Activities of the European Union on sustainable urban development

A brief overview

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1. Introduction

Sustainable development, sustainable growth and sustainability are concepts which are used on a daily basis by politicians, policymakers and researchers. Some argue that sustainability is a hype, others believe it is a concept which could change our future. Many cities use sustainability to highlight their achievements in protecting, enhancing or exploiting their environment. But what exactly is 'sustainability'? What is a sustainable city? What can cities do to comply with the concept of sustainable development? In order to find a suitable answer to this question we should look critically at the current concepts we use and understandings we have.

We will identify concepts used on the European Union policy-making level. This article summarizes the development of the concept 'sustainable (urban) development', the goals that the European Union has regarding sustainable development, and how the EU motivates cities to implement sustainable urban development. The aim of this document is to give an understanding of the concept of sustainable development, how it has developed over time and, as such, why it has become the broad concept that it is today.
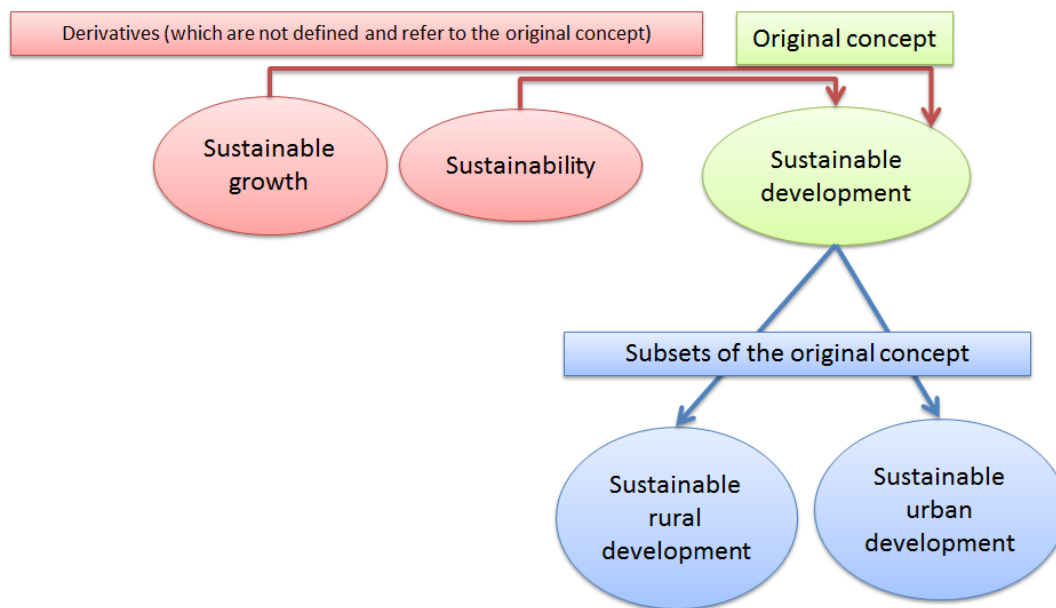
Comparing the overview of EU policy on sustainability put forward in this article to the findings of the survey, which identifies the understanding European cities have of the concept, is of course particularly interesting. Especially because cities often have varying interpretations of the 'sustainable development' concept compared to past and present views on the EU policy level.

2. The history of the 'sustainable development' concept

In this article the term 'sustainable development' will be mentioned many times, but EU treaties and policy documents also use terms like 'sustainable growth' and 'sustainability'. As will be explained later, these are all derivatives of the concept of sustainable development. Therefore, it is important to know what the original concept is, how it came into existence, and what the precise derivatives are.

Figure 1 illustrates how the different sustainability concepts are interrelated. As the figure shows, 'sustainable development' is the original concept, which is why we will first focus on describing the history of sustainable development.

