EU Support for Cities towards Sustainable Development – An Empirical Study about Failure or Success at the Local Government Level

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Abstract

The European Union is often viewed as a quasi-federal construct characterised by a voluntary pooling of sovereignty by member national governments. However, the integration of Europe also has serious consequences for sub national governance including significant impacts on local authorities and cities. Over the past two decades in particular the relationship between Europe and local/regional government has undergone profound change. What began as an "ever closer union" between nation states fifty years ago is today showing more and more signs of an evolving system of multi-level governance.

There is a growing activism in the relations between the EU and local government. Local and regional authorities are becoming far more insistent and dynamic in the way they demand a voice in the preparation of European plans, programmes and policies. In particular, local authorities stress that the principle of subsidiarity as enshrined in European treaties, gives them legal, moral, and practical credibility as stakeholders in the European policy process. From the EU perspective, it is clear that more and more European initiatives, whether legislative or funding in nature, permeate to the local level. The growing partnership is recognition of a fundamental understanding between the different levels of governance, namely that the European Union needs sub-national bodies to implement policy, and on the other side, that local and regional authorities need European assistance to build the necessary knowledge, human resource, and financial capacity to facilitate improved implementation.

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In this paper we are going to illustrate the growing relationship by analyzing the level and importance of EU supporting measures directed towards cities/local governments from a city point of view. We are going to look at one specific policy area, sustainable development, which has in recent years been in focus both within the EU and among local governments in Europe. The data material presented in the paper is collected through 3 surveys directed to member cities in the network organization Union of the Baltic Cities, active in 10 Nordic and Baltic region countries.

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Introduction – The Analytical Questions in this Paper

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In this paper[2] we are going to illustrate the growing relationship by analyzing the level and importance of EU supporting measures directed towards cities/local governments from a city point of view. We are going to look at one specific policy area, sustainable development, which has in recent years been in focus both within the EU and among local governments in Europe. The data material presented in the paper is collected through 3 surveys directed to member cities in the network organization Union of the Baltic Cities, active in 10 Nordic and Baltic region countries.

The research task is twofold. Firstly, we will describe existing EU support systems for urban sustainable development. This will encompass policy, financing, and programmes designed to foster mutual learning. Although this section of the paper is predominantly descriptive it nonetheless has a central role for the empirical part of the paper.

The empirical questions in this paper are centred on three questions:
1. Is there evidence of European support for sustainable development in our? If so, how influential is this support?
2. Are cities in non-EU members receiving similar or different support?
3. Has the impact of the support from the EU changed over time in line with the evolution of EU policy and financial instruments?

It is important to note that throughout the paper we are differentiating between two principal types of support – actions aiming to strengthen the knowledge base within local governments, and economic support/investment in the local processes. We are not aiming to explain any variance in the pattern in any analytical way; however, some indications of this will be presented in the discussion at the end of the paper.

The data material presented in the paper has been collected through 3 surveys directed to member cities in the Union of the Baltic Cities (www.ubc.net), a network of more than 100 cities and municipalities in 10 Nordic and Baltic countries. While some Norwegian cities have also joined UBC the vast majority of members are drawn from states bordering the Baltic Sea.

The network works via a number of sectoral commissions, most of which are rather limited in terms of financial and human resources. The organisation is headquartered in Gdansk, Poland. The Commission on Environment, both the

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[2] The paper is a first draft empirical analysis on the topic, based on an existing data material meant and used for other reasons, limiting the possibilities of far reaching interpretations. We would also wish that this paper would not been quoted in its present form until further analysis are made.

largest and most relevant for the purposes of this study, is located in the southern Finnish city of Turku/Åbo. The Commission is partly financed by the host city, but most of the funding is generated through project funding, including a substantial proportion from European Union programmes.

The Network was created in the aftermath of the collapse of the Communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe in 1991 and experienced rapid expansion throughout the course of the 1990s. Today, the network consists of more than 100 member cities, many of them leading cities in their own countries. The empirical research area and the UBC members network is shown in map 1.

Map 1: The UBC network 2007 (source: www.ubc.net).

Multi-Level Governance within the EU

The Canadian academic Ann Dale has written that the implementation of sustainable development is the "human imperative of the 21st Century, requiring strong leadership by local, regional and national governments, and that governments must move beyond simply being governments to governance, actively engaging all sectors of society in its implementation". (Dale, 2001, Preface).

The governance system in the EU has been described by Weale et al as being "multi-level, horizontally complex, evolving and incomplete" (Weale et al, 2003 p.1). It is therefore unsurprising that the EU's approach to supporting cities implement sustainable development is equally fraught with contradictions and fragmentation.

EU Urban policy is multi-level because no single level of governance in Europe has a monopoly on the capacity – human, financial, or knowledge; political mandate; or necessity to promote sustainable urban development. Local authorities, as the level of governance closest to the citizen, have the most immediate need to promote sustainable development in Europe's cities. However, local authorities frequently lack the financial resources, human capital, and policy tools to act. The European Union recognises urban sustainability as an "opportunity for the EU to become a more meaningful body for its citizens by bringing tangible benefits to daily lives" (European Commission 1997, p3). The transnational nature of environmental problems, especially those relating to the pollution of air and water means that urban sustainability is as much a challenge for the EU as an opportunity. The challenge is even more acute when one considers the difficulty that the EU faces in implementing and enforcing environmental policy. This leaves the Member State, a level of governance increasingly squeezed between the European and the local.

Over the past two decades in particular the relationship between Europe and local/regional government has undergone profound change. An analysis by Hooghe and Marks in 2001 concluded that that while no EU country increased the process of centralization during the 1980s, half of them decentralized authority to regional and local levels (Hooghe and Marks 2001). This squeeze to the sub-national coincided with the expansion of European Union powers

first through the Single European Act, and later, as the 1990s progressed with the TEU and the Amsterdam Treaty.

Wallace and Wallace have pointed out that the European Union is the principle arena for environmental policy-making in Europe; indeed they estimate that as much as 80% of all environmental legislation traces its origins back to the EU. However, they also counter the misconception that equates the European Union with dictates from Brussels, stating that the EU is part of, not separate from, the politics and policy processes of the member states and so the institutions that construct European policy are national and subnational, as well as those created by the EU treaties (Wallace and Wallace 2005). We can therefore argue with confidence that EU urban policy is constructed at the European, national, and local levels.

At the European level the nature and architecture of environmental governance is heavily influenced by the treaties and institutions of the European Union.

Weale et al contend that "a system of environmental governance implies more than simply the existence of internationally agreed environmental measures or policies. It also implies that there are institutional arrangements for formulating, developing, and implementing policy. It also means that rules for making rules (the rules that distribute political authority) have also come into being (Weale et al. 2003. p.1).

While "primary rules" define content of specific items of policy, "secondary rules" define how the primary rules are made, how they may be changed, and how the adoption process in Council (QMV or unanimity) and EP (Co-decision) should progress. As the Treaties have evolved so too have the secondary rules for making environmental policy.

Today environmental policy is one of the most visible and comprehensive competences of the European Union, however environmental issues have not always featured prominently at the European level. The early activities of the European Economic Community (1957 – 1972) contained very little reference to the environment. Between 1972 and 1986 a body of environmental legislation began to emerge, however much of it was initiated n order to further deepen and harmonize the single market. Landmark rulings in the European Court of Justice dealing with mutual recognition (Cassis de Dijon 1979), product standards (Danish Bottles 981) and process / pollution control (Germany 1983) compelled the Union to develop a coordinated approach to environment to avoid competitive disadvantage.

The Single European Act of 1986 is regarded by many as being a turning point for the environment. The EU responded to growing fears of a degrading environment and the increased public concerns of links between environment and public health by providing a legal framework for environmental issues, elevating them from a subsidiary of single market policy to a front ranking EU policy.

