



# Atlantic Charter of San Sebastián for sustainable urban development

## Green, attractive and solidarity-based cities

**We, Mayors and Presidents of major city networks of the European Atlantic Arc,  
meeting in Donostia-San Sebastián for the Association's 11<sup>th</sup> General Assembly,  
undertake to adhere to and promote  
the Atlantic Charter for sustainable urban development.**

### Preamble

Following on from the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), it is now widely accepted by the scientific community that human activity has a direct impact on climate change, posing a threat not only to biodiversity, but also to populations. Urgent action is needed, all the more so since it is the most disadvantaged sections of the population that are the hardest hit, in particular by rising energy prices and the increase in extreme climatic phenomena. We therefore need to act now, to adapt a development model that is not viable in the long term.

The cities have a key role to play in responding to such challenges. For too long, urban policies, having had to cope with a massive influx of population (80% of Europeans today live in urban areas), have more or less ignored environmental issues. Raising local authorities' awareness about the challenges of climate change has perhaps taken time, but these are now taking concrete steps such as implementing local Agenda 21, climate plans, etc. These efforts need to be stepped up, however; it is the cities that are largely responsible for policies concerning housing, transport, town planning, and economic development.

Furthermore, in this age of globalisation, environmental constraints must be reconciled with the need to maintain an economic activity that creates wealth and offers quality employment opportunities. However, with the explosion of trade and the emergence of new actors, competition between cities is becoming fiercer. It is often the large metropolises that have the advantage, whereas cities located on the periphery of the major trading networks have to constantly innovate and adapt to an extremely rapidly-changing market in order to remain attractive, to maintain skilled employment opportunities and avoid population drift.

This is just what is happening in the Atlantic Arc, whose peripheral situation in relation to the "heart" of Europe is exacerbated by poor accessibility. But it is also a territory that has numerous assets, not least of which is the dynamism of its cities. It has a rich environmental heritage, thanks to its proximity to the ocean and its extensive rural areas. The Atlantic Arc's environmental resources are also relatively well preserved because urbanisation has been less intensive than elsewhere in Europe, although pressure on the coastal areas is growing. The resulting acknowledged quality of life is something to be taken advantage of.

With its long tradition of economic, human and cultural exchanges, developed thanks to its maritime dimension, cooperation is particularly important in the Atlantic Arc, which has often been cited as an example of how to promote a balanced development of the European territory.

Through this Charter, the Atlantic cities signal their intention to perpetuate this vocation of the Atlantic area on the basis of a renewed strategy focusing on sustainable development and on defining a new "green" urban model. This document is not meant to be a mere declaration of intention, but the first step towards the implementation of an action plan at the scale of the CAAC in the various fields addressed.

## Chapter 1: Setting an example in environmental excellence

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*Global strategies but local action: in response to the challenge of climate change, the European Union has set itself ambitious energy targets, aiming to reduce CO2 emissions by 20% by 2020. The cities, via the Covenant of Mayors, intend to go even further than this. In the Leipzig Charter, Member States reached agreement on recommendations for creating the European sustainable city. It is the cities however that will be responsible for actually implementing these objectives, either individually or collectively, for example in the framework of the CAAC.*

*We therefore undertake to:*

- **Reduce energy consumption in our territories.** This is necessary both from an environmental point of view, since energy consumption is the main factor in the production of greenhouse gases, and from an economic point of view, because of the increase in energy prices. In response to this challenge, public authorities are stepping up their action in such fields as housing, transport, and utilities networks (gas, electricity, etc.).
- **Limit urban sprawl and give priority to the “compact city” model.** The social, spatial and energy-related costs of the “urban sprawl” planning model are no longer acceptable in view of the challenge posed today by climate change and the need for sustainable development. It will have to be replaced by a model that focuses on high-density development, public transport, networks of infrastructures/services and social links as well as to promote urban redevelopment policies which help to improve the quality of life whilst conserving cultural heritage.
- **Make our buildings more energy-efficient.** This means setting higher standards in terms of energy efficiency in new housing projects, and renovating existing dwellings that are particularly energy-inefficient. Particular attention should also be paid to developing ‘green neighbourhoods’ and supporting the construction sector.
- **Promote renewable energies.** Given the unique geographical situation, there is a strong potential for the development of renewable energy production by the Atlantic cities, in the form of wind, solar and geothermal energy, tidal power, etc. In this context, cooperation – exchange of experience or pooling resources – can be a real asset.
- **Develop efficient public transport and “soft” transport modes.** To cut down on the over-use of cars in cities, local authorities need to step up their efforts to plan alternative modes of urban mobility by improving the quality of public transport and making it non-polluting, and by actively promoting walking, cycling and car-sharing.
- **Protect the Atlantic’s biodiversity.** Maritime, coastal, and rural, the Atlantic area is environmentally-speaking one of the richest in Europe. This is one of the strongest points in favour of the area’s attractiveness.
- **Exploit waste products.** More waste should be recycled, and in a more efficient way, and any waste that cannot be recycled should be used as a source of energy.
- **Set the local authorities as an example in the fight against climate change:** the cities contribute significantly towards the production of GHGs (greenhouse gases) on account of the public property they manage (buildings, street lighting, etc.) and their areas of responsibility (transport, waste management, district heating, etc.). Their particular role in furthering the general interest means that they are beginning to play a driving role in controlling GHG emissions.

