

# A NEW GENERATION OF URBAN POLICIES

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*This output paper presents the Policy Lab's key learnings in a compact format. It summarises the keynote by Geert Teisman, Full Professor Public Administration at Erasmus University Rotterdam, and the subsequent expert discussion with João Mourato, Research Fellow at University of Lisbon. This expert exchange was enriched by the participants' view during Working Groups. This output paper also summarises those discussions and findings. For any questions and comments, please contact the EUKN Secretariat at [info@eukn.eu](mailto:info@eukn.eu).*

The EUKN Policy Lab for Portugal, which took place online on 15 April 2021, was co-organised with the Portuguese Ministry of Environment and Climate Action and the Directorate-General for Territory. Its opening statement was: 'A new generation of urban policies is needed.'

The Policy Lab's starting point was that urban matters are highly relevant for tackling contemporary environmental and societal challenges, and that urban policymaking can play a crucial role in mitigating the negative impacts of current development models and urbanisation patterns. Beyond that, urban policies represent an opportunity to proactively stimulate a transition towards sustainable urban development.

Besides the key question - why a new generation of urban policies is needed - the Policy Lab also gave room to discuss desirable features of future urban policies, suggesting policy coherence and integration as core elements. By presenting the Portuguese Circular Cities Initiative (InC2), it showcased the Circular Economy as a concrete example of coherent and integrated urban policies.

## Why is a new generation needed?

- Short-term orientation of urban policies
- Complexity of leveraging long-term structural change towards sustainability which cannot be tackled with short-term solutions

## Which features are desirable?

- Policy coherence: mitigating trade-offs and strengthening synergies within and across policies of various sectors
- Policy integration: bringing together existing, seemingly unrelated or contradicting policies, and addressing their underlying problem in a holistic way

## How to achieve these goals?

- Complexification: acknowledging and taking advantage of the complexity, wide scope and systemic nature of a transition towards sustainability
- Combining and integrating problems and solutions
- Multi-level governance: guaranteeing the consistency of policy fields, instruments and goals and involving a broader variety of stakeholders from the local, national, and European level, including civil society actors and social movements, in the design of urban policies
- Ensuring both institutional capacity of local governments and national governments' commitment to empower cities in their transition towards sustainability
- Applying the Circular Economy as a concrete undertaking of implementing the above-mentioned points

## The Experts' View

### Geert Teisman's Keynote Speech

#### Why is a new generation of urban policies needed?

- In policy cycles, the main focus is on policy input (people, money, knowledge), activities (making one's own policy), and output (implementing one's own policy). Less attention is paid to outcome and impacts, where real societal change happens.
- The fragmentation of urban policymaking into single policy siloes (like housing, mobility, industry, etc.) often leads to implementation problems. This fragmentation, together with overarching societal issues like climate adaptation and the Circular Economy, increases the complexity of policy issues.

#### Which features are desirable?

- Creation of value chains across levels of government and policy domains: less policymaking, more joint actions at the boundaries of levels, pillars, and domains of the governance system
- Greater focus on outcome and impact of the policy chain
- Appreciation of complexity
- Long-term orientation of urban policymaking: solving problems with a focus on future, long-term transitions

#### How to achieve these goals?

- Increasing the understanding of and ability to apply multi-level governance beyond dividing tasks
- Facilitation and rewarding of joint actions
- Increasing the understanding of outcome (value adding or extraction among different policies) and impact (adoption of the policy in society) as important for policy effectiveness
- Expanding the understanding and appreciation of complexity and its effective employment
- Increasing the understanding of solving contemporary problems with a focus on future, long-term transitions

## A Conversation Between Experts

### Geert Teisman meets João Mourato



*Prof. Dr. Ing. Geert R Teisman  
Full Professor Public Administration  
Department of Public Administration and  
Sociology, Erasmus University Rotterdam  
Policy Lab's Keynote Speaker*



*João Mourato  
PhD, Research Fellow, Institute of Social Sciences,  
University of Lisbon  
Policy Lab's Discussant*

**João Mourato (JM):** The need for policy integration and coordination is not new. Over the past three decades, some progress towards more policy coherence and integration has been made. But the processes of shifting institutional cultures, decision-making cultures, and the mind-set of actors have been painstaking slow. How - if at all - can this cultural change, that we need to face the challenges of climate change and sustainability issues, be speeded up?

