



Deutsches Institut
für Urbanistik

20
23

Annual Review





Dear readers,

We at Difu can look back on a successful 2023. Full order books with many exciting and challenging projects as well as healthy finances – despite significant increases in rental and personnel costs. The inflationary consequences of the so-called multiple crises have also left their mark on us. But 2023 was not only an economically successful year for Difu, it was also an emotionally special one.

With an academic conference and a small celebration, we looked back on 50 years of urban research at Difu and explored the future challenges in urban development. This anniversary once again gives me the opportunity to thank all those who have accompanied us over the decades – whether as clients or as academic cooperation partners. Our special thanks, however, go to the German Association of German Cities (Deutscher Städtetag) and “its” cities. They are invaluable partners. They enable us to be “close at hand”, which is essential for an applied research institute. Our special thanks therefore go to the President of the Association of German Cities, Markus Lewe, and its Managing Director, Helmut Dedy.

My colleague in the institute management, Luise Adrian, and I want to continue transforming the institute in innovative ways, because we believe that this is much easier to do in good times than under pressure. We know that we can only succeed together with our motivated and creative colleagues in the institute. Our special thanks go to them for their considerable commitment.

But there are also changes that you don't organise, they just happen. The long-standing head of the Urban Development, Legal and Social Affairs research department and a member of the institute management, Prof. Dr. Arno Bunzel, retired at the end of 2023 for reasons of age. He has been succeeded by Ricarda Pätzold as the new head of the research department; Dr. Jens Libbe and Ulrike Wolf were given commercial power of attorney at the beginning of the year and have been part of the institute's management since then.

There were also changes at the helm of our academic advisory board in 2023. The long-standing chairman, Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Ulrich Battis, whom I would like to thank very much for his commitment to Difu, has passed the baton to Prof. Dr. Guido Spars. The current composition of the new advisory board can be found in this “Annual Review”.

Please stay in touch with Difu in the future!

Prof. Dr. Carsten Kühl
Scientific Director and Managing Director





Annual Review 2023

With our research we want to provide municipalities with impetus for solving upcoming tasks and contribute to sustainable urban development with innovative ideas.

This issue presents a selection of our projects and activities from the past year.

Stephanie Bock and Bettina Reimann

Participation culture in municipalities: Experiences in and prospects for structured participation

Public participation is demanding and poses growing challenges for local authorities. Structured participation increases transparency and commitment.

Urban development is no longer conceivable – or feasible – without the participation of citizens. But successful participation cannot be taken for granted. Despite the many years of local government experience with a wide variety of participation formats, cities and municipalities are constantly facing new and increasingly complex challenges. It is therefore important to find new ways of engaging with the public, irrespective whether they support the implementation of projects through participation, obstruct them through protests or prevent them through referendums.

Given the complexity of the challenges, such as dealing with the consequences of the climate crisis or implementing the energy and mobility transition, it is not surprising that there is sometimes a clash of interests. At the same time, the importance of information, communication and well-organised participation has grown – with consequences for participation practices: in addition to legally prescribed and formally enshrined formats, it is above all the almost endless variety of informal participation opportunities that is changing the collaboration between local government, elected politicians, organised civil society and individual citizens.

As a result, municipal participation practices have become even more dynamic: cities and municipalities are fundamentally reorganising and restructuring their participation practices, not least in order to make the engagement between municipal stakeholders more binding. They bring together individual participation activities with the aim of establishing an overarching concept for public participation as a whole. Guidelines (processes) usually provide the basis for such overarching participation

strategies. Around 120 municipalities in Germany have developed guidelines for public participation. These are aimed at establishing or further developing a culture of participation by means of more formalised informal participation processes. The content and procedural standards developed for this purpose – such as early participation, transparency and dialogue on an equal footing – pave the way for implementing the guidelines. In most cities, the guidelines are developed in a three-way dialogue: local government, politics and urban society are involved from the outset and contribute their interests to the process. The guidelines are also given political approval.

To date, there has been no systematic overview of the status quo regarding “structured participation” as an overarching concept. This also means a lack of answers to questions as to which strategy, concept and implementation building blocks are used by municipalities and what experience they have had with the implementation.

Together with 16 cities, Difu therefore investigated these questions in the research project “Structured participation: How municipal participation concepts can be successfully systematised and defined”. The aim was to find out how such participation is organised at the municipal level, what it can achieve, what municipalities can learn from one another and what questions remain unanswered.

