

PUBLICATIONS OF THE ACADEMY OF FINLAND 5/02

Research Programme for Urban Studies 1998-2001

EVALUATION REPORT



ACADEMY OF FINLAND

PUBLICATIONS OF THE ACADEMY OF FINLAND 5/02

Research
Programme for
Urban Studies
1998-2001
EVALUATION REPORT

Academy of Finland in brief

The Academy of Finland is an expert organisation on research funding. The Academy seeks to enhance the high standard of Finnish research by long-term research funding, by expertise in science and science policy, and by strengthening the status of science in society at large.

The main focus of the Academy's development activities is on improving professional research career opportunities, providing preconditions for high-quality research environments and utilising international opportunities in all fields of research, research funding, and science policy.

The Academy's operations cover all scientific disciplines, from archaeology to space research, cell biology to psychology, and electronics to environmental research.

The wide range of high-level basic research funded by the Academy provides a sound basis for innovative applied research and the exploitation of new knowledge.

For more information on the Academy of Finland go to www.aka.fi/eng/.

Layout: PixPoint ky

Photo: futureimagebank.com

ISBN 951-715-390-2 (print)

ISBN 951-715-391-0 (pdf)

ISSN 0358-9153

Painopörssi Oy, Helsinki 2002

Contents

Preface	5
1 Evaluation Procedure	7
2 URBS Research Programme	8
2.1 Background of the Programme	8
2.2 Description of the Programme	8
2.3 Objective of the Programme	9
2.4 Funding of the Programme	10
3 Evaluation	11
3.1 Functioning of the Programme	11
3.2 Evaluation of Scientific and Administrative Co-ordination	12
3.3 Scientific Activity, Production, Progress and Relevance	13
Recommendations	16
Appendix 1	17
Appendix 2	18

Preface

The Research Programme for Urban Studies (URBS) was launched in 1998. The aim of the programme was to coordinate multidisciplinary urban studies in an attempt to interpret and understand the national and international processes at work in urbanisation, the problems accompanying urban change, and the networking trend among European cities, in order to establish a Finnish urban policy.

The Research Programme for Urban Studies was planned by three Research Councils at the Academy of Finland: the Research Council for Culture and Society, the Research Council for Natural Sciences and Engineering and the Research Council for Environment and Natural Resources; eight ministries, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Transport and Communications, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, and the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities.

The programme was led by a steering committee which was composed of representatives of the funding bodies of the programme and the scientific community. The steering committee followed up the work of the programme and directed the research when necessary to ensure that the objectives are met. The organisation responsible for programme coordination was the University of Turku.

The research work in Urban Studies was carried out in 15 research projects by over 50 researchers in more than 20 research units around the country.

In December 2001, the Research Council for Biosciences and Environment (former Research Council for Environment and Natural Resources) carried out an international evaluation of the URBS Programme and invited three independent internationally acknowledged experts to conduct the evaluation. The experts were: Professor Susan Smith, University of Edinburgh, Professor Arnold R. Alanen, College of Agricultural & Life Sciences, Madison and Professor Doreen Massey, The Open University, Milton Keynes. Ms. Virpi Kekäläinen, M.Sc., from the University of Turku acted as expert secretary for the evaluation.

The evaluators were asked to focus their evaluation on the following issues in particular:

- the functioning of the programme
- evaluation of the scientific and administrative co-ordination of the programme
- scientific activity, production, progress and impact
- recommendations for the future (including the grounds for recommendations)

This publication includes the report of the experts of the evaluation. It is based on the written material and personal observations by the experts. On the behalf of the Academy of Finland I wish to thank the invited experts for their valuable work.

Markku Löytönen

Chair of the Steering Committee
of the Research Programme

1 Evaluation Procedure

The evaluation process included a two-day visit to Finland by one expert during December 13-15, 2001 and remote work based on the material sent to the other experts in December 2001 - February 2002. During the visit this expert had the opportunity to hear presentations of researchers/grant holders of the projects. There were also discussions with representatives of financial providers, researchers/grant holders of the projects, the co-ordinator of the programme and representatives of the Academy of Finland.

