

Indicators bring academics and local government together

On the afternoon of 5 November ITC's Department of Urban and Regional Planning and Geo-information Management (PGM) together with KISS ("KennisInstituut Stedelijke Samenleving") - an urban policy forum of universities, local governments and the private sector in the province of Overijssel-, organised a seminar called: "Indicators: interplay between policy and methods".

During the seminar participants discussed conceptual, methodological, practical as well as institutional issues around the use of indicators in urban and regional planning. The seminar counted with more than 50 participants, including local government officials, academic staff, Ph.D and M.Sc. students.

Central and local governments in many countries are involved in indicator projects to support area-based initiatives with an evidence-based planning approach. In the Netherlands alike, the Ministry of Housing, had selected recently –on the basis of a set of 18 debated indicators 40 deprived neighbourhoods that are receiving additional support to improve their local situation. Within the province of Overijssel a similar exercise was conducted to get to know the most deprived neighbourhoods in the 5 major cities of the province. Mr. Peter Scheltinga, policy researcher at Hengelo municipality, presented the basic idea of the indicator exercise in the province of Overijssel. Ms. Evy Trisusanti, MSc student of the Urban Planning and Management programme and part of the ITC's double-degree programme with the Institut Teknologi Bandung in Indonesia, reviewed this exercise in terms of the sensitivity of the final outcome in relation to the various techniques that could be used to construct indices of multiple deprivation.

Karin Pfeffer, GIS Researcher at the University of Amsterdam, presented the experiences and use of the so-called Regiomonitor. The Regiomonitor is an instrument that indicates the status of the neighbourhoods in the municipalities in the Amsterdam region in terms of spatial concentration of specific societal themes like unemployment and ethnic groups. The Regiomonitor is a good example of how to open up various available databases for public use. Besides it is an illustration of how academics could cooperate with local governments in the field of policy information.

Finally, Cecilia Wong, Professor of Spatial Planning at the University of Manchester and author of the book 'Quantitative Indicators for Urban and Regional Planning: the Interplay of Policy and Methods' (Royal Town Planning Institute Library Book Series, Routledge, London, ISBN: 0415274516) reflected on the usage of indicators and the changing ethos of indicators usage for urban and regional planning.

Cecilia Wong, among others based on the UK experience, stated that despite ongoing conceptual, methodological and institutional challenges indicators remain very attractive to policy makers as they act often as an interface between the technical and more political rationality. Besides, stronger emphasis on user engagement in the development of

indicators helps to bring together the rational paradigm and the more communicative, social learning approach, which are both present in government and academic circles.

Overall, the seminar touched upon a number of relevant issues around the use of indicators and stimulated the debate between academics and the actual daily practice of local government representatives; leading to possible further strengthened cooperation in research and education between ITC, the University Twente and the local governments in the region of Overijssel.

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