well received by projects– a point highlighted in previous evaluations of URBACT. It is therefore noted that an increase in staff members from the Secretariat may well have positive effects on the effectiveness and impact of the overall URBACT III programme.

The Ex-ante evaluators may provide further comments on Section 3 when the figures to inform this section of the OP are agreed upon by Member States.

⁷ Interim and ex-post evaluations of URBACT I and mid term evaluation of URBACT II.

5.0 Comments on Section 4: Integrated approach to territorial development

Section 4 of the OP describes how URBACT III with link with the integrated approach to territorial development including how the programme will approach community-led local development, Integrated Territorial Investment (ITIs) as well as work with macro-regional and sea basin strategies.

The key comments on Section 4 provided to those drafting the OP in mid March were as follows:

- 27 There are various sub sections in Section 4 that tend to relay back to the reader the detail of various EU Regulations and Articles which URBACT III will need to link with and support. Although it is recommended that these are briefly summarised in certain parts of Section 4, there tends to be too much descriptive text around the EU regulations. Instead Section 4 needs to explain more clearly how URBACT III will support or align to them and provide practical examples of the ways in which, for example, URBACT supports integrated urban development (see below). This recommendation will also help the OP document keep within the word limit provided.
- 28 Linked to the above point, it is recommended that the sub section describing how URBACT III supports integrated urban development is expanded. Consideration should be given to the following points- that URBACT will support integrated urban development in three ways. 1. Encourage participants to work horizontally across different policy sectors (rather than looking at urban issues from one viewpoint or discipline) 2. Encouraging vertical integration between different levels of city administration 3. Encouraging active engagement of a wide range of different stakeholders to identify both problems and solutions.
- 29 On the sub-section relating to the URBACT approach to community led local development it is recommended that more could be said about the involvement of local communities, citizens and elected representatives in URBACT III projects and activities. The present draft of this sub-section tends to focus more on the involvement of partners more widely. Although this is useful it is recommended that this sub-section is used to highlight how community level stakeholders will sometimes be involved in mechanisms such as Local Support Groups/ the development of Local Action Plans in order to fit more tightly to the requirements of this sub-section.

- 30 In addition, the same sub-section on how URBACT III will approach community led local development, more could be said on how URBACT III projects are also likely to provide good practice/ tools/ methods on promoting community led approaches across European cities. This means that as well as this sub-section describing how URBACT III projects themselves adopt community led approaches it can also highlight how URBACT can be a key mechanism to promote more community led approaches more widely in EU urban policy and practice.
- 31 On the sub-section on the URBACT III approach to use Integrated Territorial Investment it is suggested that more text is provided to actually describe how URBACT III will allow Member States to implement OPs in a cross cutting way and to draw on funding from several priority axes to ensure the implementation of an integrated strategy for a specific urban territory. Because a strong ITI requires an understanding of true integration, because it demands a strong knowledge of different funding mechanisms and because those involved in ITIs will need to understand how to tackle the cross cutting issues facing urban areas then the capacity and skills of urban stakeholders need to be high if this is to happen in reality. URBACT III can play a key part in raising the capacity and skills of urban stakeholders in the ITI agenda and this should be considered more in this sub-section.

6.0 Comments on Section 5: Implementing provisions for the cooperation programme

Section 5 of the OP for URBACT III describes the overall arrangements for implementing the programme including a section on its management and delivery infrastructure and arrangements for the management authority, monitoring committee and joint secretariat.

There were very few comments made by the ex-ante evaluators on Section 5 and the text contained in the draft produced in late February was seen as being relatively sound. The comments that were made were relatively minor and therefore are not covered in this summary report. The only two notable comments on Section 5 to consider were as follows:

- 32 In the sub-sections on both monitoring and evaluation more could be explicitly said about how these arrangements would help pick up and identify the impact and benefits of URBACT III. At present, the text generally describes the processes involved in monitoring and evaluation well but could be further strengthened by providing more detail on the ‘importance’ of understanding how the transfer of knowledge and joint working is impacting on cities involved in projects– picking up on issues such as capitalisation and dissemination. This will show the Commission that plans around monitoring and evaluation linked to URBACT III will particularly focus on this area as one of its key issues.
- 33 The sub-section dealing with information and communication plans for URBACT III could be enhanced to provide more detail on this key aspect of the URBACT III programme (i.e. the sharing and dissemination of information to urban stakeholders across Europe). The section would benefit from more text to explain the main target audiences of information and communication activity (ie who is URBACT III planning to reach out to other than participating cities), but particularly more text on the methods and tools that will be used to ensure that the learning and good practice from URBACT is properly and effectively communicated in order to ensure that positive change around urban policy and practice is maximised.

