

# Mistra Urban Futures International Collaborative Framework

## Realising Just Cities

## INTRODUCTION

The Progress Report 2010-2014 is a remarkable summary of achievements across all of the LIPs. It documents many key outputs and outcomes of the process of establishing and launching Mistra Urban Futures as an international centre for co-producing sustainable cities. Each of the LIPs has developed infrastructures and local collaborations that provide solid foundations for co-production partnerships; many interesting and relevant projects have been delivered. However, the Progress Report also identified the need to improve mechanisms and processes for international collaboration and comparison.

The Strategic Plan 2016-2019 therefore addresses this need in ambitious yet realistic terms. Chapter 2 of the Strategic Plan outlines the Knowledge and Research Programme for the centre. It defines perspectives and themes to deliver on the vision of fair, green and accessible cities. It also marks a shift from locally discrete projects that are compared ‘post hoc’ to a comparative research agenda that is ‘integrated holistically with ‘local’ projects’. This means that the local is situated in comparative perspective through different mechanisms of communication during the life cycle of projects, hence ‘internationalising co-creation’ (see SP, pp. 22-24).

The Centre is currently in a process of co-designed learning across the platforms in order to reflect on and operationalise the Strategic Plan. In particular, two key questions are being addressed:

- How do international comparison and collaboration fit with local co-production and co-financing?
- Based on the Strategic Plan, how can we better communicate the research and practice agenda of the Centre, internally as well as externally?

This Centre Operational Plan summarises the content of the ongoing discussion and also outlines the planned activities for 2016. This first year of Phase 2 will be characterised by planning and start-ups of multi-year projects.

The document has two main sections:

- ‘An International Collaborative Framework 2016-2019’ which describes the conceptual framework and modes of comparison for Mistra Urban Futures, for the whole period 2016-2019. This explains how the Centre will operationalise the revised Strategic Plan 2016-2019, and will later be used as a standalone document for this purpose.
- ‘Structuring and Localising Comparative Research’ which is the actual Centre Operational Plan 2016.’

This document was produced through collaborative work involving the directors and staff at the four existing local interaction platforms (LIPs), as well as the staff and director at the Centre secretariat. Hence, “we” is sometimes used to emphasise the shared ambitions and consensus regarding objectives and plans.

## 1. AN INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIVE FRAMEWORK 2016-2019

We have concluded that a bridge is needed between the vision and mission of the Strategic Plan and the content of the knowledge and research programme and have outlined a framework for collaboration that is intended to work across all LIPs and nodes. Each will operationalise the framework in its own context.

The emergent international collaborative framework has different components, all leading towards the *Vision*, “Sustainable urbanisation where cities are fair, green and accessible”. The framework is entitled “Realising Just Cities”, a statement which is intended to provoke reflection, engagement and action in different cities around the world. The provocation includes a contested set of ideas, reflected in two orienting questions:

- What do just cities look like in different urban contexts?
- How might just cities be realised in different urban contexts?

Mistra Urban Futures’ distinctive contribution to these questions is in interrogating whether, and if so how, organising knowledge in urban areas around Local Interaction Platforms in different continental regions and practising co-creation and comparative urban research can contribute towards the realisation of just cities.

The *Mission*, “To generate and use knowledge for transitions towards sustainable urban futures through reflective co-creation at local and global levels”, is translated into a set of Core Processes, which will be operationalised across all LIPs as part of their fundamental engagement in the Centre.

### Core Processes

We have identified three sets of cross-cutting Core Processes that are essential for working towards the realisation of just (i.e., fair, green, accessible) cities in different contexts, and on which reflection, comparison, analysis and learning will be conducted: *urban change*, *urban knowledge* and *urban governance*. These equate to the ideas in the Strategic Plan of “mechanisms and processes of governance, power, and knowledge” (p.16) and can be defined as follows:

- Urban change: understanding processes of urban transformation which facilitate or constrain cities in becoming more just - the dynamics, drivers, practices and barriers to urban change processes for fair, green and accessible cities.
- Urban knowledge: innovating in the social organisation of different knowledges and practices within cities required to value and harness multiple forms of expertise to support transitions to more just cities.
- Urban governance: improving relationships and processes amongst governance stakeholders in order to ensure decision-making and urban management practices that will help achieve just cities.

