

The EU is committed to empowering cities and regions

Written by Corina Crețu on 10 October 2016 in Opinion
Opinion

The European Week of Regions and Cities is an opportunity for cities and regions to come together and share best practices, as well as plan cooperation on future projects, writes Corina Crețu.



Corina Crețu | *Photo credit: European Parliament audiovisual*

This week, we are celebrating the 14th edition of the European Week of Regions and Cities, which is the EU's largest gathering of representatives of regional and local authorities, EU institutions, businesses, academics and many other stakeholders. They all have in common a great interest for the opportunities for growth and jobs offered by EU cohesion policy.

This year's focus will be on urban policy. In May, the EU launched the Urban Agenda to allow cities to have their say in European policymaking.

We organised thematic partnerships on housing, social inclusion and mobility, in order to come up

with concrete solutions in the field of sustainable urban development.

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In the same spirit, during this Week, the Commission's Directorate-general for Regional and Urban Policy and the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) have joined forces with the Brussels Capital Region and representatives from other cities and European networks, in order to facilitate international exchange on sustainable urban development.

This will allow the wide urban practitioners' community to participate in dedicated interactive sessions, workshops and project visits around the Urban Agenda for the EU and the essential role that multi-level governance is expected to play in addressing major urban challenges.

Seminars will also discuss what labour market and social inclusion policies at local level, such as social housing or public services, can do for the benefit of those most in the need. In particular, they will allow regions and cities to share their experiences in social and professional integration, including of migrants, also with the support of cohesion policy funds.

Like every year, this Week will also focus on supporting the efforts of European regions and cities in translating EU investments into excellence, growth, jobs and quality of life.

There will be a broad range of successful examples of projects, ranging from energy efficiency and circular economy to smart specialisation, which not only attest of what our regions and cities are capable of, but also pave the way for exchanging good practice and learning from each other.

But to allow more and more innovative and quality EU-funded projects to see the light of day, we need to make it easier for small businesses and start-ups to access the funds.

This edition of the European Week of Regions and Cities will also give us the opportunity to exchange experience and good practices in simplifying the management of ESI funds programmes and enhancing administrative capacity.

The reform of cohesion policy for 2014-2020 has already introduced a range of actions to simplify the life of both managing authorities and beneficiaries, but feedback from the ground, as well as from our high level group on simplification for beneficiaries of the ESI funds, can definitely be a powerful drive to make further progress.

In this context, there will be presentations of innovative working methods, especially through online procedures.

Jointly organised by the European Commission and the CoR, the European Week of Regions and Cities will involve up to 5000 participants in around 120 workshops, debates and networking opportunities from 10 to 13 October.

Among all these events, I would like to flag two important gatherings. The first one is the opening session, which will take place on 10 October at the European Parliament. This will be a unique opportunity to engage in a lively debate with CoR members and President Markku Markkula, as well as with Parliament Vice-President Ramón Luis Valcárcel Siso.

The second gathering is the official reception on 11 October at BOZAR, where the winners of this year's RegioStars awards will be announced. The awards are a Commission initiative to encourage innovative and inspiring projects throughout the almost 300 European regions.

In any case, beyond these two particular events, the European Week of Regions and Cities will be, above all, a unique opportunity to exchange data, project results, experiences and best practice resulting from programme implementation, as well as to establish new contacts for partnerships and projects.

There is so much that we can learn from each other. The aim is not to replicate experiences, nor to copy and paste projects. The aim is to empower cities and regions and give them the means to exchange, learn and build their own ways to innovation, growth, jobs and quality of life. And of course, to come back next year and make this enhanced experience available to everyone.

About the author

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