

2016 and 2017: Spotlight on two years of intensive work at Difu

The key challenges currently facing local authorities are population growth and decline, demographic change, social segregation (sometimes combined with gentrification processes), the integration of migrants, digitalisation, their own financial provision (despite many achieving good revenues in recent years) and new ways of involving civil society in urban development. These challenges are highly interrelated, which is why integrated and interdisciplinary approaches offer the chance to tap into synergies. Such approaches are also the only way to identify conflicting goals – the precondition for any proper assessment. The German Institute of Urban Affairs (Difu) takes rigorous account of these complex interdependencies in the everyday reality of urban development through its interdisciplinary approach to projects. The broad range of skills and competencies available in its various research areas and its decades of experience stand it in very good stead in that respect.

Difu's own self-funded projects tend to address "new" issues and lay the foundations for more in-depth analyses. Examples include migration, the impact of digitalisation and safety in urban development. Staff in the relevant research areas get together to form project groups to examine the theme of a project from various perspectives. Staff from the Training and Knowledge Management divisions, Press and Public Relations, and the Institute's management may also be involved on a case-by-case basis. In early 2016 Difu was thus able to provide support in a variety of forms to local authorities on dealing with the challenges they face in connection with integrating refugees. See Part B of this publication for more information on the cross-cutting issue of "migration and integration".

Difu has a long tradition when it comes to both public-service housing policy and public-service land and property policy, both issues which are currently gaining in importance. Two position papers published in conjunction with the vhw-Bundesverband für Wohnen und Stadtentwicklung e. V. met with the general approval of both the (professional) readership and local authorities. Given how important these two issues are for sustainable urban development, the Institute will continue to contribute to the ongoing debate. More on this topic in the section "Focus on Housing/Land Policy" and in the "Legislation" and "Housing" sections in Part B of this publication.

Local authority funding continues to be an issue of crucial importance. Within the means available to it, Difu has freed up additional resources so as to be able to (once more) step up the support it provides local authorities in this area. For some years now Difu has headed the Municipal Panel on financial status, investments and local authority funding, working on behalf of KfW Development Bank and with the intensive involvement of local government associations. New projects such as the Promoting Urban Development in North Rhine-Westphalia project show that it was right to set things in motion in this regard. As part of that project Difu investigated the factors for success and obstacles when it comes to applying for, approving and invoicing funding on the federal state's behalf.

Infrastructure, another issue addressed by the Municipal Panel, has long been one of Difu's priority areas. Projects carried out in 2016 and 2017 on resource-light infrastructure, municipal transformation management for the turnaround in heating policy, various aspects in relation to the water infrastructure, as well as on smart, multifunctional infrastructure systems underscore the bandwidth of topics addressed.

Digitalisation is also coming to play an increasingly important role in this context, as the topics "smart city" and "information and communication technologies (ICTs)" show. The Institute is concerned to ensure that both the opportunities and risks associated with these issues are considered in the current debate. The same goes for digitalisation in the mobility sector, for instance in connection with autonomous driving. For more on this topic, see the section "Focus on the Megatrend Digitalisation" and the "Infrastructure" and "Mobility" sections in Part B.

In 2016 Difu took up other issues linked to mobility, including optimising commercial transport, the future of public transport in rural regions and its funding, and integrating busy transport routes into urban structures. Cycle traffic is by tradition one of Difu's priority areas. The Cycle Academy project which it runs on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastruc-

ture continues to conduct research into ways of making cycling a more attractive and sustainable option.

Another central issue is supporting local authorities when it comes to implementing the Paris climate goals and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals and in tackling the many other challenges posed by climate change and adaptation. Climate-adapted urban district development, incorporating actors and civil society, climate-friendly building, and noise and climate protection through traffic speed reduction are just a few examples of the broad range of topics addressed. Difu's own research, different types of events – ranging from training courses to the Klimaaaktive Kommune competition – as well as various advisory services are an integral part of this work. Special mention should be made here of the Service and Competence Centre: Local Government Climate Action (SK:KK). See the section "Focus on Climate Protection and Climate Adaptation" and the "Environment" section in Part B for more on this topic.

Difu's diverse projects once again provided plenty of material for a wide range of publications. These are overseen by the Institute's own Editorial Office, which is responsible for project-related and external publications as well as Difu's own publication series. The latter as well as Difu's logo and corporate identity were given a facelift in 2017; its website will likewise be relaunched in 2018. Difu also trialled e-books in the course of 2017. After taking its first steps in this field there are now plans to expand its line of e-books.

Difu's range of online offerings, for which the Knowledge Management division has operative responsibility, still includes its almost traditional services such as the local authority literature database ORLIS, the survey database kommDemos and various project databases. The rapid changes in ICTs and user behaviour mean that these online offerings need to be reviewed and developed on an ongoing basis. Other matters of concern in this area are the increasingly complex data protection requirements and ensuring the security of the Institute's digital infrastructure.

