

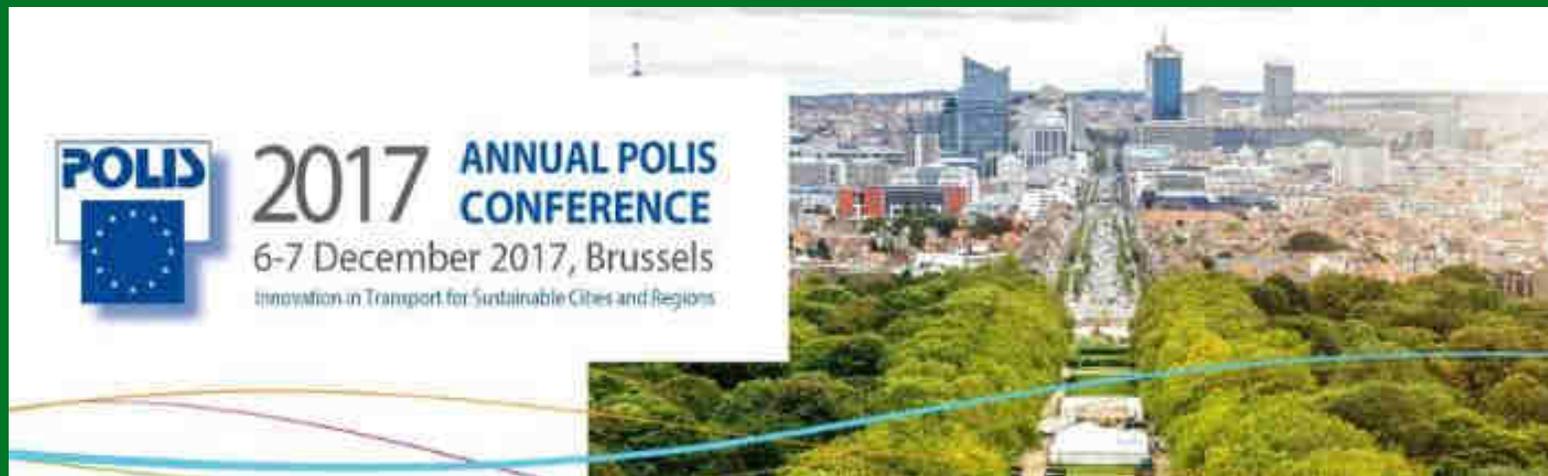
German Environment Agency

Umwelt 
Bundesamt

Annual Polis Conference

Bridging the gap between research and practice

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Section "Environment and Transport"



Bridging the gap means ...

... to connect two things or to make the difference between them smaller (Cambridge Dictionary)

... to have qualities of two different groups or things (Merriam-Webster)

... To serve as a point of connection between disparate people or groups (The Free Dictionary)

→ two words repeat: different & connect

Research and practice – two sides of the coin or insurmountable differences?

WHAT GAP?

This gap exists since research and practice are existing. But why?

- Researchers prefer producing knowledge over translating and disseminating it (Bansal et al. 2012; Van de Ven/ Johnson 2006)
- Practitioners represent information in different ways and use different language and strategies (Bansal et al. 2012; Kelemen/ Bansal 2002; Kieser/ Leiner 2009)



By Frits Ahlefeldt

→ Different incentives:

- Researchers are integrated in the research community, need quotations, publications, etc.
- Practitioners act in their institutional environment, focused on concrete duties and problems

Approaching bridging the gap

ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT BRIDGING

- Both groups emphasize the necessity of bridging
- Applied sciences like transport and traffic sciences or public health are assigned to provide orientation to practice
- Transport planning and policy is object of research but it is at the same time influenced by research paradigms and certain research findings
→ But this is not like bridging the gap and is not institutionalized!
- Based on personal motivation, one's one initiative
- Associated with much effort (following the academic discourse, „translating“ research findings: additionally to standard duties)

REASONS WHY BRIDGING IS NECESSARY

- Bridging increases the effectiveness and efficiency of practice and research
- Research is applied, gets feedback from the „reality“
- Practice gets up to date, gets feedback if routines are still adequate

**Bridging is
no sure-fire
success, it
needs much
effort and
continuous
work!**

Examples for bridging the gap: 1. The International Cycling Conference 2017

**19. – 21. SEPTEMBER 2017,
MANNHEIM, GERMANY**

- Subtitle: Bridging the gap between research and practice
- About 300 researchers and practitioners
- On Active Mobility

CONCEPT OF THE ICC

- 10 sessions with mixed speakers from research and practice
- PASTA (Physical Activity Through Sustainable Transport Approaches)
- THE PEP (Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme)
- HEAT tool



Source: Pressefoto Tröster

Did the concept work to bridge the gap?