**Geert Teisman (GT):** Unfortunately, I have made the same experience. We have been talking about integrated policymaking for a long time, but the steps we have made so far are not good or fast enough. It is important to understand that public authorities are part of the problem, and that we must talk to those people. They commit to more integrated approaches but only if their organisation is not harmed. So, organisational survival is considered more important than solving societal issues. This is the issue that we should place on the agenda, and that is what I am doing in the Netherlands; I am speaking to politicians of different levels and branches of government.

**JM:** There is a famous statement by Robert Putnam: 'Institutions don't make people; people make institutions.' The discussion about the needed shift of the policy mind-set and institutional culture does not take into account the human resources behind it. Don't you think that in the last, at least three, decades we have been extremely enthusiastic about objectives and strategies but less so about who is going to implement them? How to capacitate institutions throughout the EU at multiple levels in order to achieve these strategic objectives?

**GT:** What I said in my presentation - while 80% of our attention is going to the first three elements of the policy chain, 80% of the impact is created in the last two ones - is in line with your argumentation. In my practice, I try to stimulate those in charge to pay more attention to these last two steps. That means shifting from policymaking to implementation. One could even say that implementation creates policy. This is a reverse way of thinking of what policymaking is about. Policy-making is to create combinations of many different aims that work together in implementation. Many people in the public domain understand this and are already employing it. But what is lacking is that the traditional line organisations assist them in doing so. Implementation requires more room for making combinations that were not designed in advance but are designed in a certain place. In the Netherlands, we

have managed to make all departments related to circularity create a report on the tensions between their policies. The intention was to think about how they can combine policies in such a way that their implementation power is growing.

**JM:** I would like to come to the EU now and what it has been doing in that regard, referring to the traditional saying 'Sometimes we are our worst enemy.' I think that in the case of innovation in urban policies and of governance, the EU is its own enemy. My argument is in line with the policy chain that you presented. I think that the EU does not focus on impact but has a very deep-rooted culture of outputs. In my opinion, these outputs are becoming an obstacle at multiple levels. I agree with you that we need light and dynamic policies. But the EU policy environment is everything but light and dynamic. I think that reforms should start to appear, and that the EU should lead by example. There is a stronger role for leadership in policy innovation, and I wonder if the EU is willing to take that role. What do you think?

**GT:** I hope the EU is able and willing to take that role. I agree with your explanation of how the EU works. At the same time, I want to emphasise that states do not work differently; they are doing the same. I am sure that several cities, provinces, and regional authorities - at least I know in the Netherlands - are making the same mistake. They focus on input, through-put, output and are forgetting outcomes and impacts. Why? Because it is much more difficult to take responsibility for outcomes and impacts. And that is one of the reasons why it is so hard to create change. We should stimulate the EU to change, but the same has to happen at national, regional, and local levels. Start by changing yourself and be an example for others: I think that is the best way towards innovation.

[Discover more on the experts' contribution here](#)

## The Participants' View

### Working Groups

The second part of the Policy Lab entailed a focused discussion in two Working Groups (WGs) that approached the topic from two different perspectives:

1. Mapping challenges and solutions of the new generation of urban policies in European countries
2. Discussing the working methods and tools adopted by the InC2 initiative to address the Circular Economy

The EUKN facilitators used the interactive Miro board, an online whiteboard tool for real-time collaboration, for a joint mapping of challenges and potential solutions on these two perspectives. Participants were invited to fill sticky notes with their thoughts, which prepared the ground for further discussions. The WGs closed with a clustering of the findings as shown in the following.

## Working Group 1 - Findings

**Opening Statement:** *The pursuit of a Circular Economy supports the rise of new policy design, targeting more coherent and integrated urban policies.*

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**Guiding Question:** *Which are the challenges that urban policies for the Circular Economy are facing? What can be learnt from the InC2 Initiative in this respect?*

### Identified Challenges

#### **Waste as a 'lack of innovation'**

Many of the obstacles defined by participants had to do with cultural factors. To change the current linear model of economic growth, a 'circularity mindset' is needed. With this must come changes in the political and institutional culture that relate strongly to political willingness, adapting established procedures as well as rethinking of existing linear consumption patterns.

