The SEiSMiC practice-based guide to establishing national stakeholder networks for urban challenges

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Introduction

The following handbook is a good practice guide to involving urban stakeholders as active partners in the co-creation of knowledge when empowered to influence research priorities. It is based on experiences and key lessons learned from the SEiSMiC project (2013-2016), which piloted formats for a future stakeholder forum for the Joint Programming Initiative Urban Europe. The piloting took place in ten countries in North, South, West and Central Europe. The handbook describes the various strategies that were applied in the participating countries in order to establish a long-term network with a high level of commitment from a broad variety of relevant stakeholders over time.

Key lessons learned

Experiences gained from the SEiSMiC project show that a range of dynamics play a part in defining the potential room for SEiSMiC in different national contexts. For example, successful strategies need to take into account such factors as whether there is an existing culture of co-creation and whether support structures for social innovators, as well as established NGOs and institutions, are already in place. Specific strategies can be applied, an appropriate agenda defined and the most relevant stakeholders identified on the basis of whether the issues in question are high on the agenda and based on the particular strengths and priorities of the co-ordinating organisation. Key lessons learned are that it is important to understand and remain sensitive to the differing motives of the various stakeholder categories and their opportunities for becoming involved, and to ensure a sufficiently flexible funding scheme that will meet their respective needs. While lack of time is sometimes the primary

obstacle that deters representatives from public authorities and the business world from becoming involved, social innovators and NGOs often require reimbursement for their time and travel expenses in order for them to participate in a more substantial way. It is also worth bearing in mind that some participants are motivated to progress beyond discussion into piloting and prototyping, and to ensure that the space and means for this is provided. Another consideration is the fact that the co-ordinator is the only stakeholder whose focus is on the network itself – the participants themselves have become involved for the opportunities that the network offers.

Aim of the handbook and intended target group
The aim of this handbook is to provide guidance to the co-ordinators of the national networks within the framework of the JPI Urban Europe Stakeholder Involvement Platform (SIP) launched in October 2016. It may also benefit co-ordinators of national stakeholder networks in general. The reference list at the end of the handbook contains references to other relevant handbooks and further reading. The publication is accompanied by a SEiSMiC toolbox that describes all the workshop formats that were successfully tested during the SEiSMiC project.

SEiSMiC
From inception, the SEiSMiC project was closely connected to JPI Urban Europe. It was established with the objective of strengthening the societal dimension of the Urban Europe Strategic Research and Innovation agenda (SRIA) that was launched in September 2015, and to support the establishment of a future JPI Urban Europe stakeholder forum in which urban stakeholders would be able to participate in the programme and influence research priorities. This was achieved by way of establishing national networks in 10 European countries that included a diverse range of participants from civil society organisations, community enterprises,

About SEiSMiC

The SEiSMiC project (Societal Engagement in Science, Mutual Learning in Cities) was a support action funded under the EU's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) for research, technological development and demonstration, in the context of the European Commission's Science in Society Programme.

The SEiSMiC project explored how to tackle Europe's biggest urban problems by engaging citizens, identifying social innovation needs, and contributing to future urban policies and research strategies. It organised diverse networks of urban stakeholders to collaborate and exchange ideas about social innovation. The networks enabled grassroots innovators to influence Europe's urban-research agenda, and provide a platform for urban researchers to disseminate the results of their work. SEiSMiC is a mutual learning exercise, with researchers learning from citizens, and citizens learning from research. It supports the joint programming initiative (JPI) Urban Europe, strengthening the societal dimension of its Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda.

About JPI Urban Europe

The Joint Programming Initiative Urban Europe is a Member State-led initiative that started in 2010, the vision of which is to serve as a hub for urban research and innovation in Europe. It co-ordinates the urban-related research programmes of the participating countries in order to benefit from the synergies between national and European research programmes. The programme aims to enable researchers and urban stakeholders from the business world, the public sector and civil society to join forces with other stakeholders across national borders to participate in joint research and innovation activities and transnational knowledge exchange.