CONCERNING THE SESSIONS: YES AND NO

- + The ICC started a process of bridging
- + Important questions were raised
- + Cooperation with the practice partner City of Mannheim
- Practitioners were underrepresented
- Presentations still were „classical“
- Bridging needs more space

- Important findings by testing this format!
- Process is continued

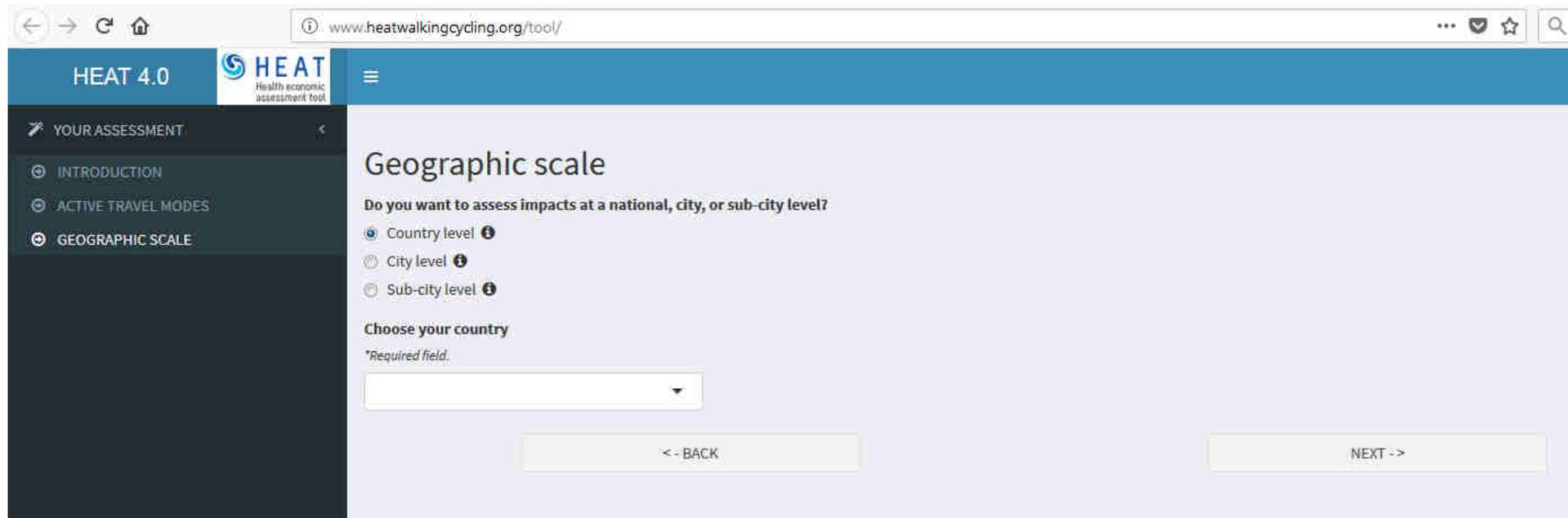


Source: Pressefoto Tröster

2. The HEAT tool

HEALTH ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR WALKING AND CYCLING

- By WHO (World Health Organization)
- Economic assessment of the health impacts of cycling and walking
- Users don't need methodic expertise
- Users fill in data guided by short instructions and receive compact results to use e.g. in transport and infrastructure planning



The screenshot shows the HEAT 4.0 web application interface. The browser address bar displays www.heatwalkingcycling.org/tool/. The page header includes the HEAT logo and the text "HEAT 4.0 Health economic assessment tool". A navigation menu on the left lists "YOUR ASSESSMENT", "INTRODUCTION", "ACTIVE TRAVEL MODES", and "GEOGRAPHIC SCALE". The main content area is titled "Geographic scale" and asks, "Do you want to assess impacts at a national, city, or sub-city level?". Three radio button options are provided: "Country level", "City level", and "Sub-city level". Below this, there is a section titled "Choose your country" with a dropdown menu and a note "*Required field:". At the bottom of the form, there are two buttons: "<- BACK" and "NEXT ->".

