LOW CARBON HUB BOARD

Date: 20th January 2017
Subject: MISTRÁ URBAN FUTURES COMMUNICATIONS PROPOSAL
Report of: BETH PERRY, ACADEMIC DIRECTOR, MISTRÁ URBAN FUTURES UK

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this paper is to present a proposal for Mistrá Urban Futures to fund a PhD student for three years, to work in partnership with the GM Low Carbon Hub, to better understand and act on improving communications and engagement with civil society groups and citizens. This would be aligned to the planned refresh of the Greater Manchester Climate Change Strategy, which will begin in 2018.

The PhD is funded as part of an innovative scheme to explore new approaches to funding and supporting post-graduate research that can balance academic excellence with relevance and impact. Mistrá Urban Futures’ overall aim is to explore how co-producing knowledge with different urban stakeholders can help realise more just cities, which are accessible, green and fair.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Board are recommended to:
• discuss and feedback on the proposal; and
• agree in principle to the proposal and to support its further development with the Director of Environment and Chair of Low Carbon Hub.

CONTACT OFFICERS:

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BACKGROUND PAPERS:

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1.0 BACKGROUND

Between 2012-2015 the Greater Manchester Low Carbon Hub worked with a team of international academics and practitioners to develop comparative understanding of the governance, policy and knowledge-related challenges in urban sustainability (see Diagram 1). The work highlighted the gap between city-regional decision-making organisations and residents in the city-region. It identified a need for the GMLCH to understand, and act on improving, the mechanisms and processes for communicating and engaging with citizens in Greater Manchester. It also highlighting the need to integrate online mass communications with tailored face-to-face interactions.

The work was supported by the Mistra Urban Futures, an international Centre for sustainability with headquarters in Gothenburg, Sweden. Mistra Urban Futures is a centre with the vision of achieving sustainable urban transitions which are accessible, green and fair. The Centre’s mission is to explore how co-production with different urban stakeholders can help achieve this vision. It has set up Local Interaction Platforms (LIPs) in Gothenburg, Malmo, Kisumu, Cape Town and Sheffield-Manchester to operationalise the vision and mission. The current programme of work is called ‘Realising Just Cities’; all funded activities must relate to and support the values and activities of this programme.

This proposal has been developed by Professor Beth Perry at the Urban Institute, University of Sheffield, with input and discussion from Mark Atherton and Steve Connor, Chief Executive of Creative Concern. Beth is the Director of the Sheffield-Manchester Local Interaction Platform.

2.0 INNOVATIVE PhD PROGRAMME

Much of the focus to date on academic impact or co-production has focussed on the relationship between academic researchers and policy-makers. However, there are now increasing efforts to think about the implications of the ‘co-production’ paradigm for post-graduate research, specifically PhD students.

A PhD cluster is being developed by Professors Beth Perry and Tim May (Sheffield Methods Institute) at the University of Sheffield, with the Department of Urban Studies and Planning. This will explore innovative ways of undertaking post-graduate research to combine academic excellence with relevance and impact. Three PhDs will be funded within the Realising Just Cities programme. Collectively, they will focus on different organisational cultures and spaces in city-regions and their role in realising just cities:

- One PhD will focus on cultures of knowledge production. They will look at the role of the university in realising just cities. This student will be based in Sheffield.
- One PhD will focus on cultures of knowledge reception. They will look at the changing roles and cultures of local authorities in engaging with citizens to realise just cities. We are exploring whether this student can be embedded in a local authority in Greater Manchester.
- One PhD will focus on communicative spaces. They will look at the spaces of communication and translation between stakeholders – particularly policy officials and civil society. This is the PhD we are looking to develop with the GM Low Carbon Hub. The PhD will, inter-alia, work on developing GM’s Platform website and at how ‘safe spaces’ can be created to allow dialogue on climate change adaptation and mitigation policy.
The PhD funding is for 3 years only and needs to complete in early 2020. This means that their contributions the Climate Change Strategy refresh would be to shape, define and develop the process and contribute to effective subsequent delivery.

The Local Interaction Platforms in Gothenburg, Malmo, Kisumu and Cape Town are also exploring how their PhD students can work in innovative ways. For instance, Gothenburg is developing ideas to set up a Transdisciplinary Research School and the Gothenburg Director of Environment is participating in this process.

