Panel Discussion 1:  
Innovative Solutions – What is Urban Reality Demanding from Research?

Application oriented urban research faces various challenges today. Based on close cooperation between stakeholders from science and urban development, demands from urban realities need to be taken into consideration by researchers. Outcomes and solutions should reflect research, but they should also actively incorporate the actual necessities of urban practitioners. Therefore, strong communication channels and transdisciplinary collaboration need to be established. This will facilitate a long term development of innovative solutions that are applicable and realistic.

Participants (from left to right)

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Applied Research & Urban Reality

Research as an essential Part of Urban Development

- Getting out of the silo of science is an adequate approach for urban development. The city has to be the driving actor because of its competencies in decision making and installing policies.
- It is necessary that research responds to national/local framework regulations with regard to the competencies of the cities; and that it influences political and institutional processes of decision making. It is important to bring the problems to the level where they can be solved.
- Research can help to identify underestimated problems. Identifying real life problems and formulating the right research questions that will contribute to innovative solutions, i.e. food systems and needs in cities like Casablanca.
- Research is very important and useful for planning (statistics, results of studies, adjustment of existing plans using additional research that had not been previously taken into account).
- Integrated research work must go beyond participation and create real cross-cutting collaboration that will endure in the long run.
- Transdisciplinarity in this context means more than bringing the disciplines together and cooperating with the local people; it means developing the project together due to the long period.
- Social and cultural problems have to be integrated in the solutions by people-centered planning (i.e. stove programme of the BMZ: Is it possible to change the cooking habits?)
- In application oriented research projects, the scientists need to apply different kinds of knowledge to moderate the process and to get solutions work in real life, not only “scientific knowledge”. Application is more than technical terms, it is also about processes, about what the barriers are.
- A lot of political dialogue between partner countries already exists; it is crucial to share solutions for urban challenges, to bring them to a global level where they can be applied and learned from.

Cross-Cutting Communication & Collaboration

The Future Megacities-Programme forces the stakeholders and researchers to interact. It is a very new approach to bring stakeholders, practitioners and researchers together in such complex and important topics as are climate change, urbanisation and sustainability. In order to establish strong communication channels, multiple partners need to be engaged at different levels.

Research Projects

- Research projects must bind multiple actors in city governance with participatory processes in civil society and with NGOs. This continuous multilevel dialogue – first government, then communities and civil society – does pay off.
- The transfer of information between practitioners and researchers should be based on constant communication and cooperation. Researchers attempt to translate real-life issues into scientific questions; then, they try to integrate their research outcomes for realistic and applicable solutions. This is both time consuming and difficult.
In transcultural projects, it is important to establish a good working communication between partners. However this starts sometimes with language problems (i.e. not everyone who should be involved speaks English).

A “joint mindscape” that integrates everybody into the process must be developed. This will allow for a thorough understanding of the problem and embracing the solutions. Everybody should have the same idea of the problem.

The long period of research in the Future-Megacities Programme has been a testing field to develop and implement methods for networking, i.e. rapid powerpoint planning in the field. It questions how research should be organised (funding modes etc.).

Civil Society / NGO’s

- Questions are often clear, but the solutions are very complicated; which is why it is important to have cross disciplinary research that involves civil society.
- Because one needs credibility of the data and the knowledge, civil society must accompany the project from the beginning, not only professionals. They must formulate the questions and be involved in the process to get solid answers. Credibility and trust exist between people, not between institutions.

Government

- The framework conditions for implementation must support dialogue: urban development is far too complex to leave it to mayors alone. At the governmental level, it is important to act as facilitators and integrators and to connect all layers of society: civil society, planners, industry, etc.

Private Sector

- It is hard for an enterprise to get involved in urban research programmes (i.e. due to funding modes).
- Many industries approach their business with city-specific programmes for urban development based on market opportunities (by selling solutions).
- Research can show the need to strengthen the private sector (local and foreign); to strengthen the corporate social responsibility as well as potential private-public-partnership.

Application and Spread Out of Solutions

Next Steps to secure the Results of the Research

- Making results accessible: e.g. HCMC built a database where the obtained data is more available. This can be used as a base for decision-making in HCMC, as well as in the wider Vietnam.
- There is the need for a network which should exist longer than the programme and should include the young researchers. In addition, the network should include the participating cities and allow for the exchange of best practices and general principles.

Participation of Civil Society (or Lack Thereof)

- Education is the most important differentiator that enables public participation processes; it creates open-mindedness
- This makes the greatest difference when it comes to evaluating the ease in implementing planning projects (no resistance from places with authoritative governments vs. civic group resistance from more democratic societies)
But: solutions must have a basis in civil society to be sustainable (credibility, social and cultural adaption, commitment and ownership).

**Political Leadership and Binding Policies**
- Official commitment and binding policies in order to secure the future of the vision: i.e. Johannesburg is committed to invest in rapid implementation and conclusive planning, so that there is less risk of the program being compromised in the future. All the spending is bundled in one institution (here the planning department), and a project management is installed.

**Financing and Economic Incentives**
- It is important to develop solutions which can be run by local/national resources.
- Implementation must also include financing and funding mechanisms (i.e. in German society, there exists the will to pay for water, so we are able to finance an infrastructure for water).