



Didier Vancutsem is an international expert with large experience in Urban and Regional Planning, Landscape Planning, Infrastructure, Environmental Management and Integrated Strategies. He holds engineer and master degrees in City and Regional Planning, Landscape Architecture and Regional management. Based in Munich / Germany, he operates as Office Director at urban scape Munich and conducts also research activities in European and international projects. He is Associate Professor / Lecturer at the Université Libre de Bruxelles / Faculty of Architecture, University of Applied Sciences Munich-Weihenstephan, Université de Lille, Higher Institute of Town Planning Brussels and at the Technical University Perm / Faculty of Architecture.



Since October 2013, he is Secretary General of the International Society of City and Regional Planners - ISOCARP. He is also member of different professional societies, honorary appointments in Europe and worldwide, AESOP representative and IFLA Europe Delegate.

### **What are the topical soil and land research needs of planners in Europe and globally?**

As Secretary General of ISOCARP, representing an international non-governmental organisation of urban planners – and practicing urban planning every day –, I am convinced that the topics of land and soil are essential for all of us, researchers, as well as all other actors of urban and rural development. Soil and Land do relate directly to our urban systems; we need to research about the interactions between land value and urban development, about the connections between ecosystem services and urban management, the relations between urban and rural systems, as well as the all complex of circular economy, soil and land value.

**“I am convinced that the topics of land and soil are essential for all of us”**

Moreover, this is strongly relates to the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda decided in Quito in October 2016 and to the climate change challenges discussed recently in Bonn at COP23. The links are clear to the SDG 12 with the Food Security and the question of soil management, Goal 13 with climate action and our problems with land management and urban sprawl, Goal 15 with Life on Land, and of course with Goal 11 with sustainable cities. All those Goals have to be integrated in our National Policies and reported to the next global level. A first test will be the next World Urban Forum in Kuala Lumpur February 2018, where Member States will adopt further implementation steps.

### **The INSPIRATION project aimed at developing a strategic research agenda for spatial planning, land-use and soil management. What was your specific motivation to become a member of the International Advisory Board of such a project?**

It was first my interest to discuss the issues of land and land use on an interdisciplinary level and on the European level; we still are not able to discuss and make achievements because the topics and responsibilities of land use and soil management are so diverse and crosscutting. At the end, nobody feels



responsible for this – but we have to stop our silo thinking, and therefore the integrated approach is the only one valuable for those so crucial topics. Also, we need more integrated approach to address our societal challenges and achieve the SDGs, as mentioned earlier.

I know cases in our planning practice, where we have regular conflicts of interest between natural protection, economic development of our cities and land speculation. An integrated approach is helping us to find the right arguments and right explanations towards a balanced and sustainable territorial development – this should not happen only on the local level, but also the metropolitan level is very important, maybe more than the local.

**“INSPIRATION is outstanding due to its interdisciplinary and bottom-up approach”**

Another aspect, which was interesting for me, was the bottom-up approach, with a strong involvement of the end-users. As a practitioner and participant in several EU projects, I realised that it never helps to have a top-down approach – proposals are not accepted, or tend to not be respected or implemented, because of the impression to take wrong decisions. We are still doing mistakes in our territorial development, and top-down processes are not the appropriate ways to develop balanced policies.

**Such a bottom-up approach seems to lend itself to the end-users. However, do you see disadvantages or risks in comparison to a more literature based review of research gaps?**

Well, I can tell you that a bottom-up agenda is better able to bring real needs to the point – but also it needs of course to be transferred or transmitted to the upper level; therefore I would say that the governmental or ministry level, or even the European level has to be strongly involved in the process. Ideally, we have the cooperation between bottom-up and top-down experts, together with researchers and practitioners.

**What advice have you regarding the implementation of the INSPIRATION agenda. Usually, we expect funders do decide, but what can each of us do?**

A very important aspect will be the dissemination of the results – each of us should know about INSPIRATION. But it has to be more: results should be integrated in legal instruments, such as a soil directive, or integrated in environmental impact assessment processes, in land use plans, in future climate change master plans and processes.

**What do you think is the most important topic identified in the INSPIRATION SRA?**

The most important topic is for me the raising awareness that our soil and land is a finite resource and that we have to find the right processes if we want to keep our urban ecosystems in good shape for our next generations. The challenges are so high; it would not be wise not to do it.

**“Our soil and land is a finite resource!”**