Launched in September 2015, the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA) describes the long-term strategy and programme for JPI Urban Europe from 2015-2020. It includes priorities, actions, in-struments, resources and an implementation timeline. The research and innovation agenda defines urban research priorities for transnational co-operation. It aims to lay the groundwork for a new para-digm in research, technological development and innovation that embraces the complexity of the grand challenge of urbanisation and bridges the innovation space from strategic research to implementation.

media, schools and universities, scientists, museum curators, research funders, public authorities, business people and policy makers. One of its aims was to bring these networks together for structured dialogue across the policy, practice and research communities.

National network meetings and SEiSMiC forums
SEiSMiC was organised on the basis of national network meetings followed by international meetings in Brussels, SEiSMiC forums, during which stakeholders from the national networks met with representatives from various EU institutions, Brussels-based networking organisations and representatives from JPI Urban Europe. The SEiSMiC forums and the preparatory national meetings were organised into three themes: New Urban Governance, New Public Space and New Urban Economy. Each national network appointed a co-ordinator who was responsible for identifying potential network members, organising and reporting from meetings, providing input to the forums, updating the national network members on SEiSMiC activities and results, and providing content to the SEiSMiC website and newsletter. The co-ordinators met at core group meetings to plan subsequent steps, determine thematic priorities, and share experiences in a co-creative process.

An exploratory process and new experience
SEiSMiC was an exploratory project that endeavoured to maintain a balance between structure and flexibility to allow room for emergent discussions and national particularities in the same framework. Establishing a national network with a broad representation of members from academia, business, policy, cities, civil society etc. was a new experience for all the SEiSMiC co-ordinators, most of whom had previous experience of establishing and managing networks with a narrower focus and more specific aims. For this reason, the core group meetings in Vienna were important opportunities to share experiences and to decide on how to proceed.

"SEiSMiC created opportunities to meet and share knowledge. It was open to unexpected events and there was no membership fee. As Cittalia is a city network organisation, there was also the potential to influence the Urban Agenda, raise awareness amongst public authorities and share important ideas with mayors."

Italy

"SEiSMiC was very innovative and creative once we became accustomed to it. It generated ideas on how to work with other individuals in a creative environment. We made continuous improvements – our last national network meeting was excellent, with numerous ideas and a large number of people involved."

Czech Republic

Success of national networks was important
From the outset, it was stated that the success of the national networks would define the success of the entire project. The following success criteria were defined: relationships amongst participants in the national networks, openness of the participants towards new ideas, perspectives and positions, arousing the curiosity of the participants in participating in the national networks and in SEiSMiC as a whole, trust-based communication, reliability in sufficient communication and collaboration, emphasising collaboration instead of competition, respect and appreciation amongst the participants in the national networks, the ability to motivate participants to join the networks on a voluntary basis, learning from trans-sectoral, transdisciplinary and transnational diversity, providing a platform for friendship, inspiration, fun and influence.

JPI Urban Europe stakeholder involvement platform

During the development of the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA), efforts were channelled through SE-iSMiC to ensure the engagement of a wide range of stakeholder groups on European and national levels and to manage interactions in a specific style and spirit. The aim of JPI Urban Europe is to continue this approach, which is why a stakeholder involvement platform (SIP) has been launched.

The SIP will facilitate strategic dialogues that in their turn strengthen the long-term development and impact of JPI Urban Europe and facilitate the implementation of the SRIA. The SIP also aims to expand participation and capacity building in terms of countries, regions, and urban stakeholders; provide an ecosystem for co-creation and multi-stakeholder involvement that takes into particular account the four main stakeholder categories – science, cities, civil society and business/industry; anticipate the differing logic and needs of the participating countries, as well as urban initiatives and stakeholders; and mobilise the different stakeholders to contribute to the defined implementation activities of the SRIA.

A framework with three levels of involvement

The SIP provides a framework with three levels of stakeholder involvement.

Engaged
On the first level, a highly engaged SIP core team with distinguished urban practitioners, policy makers and experts, will act as a stable advisory board to the JPI Urban Europe management board. The group will be consulted on urban, research and innovation policy issues and engaged in joint actions and collaboration.

