

# All urban transition roads lead to governance?

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## A summary of the SRIA Launch session on urban governance and participation

I guess all transition roads lead to governance. Or at least have to make a detour through it at some point. As governance is always bound up with what path to take, what next steps to take and future states to arrange for, it is still an obligatory point of passage for all societal concerns.

When you walk from your workplace past the grocery shop to the subway or bus, you're touched by urban governance. When you read in your local news providers' app that the large urban regional infrastructure upgrade actually cost the public EUR 10 billion – *not* five as projected yesterday – you're also touched by governance. When your city officials ask what can be done to accommodate the small stream of refugees now trying to find sanctuary in Europe (compared to the vastly greater number of refugees 'staying local' near the areas of the real crises), you're hopefully touched by governance.

Now, being touched by governance is not the same as having a direct say in these matters. But it serves as a reminder of how urban societies may hang together by and through the issues their governance deals with. In the JPI Urban Europe *Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda* (SRIA),<sup>1</sup> launched in September 2015, the theme on urban governance and participation is therefore one of five thematic priorities. Relative to the other priorities – welfare and finance, vibrant urban economies, urban environmental resilience, urban accessibility and connectivity, plus the longitudinal programme of urban sustainable pathways – governance tends to become an issue in all the others, whereas the reverse does not apply.

As the SRIA is intended to be a living document, the SRIA Launch Event in the Committee of the Regions, 30 September 2015, entailed a session to set the stage for the next years work on the thematic priority of urban governance. The session was not intended to be a *bona fide* peer review of the thematic priority or the SRIA as such. The overall objective of the session was to develop two–three key messages on important steps towards implementation of the SRIA. Moreover, the general aim of the session was to:

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<sup>1</sup> JPI Urban Europe (2015)



*Urban governance and participation as illustrated in the SRIA (see JPI Urban Europe (2015), illustration by Fred Sophie / NXIX)*

- Discuss the Urban Governance and Participation priority of the SRIA in more detail in order to raise a higher understanding of JPI Urban Europe's ambitions;
- Get commitment from major stakeholders;
- Prepare the first steps towards implementation;
- Establish a format for reoccurring reflexive discussions including researchers and city practitioners.

The following is a summary of the session and a reflection on possible next steps. It is drafted since the session on urban governance and participation generated questions on issues found a bit wanting in the SRIA. Implementation requires, among other things, *a sincere element of reflexivity*. In this respect the theme on governance and participation is functional in that it provokes questions for JPI Urban Europe to move on with. Friction begets traction: a smoother session would have been a lot more difficult.

## **Urban governance as a form of art?**

Whenever we talk of solutions – or perhaps rather sociotechnical innovations – when implementation or ‘workability’ is discussed, it always seems to double-back to governance issues. And particularly entangled democratic ones. With new solutions and new conditions (climate change, for instance), there is rarely any non-political stand-alone ‘technical stuff’ – or ‘social stuff’ and ‘natural stuff’ for that matter – clear-cut enough to make it a

wise choice to delegate to experts to solve these issues in seclusion and simply provide a solution without any explorative co-creation. That is, to re-tangle, to connect innovation with society, it has to be put through governance at one level or the other. There are no shortcuts through plug-and-play. Although urban governance may, as it has many times in Western urban history, later on simplify and redact itself out of the picture.<sup>2</sup>

All the other SRIA thematic priorities and the Urban Transition Pathways somehow has to be processed, dealt with, or metabolised by what we generally call governance. Of course, this is not to assume that governance is on top of them all, so to speak: that it would be *the single key* to all else. Rather, it is *a multiple object* identifiable as an instance or process shooting through and entangled in the other priorities and in urban sustainable transitions.<sup>3</sup>

The various issues in the SRIA are probably not to be processed in the same way over the board. Hence, the point of the thematic priority on governance and participation is precisely to find out and support innovative approaches on how to go about this. And, in reverse, governance – and participation! – relates to most topics in urban development. A safe bet is that very few transition issues are safely put into black-boxes and standardised routines untouched by governance – and some form of co-creation beyond the realm of expertise – today. This state of affairs criss-crosses all the grand or societal challenges.<sup>4</sup> Almost to the point that governance and participation can be granted status as the ultimate societal challenge.

