

# Vibrant economies

**Chair:** Sigrun Kabisch, Member of the Scientific Advisory, Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research

**Key note speakers:** Pieter Hooimeijer, Member of the Scientific Advisory Board, Dr. Vlad Mykhnenko, University of Birmingham

**Expert from the EC:** Pia Laurila, DG RTD

**Organizer/Rapporteur:** Johannes Riegler, AIT

## Description and Aim

Although the urban fraction of Europe's population is not expected to grow significantly (it is already large), there is and will likely continue to be significant migration from cities in shrinking economies to those in growing economies; particularly from countries in Southern and Eastern Europe to their Northern and Western counterparts. New strategies are needed to support shrinking cities to prevent excessive decline as well as to support cities in taking advantage of the increasing cultural diversity. The session intends to discuss how the SRIA will help to find new ways of achieving and sustaining socio-economic vibrancy and equality in cities with changing economies.

## Summary

Cities are engines of economic growth. But some cities are economically more successful than others. Speaking about vibrancy in changing economies implies the focus on how urban areas are able to deal with dynamics and shocks. While some cities show great economic and population growth, some are struggling with stagnation or decline while others changed directions from stagnation to growth again. It is important to see both directions combined, to link it and to see it as one phenomenon. If we look more closely some interesting details come afore: for example during the recent economic crises, from 2007 to 2014 cities in Eastern Germany increased their rate of employment while in the Mediterranean especially young workers suffered from unemployment. In southern Europe the loss of jobs caused the shrinkage of population numbers in the regions. Therefore, certain dynamics cause the fact that in some countries we see that economic and population growth goes hand in hand while in other the opposite can be observed. For analysing these diverging dynamics the governance should be linked with research on economic and population change for being able to draw comparisons. However, the local contexts are very important for the directories of cities and regions and should carefully be taken into account.

There is a clear and very important regional dimension in the European Commission's (EC) work. The research theme vibrant urban economies shows links with what the DG Regional and Urban Policy is working on. The structural funds, in which research is a part of, make deal with these issues. Furthermore, in 2008, the EC introduced the Smart Specialisation policy concept which underlined that it is key for local governments to take into account research and innovation for their economic development. The EC has funded a big number of projects dealing with likewise issues which build up a solid knowledge base.

The aim is to strengthen the role of cities and their competitive advantages (e.g. Barcelona as capital of innovation). In addition, in regional or agglomeration context, cities can be successful if they use the complementarity of neighbourhood cities, in terms of partnership. However, the challenge of making this research available and applicable for policy makers remains.