Involved
On the second level, strategic, thematic and concrete dialogue will take place with the multiple aims of generating input for further strategic orientation of JPI Urban Europe, identifying the most pressing research and innovation needs, developing joint implementation measures and continuing to establish a vibrant JPI Urban Europe community. This level will include the representatives of the national networks, amongst others.

Informed
The third level encompass a large group of individuals and organisations with a stake in JPI Urban Europe activities, as well as research and innovation, hence important partners with regard to disseminating results and increasing the impact of JPI Urban Europe. This group includes amongst others subscribers of the Urban Europe newsletter and project partners from Urban Europe calls.

The JPI Urban Europe stakeholder involvement platform with its three levels of involvement and four main stakeholder groups.
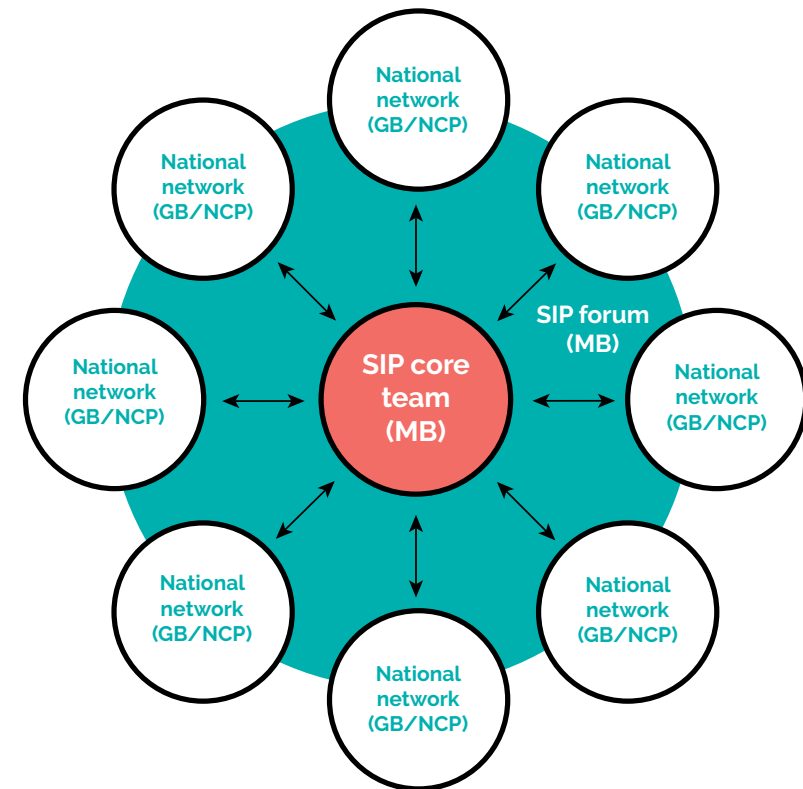
A European platform with national networks

Experiences gained from the SEiSMiC project demonstrated the benefits of facilitating dialogue on national and European levels, encouraging and supporting bottom-up engagement, and establishing regular exchanges between national and European levels. Urban development and urban dynamics are highly dependent upon local characteristics and circumstances in different kinds of setting and context. Utilising national networks enables regional priorities and opportunities to be taken into account, and mobilises national partners. With regard to the aim of expanding participation, national networks such as these fulfil various roles such as identifying specific urban needs and challenges, developing a national community that is engaged in projects and alignment actions, and, last but not least, raising awareness for and increasing the visibility of JPI Urban Europe on a national scale.

In some JPI Urban Europe member countries, national stakeholder networks already exist, some of which were established during the SEiSMiC project. To ensure the long-term development of JPI Urban Europe similar networks should be set up in all the affiliated countries.

Managing the SIP is a shared responsibility
Responsibility for managing the SIP will be shared between the Urban Europe Management Board, which will maintain the network on a European level, for example by facilitating exchanges and organising meetings and workshops, and national JPI Urban Europe representatives, who will manage the national networks.

All JPI Urban Europe member countries have appointed national contact points (NCPs) to support the national representatives in the JPI Urban Europe Governing Board and gather national stakeholders and interest groups for status reporting and consultation. NCPs are frequently well-connected in

A stakeholder involvement platform with interconnections between national networks and the European level.

national research-funding communities, but less so in cities, the business world and civil society.

