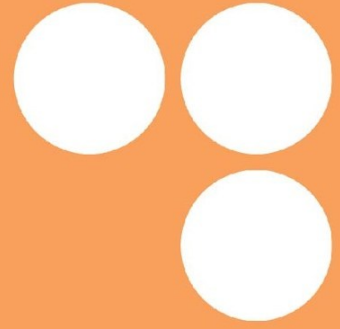


TWIN2EXPAND



STAKEHOLDERS MEETING 01

REPORT
13-14 SEPTEMBER 2023, NICOSIA

twinning towards
research excellence
in evidence-based planning
and urban design



TWIN2EXPAND hosted the first Stakeholder meeting of the project in Cyprus. In this meeting members of the TWIN2EXPAND team from University of Cyprus, University College London and Chalmers University of Technology presented the project, to highlight what EBDP is and its potential for planning and design. Examples of how EBDP is applied in policy and practice in other countries were showcased as well as spatial models, integrated urban models and development projects.

Over the course of this two-day event, TWIN2EXPAND engaged with two distinct groups of stakeholders. The initial day was devoted to the practitioner's group, a cohort consisting of 19 individuals representing T2E project members and practitioners from diverse professional backgrounds. On the subsequent day, a select group of representatives from professional and decision-making bodies joined the T2E team for discussions.

The agenda for both days was structured into five segments. These segments encompassed a project overview, an introduction to EBDP, an exploration of the T2E research and methodology, real-world examples of EBDP in action, and a discussion session. This discussion period provided a valuable opportunity to gauge stakeholder interest in the project, solicit feedback, identify potential case studies that could benefit from TWIN2EXPAND's initiatives, and explore avenues for collaboration.

First day Stakeholders meeting outcomes

The first day of the Stakeholders meeting received a wide range of insights and feedback, with several prominent topics taking center stage during discussions with practitioners:

Question-Centric Evidence: Practitioners emphasized the critical role of the questions posed in shaping the evidence collected. It was underscored that while questions may change, the evidence itself remains a constant foundation.

Stability of Evidence: Some participants expressed confusion when distinguishing between evidence and data. The importance of understanding evidence as a system of interconnected facts was emphasized.

Context and Scale: It was raised that the significance and nature of evidence can vary based on the context and scale of analysis. Different questions may require examining facts from various perspectives or adjusting the scale of analysis.

Post-Occupancy Analysis: Interest was expressed in understanding the outcomes of projects after their implementation. Practitioners inquired about the use of forecasting models, recognizing that while forecasts may not always be entirely accurate, they generally have a positive impact by promoting the use of analytical tools.

Data Availability and Accessibility in the Cypriot Context: Accessibility to data emerged as a notable challenge. The unavailability of data for detailed integrated urban models in the Cypriot context was acknowledged, with hopes that information might become available and accessible over time into an integrated database.

Database Integration: Issues related to databases were raised, with a suggestion to connect them to the planning department. This integration could ensure that relevant data is readily available for practitioners.

Case Study Potential: Four potential case studies—Larnaka waterfront, Limassol, and Famagusta and Pedieos masterplans—were identified as candidates for examination.

Interpretation Challenges: Participants acknowledged a lack of platforms facilitating interpretation in projects. Concerns were raised about the potential need for consultancy to interpret results from sophisticated tools, potentially limiting their accessibility. Emphasis of T2E should be put to efforts to democratize tools and processes for wider use and understanding.

Interagency Collaboration: Collaboration among different agencies was emphasized as both a key factor for success and a challenge in the current landscape. The importance of fostering interagency cooperation was highlighted.

EBDP and influencing design and legislation: a particular proposal was moved forward as a way to question the relation of evidence and its potential relation to legislation. The creation of a map to analyze greenery distribution and canopy coverage in public and private properties is a valuable idea. This information can inform urban planning decisions, especially related to environmental sustainability, green infrastructure and the contradictions of present policies in the Cypriot context on hard surfaces coverage.

Key questions arising in the context of EBDP and influencing design and legislation included:

How can EBDP findings be effectively communicated to influence legislation and policy decisions? In relation to this question, representatives of NGOs pointed out that they want to act as the means of communication between stakeholders. However, they often find it difficult to access data and resources, as do municipalities.

What strategies can be employed to bridge the gap between research-based evidence and practical application by practitioners? In relation to this question, suggestions were made that there is a need for academia to work directly with practitioners and provide ad-hoc trainings for them. Additionally, user-friendly tools and summaries of research outputs are needed to guide the interpretation of results by practitioners.

