

“Regional development and health” – the example of the city of Bielefeld and the counties of Gütersloh and Lippe: successful meetings of science and public?

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Background: Urban/rural development and planning procedures offer multiple opportunities for health protection, exposure prevention, and health promotion, e.g. via personal mobility (1, 2). Epidemiological methods can help anticipate health implications of development scenarios and assist public involvement. Internationally, Health Impact Assessment methodology and procedures are being used for this purpose (2, 3).

Data and methods: Taking the site of this year's DG Epi meeting as an example, we investigate the following questions: What role does “health” play in the debate on regional development? What are the relevant documents, topics, actors, and processes, esp. regarding “science meets public”? Is there a role for “integrated programs”, e.g. Healthy cities or Local agenda 21? – This exploratory analysis is based on internet information concerning the city of Bielefeld as well as the counties of Gütersloh and Lippe, and follows the format of a series of similar local/regional studies.

Results: The interconnections between regional development and health in Bielefeld and environs include a strong focus on health and (psychiatric) disability care, a distinct “spa” culture, academic research and training, promotion of innovations in the health sector, and provision of information and expertise. Local health conferences and health reporting procedures are established. Approaches of communication with the public include scenario development (“Bielefeld 2050”), workshops (“Stadtentwicklungstage”, urban development days), and excursions (“demographic city tour”). The city of Detmold is involved in the Healthy cities network.

Discussion: The information available is not enough to assess the effectiveness of efforts to cross-link regional development and health, including “science meets public” approaches. There is, however, a definite potential to improve existing links, including the use of epidemiology, reporting, benchmarking and impact procedures. – Preliminary results are being used as a basis for a more comprehensive dialogue with local government and other relevant actors.

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