Representatives for the national networks will be invited to the SIP Forum and the national network co-ordinators will connect with the SIP core team. Transnational exchanges amongst participants in the various national networks are crucial.

Strategies applied in the 10 SEiSMiC countries

United Kingdom

Endeavouring not to reinvent the wheel, to approach established networks and to promote opportunities for transnational collaboration and knowledge exchange.

Belgium

Drawing from informal networks and bringing together individuals with various backgrounds looking to progress beyond the current state of social innovation.

Netherlands

Opting for a network consisting of 80% social innovators and promoting direct contacts with the European Commission as the added-value element in the network.

Turkey

Applying a scientific approach to selecting three diverse cities and inviting individuals from these cities to all meetings.

Austria

Promoting SEiSMiC as a new brand and organically developing the national network as it attempts to connect with existing networks.

Italy

Aiming for efficiency and synergies with similar projects within the organisation.

Czech Republic

Offering a platform for social entrepreneurs to share ideas and co-operate while relying on a well-known expert to attract participants.

Sweden

Mainstreaming social innovation amongst urban practitioners while ensuring that the social innovators remain at the core of discussions.

Germany

Providing and building trust and developing a method of "curating problematisations" in collaboration with network members as a means of setting the agenda.

Hungary

Collaborating with existing initiatives – energising and influencing these initiatives.

SEiSMiC practice-based guide

This chapter presents the key lessons learned from piloting activities in 10 countries and the various strategies applied by the SEiSMiC co-ordinators with the aim of inspiring and informing similar future activities. The strategies presented evolved over time and required adjustments to individual national contexts as well as the priorities and needs of key stakeholders as expressed in the focus groups in the initial phase of the project.

Establishing a national stakeholder network

Establishing a long-term network with a high level of commitment from a broad variety of relevant stakeholders over time requires careful consideration. It also requires a comprehensive strategy for how to define the agenda and where to position the network in relation to other existing initiatives, which stakeholders to involve, and which formats and instruments to use in order to motivate the participants to remain in the network for an extended period.

Positioning the network and find collaborative partners

Experiences gained from the SEiSMiC project showed that a range of dynamics played a part in defining the potential space for SEiSMiC in different national contexts. For example, successful strategies need to take into account such factors as whether there was an existing culture of co-creation and whether support structures for social innovators, as well as established NGOs and institutions, were already in place.

In the SEiSMiC member countries Hungary, the Czech Republic and Turkey, where stakeholder networks were not a common feature and where social innovation had not been included in the agenda by established NGOs and institutions, SEiSMiC provided a unique opportunity for urban stakeholders to meet with researchers to discuss the challenges in their cities. In other member countries, for example the UK, Sweden and the Netherlands, with an existing abundance of urban and social innovation-related networks, the national co-ordinators were obliged to focus more on identifying and advocating for the added value of this particular network compared to the existing ones – in the case of SEiSMiC, opportunities for transnational collaboration and direct contacts with European institutions.

The existence of an urban agenda on a national level also determines how networks are required to position themselves. In Belgium, which lacks a structured national agenda-setting process for urban themes, the network has been required to search for relevance and impact, while in the Netherlands, which has a large number of existing urban agenda initiatives, the network has been required to identify and express its added value.

Mapping the existing initiatives and organisations operating in the field is a first important step to understanding the overall context and to identifying potential collaborative partners, and even potential competitors. Most SEiSMiC co-ordinators sought to collaborate with existing initiatives and piggy-back the SEiSMiC project on these initiatives in order to raise the visibility of the SEiSMiC network, to co-host events and collaborate on specific themes. In doing so, some eventually adapted to existing agendas by downplaying the SEiSMiC brand itself in order to boost and influence existing initiatives. Others endeavoured to promote the SEiSMiC project as a unique network platform.

