

Energie-Cités' opinion on:

COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

[COM(2004)60 final]

I – Overview

Context

"The failure to give sufficient consideration to the environmental implications of decisions and a failure to plan systematically for a high quality urban environment are among the principal causes of the current situation, with consequences both for the environment and for the city's economy and its citizens. Planning for a high level of environmental protection is one of the key elements to achieving the sustainable development of cities and to providing a high quality of life for Europe's urban citizens."

Motives

As set out in the Sixth Environment Action Programme, the Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment has the objective of:

"... promoting an integrated horizontal approach across Community policies and improving the quality of urban environment, taking into account progress made in implementing the existing co-operation framework, reviewing it where necessary, and addressing:

- the promotion of Local Agenda 21;*
- the reduction of the link between economic growth and passenger transport demand;*
- the need for an increased share in public transport, rail, inland waterways, walking and cycling modes;*
- the need to tackle rising volumes of traffic and bring about a significant decoupling of transport growth and GDP growth;*
- the need to promote the use of low emission vehicles in public transports;*
- the consideration of urban environment indicators."*

Overall Aim of the Urban Environment Thematic Strategy

"To improve the environmental performance and quality of urban areas and to secure a healthy living environment for Europe's urban citizens, reinforcing the environmental contribution to sustainable urban development while taking into account the related economic and social issues."

Particular aim

"The aim is to contribute at the EU level to the development of a strong framework which will bring about local initiatives based on best practice, leaving the choice of solutions and targets to the local decision makers."

Method

"The following overview presents the outcome of extensive consultations. This Communication and the actions it proposes will be subject to a second round of consultations in 2004, including discussions with the EU institutions, the EU Expert Group on the Urban Environment and different stakeholder groups, as well as an open internet consultation. In addition, technical working groups composed of experts and stakeholders will be organised to examine in further detail the key actions proposed, their feasibility and how they would contribute to improving the urban environment."

Timing

"The final Thematic Strategy will be proposed in mid-2005, taking into account the stakeholder consultations and the results of these working groups."

Key elements

capital cities and urban agglomerations of more than 100,000 inhabitants (i.e. the EU 25's largest 500 towns and cities) should:

- adopt an urban environment management plan with objectives to achieve a sustainable urban environment,
- implement an appropriate environmental management system to manage its delivery,
- develop and implement a sustainable urban transport plan.(The Commission believes that there could be requirements at the EU level to this effect)."

"all Member States will be encouraged to:

- adopt national and regional urban environment strategies, linking to national sustainable development plans;
- to nominate national and/or regional Focal Points for the Urban Environment to promote best practice and support towns and cities in delivering a sustainable and healthy urban environment."

"The Commission will continue to:

- support urban environment initiatives,
- developing recommendations, guidelines, indicators, data, standards, evaluation techniques, training and other actions of a more technical support nature,
- to help towns and cities assess and manage different aspects of their environment."

"The European Environment Agency will:

- report on the state of the urban environment
- ensure access to data on the urban environment
- to provide better information to the policy makers, the public and other key actors, and to guide and monitor the progress of the Thematic Strategy."

Priority themes

"In order to fulfil the mandate set out in the Sixth Environmental Action Programme, the Thematic Strategy for the Urban Environment will focus on four cross-cutting themes which are essential to the long-term sustainability of towns and cities, which have clear connections to the economic and social pillars of sustainable development and where the most significant progress can be achieved. These themes, which have been determined in consultation with the EU Expert Group on the Urban Environment and other stakeholders, are:

- sustainable urban management,
- sustainable urban transport,
- sustainable construction,
- sustainable urban design."

II – What is Energie-Cités concerned about?

With regard to the aforementioned priority themes, the position of energy is clear:

- more than 75% of energy is consumed in towns and cities and the same proportion of CO2 emissions,
- energy consumption and emissions relating to transport are increasing the most,
- in terms of volume, buildings are the largest consumers with around 50% of the total,
- urban design, which involves the overall organisation of a town or city and its activities, overdetermines a large proportion of urban consumption in transport, housing and the tertiary sector.

For all these reasons, Energie-Cités is very interested in any Strategy relating to the urban environment.

Furthermore, the Commission's Communication mentions explicitly the position of energy in the different proposal areas:

1 – Sustainable urban management: the proposal focuses in particular on the obligation to implement environment management plans, "*the plan could address the key issues such as energy consumption, greenhouse gas emissions, water use and treatment, waste, noise, air quality, nature and biodiversity, transport and mobility, design, natural and man-made risks, sustainable construction, related health issues and the quality of life as a whole.*"

Energie-Cités is involved in actions aiming at learning more about energy consumption and emissions at urban territory level, understanding better the impact of decisions and measuring progress.

