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Socially Integrative City - the cooperation and confrontation between urban research and urban policy in Germany

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1. Preliminary remarks on the programme's general background

Socially Integrative City is one of Germany's responses to the ramifications of the profound structural change in the economy, which increasing globalization reinforces, for citizens and government. Long-term unemployment and associated poverty are reaching alarming proportions. Primarily jobs in industry have diminished drastically and have not been replaced by sufficient employment opportunities in other sectors. This particularly affects the centres of the old industries, like the Ruhr District, ports and the new *Länder*. But even in these locations new structures in corporation-oriented, sophisticated services and new technologies are blossoming as globalization winners. Conversely, the marks of this shift are evident even in prosperous regions, such as Bavaria and Baden-

Württemberg. The aggravated division of society into rich and poor, the upwardly mobile and those in danger of sliding down the social ladder, is a nationwide phenomenon.

The welfare state has ultimately failed in its attempts to satisfy growing claims for economic equality and finer meshing of the safety net. Government revenue has dropped significantly due to tax evasion, facilitated by globalization, and tax relief, dictated by competition. The widening gap caused by increased spending and decreased income overtaxes the traditional national welfare system. Rethinking and new policymaking are required. Government encouragement and underwriting takes precedence over passivity and benevolence.

Initial signs of this overburdening had already been analysed and debated in the late 1970s, but adequate responses could not gain majority acceptance in either the political parties or with the electorate. Today the time for a transformation of government activity finally appears to be ripe. The theory of pathological learning in democracies is being confirmed: changes in government action only occur when a catastrophe has had an impact or at least loomed large. Until this point is reached, no popular majority for political counteraction can be achieved. Less government welfare and more individual responsibility are the inevitable outcomes. Watching whether a united Germany can negotiate this second change of course as well as the Germans mastered reunification is fascinating.

2. Preliminary remarks on the programme's urban planning backdrop

The Socially Integrative City programme ushered in a minor shift in a limited policy area in 1998. This programme entailed many firsts in the governance of the Federal Republic. The policy recognizes that constructional changes do not suffice to solve urban development problems. Urban development is more than buildings and streets and squares. It concerns the people who live there and their specific situation. Saint Augustine recognized that in 400 A.D. He knew that people and their dreams make cities rather than bricks and mortar. These people are the main focus of Socially Integrated City. The programme calls for change in the attitudes of municipal and federal executives, in legislative and business behaviour and, last but not least, in the way citizens think and act. The Chancellor has therefore labelled it a pilot project in civil society and motivational governance.

What led up to the radical overhaul of traditional patterns in this policy area? Well, as always it was a complex bundle of causes, and I cannot shed light on all aspects in this paper. I can only give you a little of the background. Cities are affected by three types of migration:

- Wealthy, primarily younger households, often the winners of globalization, are moving out of the cities into the immediate or more distant surrounding area to find a home and a community they regard as a more pleasant habitat. They are not all interested in buying property. The urban cores are abandoned to poor, old or immigrant families, the losers of globalization.
- Within the cities involuntary migration is occurring. Poorer households are

clustering in zones with cheap living space. The demand for reasonably priced quarters has increased due to long-term unemployment, while the supply of subsidized housing has fallen by more than half in the past 20 years and become more concentrated in fewer neighbourhoods. The earlier mix of council houses and commercially financed flats in practically the entire municipal area has virtually disappeared. Social polarization has been augmented by class-related spatial polarization.

- Immigrants to Germany locate primarily in these zones because first-generation immigrants or their descendants cluster there and make this the first port of call for newcomers.

Germany does not have a monopoly on this phenomenon. The trend is virtually ubiquitous in Europe. Germany has been affected later than most of the continent's countries. For more than ten years almost all European nations have been attempting to master these problems with urban development programmes (UDPs). The experiences of neighbouring countries stimulated Germany's thinking about how to proceed. The EU has commissioned a major research project acronymed UGIS. Teams from eleven countries, including Hungary, were involved. A large conference in Antwerp earlier this year wrapped up the investigation.

The framework for urban development in Germany is characterized most of all by:

- cities' dwindling financial leeway,
- growing polarization of urban social space resulting in
- increasing need to integrate various policy areas to improve the precision and problem-solving capability, the efficiency and productivity of municipal urban renewal sponsorship.