Figure 1 - The coherence between sustainable development and other concepts related to sustainability

Sustainable development has its roots in the emerging environmental awareness movement. The first to recognise potential future environmental problems was Thomas Malthus in 1798.[1] Studying population growth, he foresaw increasing population densities which in the end could not be supported by enough resources. Hence, Malthus called for a controlled form of population growth.[2] Over time, more scientists started to recognise other environmental problems and subsequently also called for

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[1] The sustainability report, 2004, An environment and sustainability chronology
http://www.sustreport.org/resource/es_timeline.htm
[2] Thomas Malthus, 1798, An essay on the principle of population:
http://www.econlib.org/library/Malthus/malPop.html Chapter V.28

more controlled human behaviour, considering that the earth's resources are limited and fragile.[3,4] Still, the concept remained a relatively obscure topic of discussion and relevant only to a small group of scientists.

In the early 1970s things started to change. In 1972 the Club of Rome[5] published a paper called 'The limits to growth'[6], which marked a definite turning point in modern thinking on sustainability. It created environmental awareness, not only among scientists but also among policy makers, politicians and the general public. The concept of sustainable development was used by the Club of Rome to describe development in a way which takes account of the Earth's fragility. Some experts already began using the concept of sustainable development in the debate which followed, but back then it was still a concept without a definition or clear common understanding.

In 1972 the United Nations (UN) organised the Conference on Human Environment (UNCHE), the Stockholm conference. Here it was put forward that environmental problems are an international concern because pollution problems do not respect institutional borders. The Stockholm conference is widely recognised as being the first time that world leaders made a joint effort to achieve global solutions to environmental problems. During this conference many principles were agreed upon by means of the signing of a declaration[7], and these principles became part of the concept of sustainable development.[8] For example, principle one states:

> *"Man has the fundamental right to freedom, equality and adequate conditions of life, in an environment of a quality that permits a life of dignity and well-being, and he bears a solemn responsibility to protect and improve the environment for present and future generations. In this respect, policies promoting or perpetuating apartheid, racial segregation, discrimination, colonial and other forms of oppression and foreign domination stand condemned and must be eliminated."*

After the Stockholm conference the UN created its first Environmental Programme[9] and in 1984 the World Commission on Environment and Development was established. It was headed by Gro Harlem Brundtland, the former Norwegian Prime Minister. In 1987 this commission released the report "Our

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[3] Scientists such as Jean Baptiste Joseph Fourier (1824) who was the first to recognise heat trapped in our atmosphere (greenhouse gas effect) and Robert Angus Smith (1854) a chemist who wrote about acid rain. For more information: http://www.sustreport.org/resource/es_timeline.htm

[4] Jeremy Rifkin, 2010, the empathic civilization, Jeremy P. Tarcher inc., P 41

[5] Founded in 1968, the Club of Rome is '*an informal association of independent leading personalities from politics, business and science (…) interested in contributing in a systemic interdisciplinary and holistic manner to a better world. The Club of Rome members share a common concern for the future of humanity and the planet.*': http://www.clubofrome.org/

[6] Donnella Meadows, 1972, The limits to growth, Universe books, ISBN 0-87663-165-0

[7] United nations, 1972, declaration of the united nations conference on human environment http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?documentid=97&articleid=1503

[8] United nations, 1972, report of the united nations conference on human environment http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?DocumentID=97 Annex 1, principles

[9] United nations environmental programme, 2012, UNEP and the green economy – four decades in development, http://www.unep.org/40thAnniversary/milestones/1972-1982.asp

Common Future"[10], which popularized the concept of sustainable development. This concept subsequently became known as the 'Brundtland definition':

"Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." [11]

This new definition does not tie the concept of sustainable development solely to environmental topics; the definition can also easily be referred to in discussions about economic or social issues.

Following the Stockholm conference, in 1992 the first United Nations Conference on Human Environment and Development (UNCED) was held in Rio de Janeiro. This summit led to important global agreements on climate change and biodiversity. The Rio Summit laid the foundations for the Conference of the Parties (COP) meetings and the Kyoto protocol (1997), which contains specific directives for all undersigned parties in relation to climate change.[12] Since the 1992 summit there has not been such a successful UNCED. The 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) was held on 20-22 June in Rio de Janeiro, which will hopefully mark another important moment in global environmental policy history.

