

# The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities



## European Urban Charter II Manifesto for a new urbanity

Adopted by the Congress on the occasion of its 15<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session  
in Strasbourg on 29 May 23008

Rapporteur: Carlos Alberto Pinto (Portugal)

Co-Rapporteurs: Willy Borsus (Belgium)  
and Myriam Constantin (France)





## Preamble

In 1992 the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (the Congress) adopted the first European Urban Charter. This was a ground-breaking step for Europe. Since then, fifteen years have elapsed and our societies, cultures and economies have changed considerably.

The great European divide between the east and west of the continent, which had such an enduring impact on the post-war period, has now closed up again. Many countries have moved forward in the pursuit of ambitious co-operation within the European Union or the Council of Europe.

In this crucial period, it was the towns and cities of Europe that were the most exposed to globalisation. First and foremost, they rapidly became the focus of Europe's efforts to adjust to the new technological, ecological, economic and social conditions that this entailed. Willingly or not, they entered the global age and had to cope with its main challenges.

They became aware of the new role they were required to play and saw themselves as "collective players", as centres of initiative and creativity. They became the setting in which new lifestyles and social networks emerged, along with a new social flexibility, often characterised by family instability, unstable employment and residential mobility.

At the same time, they were faced with far-reaching social and economic changes: the erosion of the working class, the de-industrialisation of entire regions, increasing social inequality, crises in working-class neighbourhoods, growing immigration, ageing of the population, urban sprawl and widespread car use. They also had to tackle the challenges arising from the threats to our environment.

In this period of rapid change, a number of key texts on urban issues were adopted. Some were drafted by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.<sup>1</sup> Others were the work of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe,<sup>2</sup> the European Union,<sup>3</sup> the United Nations,<sup>4</sup> civil society and associations of local and regional authorities.<sup>5</sup>

These reference texts have reflected an increasing acknowledgement of the major changes of the last fifteen years. Taken together, they follow in a direct line from the Congress's Urban Charter and have mostly been approved by European governments. A glance at them reveals an acute awareness of the scale of the changes taking place and a collective resolve to address them. Stemming from very different organisations and written in different styles, these texts reaffirm urban rights, emphasising the indispensable role of the urban citizen at the heart of urban policies.

However, given the diversity of these international reference texts on urban development, the Congress felt that it was necessary to reframe some of the principles of the European Urban Charter. While the original European Urban Charter retains its status as a benchmark, we felt that it was necessary to develop and update it. That is the purpose of this Manifesto, which reflects a new form of urbanity that has emerged at the dawn of the new century.

- 
1. European Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level (1992, ETS No. 144)  
Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life (2003)  
Revised European Urban Charter (rapporteur, Carlos Alberto Pinto, adopted by the Congress in May 2004 and revised in 2005)  
Congress Recommendation 188 (2006) on good governance in European metropolitan areas.
  2. Committee of Ministers Recommendation Rec(2001)19 on the participation of citizens in local public life  
Valencia Declaration on "Good local and regional governance – The European Challenge" (Conference of European ministers responsible for local and regional government, 2007).
  3. Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities (May 2007)  
Territorial Agenda of the European Union (May 2007).
  4. Resolution S-25/2 – Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements in the New Millennium (2001), United Nations  
Resolution 21/3 on guidelines on decentralisation and strengthening of local authorities (2007), UN-Habitat.
  5. Charter of European Cities and Towns towards Sustainability (the Aalborg Charter, May 1994) and the Aalborg Commitments (2004).



## **The European urban *acquis* and the prospect of a new urbanity**

In adopting this European Urban Charter II, after the first one in 1992, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe aims to establish a body of common principles and concepts enabling towns and cities to meet the current challenges of urban societies and to outline, for the main players in urban development and Europe's urban citizens, the prospect of a new form of urban living, in other words a new way of living together and a new approach to city life.

In keeping with this spirit, we, European local elected representatives and Congress members, reaffirm the importance of the European urban *acquis*. We believe that this *acquis*, stemming both from the experiences of urban governments and from the ideas, reports and statements of the main players in urban development, constitutes a bedrock of principles on which our manifesto can be based. In particular, we consider the following principles to have been established:

European towns and cities belong to their citizens; they are an economic, social and cultural asset which must be passed on to future generations.

Given the scale of the global challenges facing us, European towns and cities are the ideal setting for a historic compromise between the economy, society and the environment.

