



Background paper for the International Cities Forum at the 2026 ‘Kieler Woche’ event

The International Cities Forum Kiel brings together stakeholders from Kiel's partner cities and neighbouring cities to discuss key future issues of urban development. The focus is on resilient, sustainable and socially just cities and the transfer of knowledge into municipal practice. The forum offers space for exchange and networking between representatives from politics, administration and science with the aim of jointly developing viable solutions for current and future challenges facing urban societies.

This year, the theme of the International Cities Forum is **‘Science as a driving force for innovative urban societies’**.

Science is an important location factor and driving force for urban and community development. It provides sound data, innovative solutions and evidence-based strategies – from climate protection and transport concepts to social integration and digital infrastructure. By collaborating with research institutions, local authorities can make evidence-based decisions, utilise resources efficiently and tap into new potential for sustainable projects. Scientific institutions also play an important role in training and attracting skilled personnel.

Science makes it possible to systematically address complex challenges such as demographic change or the energy transition. It strengthens competitiveness, promotes quality of life and, in the best case scenario, creates trust among citizens in municipal decisions. Citizens' trust in scientific methods and the decisions based on them can be strengthened by transparent communication of successes and findings and by actively involving the public in scientific projects (e.g. through citizen science). By strategically developing the city as a centre of science in the form of Kiel.Science.City, Kiel is pursuing the goal of bringing science, urban society, administration and politics closer together. In a multi-stage process for location profiling, visions, goals and concrete measures are being developed that will lead to a Kiel.Science.City master plan for sustainable urban development.

In parallel to the strategic development, Kiel and KielRegion, along with the cities of Brest in France and Split in Croatia, were honoured with the EU project ‘Science Comes to Town’ as 2026 European Science Ambassadors. The main focus of this project is on building and expanding trust in science and social responsibility, promoting innovation from science and

strengthening science-based decisions in politics and administrative action. All of Kiel's scientific institutions are active partners in the project and the strategic developments.

Successful cooperation between science and municipal practice is part of strategically developing the centre of science and of 'Science Comes to Town', which is why it has been chosen as the thematic focus for the International Cities Forum 2026. This collaboration requires customised formats: application-oriented, comprehensible, timely and based on specific issues. The aim is to effectively integrate scientific findings into decision-making processes and thus enable resilient, sustainable and future-oriented urban development.

During the International Cities Forum, we wish to engage in dialogue with representatives of our partner cities and friendly cities on the basis of specific questions, learn from one another using practical examples and discuss different approaches. How can cities and science work together to develop effective, robust and long-term solutions for current and future challenges, particularly with a view to democratic, socially sustainable and intergenerational urban development? How can scientific expertise support politicians and administrators in developing viable concepts and making well-founded decisions? How can cities safeguard centres of science and how can science be communicated in such a way that findings become visible, understandable and relevant for urban society?

These questions will be explored during the event in three parallel workshops. Based on practical examples, the participating cities will discuss solutions and tried-and-tested approaches as well as opportunities and risks. Each participant has the opportunity to choose a workshop. Two workshops will be offered in German and English, the third will be held in English. Consecutive translations into other languages will be provided by whispered interpreting. The workshops are part of a supporting programme consisting of a keynote speech, a dialogue discussion, the presentation of the workshop results and a concluding panel discussion.

The exact programme of the International Cities Forum can be found in the attached draft agenda.