The problems raised by these trends overextend cities' resources. They need help from their inhabitants and the support of the *Länder* and the federal government. These contributions will not suffice, and it will not be possible to round up additional funding. Germany needs new forms of cooperation between various policy areas and levels, between government and business, between cities and their environs. The country has numerous approaches to this goal, although nowhere near enough, and not all of them are sound. I am not able to go into great detail. I want to limit my remarks to one example: support for disadvantaged urban districts, the mission of the Socially Integrated City programme jointly prosecuted by the federal government and Germany's 16 *Länder*.

German urban studies began to point out the early stages of such a trend in the mid-1980s. Many cities had already encountered these problems and explored new ways and means of dealing with them. Practice-oriented urban research twinned with innovative municipal renewal have great impact, perhaps even a crucial role, in refining city and district renewal in Germany. Therefore I want to focus my presentation on the interaction of urban studies and urban policies as well as elucidating instances where they are drifting apart.

3. Genesis of the Socially Integrative City programme

Germany is proud of its municipal self-government. Its core is guaranteed by the federal constitution. Nevertheless, federal policy imposes important legal and financial conditions. They include the limited, but not insignificant, Socially Integrative City programme, which extends financial aid - with legal strings attached - to urban centres assuming their fundamental responsibility for self-renewal.

The impact of federal laws and policies on municipalities is often totally neglected or not given sufficient consideration.

The Socially Integrative City programme constitutes an exception. It is a shining example of productive meshing of the three German political planes - cities, *Länder* and the federal government. Moreover, it is a brilliant portrayal of the sometimes frictional, but frequently fruitful interfacing of urban studies, including the above-mentioned multinational findings; municipal government; and urban development. The birth and nurturing of the Socially Integrative City programme are fascinating fields.

When I was working in the research department of the Federal Construction Ministry in the 1980s, we became convinced that our goals and our responsibility, to provide legislation and financial support, were best stimulated not by theoretical urban research but by the practical experience cities were acquiring in coping with contemporary urban development problems and related investigation. Examination of the rule of law, case studies and sharing of experience were the preferred subjects of research. The biggest innovations were initiatives of individual cities. Difu, the largest German urban affairs centre, for example, also owes its creation to the proposal of a German city's mayor, which was wholeheartedly endorsed by the federal government and several *Länder*, unfortunately only the cities, Hamburg and Bremen and most energetically by Berlin, the seat of the institute.

Some cities also have this kind of trailblazing role in tackling the problems of their disadvantaged districts. They have made it clear to *Land* ministries that the difficulties faced in these underprivileged neighbourhoods are tangential to the classic measures of urban planning promotion, which is therefore unable to tackle and overcome them. North Rhine-Westphalian cities and Hamburg were the first to be confronted with these problems, because structural change in their economies, particularly the loss of jobs in the coal and steel industries and in the ports, made the first severe dents in spatial patterns. However, some urban development researchers especially in North-Rhine-Westphalia and Hamburg wasted no time in studying these very problems and developing innovative measures in conjunction with local governments and residents. They took inspiration from German experience with cautious, citizen-oriented urban renewal like the exemplary Kreuzberg component of the 1985 international building exhibition in Berlin and also considered what had been done in the U.S., France, Britain and the Netherlands in the way of community-based urban revitalization.

Later Germany embraced some of the ideas of the EU's URBAN development programme that was launched in 1994 on the initiative of the French government. Now Germany's cities are seizing the initiative. They have sent an open letter to commissioner Michel Barnier urging that EU Structural Fund policy be re-architected in 2006 to specifically target the problems of disadvantaged urban districts. I am confident that Barnier will be open this proposal. UGIS results will provide another strong argument for adoption of the German cities' démarche.

Hamburg and North Rhine-Westphalia pioneered the corresponding socially oriented German urban district development policy. These *Länder*, prompted by local politicians and local government researchers, adopted programmes to help master these problems in 1993 and 1994. North-Rhine-Westphalia asked his own research institute to organize an exchange of experience between the actors in the districts involved in the programme and to set up an evaluation. However, the inertia of traditional policy prohibited more extensive intervention in decision-making processes and power structures, changes the researchers felt were necessary. Above all, no adjustment took place in the stimulatory economic and social policy environment. Policymakers were therefore criticized for only taking symbolic or, to be less harsh, simultaneous action and not getting beneath the surface to the roots of the malaise. I will return to some aspects of this problem.

