

UNECE – Building Urban resilience through action plans, nature based solutions, innovative and green financing - Tools and case studies to support urban resilience building

The Urban Charter III (2023) of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

Christina Binder

Introduction

Dear Ladies and sirs, dear colleagues,

Many thanks for the invitation. It is a great honour to be invited to this important event and to present on the new **European Urban Charter III – Urban living in the era of transformations (2023)**, to be adopted at this October Session of the CoE Congress of Local and Regional Authorities in Europe.

As I want to show in the following, the **Urban Charter III is indeed a key tool to build urban resilience since it provides detailed guidelines/actionable principles to local authorities in numerous areas of modern Urban life.**

As to the outline of my presentation: In the following,

I will first briefly explain the background of the European Urban Charter III, focussing on recent transformations in Europe (I).

Then, I will introduce the structure of the European Urban Charter III (II); and

Finally, deal a bit more in detail with its content/the principles and explore how the mentioned transformations/challenges are transposed into the current Charter (III).

I. Background of the European Urban Charter III

The present text/Charter is the second revision of the **European Urban Charter of 1992** which, by then **was a landmark document** which represented a key stage in the necessary recognition of towns and cities in the development of our societies. ~~The Congress complemented the European~~

~~Urban Charter in 2008 with the European Urban Charter II – Manifesto for a new urbanity.~~ The new manifesto updated the original Congress contribution and proposed a new approach to urban living, urging European countries to build sustainable towns and cities.

Still, especially recent and most important changes/transformations and challenges, European cities have gone through, made according revisions necessary.

These transformations include:

1. developments **relating to democratic innovations**; we have increased tools for urban residents' participation and consultation.
2. Moreover, **economic and social crises** – not least the COVID-19 pandemic/health crisis, severely impacted the Urban life, in relation to housing, healthcare, education etc.
3. The **right to a healthy environment development** is increasingly high on the agenda of the CoE, against a backdrop of increasing environmental pollution and current climate crisis we are facing.
4. Likewise, there is growing awareness that **poor governance and corruption** negatively impact the quality of life and trust in public institutions. – Municipalities need to develop and implement integrity and anti-corruption policies.
5. Russia's aggression against Ukraine/the war in Ukraine as well as a series of terrorist attacks in many European cities emphasizes the **need of security for European Urban residents**.
6. Finally, **digitalisation and artificial intelligence**, the development of smart cities, have fundamentally transformed Urban living in the past decades.

This is the background. You will find the mentioned developments incorporated in the Urban Charter which are subdivided in 6 thematic Chapters.

This brings me to part II, the **structure of the European Urban Charter III**.

II. Structure of the European Urban Charter III:

In general terms, the Urban Charter III has **5 parts**:

First, an **Introduction** provides the (historical) background to the Charter (Urban Charters I&II); and explains the mentioned transformations urban living has gone through and which also made the present revision necessary.

Second, a **Preamble**, which gives a “solemn” introduction to the European Urban Charter III and, inter alia stresses the normative basis of the Charter in human rights/the ECHR, SDGs and, the Reykjavik Declaration of the CoE Summit this May.

Then comes, third, the main part, “**The Principles of Modern Urban living**”. It contains 6 subsections (~~I. Democracy and citizen participation; II. Social rights, cultural and economic development; III. Sustainable development, protection of environment and climate change; IV. Integrity and prevention of corruption; V. Security and crime prevention; VI. Digitalisation and artificial intelligence~~) to which I will refer more in detail in a second. The Principles are, indeed drafted in a quite concise, Convention style way. ~~In doing so, they are rather similar to the 1992 Urban Charter I.~~ Hopefully, this ~~treaty-based /concise style~~ will facilitate application and operationalisation – make the principles “actionable” and guide local and regional authorities accordingly.

Fourth, the **Explanatory Memorandum**, which, conversely, is more narrative and more in depth. It provides an insight and clarifications on each of the principles.

Fifth, finally, for each of the sections there is an **interactive list of reference documents** provided to explain/detail what the relevant Principles (sections respectively) are based on at the end.

So, the Charter is a quite concise document. I will now turn to the main part of my presentation and dive into the **Principles of modern Urban living as contained in the Charter**.

III. Principles: how are the current challenges transposed in the Urban Charter III?

The principles are grouped in **6 thematic areas** which are structured along the current challenges and against the backdrop of the transformations European Cities and towns experience.

