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**2018 Action Plan of the *Knowledge Exchange Platform (KEP)***

**European Committee of the Regions**

The **Knowledge Exchange Platform (KEP)** is a form of cooperation between the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the European Commission's DG for Research and Innovation (DG RTD). Its main objective is to present new R&I solutions, innovative products and best practice in response to the numerous societal challenges facing local and regional authorities (LRAs) in Europe today.

**Background**

2016 was the first year with a full programme of KEP events based on two themes, Bioeconomy and Key Enabling Technologies. In total, seven events were held (two thematic seminars, two peer-to-peer events and three showcasing events). In 2017, the KEP events were organised on Energy and Public Sector Innovation. In total, four events were held (two thematic seminars and two peer-to-peer events).

Four areas of cooperation have jointly been identified by DG RTD and the CoR for2018-2019:

* Innovating cities with nature and Nature-based Solutions;
* Cultural Heritage;
* Industry 4.0;
* Social innovation.

The themes agreed for 2018 are Innovating cities with nature and Nature-based Solutions, and Cultural Heritage.

**KEP objectives**

As agreed in 2015 by Mr Moedas, European Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation, and Mr Markkula, then president of the CoR, the KEP has the following objectives:

* greater cooperation between the departments of DG RTD and the CoR;
* turning new knowledge created through Horizon 2020 projects to good advantage and increasing up-take and its impact on innovation at local and regional level;
* maximising synergies between Horizon 2020 and implementation of the European Structural and Investment Funds at regional level;
* assisting CoR members in becoming active drivers for change and innovation leaders in their multiple roles as political decision-makers, by showcasing the benefits of a modern triple‑helix approach (cooperation between business, academia and government).

**KEP instruments**

**These objectives will be met, *inter alia*, through the three types of instruments agreed upon:**

* **Thematic seminars (TS)**, bringing together experts, stakeholders and CoR policy makers.

Held in Brussels, they allow CoR members to have a high level knowledge exchange with experts from DG RTD and other DGs, as well as with local and regional representatives and other stakeholders, on the current state of play and the outlook in the subject areas in question. One TS will be held on each annual theme.

* **Peer-to-peer events (P2P)**, promoting mutual learning at local and regional level. These events take place at local/regional level at the invitation of a CoR member as approved by the SEDEC chair and follow a thematic seminar. During these meetings, CoR members have the opportunity to exchange views with DG RTD experts, representatives of on-going EU-funded research and innovation projects as well as other stakeholders locally. These should lead to a direct exchange of good practice between participants.
* **Showcasing events (SE)** are events organised by other parties (e.g. relevant partner organisations, relevant Directorates of DG RTD) but that contribute directly to the KEP annual Action Plan. In order to be labelled as SE, it is essential that CoR members participate in the event and that on‑going EU-funded research and innovation projects on a KEP theme are showcased. The SEs may be held in Brussels or elsewhere, subject to mutual agreement.

For organisational and implementation purposes, **the designated lead services (DG RTD Unit B5 and the CoR SEDEC secretariat) form the contact group** between DG RTD and the CoR, calling on the expertise and participation of the other stakeholders as required. This contact group will meet regularly to plan joint action and monitor implementation of the above-mentioned instruments.

**KEP actions in 2018**

KEP actions will be implemented in 2018 in the thematic research and innovation areas of **Innovating cities with nature and Nature-based Solutions** and **Cultural Heritage**, as described below.

**KEP activities in the field of Innovating cities with nature and Nature-based Solutions**

In the Action Plan for Nature, people and the economy (2017)[[1]](#footnote-2), Action 12 b foresees cooperation between the Commission and the Committee of the Regions on the theme of nature-based solutions to share knowledge on the topic in response to societal challenges faced by local and regional authorities in Europe. This action should support the implementation of the Nature Directives[[2]](#footnote-3), through communication, mutual learning, exchange of experiences between local and regional authorities on species targeted by the Birds and Habitats Directives, and the corresponding Natura 2000 network. Nature-based solutions can, in urban and rural areas, contribute to the implementation of the Nature Directives through creation and restoration of habitats, co-design and citizen science for monitoring. Therefore, for the preparation of the events listed below, DG RTD will provide knowledge and expertise on habitats, species and Natura 2000 areas covered by on-going research projects and nature-based solutions.

