
Cities as Arenas for Change

Cities are frontrunners, when it comes to building resilience and addressing the Sustainable Development Goals.

By Resilient Vejle

Building resilience requires a city to facilitate multidisciplinary discussions about the shocks and stresses, which the city is facing.

With the aim to test a way to facilitate such discussions, we set up a simulation exercise during the European Week of Regions and Cities. We asked participants to step into the shoes of mayors and city council members and create a long-term vision for their respective cities by combining the SDGs and urban resilience. A task that may seem somewhat unmanageable, when you have been traveling and participating in workshops all day, but luckily for us, the participants welcomed the task with vigor. We have written this article to summarize the discussions and points brought up during the workshop.

Urban resilience and the SDGs

Cities are currently frontrunners, when it comes to implementing the SDGs at the local level. Therefore, the SDGs is a useful tool to connect European cities and create a common language

or sustainable development in Europe. Cities should be willing to play into international agendas and participate actively in developing EU policy that succeeds in addressing the SDGs.

The SDGs are interdependent, rather than independent and integrating resilience into a city's strategy and management ensures the holistic approach needed to address the SDGs. Furthermore, the holistic nature of urban resilience results in urban projects that address multiple SDGs at once. Consequently, combining the SDGs with urban resilience creates opportunities to display the benefits of working to build urban resilience.



Integrating resilience

Integrating resilience into the fabric of a city requires interdisciplinary work, and as a city and municipality, we have a responsibility to build relationships across functions and departments.

However, as participants noted, it is easy as a city official or politician to focus on one's own area of expertise or interest. One participant said about the workshop: "It is an exercise in taking off one's professional cap and working together to create holistic solutions".

The ability to step into other people's shoes is crucial to succeeding with interdisciplinary projects and creating the holistic solutions needed to address a city's shocks and stresses. This is often easier said than done, and the difficulty to do so, emphasizes the value of the CRO - who is often politically neutral and who can help break down silos, unite people with different political views and facilitate a multidisciplinary discussion within and outside the city administration.



Citizens first

As important it is to change the discussion among politicians and city officials, it is just as important to have the discussion with citizens. A city cannot build resilience without the participation of citizens and therefore we should teach our citizens to facilitate discussions related to

resilience in our cities. The situation becomes too vulnerable and progresses too slow, if it is up to the CRO to facilitate all discussions about resilience. As one participant rightly noted, *"The schools are where we raise resilient and robust citizens"* and pointed to the necessity of including teachers, parents and students in the discussions.

All of the three cities at the workshop highlighted the importance of putting people first, when building a vision. Citizens should be at the center of the vision building process, because how else are you going to engage and involve them? Moreover, citizen participation is a prerequisite to solving the problems we are faced with.

This brings us to the reason behind cities' ability to accelerate sustainable development and build resilience at a much faster pace than states and national governments. Because we as cities are closer to the citizens, it gives us the ability to involve and engage them in ways hardly possible for regional or national governments, who are a lot further away from the daily lives of the citizens. We must take upon us the responsibility and utilize this unique opportunity to be arenas for change.