In conclusion, we can see that environmental awareness has evolved substantially since it was first touched upon (be it indirectly) in the late 18th century. This process resulted in a first definition of the concept of 'sustainable development' in 1987 by the Brundtland Commission, which remains the most authoritative (and broad) definition of the concept to date.

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[10] UN documents, 2003, Sustainable development, http://www.un-documents.net/k-001303.htm
[11] World commission on environment and development, 1987, our common future http://www.un-documents.net/wced-ocf.htm Chapter IV: conclusion
[12] United nations, 1997, Earth summit: http://www.un.org/geninfo/bp/enviro.html

3. Sustainable Development and the European Union

This section will deal with the development of European policies on sustainability, particularly the process how policies developed over time, from a purely environmental perspective to a more integrated one. The leading definition in this policy process is the Brundtland definition for sustainable development. However, with the popularisation of sustainable thinking, a number of other concepts began to emerge that are closely related to the concept of sustainable development.

3.1 European policies on sustainable urban development

The Member States of the European Union began implementing environmental policy following the Stockholm conference, in the form of Environmental Action Programmes (EAPs)[13]. As of the fourth EAP (1987-1993) the concept of environmental protection was broadened to include other policy spheres and an integration of environmental issues into other EU policies.[14] In the fifth EAP (1993-2001) 'sustainability' was mentioned as a concept and sustainability became a goal in itself[15] as the title 'Towards sustainability' clearly shows. This EAP used the UN (Brundtland) definition for the first time.

In 2001 the sixth EAP (2001-2012) was launched[16]. In the same year, the European Council adopted the first EU Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS).[17] Interestingly, this strategy modified the goal 'sustainability' relating to the environment into the broader concept and goal of 'sustainable development'. This strategy for sustainable development effectively made the concept measurable, by means of 114 indicators for signaling progress on sustainable development.[18] [19] These indicators cover ten subjects, of which only three are clearly environmental. Other themes like social cohesion, economy and governance are also included. Every two years these indicators are gauged to see if there is are any changes evident. The evaluation of overall progress towards sustainable development since 2000 shows a rather mixed picture. On the one hand a clearly favourable change is visible on certain indicators since 2001, but on the other hand there is also a clearly unfavourable change evident on other indicators. Positive change is noticeable relating to the growth of GDP per capita and sustainable consumption and production, while indicators on the conservation of fish stocks and development assistance to so-called third world countries show unfavourable changes.

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[13]European Union DG Environment, 2012, Environmental action programmes,
http://ec.europa.eu/environment/archives/env-act5/envirpr.htm
[14] EU Environmental information and legislation database, http://www.ncte.ie/environ/fifth.htm
[15] European commission DG Environment, 1998, Towards sustainability,
http://ec.europa.eu/environment/archives/actionpr.htm
[16] European commission DG Environment, 2002, Introduction to the 6th environmental action programme
http://ec.europa.eu/environment/newprg/intro.htm
[17] Renewed strategy for sustainable development for an enlarged EU , 2006, European commission
http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/06/st10/st10917.en06.pdf
[18] Eurostat, 2011, Sustainable development indicators,
http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/sdi/indicators
[19] Eurostat, 2009, Sustainable development in the European union (monitoring report)
http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-78-09-865/EN/KS-78-09-865-EN.PDF, Abstract, P5

By means of the current Europe 2020 strategy the EU is aiming for smart, inclusive and sustainable growth. It is interesting to note that the indicators for sustainable development form the foundation on which this strategy is created[20]. This leads to the conclusion that the Europe 2020 strategy regards sustainable development to be an important task and challenge for the future.[21]

Over the last 40 years, the (Member States of the) EU has put a lot of effort into (creating and implementing) environmental and sustainable development policies. It is noteworthy that the European Commission has designated a specific high-level representative for the COPs for climate change.[22] During the last COP in Durban, Europe convinced China and India to sign an agreement obligating these countries to take action on greenhouse gas emissions.[23] It is safe to state that the EU is a frontrunner on sustainable development on an international level.