European towns and cities are responsible for building a model of urban government which takes account of the new demands of democracy, particularly where participation is concerned. They are an asset in the much needed democratic revitalisation of our societies.

European towns and cities are conducive to creative diversity and represent powerful forces for innovation. They are perfect places for personal development and access to learning and knowledge. They have the potential to integrate and mutually enrich the multiple identities and cultures which exist within them.

European towns and cities are now driving forces for prosperity and key players in the globalisation process. They are the ideal setting for the knowledge-based economy which is the future of economic growth in Europe.

We, European local elected representatives and Congress members, believe that these principles and the analysis underpinning them form the basis for future change and for the policies which we will be required to implement.

The towns and cities that we want to place at the heart of our priorities are made first and foremost for the people who live there, who must also be citizens.

The towns and cities which we want are also sustainable towns and cities, respecting the local and global environment.

They are cohesive towns and cities, committed to fostering the greatest possible solidarity within and between themselves.

Lastly, they are towns and cities of knowledge and culture which need their past and present, built from diversity, in order to project themselves into the future.



## **Town and city dwellers as urban citizens**

We, European local elected representatives, share the belief that the inhabitants of our towns and cities cannot experience fully their town or city without also being responsible, active and informed citizens.

We reaffirm in this regard the validity of the values and principles contained in our European Charter of Local Self-Government drawn up in 1985, and in particular the belief that the right of citizens to participate in public affairs can be fully exercised at the local level.

Indeed, we think that it is at this level that this right is exercised most directly, most effectively and most successfully.

We also reaffirm the principles of ethical public life as defined in the European Code of Conduct for local and regional elected representatives.

Lastly, we think that the crisis of political representation facing many of our countries, which can be seen especially in high abstention rates at elections, a continuing extremist vote and a growing disaffection with politics, can and must be fought primarily at the local level.

We, European local elected representatives, believe that urban democracy, having for a long time been a school of national democracy for many politicians, can revive the public spirit of our citizens and their appetite for democracy.

As far back as 1985, the European Charter of Local Self-Government envisaged the possibility of having recourse to participatory democracy practices alongside the traditional mechanisms of representative democracy.

We therefore encourage, as the Charter of Local Self-Government invites us to do, the use of citizens' assemblies, local referendums and all forms of direct citizen participation.

To promote the exercise of modern local democracy we recommend, for example, the setting up of elected councils at the different levels of urban decision-making, which, however, does not preclude the provision of information to residents and opportunities for public discussion and co-operation in urban planning.

In the same spirit of involvement of all the components of the urban population, the right to vote and to stand in elections for urban local assemblies must be granted to migrants, who contribute in many different ways to the life of the community.

To maximise the effectiveness of these different arrangements, we urge our towns and cities to make full use of new information technologies in order to improve public consultation on urban projects. We believe that interactivity and speed of information can enhance the process of democratic participation and improve dialogue between elected representatives and citizens.

Our towns and cities must work to establish extensive local e-democracy. Far from being technical gadgets, information and communication technologies (ICTs) offer new opportunities for democratic mobilisation which it would be tragic not to make use of in these times of disaffection with politics.

With regard to local powers and responsibilities, we believe that appropriate devolution is a key to the proper democratic functioning of our towns and cities. In this connection, we reiterate our attachment to the principle of subsidiarity, which regulates the proper relationship of powers between the European, national and local levels.

But the principle of subsidiarity cannot stop halfway between central government and the local level. It must also guide the distribution of responsibilities between the different levels of local government and within local areas.

In keeping with this spirit, we believe that the general principle governing the allocation of public management responsibilities in our towns and cities must be based on a constant concern for closeness to urban citizens. This principle should apply, for example, both to large conurbations and to

infra-municipal areas (neighbourhoods, wards, districts), which should be able to have their own elected assemblies, budget and local powers and responsibilities.

Furthermore, the devolution of local and regional powers and responsibilities should be accompanied at all relevant levels by the resources, particularly financial resources, needed for the full exercise of those responsibilities. Here again, we recommend referring to the European Charter of Local Self-Government, which demands that towns and cities be able to control their expenditure.

We believe that the complexity of exercising these powers and responsibilities in the management of large urban areas calls today for a clearly identified, democratically elected urban government driven by a constant concern for good urban governance.

This governance should be subject to effective supervision mechanisms and regular evaluation. It should be open to political and public debate in local elections in order to mobilise citizens and lead a majority of urban citizens to support the collective urban political project. In this context, the elected urban executive, the mayor or equivalent, should act as a driving force for local activity and should be committed to mobilising citizens and the networks that shape the urban fabric around a collective political project that can be understood by the majority of people.