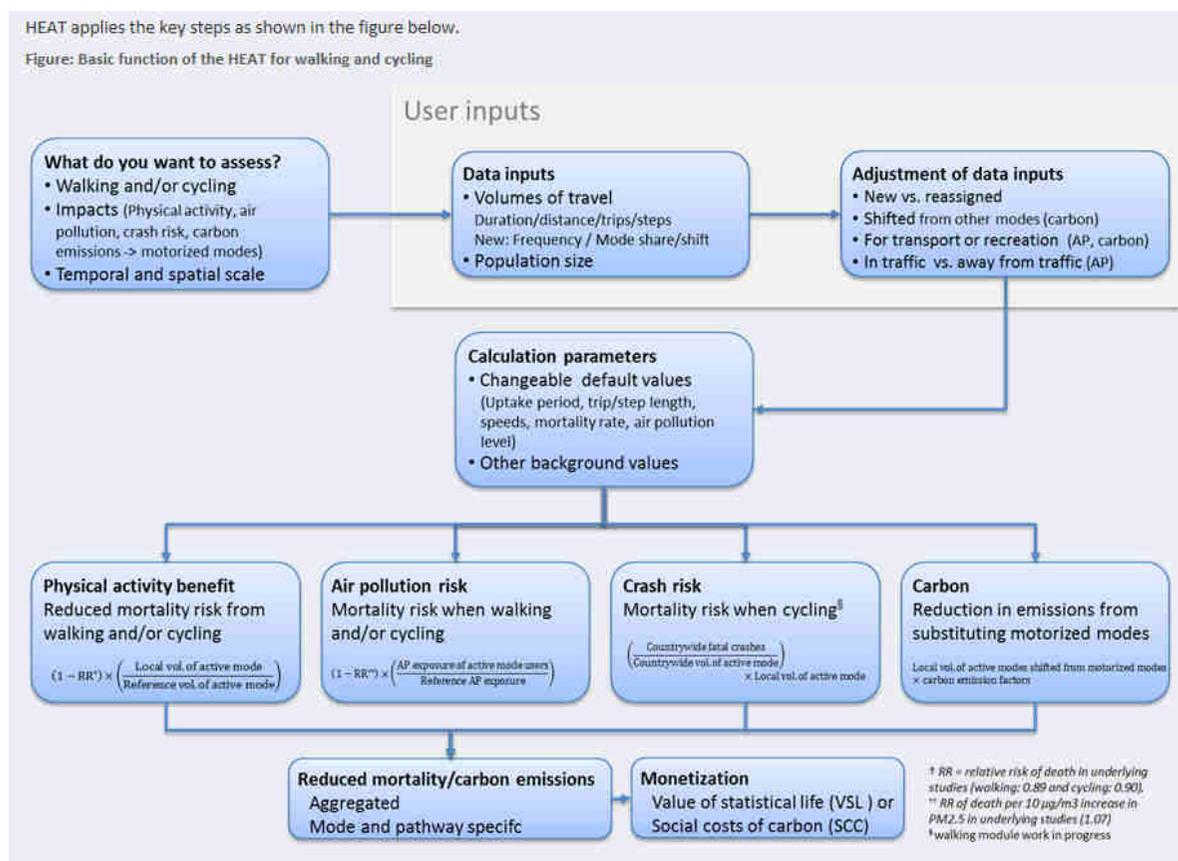
Source: www.heatwalkingcycling.org

Does the HEAT tool help to bridge the gap?

- + Easy to use
- + No methodic expertise necessary
- + Good example how to squeeze scientific knowledge into tools for practitioners

- Only in English (this is still a barrier for many administrative practitioners on local level)
- “Only” for health economic benefits → extension

→ Yes, the HEAT tool is the right approach



Source: www.heatwalkingcycling.org

Obstructive factors

PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

- People tend to prefer their own peer group (Ingroup bias)
- E.g. presentations of the ingroup are considered to have a better content and quality than those of the outgroup (Bansal et al. 2012)

TIME CONSTRAINTS

- Bridging needs time and resources: Need to understand the thinking of a practitioner or researcher; staying up to date

LACK OF INCENTIVES

- Incentives to bridge the gap are too weak compared to the incentives to follow the routines: necessity is not clear enough