In 1992 Maastricht Treaty called for "sustainable, non-inflationary growth respecting the environment". (282)The timing of the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 coincided with the preparation of the Treaty on European Union (TEU / Maastricht Treaty). The TEU thus captured the spirit of the times by mirroring both the Rio Declaration and the earlier Brundtland Report by calling for sustainable, non-inflationary growth respecting the environment.

In 1997 Amsterdam Treaty called for balanced and sustainable development of economic activities and made sustainable development a specific objective of the EU, thus it is now applicable to the general activities of the Union, not just the activities in the sphere of the environment. This means, according to Baker and McCormick that "there is probably no single government or other association of states with such a strong "constitutional" commitment to sustainable development" (Baker and McCormcik 2004, p282).

The emergence of the growth and competitiveness agenda, as evolved the European approach to sustainable development still further, with many EU analysts suggesting that sustainable development has become little more than a small component of the Lisbon Agenda.

Nonetheless, Baker and McCormick have appropriately concluded that "there is probably no single government or other association of states with such a strong "constitutional" commitment to sustainable development" (Baker and McCormcik 2004, p282).

According to Wallace and Wallace decision making in the EU is principally the result of interaction between the "institutional triangle" formed by the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission (Wallace and Wallace, 2005).

The *European Parliament's* policy and legislative role varies depending on the policy area and the provisions of the European Union Treaties. Most items relating to sustainable urban development accord the Parliament the right of

Co-decision. This means that the Parliament shares supreme legislative authority with the Council of Ministers, the result is that legislation can only be adopted when both institutions reach agreement. The Parliament also shares responsibility for controlling the budget. Whereas the Council of Ministers sets the global budget, through the Financial Perspective, the Parliament plays a significant role in determining how the budget will be allocated within the programmes. In addition, the EP also ensures that the Commission discharges the budget appropriately.

The European Parliament has often been credited for greening European policy. There are many theories on why this has been the case. Some theories point to the success of European Green parties in European elections – indeed many Green Parties have enjoyed European Parliament representation at a level that would be unthinkable in their own national parliaments. Other theories suggest that the Parliament has exploited the environment as an issue in order to increase its political power and to reach into other sectors that would otherwise be off limits. It is certainly true that the Parliament has often strengthened environmental legislation coming from the Commission, and is frequently responsible for defending environmental provisions against the less environmentally minded Council of Ministers.

The *Council of the European Union (Council of Ministers)* is the supreme decision making body of the European Union, as a consequence it is regarded by many as being the most powerful EU institution. The Council is the EU institution that belongs to the Member governments and so the interests of individual member states take precedent over the greater good of the Union during the often lengthy and complex negotiations. Decisions in the Council are taken by simple majority, qualified majority, or unanimity. Votes weighted according to population

The European Council is an extension of the Council of Ministers and is the forum for Heads of Government. It is the final arbiter within the Council and tends to resolve issues that could not be agreed at the technical or ministerial level.

The Council is widely regarded as being the least green, least transparent, and least approachable of the institutional triangle. It has been a graveyard for many embryonic environmental initiatives ranging from the carbon energy tax to the end of life vehicle directive, and more recently for efforts to drastically reduce the emissions from high performance vehicles. The Council has also frequently been an obstacle to a more activist European approach to urban sustainability.

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A number of Member States, most notably Spain and Germany, have been reluctant to allow the European Commission to work with, or legislate for, sub-national levels, citing the principle of subsidiarity as their main objection.

The *European Commission* is the Union's executive body. It has the sole right of initiative to draft legislation; is responsible for implementing legislation, budget and programmes; and acts as guardian of the Treaties and, together with the Court of Justice, ensuring that Community law is properly applied and enforced.

With the publication of *Green Paper on Urban Environment* in 1990 the Commission launched the EU's attempts to develop an integrated approach to urban issues. The Commission initiates, manages, and evaluates all of the EU's policies and programmes dealing with urban sustainability. Much of the work originates with the Directorate General for Environment (DG ENV), however DG Transport, DG Regio, and to a lesser extent DG Research all have influence and impact.

The *European Court of Justice* ensures that European Union law is uniformly interpreted and effectively applied in all the Member States. It therefore partners the Commission in ensuring the implementation of EU law, including environmental law. Like other "supreme" courts the European Court of Justice is also required to interpret the meaning of the legal framework contained within the EU Treaties. Historically, this has enabled the court to play a role in shaping EU policy, notably by identifying environmental criteria as obstacles to the single market, and consequently compelling the Commission to bring in uniform environmental rules to cover the whole of the Union and so eliminate inconsistencies.

The *Committee of the Regions* (CoR) was established following the ratification of the TEU and is designed to ensure that regional and local concerns are respected in the preparation of European policy. It has to be consulted on matters concerning regional policy, the environment and education. It is composed of representatives of regional and local authorities.

While the CoR provides a quasi-institutional route for local and regional authorities to be actively involved in the European decision making, sceptics point to a number of fundamental flaws. First, the institutional triangle is not obliged to listen to the CoR's views, and so some of its opinions are little more than window dressing. Second, the CoR is frequently criticized for providing its input too late in the policy process at a time when the other institutions have

already reached their conclusions and are reluctant to reopen the debate. Finally, the CoR does not have the resources of the other institutions and so it is often difficult for it to match the quality of outputs produced by the Parliament, Council and Commission.

The *European Environment Agency* (EEA) collects date on the state of the environment – principally from national environmental authorities, and prepares regular assessments of European environmental trends. The most well known of these is the *State of the Environment Report*. The date collected by the EEA informs EU policy-making, assisting the various institutions to prepare appropriate interventions in defence of the environment. The *Environment at the Turn of the Century* Report contained a comprehensive assessment of the impact of environmental policy, including urban policy.

There are more than 20 additional institutions, consultative bodies, and agencies are part of the formal governance of the European Union. These include the European Central Bank, the Economic and Social Committee, and the European Investment Bank. Local and regional authorities also use informal channels to participate in European decision making. The most obvious examples are the many European networks that participate in the preparation of policy papers, conduct advocacy work, and provide specialists to participate in European expert groups.

The rules and institutions discussed above provide the backdrop to the European Union's support systems for urban sustainability. We now turn our attention to look at the diverse range of support systems on offer.

The EU Support System for Cities: Sustainable Development

EU urban policy is evolving and incomplete as it is relatively new. The bank of European laws known as the acquis communitaire consist of more than 80,000 pages of rules and regulations going back 50 years. More than 600 pieces of legislation have been enacted during the past forty years in the environmental field alone and more than 300 are still active today. These cover all manner of environmental protection and pollution control. And yet attempts to develop an integrated approach to promoting sustainable urban development only truly began in 1990 with the publication of the 1990 *Green Paper on the Urban Environment* (European Commission, 1990).

"It can be said that the EU has had several urban policies, as numerous European Commission services have attempted to address urban issues in their individual programmes" (European Environment Agency, 1999, p334). According to the European Environment Agency, the 1990 *Green Paper on the Urban Environment* (European Commission, 1990) marked the start of efforts to establish an urban dimension of EU environmental policy. The Green Paper was the Commission's first step at launching a wide-ranging debate on the future of Europe's urban areas. It recognized that European policies had a significant impact on cities and towns, particularly with regard to water, noise, air quality, and transport issues. However, it further noted that there was insufficient coherence between these policies.

The Commission followed the Green Paper by setting up the Expert Group on the Urban Environment in 1991. This group, composed of academics and representatives of local and regional authorities, conducted a comprehensive assessment of the urban environment in Europe and provided recommendations on how EU policy should proceed.