3.2 Derivatives of sustainable development in European policies

Arguably the most authoritative definition within the field of sustainability is the one on 'sustainable development' (Brundtland commission of 1987). Although the EU has widely fostered this particular definition, a number of related concepts have emerged in European policies since the late 1980s. Concepts such as 'sustainable growth', 'sustainability' or 'smart growth' are often used in EU jargon and beyond. But it seems that whenever these particular terms in EU policy papers are being used, references are continuously made to the list of indicators for sustainable development, and the Brundtland definition of sustainable development.[24] The apparent conclusion is that the above-mentioned concepts such as sustainable growth and sustainability can easily be considered direct spin-offs of the concept of sustainable development (see Figure 1).

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[20] European commission, 2010, Europe 2020 targets, http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/reaching-the-goals/targets/index_en.htm
[21] European commission press releases:
http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/12/101&type=HTML
[22] Connie Hedegaard, commissioner for climate action, http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/index_en.htm
[23] Euractiv, 2011, UN Climate talks wraps up with 2020 global pact, http://www.euractiv.com/climate-environment/un-climate-talks-wrap-2020-global-pact-news-509607
[24] Eurostat, 2011, Sustainable development indicators,
http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/sdi/indicators

4. European cities and sustainable development

The European Commission recognises that cities have an important role to play in achieving sustainable development. 70% of the European population lives in urban areas. At the same time 70% of the emissions in Europe come from cities.[25] [26] Ministers for urban development of the Member States of the EU have also stressed the importance of cities in the well-known Leipzig charter.[27]

The Commission also recognises that cities are complex.[28] Cities are densely populated areas with complex structures of governance, complex networks of infrastructure and with a lot of complexity related to their spatial structures. These realities offer decision-makers and practitioners various opportunities but at the same time also pose many challenges. As such, sustainable development in a city is a substantially different task for policymakers and politicians than sustainable development in rural areas. Moreover, establishing a sustainable development mode on the national level is a different question entirely. That is why more specific terms on sustainable development are used to denote focus on cities, such as 'sustainable urban development' or 'sustainable community development'.

4.1 Sustainable urban development: what does it mean?

As mentioned earlier, the specific term 'sustainable urban development' is a concept strongly related to sustainable development. However, due to the complexity of cities, sustainable urban development is much more (visibly) interrelated with other policy fields, such as housing, infrastructure, business developments, etc. In other words, whilst 'sustainable development' at the EU level can be defined in quite an abstract way, definitions of the 'sustainable urban development' concept are often formulated along more practical lines.

The following definitions are considered to be especially significant when it comes to identifying the concept of 'sustainable urban development':

1. *"Improving the quality of life in a city, including ecological, cultural, political, institutional, social and economic components without leaving a burden on the future generations. A burden which is the result of a reduced natural capital and an excessive local debt. Our aim is that the flow principle, that is based on an equilibrium of material and energy and also financial input/output, plays a crucial role in all future decisions upon the development of urban areas."*[29]

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[25] Johannes Hahn, European commission press releases, 2012, http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/12/101&type=HTML

[26] URBACT, 2012, Low Carbon Urban Environments, http://urbact.eu/en/header-main/integrated-urban-development/exploring-our-thematic-clusters/low-carbon-urban-environments/

[27] European ministers of urban development, 2007, Leipzig charter www.eufunds.bg/document/355

[28] Johannes Hahn, European commission press releases, 2011, http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/hahn/headlines/speeches/pdf/24102011_investing_europe_cities.pdf

[29] Berlin Conference , 2000, URBAN21

2. *"A sustainable community uses its resources to meet current needs while ensuring that adequate resources are available for future generations. It seeks improved public health and a better quality of life for all its residents by limiting waste, preventing pollution, maximizing conservation and promoting efficiency, and developing local resources to revitalize the local economy."*[30]