The evaluation report is based on the representations and discussions mentioned above and the following material:

- URBS programme's publication *URBS, Research Programme for Urban Studies – Programme Book I*.
- The self-evaluation reports of the thirteen projects with information on the programme contribution of the projects, co-operation from the intra-consortium level to the international level, a list of publications and other progress of the projects.
- The abstracts of the articles for the forthcoming *URBS Book II* which is the final report of the URBS programme.
- The report of the evaluation panel that selected the projects into the programme, and the description of the progress of the evaluation process at its early stage.
- The description of the meetings and workshops arranged by the URBS programme during 1998–2000.
- The briefing by the official of the Academy of Finland

The evaluation focused on the following issues in particular:

1. The functioning of the programme
 - a) Concordance with the objectives of the research programme
 - b) Added value of the programme
 - c) Combination of the projects
 - d) Interactions between the projects
2. Evaluation of the scientific and administrative co-ordination of the programme
3. Scientific activity, production, progress and impact
 - a) Scientific competence of the participating teams and senior researchers
 - b) Scientific quality, innovativeness and relevance of the research projects
 - c) Importance of the programme for researcher training and development of the research environment
 - d) Importance of the programme from the viewpoint of the end-users of the results
 - e) Impact on and relevance to society
4. Recommendations for the future (including the grounds for recommendations)

2 URBS Research Programme

2.1 Background of the Programme

Urban studies had been promoted by the Academy of Finland through a research programme entitled 'Prospects for Finnish Localities', carried out in 1989-1993. This programme came at a time when the post-industrial restructuring of localities was still in the early stages. Since then there has been an explosive increase in the number of new problems. Some of the main problem areas in urban studies of the 1990s included the following: the city as an area (its spreading, infrastructure, urban environment); economic issues (the future of the urban economy and networking); social problems (unemployment, segregation, marginalisation, suburbs, insecurity); the general urban trend (the urbanisation process); urban regeneration; and the search for a new identity.

Since the 1990s, a number of scientific communities and ministries had been expressing an interest in the execution of an urban studies project within the framework of some broader research programme. In 1998, the Academy of Finland launched the 'Research Programme for Urban Studies' (URBS). In order to establish a Finnish urban policy, the aim of this programme was to co-ordinate multidisciplinary urban studies in an attempt to interpret and understand the national and international processes at work in urbanisation, the problems accompanying urban change, and the networking trend among European cities.

2.2 Description of the Programme

The programme had 15 major research projects, selected on the basis of competition and scientific merits. Each of the 15 projects consisted of several individual case studies. The research teams involved in the programme represented architecture and technical sciences, regional and social sciences, humanities, and landscape and environmental sciences from more than 20 academic or research departments. The projects of the URBS programme are listed under the three approaches in Appendix 1. A total of 41 PhD students and 10 postdoctoral researchers were completely or partly funded by the programme. In addition, several Master's students were involved in the programme. The programme was co-ordinated by Professor Harri Andersson from the University of Turku, Department of Geography.

The Urban Studies Research Programme concentrated on six main theme areas, which were approached via a variety of disciplines. Three topics were oriented mainly towards the urban system including its regional and spatial dimension. These topics were:

1. Internationalisation of the city and the urban system
2. The "regionality" of towns and interaction with the environment
3. New use of urban space

The other three topics concentrated more exclusively on the actors influencing urban development:

Contents

4. Urban life: its threats and opportunities
5. The cities as innovative environments
6. The new urban economy and change management

The theme areas were not mutually exclusive and have been treated interactively. The programme also had three main approaches, which focused on the programme's theme areas. The approaches and the theme areas relating to them were as following:

- Cultural/environmental approach (theme areas 2, 3, 5)
- Social approach (theme areas 4, 6)
- Political/economic approach (theme areas 1, 6)

Many of the URBS research projects have been active in fostering international co-operation. This includes work with collaboration partners, participation in conferences, seminars, postgraduate courses and participation in international programmes and other collaboration with universities, research institutes and research centres. The projects of the URBS programme had international contacts with partners mainly from Sweden (9), United Kingdom (9), Germany (3), Netherlands (3) and USA (3). Many international conferences and seminars were also arranged in Finland (5), and some projects were involved in international research programmes (5). On the whole, the projects had international co-operation with partners from 18 countries. For information on publication activity of the projects, see Appendix 2 (Figures 1 and 2).

