

# **Charter of European Cities & Towns Towards Sustainability**

**(as approved by the participants at the European Conference on Sustainable Cities & Towns in Aalborg, Denmark on 27 May 1994)**

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## **Part I**

### **Consensus Declaration: European Cities & Towns Towards Sustainability**

#### **I.1 The Role of European Cities and Towns**

We, European cities & towns, signatories of this Charter, state that in the course of history, our towns have existed within and outlasted empires, nation states, and regimes and have survived as centres of social life, carriers of our economies, and guardians of culture, heritage and tradition. Along with families and neighbourhoods, towns have been the basic elements of our societies and states. Towns have been the centres of industry, craft, trade, education and government. We understand that our present urban lifestyle, in particular our patterns of division of labour and functions, land-use, transport, industrial production, agriculture, consumption, and leisure activities, and hence our standard of living, make us essentially responsible for many environmental problems humankind is facing. This is particularly relevant as 80 percent of Europe's population live in urban areas.

We have learnt that present levels of resource consumption in the industrialised countries cannot be achieved by all people currently living, much less by future generations, without destroying the natural capital.

We are convinced that sustainable human life on this globe cannot be achieved without sustainable local communities. Local government is close to where environmental problems are perceived and closest to the citizens and shares responsibility with governments at all levels for the well-being of humankind and nature. Therefore, cities and towns are key players in the process of changing lifestyles, production, consumption and spatial patterns.

#### **I.2 The Notion and Principles of Sustainability**

We, cities & towns, understand that the idea of sustainable development helps us to base our standard of living on the carrying capacity of nature. We seek to achieve social justice, sustainable economies, and environmental sustainability. Social justice will necessarily have to be based on economic sustainability and equity, which require environmental sustainability. Environmental sustainability means maintaining the natural capital. It demands from us that the rate at which we consume renewable material, water and energy resources does not exceed the rate at which the natural systems can replenish them, and that the rate at which we consume non-renewable resources does not exceed the rate at which sustainable renewable resources are replaced. Environmental sustainability also means that the rate of emitted pollutants does not exceed the capacity of the air, water, and soil to absorb and process them.

Furthermore, environmental sustainability entails the maintenance of biodiversity; human health; as well as air, water, and soil qualities at standards sufficient to sustain human life and well-being, as well as animal and plant life, for all time.

#### **I.3 Local Strategies Towards Sustainability**

We are convinced that the city or town is both the largest unit capable of initially addressing the many urban architectural, social, economic, political, natural resource and environmental

imbalances damaging our modern world and the smallest scale at which problems can be meaningfully resolved in an integrated, holistic and sustainable fashion. As each city is different, we have to find our individual ways towards sustainability. We shall integrate the principles of sustainability in all our policies and make the respective strengths of our cities and towns the basis of locally appropriate strategies.

#### **I.4 Sustainability as a Creative, Local, Balance-Seeking Process**

We, cities & towns, recognise that sustainability is neither a vision nor an unchanging state, but a creative, local, balance-seeking process extending into all areas of local decision-making. It provides ongoing feedback in the management of the town or city on which activities are driving the urban ecosystem towards balance and which are driving it away. By building the management of a city around the information collected through such a process, the city is understood to work as an organic whole and the effects of all significant activities are made manifest. Through such a process the city and its citizens may make informed choices. Through a management process rooted in sustainability, decisions may be made which not only represent the interests of current stakeholders, but also of future generations.

#### **I.5 Resolving Problems by Negotiating Outwards**

We, cities & towns, recognise that a town or city cannot permit itself to export problems into the larger environment or to the future. Therefore, any problems or imbalances within the city are either brought towards balance at their own level or absorbed by some larger entity at the regional or national level. This is the principle of resolving problems by negotiating outwards. The implementation of this principle will give each city or town great freedom to define the nature of its activities.

#### **I.6 Urban Economy Towards Sustainability**

We, cities & towns, understand that the limiting factor for economic development of our cities and towns has become natural capital, such as atmosphere, soil, water and forests. We must therefore invest in this capital. In order of priority this requires

- investments in conserving the remaining natural capital, such as groundwater stocks, soil, habitats for rare species;
- encouraging the growth of natural capital by reducing our level of current exploitation, such as of non-renewable energy;
- investments to relieve pressure on natural capital stocks by expanding cultivated natural capital, such as parks for inner-city recreation to relieve pressure on natural forests); and
- increasing the end-use efficiency of products, such as energy-efficient buildings, environmentally friendly urban transport.