The joint reflection and discussion in workshops during the project and the in-depth analysis of how structured participation is implemented showed that there is no standardised structure for structured participation as an overarching



concept and no procedures that apply equally to – or are even necessary for – all cities and municipalities.

Nevertheless, a number of building blocks for defining participation were identified: it became clear that guidelines can improve the flow of information and communication, increase the transparency of processes and the binding nature of participation and, in the long term, strengthen municipal participation culture and local democracy. So far, the building blocks for implementing the guidelines have been aimed more at local government. There these promote interdepartmental collaboration, coordination of work processes and internal project management – and are valued by project participants as a lever for transforming local government. In addition to changing the working methods in local government, which is also supported by the organisational embedding of participation in administrative units equipped with the necessary expertise, resources and a binding mandate, most municipalities are experimenting with project lists and participation platforms.

Project lists, which provide information on municipal plans and schemes, are one person's joy and another person's sorrow: in some cities they are valued as a tool for the internal flow of information within local government and for project management, while in others they have been abolished because of the perceived unsatisfactory ratio of benefits to costs. Digital participation platforms are a commonly used information format in most cities, even if their implementation is still in its infancy in many places. In conjunction with the respective Smart City staff unit, innovative platforms are frequently set up that not only provide information about city projects, but also offer tools for networking and encouraging participation or the submission of civic projects and initiatives. In particular, there was considerable discussion about combining conventional participation programmes with formats for managing non-project-related ideas from the population – including with regard to the possibilities and limits of urban local authorities.

In general, the project work showed that the structure, organisation and formats for structured participation primarily meet local government requirements and define participation in public administration. Urban society has, how-

ever, not yet been satisfactorily reached in this way. The question therefore arises as to whether this should be interpreted as a shortcoming of structured participation or whether guideline processes that support the transformation of local government should be supplemented. Other formats could address the population or individual groups of the population, support low-threshold communication and promote an open culture of participation that takes up ideas from urban society. The different approaches were hotly debated by the municipal stakeholders involved in the project. However, the number of processes evaluated is still too small to draw further conclusions.

Nevertheless, it became clear that structured participation is ineffective without the commitment and support of the political leadership and can only be successfully developed if local politicians are on board.

The project results will be published in spring 2024 and presented and discussed in a workshop together with the German Association of Cities (Deutscher Städtetag).

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Jan Abt, Lisa Dreier, Theresa Hohmann, Dr. Jens Libbe and Dimitri Ravin

Digitalisation in municipalities: From the smart city strategy to artificial intelligence

Difu has developed the topics of digitalisation and smart cities into a new research and consultancy cluster. This is demonstrated by a series of projects and events. An interview with the Difu team from the Koordinierungs- und Transferstelle Modellprojekte Smart Cities (Smart Cities Model Projects Coordination and Transfer Office) shows the experience gained from the project work.

What political decisions on strategic digitalisation goals have been made in the municipalities?

Jan Abt: As far as the Smart Cities Model Projects that we have supported are concerned, most of the 73 municipalities have now adopted digital or smart city strategies. They provide guidance for further development by defining the underlying concept of smart cities and identifying key issues and priorities for the specific challenges faced by the municipalities. It's striking that the municipalities share a common basic understanding of what a smart city actually is: it's an integral concept for urban development that aims to support the provision of basic municipal services with digital applications. Digitalisation is not an end in itself, but a means to create more liveable cities. This applies not only to cities, but also to regions and municipalities in rural areas, where it is referred to as a smart region.

The New Leipzig Charter and the Smart City Charter emphasise the contribution of digitalisation to sustainable urban development. Do digitalisation and sustainability go together at all?

Theresa Hohmann: Digitalisation can be a valuable tool for achieving sustainability goals in municipalities.

This is why it is emphasised in many smart city strategies, for example in Constance, Ulm and Münster. A wide range of measures bring the two issues together. This is particularly clear when it comes to climate protection: an improved data basis facilitates CO2 accounting and the monitoring of climate protection measures. Sensor technology and smart control systems promote energy efficiency and renewable energies. In this respect, the strategic combination of climate action and smart cities makes sense.

Data – an important keyword and central element of smart cities. What frameworks are actually required for data-based urban development?

