



PROCEEDINGS OF THE RESILIENT CITIES 2012 CONGRESS

Session title: Cities and the EU Adaptation Strategy: How can the urban perspective be anchored in the EU Adaptation Strategy?

Abstract:

The EU is currently developing a climate change adaptation strategy, to be published in March 2013. However, it is the local level, such as municipalities, that is perceived as crucial for implementing climate change adaptation, due to the context and place-specific character of climate change impacts. This paper aims to explore how the urban dimension can be supported by the European strategy, and how the multilevel framework between local, regional, national governments and the EU is evolving.

This paper summarises the conclusions from a panel session involving representatives of the national and local government and researchers in climate change adaptation. The session started from discussing the factors affecting the multi-level governance of urban climate change adaptation. These involved the diverse governance structures across Europe and the policy context, which encourages or hinders multi-level governance.

The discussion during the panel session clearly identified the need for multi-level and multi-stakeholder governance. It was observed that in this collaborative context at interlocking spatial scales, cities need support in developing their adaptation action plans or mainstreaming the adaptation actions from higher governance levels. This support could be offered or supported by the national and European level through policy, guidance, provision of and training on the use of knowledge systems, and facilitating exchange of experiences between cities.

Keywords:

Climate change adaptation, cities, Europe, multi-level governance.

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Multi-level governance of urban adaptation to climate change: connecting the local and European scales

1 Multi-level, collaborative governance of climate change adaptation

Some cities in Europe, including London, Copenhagen and Rotterdam, have developed climate change adaptation strategies and are implementing adaptation solutions (Carter 2011). However, the majority of European municipalities lag behind these front runners. Whilst the local level is recognised as the most suitable for implementing adaptive actions, due to the context-specific character of the climate change impacts (Corfee-Morlot et al., 2009), the cities alone may find it difficult to find the resources and expertise required to develop adaptation responses, and they often see these issues as better resolved at a higher level (Wilson 2006). Further, adaptation of cities without the consideration of the wider regional context may lead to negative effects in their hinterlands. For example, in the Netherlands, the demand on limited water supply during droughts already causes tension between cities and the agricultural areas surrounding them, and the situation is likely to worsen under the changing climate. Other countries, in particular in the Southern Europe, are likely to experience similar problems in the future. This suggests that higher level policy and planning should support the cities' adaptation efforts to maintain their liveability and prosperity under the changing climate, thus stressing the importance of the collaborative governance of climate change adaptation, where the responsibilities are shared among a number of partners at different spatial levels.

Can urban climate change adaptation be governed in a multi-level, collaborative manner? Currently, a number of obstacles are present. The adaptation agenda is new, and by many considered either left-field or confined to the environment or risk management agendas. At the local authority level, the silo mentality prevails and cross-sectoral collaborations are rare: in particular, lack of communication between planning and risk management departments was observed by the session participants. This may mean that, whilst adaptation plans are being developed by the municipalities, they do not filter into land use, transport or energy planning; thus adaptation may remain a separate or additional issue, rather than become a mainstream consideration.

There is a clear need for collaboration between private and public sectors, due to their different roles in cities. However, tensions between them may occur regarding their responsibilities

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under the changing climate. For example, in Copenhagen the water supply and drainage systems are jointly operated by the city (which manages the infrastructure) and the utilities companies (which provide the service), and the changing climate is likely to have repercussions for both – but who should cover the costs of adaptive measures? In particular, financing of non-traditional solutions like sustainable urban drainage systems is problematic, as there are no clear guidelines whether the investment should come from public or private money. Also, whilst the need for creating a market for adaptation solutions is recognized, the difficulty remains in persuading the private sector of the feasibility of adaptation products and measures.

The vertical collaboration can be hindered by the uncertainty, at which spatial level the responsibility for climate adaptation lies, a problem directly linked to the governance structures in which the cities are located, and the policy frameworks that guide their activities. This is discussed in more detail in the next section of this paper.

