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## EUROPE'S ACTION IN SUPPORT OF THE TRANSITION OF CITIES

### How does it translate to the Brussels Region?

At a time when over three quarters of the European population lives in urban areas, what are the priorities and European strategies for cities and their inhabitants? What are the European laws, programmes and financing that impact urban development? How does Europe support the cities and how is Brussels taking advantage of this support to consolidate its territorial strategies for urban transition?

This ABOUT looks at the link between the Region's urban development and European policies, illustrated by the case study on the Canal Area and a focus on practical projects and the use of ERDF Funds in the Brussels Region.

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Editorial:

Alfredo CORBALAN

Alvaro DEFALQUE

Sandrine DE MEYER

International, Europe,

Interregional Unit

In association with the ERDF Department of Brussels International

For more information:

[www.perspective.brussels](http://www.perspective.brussels)

Rue de Namur 59 – 1000 BRUSSELS.

## Cities at the centre of future global and European challenges

Over half of the world's population now lives in urban areas and this trend towards urbanisation continues to intensify. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) predicts that by 2100, 85% of the planet's population will live in cities (The Metropolitan Century, OCDE, 2015). While cities occupy 2% of the global territory, they generate 70% of global GDP and produce 70% of global greenhouse gases (UN Habitat, 2016). Although they create wealth, cities are also facing large and growing socio-spatial inequalities.

Cities are both one of the sources of and one of the solutions to the major global challenges of climate change and the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources. Worldwide and in Europe, cities must play a key role in achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and the objectives of the European Green Deal.

Throughout Europe, discussions are underway to design cities that save on space, energy, travel and waste. These discussions also aim to reduce social and territorial divides and bring about a successful economic transition towards cities where production methods are more local and circular. The European Union (EU) is working to ensure that this transition goes beyond local levels and takes place across the entire continent.

The 17 sustainable development goals set by the United Nations, a new reference framework to evaluate the transition of cities.

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Source: <https://www.un.org>

### A FEW FIGURES ON THE IMPORTANCE OF CITIES

**75%**  
of the European population

**85%**  
of the EU's GDP

**70%**  
of the EU's jobs

**70%**  
of European legislation is implemented by cities

**4%**  
of the European territory

### GLOSSARY

**Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) - the UN's 2030 Agenda:** in 2015 the UN adopted a 2030 Agenda defining 17 Sustainable Development Goals to be achieved in 2030. These Goals reflect the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. A specific Goal is dedicated to sustainable cities and communities (ODD 11). <https://sdgs.un.org>

**European Green Deal:** a set of political and legislative initiatives proposed since 2019 by the European Commission with the aim of making Europe climate neutral in 2050.

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en)

## How is Europe supporting and encouraging urban transition?

The European Union is fully aware of the importance of cities. However, its action in relation to them is limited because it does not have any official power in urban or territorial matters. These areas depend entirely on the Member States.

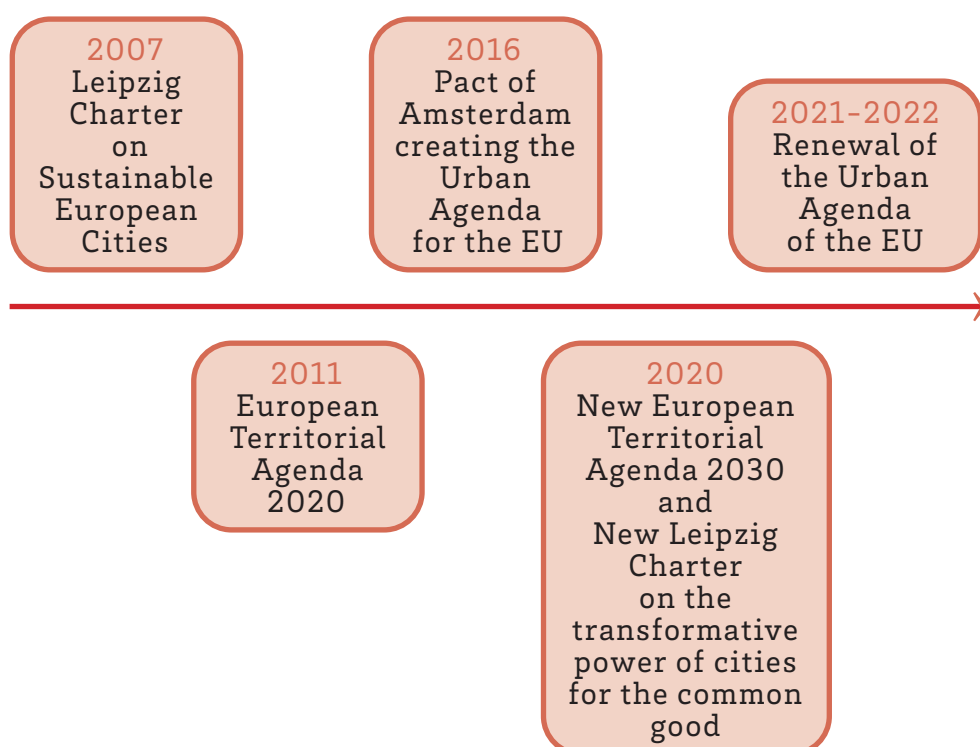
In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, the EU can however persuade, encourage, or coordinate actions that influence cities. To this end, Europe has three main action levers: major strategic documents, legislation and support programmes.