The Training division is another mainstay when it comes to knowledge transfer. Here, too, digital teaching methods are gaining increasing importance. Difu already offers a range of webinars, although face-to-face teaching retains its prominent position in the overall mix. Teaching formats range from "classic" seminars to discussion events in the Difu Dialogue series. Programmes of events combine ongoing issues such as urban development legislation and insights into ongoing research activities with new issues like digitalisation. Seminars on current issues are also included in these programmes.

Press and public relations work has a very key role to play when it comes to communicating the Institute to the public. It includes overseeing the latest press releases on research findings, publications and events, for instance, as well as the four issues of Difu's journal "Berichte" which are published each year. The staff office does important work in maintaining contact with donors and others who are interested in the work of the Institute. Difu's Facebook page is growing in popularity and has a huge multiplier effect.

The increasing number of (funding) projects and (third-party) commissions also mean that more and more time and effort needs to be put into funding applications, preparing proposals, and writing interim and final invoices etc. Our colleagues in General Administration are heavily involved in this work. Along with that they support both project managers in the various research areas and the Institute's management when it comes to controlling and optimising processes.

The developments which have only been briefly outlined in the above make it clear that Difu has had two successful years. These successes also provide an incentive for the future: Given the constantly changing conditions, the Institute will also have to continue developing going forward. Difu's Strategy 2020+, adopted in 2013, still provides the substantive basis for the Institute's future direction of travel. As a result, individual issues and areas may have to be weighed differently in future. In addition to laying this substantive foundation, the Institute has since late 2014/early 2015 been discussing its future strategic orientation, focussing on matters such as personnel development and organisational structure, the latter especially against the backdrop of a growing staff headcount and with a view to Difu's corporate identity. A number of important outcomes have already been produced and are now being implemented. A new team level was added in each of the research areas, for example. The aim is to guarantee efficient management to staff ratios, to continue improving information flows between the Institute's management and its staff, to encourage responsibility-taking which above all has staff in mind, and to increase the recognisability of topics and content in particular for outsiders. At the same time,

new internal information-sharing methods have been put in place to promote interdisciplinary thinking and action – one of the Institute's key concerns.



Focus on Housing/Land Policy

Urgent need for action

Just a few years ago it seemed that “the housing problem” had been solved. Today's urban policy debate is above all dominated by the lack of affordable housing in growing towns and cities. This is due to developments on both the demand and the supply side and to housing policy shortcomings since the 1990s. As well as incentives to overcome this lack of affordable housing, basic issues such as the (re-)alignment of housing policy need to be put on the political agenda. Difu cooperated with the vhw-Bundesverband für Wohnen und Stadtentwicklung e. V. to address these issues in the run-up to the general elections in Germany in the autumn of 2017, and called for a social and resilient housing policy.

Public-interest providers are an important point of leverage in housing policy strategies which Difu addresses in its research projects. Case examples are being used in the Expanding Municipal Housing Stock Through Construction and Acquisition as a Housing Policy Strategy Against the Background of Greater Orientation to Public Interests research project to present solutions by incorporating housing associations and other (in some cases new) public-interest actors, such as local civic organisations, employers with staff accommodation and foundations. As local conditions vary, a silver bullet will never be found. That is why any attempt to systematise local authorities' strategies and those of their housing companies must take account of the specific local conditions. In view of how differentiated the demand for housing has become as well as the changes in housing culture, the From Pioneers to Urban Practice – Potentials of Communal Living for Solving Demographic and Social Challenges, Lab City Potsdam project will provide further impetus when it comes to relaunching housing policy strategies in towns and cities.

Land policy, the basis for strategic action

Any search for solutions for a housing policy which is in the general interest will naturally raise “the land question”. Land policy is the key point of departure here, and not only when it comes to resolving competing land use issues. It also provides a means of achieving overarching sustainable urban development, climate protection and climate adaptation goals. Can the existing range of land policy instruments meet the current challenges? Are new instruments needed? Where can and must land law instruments be refined? These questions were addressed by the Future Questions in Land Policy Group of Experts, which was initiated by the vhw and Difu based on their cooperation on housing policy. The Land Policy Agenda 2030 which they jointly elaborated summarises key results and policy demands. Difu is currently conducting a study on local authority purchasing strategies in the interests of expanding strategic land reserves for sustainable, socially equitable and cost-effective urban development.



Focus on the Megatrend Digitalisation

Opportunities and risks for urban development

The digitalisation of government, business and society is making great strides. The demand for innovative infrastructures and technologies is rising rapidly. It is especially the use of integrated information and communication technologies (ICTs) which promises innovative applications. These may well help increase quality of life, economic stability, civic participation, and environmental and climate protection. Given their cross-cutting tasks in providing services of general interest and their diverse functions, it is local authorities in particular which are called to act. They need to identify risks, for instance in regard to data protection and transport safety, and take the relevant preventive measures. It is thus no wonder that Difu is working on the topic of digitalisation on a broad front: in the context of several projects, empirically and interdisciplinarily, with municipal, academic and business partners, and through knowledge transfer via advisory services, publications and training courses.