Synergy and co-operation among projects were achieved through seminars and workshops arranged by the URBS programme and project participants. Inter-consortia collaboration was especially active among projects with a cultural/environmental approach. The projects had also programmatic co-operation with other jointly funded research programmes of the Academy of Finland, such as the Finnish Biodiversity Research Programme (FIBRE), the Research Programme on Marginalisation, Inequality and Ethnic Relations in Finland (SYREENI), the Research Programme for Health and Other Differences between Population Groups (TERO), with projects from the targeted call Spaces for Nature and Culture, and with the Future Home Graduate School (University of Art and Design Helsinki).

2.3 Objective of the Programme

The objective of the research programme was to yield information on ongoing urban changes: internationalisation, urban policy and administration, the urban economy, urban life, regional development, and the environment. When analysing the changes the objective was also to forecast future urban trends, establish the procedures required in urban planning decision-making, and determine various approaches.

The programme stressed the importance of a multidisciplinary approach. The foci of the particular interest areas were the projects or consortia which sought to gain an overall picture – either long-term or short-term – of a specific urban problem, and to produce results by engaging in research in many different fields.

Contents

One of the important objectives of the programme was to create opportunities for postgraduate training. The programme also sought to promote projects that facilitate postdoctoral education as a means of training persons with doctorates for employment in business and administration. Another aim of the programme was to benefit decision-making by presenting applied information or proposals for solving practical urban problems.

2.4 Funding of the Programme

The Research Council for Environment and Natural Resources (Research Council for Biosciences and Environment at present), the Research Council for Culture and Society, and the Research Council for Natural Sciences and Engineering took all part in the programme. Seven ministries and the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities also participated in the execution and financing of the programme. The Research Programme for Urban Studies had a total budget of EUR 2.5 million (this amount does not include funding provided by the research site and other external funding supporting programme activities). For more detailed information on funding, see Appendix 2 (Figure 3).

3 Evaluation

3.1 Functioning of the Programme

a) Concordance with Objectives

The programme had a broad range of objectives, cross cut by six key themes and three 'approaches' to the subject matter. This makes for an ambitious set of targets. Given the limitations of time and resources, the experts would not expect every target to be met in full.

Overall, the experts find that most of the intellectual objectives of the programme have been achieved. There is perhaps less engagement with debates on europeanisation and internationalisation (and on the place of Finland within these) than might have been anticipated. However, more of these issues may be evident in the finished reports, and there will certainly be interest in them among the international community.

The practical achievements of the programme are also welcomed in meeting the needs of ministries and impacting on debate on Finnish urban and public policy.

In particular, the following aspects are commended:

- The breadth and range of coverage of urban topics. This far-reaching programme specification enabled some important and imaginative links to be made across many disciplines, including the natural sciences.
- The inclusion of an unusually rich spread of disciplines.
- The serious weight attached throughout the programme to factors other than the economic. All too frequently these other factors can be underplayed.
- The role of the programme in supporting postgraduate (doctoral) research. This commitment to postgraduate training is to be applauded, though greater acknowledgement needs to be made by the funding bodies of the time and money this requires if it is to be done properly.
- An intention to make international links and raise the profile of Finnish urban studies. Success here demands more resources than the programme had at its disposal, and this makes what has been achieved all the more significant.

b) Added Value of the Programme

The diversity of the programme is testimony to what can be achieved by allowing individual researchers' ideas and imaginations to triumph over strictly prescribed programme structures. The experts welcome this, appreciating the greater openness to new ideas and directions it allows, compared to the more tightly prescribed thematic research initiatives that sometimes take place in other jurisdictions.