Dimitri Ravin: In a nutshell: Municipal data strategies that, at best, provide a framework for a holistic approach to data. In terms of content, it's about setting standards, interfaces and data usage rights, especially when working with partners outside your own municipality. Equally important is the development of municipal data infrastructures in the form of data platforms. All of this contributes to securing the so-called municipal data sovereignty. It's also about developing data expertise within local government and regulating clear and reliable data responsibilities. There are also

rules for data cooperation with public or private third parties.

We have prepared a comprehensive study on this topic within the Coordination and Transfer Office Model Projects Smart Cities. In addition to trailblazing German municipalities such as Soest and Mönchengladbach, European examples such as Barcelona, The Hague, the Greater London Authority, Helsinki and Vienna were analysed in detail as well as other international examples such as Toronto and Singapore.

How will the smart city be implemented in organisational terms?

Jan Abt: There's no single solution. Municipalities are taking different approaches – and rightly so. First and foremost, it's important that the strategy's development and implementation is strongly backed by the political leadership. Then there needs to be an office that coordinates this process within the municipality – after all, the aim is to bring together and inspire the various specialist areas and implement data-based urban development in a new way. In organisational terms, it can then be assigned to a separate staff unit, specialist department or municipal project company. Municipalities are also setting up monitoring



and advisory committees in which government, business, science and urban society can be equally represented.

Theresa Hohmann: However, it's also important to understand that smart cities are not just about digitalising individual local authority departments or municipal companies and businesses. Rather, it's about looking at existing work processes and how they can be carried out in a completely different way, based on the transfer of data. The path to a smart city often involves change management and a more collaborative approach within local government.

Can digitalisation and smart cities also make municipalities more crisis-proof or even more vulnerable?

Lisa Dreier: Digitalisation offers a wide range of opportunities to strengthen urban resilience. In particular, the improved information and planning basis provided by sensor technology and data enables more precautionary action. For example, continuously monitoring environmental and meteorological data enables better forecasting of hazardous situations. Better warnings can be given about flood risks or heat-related health risks. Resilience can therefore be strengthened by using digital data infrastructures and monitoring tools. At the same time, it cannot be denied that the digitalisation of urban systems poses new risks – in particular the risk of cyber-attacks. This makes it all the more necessary to address the issue of urban resilience in this context and to see it as a strategic task cutting across all specialist areas.

We're currently hearing a lot about artificial intelligence. Is this an issue for municipalities?

Jens Libbe: Yes, if we're talking about the application of "narrow AI". This is about identifying existing patterns and probabilities based on data, and combining the results to create new solutions. The current focus is on images, video, text and sensor data. But AI is also being used in communications and customer services, for example where dialogue assistants are needed or administrative texts need to be translated into "plain language". One area of particular interest for urban development and planning is the creation of digital twins using sensor data, with AI running in the background. There are also potential applications in monitoring and controlling technical infrastructure, automatically recording road conditions or when operating mobility platforms.

Dimitri Ravin: For AI applications, a key aspect is concerned with consolidating data in machine-readable formats, which are currently still often distributed within local authorities. This is because a large amount of data is needed to train AI. An adequate data infrastructure with data platforms, standards and interfaces is just as fundamental as practised municipal data governance, including data ethics guidelines.

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Uta Bauer

Relief instead of collapse – traffic calming measures and their effects in German and European cities

Currently implemented traffic calming measures are successful, but also highly controversial in many cities. It is often argued that they do not reduce traffic but instead put additional pressure on the neighbouring road network. A meta-analysis by Difu shows that this fear is unfounded.

In a research project funded by the European Union and the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Difu analysed various impact studies on traffic calming measures in German and other European cities in order to assess the effects of the measures on road traffic. Although the measures cannot be compared on a 1:1 basis due to the diversity of local contexts and conditions, and also due to the different evaluation designs, the results nevertheless allow clear conclusions to be drawn about the trends.

Overall, the empirical findings from Germany and abroad obtained in the TuneOurBlock project dispel any fears that comprehensive traffic calming measures will simply shift the problem onto the neighbouring road network. On the contrary, almost all studies confirm the phenomenon of “traffic evaporation”, for which there is no comparable technical term in German. This means that the volume of traffic does not flow one-to-one like a liquid to other streets, but is reduced overall after the intervention and street redesign and “evaporates” to a considerable extent. In the traffic calming projects analysed, the magnitude of this “evaporation” lies between 15 and 28 per cent in rural areas, between 25 and 69 per cent in city centres as a whole, and between four and 52 per cent in the vicinity of individual redesigned streets. The figures vary according to the scheme and the reference framework.