Urban sustainability continued to gain prominence throughout the 1990s. The Aalborg Conference in 1994 and the subsequent establishment of the European Sustainable Cities and Towns Campaign (ESCTC) represented a particularly important landmark in rolling out Local Agenda 21 in municipalities across Europe. By the tenth anniversary of the Campaign in 2004 more than 2000 towns and cities had signed the Aalborg Charter, committing them to develop collaborative local approaches to sustainable urban development. The European Commission gave both financial and moral support to the Campaign throughout this period. In addition, the Commission assumed a crucial role in funding the activities and projects of the European

Networks that constituted the ESCTC. (European Environment Agency, 1999, p334)

"Policy efforts in Europe already address many of the problems affecting European cities; but these efforts have often been piecemeal, reactive and lacking in vision" (European Commission, 1997 p3). With the Communication *Towards an Urban Agenda in the European Union*, the Commission recognized that unemployment, environmental pressures, traffic congestion, poverty, poor housing, crime and drug abuse were chronic problems in municipalities across Europe. The Commission therefore resolved itself to look at how existing policies could be coordinated in order to improve the effectiveness of EU intervention in urban areas. This initiative drew upon the considerable expertise of the Expert Group on the Urban Environment in first of all assessing the various challenges facing European cities.

The Communication's principal message is integration – of existing EU policy, and of the various levels of governance. The European level is predominantly concerned with facilitating the right conditions for local action to promote urban sustainability. The Commission propose the development of clear targets and indicators for improvement of the urban environment with specified timescale. Increased support for research on transport, energy, environmental technologies, and urban planning, all within the framework of the *City of Tomorrow* budget line (see below) is stressed. Additional financial support through the structural funds is also advocated. Finally, the Commission provides a boost for European networks by highlighting the importance of mutual learning and best practice exchange.

If the 1997 Communication was predominantly an assessment of the state of EU policy on urban sustainability, the 1998 Communication entitled *Sustainable urban development in the European Union: a framework for action* was designed to be a plan of action (European Commission 1998). With this paper the Commission identified the main actions that would be necessary to improve urban sustainability.

As a first step, the Commission wanted to promote economic prosperity by looking at job creation, innovation, expansion of transport infrastructure, and reductions in congestion. In addition, the Commission wanted to promote actions leading to liveable cities by stressing initiatives on equality, social inclusion, anti-discrimination, and urban regeneration. The environmental dimension advocated initiatives on energy conservation, waste management, air quality, water, and noise policy.

Once again the governance dimension is very prominent in the Commission's approach. Integration, empowerment, capacity building, and implementation o existing policies are all emphasized.

The Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS) is the European Union's flagship policy designed to deliver environmental, social, and economic renewal. Adopted at the Gothenburg European Council in June 2001, the strategy's principal aim is to engineer a de-coupling of environmental degradation and resource consumption from economic and social development. (European Commission, 2001b). Particular attention was given to the need for greater co-ordination and integration. The SDS recognised that "too often, action to achieve objectives in one policy area hinders progress in another" (European Commission, 2001b p.4). This is a theme that aptly describes shortcomings in urban policy. In terms of specific policy recommendations, the SDS concentrated on a small number of issues deemed to be in most urgent need of attention. The issues covered were:

- Limit climate change and increase the use of clean energy.
- Address threats to public health.
- Manage natural resources more responsibly.
- Improve the transport system and land-use planning.

This final priority area is particularly important for cities and towns. De-coupling transport growth from economic development while ensuring more diverse and sustainable mobility options is key in improving air quality, while reducing noise, CO2 emissions, and congestion. A more balanced approach to regional development is attempted to address the specific problems of Europe's growing urban areas (European Commission, 2001b).

The European Union's 6th Environmental Action Programme (6th EAP) sets outlines the major the environmental priorities of the wider sustainable development strategy up to 2010. Five key priority areas are addressed: climate change; nature and biodiversity; environment and health; sustainable use of natural resources; and the role of the EU in the wider world. Crucially, the 6th EAP proposes a number of strategic actions designed to overcome the shortcomings of previous Action Programmes and ensure effective delivery of the EU's environmental policy. First, the 6th EAP aims to improve the implementation of existing legislation. The second aim involves integrating environmental concerns into the decisions taken under other policies. Third,

the Programme focuses on finding new ways to change production and consumption behaviour. Finally, the 6th EAP aims to encourage better land-use planning and management decisions (6th EAP, p13).

The 6th Environmental Action Programme could be viewed as rather vague and vacuous from a city perspective. Urban issues are addressed in an ad-hoc and fragmented way as a subordinate of landuse planning and transport. The Commission seem to limit themselves to encouraging and promoting effective policies at the local level, including Local Agenda 21, rather than obligating it through legislation. In terms of instruments, the 6th EAP promotes benchmarking, particularly with regard to transport issues, and exchange of best practice in urban planning and the development of sustainable cities. (6th EAP, 22)

By announcing the Commission's intent to deal with priority issues, including urban sustainability, in horizontal thematic strategies, the 6th EAP set in motion a wide-reaching consultation process on the future of European urban policy. The Commission's own contribution to this debate was contained within the Communication entitled *Towards a Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment*, which was issued in 2004 (European Commission, 2004). In this document the Commission stressed the growing need to improve the environmental performance of Europe's cities, while also facilitating the conditions for economic growth and social cohesion. Four priority themes were presented in this Communication:

- The first theme – sustainable urban management – sought an improvement in governance and capacity in European municipalities. The Commission continued to espouse Local Agenda 21 as a strategy for mobilizing municipal stakeholders towards the goal of integrated urban management. The Commission also campaigned for a specific and binding action, namely that all cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants should be required to adopt an environmental management plan.

- The second theme also involved a mandatory plan. Once again cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants would be obliged to implement an integrated action plan, this time concerning sustainable urban transport. In addition, the Commission advocated the extension of the CIVITAS programme (see below); the expansion of the number of low emission vehicles in use; the development of transport indicators; and an increase

in the number of awareness raising programmes such as the European Car Free Day.

- Two other priority themes, dealing with sustainable construction and urban design were also promoted by the Commission, the former dealing primarily with the environmental performance of buildings, and the latter dealing with land use planning including the extended use of brownfield sites.

Supporting the mainstreaming of good practice at local level – Commission to propose changes to the Community Framework; explore ways of improving dissemination of urban research results to towns and cities; and examine ways in which it can support the development of an Aalborg +10 initiative.

As with the SDS and the 6th EAP, the Commission stressed the need for improvements to the policy making process particularly with regard to integration. The need to promote integration across the full range of EU policies that impact on the urban area was coupled with the need to ensure coherence between work undertaken at the EU, national and regional/local levels.

The Thematic Strategy on the urban environment was released on 11 January 2006 (European Commission) The aim of the strategy is 'to improve the quality of the urban environment, making cities more attractive and healthier places to live, work and invest in, and reduce the adverse environmental impact of cities on the wider environment'.

The published strategy seems to be a collection of suggestions to, and encouragement for, the local and regional level. The Commission provide guidance on how to prepare environmental management systems and urban transport plans and urge local authorities to prepare both. The Commission further advocates a Europe-wide system for exchanging best practice. This final Strategy seems like an underwhelming successor to the preparatory paper. In a study commissioned by the IEEP, Pallemaerts et al have criticised the Thematic Strategy for lacking the ambition of the preparatory communication and for failing to include (Pallemaerts, M, et al 2006, 57). The binding implementing measures have been omitted as the Commission claimed that it would be pointless to set arbitrary targets. Moreover, networks of local and regional authorities successfully argued that large numbers of cities would lack the necessary capacity and resources to meet the standards.

The European Union's policy framework to support sustainable urban development is supported by a vast array of funding instruments. As with the policy it should be stressed that this is neither an exhaustive nor definitive list of EU financial programmes, it is rather an overview of those budget lines providing the most direct support for cities.

