

# GreenCityCon 2026: Redefining Urban Planning and Sustainable Architecture

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## Redefining Urban Planning and Sustainable Architecture through Climate City Contracts: Innovation, Governance and Building-Level Action

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### Abstract

European cities are increasingly positioned at the core of transformative processes aimed at addressing climate change and advancing sustainability, in line with the European Green Deal and major international frameworks such as the UN 2030 Agenda, the New Urban Agenda, the Paris Agreement, and the New European Bauhaus. As highlighted by the IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Cities (AR7, 2023), urban contexts represent a privileged arena for experimentation, where the proximity between local communities, governance structures, and implementation enables more ambitious and integrated climate actions. In this perspective, cities function as living laboratories in which urban planning and sustainable architecture are being redefined through systemic, place-based approaches.

Within this evolving framework, the Horizon Europe Mission on Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities promotes a new paradigm of urban transformation by supporting 100 cities in achieving climate neutrality by 2030, using the Climate City Contract (CCC) as its main operational instrument. This contribution focuses on Part B of the CCC, which constitutes its operational core and translates strategic visions into concrete actions, with particular attention to building-related measures such as indoor air quality, ventilation strategies, and energy conservation. By analysing the structure of Modules B-1, B-2, and B-3, the paper explores whether innovation primarily resides in the adoption of advanced technical solutions in sustainable architecture or in the CCC itself as a governance and planning framework capable of integrating technical, social, and institutional dimensions.

The analysis highlights how the CCC fosters a redefinition of urban planning practices by embedding architectural and building-scale interventions within broader climate-neutrality pathways, supported by measurable indicators, adaptive monitoring, and stakeholder engagement. In doing so, it underscores the potential of integrated urban governance models to drive scalable and replicable innovations in sustainable architecture, contributing to a more holistic and transformative approach to climate-neutral urban development.