Contents

Nevertheless, this strategy has given a slightly 'bitty' feel to the programme as a whole, which is compounded by researchers' attempts to respond positively to the variety of interests among funders. This may explain why the experts gained the impression that ministries, in particular, are more interested in the specific findings of individual projects than in the impact of the programme as a whole. This response may at best be a product of the limited time yet available for reflection on the programme as whole, and at worst it may be a little shortsighted. The experts feel that there are several ways in which the 'whole' of the programme may be thought of as greater than the sum of the parts. These include:

- Establishing a field of urban studies in Finland which is intellectually innovative, has a clear practical dimension and says something important about urban futures generally as well as engaging with particular and immediate concerns.
- Bringing a Finnish perspective, and drawing Finnish experiences, into the wider international arena of urban studies – an area of work which has come to increasing prominence during the period of globalisation.

In both respects, and particularly (so far) the first, the outcome is impressive – the more so for the short time period over which the programme ran.

3.2 Evaluation of Scientific and Administrative Co-ordination

a) Administration (funders and funding body)

The desire to respond to a wide range of demands, and perhaps to draw on multiple sources of funding, may account for the overall complexity of the programme. A very large number of bodies are involved at the top level, and there is a complicated structure of research interests (themes, approaches, consortia, etc.). There can be a danger that the structures are top-heavy and constricting; that too many different demands are placed on the researchers; and that there is insufficient space for intellectual flexibility (this last is particularly important when the intent is to establish a field, and in a context in which – as the programme itself argues – the very concept of a 'city' is being re-thought). Therefore as much organisational lightness and flexibility as possible should be maintained.

It appears that, once the research was under way, the projects functioned well, and that contacts with funders were on the whole positive and non-disruptive. The main tension to surface was that between policy-oriented requirements by funders and the researchers' need to develop more theoretical ideas. Such a tension is almost inevitable, and can indeed, if handled well, be productive. What it requires is time and resources for adequate development and communication.

b) Scientific Co-ordination

Researchers on the programme indicated that some useful links and collaborations within and across disciplines were promoted by the programme structure, particularly at the outset. Despite these positive initial experiences, researchers would have

Contents

welcomed more interaction during the programme, particularly of a type that forced them to work outside their existing networks. One area that could benefit from this is architecture, which finds itself caught between the technical sciences on the one hand, and arts and humanities on the other. The kind of inter- and intra-group interaction which might overcome this can work generally towards a more supportive research environment; it can also be cost-effective in producing research synergies and in promoting greater 'ownership' of the programme as a whole.

The experts wonder whether enough resources were set aside for this aspect of the programme. In other jurisdictions it would be usual to have a budget for regular meetings and exchanges among different projects within a programme, and also to secure regular input from advisory and/or steering groups.

3.3 Scientific Activity, Production, Progress and Relevance

a) Scientific Competence of Researchers

The experts had little detailed information on individual researchers and were not able to comment fully on the issue of individual scientific competence. However, it is clear that the general level of competence is high; that researchers have a good working knowledge of their field; and that there are some outstanding individuals involved in the programme.

b) Scientific Quality of Research Projects

Obviously the main body of research output for the programme is written in Finnish and the English-speaking experts were not able to assess this in detail. This means that for most projects the experts were unable to say anything about the details of project design, data collection, analysis or methodology more generally. For the most part, the experts relied on summaries, some of which are more extended than others.

It was noted, however, that the funded projects were selected on the basis of competition and review, which in itself is an important prerequisite of quality control.

Overall, and insofar as the experts were able to judge, the programme has produced a wide range of scientific achievements, with some very impressive projects. The mix of, and variation among, experimental and innovative small projects (on one hand) and more standard but substantial enquiries (on the other) is productive.

Many of the project reports indicate that there are more findings to come, and it is clear that this review is taking place before the full achievements of the work are evident. It seems possible that some funders expect rather too much at this stage: a number of project reports stress that their impact will be felt over a longer term, and they may well be correct. This suggests the importance of supporting a period of reflection and dissemination, allowing researchers to capitalise on research synergies, and to draw out some of the more important common themes.

Such themes could make a useful opening section to *URBS Book II*. At the moment Book II has individual interesting chapters but needs an outline which places more emphasis on the coherence of the programme as a whole. This publication could also include a section on significant themes for new research.

