

# Turku brings city administrators and academics together

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City governments around the world seek to initiate a dialogue with universities and research institutes to gain knowledge and policy advice. Increasing attention is given to knowledge creation, collection, analytical usage and dissemination at the local level. These co-creative 'knowledge brokerage' processes between the academy and local governments emerge from everyday needs of solid knowledge as a base for planning and decision-making.

The medium-sized Finnish city of Turku, with two research universities, offers an interesting example of a knowledge brokerage practice—in place since 2009. Turku's model, an Urban Research Programme, is organised as a flexible network, guided by a high-profile steering committee, and managed by a 'broker' jointly appointed by the city and the University of Turku. Research projects are designed to meet both the city's and universities' interests, and attention is given to active dissemination of their results.

Urban research is defined as a multidisciplinary field of research in which a city, citizens or urban phenomena have an essential role. Research topics range from economic development to welfare policy and from sustainability to good governance.

## Joint initiative between the city and universities

The Turku Urban Research Programme seeks to support academic urban research, promote tools for urban governance, and develop knowledge exchange between the universities and the city. The City of Turku's interest in developing co-operation is to support the knowledge base of decision making, while the universities aim to strengthen multidisciplinary urban research and regional engagement.



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The governing body is a high profile steering group, with representatives both from the city and the universities, including the Mayor of Turku and the Rector of the University of Turku. The steering group sets the guidelines for the programme. The operational manager (i.e. the 'knowledge broker') is the Research Director of Urban Studies, who is jointly appointed and has offices in both the university and the city administration. This dual base brings a significant advantage, with an office in city hall meaning a close involvement in strategic management of the city, and can

provide early involvement in the policy development process.

The practical cooperation is organised as a flexible network between professors and senior researchers specialised in urban issues as well as the City of Turku's leading practitioners within relevant policy areas. Academic fields covered by experts from the University of Turku and Åbo Akademi University include social sciences, geography, humanities, and business studies. To cover architectural and planning studies, the co-operation is flexibly extended to other selected universities.

## Academically relevant, delivering policy advice

The baseline is that the research projects are designed to meet both the city's and universities' interests. They should build on a theoretical framework, contribute to academic results, but also be applicable to policy development. This is a matter of project design; the project's framing is often negotiated and the knowledge broker, who can interpret the interests, may help to reach an outcome agreed by both. Projects can be initiated from either side. Major projects are externally funded by European or national funds, yet the city may have a co-financing role or it can participate otherwise, for instance as a development platform. Minor and medium-sized research projects can be city-funded up to 100 percent.

Project portfolio has been developed through funding competitions, individual research assignments, and by accepting invitations to join major research projects. By the end of 2013, the Turku Urban Research Programme had funded 39 research projects fully or partly. ■

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