"Ruhr“ metropolitan area in Germany: Rapid Health Impact Assessment (HIA) of novel spatial planning

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Context
Starting out with a Research & Development project in 2000, major Ruhr area cities contractually agreed to coordinate their spatial planning. A key strand of this cooperation refers to the "Joint regional land utilization plan Ruhr" (Regionaler Flächennutzungsplan Städteregion Ruhr, RFNP) as a novel approach of joint spatial planning.

After two waves of public and stake-holder involvement, the City Councils of the 6 participating cities approved the plan (2009). The Ministry of Economy defined some constraints, necessitating another round of cities’ resolutions (ongoing).

In this procedure, LIGA.NRW acted as "Institution responsible for public concerns" (Träger öffentlicher Belange, TöB) and provided a Rapid Health Impact Assessment. Subsequently, some results of this HIA were incorporated into the plan.

Data, Procedure
The participating cities (Bochum, Essen, Gelsenkirchen, Herne, Mülheim/Ruhr, Oberhausen, pop. 1.8 M) formerly were centers of heavy industry, now undergoing conversion.

The draft plan of this comprehensive and ambitious RFNP planning process included:
- Proposed resolution (Beschlussvorlage)
- Map (Plankarte)
- Rationale (Begründung) with 10 additional maps (Erläuterungskarten)
- Environmental report (Umweltbericht) (required by Strategic Environmental Assessment, SEA) with 12 thematic maps (Themenkarten)
- 7 Summaries of characteristics (Steckbriefe)
- Several further summaries, listings, overviews and synopses (total of 45 items).

Results
Health issues that were already discussed in the process included physical exposures (pollutants etc.), hazardous incidents, waste disposal, and green spaces.

Building on this, the LIGA.NRW contribution refers to a variety of additional topics of both substantive and procedural type, incl. recommendations (Box 1).

Box 1 Recommendations derived in the Rapid HIA of the Joint regional land utilization plan

- Utilize existing local health reports to describe status quo & identify areas of particular concern
- Ensure to cover physical exercise, issues of gender, high-risk groups, handicapped persons, and diversity in sufficient detail
- Interpret explicitly the health implications of disease of all identified risks & resources (Δ BoD)
- On human health, add a section into the planning document; and a separate technical report
- Balancing different targets and values, legal requirements need to be fully exploited, and health issues need to be given adequate weight.

Conclusions
For the conclusions drawn from this RFNP planning process and related others, cf. Box 2.

Several caveats need to be borne in mind. "Spatial planning" processes – especially in densely populated areas – involve large numbers of institutions, comprehensive public involvement, and considerable numbers of statements and suggestions.

Box 2 Conclusions drawn from this RFNP planning process and related others

- Spatial planning offers a variety of opportunities to promote and protect human health
- In Germany, these opportunities are chronically under-used ("utilization gap")
- There is growing consensus among planners and health professionals that these opportunities should be used systematically by HIA-type approaches ("closing the utilization gap")
- HIA related to spatial planning could and should evolve into a major, and universally accepted, approach to health protection and promotion.

For those testifying on health it is a challenge to fully understand the planning process and to adequately cover the health issues at stake, espec. in the absence of standard procedures and tools. For those managing the planning process, it is likewise challenging to integrate the multitude of suggestions.

Therefore, the "utilization gap" is not surprising, and the efforts required to overcome this may be larger than expected.

Curricula of urban planning and management as well as of public health, both in academia as well as in continued education should include "spatial planning and health"

Current efforts
For current efforts to improve HIA practice, as pursued at LIGA.NRW / WHO CC, cf. Box 3.

Box 3 Current efforts to improve HIA practice

- Nurturing, on local and regional level, the "cultures" of qualitative as well as quantitative, health-related analyses as explored in a variety of EC-funded HIA projects (EPHIA, PHASE, HIA-NMAC, DYNAMO, HIA, INTERESC, HEIMTS, RAPID et al.)
- Establishing closer connections of HIA with other governance instruments, e.g. health reporting / conferences / awards
- In analogy to other sectoral plans, e.g. housing plan, educational plan: Developing dedicated local / regional "health plans" (Fachpläne Gesundheit)
- Better understanding of commonalities, differences, and interrelationships of types of Impact Assessment: cf. the "Family of Impact Assessments" initiative

Links and references: available from the author

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HIA Conference at WHO Geneva, 7 April 2010
HIA in Cities: A Tool for Urban Health Governance and Accountability
HIA Conference WHO Geneva, 7 April 2010

“Ruhr” metropolitan area in Germany
– Rapid Health Impact Assessment (HIA) of novel spatial planning (Fehr)

Selected links and references

Region of Ruhr Cities 2030 / Städteregion Ruhr 2030 (German), www.staedteregion-ruhr-2030.de/cms/index.php
Master plan Ruhr / Masterplan Ruhr (German), www.staedteregion-ruhr-2030.de/cms/masterplan_ruhr.html
Joint initiative “Ruhr valley” Gemeinschaftsinitiative „Ruhrtal” (German), www.dasruhrtal.de/
Joint regional land utilization plan Ruhr / Regionaler Flächennutzungsplan (RFNP) Ruhr (German),
Evaluation of RFNP Ruhr (German), www.staedteregion-ruhr-2030.de/cms/evaluation_des_rfnp.html

LIGA.NRW: www.liga.nrw.de

Selected related publications / presentations:

2009/2010
http://www.liga.nrw.de/_pdf/service/vortraege/fehr_welteke_091014.pdf?PISESSION=23919019d991e414c4e349c8c5f610e9
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2008
Fehr R; Terschüren C; Mekel M (2008): Urban Health in North Rhine-Westphalia. DG Epi Jahrestagung, Satellite Conference: Health in Megacities and urban areas, Bielefeld, 22 - 23.9 2008 (English),
www.liga.nrw.de/_pdf/service/vortraege/fehr_terschueren_mekel_080923bielefeld_urban-health-nrw.pdf?PISESSION=234b9e59614d37e57e69be7c4b1ec1eb

2007

2005/2006