3. *"A sustainable community is one in which improvement in the quality of human life is achieved in harmony with improving and maintaining the health of ecological systems; and where a healthy economy's industrial base supports the quality of both human and ecological systems."*[31]

Although each definition emphasises a different aspect of the urban sustainability concept, they all commonly emphasise one or more thematic element. The Brundtland definition has no such specific thematic emphasis, leaving the definition very much open. The definitions quoted above all contain specific social, economic, environmental and/or governance themes. This makes the concept susceptible to different interpretations and (policy) objectives. Perhaps this is why there is (as of yet) no single definition for sustainable urban development as widely recognised as the general sustainable development Brundtland definition.[32]

A second observation is that the sustainable urban development concept does not have specific indicators to make it measurable in the way that sustainable development does. Measuring the sustainability related to cities and urban areas would require a set of tailor-made indicators and norms. Naturally many of the indicators that the EU uses for measuring sustainable development can also be applied when looking at the sustainability of cities. However, particular indicators should be designed specifically for measuring the sustainable development in cities. For example, the widely supported theory that urban density is negatively related to energy consumption[33] points to the necessity of having an indicator which can monitor development of dense urban areas. Other indicators used by the EU (such as conservation of fish stocks and global development assistance) are (often) not applicable to cities.

Finally, even if general indicators used for assessing sustainable development are applicable to urban systems, they are actually measured on the regional and/or national level. Ensuring data availability and comparability on the urban level poses a significant challenge. The result is that implementing sustainable urban development (policies and practices) remains a very difficult task.

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[30] Concern, Inc., 1993, http://www.sustainable.org/about.
[31] Indigo development, 2006, http://www.indigodev.com/Sustain.html
[32] The regional environmental centre, 2004, http://archive.rec.org/REC/Programs/SustainableCities/what.html
[33] See e.g. Edward Glaeser (2011), The Triumph of the City

4.2 Motivating cities to become more sustainable in the EU

Although the European Commission can directly influence a Member State's policy through directives and regulations, it has no direct influence over the municipalities within a Member State. So how can sustainable *urban* development be ensured in the EU?

The European Commission mainly works with directives for its Member States when it comes to sustainable urban development.[34] [35] If a Member State does not apply and implement the directive in question, the European Commission can take penalising measures. When a directive is issued, the Member States have the ability to design their own policies to implement the said directive. As the Commission has no direct influence over municipalities or cities, it cannot force European cities to become sustainable via these instruments, so they must motivate the cities (in)directly.

There are many ways to motivate cities to become more sustainable. One of the most common ways to do this is by providing financial resources through specific funding instruments. The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)[36] is one such fund and finances many local and regional development projects. More (technically) specialized development funds are, for example, JASPERS, JASMINE, JEREMIE and JESSICA.[37] Of these four specialized funds, however, only one of them is specifically geared towards sustainable investments *in European cities*. This is JESSICA: Joint European Support for Sustainable Investment in City Areas.[38]

Direct funding for (city) projects is not the only way to stimulate sustainable development in cities specifically. Conducting (demand driven) research and disseminating these results and this knowledge directly to cities is also effective. For example, extensive (EU) research is conducted into the key challenges facing cities when attempting to generate a sustainable built environment.[39] Besides its own research, the European Commission also finances programmes that enable other research initiatives to be (further) developed (i.e. R&D of businesses, local governments and other (grassroots) stakeholders). These results can also be used to create more knowledge for sustainable cities.[40] The European Commission uses, amongst other instruments, the so-called Framework Programmes for this

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[34] Experts for urban future, 2011, http://www.expertforurbanfuture.info/doc/TUZ_Torino_Sustainable_cities_and_EU_legisaltion.pdf
[35] European Union, 2011, EU institutions and other bodies, http://europa.eu/about-eu/institutions-bodies/index_en.htm
[36] European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), 1999, http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/employment_and_social_policy/job_creation_measures/l60015_en.htm
[37] European commission, 2012, Special support instruments, http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/thefunds/instruments/index_en.cfm
[38] European commission, 2012, JESSICA: Join European Support for Sustainable Investments in City Areas, http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/thefunds/instruments/jessica_en.cfm#2
[39] An example of research from the European union, European commission DG environment, 2004, building the future, http://ec.europa.eu/research/environment/pdf/sue_btf_en.pdf
[40] European commission, 2012, why do we need an Innovation Union?, http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/index_en.cfm?pg=why

purpose.[41] [42] One of the projects that have been granted budget within Seventh Framework Programma is the URBAN-NEXUS.[43]

