

## **Strategic reflection on ten years of JPI Urban Europe to derive recommendations for the “Driving Urban Transitions to a Sustainable Future (DUT)” partnership programme**

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After ten years of engagement in the JPI Urban Europe, the SAB has decided to provide the following reflections and advice to help guide the next steps in shaping the DUT partnership programme. The statement builds on and expands upon the key messages of the SAB position paper, published in 2019 [1]. The SAB addresses this statement to the Governing Board of JPI Urban Europe. It is structured as a compilation of important criteria that characterize the immense and successful work of JPI Urban Europe. For each criterion, a recommendation for further work within the DUT partnership programme is formulated, indicated by an arrow.

### **1. Uniqueness**

The JPI Urban Europe is a unique European initiative enabling inter- and transdisciplinary collaboration to tackle pressing societal problems in cities, towns, and urban regions. Its unique characteristics need to be highlighted and emphasized.

One example is the holistic approach to address the interrelationship between various goals towards urban transitions, at different urban scales and within the European context, through a dilemma-based perspective. The intensive communication of the unique characteristics through diverse channels and media contributes to the distinction from other programmes and networks that deal with similar topics. Additionally, it offers entry points for collaboration to achieve synergies.

➔ **Setting a distinguishable brand**

### **2. Dilemma perspective as a new way of thinking**

Introducing the dilemma approach, which was proposed successfully in the SRIA 2.0, opens a new way of thinking and acting, by recognising non-linear development, uncertainties, limitations, surprises, and setbacks. Costs and benefits often do not affect the same stakeholder.

The complexity of urban transition can be considered a wicked problem, which needs appropriate knowledge and solutions that integrate transversal, top-down, and bottom-up approaches, zooming-in and zooming-out in multifaceted assemblages of urban issues. Enlarging the dilemma approach by considering an honest and courageous uncovering of

paradoxes, conflicts, or risk accumulation helps in creating a realistic picture of the present and the future challenges of urban transitions.

➔ **Expanding the dilemma approach to new directions in approaching technology-, ecosystem-, community- and policy-based strategies**

### **3. Innovation through urban experimentation**

The challenge-driven approach requires co-design and co-creation to tackle problems, questions, and tasks at different urban scales. The adequate inclusion of a variety of stakeholders, such as practitioners, volunteers, residents, scientists, all diverse in terms of age, gender, class, and ethnicity, in a transparent and participating way is challenging. More efforts are necessary to inspire citizens to participate and act.

This can lead to new coalitions which may foster the creation and application of innovations. Local forms of experimentation, such as Urban Living Labs, are an important approach to intensify the use of existing knowledge and experience in concrete actions. Reflection and evaluation are decisive to improve and continue this approach in terms of implementing the results through concrete political action.

A progressive communication strategy is required to ensure the dissemination of innovative results, tools, and models. In this regard, it is important to maintain the original understanding of Urban Living Labs and avoid misusing the term for simple hands-on activities.

In order to empower practitioners and accelerate innovation by creatives and pioneers, the opportunities of awarding a prize and thereby raise awareness of the innovative potential of society should be investigated. In addition, a scholarship could be established to allow for the temporary secondment of creatives in host institutions or companies for knowledge transfer and exchange of ideas to incubate innovation.

➔ **Exploiting and multiplying innovative, co-creative solutions and knowledge gains from experimentation, incl. Urban Living Labs, and grant awards for selected efforts**

### **4. Enhancing visibility of success stories**

JPI Urban Europe launched 10 calls between 2012 and 2020. In the initial phase, the spectrum of topics was very broad. During SRIA and SRIA 2.0 periods, the definition of foci led to selection and prioritization. Based on the experiences gained, three new DUT thematic priorities have been defined. These are “100 positive energy districts and neighbourhoods”, “circular urban regenerative economies” and “the 15 minutes city”. All topics address outstanding challenges for urban transitions.

