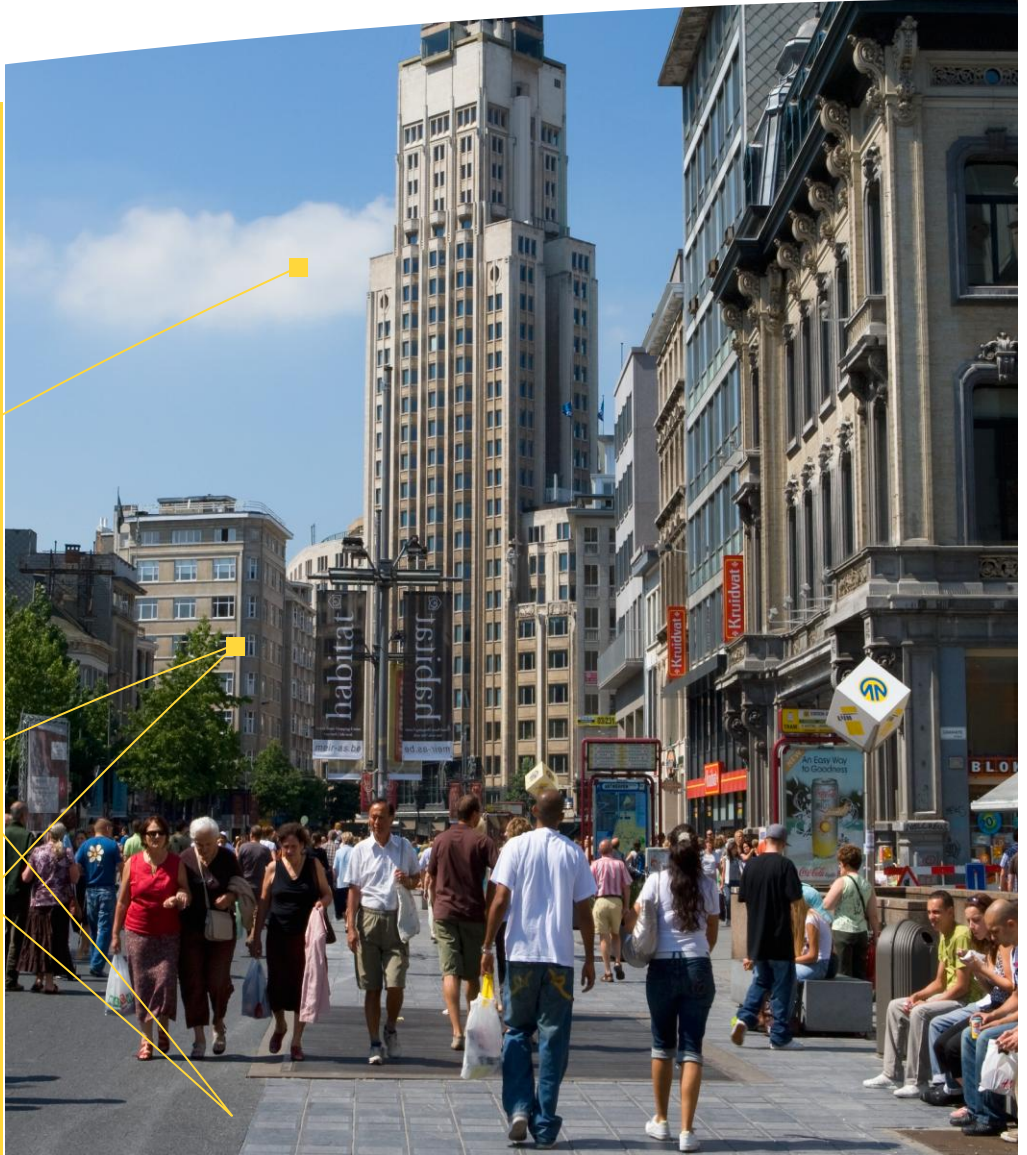
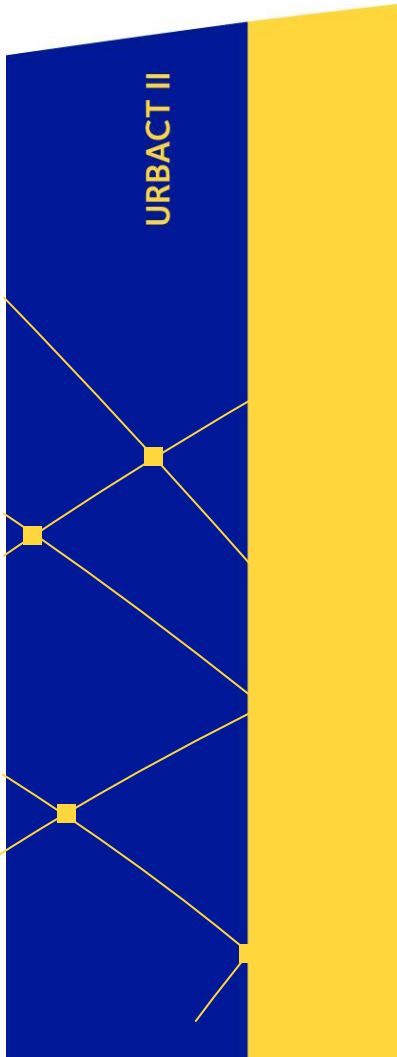


# The Netherlands URBACT National Dissemination Point Article HOPUS project



# HOPUS: Strategies for Quality in Urban Space

European cities are all different, yet, they often have to deal with the same kinds of problems. Because of the economic crisis, many local governments have for example been forced to cut down their expenses, increasingly leaving important urban development issues - such as social housing - to market forces.