7.0 Comments on Section 6: Coordination

Section 6 of the OP provides details of the coordination between EU funds and mainstream programmes as well as other cooperation programmes.

The following points are a summary of the comments made on the draft of section 6 in March 2014:

- 34 It is recommended that the sub-section dealing with the coordination with mainstream programmes could say more about how URBACT III will help cities to better coordinate mainstream EU programmes by assisting city administrations to develop integrated actions to tackle urban problems. The section would benefit from more text to explain that the integrated urban actions that URBACT III will help to stimulate will tackle social, economic, environmental and spatial problems facing cities and in turn bring together and coordinate ERDF, ESF as well as national funds much more coherently in the future. This section would also benefit from explaining that through LAPs, URBACT III will help cities to link EU and national funds in a more harmonised way and therefore help them tackle urban issues in a holistic manner.
- 35 The sub-section dealing with coordination with mainstream programmes may also benefit from mentioning that URBACT III may support projects related to urban and rural linkages which in turn will help better coordination between ERDF, ESF and EAFRD as well as briefly mentioning that URBACT III projects may help cities to look at alternative and innovative funding mechanisms including loan based approaches. If these areas are mentioned in this sub-section then it will ensure that reference is made to other EU funding outside of ERDF and ESF.
- 36 On the sub-section which explains URBACT III's coordination with other interregional programmes of the ETC goal more text could be included on how these programmes have worked together previously (it mentions about an existing 'framework' but more detail could be included). The ex-ante evaluators believe that there may have been occasions under the 2007-2013 period where URBACT II worked with other ETC programmes (ESPON, INTERACT etc) to develop common templates, forms, fact sheets and handbooks. If this is true then more could be made of this point in this sub-section and further explain how this will continue in the 2014-2020 period.

37 It may also be considered that the sub-section on how ETC programmes will work together could be strengthened by mentioning other urban networks outside of the four main interregional cooperation programmes. This might include other transnational urban networks such as the European Urban Knowledge Network as well as urban networks within Member States. This wider collaboration work will further show how URBACT III will help stimulate cooperation and reduce overlap and duplication in the field of EU and Member State urban development.

8.0 Comments on Section 7: Reduction of the administrative burden for beneficiaries

Chapter 7 of the OP provides details on how URBACT III will help reduce the administrative burden for beneficiaries. It firstly assesses what the administrative burden actually is before then going on to explain the actions planned to reduce this burden.

The main comments, observations and recommendations made by the ex-ante evaluators about section 7 provided in March 2014 were as follows:

- 38 It is recommended that additional text is included in this section on how the URBACT III Secretariat will assist projects with on-going support and guidance on the administrative arrangements of the programme. A short piece of text explaining how this advice will be provided (including training, one on one support, guidance notes and ad-hoc telephone support) would help the reader to understand how projects will be supported on issues such as auditing, project budgeting and payments. This is a strong part of the URBACT II programme in terms of helping projects overcome administration burdens and this should be conveyed more in this section if possible.
- 39 More explanation of how URBACT III intends to adhere or follow the e-cohesion initiative is needed. At present, the text generally describes the e-cohesion initiative (in terms of its aims/ principles etc) without going on to explain how plans linked to the Presage CTE programme will help to ensure that all data exchanges between beneficiaries and programme authorities can be carried out electronically.

9.0 Comments on Section 8: Horizontal principles

Section 8 of the draft OP for URBACT III looks at three horizontal principles relates to sustainable development, equal opportunities and non-discrimination and equality between men and women. However, the first two of these principles is not applicable to URBACT III.