The quality of this urban governance also lies in its ability to organise itself within an appropriate area, ensuring a match between the size of local institutions and the urban areas which they are responsible for developing and administering.

We believe, moreover, that some issues cannot fall exclusively within the scope of local management (urban sprawl, transport and information infrastructures, right to housing, environmental protection, etc.) and that it should be possible for local policy issues to be regulated at regional, national and European level on the basis of a balanced and respectful partnership.

In this connection, the need for spatial equity requires that towns and cities be able to contribute to measures for redistributing resources. Such measures should make it possible to reduce unavoidable spatial inequalities.

We, European local elected representatives, aware of the profound changes affecting our countries in the general redistribution of powers between European, central and regional governments and local authorities, believe that the weakening of state supervision and the resulting emancipation of towns and cities should not be to the detriment of much needed solidarity between local areas. The increasing independence of towns and cities should not lead to ruthless, unregulated competition between local areas.

We are convinced that the state must be the guarantor of this solidarity, which should be set in a context of balanced regional, national and European spatial planning.



## **Sustainable towns and cities**

We, European local elected representatives, support the action taken by our citizens, and more generally by all the players in urban development, to turn our towns and cities into sustainable urban spaces.

We share our citizens' growing concern at the increasingly clear evidence of the global environmental crisis facing us. This crisis now affects the whole biosphere and is reflected in declining biodiversity, soil degradation, increasingly scarce water resources, air and river pollution, an increase in other forms of pollution and environmental degradation, and many other aspects which affect our quality of life. The crisis is unquestionably man-made and one tangible result is the increasing number of natural disasters and exceptional climatic events which have alerted opinion in our countries and greatly increased citizen involvement in addressing environmental issues.

We believe that this global environmental crisis takes on a particular form in urban areas and calls for specific analysis and treatment in the context of urban ecology.

In addition to the strict protection of the local environment, which they must provide for their territory and their citizens in a context of heightened risk, we believe that our towns and cities have a major role to play in protecting, restoring and managing the global environment.

In terms of the level of economic activity, the increasing size of urban populations in Europe and the ability to generate relevant behavioural models, our towns and cities are in the front line of the fight for a more liveable planet. It is for us to support them in this responsibility which is crucial for the future of our societies.

In keeping with this spirit, we undertake to develop urban ecology in order to turn resolutely towards a more sustainable kind of urban development. We undertake to reduce the environmental footprint of our towns and cities, to preserve their natural resources, to maintain and enhance their biodiversity, to provide access for all to public assets and their networks, and to make energy efficiency central to our policies.

To achieve this, we know that we must organise our development around different types of urban form and a different model of mobility.

With regard to the urban form, we believe that the current dilution of urban areas is a cause for concern. Urban sprawl, which is usually accompanied by a functional specialisation of areas between shopping, residential, leisure, industrial and craft areas, drastically reduces the environmental capital of our towns and cities. This sector-based urban model increases energy waste and damage to the environment. It is a policy which has no future.

We must conceive of our towns and cities in terms of dense, compact urban forms requiring as few resources as possible for their maintenance and allowing their inhabitants to have access to the various urban functions and services in the immediate vicinity, as well as to leisure areas and preserved natural areas. We seek towns and cities that are sparing of resources, land, travel and energy. Our towns and cities must be coherent and compact if urban areas are to be made easier, more accessible and livelier for all their inhabitants, whatever their social status, age or state of health.

We want towns and cities that are able to check their growth through improved management of land use.

Mobility is the other central variable of the proper functioning of towns and cities and of environmentally sound urban development. Travel and mobility are becoming increasingly important in our society of intense communication. They are becoming a key to good urban practice and a decisive factor in the quality of urban life.

To take up the challenges of controlled and sustainable mobility, we believe that we must develop credible alternatives to the car. The adverse effects of the priority given to the car are now well known. Air and noise pollution, road safety issues, fragmentation of space by invasive infrastructure, the blighting of our urban landscapes – all these encourage us to turn resolutely towards a development that is oriented more towards the citizen and shows greater concern for the human dimension of our

towns and cities. We must free ourselves from over-dependence on the car all the more quickly because, in addition to the environmental problems that it causes, it prevents a large number of people without access to individual motor transport from fully enjoying the towns and cities that they live in.

