

# Partnerships: An Accelerator to a Sustainable Urban Future

## The Case of EU's IURC Programme

In this article, **Prachi Merchant, Ansu Alexander, Ashish Verma, and Dr Panagiotis Karamanos** discuss the European Union programmes on urban and regional cooperation and explain how they serve as partnership instruments through city-to-city diplomacy and collaborative regional efforts to overcome common challenges. The authors specifically highlight the Panaji Smart Parking Project as an example of the global partnership for sustainable development.



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## Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have guided innumerable city development agendas. To ensure the fulfilment of SDGs, a second level intervention for the city’s guidance system is necessary. The merit however lies in actual implementation within the local context. The European Union programmes on urban and regional cooperation (IUC and IURC) serve as partnership instruments through city-to-city diplomacy and collaborative regional efforts to overcome common challenges. For instance, the Panaji Smart Parking Project demonstrates a model of partnership between Indian and European cities for projects of local importance by applying international expertise beneficial for the city’s overall development.

## Importance of Partnerships

Multistakeholder partnerships have currently become a state-of-the-art word within sustainable development parlance. A partnership is a “formally organized coalition of interests comprising actors of different sectors aiming at joint policymaking and implementation with a common agenda and action programme” (Lang 2005).

The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs call for a collaborative effort to realize the critical needs of our planet. Goal 17 introduces a ‘global partnership for development’ which requires significant systemic collaboration across societal sectors creating value towards a common goal. It is partnerships at national, sub-national, and city levels that

harness and optimize our finite resources to deliver the SDGs and build self-sustaining and resilient nations (Stibbe and Prescott 2020). The Paris Agreement emphasized the importance of a financial, technical building, and capacity partnership between developed and developing nations (UNFCCC n.d.). The New Urban Agenda was introduced at the UN Habitat III Conference to tap the potential of cooperation among cities, businesses, industries, institutions, and civil society as a quadruple helix model to implement the SDGs (IISD–SDG Knowledge Hub 2016).

The SDG vertical under NITI Aayog, the nodal agency for coordinating and monitoring the SDGs in India, works closely with key stakeholders including the government, research and academia, civil society, private sector, and multilateral organizations – to accelerate the fulfilment of SDGs in the country (NITI Aayog n.d.). The Government of India through the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) encourages city-to-city cooperation through its ‘Twinning of Cities’ where strategic partnerships can be developed between an Indian city and a city/state/province of a foreign country in an effort to exchange information, ideas, technical assistance, and training related to sustainable development (MoHUA 2014). Moreover, India through MoHUA has signed Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with various countries and multilateral organizations to further our SDGs.

Partnerships serve as a fertile ground for fostering innovation, encouraging sharing of best practices, developing localized shared solutions, facilitating funding, and augmenting respective

capacities (UNIDO n.d.). Following are indicative examples of MoUs signed between international governments and MoHUA (MoHUA 2021):

1. Special planning, water management, and mobility management with Netherlands
2. Urban regeneration and development with United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
3. Sustainable urban development with France, Germany, and Japan

Figure 1 indicates the partnership benefits in urban growth through administrative reforms.

## European Union International Programmes on Urban and Regional Cooperation

The Urban Agenda for the European Union (EU) is an integrated and a coordinated approach to promote smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth by setting up multilevel and multistakeholder partnerships focusing on policy and regulation,

innovative funding, and urban-policy knowledge base (European Commission n.d.). At the UN Habitat III Conference held in 2016, the European Union committed to “foster cooperation between cities across the world to link up with one or more partner cities to develop and implement local action plans and projects on common priorities” (CSR Europe n.d.) through the Urban Agenda. The European SDG Summit in 2020 highlighted the importance of increased impactful partnerships across nations to collaborate towards the realization of a sustainable and inclusive urban development (CSR Europe n.d.).

The European Union International Urban Cooperation (IUC) programme (2016–2021) emerged from a goal to fulfil major international agreements such as Urban Agenda, SDGs, and the Paris Agreement (IUC n.d.). As part of IUC, 10 pairings were developed between the EU and Indian cities, leading to a number of studies, reports, and pilot projects (Figure 2).