2 - Sustainable urban transport: the proposal states in particular that:

- "*each capital city and every city and town of over 100.000 inhabitants should develop, adopt, implement and regularly revise a sustainable urban transport plan, with short, medium and long-term targets.*"
- *All Member States will be encouraged to set out a clear framework policy on sustainable urban transport;*
- "*The Commission continue to develop and expand the CIVITAS programme, urban research initiatives and the exchange of good practice and experience, (the development of) the transport-related capacities of the 250 or more local and regional Energy agencies (...) continue promotional activities such as the European car free day and mobility week.*"

Energie-Cités is involved in all these actions (www.civitas-initiative.org; www.22september.org; www.mobilityweek-europe.org; www.smile-europe.org, etc.). They all aim at implementing permanent measures that endeavour to encourage a modal transfer of individual motorised traffic to more sustainable means of transport (public transport, cycling, walking) and more generally, developing sustainable urban mobility.

3 - Sustainable construction: the proposal states in particular:

- "*develop a common methodology for evaluating the overall sustainability of buildings and the built environment, including life-cycle cost indicators*" ... then "*further non-energy-related environmental performance requirements to complement Directive 2002/91 on the energy performance of buildings*", including for "*the renovation of smaller buildings and general incentives for energy efficiency.*"
- "*developing a common methodology at the European level for evaluating the overall sustainability performance of buildings and construction, including their life-cycle costing*" (...) then "*further non-energy-related environmental performance requirements to complement Directive 2002/91 on the energy performance of buildings*", including for "*the renovation of smaller buildings and general incentives for energy efficiency.*"
- "*Member States will be encouraged to develop and implement a national sustainable construction programme*", and with "*local authorities and other public purchasers will be encouraged to introduce sustainability requirements in their own tendering procedures for buildings and other construction works*"
- "*the Commission will develop the environmental labelling of construction materials (EPDs and/or EU eco-label)*"

Energie-Cités is fully involved in this process through the different actions, the European "Display" Campaign www.display-campaign.org for voluntary display of performances of municipal buildings regarding energy, CO2 and water, being a flagship action for our network.

4 - Sustainable urban design: the proposal states in particular:

"All Member States will be encouraged to:

- ensure that their land use planning systems achieve sustainable urban settlement patterns (...);
- develop incentives to encourage the reuse of brownfield land (...), provide support for the reuse of empty properties in urban areas;
- set minimum residential land use densities;
- evaluate the consequences of climate change for their cities."

Energie-Cités is involved in promoting such exemplary actions, both through actions of the CONCERTO type, and through organising site visits to exemplary cities and towns (Freiburg, Hanover, Malmö, etc.)

III – Energie-Cités' opinion

Energie-Cités will make its detailed proposals and suggestions in working groups planned for the consultation phase. These proposals will be drafted on the basis of the following considerations:

Energie-Cités:

- welcomes the initiative aiming at deciding on a thematic strategy for the urban environment,
- welcomes this initiative all the more as we worked hard for the urban environment to be taken into account in the European Union's 6th Environment Action Programme, even though the Commission had initially clearly underestimated this priority; it then took all Parliament's effort to change the deal,
- recognises the spill-over impact of such Community initiatives on Member States and local authorities, mainly because of the references made to the good practice of municipalities and countries that are more advanced or more sensitive towards the environmental dimension, which justifies the Commission taking such initiatives,
- generally agrees with the main orientations suggested in all four fields in question and encourage, for example, the instatement of measures such as: "*each capital city and city numbering more than 100,000 inhabitants should draw up, adopt, implement and regularly revise a sustainable urban travel plan that includes short, medium and long term objectives:*"

However, Energie-Cités:

- recalls that in November 1998 a Conference held in Vienna led to "an Action Framework for sustainable urban development", drafted under the aegis of the DG REGIO, in close collaboration with the DG ENV, which has never been promoted seriously or implemented,
- wishes to avoid a repeat of this failure,
- expresses doubts about the Commission's ability to implement this strategy as effectively as is necessary mainly because of:
 - o insufficient account taken in reality of the "urban environment" dimension, despite this proposal,
 - o which is conveyed through human resource (and budget) logistics at the DG ENV that we consider to be insufficient for seeing such ambitions through to a successful conclusion
 - o when one is aware of the traditional reticence of other DGs, including the DG REGIO, despite a shift, all too often in language only, aiming at taking greater account of sustainable development principles in the use of Structural Funds, for example
 - o a lack of significant budgets to support large scale initiatives.
- is wondering therefore about the impact of potential decisions if the aforementioned weak points are not overcome.

Energie-Cités would like:

- the energy dimension to be mentioned more explicitly in all chapters, including on sustainable urban transport and urban design, which would also enable a closer link to be established with the Thematic Strategy on the Sustainable use of Natural Resources [COM(2003) 572 final], which is being discussed in parallel,
- the link between urban planning and transportation planning to be strengthened, with the following basic principles, and in particular: encouraging urban density in stead of diffuse habitat, increasing the mixed use of urban spaces and building new districts around attractive and efficient public transport stations.