2 Factors affecting the multi-level governance in Europe

2.1 Governance structures

The case studies presented at the Resilient Cities 2012 conference suggest a huge diversity of the governance types in European countries. These different types relate to the institutional arrangements (or absence thereof) influencing the power of different governmental entities and the collaboration between (Keskitalo, 2010). The level of autonomy of cities in relation to the national and regional government has been recognised as particularly important. German lands or Swiss cantons have a considerable freedom in setting their own laws and regulations. This enables developing the urgently needed working practices between the municipality and the wider region, for example in the case of Stuttgart (Kazmierczak and Carter, 2010). In the UK, the current strong focus on the local planning and abolition of the regional tier creates another type of governance context, whereby the local level is empowered to make decisions but at the same time burdened with responsibility and not sufficiently guided or supported by higher levels (Scott, 2011).

The planning and implementation of climate change adaptation is at risk of political and economical instability. The position of adaptation on the political agenda is threatened by budget cuts during the economic crises. Whilst the scientific community recognises climate

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change as one of the greatest driving forces of the 21st century, for the decision makers it is an uncomfortable issue due to the need for planning for distant future, combined with the still remaining scepticism among the general public. In addition, short election cycles do not correspond with the long-term nature of the climate change challenge; even if the leaders are committed to the adaptation issue, they may not remain in power for longer than four or five years, which may be a threat to the continuity of planning and implementation of adaptive actions. Thus, there is a need to establish more durable multi-governance structures. Policy, legislation and guidelines are the most frequently used, and they are discussed further in the following sections.

2.2 The policy context

The importance of the high level policy for guiding the adaptation action at the city level has been long recognised (EEA, 2012). Yet, some European countries still do not have national climate change adaptation strategies (for example, Italy or Poland), which may hinder the development of adaptation plans at lower spatial levels (Biesbroek et al., 2010). Thus, local adaptive action remains largely a voluntary task for local authorities (Alber and Kern 2008). In a few countries, such as Denmark or France, regulations at the national level require development of local adaptation plans (for example, Grenelle II¹); however, the knowledge in municipalities to develop them tends to be lacking.

The absence of the relevant policies at high spatial levels presents problems both for the cities that are just beginning working on adaptation and look for guidance, and for the more advanced ones that seek grounding for their plans in policy and legislation. For example, the adaptation plans developed by Copenhagen - one of the European leaders on adaptation - are so far ahead of the national legislation, that they exist in a policy and legislative vacuum and receive little support from the national level. In other countries, such as Germany, adaptation is not required by legislation at the national level; instead, it is “softly mainstreamed” into planning.

At the European level, there is currently no specific urban policy, and the urban issues are considered under the general EU’s growth strategy – ‘Europe 2020’ and in the problem-

¹ loi n° 2010-788 du 12 juillet 2010 portant engagement national pour l'environnement;
<http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000022470434>

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specific policy areas. This means that urban problems might not be comprehensively and sufficiently explicitly reflected in EU documents; neither is climate change adaptation. Whilst the first paucity of policy requires further consideration by the European Commission, the latter will be addressed by the EU Adaptation Strategy in 2013. In support, the recently established European Climate Adaptation Platform CLIMATE-ADAPT (<http://climate-adapt>) brings together adaptation case studies, outputs of European research projects and guidance on adaptation planning. Further, there are already a number of EU directives that require horizontal and vertical collaboration between municipalities, regions and countries, such as Water Framework Directive. Moreover, the Flood Directive emphasises the need for assessment of risk and preparation for floods under the changing climate. Thus, at the European level there is a basis being developed for adaptation planning and guidance. Yet, the issue remains, how this information and guidance will be understood and used at the urban level.

3 Achieving effective multi-level governance for climate change adaptation in Europe

3.1 Cities implement adaptation but need support

As adaptation is place-specific, local and regional authorities are the ones responsible for implementing adaptation action. A firm conclusion from the session was, however, that cities need support from the higher governance levels to develop adaptation action plans and mainstream adaptation into their daily activities. In particular, there is a need for provision of adaptation data and knowledge related to the expected local climate change impacts, the place-specific vulnerability of cities and the options to adapt; all this information is prerequisite to adaptation planning (Georgi et al., 2012) but its collection usually exceeds the expertise and capacity of local authorities. The main point of concern was the lack of climate data at spatial scales appropriate for city planning. It was observed, that the datasets at the European level are too coarse for this purpose, which echoes previous observations (Cavan et al., 2010).