The comments on this section provided by the ex-ante evaluators in March 2014 were as follows:

- 40 There are parts of this section which tend to describe the various articles/ treaty related to equality between men and women. Some of this text is important to summarize but more text to explain what URBACT III will do to ensure men and women both benefit from the programme is need. For instance, it states that 'corrective action' will be taken when monitoring data shows an imbalance between men and women but does not give examples of what this action would be (for example, specific requests in the project application information to state how women will be encouraged to participate?). It also mentions that an evaluation would be undertaken to see how URBACT III promotes gender equality but this would again benefit from slightly more detail on what this evaluation activity would look at.
- 41 Consideration should also be given to including text which explains that URBACT III will help ensure that women who work in urban policy and practice in EU cities have the right capacity and skills to become leaders and key players in their cities. Through URBACT helping women to develop in this policy field then it will ensure that more women are at the heart of developing and implementing European and Member State urban policy and practice in the future.

10.0 Conclusions

The latest drafts of Sections 1-8 have a number of comments and recommendations attached to them that will further strengthen them in time for the submission of the final OP of URBACT III in June 2014. The drafting team have made considerable progress in developing the early iterations of the OP and have taken on board the observations and recommendations put forward through the ex-ante process to date.

In summary, the main overall observations for Sections 1-8 can be highlighted as follows:

- It is suggested that the direct link between the activities of URBACT III and the objectives (particularly the targets) of Europe2020 are strengthened in Section 1. The 'urban dimension' of EU2020 could be better brought out with the assistance of various text and statistics from *The Urban and Regional Dimension of Europe 2020: Seventh Progress Report on Economic, Social, and Territorial Cohesion*⁸. In particular, more explanation is needed in Section 1 to state that cities are key in the various targets of this strategy are to be met.
- Most of the wording throughout the OP tends to describe the benefits of URBACT being in terms of 'better quality strategies' and 'stronger more informed city managers'. The OP would benefit from more text (mainly in Section 2) to explain what EU cities will be like as a consequence of URBACT III helping them to produce better strategies or stronger and more skilled city stakeholders. Although better strategies and stronger city leaders is a direct outcome of URBACT III it would help the reader of the OP if more text is included to explain how this will impact on cities themselves and how it will help tackle urban challenges facing urban policy and practice.
- It is recommended that more explanation is included in the OP to show how URBACT III will further encourage projects in terms of capitalisation, dissemination and therefore the transfer of knowledge. This recognises a key issue for URBACT III to consider– ensuring that enough focus is given to bringing about real benefit and impact to urban practice by making sure LAPs are implemented (recognising that LAPs are not an end in themselves). Practical ways in which the transfer of knowledge will be stimulated and encouraged should be included more clearly in places such as Section 2 but also in sub-sections that relate to issues such as monitoring/ evaluation and communication activity. This will show the Commission that URBACT III will focus particular attention on this issue for the next iteration of URBACT.

⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/interim7/interim7_en.pdf

- It is recommended that the OP (particularly text used throughout Sections 1-3) should describe in more detail the practical activities and actions for URBACT III. Activities such as LAPs, Summer Universities, Local Support Groups are mentioned throughout these sections but the OP generally assumes a pre-existing knowledge of URBACT activities and terms. This will also mean that the activities and actions of URBACT III are more clearly described in more practical terms.
- It is recommended that the 'other' category found in Section 3 (which is the focus of much of the activity around dissemination, transfer and capitalisation) has adequate budget attached to it (similar to simulation 2 or 4 ie 42-44%). In addition, it is recommended that the budget in Section 3 attached to TA recognises that the Secretariat will have to manage a 'larger' programme than URBACT II and also that the link between the 'programme' and 'project' level is kept strong.
- It is noted that sections 4-8 of the draft OP spend a relatively large amount of space and wording describing various EU Articles/ Regulations and policy. This therefore tends to use space to relay back to the reader European Commission policy on, for example, ITIs, community-led local development and equal opportunities. Although this is helpful to summarise- more text should be included on how URBACT III will actually support or align with these various articles/ regulations.