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► To cite this version:

Anne Roué Le Gall, Clément Deloly, Lucy Bretelle, Gemma Moore, James Milner, et al.. How to build trust relationships between city practitioners and scientists? Lessons learned from a local case study. Transforming our Collective Urban Future: Learning from Covid-19 - 17th International Conference on Urban Health, Jul 2021, Virtual conference, France. hal-04753007

HAL Id: hal-04753007

<https://hal.science/hal-04753007v1>

Submitted on 25 Oct 2024

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How to build trust relationships between city practitioners and scientists?

Lessons learned from a local case study

Anne Roué Le Gall^{1,2}, Clément Deloly¹, Lucy Bretelle³, Gemma Moore⁴, James Milner⁵, Nahid Mohajeri⁴, Phil Symonds⁴, Ioanna Tsoulou⁴, Nici Zimmerman⁴, Paul Wilkinson⁵, Mike Davies⁴

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Background

Contemporary challenges linked to public health and climate change demand more effective decision-making and urban planning practices, in particular by taking greater account of evidences. Collaboration and relationship-building between policymakers and researchers, including building trust, are amongst the key factors influencing strategic knowledge (Cvitanić et al., 2016; Fazli et al., 2017) and the effective use of evidence by policymakers (Oliver et al. 2014).



The four-year CUSSH research programme involving a consortium of research partners in six cities across three continents aims to conduct policy-relevant, actionable research to support the transformation of cities (Davies et al. 2021).

Implementing CUSSH in Rennes, France



The case study research was carried out in partnership with policymakers in Rennes, the regional capital of Brittany, France.

A long-standing interest in health issues



The implementation of CUSSH has taken shape through different activities formalised in a "Scope of work" co-drafted with all stakeholders → An important task has been the application of a quantitative health impact assessment model (CRAFT tool) on PCAET, the metropolitan policy related to climate change.

Objectives

- Explore and analyse the evolution of the relationship between scientists and city practitioners formed during the CUSSH research programme in Rennes (2017-2020)
- Discuss the role of the CRAFT tool, a policy decision-support tool, in developing and strengthening the collaboration & coproduction of knowledge by researchers & city planning practitioners
- Identify factors that make it possible to build trusting relationships and conduct effective participatory research.

Methodology

Analysis of field notes and documents to map the emergence and evolution of the collaboration between researchers and policymakers (Ethnographic approach).

Key outcomes (1) & (2)

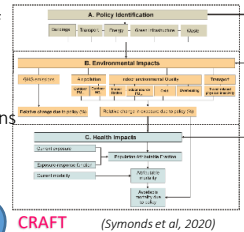
Two major elements were highlighted from this case study

(1) The role played by the CRAFT tool

- ✓ Has not (yet) fulfilled its primary objective of influencing the policy decision, BUT
- ✓ Enable knowledge exchanges between scientists and practitioners
- ✓ Made it possible to put in place the conditions for an effective research partnership.

By making the boundary between stakeholders more porous & having helped to clarify the roles of each of them

What CRAFT allows ?



Building of trust among stakeholders and ripple effects (contacts with elected representatives, launch of other modelling, etc.)

(2) The need to formalize the role of boundary spanning

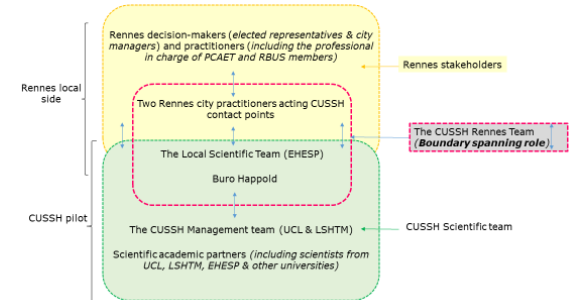


Figure 1: Mapping of stakeholders and governance organisation 3 years after the launch of the CUSSH project in Rennes

Practice of boundary spanning : "much more than a simple process of bringing together the production and use of science, these activities require sufficient time, resources, and expertise dedicated to them" (Bednarek et al., 2018).

Takeaways

Key ingredients revealed in this study to underpin effective participatory research

- ❖ Clarify the role of each stakeholder involved in the research and in particular to formalize the role of boundary spanning
- ❖ Take time to establish a trust relationship, power-sharing and co-governance
- ❖ Use an object (such as CRAFT) that serves as a conversation starter to give a support for iterative exchanges
- ❖ Enrol all the relevant cities stakeholders who are supposed to make it possible to move forward.

17th International Conference On Urban Health, July 6, 2021 through July 8, 2021

Abstract

Title: How to build trust relationships between city practitioners and scientists? Lessons learned from a local case study

Cities are faced with challenges to develop in ways that meet the increasingly urgent imperatives of planetary and population health. New approaches are needed to accelerate change, including innovative ways to influence policy makers through tailor-made and trust-based research-practice partnerships. The use of scientific evidence and participatory engagement is widely recognised today for its importance for complex policy processes of environmental public health. Trust relationships between scientists and cities practitioners within participatory research programmes is required. This work explores and analyses the evolution of the relationship between scientists and city practitioners formed during the CUSSH (Complex Urban System for Sustainability and Health) research programme, focused around a local case study, Rennes, in France. The results of the analysis demonstrate that, even if the primary objective of informing decision-making through evidence-based science is not fulfilled, the use of a decision-making support tool, a quantitative HIA in this case, may lay the foundations for trust relationships, in particular by facilitating the boundary between scientists and cities practitioners. To facilitate this process, it is essential to formalise the role of a boundary spanner and lay the conditions for iterative work between scientists and cities practitioners. Finally, the research highlights a set of necessary factors for efficient participatory research commonly cited in academic literature on science and policy interactions.

Key word: Urban transformation; Science-policy interface; Decision support tool; Boundary spanning

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