### TRACKs – Transformative Research Activities through Co-producing Knowledge

Key substantive areas for research and practice have also been identified and are called TRACKs – Transformative Research Activities through Co-producing Knowledge.

These equate to the ideas in the Strategic Plan of ‘principles and practices for sustainability transformations’. The TRACKs contribute to, and are informed by, the Core Processes; each TRACK can be considered as including and intersecting with processes of change, knowledge production/management and governance. We have identified three TRACKs as priorities for Phase 2, based on LIP Phase 1 activities and on convergences for cross-LIP collaboration: *socio-ecological*, *socio-spatial* and *socio-cultural transformations*. There is overlap between the TRACKs, hence they are to be seen as organisational principles rather than discrete or disconnected spheres.

### ***TRACK 1: Socio-ecological Transformations***

The socio-ecological transformations TRACK deals with bi-directional impacts between cities and their social and biophysical environments and with issues of urban ecological sustainability. Drawing on LIP activities in Phase 1, the following topics are relevant for cross-LIP convergence and collaboration in Phase 2:

- Understanding urban metabolism and ecosystem services, and promoting the sustainable use of natural resources and more effective environmental management (for example, the management of solid waste);
- Promoting climate change adaptation and mitigation (including issues such as promoting the green economy, energy governance and increasing the use of renewable energy);
- Understanding urban food systems (including the distribution/retail of food and urban/peri-urban agriculture), increasing urban food security and addressing food poverty;
- Exploring the interface between economic, social and ecological sustainability, such as ecotourism, the greening of cities and the use of the natural environment for recreation; and
- Understanding linkages between urban and rural areas.

### ***TRACK 2: Socio-spatial Transformations***

The socio-spatial transformations TRACK deals with the built environment and spatial form of cities. Drawing on LIP activities in Phase 1, the following topics are relevant for cross-LIP convergence and collaboration in Phase 2:

- Access to land, infrastructure, housing and facilities;
- Creating denser mixed-used urban environments through urban planning and the implementation of catalytic projects;
- Increasing accessibility through improving urban transport systems and promoting transit-oriented development; and
- Understanding existing patterns of socio-spatial segregation and finding ways of facilitating socio-spatial integration.

### ***TRACK 3: Socio-cultural Transformations***

The socio-cultural transformations TRACK deals with urban life and human development in cities. Drawing on LIP activities in Phase 1, the following topics are relevant for cross-LIP convergence and collaboration in Phase 2:

- Promoting more diverse and inclusive urban societies (for example, through the design of public spaces and public art);
- Preserving and enhancing tangible and intangible cultural heritage in urban environments;

- Exploring the role of the humanities, arts and culture in sustainable urban development and as mechanisms for urban transformation;
- Improving urban health and wellbeing (including safety and mental health); and
- Promoting social inclusion (including gender mainstreaming and strengthening local democracy and the role of civil society).

### Collaborative framework

The key elements of the framework can be summarised as follows:

- Local Interaction Platforms and other partnerships co-create knowledge
- TRACKs (Transformative Research Activities through Co-producing Knowledge)
- Core processes around Urban Change, Urban Knowledge and Urban Governance (reflection, comparison, monitoring, analysis, learning)
- Methodologies for co-designed and produced research are embedded in all the activities and processes, as well as established as a meta-research focus.
- Integrating holistically to maximise impact

The overall framework described above is captured in Figure 1 below.