Another important way to stimulate sustainable cities is by bringing cities and their stakeholders together, letting them exchange knowledge and experiences, and thus ensuring the necessary commitments on goals and implementation. One of the first initiatives deserving attention in this respect is the establishment of the ICLEI network for sustainable cities (1990). More than 200 local governments from 43 countries convened for an inaugural conference 'the World Congress of Local Governments for a Sustainable Future', in New York.[44] Twenty years on, ICLEI is continuing to connect cities globally on the topic of sustainability. ICLEI has become an important EU partner in this issue.

Besides the establishment of institutions and networks, charters and agreements also play a big role when it comes to stimulating urban sustainability. One of the big successes is of course the Aalborg Charter, initiated by ICLEI (1994).[45] This first charter of European sustainable cities and towns now has over 2000 signatory European cities, towns and communities.[46] The Covenant of Mayors (launched in 2008 by the European Commission) is also considered to be highly successful; more than 4000 local governments have already signed.[47] Signatories of the Covenant of Mayors voluntarily commit themselves to increase energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy sources. By stating their commitment, they show their support for the so-called 20-20-20 European Commission objectives as outlined in the Europe2020 Strategy[48], which aims to, amongst other things, reduce 20% of greenhouse gas emissions by 2020.[49]

Informal meetings by the various EU Member State ministers responsible for urban development also hold meetings on this topic. During these meetings the national ministers responsible for urban development might make commitments, which sometimes even lead to new declarations. The Lille programme (2000), Bristol accord (2005), the Leipzig charter (2007), the Marseille statement (2009) and the Toledo Declaration (2010) are examples of this.[50] These charters and/or agreements, in turn, can spark the development of new (city) initiatives. Below two of these initiatives are highlighted:

[41] Coridis, 2007, Understand FP7, http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/understand_en.html
[42] For more information on the program, the assessments and its criteria:
http://cordis.europa.eu/fetch?CALLER=FP7_NEWS&ACTION=D&SESSION=&RCN=26064 and
http://cordis.europa.eu/fetch?CALLER=FP7_NEWS&ACTION=D&SESSION=&RCN=26145
[43] See http://www.urban-nexus.eu
[44] ICLEI – Local governments for sustainability, 2012, About ICLEI, http://www.iclei.org/index.php?id=about
[45] European conference on sustainable cities and towns, 1994, The Aalborg charter,
http://ec.europa.eu/environment/urban/pdf/aalborg_charter.pdf
[46] Local Agenda 21, 2004, Austrian ministry of environment,
http://www.partizipation.at/fileadmin/media_data/Downloads/themen/issue_en_la21.pdf
[47] Convenant of mayors, 2012, main page, http://www.eumayors.eu/index_en.html
[48] Europe2020 Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth
http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/europe-2020-in-a-nutshell/priorities/sustainable-growth/index_en.htm
[49] Covenant of mayors, 2008, English covenant text,
http://www.eumayors.eu/IMG/pdf/covenantofmayors_text_en.pdf
[50] Reference framework for sustainable cities, 2012, Reference texts, http://www.rfsustainablecities.eu/reference-texts-r137.html

- Following the Leipzig Charter, France, together with the European Commission, other Member States of the European Union, the Urban Development Group[51] and other urban stakeholders decided to develop a Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities (RFSC)[52]. The RFSC is a toolkit that allows cities to assess their sustainability policies, and, as a result, improves dialogue and action on sustainability in a city.[53] The tool does not provide a single definition for a sustainable city, or for sustainable urban development.[54] This is because the EU considers it important that European cities develop their own definition(s) and understanding(s) on these concepts.