The effect can be explained by a change in traffic behaviour: the more attractive footpaths and cycleways are, the more people use them. In addition to a change in the choice of transport mode, other adaptation strategies are also responsible for the effect: other destinations are chosen, less important journeys are omitted or different routes are taken. And although the measurements also show a shift to neighbouring roads, this is usually moderate and the feared traffic collapse fails to occur in almost all cases.

In addition, many traffic calming measures have shown significant improvements in air quality. Nitrogen oxide pollution in particular is reduced on the streets where the measures are implemented – and in some cases also on the neighbouring main roads. In low-traffic neighbourhoods in London, this effect is even more pronounced on the main roads than in the streets where there has been intervention. The experience of other European cities, some with longer intervention periods, also shows that the positive effects of reducing congestion increase over time. In low-traffic neighbourhoods, increasingly more people walk or cycle, and sometimes decide to give up their cars altogether after a year or two. In the Belgian city of Ghent, car ownership has also fallen since the implementation of the car-free city centre in 2017. In 2015, Ghent residents owned an average of 1.2 cars per household, compared with 1.0 in 2021.

Data from TomTom, the navigation provider, also reveals that good cycling infrastructure and smooth vehicular traffic are by no means mutually exclusive. On the contrary, the cycling cities of Amsterdam and Copenhagen consistently come out on top in European congestion rankings. Average car speeds are 40 and 30 kilometres per hour respectively. By comparison, the average speeds in Leipzig (26 km/h) and Hamburg (23 km/h) are much lower. Motor vehicle traffic therefore moves more slowly there than in the “cycling cities”. Data analyses from Berlin, Leipzig, Munich and Hamburg quantify the time lost by motor vehicles after installing cycling facilities. At Leipzig’s main railway station, for instance, the new cycle infrastructure has increased car journey times by just one minute. In the other cities, journey times have increased by between two and twenty seconds. These “lost” journey times are offset by positive effects in terms of road safety and the attractiveness of cycling.

These findings confirm the 1960s theory that additional roads generate additional traffic (Braess, 1968; Downs, 1962). This is also supported by the analyses of Cairns, Atkins & Goodwin (2002), who evaluated 60 traffic calming schemes in 11 countries in the 1980s and 1990s, and found that in half of the projects studied, on average more than 11 per cent of motor vehicle traffic simply disappeared after the redesign, including on the adjacent road network. A significant increase in traffic was only observed in three out of 60 cases. These results are good news for the mobility transition in municipalities. Measures to tame car traffic in cities are having the desired effect: overall, car traffic is reduced and flows more smoothly, and the much-cited traffic jams do not occur. This lever must also be given greater consideration in the technical discussions in transport authorities. In particular, the effects described above should be better reflected in the modelling of traffic calming measures. The common assumption that there will be a one-to-one shift of car traffic to neighbouring roads does not seem to be automatic in the light of the available studies.

Transformation processes such as these change the everyday life of the population and – as the discussions in Paris, Barcelona and Ghent show – initially trigger resistance and opposition. After a few months, however, most of the dissenting voices fall silent, the urban street space regains its quality of life, retailers and restaurants benefit, personal encounters in the neighbourhood increase and public space becomes more attractive: greener, quieter and less hot. But it also means: Guiding principles such as the 15-minute city, mixed-use city and the city of short distances will only become reality if space and privileges are taken away from the car and urban space is distributed more equitably.

Detailed results of the study can be found in the Difu policy paper “Traffic calming: Relief instead of collapse! Measures and their effects in German and European cities”.

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Municipalities on route to greenhouse gas neutrality – climate mitigation monitoring and CO₂ balancing promote transparency

Municipalities are faced with the challenge of achieving greenhouse gas neutrality. But how can they document their progress transparently? Difu is supporting municipalities through its work for the “Agentur für kommunalen Klimaschutz” (Agency for Municipal Climate Change Mitigation) and other research projects.