Second day Stakeholders meeting outcomes

The second day of the stakeholders meeting received inquiries and feedback from representatives from professional and decision-making bodies. The topics highlighted included:

Active initiatives: The Existence of SUMP (Sustainable Mobility Plans) was highlighted. It was reported that the public works department is actively engaged in the creation of a digital twin of Cyprus and the gathering of associated data. Specifically, the digital twins for Limassol and Larnaka have been completed. There is ongoing work for the Nicosia one.

Barcelona declaration: Art 13 and 14 of the Barcelona declaration (to be soon co-signed by EU members) was highlighted as relevant to the T2E project. The Articles states:

“(we)

13. SHOULD PROMOTE data-driven approaches that allow for evidence-based policy-making, resources allocation, and tracking of implementation, ensuring that transportation solutions effectively cater to the needs of all individuals, especially those who may encounter barriers to access and affordability.
14. SHOULD STRONGLY ENCOURAGE progress in technology and digital transformation, such as smart transportation systems, real-time analytics, data sharing environment and mobile applications that can enhance the efficiency, reliability and resilience of mobility and transport services and thereby the user experience of transportation services.”

Reliability on Empirical data and intuition: It was acknowledged that public authorities often rely on empirical data and intuition for decision making rather than on evidence.

Implementation of projects: It was acknowledged that often, the process for selection of plans for implementation does not include the option to re-examine the designs in case of underperforming projects. Even when municipal officials have access to many different design alternatives, they typically only showcase the one that was ultimately chosen, without providing a clear rationale for that choice or presenting the other design solutions that were considered.

Public consultation and Community Involvement: On this topic the discussion revolves around the challenges and possibilities of inclusion of communities in design processes. The topics highlighted included: understanding community needs, participation involvement & trainings and leveraging local expertise.

Driving culture: When addressing the reasons for Cyprus's public transport problems, a prevalent response often attributes these issues to cultural traits rather than recognizing potential flaws within the transport system itself. This perspective tends to overlook the deeper analysis and examination of the problems at hand. Nonetheless, there is an acknowledgment that prioritizing pedestrian safety is essential, indicating a recognition of one key aspect of the issue.

Case Study Potential: Specific case studies were suggested in the context of Nicosia. These suggestions included: Pedieos, SUMP, Latsia strategic planning, green spaces in Engomi, pedestrianization of old city core and industries hub, the Cyprus Expo.

The two-day meetings highlighted that Cyprus stands as fertile ground for the exploration and implementation of Evidence-Based Design and Planning (EBDP). The engaging discussions during this stakeholders meeting illuminated both the challenges and opportunities that may lie ahead.

Considering the project's commitment to advancing Evidence-Based Design and Planning (EBDP) in Cyprus, the T2E team is poised to propose a forward-looking strategy and a roadmap for potential engagement in specific projects. To facilitate this endeavor, the team will consider key actions, including:

Creation of a Comprehensive Database: initiating the development of a comprehensive database encompassing areas undergoing development or currently under construction, with a special focus on highlighting important planned developments.

Mapping of Development Areas: a mapping initiative aimed at providing a visual representation of the areas currently undergoing development. This mapping effort would enable the team to gain a comprehensive understanding of the current situation.

Engagement with the Technical Chamber of Cyprus: The team will establish communication channels with the Cyprus Scientific and Technical Chamber. This communication may enable the team to gain access to project prioritization processes and provide essential support in promoting evidence-based design and planning to the legislative body.

Feedback evaluation from stakeholders

Feedback for evaluation of the meeting was collected from stakeholders informally through follow-up communication by the Project Coordinator and UCY team members.

The feedback both during and after the sessions was generally positive, highlighting that the content of the meetings had high relevance to practitioners, more than they had expected. In fact, one practitioner said: “we never thought it would be this interesting, we thought it was going to be the usual [academic] theatre... we didn't realise it was going to be like this...”.

Practitioners expressed interest in partnering with the project and contributing to the development of EBDP analytical methods. Interest is even greater if the project case studies include projects that the practitioners' offices are participating in. The tools presented were deemed to be more useful and clearly

applicable to larger scale projects; any efforts towards mainstreaming of such tools should commence through interaction with the Cyprus Scientific Chamber. It was also highlighted that the integration of socio-spatial aspects in analyses of development projects is likely to bring the greatest benefits toward sustainability, especially through sustainability studies to determine optimal building programmes in terms of uses and scales.

Representatives of the public sector believed that cooperation with the project would have synergistic benefits in the urban environment and would lead to a reduction in overlapping of studies and duplication of research while deepening know-how.