Different levels of power and institutions are needed to trigger these levers. Member States adopt strategic documents defining a common reference framework. The European Parliament and the Council of Ministers adopt the regulations, programmes and funding that the European Commission will have to implement. Finally, the Committee of the Regions represents local and regional authorities. It gives opinions that can influence the legislative acts that impact regions and cities.

### Major strategic documents

In 2007, the first Leipzig Charter set out the key principles of sustainability and integration needed to underpin the urban development policy across the EU. By signing it, all EU ministers were confirming their commitment to incorporate these principles nationally and locally and supporting cities to do the same.

Since then, the common European framework has been strengthened through a series of charters, declarations and agendas, always against the backdrop of recognising the role of cities in the economic, social and territorial cohesion of Europe:



### GLOSSARY

**Principle of subsidiarity:** this principle is designed to favour the lowest level of decision-making power as long as the higher level cannot act more effectively.

**Urban Agenda for the EU:** cooperation and governance framework allowing cities to be more involved in the development of European policies. Since its creation in 2016, 14 partnerships have been launched on 14 central themes for the future of cities. These partnerships bring together representatives from cities, Member States, the European Commission and other stakeholders. <https://futurium.ec.europa.eu/en/urban-agenda>

**Leipzig Charter:** the first [Leipzig Charter on the sustainable European city](#) was adopted in 2007. It advocates the **integrated and sustainable development of European cities**. A new version of the [Leipzig Charter: "The transformative power of cities for the common good"](#) was adopted in 2020. It contains the basic principles of the first charter and defines the three dimensions of the European city of tomorrow: ecological, social and economic for a green, just and productive city. The new Leipzig Charter is the result of intergovernmental cooperation in urban affairs. It was prepared by informal working groups of experts and directors from the administrations responsible for land planning and urban development in the 27 Member States.

**Territorial Agenda:** this sets the priorities for Member States in terms of territorial development in the context of overall spatial planning (while the Leipzig Charter focuses on cities). <https://territorialagenda.eu/home.html>

## A legislative arsenal

Although the European Union does not have the authority to legislate directly on urban issues, the scale of the challenges causes it to go further by gradually changing how it operates to involve cities directly in the development and implementation of regulations and policies concerning them. To this end, it adopts **legislation in fields that have a direct or indirect impact on the development of cities**. This is evidenced by the directives and regulations relating to the environment (Habitats and Birds, Water Quality, Waste, Seveso Standard) and energy (energy efficiency, renewable energies).

## And financial programmes

At the same time, and it this is undoubtedly the European action lever with the most impact, the European Union, via its **programmes and funds**, is able to finance **practical actions on the ground**. For example, with a budget of **750 billion euros**, the European Recovery Plan will support projects and reforms promoting ecological and digital transitions as a priority. For 2021-2027, the EU has also activated four structural funds and earmarked a total of **392 billion euros** (which is 37% of the European budget) to deliver its cohesion policy. Through funds and programmes such as the ERDF, ESF, ESPON, URBACT, INTERREG (to name the best known), it will be able to draw on resources to finance local and regional urban development projects in relation to **social issues, the environment, mobility or research and innovation**.