The organisation of the KEP on Innovating cities with nature and Nature-based Solutions is outlined below:

In first half of 2018, a thematic seminar will be organised with the working title "R&I policy seminar: Sustainable cities with nature-based solutions for the implementation of the Nature Directives". For this thematic seminar, experts in sustainable cities with nature-based solutions, local and regional authorities, the private sector, civil society organisations and EU policy makers will be brought together to discuss how to optimise the coordination of different funding programmes and schemes to advance related R&I at local and regional level, in relation to the implementation of the Nature Directives.

In May 2018, there will be showcasing events linked to the "EU Green Week", which is organised every year and which is Europe's most important policy conference dedicated to the environment. The 2018 EU Green Week theme is "Green Cities for a greener future". The Green Week is organised in Brussels, and additional partner events are located in the EU Member States. This conference will provide an opportunity to attract a large variety of EU stakeholders, linking cities to the implementation of the Nature Directives. In this context, three showcasing events are possible, with different levels of participation:

1. EU Green Week Partner Event: Think Nature Brainstorming Forum in La Coruña, Spain, (16‑18 May 2018) organised by the Nature-Based Solutions Stakeholder Platform, in conjunction with the "Symposium on Indicators for Transformative City Innovation with Nature-based solutions", organised by the EU-funded Connecting Nature project. The focus will be on sustainable urbanisation and restoring degraded ecosystems, and it will include discussions as well as interactive working sessions on best practice. Over 100 delegates from across the EU and from overseas are expected, including business representatives, market actors, scientists, experts, policy makers and end users such as municipalities and local and regional authorities. This event should explore links to the implementation of the Nature Directives.
2. EU Green Week session in the official programme in Brussels: "Cities as actors of open innovation: A Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda for sustainable urban development", in collaboration with DGs RTD and DG ENV.The session will showcase thatinvesting in R&I using the urban food, water, energy and climate nexus approach can advance the knowledge base and options for sustainable solutions. It will also promote the systemic approach to new urban solutions that combine digital, social, cultural, technological and nature-based innovation, in line with the Habitat III New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. The session will highlight the fact that such innovative, visionary and systemic solutions provide new opportunities for achieving water, energy and food security while reducing tensions between different systems, and contribute to the transition to resilient, inclusive, safe and sustainable cities that embrace an open "urban innovation ecosystem" approach. This event should also explore links to the implementation of the Nature Directives.

The peer-to-peer events will be organised with CoR members interested in hosting such events. The Nature-Based Solutions and Sustainable City community involved in EU-funded projects includes a network of over 80 cities and regions, and some members of the community are also members of the CoR. Given the participatory nature of the Horizon 2020-funded "Sustainable Cities" demonstration projects, the subject of "Public Engagement and Citizens Science for Nature-Based Solutions" is proposed as one possible theme for the peer-to-peer events in collaboration with the Nature-Based Solutions Stakeholder Platform. These events should likewise explore links to the implementation of the Nature Directives.

**KEP activities in the field of Cultural Heritage**

Since the 2000s, EU-funded research on cultural heritage has increased considerably. Due to the ever-expanding notion of "heritage" – currently including natural and cultural, tangible and intangible entities as well as urban and rural areas and landscapes, tourist destinations, places of creative economy, digitalised archives and registers, etc. – practically every academic discipline has become involved in the study of cultural heritage. Customary scientific objects and topics are re-defined as cultural heritage themes, which is not merely a matter of recognising new social and political expectations. Research on current European cultural heritage takes also into consideration the fact that cultural heritage not only incorporates anything inherited, selected and used in identity formation, but also rearranges these entities into complex ensembles, which are in constant dialogue with the different levels of identity formation, from universal to local.

Cultural development strategies present opportunities for regional and local authorities to work together with other stakeholders and jointly identify practical approaches and measures that will stimulate the creation of sustainable cultural eco-systems with a focus on job creation and creative entrepreneurship, thus securing long-term social and economic benefits. An overview of good practice would raise awareness of this potential at local and regional level.

The organisation of the KEP on Cultural Heritage is outlined in the following. A thematic seminar will be organised in October 2018 in connection with a major Brussels-based event, the "European Week of Regions and Cities", with the working title "Cultural Heritage, a living resource for innovating European cities and regions". In this thematic seminar, experts in cultural heritage, local and regional authorities and EU policy makers will be brought together to discuss the topic and inform the actors at local and regional level of the main dimensions of cultural heritage.