Overcoming geographical distances
Establishing a national network can be more challenging than a regional or local network due to the highly contextualized nature of urban issues. Meaningful dialogue can easily take place when a range of local stakeholders is engaged in solving local issues. When removed from a local context and asked to provide some generic reflections, it becomes less specific and less rooted in solving problems. In a national network travel becomes an obstacle, particularly when attempting to engage stakeholders from smaller cities. Most of the SEiSMiC co-ordinators selected one or several cities as their operational bases, hosting all the meetings in these cities, inviting local stakeholders and selecting the study cases from these cities.

In one case, cities were selected based on specific criteria to ensure a broad representation in terms of geographical distribution, size and socio-economic development, while in other cases cities were selected on the basis of "following the energy" and base camps were chosen based on where established communities and initiatives were already operating. The joint Belgian-Dutch national networking meetings highlighted the fact that in terms of agenda-setting there is a great deal that can be learned and shared amongst cities across national borders. In cases where co-ordinators were able to build on existing (national) networks, it was easier to establish a more widespread network, especially when national networking organisations that represent stakeholders with a wide geographical distribution are involved.

Selecting a resourceful national co-ordinator
The role of co-ordinator can be filled by a single individual or a group working together. Success is dependent upon individual ability as well as organisational support. It is not especially important whether the organisation filling this role is a university, an institute, a city networking organisation, an NGO representing civil society, or a funding agency. What matters

"The strategy was simply to gather people that can share ideas and inspiration. All our activities were SEiSMiC-branded: This is a new platform, please come and share and collaborate!"

Czech Republic

"SEiSMiC created the opportunity for me to connect the Transition Cities Network in Flanders with the JPI Urban Europe network, and in a way that ensured added value, bridging Flanders with Europe."

Belgium

"We endeavoured not to repeat anything that was already being done. We also understood the difficulties of establishing a network and branding ourselves as something new. We approached the established initiatives and organisations in the first phase of focus groups and the launch event."

United Kingdom

"Since there is already a high density of networks in Austria, we could have cooperated more with them to distribute our messages."

Austria

more is the position and credibility of the organisation and its previous experience in building and maintaining networks on an international and national level. On an individual level, the co-ordinator needs to be enthusiastic and credible, with the ability to identify and invite the right people quickly, organise meetings and co-ordinate activities. Experience in academic and professional contexts, a good understanding of the interdisciplinary approach, an interest in urban topics and a familiarity with stakeholders and the specific issues at stake in the nexus of applied research and practice is also essential. Co-ordinators should be able to understand the needs and perspectives of the various stakeholders from cities, the business world, academia and civil society.

Necessary support from the organisation includes funding to cover working time and the costs of organising national meetings and additional activities, in addition to the travel expenses of the co-ordinator and network members participating in European meetings. Visibility for events and activities on the website, and assistance in disseminating results and outcomes is also an advantage.

Approaching stakeholders

Identifying and inviting appropriate stakeholders
Once the project framework has been approved, the massive and intensive work of identifying and inviting stakeholders to join the network begins. The process of identifying stakeholders starts with desk research, for example searching online and making contact on the phone, the aim of which is to map initiatives and individuals. The snowball method is one possible option, which is based on one individual providing the names of other relevant individuals in the field, who in their turn provide even more names. When no new names are suggested, the map is complete.

"It is important to engage an organisation with a good public image in society and national prestige as well as a co-ordinator that is enthusiastic, skilful, credible and convincing."

Hungary

"It requires an enthusiastic and hard-working group that can attract individuals, one that can connect with and reach out to the whole country without following a particular agenda. The organisation needs to be active on a strategic level, with an overview of activities in the country. Representatives from the organisation need to be well-known and visible from the outset."

Czech Republic

"The fact that we had some theoretical competencies was a plus, as there was an intellectual basis. It was not just a matter co-ordination, you need certain analytical perspectives."

Germany

"It helps if the co-ordinator has a widespread network that mirrors the complexity and diversity of the national network. The co-ordinator needs to be motivated and prepared to walk that extra mile to connect with stakeholders."