In the context of the poor provision of national policy and guidance on adaptation, the cities are also frequently at loss how to proceed with adaptation planning. The idea of knowledge systems or databases containing information about how to plan adaptation, such as the CLIMATE- ADAPT platform, was appealing to the cities. In particular, the user-generated

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information, such as case studies, allowing the decision makers to learn from other cities' experiences, was considered crucial.

However, two important issues were raised. Firstly, there was a need for training on the use of the databases, tools, and information produced by research projects or European agencies. A "travelling training squad" for new tools developed at the European level, assisting the cities in their application, was considered a good idea. In Denmark, a national expert group advising municipalities provides an excellent example of such an initiative. Secondly, the cities voiced the need for performance indicators, or benchmarks, which would allow them to measure the progress they have made in adapting to climate change. Finally, financial resources and dedicated funds were mentioned to support adaptation.

3.2 Possible support from the European level

Europe is already playing a crucial role in providing the climate and adaptation data through the CLIMATE- ADAPT platform and the funding for collaborative research projects generating new knowledge (EEA, 2012). However, the urgent need remains for downscaled climate projections and analyses of impacts on individual cities. Whilst this information could be best developed by the individual countries, appropriate funds and tools at the European could enable this. Further, in order to maximise the use of emerging research outputs, training events focused on presenting the data and its use in adaptation planning are required. There is a need to put even more emphasis on the dissemination of research results, and possibly make plans for knowledge transfer a requirement for research consortia to obtain European funding.

Similarly, facilitating the exchange of knowledge between cities is an important task for Europe in order to promote adaptation. The role of projects promoting interregional contacts cannot be overestimated. For example, the Interreg IVC GRaBS project (Green and Blue Space Adaptation for Urban Areas and Eco Towns, 2008-2011; <http://www.grabs-eu.org/>) facilitated the much needed exchange of adaptation knowledge and experience between 14 organisations from eight member states. The recent project EU Cities Adapt, supported by the European Commission's DG Climate Action (<http://eucities-adapt.eu>), combines different types of knowledge transfer as it offers free training for cities, which encompasses web-based tutorials, workshops, city site visits, coaching and peer exchanges, access to a web-portal with tools, guiding materials and a reference library, as well as an interactive members exchange forum.

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Such activities should be further encouraged by the European Commission through appropriate funding streams.

The need for strategic policy support from the EU was seen as particularly important in the countries without national legislation relating to adaptation. Here, expectations were raised towards an EU adaptation strategy that could fill that national gap. However, there was an uncertainty about the most appropriate legal status of the EU adaptation strategy. A directive on adaptation was not considered to be the best way forward due to wide range of legal frameworks and varying advancement of planning and implementation of adaptation across Europe. A more flexible approach, in form of guidelines, was considered potentially more relevant. In recognition of the potential climate change impacts on cities, there is a need for a pronounced urban angle in the EU adaptation strategy.

There is also a need for mainstreaming adaptation into other European directives, following the example of the Floods Directive. The Water Framework Directive, for example, is not explicit about the need for incorporate the climate change adaptation (Wilby et al., 2006); the directives on environmental impact assessment offer another opportunity for including adaptation requirements. More specific actions at the European level could include regulating the market of adaptation products (for example flood resistance products or anti-overheating building materials) through development of standards and technical guidelines. Of high importance is mainstreaming climate change adaptation and the urban dimension into funding opportunities like the Cohesion Funds.

4 Conclusions

The session concluded that promoting the adaptation of all European cities to climate change requires the engagement of the regional, national and European levels. The European level in particular can offer the much needed policy grounding, climate and adaptation knowledge and facilitation of the exchange of experiences between municipalities. This high-level support is particularly important in the times of political and economic instability, which may push the adaptation agenda onto the sidelines. Whilst this paper presents a record of the discussion during the panel session, a more comprehensive analysis on the multi-level governance approach can be found in the report 'Urban adaptation to climate change in Europe' (EEA, 2012).

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