

London Launch Conference

Workshop Sessions on Planning through Partnerships TransPlanLab in Action:

Working groups on joint learning from first round of Joint Planning Groups

What is TransPlanLab?

TransPlanLab is an abbreviation of “Transnational Urban Space Planning Laboratory Programme”. This communication strategy provides the basis for transnational learning, knowledge transfer and experience exchange to the **Saul** project. TransPlanLab aims at fostering joint concept development and planning between regional partners and practitioners.

Saul tackles key issues for all agglomerations in North West Europe. With transnational work, we share expertise and development costs and aim at producing transferable models. We reflect the European dimension and, hopefully, help to minimise the gap between the ESDP European Spatial Development Programme and regional policies.

The main element of the TransPlanLab is the concept of the **Joint Planning Groups (JPG)**: The **Saul** regional partners form Joint Planning Groups for each region. The toolkit for JPG members reveals that the JPGs work towards bringing together practitioners from SAUL partner regions in a transnational working and learning environment in order to develop regional strategies and a regional pilot project. That means all **Saul** partner regions can make use of experts, their knowledge and experience from other partner regions, including their own pilot projects. These regional contributions play the role of “real experiments”, thus forming the basis for a transnational laboratory, together with the transnational work, discussions, and exchange on them. Other elements of TransPlanLab are

- two main conferences: the Launch Conference in London and the final conference in Amsterdam,
- transnational symposia in each region, each of which will be focused on one of the key issues of Saul,
- the **Saul** NWE Award Scheme,
- an interactive internet platform for continuous exchange, and
- the Joint Good Practice Guidance on planning through transnational partnerships for new urban landscapes.

TransPlanLab is not restricted to an internal discussion of the SAUL partners only. It is organised as a network, involving additional co-operating institutions of the partners on their regional level, as well as extending to participants of other Interreg-projects, dealing with similar and related issues, and to other metropolitan regions in North-West Europe, not participating in the SAUL project.

This concept is still under construction and, following our experience, it will be further developed within the first meetings and working phase.

Saul key issue: planning through partnerships

Starting from the idea of planning through transnational partnerships, the working sessions of the Launch Conference focussed on one of the **Saul** key issues: **Saul** lays a strong emphasis on co-operative planning approaches and fostering the engagement of civil society on all planning levels. Planning through partnerships will be addressed at the level of regional strategies as well as that of practical projects.

In this field we all have different experiences and traditions. The first round of Joint Planning Group meetings provided us with a great opportunity to share these.

We addressed several key questions:

- What previous experiences do we have of using co-operative planning / planning through partnerships methods in our own regions? Which methods are already used to engage civil society, how do we evaluate the results?
- On the „local“ level of concrete SAUL actions and investments: Which of the methods should be used? Which seem to have a potential for success regarding different tasks and aims of the local projects (drawing on results of first round of JPGs in the regions)? How could we use the „lab“-approach of SAUL for testing different approaches and methods?
- On the „regional“ level of planning and open space strategies: How could we use co-operative planning methods on the more „abstract“ planning level; how could they contribute to **finding** and **creating** regional identities in our urban regions?

On the basis of our regional experience these key questions have been discussed in two parallel working groups. Some main aspects of the discussion, and some essential points that seemed to find general acceptance have been captured in the following, summarising procedures of both working groups.

Why participation?

- The best technical solution might not be the best solution for people! Therefore: plan *with* not *for* people!
- Involving civil society with manifold demands, perspectives and visions helps meeting future uses. This eases the search for orientation and new functions in a changing environment (world).
- Participative methods add dimension of realism to planners' plans.
- The increasing complexity of spatial features and planning makes co-operation unavoidable. Plans and projects need a broad basis of acceptance, understanding and consensus to be put into action successfully.
- By involving people we can make use of local skills and resources and thus create better results and added value.
- We can create new partnerships not only for the planning phase but also for the following phases of implementation and maintenance. Here, the involvement of private land owners e.g. within the agricultural or forestry sector is of great importance. These partnerships can function as motors for future co-operation networks.

- Planning in partnership approaches and the intensive experience of face-to-face contacts, being a crucial element of them, foster public awareness and trust, even beyond the specific task, thus creating a better basis for communication and co-operation in future spatial planning projects.
- Participation produces a sense of ownership and creates a “responsive environment” which helps finding sustainable solutions and ensures the support of the locals.

