

# Joint Programming Initiative Urban Europe – a new Approach to Funding Research on Urban Issues and Technologies in Europe

*Hans-Günther Schwarz*

(Hans-Günther Schwarz, Austrian Ministry of Transport, Innovation and Technology, Renngasse 5, 1010 Wien, hans-guenther.schwarz@bmvit.gv.at)

## 1 ABSTRACT

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is often referred to as ‘the urban century’. The year 2007 proved to be a pivotal moment in the long history of urbanisation; for the first time in human history the city took over ‘power’ from its hinterland. As of 2007 more than 50 percent of the world population was living in urban areas. And the structural urban development is still continuing, with urbanisation rates exceeding 70 percent in various European countries and elsewhere (Mega 2010). This is no mean feat, considering that a few centuries ago, only 20 percent of the population on our earth lived in cities. There is no reason to assume that this trend towards further urbanisation will come to a standstill. What is more, it is even anticipated that in less than one generation time more than two thirds of the population on our planet will live in urbanised areas. In Europe – but also in other regions of our world – the urbanisation rate is expected to rise to 83 percent (557 million) by the year 2050 (European Commission 2010) gradually making non-urbanites a minority. This development already calls for urgent action from the policy side to respond from a strategic and sustainability point of view.

This long-term megatrend in population movement towards the city is the result of two underlying force fields: the exponential growth in world population (with an average growth rate of approx. 1.2 percent per annum) and the rural-urban drift (due to the relatively more favourable socio-economic opportunities in urban agglomerations). This leads to new challenges for policy makers, like social deprivation and segregation, urban sprawl and congestion, environmental degradation and effects of climate change, posing a formidable and unprecedented challenge to the resilience, management and governance of urban systems in our world. At the same time, European countries, wishing to be attractive places to live and work in, within the context of a global village, should exploit the advantages of urbanised space.

## 2 BACKGROUND

The above sketched megatrend clearly means a dramatic transformation in settlement patterns in our world. This emerging re-positioning of cities may be interpreted as a third settlement revolution. The first revolution was essentially marked by a rural to urban shift instigated by safety and political motives, which led to the first demarcated cities (often with walls and fortifications) (see Tellier 2009). A second revolution took place in the period of the Industrial Revolution (19th century) when large-scale industrialisation and far-reaching labour specialisation led to the emergence of unprecedented scale advantages in large urban industrial agglomerations. We are currently witnessing the rise of urban networks and mega-cities – comprising not only urban centres and suburban areas, but also edge cities, new towns and urban sprawl areas – that together form connected agglomerations (see also Castells 1996). The trend towards global city networks is imminent (see Sassen 1991, 2010; Scott 2001). Moreover, metropolitan development nowadays increasingly turns into mega-cities development, and it appears to be hard to find a conclusive answer to Alonso’s (1964) challenging question “How big is big enough?” and “How big is too big?”. Suffice it to say that it seems plausible that ongoing urban dynamics will remain a landmark in a modern open society in the future.

This urban evolution which reflects a drastic quantitative change in the share of inhabitants in urban areas at the national territory level, calls for novel socio-economic and technology research initiatives as well as political actions. Modern network cities have turned into spearheads of (supra-)regional and (supra-)national power, not only from a socio-economic perspective (business, innovativeness, jobs, wealth, migration, entrepreneurial dynamics), but also from a geo-political perspective (‘cities as global command and control centres’; see Sassen 1991) and a technological perspective (mobility, transport and energy systems, ICT).

In this view, the future of Europe will be an increasingly urbanised future. European urban areas must respond accordingly and urgently to avoid degradation in ‘liveability’ and decline in attractiveness for creative talents and firms. This leads to a new ‘urban imperative’: European urban areas must attract, retain and even nurture highly mobile, creative, innovative firms and talent (the ‘pluriformity’ approach), as their aggregate efforts will become the primary drivers of Europe’s socio-economic development and competitive

advantage. Urban agglomerations are not necessarily a source of problems, but offer the integrative geographic action platform for creative solutions and new opportunities.

An urbanised future requires a rethinking of existing policy measures to steer urban development. New models of strategic planning, urban governance and management (in terms of finance, infrastructure, etc.) as well as civil participation measures are not only necessary, but have the potential to completely redesign urban policies so as to contribute to European cities' competitiveness.

### **3 CONCLUSION**

The JPI Urban Europe has a clear focus on urban areas as key elements for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. As urban areas are the main drivers of growth in the European economy, Urban Europe therefore provides an important contribution to the EU 2020 strategy (European Commission 2010). The initiative aims to develop innovative approaches to adequately address the above-mentioned challenges and to create urban places of vitality, liveability and accessibility. Only joint efforts from policy makers, firms, civil society and scientists can make it possible to reach these aims. Urban Europe provides a systemic long-term and strategic approach which takes advantage of emerging technologies, assessing their potential and socio-economic impacts and utilising them in fundamentally new urban policies and design strategies.

The presentation will be focused on the thematic approach of the JPI Urban Europe and on the structure and financial instruments needed to meet its objectives.