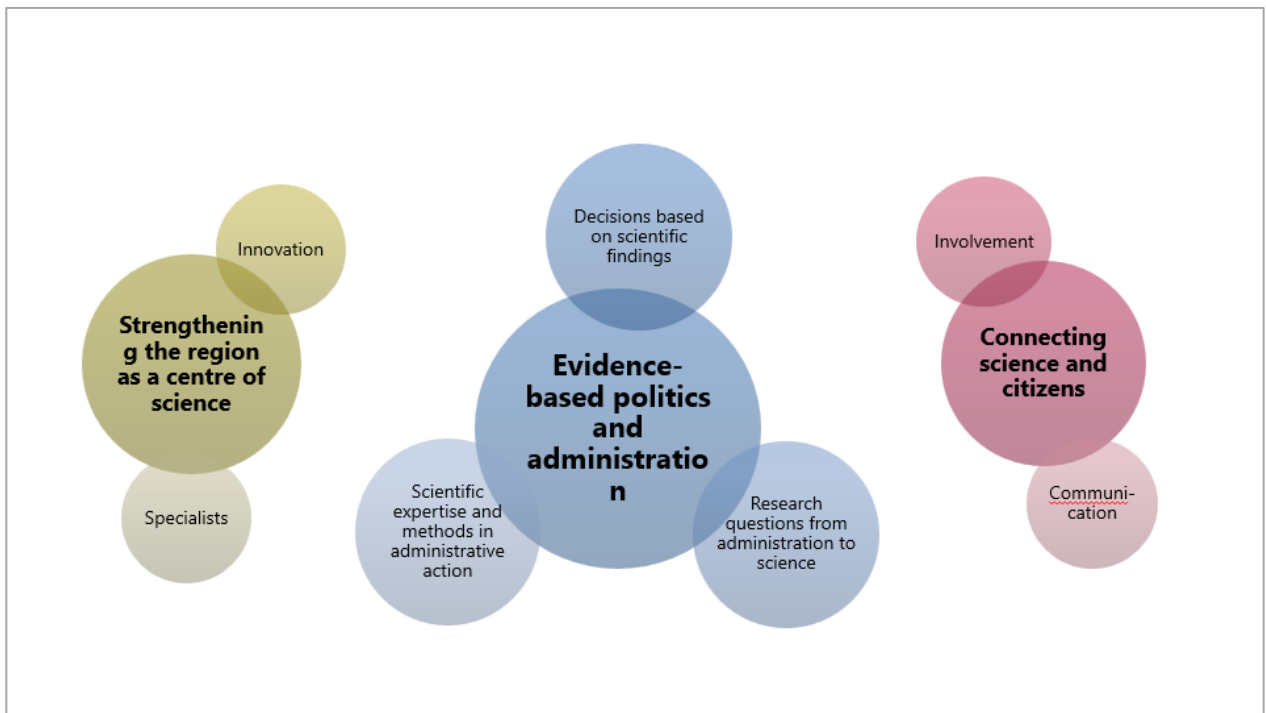


Figure 1: Proposed thematic priorities as a basis for the workshops

Workshop I: Evidence-based policy and administration

Evidence-based action in politics and administration means incorporating sound scientific findings into decisions and processes, thereby increasing effectiveness, transparency and efficiency and taking new approaches to solutions into account. Essentially, it is about organising public action in such a way that social goals are achieved in the best possible way. The impact assessment of measures also plays a role in minimising undesirable side effects.

Evidence-based action in politics and administration therefore requires methodological expertise, e.g. for upstream impact assessments or downstream scientific evaluations of decisions. Above all, local politics and administration need cooperation that addresses concrete challenges and is presented in a practical and understandable way, while scientific work is usually structured for longer periods of time and often deals with overarching, more abstract issues in larger contexts. In order to unite these interests, functioning structures for exchange are needed to discuss current knowledge and research questions and to realise joint projects.

The state capital of Kiel, for example, has scientifically evaluated and confirmed the use of additional special education staff in childcare centres and classroom support in primary schools. By participating in the 'Inter-municipal comparison of medium-sized cities in the area of educational support, integration support and protective measures' (IKOV), Kiel can compare performance data, cost structures and case numbers with other municipalities and implement better management by analysing impact factors. The fundamental aim is to improve economic efficiency and ensure that tasks are fulfilled. In the area of municipal infrastructure, the city of Kiel is cooperating with numerous scientific institutions to realise a semi-autonomous ferry for crossing the Schwentine – a river that flows into the Kiel Fjord. The technical development, design and concept come from Kiel universities.

Workshop 1 is based on the following key questions:

- How can scientific expertise support administrators in developing viable concepts and making well-founded decisions?
- How can scientific methods be successfully transferred into the day-to-day work of local government?
- How can municipal topics be systematically translated into research questions and integrated into administrative processes in a structured way?
- How can the city be made more resilient and safer with scientific support, especially with regard to crisis situations?
- How can evidence-based working methods be used to promote concrete progress in urban planning, mobility, climate, sustainability, social development, participation and the culture of remembrance?
- Where and how should exchange, discourse and communication between science, administration and urban society take place in order to be effective?

Workshop II: Strengthening the region as a centre of science

Scientific institutions play a key role for cities and regions, not least for their innovative strength and for attracting, retaining and training skilled workers. Even though universities in Germany are primarily financed by the state and third-party funding, cities and regions contribute to the success of academic institutions through housing, infrastructure and mobility connections, among other things. However, strengthening the centre of science goes beyond this; well-functioning networks between science, business and the city, and common goals and strategies play an important role in order to be able to optimally utilise the knowledge of scientific institutions for the development of the location.

Kiel is a diverse centre of science with four universities, where around 34,000 students are educated and 7,000 employees work. There are also other research institutes such as GEOMAR (ocean research), the Leibniz Institute for Science and Mathematics Education (IPN), the Kiel Institute for the World Economy (IfW) and the Max Rubener Institute, which specialises in nutrition and food. The science officers of the state capital of Kiel form the interface between the city and the scientific institutions and develop concepts and instruments to strengthen Kiel as a centre of science together with the universities, scientific institutions and other partners. The main areas of activity are the promotion, organisation and in particular the supervision of cooperation between the state capital Kiel and the scientific institutions, the implementation of joint projects and the support of the scientific institutions in their cooperation with the city administration.

Workshop 2 is based on the following key questions:

- How can science tie in with the reality of life in cities and effectively address local and regional challenges?
- How can scientific findings be communicated to specific target groups so that they become effective in urban society, administration and politics?
- How do city-science partnerships strengthen the science centre, secure skilled personnel and promote innovation?
- How can science centres be financed in the long term?
- How can the visibility of science be used to attract skilled personnel and strengthen innovation at the location?

Workshop III: Connecting science and citizens

The active involvement of citizens in research processes opens up new perspectives and increases the social relevance and acceptance of scientific projects as well as trust in science. When research is organised in a participatory way, questions and experiences that are close to everyday life can be taken into account – a benefit both for the quality of the research and for its social impact. Participation in research therefore encompasses many different forms of involvement. This can already be realised in research planning, in the implementation of research projects (citizen science) or through science communication. At the same time, it is

necessary to specifically strengthen the acceptance of scientific findings, as these are increasingly being questioned and relativised or scientific methods are not understood.

But how can broad involvement be achieved so that citizens feel addressed even without existing points of contact with science, and what role do formats, approaches and locations play in this? The 'Science Comes to Town' project also emphasises this issue and brings together citizen science projects, competitions, existing and new events. Examples of citizen-orientated activities include the Kiel Science Communication Network (KSCN) and the 'Workshop 20th century', where a new venue is being created for local history and remembrance, in which participation is encouraged.

Workshop 3 is based on the following key questions:

- Which formats and locations are suitable for anchoring science in urban society in an easy-access, interactive and tangible way and how can cities support this?
- How can science be communicated so that scientific findings become visible, understandable and relevant for urban society?
- How can scientific topics be presented in a practical way to facilitate an exchange of knowledge between science and urban society?
- How can municipal facilities, schools and third places be used to enable access and participation?