



Setting the path for urban mobility – how to take the right decisions?

Executive summary of the Trialog on January 12, 2017 | Report ETR/01-2017

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Topic and background

On January 12, 2017, the fifth Trialog-event in cooperation with the academies' project "Energy Systems of the Future" (ESYS) took place in Berlin. The event „Setting the path for urban mobility – how to take the right decisions?“ discussed **challenges related to path dependencies in the energy transition** with a focus on specific questions of urban mobility systems.

Path dependencies can be described along the **dimensions of production and market penetration, technology development and-installation, governance and regulation, usage patterns and discourses**. Today's mobility structures are shaped by path dependencies from the past. A prominent example is the "car-oriented city" with urban highways and free parking spaces that dominates urban landscapes and the way we move within cities. In the same way, decisions of today will influence developments for the decades to come – think of the discussion about the future of the combustion engine. Climate change

urges quick and landmark decisions in the mobility sector. This is especially important for urban transport, as traffic is responsible for a fifth of CO₂-emissions in Germany and more than 70% of the German population live in urban areas.

The aim of the Trialog was to facilitate a **discussion on decision-strategies and decision formats** with stakeholders from academia, the business and public sector, organized civil society and media. The discussion reflects on and complements the activities of the academic working group on "path dependencies" of the project "Energy Systems of the Future". Through the exchange of the different stakeholder perspectives, participants broadened their knowledge base and pointed out conflicting goals and challenges of path dependencies regarding further developments in urban mobility. The results of the Trialog will be reflected in the position paper to be published by the scientists of the ESYS-working group in 2017/2018.

Starting point for the Trialog discussion was an input-paper by the ESYS-team as well as **three guiding questions** from the ESYS working-group:

- What does a good strategy need to comprise in order to massively reduce traffic related CO₂-emissions in cities?
- Which strategies exist for taking sound decisions despite uncertainties and path dependencies?
- How should a good decision-making-process be structured? Which stakeholders need to be involved?

Participants

A total of 61 participants from the public sector, business sector, academia, organized civil society and media took part in the Trialog-event in Berlin. As the Trialog is part of the academic project ESYS, participants from **academia** constituted a big bloc of participants with 16 persons. Amongst the participating institutions were the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, the Technische Universität Berlin, the Berlin Social Science Center (WZB), Forschungszentrum Jülich, Deutsches Biomasseforschungszentrum and Agora Verkehrswende.

19 participants came from the **business sector** that represented associations and companies from various sectors: e.g. the company H2Mobility focuses on hydrogen fuels, the association eMobiLiät represented electromobility, and natural gas industries were represented by erdgas mobil and for the bike-sharing provider Nextbike was present.

A total of 16 participants came from **organized civil society**, among them were traffic clubs such as ADAC and VCD, the environmental organization BUND, the consumer organization

Verbraucherzentrale, workers' unions and the Zivilgesellschaftliche Plattform Forschungswende.

8 persons from the **public sector** participated in the Trialog. Several federal ministries were represented (BMBF, BMUB, BMWi) as well as the regional association of die LINKE in Schleswig-Holstein and the city of Stuttgart. The Trialog was accompanied by a free journalist and the newspaper der Tagesspiegel.

Results

Despite the differing perspectives of the participants, there was a common understanding on the future of urban mobility systems: They need to be **structured in a climate-friendly way and ensure a city that is worth living in**. The participants recognized the need to foster public and shared mobility as well as walking and cycling.

The Trialog-discussion focused on the question which paths need to be followed to facilitate these developments. Therefore, the Trialog discussed decision strategies for urban mobility. It was emphasized that the decision process should be started "without mental path-dependencies", i.e. **without pre-defined results**. It is necessary to gather all relevant information and to actually take this information into account. Furthermore, several criteria were collected that help **to assess the urgency of a problem**. If, for example, the pressure to act is high and the costs of a measure are low, decisions should be taken soon, e.g. parking lots could be reallocated to provide public space for walkers and cyclists. If, on the other hand, there is a high level of alternative options, public opinion on the issue is diverse and the pressure to act is relatively low, then decisions can be actively deferred to gain time to improve the knowledge basis. This

is for example the case with the regulation of autonomous driving.

The Trialog also discussed **requirements for good decision-making-processes**. The participants stressed the importance to include all relevant stakeholders – which is currently not always the case. For example, pedestrian’s interests have a much weaker lobby than business interests and as a result have lower chances to influence policy making. Therefore, organizations that observe the market activities (so-called “watchdogs”) were considered a valuable format to strengthen under-represented interests. Participants also called for a **stronger evaluation of decisions**. They recommended pilot projects and field tests (Reallabore) in a temporarily or locally restricted area. In such a setting stakeholders can jointly test and evaluate innovations to develop recommendations for the development of future paths.