↑ Photo 1: The future is Europe © visit.brussels - Jean-Paul Remy

## EUROPEAN URBAN DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

- > URBACT
- > Urban Innovative Actions
- > ESPON
- > INTERREG North-West Europe
- > INTERREG Europe
- > Horizon Europe
- > JPI Urban Europe
- > ERDF and regional ESF

## EUROPEAN RECOVERY PLAN

With a budget of 750 billion euros, the European Recovery Plan was launched in 2020 as a response to the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis. The objective is to rebuild a greener, more digital and more resilient Europe. The Brussels Region will receive 395 million euros to finance 5 reforms and 14 investment projects (building renovation, sustainable transport, education, training, digitalisation, public administration).

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

International and European action by perspective.brussels:

<https://perspective.brussels/en/about-us/metropole-belgium-international>

Urban policy of the European Union:

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/eu-regional-and-urban-development/topics/cities-and-urban-development\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/eu-regional-and-urban-development/topics/cities-and-urban-development_en)

Urban policy of the United Nations:

<http://unhabitat.org>

## How does the Brussels region reflect these European strategies locally?

### Brussels, a unique case in Europe

Compared with other European cities, the Brussels Region enjoys a special relationship with the European Union. This particularity is not only due to its status as Europe's capital which houses most of the European institutions, but can also be attributed to the federal system which gives the Brussels-Capital Region a power of representation and direct action on certain European institutions and policies.

Belgian federalism provides that the Regions and Communities maintain international relations for the areas over which they have jurisdiction. In other words, they can, under certain terms and conditions, represent Belgium at some Councils of European Ministers on matters including land use planning, housing and the cohesion policy.

Brussels, as a regional entity, is therefore the only European city that can:

- › sit directly on the Council of European Ministers (representing its country);
- › sit directly on the management committees of certain European programmes;
- › directly negotiate and manage a series of funds including ERDF, ESF and the Recovery Plan.

This gives the Brussels Region more direct access to the European institutions and a unique opportunity to be able to influence the content of certain European policies, regulations and programmes.

### Synergies between the European and Brussels strategies

The Brussels Region uses the support opportunities offered by Europe to complement its own regional schemes, including:

- › Regional Sustainable Development Plan
- › Go4brussels2030 Strategy
- › Regional Good Move Plan
- › Regional Programme for a Circular Economy
- › Regional Plan for Innovation
- › Regional Air Climate Energy Plan
- › Nature Plan
- › etc.

European support enables the public, private or association actors in Brussels to access additional financing, test new ideas, share good practices or increase their knowledge and innovation capacity. Europe also intensifies Brussels' results in terms of urban, economic, social and ecological transition.

### Making its voice heard in all ways

In addition to its direct access to some European institutions, the Brussels Region benefits from influential power through its participation in European networks such as **EUROCITIES** (the network of major European cities) and the **European Metropolitan Authorities** forum. These networks act as intermediaries between the cities and EU institutions and work towards greater recognition of urban and metropolitan dimension in European policies.

## GLOSSARY

**PRDD, a territorial vision for 2040:** the Regional Sustainable Development Plan (PRDD) is the strategic document that sets the development objectives and priorities for the Brussels Region in line with economic, social, environmental and mobility requirements at the medium and long term. <https://perspective.brussels/fr/plans-reglements-et-guides/plans-strategiques/plan-regional-de-developpement-prd/prdd/> (french version)

**Go4Brussels 2030 strategy:** regional strategy to set Brussels on the path towards economic, social and environmental transition. Following the COVID-19 crisis, the strategy was updated to meet the many new challenges. <https://go4.brussels/> (french version)

**EUROCITIES:** European association based in Brussels bringing together over 140 major European cities from 39 different countries. It represents the interests and needs of some 130 million citizens with the European institutions. <https://eurocities.eu/>

## EXAMPLES OF PROJECTS FINANCED BY EUROPE IN BRUSSELS

- > Cohabitats
- > Help for young people
- > Business centres
- > Crèches
- > Socio-cultural and sports centres
- > Cycle paths
- > Support for companies
- > Micro-credits

## Focus on the ERDF Programme and urban development

### A partnership between Europe and the regions

Since its creation in 1989, the Brussels-Capital Region has developed several urban regeneration initiatives with the support of European, national and local authorities along with private stakeholders.

Among the different European Programmes, the ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) is undoubtedly the one that enjoys greatest visibility in Europe and in Brussels. The ERDF is a fund that is used to finance the **European cohesion policy**. ERDF programmes are implemented on the basis of a **partnership** between Europe, the regions and project leaders as well as that of **co-financing**.