#### **Cooperation: the key to circularity**

Next to cultural issues relating to behavioural patterns and mindsets, also functional/institutional factors were mentioned. Circular Economy indicators and benchmarking can help pushing this topic forward. Also, circularity-oriented funding frameworks are needed to provide adequate resources. All in all, public administrative structures would

need to work in a more integrated way. Circularity requires vertical and horizontal policy coordination, increasing exchange and inter-siloed working, and 'true' multi-level governance. Citizens and stakeholder involvement is crucial but not self-evident: it depends on policymakers with an open mind who can listen.

#### **Lost in translation**

In WG 1, the application of the Circular Economy 'on the ground' was identified as a specific challenge of urban policies. Cities and regions encounter individual challenges, but to date, there is no full understanding of the metabolic relations of resources within cities and their functional areas. Similarly, the feeling of being 'lost' and not knowing where to start was mentioned in this context, as well as the need for additional opportunities of co-learning and an exchange about practices with others. Another challenge of urban policies for the Circular Economy was seen in potential conflicts between policies from the national and EU level. For example, arranging local food systems in accordance with circularity was deemed difficult in light of the Common Agricultural Policy of the EU. On a more abstract level, participants brought up the idea of translating the Circular Economy as a narrative: a challenge was to convert the circular narrative into a sustainable economic development narrative.

## Potential Solutions

- Awareness-raising/communication: provide information about impact, the 'cost of no circular economy', and thus involve citizens
- Sharing knowledge: such as via open workshops to share good examples of circular economy applied to urban policies
- Understanding the circular economy: going beyond waste management and grasping the entire dimension of this topic
- Multi-level governance: circularity is about working together

## Working Group 2 - Findings

**Opening Statement:** *A new generation of urban policies is needed. These new urban policies should acknowledge the complexity of a transition to sustainability and embrace its wide scope and systemic nature to generate long-term, structural changes.*

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**Guiding Question:** *What are the challenges that the new generation of urban policies will face/is facing?*

## Identified Challenges

### Shared with WG1

Similar to WG 1, cultural factors dominated the debate about the determinants of a 'new generation of urban policies': there are massive societal challenges related to lack of trust, fear, deprivation, and growing divisions. Feelings of anxiety, lack of control and distrust are on the rise, putting people in an 'unsustainable mindset'.

### The public servants of the 21st century

As regards functional and institutional factors leading to a new generation of urban policies, the quality and performance of the public service was mentioned. This includes the notion of 'public servants of the 21st century' who can lead by example in breaking open inflexible, change-preventing structures in public administration. Too often, policy is made based on old mindsets and structures. The public servants of the 21st century exist and there are a lot of them, but they should not be overwhelmed and need adequate resources. Representation and co-creation possibilities are also insufficient: people feel a lack of possibilities to actually change something and experience little 'self-efficacy' in their own living environments.

### Accepting failure in policymaking

Policymaking logics do not necessarily help in achieving the desired change towards more policy integration and coherence as part of a new generation of urban policies. Politics suffers from a 'success bias' and short-termism. The opposite should be the case: accepting failure and the fact that leaders do not have the answer to every question. Not all policy can be equally successful all the time. Without admitting there is failure or problems, there is no learning and no improvement.

## Potential Solutions

- Combine the thinking on governance and participation, giving people voices to restore trust in policy and politics
- Focus on implementation and impact; end turf wars; combine sectoral and integrated approaches in a place-based way
- Activate and listen to the great (young) people in public administration
- Use the Circular Economy as a case/policy field to bring about more integrated policies (see successful URBACT networks on the circular economy, e.g. construction, sustainable food)

Both WGs identified a cultural shift of mindsets and behaviour, both in society and public administrations, as the major challenge to move to a new generation of urban policies. To tackle this fundamental challenge, open-mindedness, inclusive cooperation and 'real' participation should be leading the way to more coherent and integrated urban policies.