#### **I.7 Social Equity for Urban Sustainability**

We, cities and towns, are aware that the poor are worst affected by environmental problems (such as noise and air pollution from traffic, lack of amenities, unhealthy housing, lack of open space) and are least able to solve them. Inequitable distribution of wealth both causes unsustainable behaviour and makes it harder to change. We intend to integrate people's basic social needs as well as healthcare, employment and housing programmes with environmental protection. We wish to learn from initial experiences of sustainable lifestyles, so that we can work towards improving the quality of citizens' lifestyles rather than simply maximising consumption.

We will try to create jobs which contribute to the sustainability of the community and thereby reduce unemployment. When seeking to attract or create jobs we will assess the effects of any business opportunity in terms of sustainability in order to encourage the creation of long-term jobs and long-life products in accordance with the principles of sustainability.

## **I.8 Sustainable Land-Use Patterns**

We, cities & towns, recognise the importance of effective land-use and development planning policies by our local authorities which embrace the strategic environmental assessment of all plans. We should take advantage of the scope for providing efficient public transport and energy which higher densities offer, while maintaining the human scale of development. In both undertaking urban renewal programmes in inner urban areas and in planning new suburbs we seek a mix of functions so as to reduce the need for mobility. Notions of equitable regional interdependency should enable us to balance the flows between city and countryside and prevent cities from merely exploiting the resources of surrounding areas.

## **I.9 Sustainable Urban Mobility Patterns**

We, cities & towns, shall strive to improve accessibility and sustain social welfare and urban lifestyles with less transport. We know that it is imperative for a sustainable city to reduce enforced mobility and stop promoting and supporting the unnecessary use of motorised vehicles. We shall give priority to ecologically sound means of transport (in particular walking, cycling, public transport) and make a combination of these means the centre of our planning efforts. Motorised individual means of urban transport ought to have the subsidiary function of facilitating access to local services and maintaining the economic activity of the city.

## **I.10 Responsibility for the Global Climate**

We, cities & towns, understand that the significant risks posed by global warming to the natural and built environments and to future human generations require a response sufficient to stabilise and then to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere as soon as possible. It is equally important to protect global biomass resources, such as forests and phytoplankton, which play an essential role in the earth's carbon cycle. The abatement of fossil fuel emissions will require policies and initiatives based on a thorough understanding of the alternatives and of the urban environment as an energy system. The only sustainable alternatives are renewable energy sources.

## **I.11 Prevention of Ecosystems Toxicification**

We, cities & towns, are aware that more and more toxic and harmful substances are released into the air, water, soil, food, and are thereby becoming a growing threat to human health and the ecosystems. We will undertake every effort to see that further pollution is stopped and prevented at source.

## **I.12 Local Self-Governance as a Pre-Condition**

We, cities and towns, are confident that we have the strength, the knowledge and the creative potential to develop sustainable ways of living and to design and manage our cities towards sustainability. As democratically elected representatives of our local communities we are ready to take responsibility for the task of re-organising our cities and towns for sustainability. The extent to which cities and towns are able to rise to this challenge depends upon their being given rights to local self-governance, according to the principle of subsidiarity. It is essential that sufficient powers are left at the local level and that local authorities are given a solid financial base.

## **I.13 Citizens as Key Actors and the Involvement of the Community**

We, cities & towns pledge to meet the mandate given by Agenda 21, the key document approved at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, to work with all sectors of our communities - citizens, businesses, interest groups - when developing our Local Agenda 21 plans. We recognise the call in the European Union's Fifth Environmental Action Programme "Towards Sustainability" for the responsibility for the implementation of the programme to be shared among all sectors of the

community. Therefore, we will base our work on co-operation between all actors involved. We shall ensure that all citizens and interested groups have access to information and are able to participate in local decision-making processes. We will seek opportunities for education and training for sustainability, not only for the general population, but for both elected representatives and officials in local government.

