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## The Institute

The Deutsches Institut für Urbanistik (German Institute of Urban Affairs, Difu) is the largest urban research institute in the German-speaking region and provides a variety of services to the municipalities. It is a non-profit institution of solidarity for the towns and cities, and is supported by over 100 municipalities as well as institutional donors in the form of the German Federal Government and the federal state of Berlin.

The independent Institute was founded in 1973 and has its headquarters in Berlin and a further office in Cologne (Environment Department). It covers a comprehensive spectrum of topics and on an academic level, it addresses all the tasks that municipalities have to master now and in the future.

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[www.difu.de/6638](http://www.difu.de/6638) (media library)  
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As of: January 2026



## Topics

Urban development and planning  
Environment and sustainability  
Economy and finance  
Population and social aspects  
Mobility and infrastructure  
Policy, law and administration

## Objectives and research tasks

The German Institute of Urban Affairs (Difu) was established in 1973 on the initiative of approximately 60 towns and cities in order to help municipal administrations and policy-makers carry out their municipal responsibilities by providing academically founded research and further training. Furthermore, Difu is also tasked with showing longer-term perspectives and options for urban development.

The Institute investigates issues concerning municipal politics, addresses the challenges faced by municipalities in an interdisciplinary manner and compiles method-based foundations and practice-based concepts for municipal planning and administrative practice. Through the focus of its work it supports individual cities and towns, e.g., to solve current problems, when they can be taken as example problems.

As a community institution supported by over 100 donors, mainly municipalities, municipal associations and planning communities, Difu focuses its work on the needs of the municipalities and offers them a wide range of services.

Publications, further training and information services assist the practice-based communication of academic findings, the exchange of experiences between the municipalities and support the implementation of planning objectives in municipal administrations.

[www.difu.de/institut/aufgaben](http://www.difu.de/institut/aufgaben)

## Our testimonials

### Events

With approximately 150 events and approximately 7,000 participants per year, Difu offers a comprehensive range of municipality-orientated further training, also online. In-service seminars and webinars on current municipal political topics are mainly directed at managers, senior employees in the administration and members of representative bodies. They are held in Berlin or other cities, also in the form of short seminars whose content can be tailored to suit specific requirements on site. Larger specialist conferences and focus seminars as well as the public "Difu dialogue for the future of towns and cities" event series round off its further training opportunities. In addition, there are a multitude of subject specific events held by the "Agentur für kommunalen Klimaschutz" (Agency for Municipal Climate Change Mitigation), the "Zentrum KlimaAnpassung" (Climate Change Adaptation Centre), the "Mobilitätsforum Bund" (Federal Mobility Forum) or the "Dialogforum für Kinder- und Jugendhilfe" (Dialogue forum for child and youth welfare services).  
[www.difu.de/veranstaltungen](http://www.difu.de/veranstaltungen)

### Information and documentation

The Institute's information and documentation services provide for inter-municipality exchange of experience and transfer of research results into municipal practice. An important foundation is the Difu Repository.

The publication server holds bibliographical data of all publications published by Difu or with the cooperation of Difu, as well as contributions from Difu academics, also in external publications, such as periodicals or collections. Some of them are even provided as full texts.

[www.repository.difu.de/home](http://www.repository.difu.de/home)

### Publications

Difu publishes various publication series – as of 2023 they are largely available as open access publications:

"Edition Difu – Stadt Forschung Praxis" (Edition Difu – urban research practice), "Difu-Impulse" (Difu impulses), "Difu-Arbeitshilfen" (Difu work tools), "Difu-Policy-Papers" as well as two magazines: the quarterly "Berichte" (report) magazine and the semi-annual "Moderne Stadtgeschichte" (modern urban history). Furthermore, special publications are released in the framework of various research projects.

[www.difu.de/publikationen](http://www.difu.de/publikationen)

## Donors and sponsors of the Institute

Indirect or direct member states of the Association of German Cities (Deutscher Städetag) and the German Association of Towns and Municipalities (Deutscher Städte- und Gemeindebund) can be admitted to the donor group. Furthermore, districts as well as regional associations and associations for surrounding areas of cities have the opportunity to use Difu services. Donors benefit from the regular services of the Institute, allowing them the subscription to the Institute's publications free of charge, participation in seminars and other further training events at heavily reduced prices as well as access to the Difu extranet. In turn, by communicating current issues to the Institute the towns and cities ensure that the research and further training is based on their real and current problems.

Until the end of 2007 the legal entity of the Institute was the non-profit Verein für Kommunalwissenschaften (VfK - association for municipal research), which was established by the Association of German Cities and the federal state of Berlin in 1951. Since the Institute's change of legal form into a non-profit limited company under German law on 1 January 2008, the sole shareholder of the gGmbH (non-profit limited company under German law) is VfK, whose members are appointed by the Association of German Cities and the federal state of Berlin, the federal state where the Institute is registered.

[www.difu.de/institut/das-difu-als-zuwender-foerdernde](http://www.difu.de/institut/das-difu-als-zuwender-foerdernde)

[www.difu.de/institut/organisation-gremien](http://www.difu.de/institut/organisation-gremien)

### Finance and staffing

The non-profit Institute is financed by the donors, the federal state of Berlin and the German Federal Government. There are additionally the Institute's own funds, e.g., from project funding, as well as income from seminars and publications. Approximately 200 people are employed in the Institute.

[www.difu.de/institut/finanzierung-foerderung](http://www.difu.de/institut/finanzierung-foerderung)