Some of the emerging results are highly significant for policy debate in other countries. The experts stress that there is work here that should be made more available to an international audience. Examples include: the very real importance and effects of commitment to a substantial welfare state; the finding that the new form of growth in itself leads to polarisation; the necessarily contested nature of urban space(s).

c) Importance for Researcher Training

The programme has provided opportunities for nearly 100 Master's and PhD students. This is an excellent record, which makes a real contribution to the training of the next generation of urban researchers in Finland.

It seems a pity, however, that in many cases funding for young researchers was partial, and available over too short a period for the relevant training to be completed. This is not the best strategy for encouraging PhD completions, and it places extra pressure on senior researchers to try to find alternative funding. In the worst cases, good researchers may be forced to turn to other professions so that skills and knowledge built up through the programme are lost to other sectors.

It is possible that slightly larger project teams with small groups of PhD students could be a preferable funding model for young researchers. This at least could provide the possibility for peer group support among research students which could pay off in terms of self-confidence, completion strategies and future funding options.

Finally, researcher training needs would be better fulfilled with more attention to inter-group relations within the programme. Meetings, seminars, and other arenas in which to contribute to overall programme goals and findings would all be good practice in researcher training terms, and well as in relation to the overall productivity of the wider research programme.

d) Relevance and Importance to Users

The discussions with ministries indicated high overall satisfaction with individual project findings. The ministries also appeared to welcome the focus this programme has given to new discussions among policy-makers about urban development in Finland.

The provisional and partial nature of some of the project reports, together with the ministries' thirst for more input, suggest that there is demand for wider and more detailed dissemination of findings to policy-makers. There is a strong case for allocating extra resources to this process.

Communication among funders, users, and researchers seems good, and this in itself is conducive to the most productive use being made of the findings. However, it is

regrettable that at the same time as arguing for more funding for urban research, and for more policy-directed work in this area, the ministries do not currently have plans to co-operate with the Academy of Finland to take this work forward.

e) Impact and Relevance to Society

It is very early to make statements about the full impact of a complex research programme like this, which has produced so many findings in such a short time. A period of fuller analysis, reflection and dissemination is important if the Academy and policy-makers are to get the most return on their investment into this initiative. The potential impact is high, and the programme findings are an important resource for Finnish urban development.

Care has been taken from the outset of the programme to ensure its wider relevance to issues of interest and concern to Finnish society. The wide coverage of the programme ensures that some input is possible into most key policy areas. Some of the best projects have brought to light the size and significance of some important and neglected policy issues. An attention to wider conceptual and theoretical matters means there is potential to engage in key international debates on a wider Nordic, European and global stage. There is, in other words, a good balance between theoretical sophistication and practical relevance, which suggests that the programme will stand the test of time.

Recommendations

1. To make the most of the investment that has already been made into this programme, resources could usefully be devoted to further reflection on what can be learned from it. It might be beneficial to consider funding meetings, seminars, or other forms of active networking which might pull the programme together more, bring out some common threads, and begin to point ahead to an agenda for further research. Such investment might draw out the full added value of having such a wide and complex programme.
2. This would lead into a wider and more active process of dissemination. There is much in this programme which could have resonance with a wider international audience. Serious attention should be given to dissemination in order to ensure that this potential is fulfilled.
3. The two previous recommendations point to the significance of URBS Book II, on the outline of which we were also asked to comment. The common themes across the programme could make a useful opening section to this book. At the moment the outline indicates interesting individual chapters but needs also to consider the coherence of the programme as a whole. It could also point towards significant themes for new research.
4. Funding constraints have loomed large in this programme and have probably reduced the overall value for money secured from the researchers by funders. Some of the difficulties have been particularly acute for research students, and this is an issue that should be addressed with some urgency.
5. A strong case has been made for the importance of a Finnish urban research programme. This is recognised by practitioners and by researchers. The experts support this view and urges attention to a continuation programme of some kind.