Climate change and its consequences have long since arrived in Germany. The above-average mild temperatures in the autumn and the record temperatures in the oceans in 2023 are all evidence of climate change and once again underline the need for action. As a result, mitigating climate change has become even more important as a cross-cutting issue. There is potential for saving energy and reducing CO₂ emissions in all areas of life and therefore in all fields of activity. It is clear that efforts in all areas must be intensified in order to meet the national climate

targets and the contractual obligations of the Paris Climate Agreement. Many municipalities are already active and working hard to achieve greenhouse gas neutrality.

However, they face significant challenges. Assessing the baseline situation and establishing an energy and greenhouse gas balance requires the collection of relevant data and the use of appropriate balancing methods. As the measures are implemented, local authorities need to record the energy and CO₂ savings achieved.





This not only documents their own progress, but also helps to communicate with the urban community.

To date, however, there has been no standardised, comprehensive procedure for reporting on climate mitigation measures. Municipalities take very different approaches to documenting their climate mitigation activities: they report on the number of measures implemented, the regional added value or the number of climate action-led council resolutions. Energy and greenhouse gas balances form the basis for quantitatively monitoring and controlling local activities for mitigating climate change.

They show not only the distribution of energy consumption by sector, but also greenhouse gas emissions. The balance data are essential for presenting climate mitigation indicators. These help to relate the balance results to the structural data of the municipalities and are easier to interpret and compare.

In 2023, Difu was involved in several projects for balancing and monitoring climate change mitigation. On behalf of the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Protection (BMWK), the Agency for Municipal Climate Change Mitigation manages and develops standards for municipal greenhouse gas balancing. The focus is on further developing the "Municipal Balancing System" (BISKO) balancing standard. The agency's tasks also include providing data for balancing and supporting as well as certifying providers of balancing tools.

In the coming years, Difu will continue to support local authorities in monitoring climate action as part of its work for the Agency for Municipal Climate Change Mitigation. A regular exchange of expertise will ensure the quality of the standards being developed for reporting on climate action. This complex and innovative field is being strengthened by another Difu project: with its project entitled "More climate action together! Knowledge and action package by and for municipalities", which has been ongoing since the beginning of 2022 and is also funded by the BMWK, Difu is organising several practical workshops on monitoring climate change mitigation throughout Germany. The exchange and experiences reported by the participating municipalities showed that the principles and

approaches to monitoring climate action are as diverse as the climate mitigation activities in the municipalities.

Nevertheless, climate action concepts or climate roadmaps as well as well-functioning interdepartmental communication and collaboration provide an important basis for monitoring.

Particular challenges include the collection and processing of data, the development of appropriate indicators to show the impact of climate mitigation measures, and the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders. Suitable tools, uniform standards and better financial and human resources are needed.

The Difu project activities on this topic will be continued in the coming years, and the results will be published and widely disseminated in order to make a further contribution to mitigating climate change at the municipal level.

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From research to practice: How municipalities benefit from Difu's knowledge

Difu supports municipalities in their day-to-day work: in 2023, for example, it provided more than 130 practice-oriented training courses. In addition, it produces a large number of publications and information offerings with practical knowledge on all municipal topics every year.

Municipalities face major challenges: they have to deal with the consequences of multiple crises, increasingly complex demands, generational change and increasing staff turnover. As a result, there is a growing need for in-depth practical knowledge and dialogue in order to best master the challenges of the future.

For this reason, Difu ensures that its research findings are easily accessible, takes account of changing learning habits and offers appropriate support for solving current urban development challenges. The institute emphasises the importance of providing new impetus for sustainable urban development through innovative ideas. Interdisciplinary research teams focus on the full spectrum of municipal topics. They address current issues and develop practical recommendations and proposals for solutions. Difu attaches particular importance to closely collaborating with local practitioners and other community-oriented stakeholders – whether policymakers, local authorities, associations, civil society or business.

Knowledge transfer: Valuable personal contacts

Good ideas and practical solutions are developed through direct, per-

sonal dialogue. This is why in-person seminars continue to play an important role as the interface for transferring knowledge between research and practice. In addition to specialist input, they offer plenty of scope for sharing experiences and networking – in open discussion rounds, workshops, excursions or in “stand-up discussions”. Difu's seminar organisers are both methodologically trained and experienced. Difu's researchers draw on experts from the German Association of Cities, Difu's contacts in the donor cities and Difu's academic advisory board in designing the seminar programmes. This ensures that questions are addressed that are currently on the municipal agenda and are helpful for municipal practice. Last but not least, sharing expertise in the seminars helps to further develop research topics and to identify examples of good practice.

