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26.07.2013

## **URMA-Approach: Improving Urban-rural Cooperation and Contributing to Territorial Cohesion**

### **I. Background**

The INTERREG IVC URMA project promotes urban-rural partnerships as a tool to strengthen the potential for generation and transfer of innovation in European metropolitan areas and their surrounding hinterlands. In the course of the project, different types of regional innovation systems will be identified and the effectiveness of regional and local policies in the field of innovation will be improved. Finally, the URMA project will raise awareness of the need and potential of urban-rural partnerships. Conferences, workshops and study visits as well as three pilot implementations on urban-rural partnerships in Germany, Italy and the Netherlands will contribute to the exchange of experiences and help to identify good practices.

The basis for URMA was laid during the project “Supra-Regional Partnership Northern Germany/ Hamburg Metropolitan Region”, integrated in the German Federal Government’s programme “Demonstration Projects of Spatial Planning” which ran between 2008 and 2010. In this project innovative means of addressing regional disparities and new governance structures were developed for large scale urban-rural partnerships. The URMA project’s objective is therefore to utilize the urban-rural cooperation schemes developed and tested in the demonstration project in other European regions (URMA Proposal 2010: 6).

### **II. URMA’s objectives: Why do we need urban-rural partnerships?**

Globalization compels cities and regions to position themselves in international competition. As most European cities are relatively small in global terms, in order to maintain or gain global visibility, metropolitan regions start cooperating in new ways with their surrounding non-metropolitan and rural hinterlands. At the same time regions are increasingly interconnected and inter-related allowing for new types of win-win-urban-rural partnerships to develop.

Another aspect is that regional challenges are very complex and do not stop at the administrative or national boundaries. Key challenges of climate change, sustainable development and demographic change provide new opportunities for urban and rural areas to work together. They only can be tackled when regional actors ignore existing boundaries by thinking and acting holistically.

Whereas *relations* or *interactions* between urban and rural areas are common due to commuter flows, provision of food production or leisure activities, there is a need to define, develop and test further fields of urban-rural *partnerships* and to widen the territorial dimension of co-operation. In particular, the question arises how to interrelate metropolitan regions with their neighbouring and more distant rural areas.

In this context, the objectives of URMA are:

- Promoting urban-rural partnerships as a tool to strengthen the potential for innovation and growth in European metropolitan areas
- Identifying and exchanging experience on good practice urban-rural cooperation schemes
- Improving the effectiveness of regional and local innovation policies

### III. Definition of urban-rural partnerships

Within the framework of URMA (Concise dictionary, January 2013, URMA-Proposal 2011, METREX b, undated: 7-8, 12-14, Kawka: 2009: 63), we define urban-rural partnerships as project-oriented cooperation initiatives between different actors in metropolitan areas and their surrounding and more distant rural hinterlands with the aim to establish stable but flexible cooperation structures. In particular, urban-rural partnerships can be characterised by the following features which should be recognised as equally important:

1. **Spatial aspect:** Urban-rural partnerships can be created within the formal boundaries of a metropolitan region but can also extend further than the core areas of influence (beyond classic city-suburban-cooperation/city-region-cooperation). In other words, they can stretch over a wider geographical distance than the neighbouring or surrounding areas. In URMA, three spatial scales of pilot implementations can be distinguished:
  - Small-scale: Inner-metropolitan area of cooperation between metropolitan core and its periurban area(s) (e.g. Florence metropolitan area)
  - Medium-scale: Inner-metropolitan region cooperation between urban area(s) and rural area(s). This also includes predominantly rural area(s) with a polycentric structure (e.g. Twente-Borne)
  - Large scale: Supra-regional cooperation of metropolitan core /area /region with rural hinterland, defined on a more global scale (e.g. Hamburg-Jutland)

2. **Partnerships on a level playing field:** The urban-rural cooperation is based on equal footing, respect and recognition of mutual interdependence between urban and rural actors. The cooperation will fail in the long term if it will be dominated by hierarchical structures and stereotypes.
3. **Benefits and resources/cost sharing:** Urban-rural partnership is formed on the basis of mutual benefit as well as mutual resources and cost sharing. The cooperation should bring both, urban and rural actors win-win situations as much as possible, so both parties have to decide how to achieve it. Balanced negotiations of interests and the ability to share resources, responsibilities and commitments will enhance cohesion between the metropolis and rural regions.
4. **Competences and profiling:** Cooperation initiatives should be based on the existing competences (territorial capital) of urban and rural areas. Partners should be clear about the competences and capabilities which shape their profile and what they can bring into the partnership.
5. **Spatial solidarity:** Urban-rural partnerships should enable peripheral and economically weak areas to participate in growth and innovation. Metropolitan areas as engines of development have responsibility to initiate projects from which less favoured areas would profit. Solidarity in the context of URMA is based on finding the balance between competition and support. Support in this context can be understood as an exchange of know-how, good practices and innovative solutions.
6. **Actors:** Urban-rural partnerships are developed through the involvement of a wide range of actors representing various sectors and levels of governance: public administration and representatives of local/ regional governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and business.
7. **Innovation:** Innovation in the context of URMA is understood as knowledge transfer based on the creation and dissemination of “novelty”, new knowledge, or the introduction of existing knowledge in a new way (cf. Cooke: 2001: 33, Lamboy 2005: 1142, modified). Innovative solutions can be better found if actors from different fields/sectors work together.
8. **Dialogue culture:** The formation of urban-rural partnerships is based on a voluntary basis and requires ongoing process of respectful negotiations, capacity building (know-how), and trust building. Urban and rural actors need to gradually establish a culture of dialogue, searching for long-term solutions for (wider) regional benefit, rather than only for short-term and small-scale benefits.
9. **Common understanding and joint vision:** Urban and rural actors should develop a common understanding on the objectives of their partnership. This might be based on

a joint vision or strategy for the development of the functional area concerned, irrespective of administrative boundaries.

**10. Topics:** The topics should reflect the need for cooperation and provide solutions to regional challenges or disparities. Urban-rural partnerships could develop projects in the field of: business, infrastructure, spatial planning, science, education, culture, tourism, environment, etc. An integrated supra-regional approach could be implemented.

**11. Variable geometry:** This principle implies that the constellation of actors/ regions and geographical area involved in urban-rural partnerships may vary according to the thematic orientation of cooperation. Therefore, urban-rural partnerships are most of all driven by concrete actions and tangible projects and less by regional planning.

#### IV. Examples

- Polish-German crossborder cooperation in the functional region between Westpomerania, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Brandenburgia, possible cooperation in the field of tourism (watersports) (PP3)
- University cooperation in Pleven; crossborder infrastructure cooperation between Pleven and the neighbouring Romanian district (name?) (PP9)
- Sustainable land management in Milano metropolitan area (EXPO 2015) (PP5)
- German-Danish crossborder cooperation along the Jutland axis (PP2)
- Development of Krakow metropolitan cooperation (PP7)
- Improvement of links between agricultural parks and urban areas in the Florence metropolitan area (PP4)
- Restoration of regional food chain in Twente (PP8/PP10)