It is for us, European local elected representatives, to promote sustainable mobility policies which favour "soft" means of travel such as walking and cycling as well as all forms of public transport.

In this connection, we must opt for a public transport policy which is not restricted to public transport alone, but which provides for a new social sharing of the roads and public space in which all means of travel will find a place, but with cars and motorcycles taking a smaller place, due account being taken of their social usefulness.

It is in this spirit that we must pursue concurrently our aims of sustainability, conviviality and improved mobility flows in our towns and cities, which depend in particular on the possibilities offered by increased use of intermodal transport.

Our analysis has led us to the realisation that the sustainability dimension of our urban development (compact towns and cities, voluntary and controlled mobility, respect for the environment) is not just another step in the improvement of our quality of life, but the indispensable precondition for proper spatial development. Only a commitment to sustainability can give real coherence to our urban development projects and offer tangible prospects of success.

## Cohesive towns and cities

Our towns and cities must be understood in their wider geographical context. They develop within a regional, national and European space. They are integrated politically and economically into those spaces and crystallise their socio-economic contradictions, and in particular the profound social inequalities affecting our societies.

We, European local elected representatives, believe that sustainable urban development, which must reconcile the economic activity of towns and cities with the protection of our environment, is inconceivable without a demand for social equality. We want to make the social dimension a central aspect of our sustainable development policies. That is the meaning of the historic compromise that we want to achieve at the local level between the environmental, economic and social dimensions. It is essential to pursue new urban policies incorporating these three requirements.

The towns and cities that we want are places where everyone enjoys a good quality of life and access to services, particularly in the education, health, cultural and housing sectors. They are also places where there is a genuine social mix, reflecting our goal of building a cohesive, inclusive and diversified society with ambitious quality of life standards in Europe.

The question of housing is of particular importance. The population movements which have led to continual growth of our towns and cities in recent years have triggered a housing crisis in many of our countries and urban areas, which has been exacerbated by the rising land and property prices. Despite this situation, we remain attached to the principle of a right to housing. We must pay particular attention to the availability of a varied housing provision with the aim of maintaining an indispensable social mix in our neighbourhoods. We must be able to offer the inhabitants in all sections of our towns and cities the possibility of housing that is tailored to their needs and income.

This aim calls for strong political will on our part and a policy of active solidarity founded on a democratic ethic. It involves promoting solidarity between generations, with low-income groups and the disabled, and with all those facing financial and social difficulties. The ultimate goal is to combat social exclusion and thus offer everyone the opportunity to enjoy the vast potential offered by towns and cities.

In this connection, we are aware of the work that remains to be done to realise this aim of cohesive towns and cities. We observe disturbing trends towards increasing poverty. Serious social and spatial disparities continue to affect large sections of our populations. In addition to the wide social rifts between different urban neighbourhoods, there are ecological disparities which mean that the most vulnerable among us are concentrated in the areas of greatest environmental degradation, resulting in a dramatic combination of inequalities. We are particularly alarmed by spatial disparity processes that are leading to gentrification of certain urban areas, by the uncontrollable rise in land prices in our urban centres and its parallel phenomena of ghetto formation in peri-urban areas and by the appearance in certain places of "gated communities" that encourage a spatial segregation which is breaking up our towns and cities.

We solemnly reaffirm that the central aim of urban policies is social and spatial cohesion. Our towns and cities are places where people live and work, multigenerational, multicultural and multireligious places where people from all social backgrounds mingle on a daily basis. For urban society to develop fairly, mutual assistance between citizens, dialogue between groups, including inter-religious dialogue, and voluntary activity need to be promoted. We will continue our fight against financial and employment insecurity, exclusion and all forms of discrimination on grounds of social status, age, culture, religion, gender and disability.

Our towns and cities must also be rid of all forms of stigmatisation of particular groups, which are seriously detrimental to the sense of belonging to an urban community and which, more often than not, are the root of the urban violence, antisocial behaviour and insecurity that is painfully felt by our urban citizens, particularly the most vulnerable among them (the elderly, children, people living alone, immigrants, the poor).

Lastly, we consider that the solidarity which is needed within the city limits should also guide our relations with urban surrounding areas, other neighbouring towns and cities and the rest of the population, in accordance with criteria and redistribution mechanisms decided at national level.