I. Democracy and urban residents’ participation

First, and perhaps most important, is the **necessary focus on highest standards of democracy/political participation** which is acknowledged in the principles of subsection I. Accordingly, as regards democracy and urban residents’ participation, the revision refers to, first, the essential preconditions for meaningful participation, i.e. the necessary respect of adjacent

freedoms of expression, assembly, association and movement. Without them, and informed participation in governmental affairs would be meaningless. Then, the need for elections in line with international standards as transmitter belt to translate peoples' power in governmental power and, more broadly, consultation and participation, as softer/broader but potentially more direct means ~~of participation~~ is addressed. Finally, transversal principles/requirements/rules are detailed; as equal/non-discriminatory participation (of particular relevance as regards vulnerable/marginalized groups), gender equality, and the involvement of youth and older persons to ensure the equal participation of all sectors of the population, especially of vulnerable groups. Therewith, the principles of the first subsection/**democracy and urban residents' participation** aims to address current challenges to peoples' participation, therewith strengthening the resilience of European towns.

II. Social rights, cultural and economic development

The principles of the **second subsection, social rights, cultural and economic development** acknowledge urban living against the backdrop of rising social inequalities. It depicts/describes cities' possible contribution to counter the related challenges with a particular focus on social rights and issues; namely health, housing, education, work, social security and welfare. Drawing on relevant economic, social and cultural rights.

In addition, again, the principles focus on **cross-cutting issues** of increasing importance, as social cohesion and integration with a particular focus on marginalised groups as foreigners or IDPs; and a relevant focus on culture and intercultural dialogue, ~~to ensure participation of different ethnic and religious communities in cultural activities~~. Somehow more general but of equal importance are the principles on a balanced/forward looking economic development; the protection of urban architecture and heritage as well as according emphasis on sport and leisure.

III. Sustainable development, protection of environment and climate change

The challenges relating **to environmental pollution and the climate crisis** are accounted for through the principles incorporated in the third (sub)section. A general introductory principle on the matter, emphasizes the need for environmental protection and the fight against climate

change through multi-dimensional policies. Obviously, this involves public participation in environmental decision making as key. Subsequent principles focus on the need for food security, the responsible management of the environmental wealth and natural resources, for example through green technologies; as well as on transition to a circular economy and sustainable mobility, especially through affordable and adequate public transportation. This requires, for example, awareness raising and information campaigns for all groups.

IV. Integrity and prevention of corruption

In light of decreasing public trust in authorities/government, **integrity** and the **prevention of corruption** appears central. The principles in subsection IV attempt to account for this. Principle 1 focusses most generally on integrity policy and ethical rules through various dimensions, including codes of conduct, fair recruitment and adequate training as well as the protection of whistle-blowers. The following principles “zoom in” on relevant key areas, principle 2 deals with potential conflicts of interests; principle 3 with dimensions relating to public procurement; and principle 4 most generally with measures relating to transparency and oversight. So, overall, the **elements of good governance** are provided for.

V. Security and crime prevention

Section V, security and crime prevention, deals with the need **for safe cities in times of increased insecurity** at all levels and the importance of security for good quality of urban life. Principle 1 address first, the various dimensions of security, ranging from crime, delinquency, gender based and domestic violence. It highlights the importance of support for victims as well as the new dimension of cyber-crime/cyber security. Principle 2 deals with crime prevention, especially through effective and inclusive prevention strategies, ~~based on a cooperative relation with law enforcement authorities~~. Principle 3 focusses on resilience, building up responses to crises and emergencies as natural disasters or terrorist attacks inter alia through contingency plans. They all should contribute to safe cities and according high quality urban life

VI. Digitalisation and artificial intelligence

Finally, Section VI deals with the various challenges/dimensions stemming from to **digitalisation and artificial intelligence**; their potential but also their risks. Principle 1 addresses the protection of personal data and privacy, especially when it comes to control over personal data, as key safeguards against misuse. Then, smart cities and e-governance are mentioned in general terms, in compliance with human rights. Principle 3 focusses on digital equity and access to affordable internet and technology, addressing the digital gap. Principle 4 deals with assessment and mitigation of risks stemming from new technologies especially for human rights through continuous evaluation and management. So, the fundamental transformations urban living has gone through because of digitalisation and artificial intelligence are acknowledged in this final (sub)section.

The **Explanatory Memorandum** takes up the principles one by one (after a general introduction to each Section). It hopefully situates and contextualizes them, provides a narrative and explains the background.

Finally, a **list of reference documents** provides the “sources” of inspiration and shows the grounding of the revision in the European Urban Charter in relevant Council of Europe and Congress documents.

To conclude:

IV. Conclusion

So, this European Urban Charter III in a nutshell. I hope that my presentation has provided a certain insight into its background, structure and content and sustained my argument that the Charter is a key tool to foster Urban resilience.

Many thanks for your attention. I am very much looking forward to our discussion and, of course, to receiving whatever questions you may have.