The Netherlands

Another strategy involves inviting key individuals from other networks, engaging "multipliers" with broad networks, as well as identifying researchers and practitioners with in-depth knowledge and relevant expertise that will strengthen the content and learning experience. Experiences gained from the SEiSMiC project show that approaching potential stakeholders takes a great deal of time, enthusiasm and convincing power from the national co-ordinator, meeting people and building trust on an individual level. The importance of the credibility of the organisation or a well-known authority within that organisation should not be underestimated.

In the SEiSMiC project, the broad mix of stakeholders was a unique selling point as the opportunity to meet interesting people was an important reason for joining the network. Depending on the priorities of their own organisation and past experience, most co-ordinators had a clear idea, although not necessarily the same idea, of which stakeholders were particularly attractive and important to bring on board from the start so as to facilitate the upcoming stages of the project.

Involving key stakeholders at an early stage
Since many stakeholders are interested in collaborating on specific issues rather than joining a network, it is important to invite key stakeholders as early as possible during the agenda-setting process to ensure that the most relevant issues are prioritised. During the SEiSMiC project, a series of three focus groups meetings were organised in each country for this purpose. These meetings proved very useful in identifying common priorities and establishing future collaboration.

"We were committed to efficiency, in the context of Cittalia being a rather large organization, connecting and achieving synergies with other ongoing projects in the same organisation. Most activities were SEiSMiC-branded. We began with established links and connections, and using the snowball effect involved new members based on the selected topics."

Italy

"Our approach involved both existing connections and successive invitations to previously unknown actors in an iterative procedure throughout the project years. In Sweden, there are currently several platforms committed to gather interests, ideas, stakeholders and research to boost the social innovation scene. We promoted the SEiSMiC brand and tried to explain the added value of SEiSMiC in a Swedish context."

Sweden

"We started by identifying individuals in German cities that were involved in practical discussions on how to live together and how to shape urban space. We asked ourselves who the stakeholders were and considered the rationalities. We worked hard to achieve a wide variety of people and used a personal approach to contact them. During phase two, we applied the "curating problematisations" format. By then the process had become self-generating, and participation in SEiSMiC increased organically."

Germany

Managing the network

Understanding the motivation of different stakeholders

The SEiSMiC project as well as the future JPI Urban Europe stakeholder involvement platform was committed to involving a heterogeneous group of stakeholders, broadly categorised as the business world, cities, civil society and science/academia. These four groups include a potentially wide diversity of stakeholders in each group, particularly in the civil society nexus.

Experiences from the SEiSMiC project show that it is important to understand and remain sensitive to the different motives of the various stakeholder categories and the potential obstacles to them becoming involved. In addition, the funding scheme must be flexible enough to meet the needs of the different stakeholder categories and conduct pilot activities.

While lack of time often proves the primary obstacle to the participation of city authorities and businesses, social innovators and NGOs often have lack of time and money, and their field expertise merits reimbursement for time and travel expenses. Since most stakeholders contribute specific expertise to the project that relates to their experience and current roles and positions, it is also wise to clarify the processes and expectations of different stakeholder categories.

Keeping stakeholders on board in the long term

Experiences gained from the SEiSMiC project show that it is a challenge to retain stakeholder engagement over time. Competition from existing networks, non-measurable output, vague objectives, a lack of intensity and an insufficient number of meetings can cause stakeholders to drop out. Regular communication and feed-back loops that indicate how the input generated in the network has been taken up in the European Platform is therefore essential.

"We sought to attract 80% social innovators to the network to start with, and not to invite local officials and researchers initially, so as to avoid creating a circus looking for occasional stakeholders. They would quickly join once the social innovators had joined."

The Netherlands

"If you find and activate initiatives that can add some level of symbolic reputation – others will follow."

Germany

"A lot of people appreciated the openness and respectfulness of the network. It was obvious that this was a group of people searching for common values and not bringing their own agenda to the table."

Belgium

"The USP of SEiSMiC is the wide variety of stakeholders."

Germany

"Roman Hakein, who works for a local development NGO, is our most active member. He invited other people and provided contacts to other groups, which was very valuable."

