

JPI URBAN EUROPE CONFERENCE:
POLICY DAY (May 29)

Break-out sessions: research put into practice

Sound strategic Urban Planning



Short summary of conclusions

Conflicts or tensions between opposing objectives in sustainable urban development often can be overcome if we address the problems and systematically apply creative, innovative and/or holistic approaches.

Planning based in citizens' interests and needs is significantly important. However, not always are dialogues and active participation the most effective way to safeguard public interest. Studies of how values and preferences develop and change can often provide valuable input into the planning process and subsequent policy-making.

The EU agenda for urban research must be clearer and more specific regarding the instruments and expected impacts: 'why based' (basic) research e.g. about driving forces or probabilities is relevant but can seldom be used straight off in practice. 'How-based' research must provide output that is both relevant and possible to apply in practice.

As people and their preferences change over time, political stances will shift as well; therefore, planning processes as well as programmes must be flexible and agility to award creativity and take into account changing preferences of people.

Input by the group, kindly summarized by Göran Cars:

In the Breakout session Sound strategic urban planning contributions to the EU Urban Agenda were made. Three significant remarks were the following:

1. In ambitions to build the sustainable city, not seldom desirable objectives are conflicting, e.g., social objectives to provide affordable housing conflict with ambitions to provide top-notch environmental and energy efficiency in new construction of housing. One of the papers presented had environmental concerns as its starting-point. In a case study conducted in the project was shown that creative thinking and innovative approaches made it possible to achieve the environmental objectives set up, and at the same time the project contributed to social improvements. A conclusion is that we must realize that the conflict or tension between objectives often can be overcome if we address the problems and systematically apply holistic approaches.

2. Lots of research, not least sponsored by the EU, have focused on citizen participation in urban planning and methods for dialogue. In the Breakout session the need for planning based in citizens'

interests and needs was stressed as significantly important. However, at the same time was argued that new ways to capture residents' needs are called for. In one of the presentations was shown how radical changes of citizens' values and preference regarding environmental change, have had a direct impact on politicians and policy-making. The point made was the following. Not always are dialogues and active participation the most effective way to safeguard public interest. Studies of how values and preferences develop and change can often provide valuable input into to the planning process and subsequent policy-making.

3. During the Breakout session the distinction between 'why-based' and 'how-based' research in urban planning. The 'why-based' research is by its character often 'basic research' e.g. about driving forces or probabilities. Here results can seldom be used straight off in practice. However, for the 'how-based' research expectations are that results should be relevant and possible to apply in practice. In the Breakout session is noted that this often is not the case. The recommendation is that the EU agenda for urban research must be clearer and that 'how-based' research must provide output that is both relevant and possible to apply in practice.

Some additional inputs:

Albeit sustainability targets are important societal goals, it would be helpful for transitions to also, or more explicitly, address issues closer to the aspects that directly impact citizens life: health and happiness might become important 'people' aspects of sustainability. Projects could also focus on the need of end users, 'people first'. If successful, such projects will sell itself.

Specific remarks were made regarding the EU - China collaboration: we should be aware of the profound cultural differences between EU and CN; even if on the surface we seem to be on equal terms, this does not necessarily hold when engaging in projects.

Also, the development pace and time to implementation in CN is much faster than in EU, also the scales are quite different – this should be taken into account in combined programmes and in trying to translate experiences and research findings.

The impact and relevance of JPI Urban Europe could be strengthened by linking to other, already existing initiatives and instruments. It would be especially beneficial for JPI UE to link closer to the Smart Specialisation Strategies approach (RIS3).

The urban agendas should take specific care on how to deal with 'elephants in the room', i.e.: the social inclusion (also in programmes and projects) if usually not involved / unreachable citizens, acknowledging different societal and political cultures, uses and power structures, and taking into serious account the apparent worries amongst significant groups of citizens that form the background of so-called populism.