The SRIA thematic priority illustrates this by the issue of climate change, although it is but one field of entanglements where governance and participation requires new approaches. We could just as well take the timely and urgent issue of refugees and migration: a topic that, if we take e.g. the revitalisation of ‘the political’ by Chantal Mouffe or the re-take on pragmatism perhaps most vibrantly explored by Noortje Marres,<sup>5</sup> seems to require a creative approaches to complement or even challenge existing governance habits! Clearly, at the bare minimum, we have to look more at participation beyond proceduralism<sup>6</sup> and representational democracy articulated every four years on a political market.

Following Jan Erasmus, City of Johannesburg, South Africa, who proclaimed something like ‘integrated urban governance is more an art than a science’<sup>7</sup> This is a claim that

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<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Aibar & Bijker (1997)

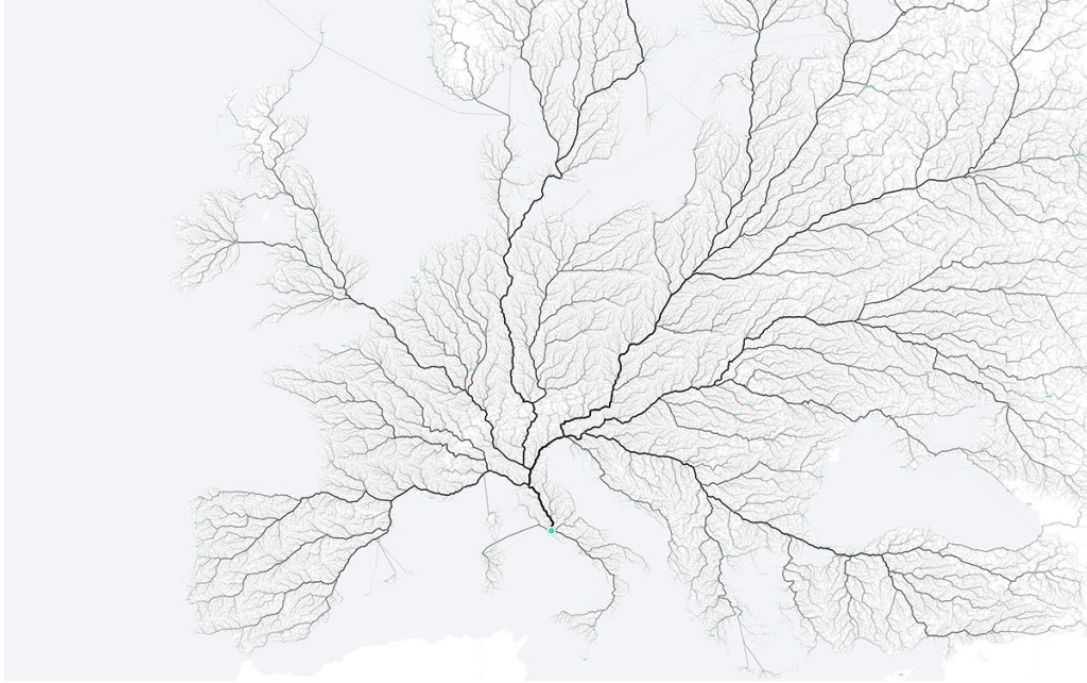
<sup>3</sup> For ‘the multiple object’, see Mol (2002)

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Lund Declaration (2015); Lund Declaration (2009); EC (2014); Bos (In press)

<sup>5</sup> Mouffe (2005); Marres (2010)

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Marres (2005)

<sup>7</sup> See *Berlin Initiative on Integrated Urban Governance – Successful Policy Transfer*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SfJI6LD2mI0>, around 2:00min.



*European roads that lead to Rome (moovel lab, see Schmitt, Groß, & Reimann (2015)).*

points to the complex entanglements and practiced realities in urban development practices and what we face in urban transformations towards sustainable development.