Nonetheless, these two *Länder* managed to intensify regional and federal awareness. In 1996 they persuaded the panel of *Land* construction ministers to give a signal to start a common initiative, Socially Integrated City, and urged the federal government to wake up and explore the issue. But the decisive nudge that convinced the central government to act was a finding of urban research. At a hearing on urban development promotion in the Bundestag, the German Institute of Urban Affairs, or Difu, shared its concerns about the drama unfolding in the cities and the incipient social disintegration of urban communities and urged the German parliament to focus on these situations in drafting its urban development schemes. Difu research operations benefited from especially close and steady contact with the cities. The institute always has an accurate, up-to-date picture of urgent urban problems thanks to its studies and interaction.

Only a short time after the hearing, the appropriate construction ministry officials met Difu specialists and authorized the institute to produce an expertise and schedule an expert workshop to lay the groundwork for commissioning research. This would investigate concrete examples and establish whether a corrective federal programme was required. The new government elected in 1998 halted the preparatory research, alleging it was superfluous, and adopted the nationwide Socially Integrated City programme. At the same time Difu was awarded a contract to support programme implementation with theoretical knowledge and practical know-how.

4. Innovative Socially Integrative City approaches

What characterizes the Socially Integrative City programme? I would like to

highlight three aspects.

a) Area focus

Traditional urban development promotion, which centres around building investment, has always been characterized by the fact that measures are implemented within a precisely defined area. It is equipped with specific legal and financial tools which differ considerably from general urban planning legislation. Their application must therefore be restricted to a particular area, for constitutional reasons of equality alone.

However, in Germany social measures targeting people rarely spotlight specific areas, but are classified according to certain groups of addressees and are always limited to individual cases. Attaching a district orientation to the Socially Integrated City programme, i.e. giving it a sociospatial approach, makes it a innovation in attacking social problems. It constitutes a revolution in youth services, welfare, health and labour policies.

The programme is responding to calls from youth welfare and social researchers for sociospatial and case-independent schemes which have long been discussed but are not yet practised or have been neglected. The Federal Youth Ministry has therefore become involved in Socially Integrative City through the Development and Opportunities for Young People in Social Hotspots programme - or E & C - to foster sociospatial approaches in youth welfare. In this case it is the federal government which is promoting innovation in practical youth work at local level. Private youth welfare sponsors are the main instigators of such activities. Municipalities themselves tend to play a minor role. Nevertheless, practice-based research has also triggered political activity here. The federal youth report, which government-commissioned researchers publish every four years, demanded that youth welfare be extended to encompass sociospatial measures as early as 1990.

Socially Integrative City now aids 300 districts. They are located throughout Germany, in both cities and towns, in fairly wealthy and relatively poor areas. The average district has 126 hectares and has 8415 residents. More than half the districts are new developments built in the 1970s and 1980s. One fifth have only prewar buildings. Another fifth contains both older and newer construction. The common denominator is significantly more severe unemployment and need than in the whole municipality. Other identifiers are an overproportion of young people, children and people of migrant background. These districts have the function of alleviating the municipality because individuals with various handicaps (must) congregate here and because they provide impetus for new tacks in solving social and multicultural problems.

In this context I should point out that district selection does not depend solely on their problems, but also considers their potentials and the people who live and work there. Challenging, consolidating and fostering individuals' skills and boosting the self-confidence and self-esteem which many residents have lost is a key element of the programme. This contradicts some urban development

researchers, who had concluded that people in these districts were superfluous to the societal reproduction process. Experiences with Socially Integrative City districts refute such hypotheses and show that this is not the case.

b) Citizen involvement

Another new aspect of the programme is that it aims not to do something for inhabitants in these districts, but to promote development there hand in hand with residents. This poses a challenge to many professional urban planners, social workers and youth welfare officers, who have learned and studied what is in people's best interests. They must relinquish some of their decision-making powers and be willing to engage in open dialogue with citizens. However, residents are also challenged and expected to articulate their interests and realize them in cooperation with local government. The population should not have a hostile or alienating view of the authorities, but should regard them as a necessary partner in achieving their goals.

Of course, local government cannot simply wait and see whether people wish to be involved in decision-making. It must actively seek to mobilize and empower them. The state is therefore no longer a bureaucratic, service-performing institution, but one which mobilizes citizens, requires and facilitates their participation and encourages them to assume responsibility. The programme strives to foster and reinforce this process by calling for the establishment of three-level neighbourhood management, incorporating the neighbourhood, local government and an intermediary. Neighbourhood management has the task of contacting people and establishing structures which comply with the requirements I have just listed. We have found that neighbourhood management plays a crucial role in assuring the success of social urban district development.