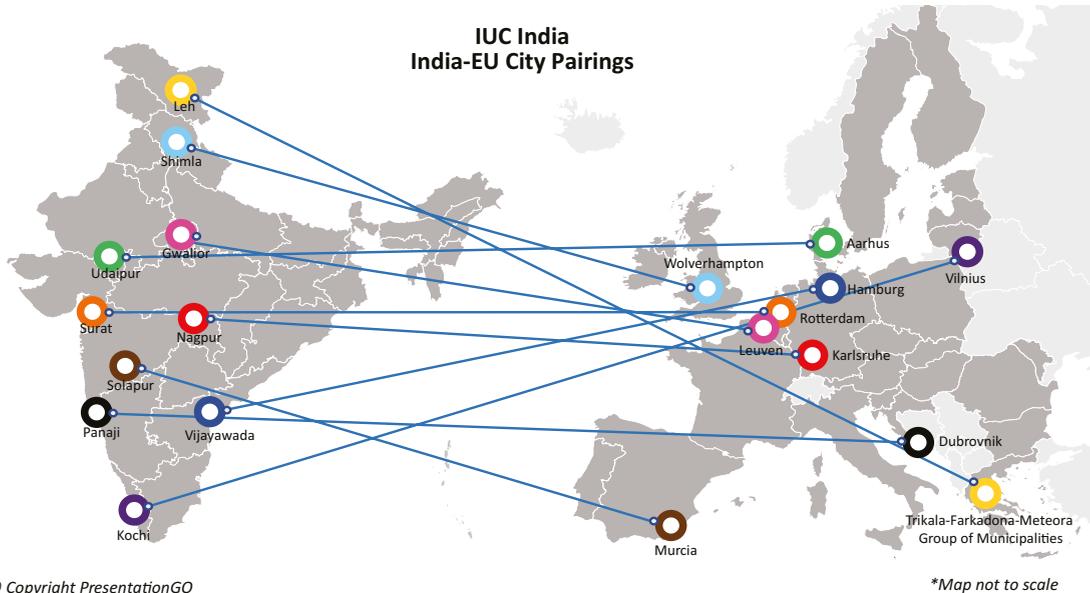
The strategic partnerships between some of these cities as well as new

cities will continue as part of the follow-up IURC programme, which is being implemented from 2021 to 2023 in cooperation with the Government of India and the EU Delegation in India. IURC targets to develop a decentralized international urban and regional cooperation in sustainable urban development and innovation, with key partner countries in line with ‘Europe 2020’. Through the programme, IURC will transform into a “global network of reference for urban and regional innovation by augmenting the impact of international cooperation” (IURC 2020). In the case of India, 10–14 cities are expected to be part of this programme. The topics of cooperation are related to urban planning, mobility, waste management, water management, and heritage protection among others.

The model of city-to-city cooperation on sustainable urban development provides the opportunity for cities to “learn from each other, set ambitious targets, forge lasting partnerships, test new solutions, and boost their international profile” (EU n.d.). These initiatives are aligned with the 2017 Joint Declaration between the EU and the Government of



» **Figure 1:** Benefits of partnership in urban growth  
 Source(s): European Commission (n.d.); Friesecke (2007)



» **Figure 2:** Map indicating pairing of Indian and European cities under IUC project  
*Source(s): (EU n.d.); (Survey of India 2020)*

India on ‘Partnership for Smart and Sustainable Urbanization’ and ‘EU–India Strategic Partnership: A Roadmap to 2025’. With EU–Indian city partnerships, the cities benefit in different ways as shown in Figure 3. Similar to IUC, the IURC follows a strategy of local sectoral contextualization by implementing the programme and selecting relevant partners by focusing on their needs and priorities. As a result, it is possible to bring in the right focus, relevance,

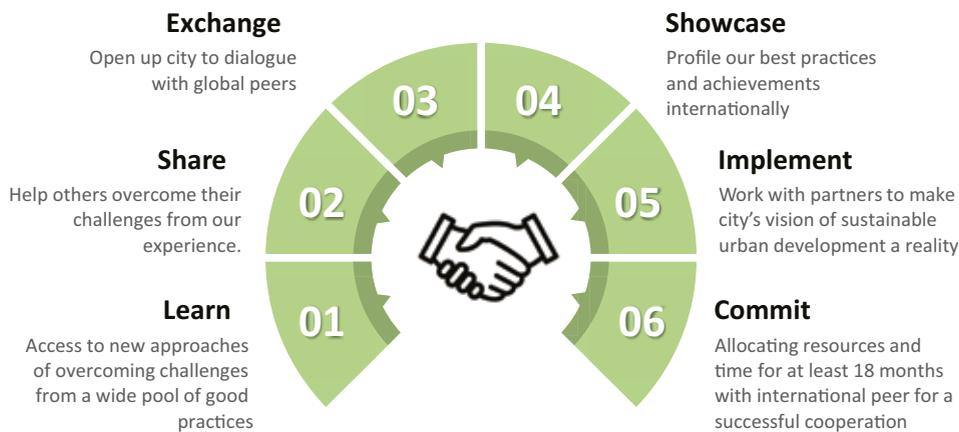
and improved implementation. A case in point is the successful cooperation between the cities of Panaji, Goa, and Dubrovnik, Croatia on smart parking as part of IUC.