Governance feeds on ideas, knowledges, the craft of articulating needs, desires, and dreams as well as obstacles in various formats. And it requires, in democracy aspiring societies such as e.g. Sweden, a lot of trust.

All the more so when we live in a world where urban societies may drastically change by disruptive dynamics overnight and which are not controllable by policy-makers.<sup>8</sup> This condition puts a lot of stress on plans, decisions, and public engagement. Nevertheless, as the Flagship project reminds us, ‘well designed anticipatory policies remain powerful tools shape the future’<sup>9</sup> and to meet these uncertain conditions. However, or so the pick-up from the thematic priority urban governance and participation would be, to what degree and under which circumstances these anticipatory policies are to be designed *and implemented* seems to require a carefully considered co-creation approach!

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Flagship (2015)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 1

## Participatory practicalities

Participatory approaches are currently a lively field of urban research and innovation.<sup>10</sup> Of course, this vibrancy is highly entangled and meshed with ICT and digital data processing by each and everyone. Thus, urban governance and participation is also vulnerable to e.g. the digital divide that is currently part of shaping new kinds of segregation dynamics in European urban areas.<sup>11</sup>

Then there is also a different angle on integration of participatory or co-creative approaches. For instance, an article in press by partners in one of the projects funded by JPI Urban Europe – Governance of urban Sustainability Transitions (GUST) – reviews the urban living lab-practices in the programme. One of the noteworthy conclusions directly related to a key issue for urban governance and participation is:

What is clear across the cases is that ULLs [Urban Living Labs] are bringing existing constellations of urban actors together in new ways to create more collaborative and experimental ways of ‘doing’ urban development. [...] A key question warranting in-depth and comparative research involves the extent to which ULLs extend beyond individual projects to become embedded in existing modes of governance.<sup>12</sup>

Even if this relates directly to the urban living labs as a particular methodological approach to participatory urban research and innovation, it also harbours a more general message concerning the legacy of how issues are handled: *the importance and – frankly – necessity of the creative and experimental ethos as well as the embedding into existing modes of governance actually extends beyond the urban living labs-approach to urban governance in general!*

## More issues, more publics, more entanglements...

Olivier Coutard, LATTS, France, and the Scientific Advisory Board-member, summarised the main lines of the Urban Governance and Participation thematic priority in the SRIA thus:

- the contemporary societal context calls for more and variegated participatory forms of governance because of the increasing technicisation and decreased trust in experts;

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. SEiSMiC, <http://www.seismicproject.eu/>; Creating Publics, <https://creatingpublics.wordpress.com/>; Science with and for Society and Responsible Research and Innovation, <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/h2020-section/science-and-society> etc.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Fireball (2012)

<sup>12</sup> Voytenko, McCormick, Evans, & Schliwa (2015), p. 9



- overall, current representative democracy deficit invites new kinds of mediations;
- change in communication infrastructures has drastically transformed recent decades everyday life and behaviour, something which begets new forms of mobilisation.

These developments has led to friction in diverse forms for urban policymaking and implementation:

- increase in wicked issues;
- ‘real-time’ issues come with complexities by crisis events and long-term trends;<sup>13</sup>
- and results in calls for more agile, distributed, and open urban governance.

Overall, Coutard suggested, this situation calls for a focus on the *politics of knowledge* understood as an acknowledged plurality. Questions on what knowledges (or knowledge practices) are taken into account as useful, relevant, and legitimate and which are dismissed as not useful, irrelevant, and non-legitimate should be foregrounded – particularly in how lay, expert knowledges, and vested interests can be combined in decision making (including how they are commercialised, e.g. big data).

Urban research and innovation need to articulate the processual (how?) and substantial (what, and with what results?) dimensions of governance; as well as the inter- and transdisciplinary research and innovation need on governance and participation<sup>14</sup> topics proposed as:

- Plural forms of knowledge, policymaking, and urban responses to major contemporary changes (particularly climate change)
- Participatory policymaking and distributive justice
- Policymaking and the material transformation of urban spaces, landscapes, and infrastructures

### ... beyond conflict?

Diana Mangalagiu's, Oxford University, UK, were invited to reflect and provided perspectives centred around three issues:

- Participation as concept and approach to urban governance: how to ensure maturation and irreversibility; reflexivity and values; this is not necessarily synonymous to ‘engagement’; develop (codified and formalised) knowledges in the field: what constitutes ‘success’? Is scalability a necessity?