Contents

Appendix 1

Projects of URBS Programme

Cultural/environmental approach

New use of urban space

The cities as innovative environments

The 'regionality' of towns and interaction with the environment

1. Public Space, Urban Development and Cultural Interaction (grant holder: Professor Kari Immonen)
2. Public Park Spaces in Urban Centres (grant holder: Professor Tom Simmons)
3. Ecology and Aesthetic in the Planning of Urban Green Spaces (grant holder: Professor Markku Kuitunen)
4. Urban-Rural and Rural-Urban Interplay (grant holder: Researcher Petri Kahila)
5. Theatre and the Changing Urban Municipalities in Helsinki (grant holder: Professor Pirkko Koski)
6. Process of Change of the Historical Town (grant holder: Professor Kaisa Broner-Bauer)

Social approach

Urban life: its threats and opportunities

The new urban economy and change management

7. Urban Social Problems in Finland (grant holder: Professor Seppo Siirilä)
8. Unemployment in the City (grant holder: Docent Kari Vähätalo)
9. Globalizing City in a Local Context (grant holder: Professor Hilikka Lehtonen)
10. From Suburb to Local Community (grant holder: Professor Heikki Kukkonen)
11. Towndwellers and Their Places (grant holder: Professor Anna-Maria Åstrom)

Political/economic approach

The new urban economy and change management

Internationalisation of the city and the urban system

12. Premises of Urban Governance: Past and Future (grant holder: Professor Pertti Haapala)
13. Changing Dynamics in Urban Economies, Differentiation of Local Labour Markets and New Forms of Local Governance (grant holder: Professor Perttu Vartiainen)
14. Economic Research Programme of the Finnish Urban Policy (grant holder: Director Esko Niskanen)
15. Regional Effects of High-Tech Industry (grant holder: Professor Rauli Svento)

Contents

Appendix 2

Publications of the projects

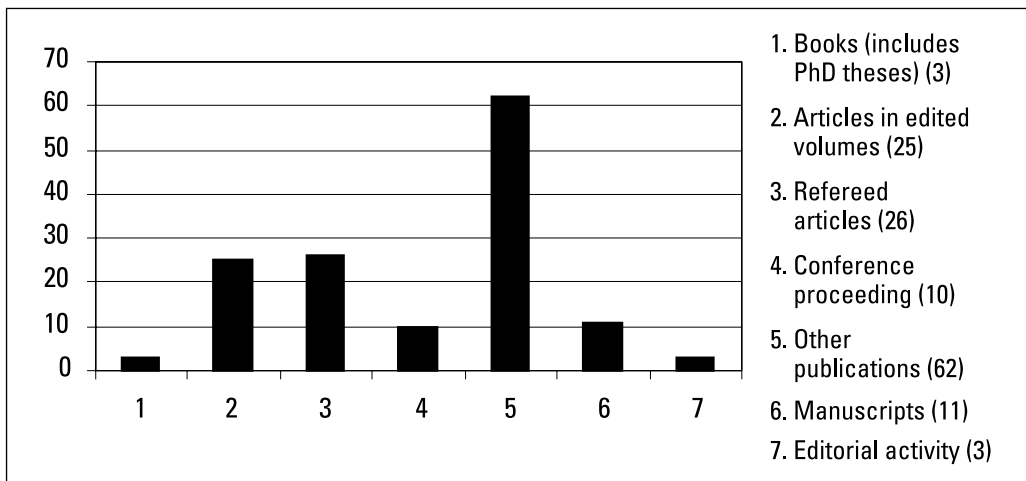


Figure 1. Finnish publications of URBS programme *.