The "Heritage Alive" section[[3]](#footnote-4) of Horizon 2020 is supporting a future-oriented approach to cultural heritage, which should be considered as a strategic living resource for society and the economy rather than as passive stock to be protected. On-going R&I projects deal with the regeneration of city centres and rural landscapes, as well as with innovative re-uses of historic buildings and districts in cities and regions. Beside projects at urban and landscape scale, "Heritage Alive" is also supporting the creation of an open Community of Innovators on cultural heritage and is funding projects to increase the resilience of cultural heritage sites facing climate change and natural disasters. The cultural heritage community involved in such EU-funded projects will include by the end of 2018 more than 40 cities and sites and 15 regions across Europe and also internationally.

Activities planned for the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage[[4]](#footnote-5) under the "Heritage Alive" approach that can be labelled as KEP showcasing events are the following:

* The workshop on "Adaptive reuses of heritage buildings and sites" will discuss through the most innovative initiatives how to best re-use abandoned buildings and complexes in cities and territories. The theme is of utmost importance for many European cities and regions and is included in one of the "Heritage in transition" initiatives of the European Year of Cultural Heritage. The workshop is currently being organised together with DG EAC and Europa Nostra for the European Cultural Heritage Summit in Berlin in June 2018.
* The "Fair of Innovators on Cultural Heritage", a two-day event with workshops, city talks, debates and B2B meetings, to take place in November 2018 (location to be decided). The fair will include a demo area showcasing the results of EU-funded R&I projects on cultural heritage including prototypes, products and new solutions that can be very useful for cities, especially those interested in supporting the cultural and creative sectors.

The "Socioeconomic and cultural transformations in the context of the fourth industrial revolution" section[[5]](#footnote-6) of Horizon 2020 aims to address the challenges linked to the combined socioeconomic and cultural origins and effects in Europe of the fourth industrial revolution in a context of globalisation and digitisation. The R&I activities will provide new evidence and alternative policy options in order to mitigate or support these transformations with a view to enhancing the diversity of cultures and social bonds, the existing or nascent social and cultural strengths of Europe, as well as reinforcing the social, cultural and economic benefits of the fourth industrial revolution. They will thus contribute to fostering equitable and sustainable prosperity and culture in the broad sense through objective scientific evaluations, social, cultural and technological innovation, co-creation and bottom-up solutions. The R&I activities will also contribute to the objectives and the legacy of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 and to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. All of the above-described R&I activities are highly relevant for regional and local authorities.

The peer-to-peer events will be organised with CoR members interested in hosting events related to Cultural Heritage. Various events will take place in European cities and regions involved in the projects funded under Societal Challenges 5 and 6 of Horizon 2020. As an example, a kick-off meeting of the large-scale demonstration project on "Heritage-led rural regeneration", involving around 15 regions throughout Europe, will take place in 2018.

**Annual Timetable 2018 (times approximate, tbc) for the planned activities:**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec |
| Thematic seminars (TS) in Brussels (two per year, one during the European Week of Regions and Cities) |  |  |  |  | x |  |  |  |  | X |  |  |
| Peer-to-peer events (P2P) in the regions (max. four per year, subject to availability of CoR members and regions willing to organise them) |  |  |  |  |  | X | X |  |  |  | X | X |
| Showcasing events (SE) as agreed with partners, times and number subject to mutual agreement and budget constraints (allocated flexibly during the year depending on availability). | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Political dialogue to summarise the achievements of the first years of the KEP in 2018. | | | | | | | | | | | | |

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1. COM(2017) 198 final and SWD(2017) 139 final [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Nature Directives: Birds Directive and Habitats Directive. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. This section is part of the priority area "Protecting and leveraging the value of our natural and cultural assets" under Societal Challenge 5, "Climate action, environment, resource efficiency and raw materials", of Horizon 2020 and is a topic under the call for proposals in 2018-2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. 2018 is the European Year of Cultural Heritage [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. This section is a call for proposals in 2018-2020 under the Societal Challenge 6 "Europe in a changing world – Inclusive, innovative and reflective societies" of Horizon 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)