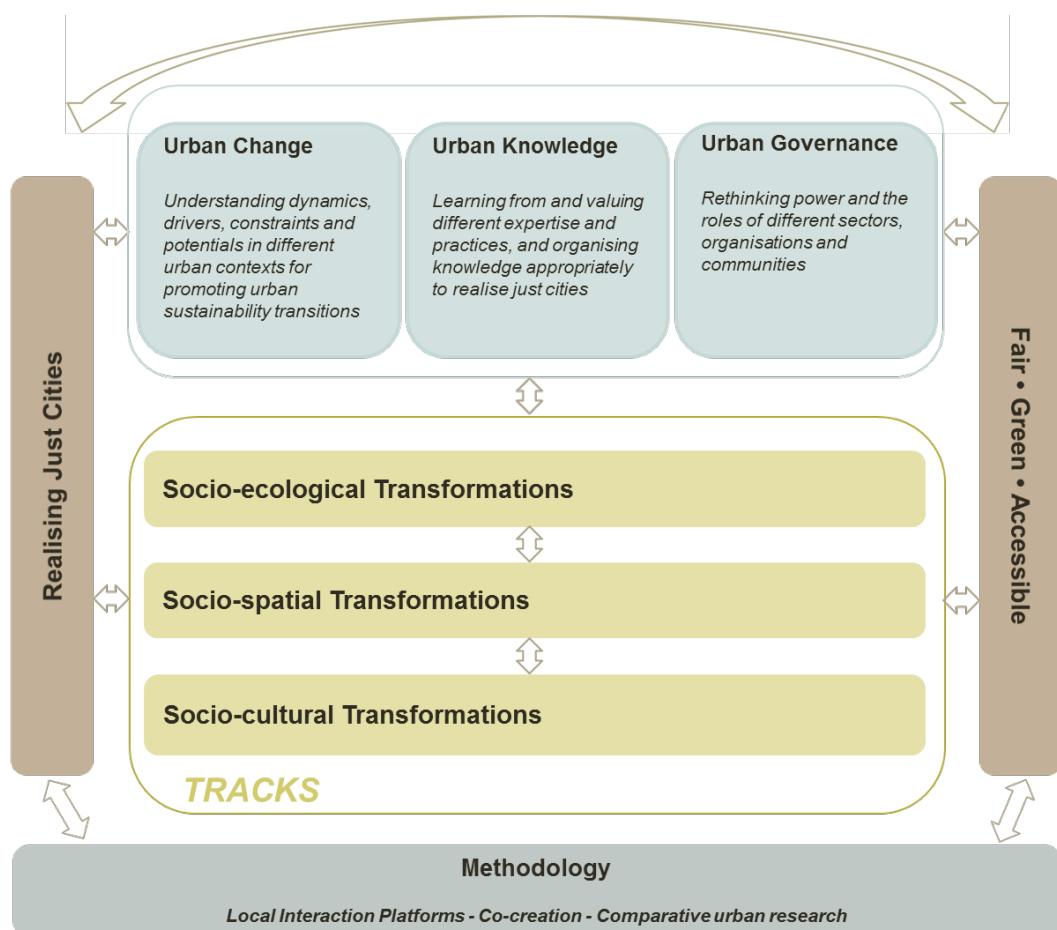


Figure 1 Overview of collaborative framework in Phase 2

Within this co-designed, international, collaborative framework, the Centre will:

- Co-produce and co-finance local projects
- Collaborate and compare among LIPs and partnerships
- Co-reflect and analyse
- Learn and disseminate
- Demonstrate value added and impact

### Modes of Comparison

Five modes of comparison that are likely to be appropriate to the Centre's work have been identified and are outlined below. These different modes are complementary to each other and can co-exist within a single project or be undertaken in different projects, depending on the starting position of respective LIPs and partnerships. Importantly there can be movement *between* modes. For instance, out of clusters of projects a single comparative project may emerge. The replication of a local project may strengthen the clustering of a group of similar projects around a topic. The development of this comparative methodology will be reflected on as part of the distinctive approach of Mistra Urban Futures. For each mode, the following general points apply:

- Comparison should, as far as possible, be embedded in the project and carried out by the project actors themselves. Additional needs for each mode are noted below.
- Each mode of comparison is designed to produce comparative outputs. A number of common publications can be envisaged, including scientific papers and briefings, as well as discrete publications on specific topics and contexts. Specific conferences and workshops, for instance in the TRACKs, can also be envisaged.
- Co-production as a methodology will be developed further and refined and lead to international dissemination (conferences, papers, publications).
- A key outcome of different modes is the identification of gaps in existing structures and ways of thinking and doing. This would have impacts on the ground, as new practices will emerge and be established cross-context.
- Meetings/workshops across the LIPs and partnerships will eventually have to be established for each mode of comparative work to produce and coordinate outcomes.

