

EU policymaking: The time has come to make the role of cities official

Written by Frédéric Vallier on 11 April 2018 in Opinion
Opinion

Cities and local government associations are in a unique position to understand citizens' needs and root EU legislation in reality, writes Frédéric Vallier.

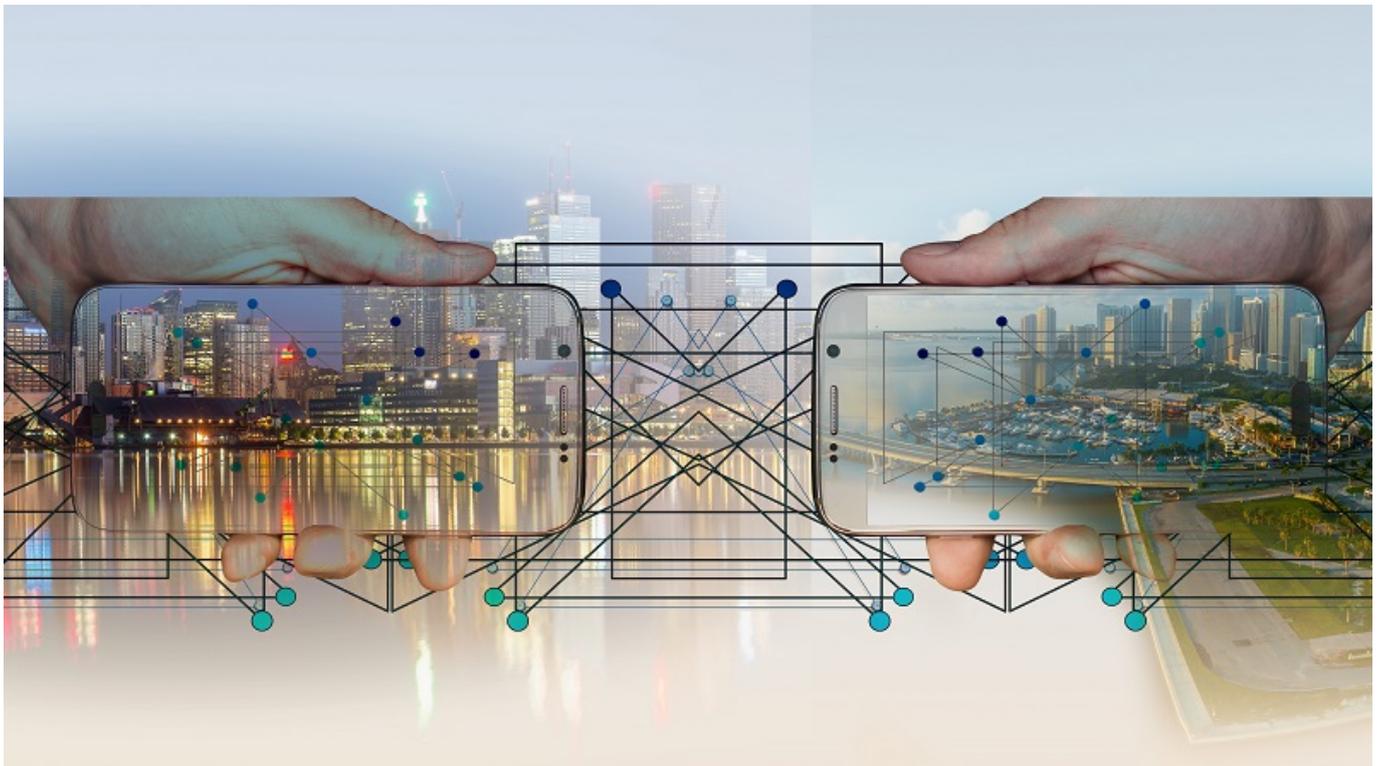


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Cities and local government associations are attract increasing attention from EU lawmakers and the international community. However, there is no legal basis to allow cities and their representative associations to be formally and systematically involved in EU decision making.

This is what MEP Michal Ujazdowski and his colleagues want to put on the table, with their report on the 'Role of cities in the institutional framework of the Union'. Parliament's constitutional affairs committee will vote on this before the summer.

Local government associations have three solid arguments in favour of their having a formal role in the institutional framework of the Union: proximity, pre-legislative input and expertise.

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By their very nature, mayors and local councillors are in a unique position to understand citizens' needs and root EU legislation in reality. On their own, however, mayors or councillors are limited in their efforts to provide Europe-wide expertise and presence, crucial to effective policymaking.

Only local government associations, with strong connections to the issues on the ground, can do this. They are the best placed to provide valuable and targeted input throughout the legislative process, but also in the pre-legislative stage when policy options are still being defined. This technical insight and advice is based on the knowledge of thousands of local leaders, practitioners and experts that are confronted with the reality on the ground.

This stance is shared by many MEPs, including Jan Olbrycht, Chair of Parliament's Urban intergroup. In his draft opinion report on the same issue, he calls for "local government associations' closer involvement in relevant Commission expert groups and Council working groups".

Back in 2001, the Commission, in its white paper on governance, expressed the need for more systematic dialogue with representatives of local and regional government through their national and European associations at an early stage in policymaking.

Fifteen years later, some of the white paper's hopes became a reality with the arrival of the EU Urban Agenda, which led to the creation of 12 partnerships.

This model of governance in partnership is the way forward. It allows member states, the Commission, Parliament and local governments, on an equal basis, to review existing legislation and shape future policies. Yet the story doesn't end there. It is now up to the Commission and the Council to demonstrate how the concrete proposals that emerge from the EU Urban Agenda partnerships can be taken on board in future legislative proposals.

In a Europe facing much division, member states and the European institutions must deepen their roots in local communities. Who else other than local government and their associations to constitute the necessary link to Europeans? Parliament will hopefully recognise that this way of policymaking could be a game-changer. Let's hope that the Commission and the Council will follow suit.

About the author

Frédéric Vallier is Secretary General of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions

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