This concept has also arisen from cooperation between municipal practice and practice-based research. Social work in the neighbourhood has always been an integral part of good urban planning promotion, but an intermediary level was rare, and the involvement of local government was almost unheard of. Research findings on community affairs and local government led to the realization that activities which are limited to the neighbourhood are inadequate and liable to end in failure. What we need are authorities which are able to handle the complex problems and the wealth of potential at grassroots level. This requires the establishment of interdepartmental project groups and the introduction of decision-making processes which make citizens' involvement relevant. In the case of larger measures, it goes without saying that the final decision must lie with the elected local council. This ensures the commitment of the whole municipality. Nevertheless, citizens themselves can take many smaller decisions and implement them by drawing on a contingency fund not earmarked for any specific purpose, for example.

The University of Essen and Difu have jointly developed a three-pronged model of this kind, and have tested and refined it in a common research project, Municipalities of the Future, run by the Bertelsmann Foundation, the Hans Böckler

Foundation and KGSt. This studies ten towns and cities of varying size and problem density. Our survey of the programme districts reveals that 80% have implemented the model. Many towns and cities have tailored it to their specific situation, but its basic form is easily recognizable.

It is understandable that local politicians are not always happy with the new decision-making structures. But if they give innovations a chance and get involved, as they do in many towns and cities, they do not lose their standing but improve contact with residents, gain influence and win trust. This effectively combats the political reluctance which can be observed in many areas, without causing "problems of democratic theory".

c) Integrated action plans

I have already mentioned the necessity of interdepartmental cooperation. This should not be random or spontaneous, but should be based on an integrated action plan drafted and developed jointly by local government, residents and business and other onsite players. The programme prescribes an integrated action plan as a fundamental sponsorship condition and does not leave planning up to the whim of the municipality.

Nonetheless, up to mid-2002 barely two thirds of districts had developed such plans. Many employed older structures which did not comply with programme requirements. Our survey of programme districts showed that integrated action plans have been received positively in almost all places where they have been implemented, despite initially being scorned as excess bureaucratic baggage. Here they are not regarded as straitjackets, but are adapted flexibly as the procedure unfolds to incorporate proposals from various parties. Experience demonstrates that cooperation between the various policy levels intensified in communities which implemented an integrated action plan of this kind. Resource pooling from different departments was more successful and employment of funds was perceived as more efficient.

5. Concomitant research procedures and findings

Socially Integrative City is not a research or pilot programme which spans only a few towns. It promotes disadvantaged urban districts "across the board". But it demands new attitudes and behaviour from all participants. Federal and *Land* governments have agreed that it is helpful, vital even, to support and advise the towns and cities implementing the programme, and to mobilize and challenge them where necessary. Federal research funds have therefore been invested in concomitant research. An interregional mediation, information and advice agency has been set up to boost implementation of the programme in the municipalities concerned. Difu has been commissioned with this task in its role as a predominantly privately funded research institute which also receives support from the federal government, the, *Länder* and, last but foremost, 130 municipalities.

The concomitant research focused on three elements: promoting communication and sharing of findings among players, reinforcing and investigating programme implementation in one "pilot district" in each *Land*, also known as "onsite programme support", and conducting two nationwide surveys at the outset of the programme and about two years into the scheme. To foster communications, Difu has conducted five national and numerous local events to promote exchange and further training and has published a journal highlighting various topics. Thirteen volumes have been issued to date. One more is due to appear by autumn. The most important meetings were documented and published in a special series along with other materials deemed crucial for programme implementation.

Difu has also launched an Internet forum which features all the information we have on Socially Integrated City. Visitors to the site now total 100,000 per month. The most important component is the project database, for which we have now researched and documented more than 250 integrative projects with different focuses. It is supplemented with good practice analyses performed by Difu researchers and empirica colleagues. They identify quality criteria for efficient, strategic and integrated urban district renewal and illustrate the findings with specific examples.

One outstanding aspect was onsite programme support. In early 2000 all *Länder* selected an urban area as a model district and commissioned a group to conduct mobilizing concomitant research. Difu monitored four districts and subcontracted supervision of the other twelve to eleven different teams. Selection took place in consultation with the municipality and the *Land*. The research team's task was to document activities in these areas and to inspire new projects and approaches.

The teams were expected to take the opportunity they had to share their experience and knowledge of good practice in other areas and their overview of research findings and to tap the benefits for municipal practice. Of course, policymakers, government and other locally active organizations and even citizens themselves initially eyed them with suspicion. They were often accused of imposing inappropriate controls, using unnecessary and time-consuming approaches and being removed from reality. But almost all teams succeeded in winning the trust of the players and becoming an asset to them.