Whether web seminars or publications: Many Difu services are available online

In order to facilitate access to research results, Difu places particular emphasis on its digital offerings: web seminars are now an integral part of its seminar and event programme. Following the principle “more frequent, shorter, up-to-date and

concise”, this format enables Difu to support municipalities directly in their actual daily work and to intensify contact with practitioners. Feedback from practitioners ensures that Difu's programmes are precisely tailored to the needs of local authorities. One third of Difu's seminar programme now takes place online. Here, too, the institute focuses on interaction and networking as well as specialist input.

Last year, Difu took a further step towards the demand-led implementation of its digital services: the institute is gradually joining the open access movement, thereby supporting the idea of unrestricted and free online access to research results. Since 2023, almost all new Difu publications can be downloaded under an open access licence. The publications shown on the Difu website are linked to the publication server and can be downloaded free of charge. And this service is being expanded: older publications will be added and the user interface and functions will be further developed. This will enable Difu's research results to be visible and usable for a larger group of interested parties – for academics, practitioners and the general public. Due to changing user habits, Difu has decided to discontinue the ORLIS database and to develop other digital services.

Difu publications can now be found in the Difu repository.

Difu Policy Papers: Decision-making aids for local policymakers

Three issues of the new “Difu Policy Papers” series were published last year – on spatial planning, traffic calming and sustainable finance. The maxim here is “From Difu research for policymakers: up-to-date – well-founded – condensed”. The series is aimed in particular at political actors in municipalities but also at experts in local government who wish to use the condensed policy papers as a decision-making and evaluation aid.

Different information channels for different information needs

Difu's website provides the “home base” for information about Difu; all the latest news about the institute can be found here. Those who prefer automatic delivery can subscribe to one of the other channels: the “Berichte” magazine provides quarterly information on research findings, new projects, publications, events and other activities – online and in print. Difu's newsletter, Difu-News, is published fortnightly by email. It contains a selection of current content from Difu's website, such as news, publications,

events and extranet content. The social media offerings on X, Facebook and YouTube provide daily updates on Difu's work and other news relevant to municipalities. There is also information about individual projects from, for example, the Agentur für kommunalen Klimaschutz (Agency for Municipal Climate Change Mitigation) or the Zentrum Klima-Anpassung (Climate Change Adaptation Centre).

Donating to Difu has many advantages

More than 100 municipalities and community-oriented planning associations support their “Research and Training Institute for Cities” with a grant. This creates the basis for Difu's work, from which all municipalities benefit. Donor cities benefit from advantages such as highly discounted rates for Difu seminars, unlimited free participation in Difu's web seminars and the opportunity to bring Difu's expert input into their own city free of charge as online impetus. Donor cities are the first choice for case studies. They receive not only a precise analysis of their situation, but also up-to-date expertise. Difu regularly organises an annual meeting that is used by contacts from the Difu donor cities for further training and to discuss how to meet future challenges. The meeting

also serves as a forum for dialogue with Difu's experts on new research and training needs for municipalities as well as on the direction of the institute's work.



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Works councils in Berlin and Cologne

Works council: Focus on employees

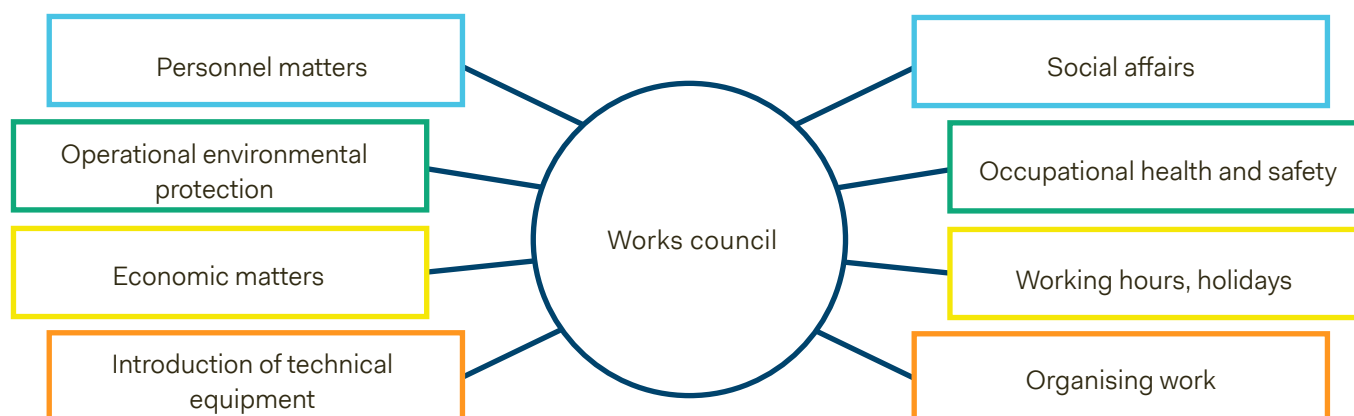
Difu has been in existence for five decades and has had a works council for a good half of that time. This is an important task in a research institute with a wide range of topics and a variety of tasks – and at the same time one that has to prove itself in the market as a non-profit limited company..