## Chapter 2: Supporting sustainable and innovative economic development

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*In spite of the constraints resulting from the Atlantic area's peripheral situation, its cities do not lack assets which should be further exploited, the most important of which is the environment.*

*We therefore undertake to:*

- **Strengthen the Atlantic area's capacity in innovation, R&D and the knowledge economy.** Each city should make it a priority to improve its own competitiveness and innovative capacity. However, Atlantic-wide cooperation, via exchanges of experience, pooling of expertise and resources, and the development of special partnerships, can provide effective support for such efforts.
- **Support the development of green activities and particularly renewable energies.** Not only are these a response to the challenges of the twenty-first century, they also represent a strong potential for the economic development of the Atlantic territories.
- **Support SMEs,** because they are an essential breeding-ground for employment and a vector for dynamism and attractiveness, especially in the city centres.
- **Lobby to improve the accessibility of the Atlantic area,** because the poor servicing of the area in terms of transport infrastructure hinders the development and attractiveness of the cities.

## Chapter 3: Ensuring greater cohesion and social mix

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*The choice of so-called "sustainable" development cannot be made without giving serious consideration to the present and future welfare of the population. Climate change and globalisation are global phenomena that threaten first and foremost the most disadvantaged sections of the population. It is therefore important that the Atlantic cities do not overlook the social dimension in their sustainable development strategies.*

*We therefore undertake to:*

- **Give priority to the social mix in planning policies,** by paying particular attention to the provision of a diversified offer of housing, high quality social services, and an ambitious cultural policy catering for all sections of the population.
- **Support initiatives in favour of solidarity and social cohesion,** promoting equal opportunities, help for the elderly, the poorest, combating all forms of discrimination, and encouraging active community involvement.
- **Promote a modern urban mobility,** by aiming to provide high quality public transport (in terms of prices, accessibility to all sections of the population, servicing of the area), and on promoting non-polluting transport/travel modes.
- **Involve and heighten the awareness of the local population in urban development choices,** by implementing a modern and interactive communication policy, organising more consultation and through a real environmental education policy. This is an essential aspect in order to raise people's awareness about the problem of climate change.

## Chapter 4: Supporting and exploiting the shared identity of the Atlantic cities

*The fruit of a rich, centuries-long common heritage, the Atlantic identity is also being shaped at the present time through its unique features reflected in particular in its maritime culture and above all the will of the various partners to work together. This Atlantic identity is an asset that should be exploited so as to enhance the attractiveness of this territory for its inhabitants, its enterprises and the tourists who visit it.*

*We therefore undertake to:*

- **Enhance and protect the maritime heritage of the Atlantic cities.** The unifying element of the Atlantic area is unquestionably its maritime culture. The ocean holds strong potential in terms of economic development and tourism for the Atlantic cities, but also needs to be protected from environmental threats.
- **Promote the cultural wealth of the Atlantic area.** From the Celtic heritage to the present day via the epoch of explorers and discoveries, the Atlantic cities share a long common history. The result of this is a precious cultural heritage which should be exploited. This richness is enhanced by an artistic creativity and dynamism within the cities that must be encouraged.
- **Pursue efforts to improve the quality of life.** The Atlantic area is composed mainly of medium-sized towns and cities, which have the advantage of being close to the ocean. This quality of life is also reflected in the transport, social, educational and cultural services provided by the cities as well as in their dynamism.
- **Encourage sustainable tourism.** The Atlantic area has a rich cultural, natural and geographical heritage set off by a broad range of quality tourist facilities, infrastructure and services. This sector therefore comprises a strong attractiveness factor and represents a very important part of the economy of the Atlantic Arc. However, in view of the strong pressure tourism puts on the environment and natural resources, it is important to emphasise compliance with the precepts of sustainable development.

## Chapter 5: Developing a more open, efficient and more ambitious cooperation

*The Leipzig Charter, signed by the 27 Member States, makes it clear that the implementation of the European sustainable city implies the development of integrated urban development strategies in conjunction with the whole range of actors concerned at European, national, regional and local level. At the scale of the Atlantic, the development challenges call for a new way of imagining cooperation on a more ambitious basis.*

*The Atlantic cities therefore undertake to:*

- **Develop a more ambitious cooperation by**
  - Improving the governance of cooperation. The EU's ambitious cooperation objectives call for the setting-up of new forms of cooperation integrating in particular the concept of multi-level governance.
  - Using cooperation as a means of developing innovative actions to solve common problems at a transnational level.
- **Promote a more open and efficient cooperation by**
  - Improving collaboration and consultation between the actors in the Atlantic area, particularly the Regions, the States, the universities and other organisations and identify other areas for which joint actions could be developed. Promoting joint initiatives with research centres, universities and private sector partners.
  - Strengthening cooperation on a wider scale than that of the Atlantic: developing partnerships at European level so as to exchange know-how and best practice, carrying out ambitious projects, and giving greater importance to the values and objectives promoted by the CAAC.



**By signing**  
**the « Atlantic Charter of San Sebastián for sustainable urban development**  
**- Green, attractive and solidarity-based cities »,**

**the City of .....**

**shall ensure the implementation of the objectives presented in this document.**

**On ....., in .....**

**Name and position of the signatory political representative:**

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