The three PhD positions have already been advertised, without any specific details about partnerships and co-supervisors, prior to the Board discussing the proposal (see http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/usp/researchschool/realising-just-cities)

3.0 THE PROPOSAL

In discussion with the Director of Environment (Mark Atherton), Creative Concern (Steve Connor) and the Academic Programme Lead for the Sheffield-Manchester Local Interaction Platform (Beth Perry), a proposal has been developed to co-supervise a PhD student on the topic of ‘Communication, Engagement and the Just City’. Dr Aidan While from the Department of Urban Studies and Planning would also co-supervise the student within the University of Sheffield.

The PhD would address a series of intellectual and practical questions. It would operate in an ‘action-research’ mode, focussing on ‘how to’ address problems identified through practical interventions. Questions include:

- What kinds of ‘communicative spaces’ are needed in urban governance between public policy officials and civil society?
- How can they be created and maintained?
- How does communication relate to broader strategies for participation and inclusive governance?
- Who needs to communicate to whom and how to realise more just cities?

The proposal is to focus on a case study of the Greater Manchester Low Carbon Hub, specifically the balance between digital (via ontheplatform.org.uk and other websites) and face-to-face communications and linked to the refresh of the Greater Manchester Climate Change Strategy.

The PhD student’s fees and bursary (c.£60,000) and the time of the academic supervision team would be paid for by Mistra Urban Futures/University of Sheffield. The proposal requires GMLCH/Creative Concern to provide supervision time and in-kind resources (such as desk-space, venues) to match the work.

Cash funding would also be available to part or fully match communication, participation and engagement funds provided by GMLCH.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 The Board are recommended to:

- discuss and feedback on the proposal; and
- agree in principle to the proposal and to support its further development with the Director of Environment and Chair of Low Carbon Hub.
UK Coalition Government

- Regionalism replaced by localism
- RDAs abolished
- LEPs established
- Context of development of GMCA, devolution and City Deal

Global ‘polycrisis’ – financial, ecological, social

- State restructuring
- Authority cuts
- Welfare reform
- From Environment Commission to Low Carbon Hub
- Uncertain national environmental commitments
- Targets and incentives
- New concepts and ideas
- Development of first Greater Manchester Climate Change Strategy

Diagram 1
Contexts and Challenges Identified in the 2012 Baseline Assessment

- Tension between city-regional and localist approaches
- No single governance body for sustainability in GM
- Limited stakeholder engagement
- Integrating new GMLCH in governance structure of GM
- Organisational change
- Need to utilise relationship mechanisms of local authorities to engage communities
- Manging vertical and horizontal relations and building capacity
- Focus on negotiating with Central government

- Diminishing organisational capacity: staff cuts
- Changes to political landscape
- Changes to political landscape
- Siloed and multi-scalar policy domains
- Tension between city-regional and localist approaches
- Limited stakeholder engagement
- Need to utilise relationship mechanisms of local authorities to engage communities

- Dominance of enviro-economic interface
- Pursuit of economic growth rather than development
- Complexity of sustainable urban development topics
- Policy framework does not reflect full inclusion of SUD topics
- Headline indicators are economic
- ‘GM’ is not meaningful to citizens and stakeholders

- Gaps in local authority data
- Lack of research budget
- Poor use of HE and FE research to inform policy development
- No formal sustainability audit process
- Lack of formal management system
- Under use of existing regional data from RDA

- Prevailing economic conditions
- Just-in time culture
- Paucity of recognised and collected data for sustainable urban development topics

- Imbalance of resources between strategy and delivery
- Project funding and bidding mentality
- Competing priorities for limited resources
- Little learning from grassroots initiatives

- Organisational change
- Competing priorities for limited resources
- Project funding and bidding mentality
- Tension between city-regional and localist approaches
- Need to utilise relationship mechanisms of local authorities to engage communities

- Fragmented evidence base
- Gaps in local authority data
- No formal sustainability audit process
- Lack of time and resources
- Lack of research budget
- Poor use of HE and FE research to inform policy development
- No formal management system
- Reliance on usual suspects to provide expertise and input

Governance

Policy

Knowledge