

# Urban transition pathways

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## Introduction and aim

JPI Urban Europe aims to promote a more comprehensive approach to urban research and innovation in urban sustainability, building on urban transition pathways, taking into account that integrated systems approaches and inter- and trans-disciplinary collaborations are necessary for successful solutions and to support transition processes.

This session aimed at discussing and exploring new ways of dealing with the complexity of sustainable urban transition pathways and ways of bridging the implementation gap; since ideas and theories related to transition pathways and their practical implementation are not necessarily linked together today.

## Summary of Presentations

**Dr. Niki Frantzeskaki, DRIFT – Urban Sustainability Transitions**

**Taking stock and moving forward**

For the transition towards sustainable urban futures it is of great importance to take people and their connections into account. Social innovations can help to unpack society's potential by looking at how people relate, how they are organised and organise themselves as well as taking into account the role of sustainable businesses. In this regard, local governments can be innovators such as the City of Ghent which establishes new relationships with a wide range of partners including civil society for supporting transition processes by a fostered engagement. Local governments can take the role of the facilitator for innovative actions for supporting the transition towards sustainable transition. Therefore, the role of the citizens shifts from being consumers to be prosumers – actors who produce services. Universities and research and technology organisations can take the role of being the mediator in these processes between local governments and civil society. Experimentation and testing of ideas as instruments are of great importance for such endeavours and living labs can be a useful tool therefore. Especially temporary usages of space offer the environment to test and experiment. The scaling up of successful models and projects supporting the transition towards sustainability might in many cases not be the most desirable process. Local and regional initiatives are very often context depend and might work because of the local circumstances and realities. Instead of a scaling up in economic terms and in size a scaling across and the translation from one case to another is

For successful transition the balance between planning, regulating, testing, empowering, participation and investment in infrastructures is incremental for a success. Furthermore, the knowledge sharing between projects and cities will be facilitated within the JPI Urban Europe in the next years to exchange experiences, eventually scaling them up and to scale them into the local contexts.

## **Domenico Rossetti Di Valdalbero, DG RTD**

For the European Commission, the replication of research results and innovation from local to European level is of great importance. In general, there two trends can be observed in society: (1) individual empowerment: citizens have never been faced with such a strong empowerment to change their surrounding and habitat by taking action (2) collaborative and sharing economies: new ICT tools and apps provide the ground for exchange of knowledge and goods easily. Both dynamics are developing and spreading fast which put challenges as well as opportunities on urban areas. While these things might be understood as being in opposition to each other, cities are the places where both trends become connected. For the European Commission it is very important how to make better use of these dynamics and to incorporate them into common frameworks.

The European Commission has allocated 400Mio € in the work programme 2016/2017 for urban issues in various fields: Smart Cities and Communities, Nature Based Solutions, Transport in urban areas, climate change, energy and Social Innovation.

## **Discussion**

Cultural heritage has an important role to play in the transition of cities towards sustainability. Therefore, it should be seen as a burden but as an instrument and a resource for sustainable development. Across Europe we see different directions how urban development dealt with cultural heritage as in countries in Central-Eastern-Europe in many cases it has been destroyed for progress and for building something new. The JPI Heritage offers to exchange and discuss the role of heritage in urban development with the JPI Urban Europe.

In order to achieve sustainable urban futures, emphasis has to be put on developing long-term targets. Often cheap investments have been taken to eg. Reduce carbon emission which set aside the actual problems. The complexity of the problems has not been dealt with sufficiently in this sense. Holistic and long-term targets provide the basis for change and the transition.

For cities, it is very important to see what strategies work for the transition towards sustainability. For this reason, a sustainability rating would be very helpful in order to analyse when a city is actually sustainable or in the transition towards sustainability. Successful strategies of cities should be highlighted. The JPI Urban Europe is going to invest in this issue over the next years to facilitate the learning from and across cities and projects.

Besides considering factors supporting the transition towards sustainability, also the factors increasing unsustainable patterns should be taken into account for a research programme in order to have a holistic view on the matter. One example is the sharing economy which found a broad reception in recent years. Although the idea of many of these endeavours are increasing sustainability in social, economic and environmental terms, it has to be taken into account that in cases a few big companies benefit without actually supporting society. In regard to cities, certain businesses of the sharing economy have big negative effects on the urban dynamics. For supporting cities in becoming more sustainable it is essential to also have a look at the negative effects certain ideas and businesses have. Compared to other regions of the world, European cities are dealing with 'luxury' problems. The JPI UE should also have a look at how it can address urban needs in developing countries and how knowledge from Europe can help to support urban development there. In this regard, it is important to take into account the local context which means that when supporting developing countries we should not sell them a solution but rather help them in the finding of solutions in their contexts.

Urban areas across Europe are very different due to the development pathways of the past and the present. Therefore, not every city can learn from each other. A typology of cities might be needed to provide a concept of typologies of pathways.

The results of the projects funded by JPI Urban Europe need to be communicated to cities. This might be a challenge especially for smaller cities. We need a language which is not too academic therefore to make cities aware of the solutions JPI UE might have to offer.

JPI Urban Europe should keep and extend close links to policy. One example would be the link to the EU Urban Agenda. The question in this regard is how research can inform politics, how it can support policy making and provide the evidence for the policy agendas.