Even though this does not necessarily have to be a problem, the partners of the URBACT [HOPUS project](#) (Housing for Europe: Strategies for Quality in Urban Space, Excellence in Design, Performance in Building) noticed that many European cities are suffering from a certain degree of deterioration. Because of budget cuts, areas outside the city centre are particularly given less attention, resulting in disintegrated and low-quality urban spaces.

The HOPUS project therefore wanted to find out if it was possible to take action against this urban decadence and imagine innovative ways to build and govern the city. It was specifically interested in the way good residential design could lead to the creation of a better city and vice-versa.

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*Design guidance can be defined as a generic term for a range of tools that set out design parameters with the intention of better directing the design of development. Different forms of guidance are often produced by the public sector to guide the design of housing developments.*

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The partners concluded that there are indeed good ways of building and designing housing. But how do you apply them to different cities that are all characterized by varying histories, political traditions and governance systems? Design guidance or design codes may form an effective instrument in this respect.

## **Dutch partner of the HOPUS project**

[Henk Visscher](#) was the main partner within the HOPUS project representing the [OTB Research Institute for the Built Environment](#), which is part of [Delft University of Technology](#). He explains why design codes could be useful for European cities: "Design codes could form a guideline for designers and architects. By using them, local government could get a stronger hold on the results of new building projects."

The role of the local government in improving the quality of urban space and housing was the most important interest of OTB. Whereas most of the other HOPUS partners focused on the application of design codes, they were more interested in governance models that could improve the quality of the urban environment. "Because of our particular expertise, we chose to focus on what local governments can do to improve the physical quality of housing through regulations for physical aspects."

The research OTB conducted as part of the project corresponded with this focus. By looking at case studies in Heerlen, Almere and Amsterdam, it explored how and by which policy instruments Dutch municipal governments can plan for and realize highly energy efficient new houses. The results of the study were published in [the final report of the HOPUS project](#) in an article titled 'Towards Energy Neutral New Housing Developments: Municipal Policy Instruments in the Netherlands'.

Energy efficiency is an important issue for Dutch municipalities. The Dutch government wants to increase the current energy performance standard of the national building regulations for new buildings (EPC), in order to be able to reach an energy neutral level by 2020. Municipalities are preparing to meet this target, some even earlier. However, they have limited opportunities to do so, because Article 122 of the Dutch Housing Act prohibits municipalities to undertake an act of civil law regarding issues covered by the Dutch Building Decree, e.g. the energy performance standard of new dwellings. The study of OTB therefore explored other policy instruments that municipalities could apply to regulate the energy efficiency of new houses. The municipality of Amsterdam for example published a [sustainability tender](#) for the redevelopment of the Buiksloterham area – a first in the Netherlands – in which the municipality selected developers on the basis of sustainability criteria. In this way they were able to control issues such as energy efficiency and sustainability without having to infringe upon Article 122.

### ***Learning experiences***

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According to Henk Visscher, the HOPUS project offers some important lessons to learn for other cities. “I think it is important for cities to expand their horizon and come to understand the local realities of other municipalities in Europe. Our final report offers many international examples of how local governments can control the quality of the built environment and new housing developments, for example through design codes.”

The report indeed offers a broad analysis of good practices in creating quality housing. It presents good practices from a wide variety of countries including the Netherlands, Portugal, France, Hungary, United Kingdom, Spain, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Belgium, Austria and Germany.

### ***Follow up***

The HOPUS project ended one year ago, in April 2010. The project’s results were presented during a [final conference](#) in Rome. One year has passed now, but OTB is still focusing on issues that were also addressed by the HOPUS project.

“Because we had a very specific focus within the HOPUS project that differed from the other partners’ expertise, we are not directly following up on the issue of design codes. However, we are continuing to study the role of local governments in the provision of quality environments and housing projects,” Henk Visscher states. “We are currently involved in a research program focusing on the quality of privately owned housing. [This project](#), conducted in cooperation with [Nicis Institute](#), looks at the way different urban actors can influence the quality of housing that does not officially belong to them.”

In the near future the academic journal [European Planning Studies](#) will also publish a paper of one of OTB’s researchers focusing on the question of local control on the quality of urban spaces and housing.

## URBACT II

**URBACT** is a European exchange and learning programme promoting sustainable urban development.

It enables cities to work together to develop solutions to major urban challenges, reaffirming the key role they play in facing increasingly complex societal challenges. It helps them to develop pragmatic solutions that are new and sustainable, and that integrate economic, social and environmental dimensions. It enables cities to share good practices and lessons learned with all professionals involved in urban policy throughout Europe. URBACT is 255 cities, 29 countries, and 5,000 active participants

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