### The Case of Panaji Smart Parking

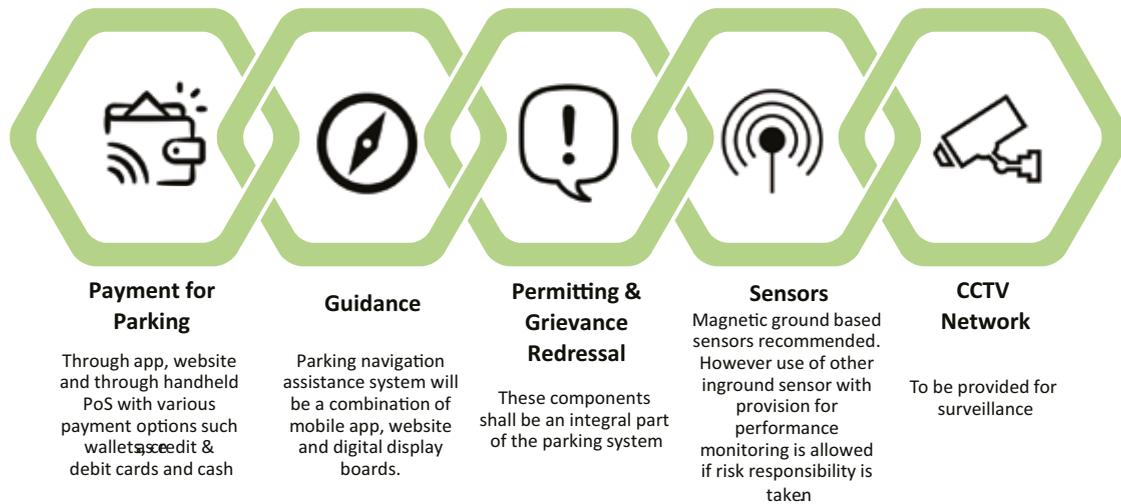
With India’s urban population expected to reach 814 million by 2050 (UN 2014), the country is facing

an increased demand for mobility followed by other challenges in this sector. Smart mobility has become an increasingly deliberated theme in sustainability agendas in response to the impact of the transportation systems in cities (Munhoz, Dias, Chinelli, et al. 2020).

As part of the IUC programme, several cities such as Panaji, Nagpur, and Gangtok expressed interest to work on challenges related to



» **Figure 3:** Benefits of IURC programme (IURC 2020)



» **Figure 4:** Components of the smart parking solution in Panaji (IUC 2021)

urban mobility and the programme supported them by forging partnerships with European cities and encouraging technical knowledge exchange, capacity building, etc. As a result, these cities are constantly improving their approach to mobility services. The cooperation between Panaji and Dubrovnik is one such example where the model of city-to-city partnership has proved to be successful in showcasing an effective approach to parking.

The selection of Panaji city in the IUC programme was done through

a competitive process where a number of factors were evaluated (e.g., challenges, interests). Based on this information, Panaji was paired with Dubrovnik, which had faced similar urban challenges and conditions. The initial interactions, exchange visits, preparation of joint local action plans, pilot projects, and other shared activities allowed the two cities to develop a focused approach and create appropriate solutions (IUC 2020). Through deliberations, a highly congested city centre was selected as the pilot area. The Corporation of the City

of Panaji (CCP) in partnership with Dubrovnik city experts agreed to adopt smart parking solutions with specific components, as described in Figure 4. A detailed study was developed for the pilot project (Figure 5). The project aims to improve the traffic flow, mobility, and living conditions. It would further help in getting additional revenue. Smart parking can significantly curb air and noise pollution levels, thus saving time, fuel, energy, and reducing traffic problems. Local businesses would benefit with ease of parking, resulting in greater customer footfall. The next



» **Figure 5:** Map indicating the site for pilot parking project in Panaji, its length and number of parking lots (IUC 2021)

step is to identify financing options for implementing the project.

## Conclusion

The SDGs guide the cities at a macro level and depend on the regional and local governments to partner at various levels for their implementation. The partnership governance model is useful for implementation of global programmes, opening doors for interaction, establishing practical linkages between policy and its execution as also for economic, social, and governance benefits. The European Union IUC and IURC approaches fulfil goals at the global, regional, and local levels. A case of Panaji Smart Parking project is developed at a local level along with the partner EU city of Dubrovnik by aligning the SDGs with the National Smart Cities Mission. The city showcases a project useful for the city's overall development and encourages other cities to replicate as well.

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