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. McLean, Bulkeley, & Crang (2015)

<sup>14</sup> Something which may lead to participatory research to study participatory governance?

- Friction between 'have' and 'have nots': increasing divide globally between elites and marginalised groups, how does urban governance and participation reflect this? Urban injustice and inequalities (gender issues, age, ethnicity, religion, disability issues, etc.)? European urban areas' youth unemployment issues?
- Urban research and innovation still tends to focus on technology fixes and sideline social science and humanities (SSH) and e.g. digital social sciences/digital humanities: how to connect multi-scalar 'real-time'? How to deal with 'algorithms against human rights'? Foreground the issue of open data and how to engage hard-to-reach groups (e.g. urban poor) for citizen technologies, urban living labs, social innovation, etc.

Mangalagiu rounded off the comments by asking the very pertinent question 'how are you going to implement this transversal thematic in the programme?'

## Get going!

Dionysia Lagiou, DG Research and Innovation, EC, commented on the transdisciplinary and co-creative challenges to contemporary research and innovation. Particularly on a longstanding discomfort in the academe to involve non-academic actors; and thus on the possible support to responsible research and innovation (RRI) to increase shared responsibility and egalitarian benefits across the board; on open innovation to enable citizens' initiatives to play a key role to shape pathways; and, in the light of these remarks, foregrounded the SRIA as a catalyst in public service innovation.

Lagiou put three questions put on the table for the thematic priority urban governance and participation to pursue:

- New forms of normativity, regulatory devices and their implications?
- The global dimension with a European model of urban governance? There's a distinct European urbanity and approach to urban issues, which could be worthwhile to cultivate and communicate around the world.
- It is important to foreground how the SRIA in this perspective (the theme urban governance and participation) also supports 'the right to the city'.

So, with Mangalagiu's query in mind, what are the first steps to implement the SRIA?

Session provided three interrelated key messages to give help us with a conceptual entry point. The key messages were extracted on-the-go and may have to be revised in the light of a slightly more rigorous analysis of the session's input and discussions (in brackets are some key words or reasons added upon reflection):

- Work with different kinds of inequalities, not just the 'conventional' socio-economic kind (Weberian marginalisation/exclusion from big table in civil society).

The other vistas of inequalities may be: gender; digital divide; accessibility; urban conviviality (more-than-human urbanity); ‘articulatory’ inequalities (publics’ various competencies to participate and raise concerns).

- Broaden the sense of ‘participants’ and knowledges for co-creation. The theme needs to break out of a narrow sense of citizen-government relations into a broader implementation sense. (More ‘heterogeneous engineering’ and ‘emerging publics’, since this shows us that issue-oriented political work and the publics that emerge rather than ‘proceduralism’ may allow for a better connection ‘to the street’ and shape benign friction and agony rather than antagonist conflict, to use the technical notions).
- Cultivate a sociotechnical process approach instead of fuelling the opposition between ‘social’ and ‘technical’ issues and ‘solutions’. This also pertains to the issue of how to deal with wicked issues and silos in the thematic priority of urban governance and participation, not to propose a total deconstruction of silos but still increase exchange and connectivity between them.

How do they ‘align’ with all roads lead to governance? In that they actually promotes an effort to connect different thematics. But also to support and develop the insight that governance *and* participation is distributed and to be crafted in particular ways according to the issue at hand. In other words, Rome in this case seems to distributed out to very local settings by way of the roads? So, we need to be careful about governance in the tendrils all around and perhaps cultivate a pick-up habit: don’t shut out governance details but go with it. So, the question in the title can be answered in the affirmative but not without loosing sight of the particularities of each issue, case by case in terms of how to approach them?

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