Czech Republic

It is also important to bear in mind what motivated stakeholders to become involved in the first place and facilitate these particular activities. For many stakeholders, the opportunity to meet and engage with interesting people was an important reason for joining SEiSMiC. Some stakeholders were motivated by the fact that the network was committed to enabling genuine dialogue between experts from different fields. This was especially the case with the civil society stakeholders in the German network, who were eager to talk to individuals that actually practiced planning law or invested in real estate. Offering these kinds of dialogues is an ideal opportunity to sustain motivation levels.

Other stakeholders were motivated by expectations of gaining influence and attention at a European level as well from national and local governments. Against this backdrop, the genuine engagement of these groups and feedback loops are important motivational factors that encourage stakeholders to remain in the network.

A majority of stakeholders were interested in specific topics and only a few remained in the network for an extended period. It is important to remember this in order to ensure that the network remains open to new participants, to identify topics in the long term that are relevant to the stakeholder groups, and to connect and match stakeholders with these particular topics.

Establishing formats that support active dialogue
One way of ensuring that the network remains attractive and relevant over time is to apply and develop formats and tools that enable active dialogue and co-creation. During the SEiSMiC project, a great deal of effort was put into improving formats and the way topics and discussions were framed. For the forum workshops, formats were elaborated with the aim of maintaining a certain balance between free space

"We tried to balance the participants from the business world with NGOs. Academic partners were more engaged and institutional partners more active. Individuals from civil society, for example housewives, found it more difficult to follow the discussions at the meetings."

Turkey

"In Sweden one major obstacle to involvement was a general "network fatigue" in the sense that many people are already involved in a large number of networks and try to prioritise their efforts. Numerous individuals that came to our meetings were grounded in urban practice and theory and wanted to learn more about social innovation."

Sweden

"SEiSMiC was a creative process. In a new project I would introduce more structure to the network, inspired by URBACT creative implementation networks, and issue a national call that would provide resources to innovative experimentation on the ground."

Italy

for reflection and discussion, and predefined key notes and aspects. This allowed time for long discussions or for network members to self-organize and to set the scene and list of agenda items.

All in all, a variety of formats and tools were applied to foster active dialogue and facilitate co-creation. The tools listed here are described in more detail in the SEiSMIC toolbox: site visits, walkshops, creative dialogue, a marketplace for ideas, shoestring prototyping, open space, "curating problematisations", Guide to EU and other funding, Social Innovation Explorer Toolkit, collaborative mapping, Sketches of New Heroes.

Providing the space and the means for prototyping
Some stakeholders that join a network are eager to progress beyond problem-oriented discussions into problem-solving through piloting and prototyping activities. In order to tap into this potential and positive power, it is necessary to include related formats and funding in the framework from the outset. A certain amount of flexibility when assigning the means is essential in order for innovation to take place. One lesson learned from SEiSMiC is that it can be problematic to combine an innovative space for the front-runners and innovators with the aim of mainstreaming lessons from best practice to a larger group of stakeholders. For this reason, there is a need for several kinds of forum and flexibility when adapting activities to the needs and priorities of the stakeholders that engage.

Encouraging transnational learning
SEiSMiC encouraged the network participants to find partners from other countries that were willing to engage in mutual learning activities and transnational knowledge exchange. SEiSMiC facilitated these activities by providing a number of "marketplaces for ideas" at the forums and an online platform with updates on the working groups that would also enable

"At the SEiSMiC forum on Urban Governance, we invited network members along for a walk with CityMine(d), who are very skilled at prototyping and experimenting within the urban spatial and institutional voids, with the aim of establishing a renewed and open dialogue about the city. This resulted in animated discussions across the national borders of the networks."

Belgium

"In Belgium, a country with three official languages, building a network of social innovators, city practitioners, policymakers and so on, is not very easy. The kind of conversations we wanted to encourage within the network clearly developed more easily in a trusted and comfortable environment, which also involved speaking one's own language. We probably underestimated this issue initially."

Belgium

"In the Belgian network, we conducted a test and distributed a text from the European Commission on social innovation policy and asked the participants to discuss it. The exercise highlighted that there is an important gap between the language of the urban stakeholders and the language of the EU."

Belgium

"People were not interested in yet another "talking shop" and were eager to start working."