### **I.14 Instruments and Tools for Urban Management Towards Sustainability**

We, cities & towns, pledge to use the political and technical instruments and tools available for an ecosystem approach to urban management. We shall take advantage of a wide range of instruments including those for collecting and processing environmental data; environmental planning; regulatory, economic, and communication instruments such as directives, taxes and fees; and mechanisms for awareness raising including public participation. We seek to establish new environmental budgeting systems which allow for the management of our natural resources as economically as our artificial resource, 'money'.

We know that we must base our policy-making and controlling efforts, in particular our environmental monitoring, auditing, impact assessment, accounting, balancing and reporting systems, on different types of indicators, including those of urban environmental quality, urban flows, urban patterns, and, most importantly, indicators of an urban systems sustainability. We, cities & towns, recognise that a whole range of policies and activities yielding positive ecological consequences have already been successfully applied in many cities through Europe. However, while these instruments are valuable tools for reducing the pace and pressure of unsustainability, they do not in and of themselves reverse society's unsustainable direction. Still, with this strong existing ecological base, the cities are in an excellent position to take the threshold step of integrating these policies and activities into the governance process for managing local urban economies through a comprehensive sustainability process. In this process we are called on to develop our own strategies, try them out in practice and share our experiences.

## **Part II**

### **The European Sustainable Cities and Towns Campaign**

We, European cities & towns, signatories of this charter, shall move forward together towards sustainability in a process of learning from experience and successful local examples. We shall encourage each other to establish long-term local action plans (Local Agendas 21), thereby strengthening inter-authority co-operation, and relating this process to the European Union's actions in the field of the urban environment.

We hereby initiate The European Sustainable Cities & Towns Campaign to encourage and support cities and towns in working towards sustainability. The initial phase of this Campaign shall be for a two-year period, after which progress shall be assessed at a Second European Conference on Sustainable Cities & Towns to be held in 1996.

We invite every local authority, whether city, town or county and any European network of local authorities to join the Campaign by adopting and signing this Charter.

We request all the major local authority networks in Europe to undertake the co-ordination of the Campaign. A Co-ordinating Committee shall be established of representatives of these networks. Arrangements will be made for those local authorities which are not members of any network.

We foresee the principal activities of the Campaign to be to:

- facilitate mutual support between European cities and towns in the design, development and implementation of policies towards sustainability;
- collect and disseminate information on good examples at the local level;
- promote the principle of sustainability in other local authorities;
- recruit further signatories to the Charter;
- organise an annual "Sustainable City Award";

- formulate policy recommendations to the European Commission;
- provide input to the Sustainable Cities Reports of the Urban Environment Expert Group;
- support local policy-makers in implementing appropriate recommendations and legislation from the European Union;
- edit a Campaign newsletter.

**These activities will require the establishment of a Campaign Co-ordination.**

We shall invite other organisations to actively support the Campaign.

**Part III**

**Engaging in The Local Agenda 21 processes: Local Action Plans Towards Sustainability**

We, European cities & towns, signatories of this Charter, pledge by signing this Charter and joining the European Sustainable Cities & Towns Campaign that we will seek to achieve a consensus within our communities on a Local Agenda 21 by the end of 1996. This will meet the mandate established by Chapter 28 of Agenda 21 as agreed at the Earth Summit in Rio in June 1992. By means of our individual local action plans we shall contribute to the implementation of the European Union's Fifth Environmental Action Programme "Towards Sustainability". The Local Agenda 21 processes shall be developed on the basis of Part One of this Charter.

We propose that the process of preparing a local action plan should include the following stages:

- recognition of the existing planning and financial frameworks as well as other plans and programmes;
- the systematic identification, by means of extensive public consultation, of problems and their causes;
- the prioritisation of tasks to address identified problems;
- the creation of a vision for a sustainable community through a participatory process involving all sectors of the community;
- the consideration and assessment of alternative strategic options;
- the establishment of a long-term local action plan towards sustainability which includes measurable targets;
- the programming of the implementation of the plan including the preparation of a timetable and statement of allocation of responsibilities among the partners;
- the establishment of systems and procedures for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the plan.

We will need to review whether the internal arrangements of our local authorities are appropriate and efficient to allow the development of the Local Agenda 21 processes, including long-term local action plans towards sustainability. Efforts may be needed to improve the capacity of the organisation which will include reviewing the political arrangements, administrative procedures, corporate and inter-disciplinary working, human resources available and inter-authority co-operation including associations and networks.

**Signed in Aalborg, Denmark, 27 May 1994**