

To:

H.E. Maroš Šefčovič
Vice President of the
European Commission for
Interinstitutional Relations

H.E. Mariya Gabriel
European Commissioner for
Innovation, Research, Culture,
Education and Youth

H.E. Elisa Ferreira
European Commissioner for
Cohesion and Reforms

Date:

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Honourable members of the European Commission,

In these demanding times that are a challenge to us all, I hope this letter finds you well.

COVID-19 overshadows our daily lives. Impacting our health, the way we live, the way we socialize, our work. For many it is more apt to say 'our perspective to work', as our economies are so fundamentally unsettled. This will probably and unfortunately worsen in the coming months, touching many more citizens across Europe in different domains in society.

We see in different discussions and policies in Member States, at European and global level, a frequent reference to the vital importance of science and scientific knowledge, for example for our handling of the COVID-19 crisis. We have to acknowledge there is so much that we do not yet know. There is a need, I believe, to invest more in research on all aspects of the virus (health wise, medical, societal, behavioral) and accelerate in that sense European research programs.

In addressing the challenges European citizens will face in the coming years the importance of the local level cannot be overestimated. In fact, most of our current societal challenges (health, climate, social, environmental, economic) are related to the steadfast urbanization of our continent. Cities have developed into dynamic and complex social, physical, technological and ecological communities. They have become so complex that it is becoming increasingly demanding for scientists to research our modern urban challenges. This is the realm of 'City science': an area of science and research which reflects on a new methodology to design the best suited approaches to Europe's key challenges.

It is with this understanding in mind that the city of Amsterdam launched the 'City Science Initiative' (CSI) in 2019. Initiated by our City Science Officer, Prof dr. Caroline Nevejan, this initiative is focused on the interaction between urban challenges on the one hand, and the world of science and academia on the other. With the dedicated assistance of the services of the European Commission (DG JRC, DG RTD and DG REGIO) the CSI has been focussing in the past 1½ years on how we can better connect science and research to the challenges cities face.

City-science officers from over 35 different cities across Europe met in the context of the CSI which served them as a strategic learning environment. In this way a unique network was created, offering professionals who had never met before the possibility to discuss their work and learn from each other. At the center of all meetings was the key question on how cities

are pioneering in responding to their challenges by designing and implementing evidence-based policies and by participating in ground breaking research for identifying new solutions.

In-depth thematic sessions were dedicated to a range of issues: Air Quality (led by Paris), Circular Economy (led by Hamburg), Mental Health (led by Thessaloniki), Urban Mobility (led by Cluj-Napoca) and Urban Technology (led by Reggio Emilia).

It is my pleasure and honour to present to you the report of the first phase of the City Science Initiative: 'City science for urban challenges'. The report reflects the richness of insights that have come forward from the strong and innovative ways of cooperation in a truly European setting.

One main finding is that of the added value of '**design**' in the early phase of a research project on a given urban challenge. In design, different fields of expertise come together. In its original context methodologies of design put citizens as end-users central. But the discipline of 'design thinking' as is developed in the last decade, also puts policymakers and other decision makers centre stage. It is therefore a fruitful discipline that can serve to accommodate different perspectives in any complex, interdisciplinary research project. And it is thus a very useful tool for those working on the science-policy interface.

Another insight that emerged from CSI-meetings is on **data**. In cities lots of data are produced that are interesting for research. Vice versa, methodologies are developed in research and academia that are highly relevant to cities. Both cities and research struggle however with finding the right data at the right aggregation level while at the same time respecting GDPR and intellectual property rights. In addition, lots of data are not available to citizens or municipalities and remain property of specific private companies and organizations that are often reluctant to share.

These particular but highly relevant aspects on science and research have been much discussed in the City Science Initiative and common approaches have been studied and designed. With this report, the pilot phase of the CSI has come to an end. Many professionals who have been involved, either from cities, from academia, network-organisations or from Commission-services, have expressed a keen interest in this initiative, underlining its added value and potential for their future work.

Given the societal urgency to find innovative approaches and solutions to the challenges European citizens will face in the coming years, we believe that there is a need to continue the City Science Initiative as a learning platform for urban research.

The CSI, through its combined expertise, could certainly serve as a sounding board to different entities in the European Commission to reflect on research outcomes and to offer input for new research agenda's. We are convinced that taking forward the CSI will be beneficial to obtaining many of the goals the EU has set in areas like the Green Deal, the digital transition and the Recovery and Resilience Plan.

We recommend that this report and its findings will fuel further ambitions to take this important initiative further. In doing so, you will boost the interface between science and policies at the level where the difference is made, and at the same time respond to the need for strengthening the inter-city cooperation on urban challenges in the European Union.

We can assure you that our cities stand ready to support the next phase of the CSI.

With the highest regards,

Marie-Christine Lemardeley
Deputy Mayor of Paris



Emil Boc
Mayor of Cluj-Napoca



Konstantinos Zervas
Mayor of Thessaloniki



Luca Vecchi
Mayor of Reggio Emilia



Almut Möller
State Secretary of Hamburg



Femke Halsema
Mayor of Amsterdam