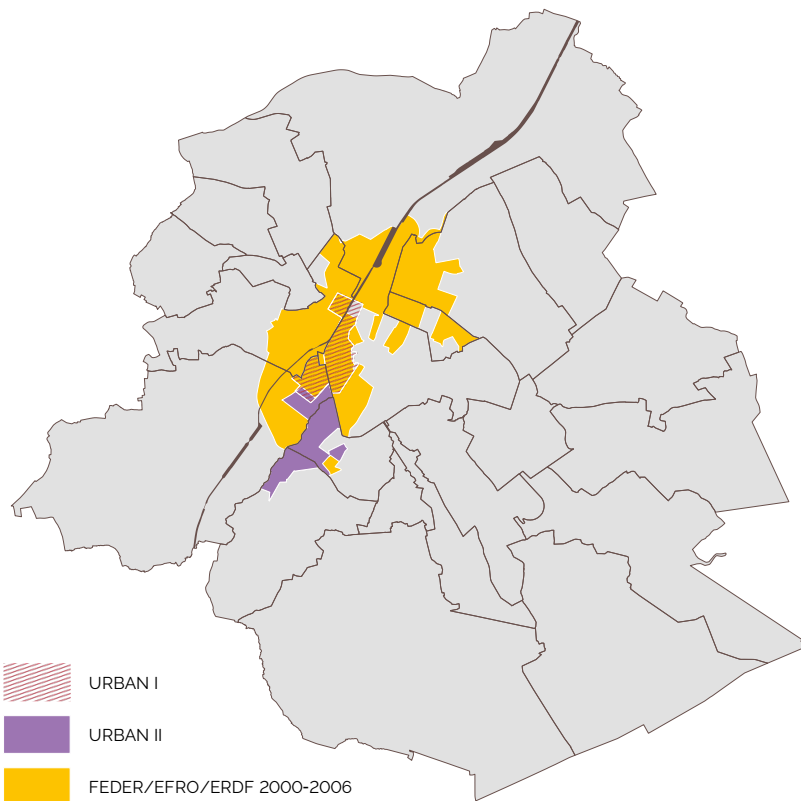
In Belgium, each of the three Regions develops an ERDF programme for their territory, in cooperation with the European Commission.

### The territorial and urban aspect of the ERDF

Between 1989 and 2006, the ERDF had a strong territorial approach with Europe asking the European regions to define specific zones in which to implement projects. Europe wanted to concentrate ERDF financing on those territories deemed to be in most need. This territorialisation doubled up as a specific focus on the **urban development of deprived neighbourhoods** through the URBAN I (1994-99) and URBAN II (2000-2006) programmes and on **urban deindustrialised areas** through the 2000-2006 ERDF programmes.

In Brussels, this territorialisation was reflected by the definition of **different zones along the Canal Area** and use of the ERDF funds for the **urban regeneration of this area**.

MAP 1 1994 - 2006 ERDF, URBAN I, II and 2000-2006 ERDF programme areas



Source: perspective.brussels

## 4 EUROPEAN STRUCTURAL FUNDS (2021-2027)

These are the tools for the European cohesion policy:

- > ERDF: European Regional Development Fund
- > ESF: European Social Fund
- > Cohesion Fund
- > JTF: Just Transition Fund