Everybody's talking about the smart city

More and more towns and cities are seeking conceptual and practical solutions which are based on integrated ICTs. What has been lacking so far, though, is a systematic overview. What are local authorities in Germany already doing to become smart cities? And how far have they got in terms of planning and implementing smart city approaches? Difu addressed these questions in a study of 200 of Germany's most populous towns and cities. The Institute organised what was a second event at which experts from these towns and cities were able to share experience. It became clear that "the smart city" is now an integral part of integrated urban development strategies, which was not the case just a few years ago. Bigger towns and cities in particular have begun to set themselves targets in regard to the use of smart ICTs. They can increasingly talk to specialist technology providers at eye level. Especially in smaller towns and cities, pilot applications such as digitally supported mobility services or new Wi-Fi offers may be a judicious approach. Regardless of the size of community, the smart city also opens up opportunities for utilities and local businesses. It makes sense to involve both in smart city initiatives at an early stage. The event also showed that local authorities should think carefully before commissioning private enterprises with "collecting", processing and interpreting data. The interfaces between data pools in particular will become a critical aspect in the coming years.

Key topic especially for local authorities: autonomous and connected driving

The issue of autonomous driving is now firmly in the public arena. Automotive manufacturers, suppliers, IT businesses and Deutsche Bahn have discovered autonomous driving as a future business field and are already testing these vehicles in German towns and cities, both in private and public transport. Under laboratory conditions, the possible benefits of autonomous vehicles include greater transport efficiency, reduced emissions of air pollutants and greenhouse gases, as well as better transport safety. However, automated and autonomous driving raises numerous questions in regard to its application in everyday urban reality. Difu has been addressing these questions for some time now in workshops, for instance. Does autonomous driving mean the end of "urbanity" as we know it? Will it boost or weaken compact settlement development? Will it possibly even lead to unwanted displacement effects – a move away from public transport, walking and cycling towards more individualised automotive transportation?

There is no question that, in view of current traffic-related air quality problems, local authorities should seek to actively draw on the benefits of autonomous driving to complement both public transport and new options such as car sharing and carpooling. Municipalities will at any rate have to act quickly if they want to play a part in shaping this process. Integration, automation and e-mobility may well contribute to the turnaround in transport policy. Municipalities need to link their vision of a liveable city with the debate around autonomous driving. Towns, cities and communities need help to find their bearings in this debate, which Difu and its experts can provide.

Focus on Climate Protection and Climate Adaptation



Indispensable and promising

Climate protection and climate change adaptation have become vital concerns in the context of the provision of municipal services of general interest. The tasks which towns and cities will in future need to address will be closely linked to other urban-social issues, concepts and processes relating to urban development. Relevant topics include water-sensitive urban development and the green and blue infrastructure.

It is clear that on account of the bandwidth of possible local climate consequences various different local government departments and other non-administrative actors will have to be involved in drawing up and implementing viable adaptation solutions. Difu is addressing the issue of climate change adaptation in several of its research projects. The Institute publishes the results of these projects in various formats, for instance in its "Practical Guide to Climate-Friendly Build-

ding" brochure or at Difu training events such as its course on Diversity in Developing Green and Open Spaces – New Actors and Concepts for Urban Green Spaces.

The practical benefits for local authorities – a key concern for Difu

Difu is developing a new urban climate model as part of the joint Practical Climate Models project and is testing it on the ground in several "pilot municipalities". The aim is for this new model to be able to "calculate" the consequences for the urban climate, such as heat, radiation and air chemistry, for an entire major city more precisely and in more detail than has previously been the case, and, among other things, to assist in assessing the possible local climate consequences in 30 or 50 years.

Flood prevention and heavy rainfall management, both joint municipal tasks, mean that very different actors need to be involved and that cooperation with them must run as smoothly as possible. Difu is currently executing the Municipal Flood Prevention – Planners in Dialogue project, the objective being to optimise the relevant planning and administrative processes. Difu has got local authority practitioners "on board" this project, too.

One of the key aspects of another, now completed, project which Difu was involved in was making know-how available to local authority practitioners. The underlying idea of the Plan4Change project was that although the relevant concepts and internet tools are available at regional and local level, the planning and implementation of adaptation measures often fail in everyday planning processes. It is especially this transition from theory to practice which the pilot project addressed. The project was based on a climate adaptation strategy applied in Bochum. Difu and the University of Bochum supported the implementation of that strategy in a neighbourhood in Bochum over a period of three years in close cooperation with Bochum city planners and other actors. One key outcome of the Plan4Change project was a practical urban planning guide which makes the insights gained in Bochum available to other towns, cities and districts.