According to the German Works Constitution Act (Betriebsverfassungsgesetz), the works council's main task is to "ensure that the laws, ordinances, accident prevention regulations, collective agreements and works agreements in force for the benefit of the employees are implemented". This may sound a little terse, bureaucratic and inflexible, but it is an important guiding principle that provides a bastion of calm in view of the constant need for change that Difu – and therefore all employees – experience.

After all, Difu employees have a demanding job: they work for very different municipalities all over Germany. From basic research to practical consultancy projects on site, they have to be fit. They offer a wide range of events and training courses. They work on all the issues that municipalities have to deal with now and in the future. They work for clients from the EU, national and regional governments, foundations and many other institutions, and have to comply with substantive, legal and formal requirements. They publish, are present in the media and inform the public about the results of their work, which are important for municipalities.

The works council therefore also sees itself as a partner in managing change, contractual relationships, employment and a working environment in a fair manner that best supports employees in these challenging tasks. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the aim was to organise working conditions for the institute's staff in such a way that they could continue to work safely. The works council was also involved in developing "mobile working" from home and ensured that reliable regulations were developed that are still in place today and have accompanied the institute into the "new normal".

Co-determination, clear rules and reliability were and are important parameters of the works council's work, as is reconciling family life and careers. In addition to its "mandatory tasks", the next topics are already on the agenda for its future work: these include supporting the generational change as well as the next steps towards digitalisation. So it's not just "out there" that transformation is the order of the day; continuous further development can also be experienced "inside" at Difu. And it's precisely for this reason that the Difu works council is needed as a "bastion of calm".



Research & training: Up-to-date and practical

The German Institute of Urban Affairs is the largest urban research institute in the German-speaking world. We advise municipalities on all tasks that they face now and in the future. Independent, objective and well-founded.

We have been a reliable partner for the municipalities for 50 years

Difu was founded in 1973 on the initiative of the member towns and cities in the Association of German Cities (Deutscher Städtetag, DST). Difu is a non-profit limited company under German law with offices in Berlin and Cologne. In addition to the German Federal Government and the State of Berlin, its donors include more than 100 municipalities. Its sole shareholder is the Verein für Kommunalwissenschaften (VfK – Association for Municipal Research).

We address the full range of municipal issues

From new forms of mobility and housing to municipal climate action and environmental protection, from integrating refugees and concepts for developing building land to the use of AI in urban development. Our research focuses specifically on the needs of towns and cities and the challenges they face: we carry out simulation exercises and regulatory impact assessments, conduct applied research, evaluate programmes and develop specific training opportunities and tools for municipal practice.

We address the future issues facing municipalities at an early stage.

Through research, training and sharing experience, we aim to inspire towns and cities to meet the challenges they face and contribute to sustainable urban development with innovative ideas.

We bring together different perspectives

Complex societal problems can only be solved by working together. That's why we work closely with our partners in government, civil society and business, bringing their expertise to the research process. Together we find sustainable solutions suitable for practice.

Our research is interdisciplinary and networked

At Difu, researchers from different disciplines work together on current local issues. Whether urban and regional planning, law, geography, social sciences, economics or environmental sciences – we analyse local issues from different perspectives. And we have an excellent network at our disposal: in cities and municipalities, in academia, and with our partner institutions at home and abroad.

Our training programmes are tailored to the needs of local authorities.

Difu's practice-oriented seminars are in great demand, whether on site, online or at our headquarters in Berlin. At our events, experts from municipal practice and research impart application-oriented knowledge, while Difu researchers facilitate the mutual exchange of experiences and share the knowledge they have garnered from their cooperation with municipalities.