## SCALE OF THE COHESION POLICY IN EUROPE FOR 2021-2027:

**392**  
billion Euros

**37%**  
of the European budget

## GLOSSARY

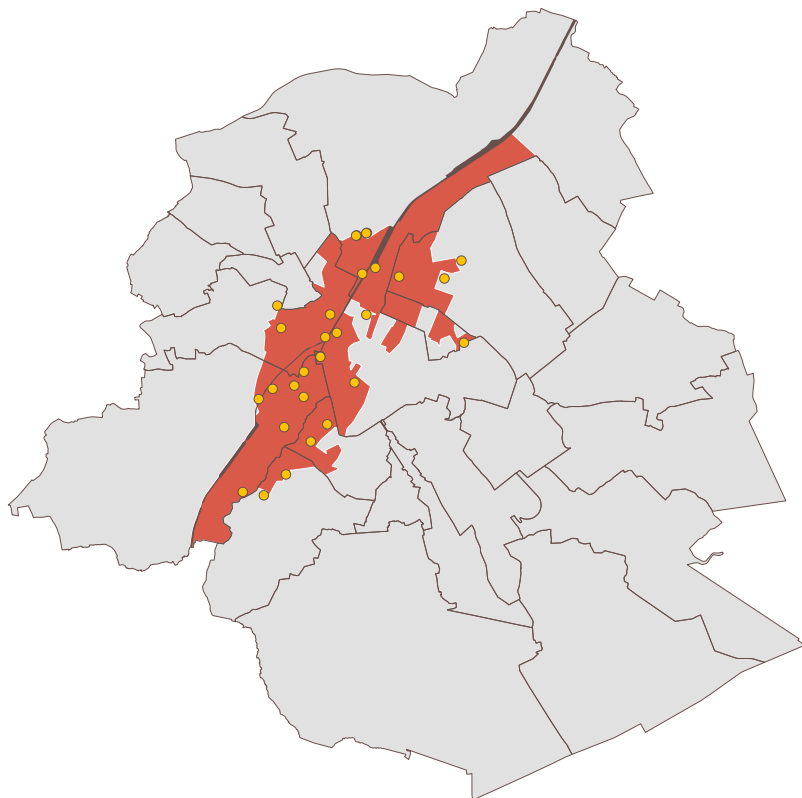
**European Cohesion Policy:** European policy created in 1957 which aims to ensure the harmonious economic, social and territorial development of the European Union and reduce the disparities in development between European regions. <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/>

**Priority Intervention Zone:** zone defined by the Brussels Region to concentrate the financing from the 2000-2006 and 2007-2013 ERDF programmes in central Brussels neighbourhoods.

Between 2007 and 2013, Europe focused more on territories' competitiveness and attractiveness to the detriment of territorial cohesion. The obligation to zone funds and the specific action with regards urban areas disappeared at the European level.

However, Brussels continued to use a territorial approach in its ERDF programming and concentrated financing in a Priority Intervention Zone along the canal.

MAP 2: 2007-2013 ERDF programme - Area and location of territorial projects



Source: perspective.brussels

Finally, in 2014, Europe reintroduced a certain territorialisation of funds and an urban aspect, with for example, the obligation to spend 5% of the total ERDF amount in urban areas.

Brussels, for its part, decided on a hybrid approach with the territorialisation of infrastructure investments in the Canal Area and regional strategic zones while using the remaining financing across the entire region. In addition, a priority focus for the Brussels ERDF programme was dedicated to improving the quality of life of vulnerable areas and populations.

For the 2021-2027 period, the Commission has increased the territorialisation of the ERDF programme, and its urban aspect, with the obligation to spend at least 8% of the total ERDF amount in urban areas.

The Brussels region is currently defining its strategic use of the ERDF funds for this period. Within this framework, it must take into account the five major objectives set out by the Union which should lead to a smarter (innovation, digitalisation), greener, lower-carbon Europe which is also more connected (strategic transport and digital communication networks) more social (strengthening of the European pillar of social rights) and closer to its citizens.

### Multiple projects to build the city of tomorrow

Since 1994, over 180 projects have been co-financed by Europe through the ERDF as part of the economic, social and environmental transition policies in which the Brussels Region has wanted to be involved.

## ERDF SUBSIDIES ALLOCATED TO BRUSSELS IN THE LAST 30 YEARS

> 1994 - 1999  
URBAN I Programme:

**15**  
projects (€7 million)

> 2000 - 2006  
URBAN II Programme:

**11**  
projects (€15 million)

> 2000 - 2006  
ERDF Operational Programme:

**62**  
projects (€104 million)

> 2007 - 2013  
ERDF Operational Programme:

**32**  
projects (€108 million)

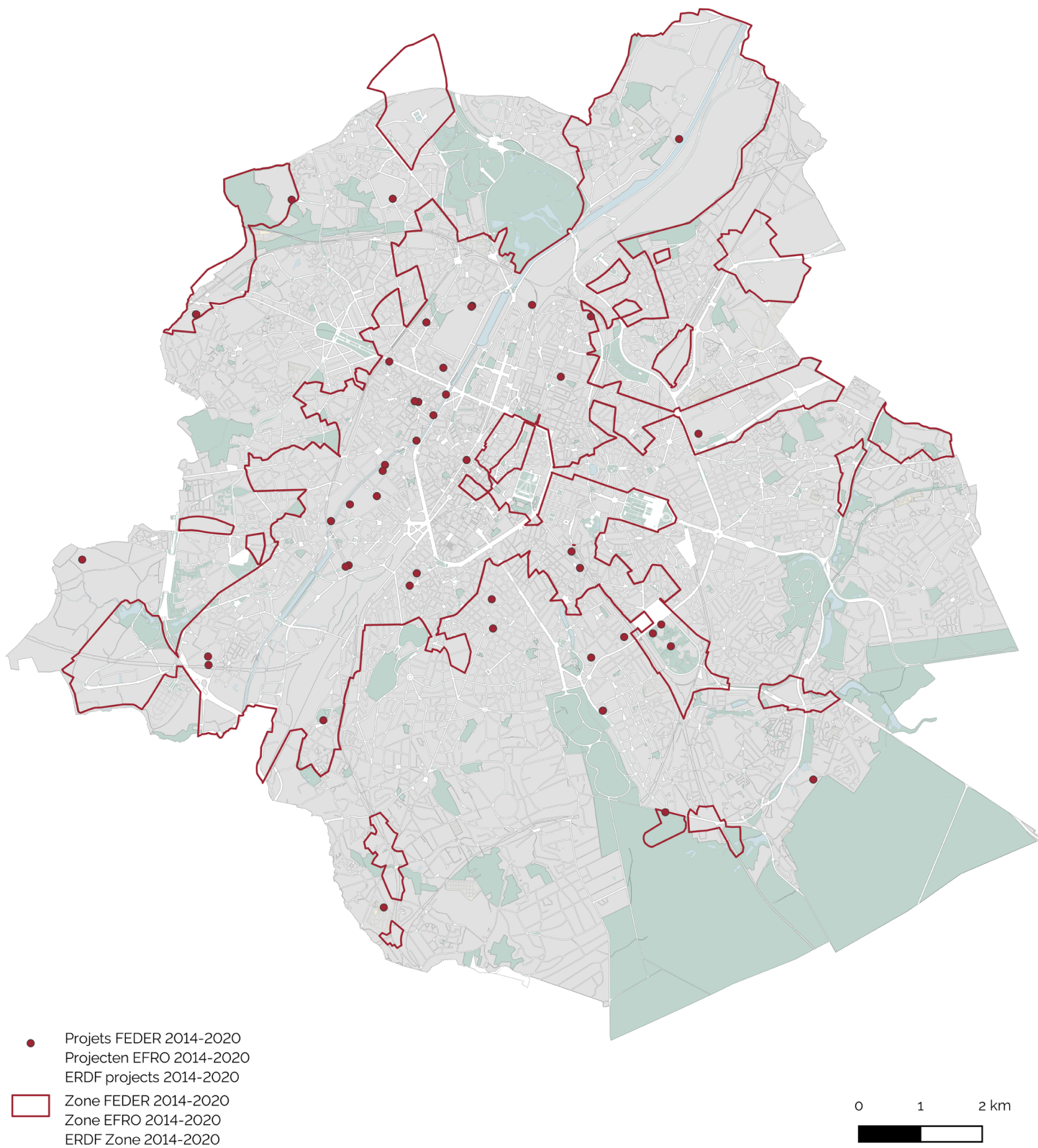
> 2014 - 2020  
ERDF Operational Programme:

**61**  
projects (€195 million)

## FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE ERDF IN BRUSSELS

- > Website on the ERDF funds in the Brussels-Capital Region: <https://erdf.brussels/>
- > Website on the cohesion funds in Belgium: <https://www.europeinbelgium.be/en/brussels-capitalregion-erdf>

MAP 3: 2014-2020 ERDF programme - Area and location of territorial projects





## A look at 3 ambitious practical projects from the 2014-2020 ERDF programme in Brussels

### L(ag)UM - Urban agriculture for a productive and sustainable city

Launched on 11 October 2021, L(ag)UM is an ERDF participatory action research project in the field of food sustainability. It complements the Maelbeek Neighbourhood Contract project with a vegetable production space of approximately 1,500m<sup>2</sup> in the form of a vegetable garden on the roof of a Colruyt store.

Created in association with the municipality of Ixelles and the ULB (Université Libre de Bruxelles), the space offers a showcase of the different crops possible above ground and which can be reproduced by citizens. The project's educational, social and training dimension was assigned to the non-profit organisation, Refresh.

