

Case Study: Future Cities Dialogue

It is predicted that by 2040, over 70% of people will live in urban areas¹. This will pose major challenges for urban systems to cope with increased demand. These systems were designed in isolation but will need to be integrated to work effectively together in the future. Between August 2015 and August 2016, Innovate UK ran a public dialogue, with support from the Sciencewise programme, which explored potential options for integrating urban systems which would equip cities for the future.

1. Background

Rapidly growing urban populations pose major new challenges for urban systems which organise how essential services including food, transport, and healthcare are provided. In the past these systems have been designed in isolation but could be improved by integrating their designs to assist and complement each other. These future systems would significantly impact the public's life in a variety of ways and therefore would benefit not just from understanding public perspectives but also from a collaborative approach to designing them. Therefore, a public dialogue at this early stage provided a key resource for exploring and understanding what the public would want out of these systems.



Figure 1. Picture Source: Dialogue Report from Innovate UK.

The aims of the public dialogue were fourfold. First, to study opportunities for future systems and how they could be co-created with the public and stakeholders. Second, to inform the development of the Infrastructure Systems team through citizen insight. Third to provide Innovate UK with an opportunity to learn about public dialogue, and finally to give Innovate UK a clearer understanding of citizen perspectives on opportunities and risks of different systems options².

After commissioning, an Oversight Group (OG) was set up. The OG advised on how best to frame the dialogue subject area, input into stimulus materials and reached out to relevant stakeholder groups. Following a series of interviews and workshops with experts, the dialogue process comprised three single-day public workshops in Glasgow, London, and York, involving 73 participants in total. The workshops explored the values and principles which public participants felt should underlie systems designs. These included equality, use of technologies to enhance social interaction, and sustainability. All 73 participants were invited back to a reconvened citizen dialogue workshop to explore how systems could be integrated. Of the 73 participants, 61 attended along with members from the online community which was set up to open up to the public from other geographical areas.

¹ <http://www.unicef.org/sowc2012/urbanmap/#>

² Ipsos MORI. 2016. Future Cities Dialogue. Report for Innovate UK and Sciencewise

2. Impact

This dialogue explored public opinions on what integrated future systems might look like in 2040. The upstream, forward-looking and open-ended focus of this project means that its impacts will be over a long time period, rather than feeding immediately into a specific policy decision. This approach allows the outputs from the dialogue to feed into ongoing development of policy on integrated urban systems. For example, the key principles identified by the public - such as equality, strong oversight and avoidance of technology 'de-skilling' of people - provide a clear foundation for future policy decisions.



Figure 2. Image source: Dialogue Report from Innovate UK

More immediate outcomes of the public dialogue have come through Innovate UK's Knowledge Transfer Network. When interviewed, an Innovate UK representative highlighted that the dialogue had raised interest in local areas, with Bath and North-East Somerset, and the London Borough of Greenwich wishing to develop ways to engage with the public on integrating future urban systems³.

Two policy experts who were involved in the stakeholder workshops were particularly positive about the institutional knowledge gained from running this public dialogue: *"putting citizens at the centre is necessary and this seemed to be a really good alternative to traditional community consultation"* and *"the principles that emerged were not particularly surprising but [the process] makes the whole citizen-led discussion much less abstract: we now understand it a lot more"*⁴.

The value of the dialogue was summarised by an Innovate UK representative, after the dialogue, who said *"the most successful cities are those that best meet the changing needs of their citizens. Too often, solutions to challenges are designed without properly considering what people really want – with the result that we get technically perfect products and services that no-one actually wants to use. Putting people at the heart of this project challenged some of our assumptions about what city success looks like, and clearly identified some key principles for city system integration that we have been able to use in our funding programmes to make them stronger and better fit for stimulating city futures that citizens really want."*⁵

3. Vital Statistics

Commissioning Body	Innovate UK
Duration of Process	August 2015 – May 2016
Number of Participants	73 public, 400 online, 21 stakeholders
Budget of Project	£272,800
Dialogue Contractor	Ipsos MORI
Evaluation Contractor	URSUS

³ Post-dialogue interview conducted with a representative from Innovate UK.

⁴ URSUS. 2017. Evaluation of Future Cities Dialogue. Report to Innovate UK.

⁵ Post-dialogue interview conducted with a representative from Innovate UK



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