



Cooperation Leading to Successful Implementation

Dear reader,

The funding priority Sustainable Development of Urban Regions (SURE) of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) addresses the challenges of climate change and exacerbated urbanisation. Cities and urban regions are driving forces of climate change (UN environment programme, 2023). At the same time they are most vulnerable to increasing temperatures, the rising sea level and the intensification of extreme weather events. The SURE collaborative projects address these issues through research and development by probing and demonstrating ways to mitigate climate change effects in selected urban regions in South East Asia and China. The aim is to make urban regions more resilient to the impacts of climate change. In order to successfully implement the generated solutions, collaborations and the transferability are key factors.

The 8th Synergy Workshop of the SURE funding priority, which took place on 15 February 2023, was dedicated to the topic of implementation from two perspectives: the design of collaborations for successful implementation and the transferability of solutions and strategies to other regions or countries. These are key factors in the current research and development phase of the funding priority to enable the later successful application of the developed solutions in the subsequent implementation phase.

The exchange was enriched by contributions from three international experts on the topic: Prof. Dr. Mariele Evers (Executive Director of the Institute of Geography at the University of Bonn, Chair UNESCO – Chair in Human-Water Systems), Tarryn Quayle (Professional Officer: Climate Change and Water Resources Management, ICLEI) and Dr. Ernita Flynn (Senior Professional Officer, Social-Ecological Systems, ICLEI). The international experts currently work in several African countries and focus on SURE-related topics such as nature-, technology- and community-based solutions for biodiversity, restoration, resilience and risk management. In their presentations, the experts provided valuable insights into their implementation experiences and strategies, which were further explored in the following discussion with the projects.

In this newsletter you can find out more about the potential of collaborations for successful implementations and the transferability of solutions to other regions and countries.

Kind regards
The SURE Facilitation and Synthesis Research Project

References

UN environment programme, 2023. Cities and climate change.



The Importance of Collaborations in Sustainable Transformation Research

According to the sustainability researchers Mauser et al. (2013: 420), knowledge generation for social and sustainable transformations requires "integrated global environmental change research that will be designed and conducted in partnership with society". Hence, the SURE research projects adopt a collaborative research approach to find and implement context-specific solutions to complex sustainability problems in South East Asia and China. Besides the beneficial effect of collaborations between researchers and non-academic stakeholders with regards to the development of concepts, the collaborative approach also "promises to increase legitimacy, ownership, and accountability for the problem, as well as for the solution options" (Lang et al. 2012: 26). Joint efforts are therefore crucial for a successful implementation of the SURE project results and thus for a sustainable transformation of fast-growing urban regions.

Within the SURE collaborative projects, a broad range of relevant societal, academic and political actors collaboratively work together in transdisciplinary co-learning and co-creation processes to ensure the implementation of strategies according to the needs and wishes of local groups. Sustainability researchers such as Lang et al. (2012: 34) emphasise the need for an open, integrated process in which findings from many potential actors are constantly incorporated. During the workshop, the SURE projects however pointed out that in the actual research practice the stakeholders are involved to varying degrees and at different points in time during the project duration. While citizens, public sector actors and planners play a vital role throughout the research, development and planning, stakeholders from the business sector are particularly important for the implementation of solutions.

According to workshop discussions, a number of factors facilitate the implementation of collaborative methods in research practice. Local project partners, for instance, play a central role in the coordination, implementation and monitoring of these activities. In this sense, long-term, non-hierarchical and trusting relationships are important factors for collaborative approaches. Similarly, strong personal commitment and intensive communication and dissemination efforts go hand in hand in this context. Collaborations aim at the joint development of solutions that benefit the local population. In this way, collaborations are both the means and ends of sustainable transformation research.

References

Mauser, W., Klepper, G., Rice, M., Schmalzbauer, B. S., Hackmann, H., Leemans, R., Moore, H., 2013. Transdisciplinary global change research: the co-creation of knowledge for sustainability. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* 5 (4), 420-431.

Lang, D. J., Wiek, A., Bergmann, M., Stauffacher, M., Martens, P., Moll, P., Swilling, M., Thomas, C. J., 2012. Transdisciplinary research in sustainability science: practice, principles, and challenges. *Sustainability Science* 7 (1), 25-43.



Transferring Solutions and Knowledge from one Region to Another

Up-Scaling solutions

The collaborative projects of the funding priority Sustainable Development of Urban Regions (SURE) are currently in the research and development phase. The implementation phase will start in 2024/2025. The objective of the upcoming implementation phase is to make the community-, technology- and nature-based solutions generated transferable to other regions. A central goal of the SURE collaborative projects is thus a cross-regional and cross-national transfer of solutions and knowledge. In this context, there are opportunities as well as challenges in terms of the envisioned transferability and scaling for the SURE collaborative projects.

No "one size fits all"

The projects agreed that a 1:1 transferability of knowledge and solutions is neither feasible nor desirable in the 8th Synergy Workshop of the SURE funding priority. Each city and urban region has its own geographical characteristics, individual stakeholder settings and culture-specific planning processes with regard to the sustainable and resilient design of living and economic spaces. Moreover, data accessibility, human capacity, and financial resources vary from country to country or region to region in South East Asia and China.

In order for other urban regions to benefit from the nature-, technology- and community-based solutions developed by the SURE collaborative projects, the designed methods and concepts must be flexible for local adaptation. The aim is to develop a self-explanatory and transparent implementation design to ensure adaptation possibilities. Another key to successful transferability of solutions is the establishment of networks with relevant actors from politics, business and civil society. It is therefore valuable to encourage cooperation between different countries and regions in order to initiate a long-term exchange of experience and trust building.

Involving local stakeholders

National governments and local project partners play a helpful intermediary role and are important multipliers in the dissemination of knowledge and tools. According to the SURE collaborative projects, these local stakeholders often have a deep understanding of resilient and sustainable applications and practices from different cultures and political settings. The adaption of solutions as well as the translation and transfer of knowledge are more likely to be feasible with the involvement of local stakeholders. For a successful implementation, it is therefore crucial to identify and involve them at an early stage. In addition, regional representatives of international organisations such as the UN or ICLEI often show interest in application ideas and knowledge transfer. These organisations have the necessary capacities to transfer solutions for more climate protection and resilience and to act as continuous contact partners for all interested projects in the implementation phase.

The role of media and formats for dissemination

The SURE projects consider a participation in and contribution to global platforms such as the UN Climate Conference as a key for knowledge dissemination. In addition, traditional outreach formats such as manuals, workshops and training programs are also valuable tools for the exchange of knowledge. The use of social media to transfer generated knowledge and developed solutions should, however, not be underestimated. Especially against the background of the intensive use of social media in the professional and social context in Southeast Asia and China, the projects see great potential for the implementation phase. As social media transcends any geographical boundaries, the visibility of profitable solutions is increased. Based on these formats and media, it is possible to exchange experiences transnationally and to jointly shape sustainable developments.

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