However, there were cases where teams' efforts actually to implement programme requirements were unwelcome. Not all *Länder* and municipalities appreciated criticism. This sometimes led to serious confrontation. Problems generally stemmed from differing opinions on what constituted appropriate local government intervention, on the extent to which politics and administration should embrace participative procedures and on the role of onsite programme support, which was intended to be more than (merely) an additional administrative office. This escalated, engendering the age-old conflict concerning the freedom of science.

However, research team activity was generally greeted as inspiring and helpful. Citizens therefore lamented the end of onsite programme support and requested its continuation. This is an ideal scenario for practice-oriented urban research,

which desires and claims to contribute directly to furthering municipal practice.

Unusually, the research teams agreed on a common statement following conclusion of their work. It communicates their experiences of specific onsite programme support and addresses proposals and demands regarding refinement of programme design and implementation to federal, *Land* and municipal policymakers. It remains to be seen whether this will have any effects on practical operation and refinement of Socially Integrated City.

I don't intend to explore the results of the first survey right now. The poll targeted agencies which were in charge of enforcing the programme in their city - usually planning offices, but often welfare agencies or business promotion offices. They were asked about the *status quo* in their jurisdictions. I only want to mention that we found that the selection of districts conformed with programme objectives. The findings of the second survey, with 90% of the currently operating districts reporting, are mixed. I can only touch on two facets today.

The biggest problem in the eyes of city officials is the difficulty in raising the necessary funds from various programmes and using them in accord with Socially Integrated City goals in an cohesive, thus efficient and effective, fashion. Budgeting and spending is easier to handle in the EU URBAN II programme because the application of resources is less restricted than in German schemes, which feature the objectives and operations of individual government departments.

Of course, what interests us most is whether city government officials involved in the programme believe it has reaped benefits. What we have learned is that we must distinguish between substantive operations and instrumental-strategic activities. In the former sphere, improvement in climate was noted, but the residents' dire material straits were not measurably alleviated. This comes as no surprise in the light of the complex, ramified problems in the districts and the generally depressed economy. These burdens radically overextend the limited scope of issues that the Socially Integrated City programme addresses.

In contrast, the programme has chalked up amazing progress in the instrumental-strategic theatre of operations, but has also suffered setbacks in this domain. The Socially Integrative City programme has scored numerous successes in engaging neighbourhood residents and government policymakers and administrators in face-to-face dialogue and in encouraging inhabitants to participate in neighbourhood affairs and communicate more efficiently with one another. These inroads suggest that the programme has laid considerable groundwork for sustained improvement in affected districts. However, the reluctance of local business to do its part must be overcome. It appears that many parties that need to become partners are afraid of meeting each other halfway.

The task of the current interim programme evaluation is to validate or qualify our findings.

6. Concluding remarks

What general lessons can researchers and policymakers learn from the Socially Integrative City programme?

Researchers who focus on specific local problems and develop concrete proposals for change will often encounter incomprehension, rejection and resistance. If their approaches or jargon are too far removed from urban reality, this reaction is justified and understandable. If they cooperate with local players to create practicable models of acceptable administration and do not only criticize backward-looking developments or draft practice-removed, theoretical models, they will gain recognition in isolated quarters. This will not happen everywhere or immediately, but acceptance will gradually spread. Researchers therefore need to be tenacious, for they have to stand their ground in the face of frequent short-term exploitation attitudes in the research landscape. They also need partners in innovative local government agencies. It is their job to find them. Grassroots, pace-setting research and "upwardly mobile", outward-looking practice are the ideal combination.

Policymakers can learn that researchers are not necessarily just theoretical, analytical and retrospective, but that they can use the knowledge they gain to devise and develop practicable, forward-looking solutions. They can also learn that researchers can provide help, legitimization and constructive criticism for policy formulation. Socially Integrative City and E & C are good examples of this function. The Federal Research Ministry is cooperating with research teams to promote urban development concepts in eleven competition-winning cities and regions under the City 2030 project. This shows that politics are still open to new ideas and not always deaf to guidance.

Incorporating research into constructive policy design and not reducing it to (equally necessary) summative, retrospective, or at best, formative, process-accompanying evaluation, helps researchers to focus more sharply on actual problems and practical solutions. It also improves policy quality by stretching it beyond the bounds of the obviously achievable and fostering truly innovative ideas.

Independence and learning of researchers and scientists in this field crucial for city development is as important as independence and learning of policy makers. In times where almost all certainties and traditional recipes for success are crumbling around us, this is an essential, lifesaving axiom.