Organisation

Institute management

Prof. Dr. Carsten Kühl
Director, Director of Research and
Managing Director

Dipl.-Geogr. Luise Adrian
Commercial Director

Dr. Jens Libbe
Authorised signatory, Head of the Infrastructure,
Economy and Finance research department

Dipl.-Geogr. Ulrike Wolf
Authorised signatory, Head of the Knowledge
Management and Training department

Research departments

Urban Development, Legal and Social Affairs
research department
Head: Dipl.-Ing. Ricarda Pätzold

Infrastructure, Economy and Finance research
department
Head: Dr. Jens Libbe

Mobility research department
Head: Dipl.-Geogr. Anne Klein-Hitpaß

Environment research department
Head: Dipl.-Ing. Cornelia Rösler

Overview of all employees

➔ difu.de/institut/menschen-am-difu

Organigram

➔ difu.de/12910

As of: February 2024

Difu 2023 in figures



2 offices: Berlin and Cologne



188 employees, including
32 students



87 ongoing research projects, of which
24 have been newly started



Research, education and networking:
more than 130 events (Difu seminars,
Difu web seminars, Difu dialogues
and a large number of project-related
events)



Innovative research & training for
around 110 donors (cities) with a total
population of around 25 million people



Around 7,300 subscribers to Difu's
"Berichte" magazine



Over 600,000 page views on difu.de
and around 130,000 publication down-
loads from Difu servers



Around 8,600 subscribers to the
Difu-Newsletter



More than 11,400 followers on the insti-
tute's social media channels

Academic advisory board

The academic advisory board advises the management and the shareholders' meetings on specialist and strategical matters. It is made up of experts from academia, practice, various federal ministries and the State of Berlin.

Chairperson

Prof. Dr. Guido Spars

Deputy Chairperson

Prof. Dr.-Ing. Angela Million

Practice

Thomas Dienberg
Mayor and Director of Urban Development and Construction, City of Leipzig

Christian A. Geiger
Head of Finance and Fire Services, Deputy Mayor, City of Braunschweig

Prof. Dr. Martin Haag
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Hilmar von Lojewski
Deputy and Head of the Department for Urban Development, Construction, Housing and Transport, Association of German Cities

Christian Specht
Mayor of the City of Mannheim

Dr. Christine Wilcken
Deputy and Head of the Department for Climate, Environment and Economy, Fire and Disaster Protection, Association of German Cities

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Project Manager Urban Mobility, Agora Verkehrswende

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Prof. Dr.-Ing. Angela Million
Head of Department and Professor of Urban Development and Settlement Planning and Managing Director of the Institute for Urban and Regional Planning, Technische Universität Berlin

Prof. Dr.-Ing. Guido Spars
Founding Director of the Bundesstiftung Bauakademie and Chair of Economics of Planning and Building, University of Wuppertal (on leave)

Prof. Dr. Annegret Thieken
Head of Geography and Natural Risks Research Group, Institute for Environmental Sciences and Geography, University of Potsdam



Federal government and the State of Berlin

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Head of Directorate for Financial Relations
with the Länder and Municipalities; Public and
Constitutional Law, Federal Ministry of Finance

Harald Fuchs
Head of Property Policy and Property
Management, Senate Department of Finance;
Berlin

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Spatial Planning, Federal Ministry of Housing,
Urban Development and Building

Ministry Head Dr. Susanne Lottermoser,
Director-General for Transformation –
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Adaptation, Federal Ministry for the
Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear
Safety and Consumer Protection

Thorsten Tonndorf
Head of Urban Development Planning, Senate
Department for Urban Development and
Housing, Berlin

Research Associates at Difu

Dr. Elke Bojarra-Becker
Researcher, Environment research department

Dr. Christian Raffer
Researcher, Infrastructure, Economy and
Finance research department

Maic Verbücheln
Researcher, Environment research department

Permanent representation

Helmut Dedy
Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director
of the Association of German Cities

Birgitt Geßner
Head of Administration, Association of German
Cities

Verena Göppert
Permanent Deputy to the Managing Director
and Deputy, Head of the Finance Department,
Association of German Cities

Member of the Steering Committee of the
German Institute of Urban Affairs

As of: February 2024

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As of: February 2024

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