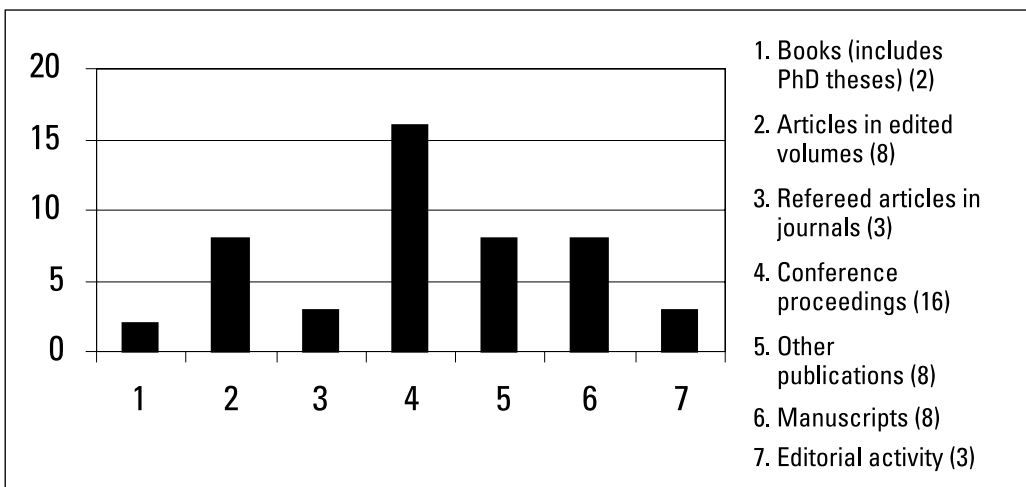


Figure 2. English publications of URBS programme *.

* Because of omissions in the self-evaluation form or lack of self-evaluation forms the figures (1 and 2) do not include information from three projects.

* The figures (1 and 2) include only publications from master's students, PhD students and post-doctoral researchers. The publications of grantholders or project leaders are not included.

Contents

Total funding of URBS programme 1998-2001

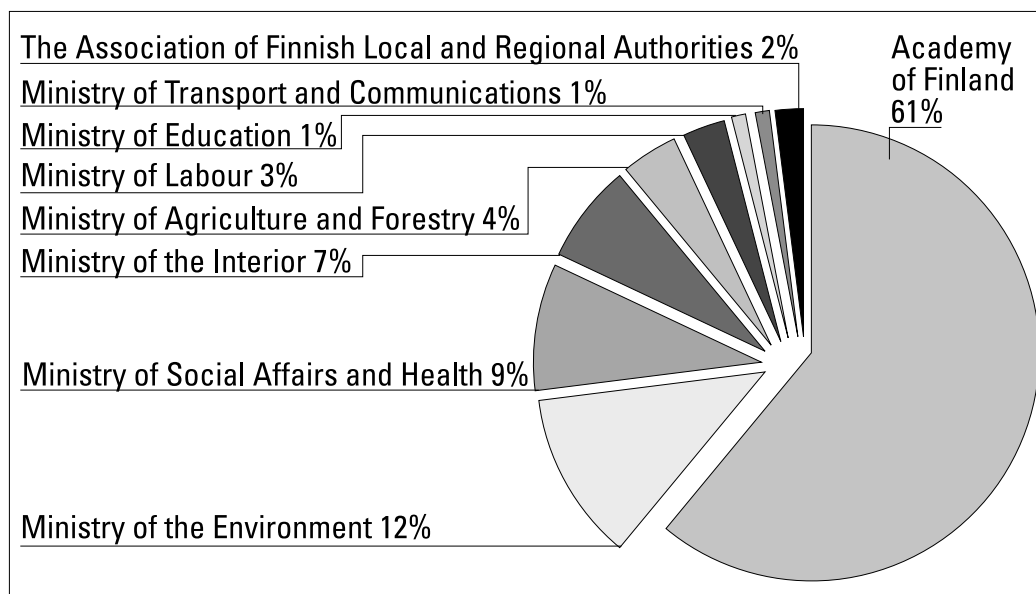



Figure 3. Total funding of URBS programme 1998-2001



The Academy of Finland's Research Programme for Urban Studies (1998-2001) has been evaluated by international experts. The research programme was carried out in 15 research projects by over 50 researchers and was funded by the Academy in co-operation with several ministries and the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities. The multidisciplinary programme aimed at yielding information on ongoing urban changes such as internationalisation, urban policy and administration, the urban economy, urban life, regional development, and the environment. The evaluation showed that the far-reaching programme specification provided important and imaginative links between many disciplines, including the natural sciences. The programme also contributed greatly to the training of the next generation of Finnish researchers on urban studies. The evaluation report recommends that more attention be given to wider dissemination of research findings to policy-makers.

ISBN 951-715-390-2 (print)
ISBN 951-715-391-0 (pdf)
ISSN 0358-9153

Orders:
Academy of Finland
P.O.Box 99, FIN-00501 Helsinki, Finland
Phone +358 9 7748 8346, Fax +358 9 7748 8372
viestinta@aka.fi
www.aka.fi