Sweden

others to join and provide travel expenses for meetings. One lesson learned from the SEiSMiC project is that activities such as these benefit from co-ordinator support, in comparison to if they are entirely self-organised between the partners. Seed funding to initiate the collaboration is another important factor.

Anticipating language barriers
Language barriers should be anticipated and managed professionally. A poor command of English can act as a barrier to local stakeholders participating in activities on a European level. The SIP platform may need certain facilities for translation into different languages to achieve a wide stakeholder engagement in Europe.

Another language barrier stems from the fact that urban practitioners may not be familiar with the particular terminology used in EU policy settings or research environments. During a discussion amongst stakeholders from different professional spheres in the national network, there can be a lack of communication due to ambiguity, for example when the same term has different meanings in different professional contexts. The policy, research and practice gap is to some extent caused by language barriers.

Communicating and raising awareness

A solid communication strategy including defined tools, channels and target groups is crucial in order to expand the national network and to keep stakeholder informed over time. Maintaining a contact database with national stakeholders is a central co-ordinator task. It is an advantage to be aware of how to reach out to intended target groups, and how to tap into the communities of partners on a national level so as to announce activities on their websites and in newsletters.

"In retrospect, more active and frequent communication, e.g. disseminating new activities in other countries or after core group meetings in Vienna etc. to the list of national network participants, might have helped to develop the SEiSMiC identity better. Nowadays, people are on social media all the time and although the project webpage is a useful resource for the different ideas and activities across Europe, it is not an efficient communication channel for a project that wishes to be perceived as active and ´alert´."

Sweden

"I would have wanted the freedom to confirm the front-runner approach and skip the part where the network is expanded –– that would have allowed us to set up real actions much more quickly and to do something. I think action, actually doing innovative activities together, could add great value to the dynamics of the future stakeholder networks."

Belgium

If I had the chance to everything again, I would organise more focus groups on more topics.

Hungary

Setting up national subpages

The SEiSMiC website (which will be retained, but without updating during 2017-2018) included national subpages with information about native languages and an online sharing platform for the transnational working groups. Some network members requested exposure, matching and knowledge exchange amongst participants in the national networks on the sharing platform.

The JPI Urban Europe SIP will be integrated into the communication infrastructure of Urban Europe, with the website as the natural communication hub. Unlike the SEiSMiC website, this website of today only include the European level. For this reason, it will be a good idea to establish national SIP webpages on the website of the co-ordinating organisation on a national level and link these to the JPI Urban Europe website.

Sending out regular newsletters

The SEiSMiC newsletter "What's Shaking" was issued seven times and ended with a total of 920 committed readers. Furthermore, the Dutch national network issued seven specific Dutch newsletters with features such as interviews with network members and information about JPI Urban Europe calls. The JPI Urban Europe newsletter currently has 2,000 subscribers spread across Europe. In addition, it might be worthwhile to consider issuing national newsletters to update the stakeholders in national networks and keep them in the loop between meetings.

Encouraging social media activities

The SEiSMiC Twitter strategy of only making occasional official tweets from the SEiSMiC account, while encouraging project participants to take their own initiatives in spreading the word on Twitter, was very successful. On the other hand, LinkedIn proved to be a less successful channel for communication and interaction.

References

SEiSMiC national network co-ordinators

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JPI Urban Europe management board

Co-ordination of JPI Urban Europe Stakeholder Involvement Platform on a European level will be handled by Jonas Bylund and Margit Noll JPI Urban Europe management board.

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This handbook is a good practice guide to involving urban stakeholders as active partners in the co-creation of knowledge when empowered to influence research priorities. Based on the SEiSMiC project (2013-2016), it aims to provide guidance to the co-ordinators of the national networks within the framework of the JPI Urban Europe Stakeholder Involvement Platform (SIP) launched in October 2016. It may also benefit co-ordinators of national stakeholder networks in general.

The SEiSMiC project piloted formats for a future stakeholder forum for the Joint Programming Initiative Urban Europe. The piloting took place in ten countries in North, South, West and Central Europe. The handbook describes the various strategies that were applied in the participating countries in order to establish a long-term network with a high level of commitment from a broad variety of relevant stakeholders over time.

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