

# **The Sustainable Communities Agenda for Europe - how viable is it?**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper will seek to assess the potential of the Sustainable Communities Agenda, the Bristol Accord, to integrate and refine the nebulous concepts of cohesion, competitiveness and sustainability. The Accord, which was initiated by the British presidency of the EU December 2005, set out eight key characteristics that should inform future European governmental endeavours to deliver sustainable communities. Such neighbourhoods are characterised as: active, inclusive and safe; well run; environmentally sensitive; well designed and built; well connected; thriving; well served and fair for everyone. The approach is thus a holistic one, encompassing social, economic and environmental objectives. With a focus on integration it has a consciously place-making orientation.

However, do such virtuous objectives and definitions really provide a realistic means of firming up previously ambiguous concepts? At its inception the Accord was ambitiously depicted as the 'first step towards a European Charter for Sustainable Development'. If such a potential exists, what specific measures need to be taken to monitor and independently assess the progress of cities and neighbourhoods within them? Finally, does the Agenda, conceived in the British context, have any value or applicability which is transferable to the rest of the EU-27?

The paper will draw on research recently completed by CUDEM and ERBEDU at Leeds Metropolitan University for the European Parliament (Policy Department Structural and Cohesion Policies) into the potential and progress of the Sustainable Communities Approach.

**Key Words:** sustainable communities, Europe