

Prague, Regional UN Habitat III Conference, 16-18 March, 2016

### Side Event

### “Urban sustainability transformations in European Cities”



### Organizers:

Department for Urban and Environmental Sociology, Helmholtz-Center for Environmental Research UFZ, Leipzig, Germany in cooperation with the City of Leipzig, Germany, the City of Brno, Czech Republic, and the Joint Programming Initiative (JPI) Urban Europe

### Background and Aims

European cities are vibrant places which contribute to the quality of life and human wellbeing of urban dwellers and are important for the generation of wealth. Yet, contemporary urban development paths are often contrary to sustainable development goals. Demographic, environmental and economic changes together bear many challenges for urban areas and call for holistic and fundamental transformations towards sustainability. In our understanding, so-called **urban sustainability transformations** are needed, which subsume a bundle of different, partly interwoven, partly divergent goals such as the provision of adequate housing, CO<sub>2</sub>-reduction in cities, healthy, green and safe urban environments as well as measures to increase urban resilience against hazardous events e.g. caused by climate change. The side event tackled the question of how cities can respond to environmental, demographic and economic challenges through transforming existing (un-sustainable) urban development paths and at the same time secure healthy and affordable housing and involve a broad range of stakeholders. The aim of the side event was to provide a broad platform, where practitioners and researchers can discuss what has already been done regarding sustainable development with focus on housing and what lessons can be learned concerning an integrated understanding of sustainability transformations.

### Content

The event, moderated by **Florian Koch from UFZ Leipzig**, started with a presentation by **Sigrun Kabisch, also from the UFZ Leipzig**, on Science-Practice-Interface concerning the topic of urban transformations. She emphasized the need of close exchange between academia and praxis. Using research results on potentials and weaknesses of large housing estates, she described how these results influence urban planning decisions. This scientific analysis helped to measure the impact of housing investments and strategies and to prioritize further need for action. **Stefan Heinig from the Department of Urban Development of the City of Leipzig** focused on the question of how Leipzig's new housing policy concept can support sustainable development. He presented the work on the city's new housing policy concept and demonstrated how different elements like a participative approach, the challenge of changing demographic trends as well as the competing objective of energy efficient and affordable housing are addressed in an integrated way in the concept.

In the presentation by **Eva Gregorová from the City Strategy Office of the City of Brno** the need for an integrated approach to sustainable development was highlighted. The close relation between the city and its surrounding region requires concepts (especially for its governance) on metropolitan scale and the city of Brno successfully participates in European programs and initiatives on these issues. Furthermore, with its integrated approach to city development Brno addresses also issues like social housing, revitalization of deprived areas, education, smart mobility and others. Coming from the local level to the European level, **Jonas Bylund from Joint Programming Initiative (JPI) Urban Europe** focused on the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA) of the JPI Urban Europe and how this agenda can support Urban Sustainability Transformations. He presented some of the principles of the SRIA as the focus on cross-sectoral policy area(s), the orientation towards implementation and co-creative approaches which involve different stakeholders. He also talked about JPI Urban Europe's future Calls for research projects which contain the topics of quality of urban life including housing, Urban Transitions and sustainable urban areas.

## Discussion

In the following debate with the speakers and the 60 participants of the side event a diverse set of different requirements for the implementation of more sustainable forms of urban development were discussed. Besides the need for creativity in order to find solutions for wicked problems, the involvement of different partners including research organizations as well as suitable funding schemes, political issues were highlighted as a crucial precondition for urban transformations: New forms of multi-level-governance and city networks as for example Eurocities play an important role. Furthermore, especially the interaction between political will and leadership of key persons as well as a strong civil society support was stressed by the speakers as decisive. Nevertheless, maintaining the constellation between these three components requires continuous efforts and transnational infrastructures to support it. Comparative approaches and transdisciplinary research can reveal how cities may succeed in becoming more sustainable.

As a **conclusion**, the participants of the side event agreed on the importance of science-practice interfaces for better urban development as well as on the need to involve an integrative view of urban sustainability transformations in the New Urban Agenda.

## Further Information

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