LIFE+, a successor to the LIFE programme, is the principal financial instrument of European environmental policy. It will consolidate various funding, including those dealing with urban issues, into one single framework. LIFE+ will provide almost €2bn in financial support for environmental initiatives between 2007 and 2013 and is designed to promote the environmental priorities contained within the 6th EAP. This also includes financing the seven Thematic Strategies including the Thematic Strategy on the Urban Environment. LIFE+ is divided into three components. The first, entitled "Nature and Biodiversity, focuses on implementing EU Directives on conservation, as well as developing suitable data for the preparation of new legislation. The second component, dealing with environmental policy and governance seeks to strengthen capacity to develop, implement, and enforce European environmental policy. The third component provides financial support for information and communication initiatives. At least 50% of the budgetary resources for LIFE+ dedicated to project action grants shall be allocated to support the conservation of nature and biodiversity. (Council of the European Union, 2007)

The European institutions agreed that 78% of the overall budget will be spent on project grants and allocated via regular calls for proposals. The remaining money will be used by the European Commission to fund NGOs, prepare communication materials, and conduct impact assessments of environmental policy and on policies related to climate change. (Council of the European Union, 2007)

Among its advantages, LIFE+ foresees more involvement of Member States in the definition of priorities as they may express national priorities to enable the proposed projects to respond to their various national and regional environmental needs. Another novelty is that the programme includes a provision to ensure a proportionate distribution of projects by establishing indicative national allocations based on a set of criteria, essentially population size and nature and biodiversity. Finally the Commission shall endeavour to ensure that at least 15% of the budget dedicated to project action grants is allocated to transnational projects. (Council of the European Union, 2007)

The final adoption of the LIFE+ initiative was delayed following a dispute between the European Parliament and the Council concerning who should manage the programme's funds. Some Member States had argued that the funds should be decentralized to national agencies, whereas the Parliament wanted the European Commission the allocation of funds. (Council of the European Union, 2007). The LIFE+ regulation is expected to enter into force by September 2007 with the first call for proposals expected to follow in the early autumn. (Council of the European Union, 2007)

The URBAN initiative (URBAN I between 1994 and 1999 and URBAN II between 2000 and 2006) is a European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) programme that focuses on disadvantaged communities and is designed to fund physical and environmental regeneration, social inclusion, training, entrepreneurship and employment. URBAN II consisted of €728m of funding spread across more than 70 programmes. Funding is typically targeted at districts that are characterized by unemployment, crime, and immigration levels running at twice the EU average according to the European Commission criteria), and very low proportion of green spaces. The bulk of the project financing goes towards physical and environmental regeneration, social inclusion, training, entrepreneurship and employment. According to the IEEP, one of URBAN's greatest strengths is the high degree of involvement of the local level. "In most cases the local authority is responsible for day to day implementation, advised by local community groups and in partnership with the national / regional authorities and the European Commission" (IEEP, 2005 p97). This provides greater scope to target funds at specific local needs.

The URBAN initiative also finances a European Network called URBACT that aims to facilitate mutual learning and exchange of experience across the projects funded by URBAN I and II.

In addition to URBAN, the Structural Funds also support sustainable urban development through the INTEREG III programme. More than €4.8bn was provided between 2000 and 2006 to projects addressing cross border urban development, social inclusion, protection of the environment, promoting renewable energy, co-operation among cities, spatial development strategies, efficient and sustainable transport systems, and capacity building. The Programme has three strands: Cross Border cooperation designed to promote joint spatial development approaches; transnational cooperation with a view to promoting wider European integration and sustainable development, and interregional cooperation to improve the effectiveness of regional development policies and instruments through large scale information exchange.

The City of Tomorrow and Cultural Heritage Programme was a component of the 5th Framework Programme for Research. Although this budget line was subsequently dropped from both the 6th and 7th Framework Programmes it has nonetheless made a significant contribution to initiating research on urban sustainability. The Programme covered the period 1998-2002. It provided support to research in four main areas: city planning and management; cultural heritage; built environment; and urban transport. Although some of the funds were allocated to improving urban governance, the bulk of monies were spent on identifying innovative and technological solutions to the challenges facing cities. The aim is to pilot new technologies in the hope that they can be rolled out and mainstreamed in other European cities.

The Seventh Framework Programme for Research (FP7) is designed to fund research into technology and innovation. It comprises a Cooperation Programme to promote collaborative research, a Capacities Programme, to develop research infrastructure, and an Ideas Programme to facilitate a shift from the research lab to the market place. It also includes a People Programme to fund young researchers. The overall budget for FP7 is more than €50bn over seven years; however the Programme has been criticized for failing to provide sufficient access to local and regional authorities, and for omitting any direct approach to urban sustainability.

The CIVITAS programme, which began in 2000, is the principle funding mechanism designed to promote sustainable urban transport. It is designed to initiate demonstration projects in a number of cities across Europe. Although CIVITAS covers urban transport issues the types of projects it funds tend to be those which entail new infrastructure or the testing of new pilot projects.

In 2001, in the face of stern opposition from a number of influential Member State governments, the European Commission launched the Community Framework to promote sustainable urban development. The Community Framework was directed at European local authority networks with the aim of encouraging the conception, exchange and implementation of LA21. It provided €14m in funding between 2001 and 2003 to projects led by networks of local authorities / municipalities. Projects focused on exchange of information, cooperation and accompanying measures. The European Commission sparked a great deal of controversy with their local authority partners when they decided not to renew in the Community Framework in 2004. Instead, it is one of the funding streams that have been merged into the LIFE+ funding mechanism.

The IEEP described the decision to close the Cooperation Framework after 2004, combined with the lower level of ambition of the final Thematic Strategy, as "a step backwards in achieving the goals of the 6EAP". (Pallemaerts, M, et al 2006, 34)

In addition to the policy and funding initiatives, there are a growing number of innovative support mechanisms at the European level to support urban areas.

The **Urban Audit** was initially launched in 1997 and completed its first full funding period in 2005. Financed by European Commission DG Regio and EUROSTAT, the Urban Audit collects data on urban sustainability in 258 medium and large cities across the European Union. In theory this should contribute to the EU's new policy of name, fame and shame, allowing local elected officials to compare the state of the urban environment, rewarding the leaders would positive publicity and shaming the laggards into greater efforts.

The Aarhus Convention provides access to environmental information, decision making and justice. From the city perspective, it obliges local authorities to improve reporting on urban environmental issues and participation in the development of urban environmental policy and initiatives (European Environment Agency, 1999, p333).

According to the European Environment Agency many of the problems faced by Europe's urban centres "can be solved if countries learn from others that have pioneered solutions" (Jacobsen and Merete Kristoffersen, 2003). The practice of exchanging experience and promoting mutual learning is promoted and encouraged in a number of ways. For many years the European Commission provided funding to the European Sustainable Cities and Towns Campaign. This enabled the Campaign to maintain a secretariat in Brussels that actively encouraged take up of the Aalborg Charter and provided a facility for dissemination of across Europe. Moreover, the Commission remains a major, and in some cases the main, source of funding for many European networks of local and regional authorities whose principal objective is to facilitate best practice exchange.

The Empirical Analysis

There is a lack of systematic quantitative data on the impact of EU initiatives designed to support the advancement of sustainable development at the local level. There are a handful of studies that analyze the development within local government regarding sustainable development (see for example Joas and Grönholm 2004, as well as Evans, Joas, Sundback and Theobald 2006). There are also tools that collect on-line data on cities performance in this policy area, including questions about the importance and level of outside support for the local process (see for example Joas, Evans and Theobald 2005).

In addition to these quantitative approaches several qualitative case studies have been made in order to analyze this impact.