#### *1. Local projects compared internationally*

Local projects with a similar content or research focus will be compared, reflected and analysed across the LIPs and partnerships. For *new projects*, this comparative mode will require similar project criteria with comparative components/ instructions. For *existing projects*, they may be retrofitted or replicated to be able to undertake international comparison, as follows:

##### *1.1 Local projects retrofitted*

Some local projects may need to be re-designed or adapted. For example, in at least three of the LIPs there are existing projects relating to urban food production. However, these are of different character and addressing different local issues of food production. Each of these projects might need specific 'add-ons' to facilitate comparison, identified in relation to the other projects. This may require project coordination and additional expertise at different LIPs.

### ***1.2 Local projects replicated***

Some local projects have been particularly inventive and successful, such as the Knowledge Transfer Partnerships at CTLIP and the ESRC Urban Transformations ‘Jam and Justice’ project at GMLIP. Such projects, or elements thereof, could be replicated at other LIPs. This would require leadership from the initiating LIP with the particular experience and knowledge to offer guidance to the adopting LIP or partnership. It would also require clarity about intellectual property (see Section 5.2 Strategic Plan).

### ***2. Projects, locally or trans-locally clustered***

Another kind of comparison could occur through clustering projects by topic to produce new knowledge and insights. These could be a set of projects within a TRACK, the full content of a TRACK, or an element within one of the core processes (Urban Knowledge, Urban Governance and Urban Change). Clustering could take place within one LIP or across LIPs. Clustering would require project co-ordination, which could be one of the actors already involved in any of the projects within the cluster, or a new resource. The added value of this mode of comparison is to strengthen as well as evolve existing or new fields for research and practice. It would contribute to the development of the international debate on and knowledge of urban life.

### ***3. Internationally-initiated project with local co-production***

These projects are internationally conceived through co-design (LIP/partnership directors and Secretariat), but are implemented by the LIPs. The projects could emerge from international agendas, as with the recent Urban SDG project, or as locally selected topics. These would be presented for consideration as a common topic to address within MUF and the different LIPs. Each LIP would then initiate local co-production partnerships and activities to deliver the research as part of an international comparative agenda. This type of research may require extra research capacity at each LIP/partnership.

### ***4. International projects with trans-local co-production***

These types of projects are initiated and undertaken by trans-local teams drawn from more than one LIP. These teams would work across cities, meaning that researchers from particular LIPs would be undertaking research in other cities as part of a multi-LIP/Secretariat team. Such projects would require extra co-ordination capacity and possibly extra researchers beyond the ones already engaged and involved. These projects could also have comparative PhD studies linked to them.

### ***5. PhD studies***

Since PhD students are dependent on different institutional agreements, it can be difficult to ‘steer’ PhD projects into a comparative framework, especially where these are co-funded. Fully supported MUF projects could have an international comparative urban dimension as one possible precondition for funding. Another option would be to emphasise a co-production approach as a precondition for funding and cluster PhD students around this theme. To enhance the production of this kind of PhD research, a common research agenda between LIPs/partnerships might need to be established. The feasibility of establishing a research school (initially at GOLIP, possibly later at each LIP) with international pedagogic exchanges will be explored.

An additional comparative outcome from this mode of comparison would be the PhD thesis itself. Comparative urban studies will identify gaps and create juxtaposed urban knowledge. A research school would ground methodologies of transdisciplinary research and co-production, both locally and internationally, for the next generation of scholars.

## Indicative Outputs

During Phase 2, we plan to produce a suite of complementary output formats, ranging from major agenda-setting publications from MUF to specific policy briefs derived from the work of individual projects. Those identified at this stage include:

- Book on *Rethinking Sustainable Cities* (see above).
- Book on *Realising Just Cities*.
- Three special issues relating to Core Processes.
- Three special issues relating to the TRACKS.
- Other academic articles in peer-reviewed journals related to theme/topic specific work.
- Sessions at high profile international conferences.
- Approximately five policy briefs per year.
- Implementable results from TRACKS (policies, processes, mechanisms, experiments, toolkits, manuals).
- Urban designs and planning documents.
- Annual *Mistra Urban Futures Conference* outputs (e.g. reports/summaries).
- Creative communications to different audiences.
- Workshops, exhibitions.
- Press coverage.
- Forward Plan and additional funding bids/projects.