

**Response to SAUL messages on behalf of DG Regio
Lewis Dijkstra (Urban Actions Unit, DG Regio)**

Lewis Dijkstra apologizes for his director general, Graham Meadows, who could not be here today. Dijkstra will, in his place, give a short response to the main messages of SAUL. He will present three main aspects the European Commission is planning to give attention to in response to the main conclusions of SAUL.

The first aspect concerns spatial planning. The European Commission is not responsible for spatial planning, but it does think about it. The previous commission put territorial cohesion in the constitutional treaty, but unfortunately this treaty wasn't very popular, particularly in France and the Netherlands. Some may have heard of the European Spatial Development Perspective, which gives insight into some of the topics the European Commission is thinking about. It emphasizes polycentric development and maintaining open green spaces close to open areas. This was followed by the European Spatial Planning Observatory Network (ESPON), which is another interactive programme and has its secretariat in Luxembourg. ESPON has done a lot of studies and it tries to find out what shape Europe is in and where it is heading. Dijkstra himself is responsible for the European audit, which looks at 250 cities in the EU 27, to find out how cities are doing, how densely they develop and how they are changing, socially and economically. One of the aspects is the percentage of the population that lives within walking distance of accessible open green spaces. Looking towards the future of spatial planning, it might be interesting to know that the German Minister Tiefensee is preparing a research project that is called the Territorial State of Europe.

The second aspect concerns transnational cooperation. This aspect received a lot of attention during discussions on this day. SAUL is an excellent example, showing the added value of learning from each other across borders and oceans. The European Union definitely wants to stimulate and maintain this kind of cooperation. Dijkstra himself manages nine urban programmes. These programmes are aimed at an integrated manner of resolving issues in deprived neighbourhoods and at fostering the partnerships mentioned so many times on this day. These urban programmes have their own cooperation programme, which is called URBAN. It focuses on topics very similar to the ones that SAUL does. URBAN will be continued. One topic that the European Union quite recently gave attention to is the concept of scale. Until now, it worked with regions mostly, but in the next period city regions will get more attention. Dijkstra thinks that city regions are critical to get the competitiveness and cohesion right.

In the next seven years, the focus will be on convergence, regional competitiveness and employment objectives and finally, cooperation. Regarding the second objective, there's room for projects that are geared towards improving the appeal of a region, like the SAUL-project did. Many of the URBAN-programmes, which will be continued, also are a part of this category. Dijkstra stresses the importance of the third objective, cooperation. In the next period it will become a full-fledged priority. URBAN will be integrated within this objective, and ESPON as well as the European Audit will be continued. Dijkstra concludes that there are a lot of elements in the right place for cooperation like this to continue.

Looking at the presentations and the main messages, two things come to mind. One of them is innovation, which apparently fails four out of five times. This might be a bit pessimistic. With the European programmes, innovative methods and content will be encouraged. The cases Dijkstra saw were quite successful and he believes that encouraging innovative approaches to make cities more attractive are very important. The second observation he made is that a lot of attention went to the question of how to do things; what methods to use, how to participate, how to convince. Maybe the goals underlying this project were not sufficiently explicit. Dijkstra is convinced that all of the people visiting this conference share the idea that having accessible open green spaces is of important value. That idea should be at the forefront more explicitly.