There is one problematic feature, however, in all studies about the local level processes towards sustainability in Europe – the lack of time-series data. This is particularly true with regard to the focus of this study where the type and focus of EU policy tools varies over time. Therefore we selected data-sets that could, despite other limitations, highlight this change over time.

The Data - UBC Surveys 1998, 2001 and 2004

The basic data for the empirical analysis in this paper comes from a series of surveys, from 1998 until 2006, conducted by the Commission on Environment of the Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC EnvCom) in cooperation with Åbo Akademi University (all of them) and also other partners such as WZB–Berlin (2001 and 2004), Turku Polytechnic (2004) and financed by the network and the Ministry of the Environment in Finland. The surveys were and are basically used in to evaluate and analyze present and further needs of the cooperation between the network organization UBC and it's by now almost 100 member cities in the Baltic Sea region.

The surveys are not planned as such to be seen as time series, they are rather focused on different items and questions different years, following the general development within the issue area – environmental policies, local Agenda 21 and sustainable development.

Despite the character of non-contingency surveys there are items and series of questions in them that can be, in some cases be modified, and thus followed

over time. These questions are based on a follow-up of the standard structures and procedures within the local government environmental policy units.

The basic setting to use this material in a comparative setting over time is very good regarding this question. As the collected answers are all members of the same network, and also basically the same cities over the whole research period, the possibilities to analyze their behaviour and the opinions of the respondents are rather good.

The responses to the surveys are collected from a senior or expert level official within the local environmental authority – the named contact person for the network within the environmental administration. He or she has been given the opportunity to seek further knowledge and respondents on issue areas he has not been familiar with. These questions have been normally more technical, however, than the general questions we use in this analysis.

The setting for a well balanced comparison is further enhanced by the fact that with this material we are able to follow-up, to some extent, the effects of the EU and other supporting organizations effect in cities within the policy sector in different set of countries as the region has been in the focus of two of the major enlargement waves, 1995 and 2004. Therefore, the research area during the survey years displays a selection of countries with different relations to the EU: Old member countries, rather recent member countries and countries within but also outside the accession process. Even if the total number of responses is at lowest 59, the distribution can in some cases be rather narrow to be presented country by country. We thus use the categorization above to highlight different kinds of countries in relation to the EU.

A data description, including an analysis of drop-outs

We are using material from the 3 earlier surveys, dating back to 1998, 2001 and 2004 respectively. The latest survey from 2006 did not include anymore the type of question that we are mostly interested in this analysis – evaluations of different supporting systems for the development of local environmental and sustainability policies.

Present EU Status:	1998	2001	2004
EU member before 1995	11	15	6
	18,6 %	17,6 %	9,4 %
EU member since 1995	24	29	22
	40,7 %	34,1 %	34,4 %
EU member since 2004	20	35	33
	33,9 %	41,2 %	51,6 %
Non EU-member	4	6	3
	6,8 %	7,1 %	4,7 %
Total N	*59*	*85*	*64*
Missing	*22*	*15*	*34*
Response Rate	*73 %*	*85 %*	*65 %*

Table 1: Frequencies – Cities from Different Type of Countries (Source: UBC Surveys 1998, 2001 and 2004).

UBC experienced rapid growth as a network organization throughout the mid 1990s. In 1998 the network had 81 member cities at the time of the survey. The survey was sent to all UBC EnvCom contact persons, and was returned by 59 of them. This gives a response rate of 73% (the survey and analytical results from it are presented in Grönholm and Joas 1999). The number of UBC member cities reached 100 by 2001. This survey was answered by 85 cities, with a response rate of 85%. This survey is reported in Lindström and Grönholm 2001. The major focus in the first two UBC surveys was existing governance structures for sustainable development within the local communities.

The final survey used in this analysis was conducted in December 2004 and January 2005. This survey, reported partly in Lempa *et al.* 2005, was part of a new evaluation system by the UBC EnvCom, and was directed more than earlier on environmental and sustainability indicators. It consisted of two separate parts, one basic part (partly including earlier questions) and one entirely indicator part. The basic knowledge part was answered by 64 cities out of at that time 98 member cities, the indicator part by 72 cities. The response rates are thus 65% and 73%.

The gaps in the survey are not systematic in any significant way; however, regarding results discussing the group of cities coming from non-member countries is rather small and heterogeneous. The two exceptions are Norway that has traditionally decided to opt out of joining the EU, and Russia an unlikely candidate for future membership.

Another limitation for our analysis is the fact that the data is not collected for a time-series analysis. This means, for example, that while analyzing survey answers we must make many short-cuts and interpretations that can even harm our results. For example, the exact wording and type of answering options vary between the surveys, forcing us to interpret and manipulate the basic data to some extent in order to make it comparable. Therefore we want in advance note the reader of these limitations and see the paper as a first draft, a testing of a possible empirical setting[3].

Where Do Cities Get Support From?

The European Union is by no means the only actor promoting and supporting sustainable development and active local environmental policies in cooperation with local authorities in Europe. This is particularly true in the Baltic Sea Region where other organisations such as the Nordic Council are active. The collapse of the iron curtain did not only herald economic and political reforms in the early 1990's, it also brought new awareness of the significant environmental threats and near collapse of environmental resources in parts of the former Soviet Union. Some of the most immediate threats were and are bordering on the Baltic Sea.

There was thus a need and a market for environmental and sustainable development reforms in the area. This can be seen as needs in addition to the overall need for all industrial societies to change lifestyles in order to secure a more sustainable future. The need for reforms were and are evident thus in all countries in the research region.

We have analyzed, based on our research questions, two forms of support to cities in the region – knowledge to make better use of cities internal resources and raise the problem identification level in general, and economic support to implement actual reforms and investments.

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[3] The set of questions used in this analysis was following: **1998: Q 25**. *Has your city had international or national support to create the LA21 project? If so, what kind of support (several answers possible)?* + Categorization and open options. **2001: Q 22.** *What kind of support has your city received from the following institutions to create the LA21 process? And what is the importance of their support?* + Categorization and open options. **2004: Q B3/4.** *What is the importance of the economic/knowledge support your city has received from the following institutions to initiate UBC related activities?* + Categorization and open options. This last year did not have an opportunity to answer if the city had got support, the question was phrased as to state the importance of the support for the city – two least important categories were in our analysis interpreted as non-support. In all surveys the main focus has been on the environmental and sustainability sectors within the city, therefore despite the varying wording in the questions some general conclusions can be drawn on the level of overall support.

The empirical material included, as can be seen above, questions of whether the cities has received knowledge and/or economic support (1998 and 2001) and about the importance of this support (2001 and 2004) for local processes towards sustainable development (phrase was unfortunately somewhat different each year).