➔ **Telling exciting narratives to illustrate the thematic priorities (hands-on examples and food for thought)**

## **5. Ensuring long-term planning and commitments**

As of today, 20 countries participate and a network of 41 funding agencies exists. This demonstrates the advantage of European collaboration and exchange. Building upon national strategies and developing a common agenda and programme allows to take advantage of competencies across countries, leverage funds, and create a transnational innovation ecosystem.

The common goal is to grasp the increased complexity of urban challenges while following national or regional key priorities. Many of them require long-term approaches to discover the entire potential at different spatial scales and with different stakeholder groups to reach the expected input. Trust, reliability, and long-term commitment in collaboration are important prerequisites to pursue the common goal.

➔ **Balancing variable geometry and reliable long-term commitment**

## **6. Contribution to accelerate urban transitions**

To accelerate urban transitions in the decade of action until 2030 to fulfill the SDGs, efforts and actions at multiple levels - from the global to the local level - are essential. A clear political will to achieve well-defined goals (e.g. zero emissions, climate neutrality) should be expressed through democratic decisions for the implementation of adaptation strategies.

To this effect, it is crucial to ensure that the various innovative solutions that have been developed through the urban transitions research projects of previous JPI UE calls are effectively implemented in practice. To speed up progress in transitioning, a mobilization and full involvement of key policymakers, i.e. members of parliament, ministers, heads of government, prime ministers as well as lord mayors or aldermen, are necessary to align commitments. European city networks, e.g. "Eurocities" or "Covenant of Mayors", should be considered as allies.

➔ **Mobilisation of key policymakers and expansion of cooperation with city networks**

## **7. Intensive exchange with national entities**

The European platform of JPI Urban Europe builds upon the intensive consultation and cooperation with national or regional funding agencies and the responsible political institutions (e.g. ministries). The most important prerequisite for cooperation is the conviction that all parties will benefit together.

This refers to enlarged partner relations across Europe and to the customized replication of conceptual and methodological project approaches considering different social and cultural contexts. Furthermore, the intensive exchange could enable long-term projects and long-term field experiments beyond the duration of the JPI UE resp. DUT funding, helping innovative solutions to take root in the urban habitat.

➔ **Justify the benefits of collaboration to reluctant national institutions and exploit the potentials by bringing results and actions from transnational to national/regional level**

## 8. International performance

During the last years, JPI Urban Europe presented its “philosophy” at several international conferences (e.g. World Urban Forum in Kuala Lumpur, Durban, and Dubai) and country-specific symposia (e.g. in Brazil, China). By doing so, networks and collaboration could be established, enlarged, and strengthened successfully.

For instance, the joint call with Belmont Forum in 2017, and a joint call with the National Natural Science Foundation of China in 2019 make evident the merits of developing common projects and of increasing exchange of knowledge, always considering the local and cultural context.

**➔ Continue efforts on European and international level to mobilise international funding agencies and global decision-makers**

## 9. SAB contribution

The Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) was installed to advise the JPI Management Board and the Governing Board concerning strategic and pressing challenges in the frame of urban transitions. The current SAB consists of internationally recognised scientists including architects working at universities and research centres. They represent different disciplines but advocate for inter- and transdisciplinary approaches to grasp the complexity of urban transformations.

This advice of the SAB mainly refers to the members’ scientific expertise. Spokespeople from other domains, e.g. mayors, ombudsmen for minorities, representatives from housing enterprises or infrastructure providers, representatives from city networks, may complement this perspective in future.

**➔ Consider changing the composition of the advisory board by including experts from different domains**

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[1] Sigrun Kabisch, Göran Finnveden, Petr Kratochvil, Richard Sendi, Marta Smagacz-Poziemska, Rafaela Matos and Jonas Bylund, New Urban Transitions towards Sustainability: Addressing SDG challenges (Research and Implementation Tasks and Topics from the Perspective of the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) of the Joint Programming Initiative (JPI) Urban Europe), *Sustainability* **2019**, 11, 2242; doi:10.3390/su11082242