### Usquare - A new neighbourhood for a circular and innovative city

The Usquare urban project has also benefited from European financial support with the aim of redeveloping the former Brussels military barracks into a new neighbourhood combining innovative ways of living, learning and creating. Eventually, this international city will set an example technically (circular economy, energy performance, etc.) and in terms of living together (collective, inclusive projects).

### Masui4Ever – A cultural infrastructure for an inclusive city close to its inhabitants

The "Masui4Ever" project aims to ensure the permanent integration of the Zinneke non-profit organisation in the city and its range of socio-artistic, art education and production work. It has enabled the renovation, redevelopment and equipping of the 2,088 m<sup>2</sup> former Atelier du Timbre building. The objective is to build a cultural infrastructure in a neighbourhood where there is none and where there is no socio-artistic dynamic. Every two years, the Zinneke non-profit organisation organises the Zinneke Parade, an event which is used to connect the various Brussels municipalities and showcase the cultural diversity of the neighbourhoods.



↑ Photo 2: L(ag)UM roof vegetable garden, © SPRB - Yannick Coppens



↑ Photo 3: Usquare © perspective.brussels/BUUR



↑ Photo 4: Masui4Ever Zinneke © 2020 - Delphine Mathy

### MORE INFORMATION ON PROJECTS

- > L(ag)UM: <https://erdf.brussels/project/lagum>
- > Usquare: [www.usquare.brussels](http://www.usquare.brussels)
- > Masui4ever: [www.zinneke.org/Masui?lang=en](http://www.zinneke.org/Masui?lang=en)

### GLOSSARY

**Sustainable Neighbourhood Contracts:** action plan limited in time and space. These are agreed between the Region, the municipality and the inhabitants of a Brussels neighbourhood. They set out a programme of operations to be carried out with a defined budget. <https://quartiers.brussels/1/> (french version)

## Case study - Europe in support of the transition of the Canal Area

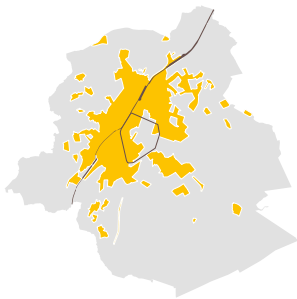
### A strategic territory

The Canal Area, the historical centre and former industrial area of Brussels, is a strategic zone for the development of Brussels. It crosses the entire central part of the Region, lying on both sides of the 14km of canals that connect Brussels to Charleroi and the North Sea. This area is home to a large proportion of young people and is experiencing strong population growth. It is also brimming with an important economic, creative and cultural dynamic along with a diverse range of populations, functions and landscapes. But additionally, it is an area requiring major public investment to combat the poverty of a large part of its population and improve the quality of life in its neighbourhoods. Finally, it is also a strategic river and rail link and an important space for biodiversity and hydrology. All these reasons mean that the **Regional Sustainable Development Plan** make it a strategic centre in its own right.

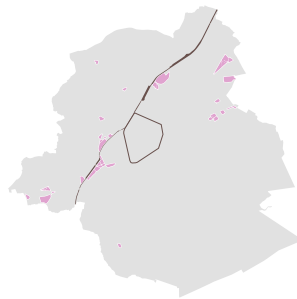
### Joint action by the public authorities and Europe

In the 1960s-1970s, the Canal Area underwent a process of deindustrialisation leading to a fourfold transformation: physical, economic, social and environmental. Over time, the Brussels Region has launched many initiatives to support the **revitalisation and territorial cohesion** in this area. The European URBAN I and II programmes and the various ERDF programmes since 2000 and some of the ESF programmes have complemented these Brussels initiatives. They have provided financial aid to public and private actors, associations and even universities to implement strategies for circularity, city metabolism, social innovation and support growth sectors (food sustainability, green building, health, resources and waste, etc.).

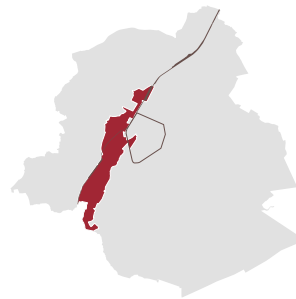
### MAPS 4 TO 9 Different public schemes supporting the transition of the Canal Area



Urban regeneration zone 2020



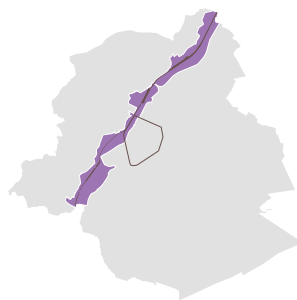
ZEMU (Urban Business Zone)