Despite the differences we have created two variables for each of the years, one stating if the city has received knowledge support, the other if the city has received economic support.
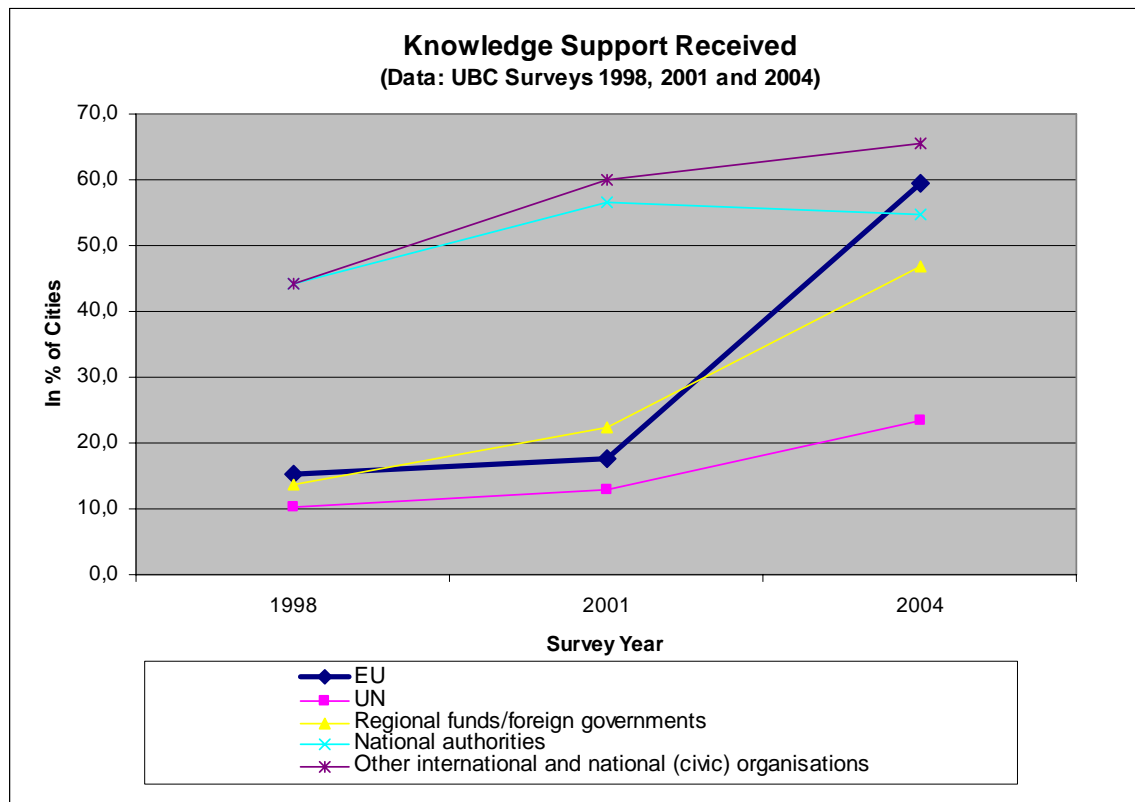
Knowledge Support Received
(Data: UBC Surveys 1998, 2001 and 2004)

Chart 1: Received Knowledge Support from Different Sources (Source: UBC Surveys 1998, 2001 and 2004, N = 43-73, missing = 10-21)

The level of knowledge support received from different sources shows a similar pattern for the first two surveys. Almost 50% of the UBC member cities received some degree of knowledge support in 1998 from either national authorities or international or national civic organizations, often working as single issue organizations in this policy area. This pattern, on a slightly higher level, however, is also visible in the 2001 data material. The level of EU knowledge support for cities is considered rather low at the time if the first two

surveys as just below 20% said that they had received EU support for tasks within this policy area.

This pattern clearly changed in the last survey as close to 60% of the cities considered the importance of EU knowledge support for their cities environmental and sustainability work to be at least rather important, in our interpretation meaning that they are receiving support. The pattern of more knowledge support overall is also visible in the material in 2004, but the internal order of the other sources remain the same as in the previous surveys. It can, however, be noted that the importance of regional know-how in the Baltic Sea region seems also to be growing.
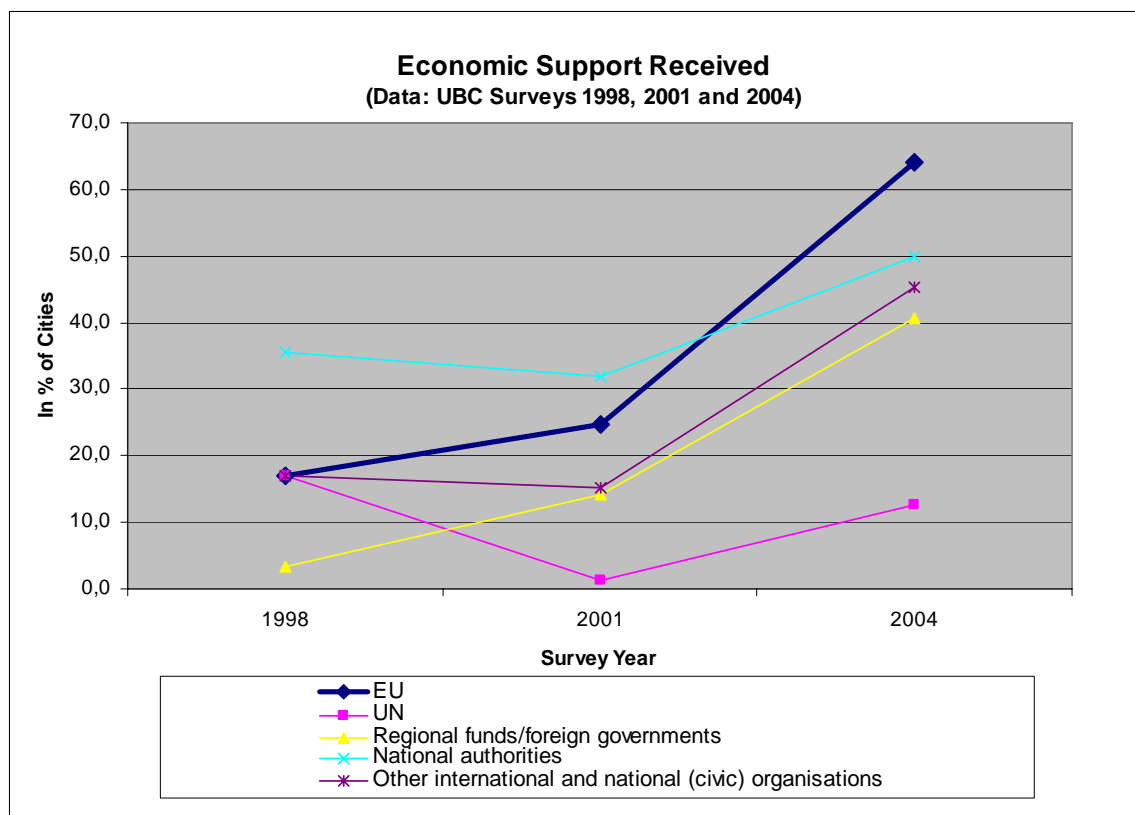

Chart 2: Received Economic Support from Different Sources (Source: UBC Surveys 1998, 2001 and 2004, N = 43-73, missing = 10-21)

The overall importance of funding seems to follow in general the same pattern as regarding knowledge support. The data material, logically, shows that the importance of funding from civic organizations is clearly lower than regarding knowledge. But, they still support also economically, as many local governments as regional funds (in 2001) and UN funding schemes (in 1998). An interpretation of this funding is that some part of institutional funding

(governments, Nordic council, EU and UN) is directed through various civic organizations, not the least larger networks such as EUROCITIES, WHO, UBC and ICLEI, all active in the policy area of sustainable development.

As regarding knowledge it also seems that the level of economic support has been growing through the research period.

What is also striking is the importance of the EU as the main funding institution seems to be rising. In 2004 almost 65% of our case cities stated that they consider the EU funding for their city as at least rather important, in our interpretation meaning that at least that many cities are economically supported in their activities for sustainable development or the environmental sector by EU.

EU Support over Time in Different Type of Countries in the Region

The analysis above shows that the number of UBC member cities that receive knowledge and/or economic support from EU has been increasing over time. This might be considered to be an effect of the enlargement of EU, even if there are funding schemes that are also available for non-members and especially accession countries.

If we look at the level of support that cities have received from the EU within the 4 groups of countries an interesting pattern is emerging. Knowledge and know-how based support seems to be directed from the EU to non-members and accession countries/new members since 2004. The Nordic countries that became members in 1995 seem to be clearly under a lower level than the other groups in 1998 and 2001, but even in this group the importance of the EU as a source of knowledge has been growing. It seems as if the new members from 1995 and the accession countries/members 2004 have learned how to work with EU mechanisms during the past five years.