- The Sustainable Cities and Towns Campaign is an excellent example of how local sustainability is promoted in the EU.[55] By means of a website, this initiative offers tools to help and inspire policymakers of European cities to '*mainstream local sustainability throughout Europe by fostering the implementation of the Aalborg Commitments*'[56]. The website links to all important work that has been done on sustainable urban development on the European level (i.e. Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities, the Aalborg commitments, and many sustainability networks).[57] The Campaign has also resulted in many seminars, working sessions, projects and awards to increase European awareness for sustainable development on a local level.[58] Several conferences following the Aalborg charter were also (jointly) initiated, thanks to this Campaign: Lisbon (1996), Hannover (2000), the Aalborg +10 conference (2004), Sevilla (2007) and Dunkerque (2010).[59] The next conference will be held in Geneva (2013).[60]

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[51] Urban Development Group (UDG) http://ntccp-udg.eu/udg
[52] Reference framework for sustainable cities, 2012
http://www.rfsustainablecities.eu/urban-development-group-r10.html
[53] Reference framework for sustainable cities, 2012, What is this reference framework?
http://www.rfsustainablecities.eu/what-is-this-reference-framework-r142.html
[54] Reference framework for sustainable cities, 2012, What is it not?, http://www.rfsustainablecities.eu/what-is-it-not-r143.html
[55] The European Sustainable Cities and Towns Campaign, 2012, Welcome to the campaign, http://sustainable-cities.eu/index.php
[56] Ibid.
[57] Such as Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), United Towns Organisation (UTO), Eurocities, World Health Organisation (WHO)-Healthy Cities Project and ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability
[58] The European Sustainable Cities and Towns Campaign, 2012, Campaign activities, http://sustainable-cities.eu/Campaign-Activities-78-2-3-.html
[59] Delivering sustainable cities: the leadership challenge, 2010, http://energy-cities.eu/IMG/pdf/esct_2nd_annoucement_en.pdf
[60] ICLEI – Local goventments for sustainability, 2012, Events, http://www.iclei-europe.org/events/?cmd=view&uid=06be74bc

5. Conclusion

Sustainable development is a broad concept. By officially recognizing the Brundtland definition as well as identifying and monitoring 114 sustainable development indicators, the EU institutions have shed some much-needed light on the concept. Monitoring progress on sustainable development is now being done every two years, making any progress on sustainable development indicators plainly visible. The strategy for sustainable development, as an EU-wide framework, ensures that significant progress is being made on these indicators.

Sustainable development on the European level necessarily requires realising sustainable development on the city level as well. As 70% of the European population lives in urban areas, cities can make a substantial contribution to reaching overall sustainable development goals. In other words, sustainable development in Europe is dependent upon sustainable development in European cities; sustainable *urban* development. For sustainable urban development there is, however, no well-defined set of indicators geared to context and needs. It might be good if the European Commission could fill this void. Because monitoring progress is a key element for the European Union to achieve sustainable development, these indicators could give European cities a standard by which to measure their progress and to compare themselves to other cities. In this way, defining the concept of sustainable urban development could popularize the concept. Because concepts like 'sustainable growth' and 'smart growth' (and hence the frequently used term 'smart cities') are often used to highlight an aspect that is either part of or overlaps with sustainable urban development, these terms could also be directly linked to sustainable *urban* development as well.

The European Commission does not have the tools to directly force cities to develop or implement certain policies; they only have tools to influence the Member States. Nevertheless, many EU-wide initiatives have motivated cities to implement sustainable urban development. For example, there are many initiatives which bring cities together, programmes that provide resources for cities to implement sustainable projects but also programmes making resources available for conducting research regarding sustainable urban development. It would be interesting to assess the various possibilities in the EU, in order to see what measures work best for European cities. What are the (dis)advantages of tools such as JESSICA over funding opportunities such as FP7? In what way are networks of cities more or less effective than charters? Each of these activities has its pros and cons, but it would be interesting to have a coherent review of them.