Prerequisites for successful involvement processes

- We need to give incentives for people to engage (“offers”), and create win-win-situations. Though it is usually thought to be difficult to motivate public involvement on the regional level, it often turned out to be easier to create positive incentives and find win-win situations on this planning level.
- Quick first results and tangible outcomes are crucial for stimulating continuous engagement in the process.
- People should get involved in a very early planning stage: What sense does it make having consultations of a ready- for-use plan (a blueprint)? Participation should begin with setting the task and aims; a communication plan should be part of every plan or project.
- We should be clear about the framework of time and resources, about stakeholders and their interests.
- Involvement processes need a sound, professional, and transparent structure with clear roles and responsibilities.
- We have to give positive feedback and keep all those involved informed, as an integral part of the process.
- Participation processes should enable the locals to take part in planning procedures as qualified partners. All of us are users as well as inhabitants of urban places and facilities; thus we all are experts for our own “lifeworld”.
- Participation should initiate and strengthen interactive learning.

Methods

- There is a variety of methods proven successful, and may be used, according to the special task and situation, e.g. “planning for real”, which was specially highlighted during the discussion.
- A target group-oriented navigation through spatial planning processes and projects is indispensable, and this remains a particular challenge: it is necessary to define and understand different target groups and develop appropriate tools / methods for their involvement.
- Visualisation plays a decisive role while addressing people: using models and images facilitates the discussion on “abstract” themes and offers the opportunity for visual articulation. These approaches can help to create a mental map of the region.
- We should focus on a type of work that integrates programme and project-oriented elements. Thus we can enter a vital and theme-focused interaction with those involved with greater ease.
- We should explain the regional context of local projects and give people the opportunity to find their own positions within a region-wide spatial vision for the future urban landscape.

- We need creative and aesthetic approaches to meet people's demands and abilities on all planning levels. For this, we should search for new partnerships with artists, writers, journalists, social workers etc.
- "Pioneer" municipalities can be held up as an example to prepare the ground for a region-wide co-operation process. Pilot projects and model tests are useful instruments, but we should be cautious against a simple transfer of best practice models to other regions and projects.
- Creating public awareness, e.g. through the media, events or campaigns, is a good first step for initiating public participation.
- Participation needs a style of communication that is really listening to people. Bridging the gap between understanding and language of the two spheres of professionals (the "systems' world") and "ordinary people" (the "lifeworld"), is crucial for a successful participation process.

Who is the community?

- Definitions and connotations of "community" are completely different in the SAUL regions. Some confusion arises with Germans used to the term of "Kommune", meaning the local administration. Does community mean the residents and users of a special site, a plan area, or a project, only, or does it include a wider range of stakeholders?
- Ongoing differentiation of society shows more and more complicated structures of social groups and lifestyles. These processes call for a concept of a plurality of communities to be involved; how can this be brought into practice?
- Therefore, for each specific case, we need an identification of the communities we are talking about; moreover finding those who want to engage in participation processes, is necessary, and appropriate measures to address them are needed.

"Reservations" against participation

- There is a quite deeply-rooted fear among planners and politicians that "the public" could harm or even destroy the professionally optimised plans or projects; or they fear participative procedures could result in a planning blockade, leading to an endless discussion without results and decisions.
- Participation processes might to be too time-consuming and too expensive.
- There is a risk of interfering the legal institution-led processes and perhaps - even stronger - a lack of democratic legitimacy.
- People are not planners: how do we ensure professional quality standards?
- Spatial planning might turn into an event-oriented business and follow short-lived fashions.
- Conflicting interests could lead to compromises on a low level.
- The "not in my backyard"-mentality and self-interest are seen to stand in the foreground of public discussions.
- A general impression was that it seems, reservations against participation are mainly expressed by two groups of planners: those having little practical experience, or those having negative experience resulting from planning procedures following a highly defensive style.

Challenges for Saul

- How do we get the public involved in decision-making processes without weakening the democratic system? How do we integrate informal participation processes and formal planning procedures? What legitimacy could a consensual result or even final public approval (referendum) have for results of co-operative planning procedures?
- How do we deal with the clash of interests between different societal groups e.g. NGOs and politicians and the competition among players?
- How do we overcome sector planning and tap into integrative regional development? How do we make planning a creative process?
- The difference between involving organised or corporate actors on the one hand and the unorganised public on the other. How can we capture the different views?
- How do we keep the people committed in a long-term planning or implementation process?
- How do we implement participation processes for projects with regional relevance – regional forums and conferences for the broad public?
- On the whole, on a regional level, participative planning seems to be a challenging task. All SAUL regions show to have little, if any, experience with this. Questions like identifying the relevant community and finding appropriate methods have not been solved yet and deserve common attempts from SAUL.
- Finally, a statement that deserves our attention: calling co-operative and participative planning an “art”. There is a lot to be learnt about it, but no single way to do it, no single method or instrument, and no best practice alone may show you the right way.

What do we need most or first?

- ... an exchange about different understandings and traditions of co-operative planning on local and regional level (though the discussion was heavily concentrated on participation aspects, regarding the unorganized “general public”, the planning through partnership approach also includes co-operation with organized interests and stakeholders from the public, private and voluntary sectors).
- ... an exchange about a wider range of approved methods for engaging, involving, and empowering the civil society on all planning levels.