The basic knowledge support level changed slightly before 2001 but more significantly after that. However, even in this case we have to make a reservation due to differences in the surveys (both charts 3 and 4).
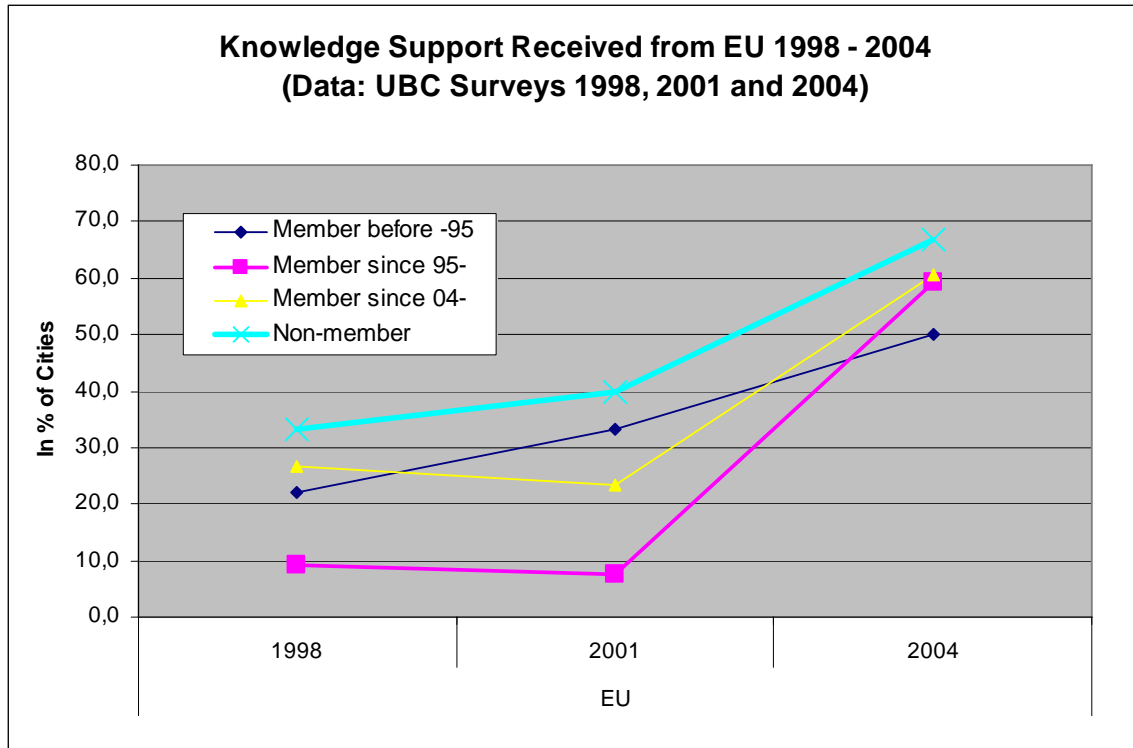
Chart 3: Received Knowledge Support from EU (Source: UBC Surveys 1998, 2001 and 2004, N = 43-73, missing = 10-21)

In 1998 about one third of cities from both old EU member countries and non-member countries received economic support for the local work in sustainability sector. The level of support to new 1995 members and accession country cities was clearly lower at the time of the survey. This relationship was turned around in 2001; about 36% of the UBC member cities from the candidate countries and 28% of the cities from 1995 member countries received support in some form, clearly at a higher level than the two previous groups of cities.

Regardless of region, almost all UBC member cities seemed to get more economic support in 2004 (see chart 4, with above mentioned restrictions).
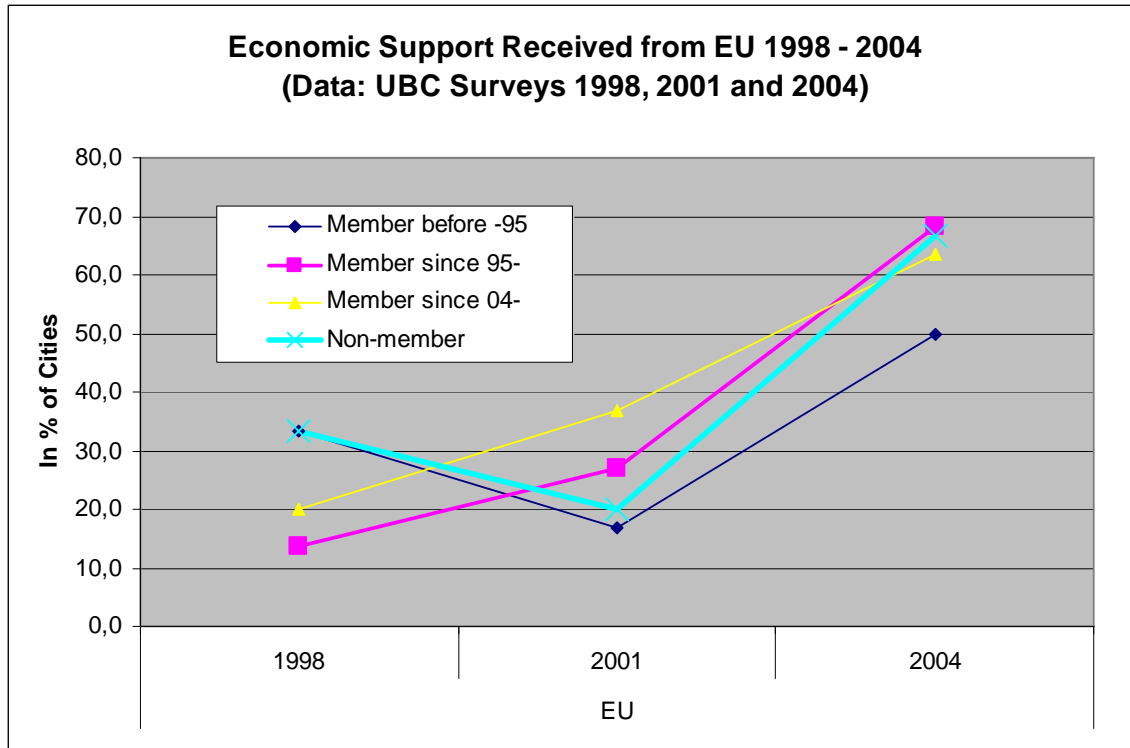
Chart 4: Received Economic Support from EU (Source: UBC Surveys 1998, 2001 and 2004, N = 43-73, missing = 10-21)

Even considering the possible measurement problems it looks as if support from the EU is reaching more cities independent of the status of their membership status. This might indicate that more recently introduced support systems seem to reach the end-users in a more successful way (i.e. cities in this case). However, we are limited in this study by the fact that the different programmes and systems are as such not analyzed on a detailed level, rather with a general question about support, and the importance of this support.

The Impact of EU Support: Importance of Support 2001 and 2004

The 2001 and 2004 surveys had an additional question about the importance of the support received by the city. In 2001 this was a general question, in 2004 separate questions were included for economic as well as knowledge support, and on a 5-grade scale.