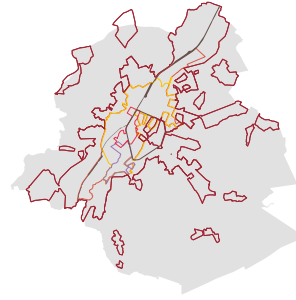
ZEUS (Stimulated Urban Economy Zone)



1994-2021 Neighbourhood Contracts



Canal Plan



1994-2020 ERDF Areas

### THE CANAL AREA

**15%**  
of the Brussels territory (2,509 ha)

**17%**  
of its inhabitants (190,000).

**6,000**  
companies

**7.5**  
billion euros generated annually.

### GLOSSARY

**Urban Renewal Policy:** urban regeneration aims to restructure an urban area, in whole or in part, so as to develop or promote its urban, economic, societal and environmental functions, where necessary by highlighting its architectural and cultural characteristics, and in a context of sustainable development (source: <https://quartiers.brussels/2/> - french version)

**Urban Regeneration Zone (ZRU):** brings together deprived neighbourhoods. Investments aim to improve quality of life, socio-economic integration and the local economy.

**Stimulated Urban Economy Zone (ZEUS):** aims to improve employment in a given area, by encouraging companies to hire local labour

**Urban Business Zone (ZEMU):** zone of the Regional Land Use Plan (PRAS)

## Taking advantage of the opportunities offered by Europe for the 2021-2027 period

The COVID-19 crisis has hit major European cities harder than other areas. It is therefore important to increase the voice and place of cities in the post-COVID-19 recovery and the European decision-making process. The renewal of the Urban Agenda by European ministers in November 2021 should help to increase the importance of cities over the coming years.

### 1,800 billion euros for 2021-2027

The European Union has just renewed all its policies for the 2021-2027 period. By providing for some 1,800 billion euros, it has adopted the **largest budget package in its history**.

The Brussels Region has a window of opportunity to take advantage of **in support of its own recovery and urban resilience**. This will give the best possible benefit to the people of Brussels:

- › 395 million euros from the **European Recovery Plan** which will support 14 investment projects in the Brussels Region.
- › new ERDF, ESF and Youth Guarantee programmes, along with the brand new **Child Guarantee** programme.
- › the new European research and innovation program "Horizon Europe" which will finance two major missions of particular interest for Brussels: **100 climate-neutral cities by 2030** and **150 climate-resilient regions and communities by 2030**.
- › brand new European initiatives: the **European Urban Initiative**, the **Affordable Housing Initiative** and the **New European Bauhaus**.
- › and important legislative changes related to the **European Green Deal**.

The main challenges are at the level of governance. They will require demonstrating excellent coordination between Brussels public actors, good cooperation between the different levels of power and actors and effective organisation between the European funds and territorial development.

This is how the Brussels Region can make the most of the opportunities offered by Europe to intensify its territorial, economic, social and ecological transition.

### 5 PRIORITIES OF THE 2021-2027 COHESION POLICY

- › A smarter, more competitive Europe
- › A greener, lower-carbon Europe
- › A more connected Europe through mobility
- › A more social and inclusive Europe
- › A Europe closer to citizens supporting the sustainable development of all territories

### GLOSSARY

**Horizon Europe Missions** : integral part of the Horizon Europe framework programme for the years 2021-2027. The Missions are a commitment to resolve some of the current key issues such as fighting cancer, adapting to climate change, living in greener cities, guaranteeing the health of soil and food...

**New European Bauhaus**: initiative launched by the European Commission President in late 2020. It aims to begin a movement designed to explore how we can make living together easier, connect people from different backgrounds and disciplines and support the emergence of new solutions for a more aesthetic, sustainable and inclusive way of life.

**European urban initiative**: new instrument of the European Commission. It aims to provide consistent support to cities covering all urban areas, by addressing the diversity of initiatives, programmes and tools offered to cities under the cohesion policy.

**Affordable Housing Initiative**: cornerstone of the EU's strategy in terms of building renovation, this initiative aims to regenerate 100 neighbourhoods as flagship projects across the whole of the EU over the coming years.

### Responsible Editor

Antoine DE BORMAN,  
CEO of perspective.brussels Rue de  
Namur 59 – 1000 BRUSSELS.

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