In keeping with this spirit, mutual assistance between towns and cities is intensifying at international level, particularly where the countries of the South are concerned. This solidarity which is spreading as globalisation grows may be seen as a form of “city diplomacy”. We strongly encourage these other forms of solidarity with the cities of disadvantaged countries, which help to build a more balanced and more cohesive world.

Our concept of solidarity begins in the neighbourhoods of our towns and cities, but it cannot stop at their gates.

## **Knowledge-based towns and cities**

Our towns and cities are the crossroads of civilisations. They are the ideal setting for knowledge and culture to find expression; they are contact and meeting places. We, European local elected representatives, view our towns and cities as places of exchange, cosmopolitan places where differences are free to interact and find expression in a spirit of mutual respect.

We are not looking for towns and cities where cultural differences merge into a single global, globalised and homogenised model. Our towns and cities are culturally and architecturally different and diverse, and must remain so. We are alert to the risks of standardisation of buildings and services and the aberrations of a globalised urban development model which only obeys the rules of a global market, leaving its uniform imprint everywhere.

We also support the culture of our local areas and their identities. We wish to promote and disseminate our local cultures and our local history as a key asset in an increasingly globalised world. We undertake to continue our efforts to support artistic creation and ambitious policies of cultural amenities for our towns and cities.

Our towns and cities have always been home to forces for change and innovation. They are an opportunity for progress and adjustment to change. We believe that our towns and cities are the focal points of the knowledge-based economy, which is already driving the development of our communities and will do so even more in future.

We think that, at the beginning of this new millennium, our towns and cities more than ever have a historic role to play in the establishment of this knowledge-based economy in Europe. The de-industrialisation of entire regions, the rise of the new information and communication technologies, the advent of biotechnology and, more generally, the development of intangible economic activities, mark the new forms of our development, and we know that local areas can play a major role in this regard. We therefore want to give priority to knowledge and innovation, to access to education, to research, and more generally to cultural and artistic activities, which provide the fertile ground on which this new economy will grow.

With this in mind, we undertake to develop our communications and telecommunications infrastructure, increase Internet access, to create "intelligent" spaces and bring e-governance into general use. We want to make our towns and cities the setting for omnipresent co-operation networks that can facilitate the transfer of knowledge between education and research systems and the production system. We want to build digital towns and cities that are an asset to our development.

We are aware that our goal of making our towns and cities a cradle of knowledge, culture and the arts would lack credibility if we showed no concern for their architectural beauty.

In this connection, we are aware that our urban landscapes have often developed in the last fifty years without any real concern for high architectural quality. We have neglected many of our peri-urban landscapes and we have abandoned the outskirts of our towns and cities to soulless and uncreative commercial urban planning. Henceforth we want to take into greater consideration the architectural dimension in our spatial development and foster the development of a lively architectural culture among decision-makers and urban citizens.

We want to be proud of our towns and cities and their culture, but also of their architecture.



## Conclusion

We, European local elected representatives, know that the present development of our towns and cities is not without danger and that they face unprecedented environmental, democratic, cultural, social and economic challenges.

In this Manifesto we are driven by a sense of confidence in our towns and cities. We firmly believe that they are a unique asset for our societies. As driving forces for local and regional development and as political players, individually and in networks, towns and cities have to address the changes in our societies. They can contribute to the prosperity of their communities and to their sustainability. But the perspective cannot be exclusively local. In the pursuit of this goal of prosperity and sustainability, they must continue to show solidarity with other local areas.

We know that our towns and cities have a long history and must be viewed from a long-term perspective of our cultures. We think that these roots in the past and in our collective memories are also an asset that helps us to project ourselves into the future on the basis of a strong identity. We are not proposing a single model of urban development. Our towns and cities have their own personalities. They are all different and their diversity is an opportunity for Europe.

Concerning diversity of, and diversity within, towns and cities, we think that the ability to integrate cultural diversity can be developed through a conflict-free vision of our identities. We are proud of our identities, but we view them unreservedly as an element of openness to others.

We are convinced that encouraging towns and cities to strive for more democracy, greater sustainability, ever greater solidarity within and between local areas, better governance and better performance is crucial for the proper development of our societies.

It is this optimistic, ambitious and demanding message that we wish to convey to our urban citizens and to all those involved in urban development. We propose this Charter as an invitation to build a new urban project for the towns and cities of Europe based on a sharing of values and an exchange of experience, so that towns and cities can retain their individuality while collectively embodying a European urban blueprint that is a seamless combination of humanist values, individual freedom, economic prosperity, social solidarity, care for the planet and living culture.