We converted the 2004 scale into a 3-grade scale: *Not at all important* (2 least important levels), *rather important* (mid-option) and *very important* (highest options).
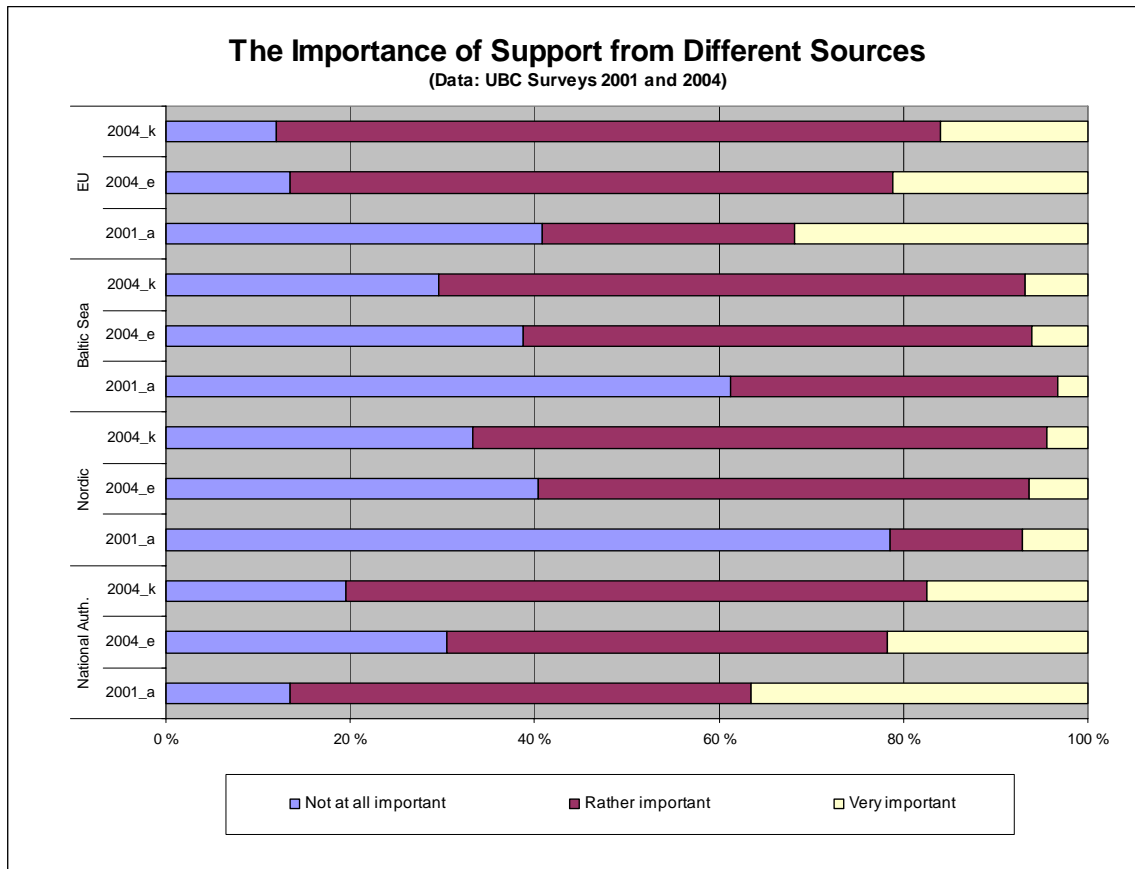
Chart 5: The Importance of Support from EU, Baltic sea and Nordic Funds and National Authorities, Changes 2001 - 2004 (Source: UBC Surveys 1998, Legend: 2001_a =all types of support, 2004_k = knowledge, 2004_e = economic, N = 26-55)

It seems obvious that the cities are considering the national government and/or authority knowledge and funding as most central for their work within the policy sectors of sustainability and the environment. The importance of national sources seems to be slightly lower, however, in 2004 than in 2001.

The importance of the EU support seems, on the contrary, to increase somewhat between the two measurement spots. In 2001 just less than 60% considered the EU support to be of at least rather importance for their cities; in 2004 this percentage is already above 80%. Regional and Nordic funding schemes are considered less important than national and EU in both 2001 and 2004, but also their importance is considered to be increasing rather than decreasing.

In general this would indicate that cities, despite membership status in the EU, are to even higher degree using and perhaps also relying on outside support, both funding and knowledge, in order to work with sustainability and environmental issues. This might be an effect of better opportunities, higher levels of need or a general way to work within networks that include other cities, outside funding institutions and other supporting organizations.

A Discussion: Success or Failure

Returning to Dale's quotation earlier in the paper it is important to not that governance rather than government is not something that comes natural to most institutions or centres of authority. The European Union has made various rhetorical commitments to improving key governance concepts. The Lisbon Agenda from 2000, the Sustainable Development Strategy of 2001 and most notably the European Commission White Paper on Governance from 2001 all stressed the need to improve stakeholder participation and consultation; transparency and accountability of decision making; integration and coherence of policy; enhanced communication and co-operation; and improved implementation and enforcement of policy. While the words have been encouraging, the evidence on the ground still suggests that the European system has not yet made the transition from government to governance.

The European Environment Agency have stated that "policies to address urban environmental issues show serious weaknesses", in particular the EEA criticizes the lack of sectoral integration, the absence of a specific EU mandate to work on urban sustainability, and the inability of the governance system to ensure vertical coordination across levels of governance. (European Environment Agency, 1999, p332)".

John Pinder has argued that while the Commission's role in preparing policy is extensive, its inability to ensure that Member States actually properly implement policies and programmes is a significant problem. He further contends that the governance of the EU, with the Commission's own silo mentality complementing the Council of Minister's habit of interfering with policy preparation, constitute "serious weaknesses" that limit the effectiveness of EU policy.(Pinder 2001, p163)

In addition, the integration process, launched by the European Council in Cardiff in 1998 and an essential component of the Sustainable Development

Strategy, also draws heavy criticism. Most observers agree that little is happening to establish comprehensive and cross sectoral strategies that take account of environmental and sustainable development concerns. In its 2003 Environment Policy Review, the European Commission noted that a large number of the environmentally unsustainable trends result from a failure to deal with inter-linkages between sectors. This lack of integration and coherence leads to policies in different areas working against each one another rather than being mutually supportive. This makes policies both more costly and less effective and thus hinders progress towards sustainable development. (European Commission 2003).

Perhaps the greatest failing of the EU system of environmental governance is the lack of adequate implementation. Weale et al argue that the current regulatory system adopted by the Commission focuses too much attention on constructing directives and not enough time dealing with effectiveness or enforcement. Regulatory measures tend to operate in a top-down fashion, focusing attention on the policy formulation and legislative process with little regard for outcomes. This stress on the enactment of a piece of legislation rather than on the capacity for enforcement or its potential as an effective reaction to environmental problems is common (Weale et al. 2003. pp. 117-118).

Baker and McCormick have written that "in reading the literature on sustainable development, and in studying the policies of the European Union and its member states, it is difficult not to come to the conclusion that while there have been many words written and spoken in support of the general principle of sustainable development, and a strong legal, moral and political commitment on the part of the EU, significant policy results are hard to find". (Baker and McCormick 2004, p294)

Serious also exist at the local level. European cities are heterogeneous in terms of governance, population make-up and capacity. Some have considerable scope to govern their own territory with powers to tax/spend and to initiate a range of policy measures. Others have little role beyond waste collection. As a result virtually every aspect of European policy has an impact in Europe's cities. Cities have a legitimate interest in participating in the preparation of European policies and programmes. Moreover, given the presence of cities at the front line of the monitoring, implementation and enforcement of EU policy, there should be a stronger recognition on the part of the European institutions to include them as full partners.

However, cities often lack the essential resources and capacity to engage with the European Union. They lack the human and financial resources that are necessary to implement policy and apply for financial support.

Despite these shortcomings our analysis indicates that the overall scope and penetration of EU support is improving over time. This could be a result of the measuring difficulties described above or it could be a result of the increasing umber of target cities falling within the scope of the EU in 2006 as opposed to 1998. It is more likely, however, that improved interaction between the EU and local levels on urban sustainability is a consequence of the slow evolution of EU urban policy from 1990 onwards; the EU's efforts to overcome problems in the way its policies and programmes are conceived and delivered; and a stronger understanding of European issues, and willingness to work with the European level, on the part of Europe's cities and towns.

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