To reach the climate targets, we need to initiate change processes on all levels of the triad for sustainable urban transport: **avoid – shift – improve** (A-S-I). It became clear that the improvement of transport through increased efficiency and a change of the drive technology towards renewable energies can only be one of the steps to achieve a CO₂-emission reduction of 40% until 2030. In the long run, all vehicles must rely on climate friendly driving technologies. Rail vehicles, fuel-cell-vehicles and battery-vehicles all have specific advantages and disadvantages, that need to be considered. In the longer perspective, electricity-based synthetic fuels could also be an option. In the short and medium term, the shift to fuels that emit less CO₂, such as natural gas or biogas, can contribute to lower the emissions.

Great potential was seen in the shift towards transport options that emit less CO₂ such as

walking or cycling. Participants also stressed the importance of an increasing shared mobility. To **raise the attractiveness of shared transport** a higher variety of flexible and individual options such as shared taxis, car-sharing and rent-a-bike is necessary. Many discussants considered the traditional public transport to be the backbone of future urban mobility. Nevertheless, to reach the required emission reductions the overall energy demand of the transport sector needs to be reduced. With reference to several studies and scenarios, it was made clear that also a change in usage patterns is needed. If citizens get involved in the relevant decision-making process from the beginning, it is more likely that citizens accept and understand the challenges and opportunities related to a transition of the mobility sector.

Our Trialog format

Trialogs **organize a process of understanding** between stakeholders from the public sector, the business sector, organized civil society and academia, in order to find widely acceptable solutions to societal challenges oriented towards the common good. In our Trialog events participants profoundly discuss current societal questions on a certain topic and are asked to take into account the different perspectives of the stakeholder groups and substantiate their point of view. The topics and questions of our Trialogs are developed together with our clients and cooperating partners.

Trialogs are led by an experienced host and take place under the [Chatham House Rule](#). In that way Trialogs allow for the necessary confidentiality to integrate all perspectives of the participants in the discussion – regardless of diverging power positions. As a follow-up, the transcript of the discussion is analyzed by

means of qualitative social research approaches with the aim to demonstrate corridors of consensus for broadly accepted solutions to societal challenges.

Our **transdisciplinary Trialogs** have a stronger focus on researchers as their scientific work and its implications come to the fore in the discussion. Through the exchange with different stakeholders from society (business, civil society, politics, media) researchers receive feedback on their work while at the same time all participants get new insights and

new perspectives on the topic. Our transdisciplinary Trialogs bring together scientific-analytic research with societal knowledge gained on experience and societal requirements to decision-making- and problem-solving-processes. In that way, a rich basis for understanding is established which allows a change of perspectives and a broader process for understanding. This discussion format fosters, in the long term, an increased and better understood use of research results, a better-informed society as-well-as sustainable political decisions.

About the HUMBOLDT-VIADRINA Governance Platform gGmbH

The HUMBOLDT-VIADRINA Governance Platform is a not-for-profit limited liability company that aims to contribute to democratic processes as well as elaborate governance strategies in Germany, Europe and in the world. Our contribution to Good Governance focuses on the basic principles of transparency and participation. With our multi-stakeholder initiatives and Trialogs we develop procedures that aim to integrate multiple perspectives and to make them transparent. We believe that only through transparency and participation it is possible to involve all stakeholder groups and thereby, strengthen the trust in political decision-making processes.

About the project



Leopoldina
Nationale Akademie
der Wissenschaften



In April 2013 acatech – National Academy of Science and Engineering, the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina and the Union of the German Academies of Sciences and Humanities started the initiative “Energy Systems of the Future” (ESYS). The Academies’ project assembles around 100 experts from science and research to develop policy options for the implementation of a secure, affordable and sustainable energy supply. Experts from the technical and natural sciences, economics, law, and the social sciences collaborate in interdisciplinary Working Groups.

Throughout the process, there is a constant dialogue between the Working Groups and representatives from politics, the industry and civil society organisation. In different discussion formats and expert talks, the project members exchange views with stakeholders of the energy transition. The “Trialogs on the energy transition” of the HUMBOLDT-VIADRINA Governance Platform are one of these dialogue formats. They are useful for highlighting different perspectives on new ESYS topics and to ensure that leading questions are relevant for societal players.

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