LANGUAGE

- Many academic texts are in English (barrier for some practitioners, e.g. small cities)
- Terminology, diction and formula might be difficult to understand

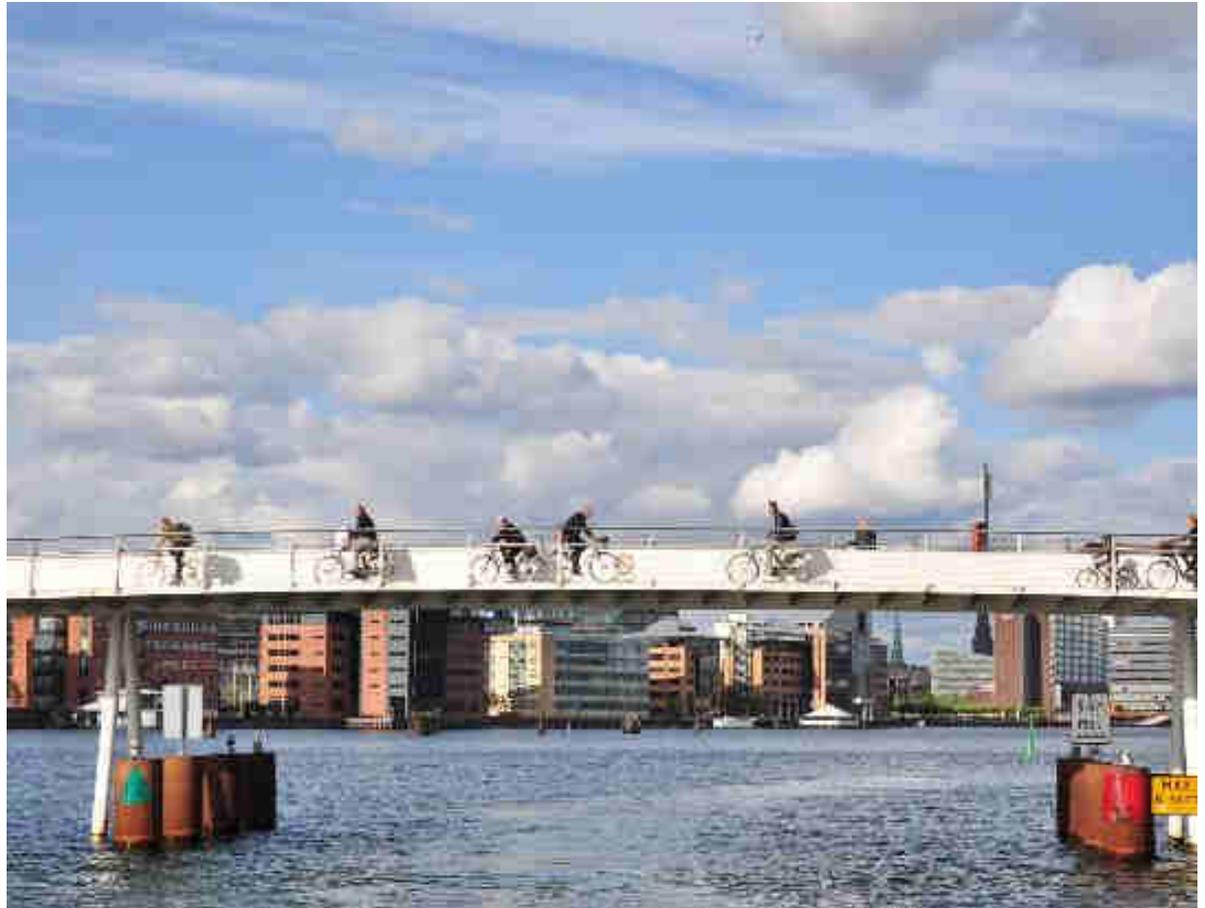
AVAILABILITY

- Access to academic literature / administrative and political processes

→ **How can we bridge the gap under such preconditions?**

How can we bridge the gap?

- Summarizing and synthesizing is not enough: easy-to-grasp models and frameworks (Bansal et. al 2012)
→ HEAT tool
- Networks / personal contacts
- Dissemination of research findings beyond the research community
- Conferences like the ICC 2017
- Institutions that support bridging



Source: Fotolia.com

The German Environment Agency (UBA) as an actor to bridge the gap

INSTITUTIONAL DESIGN

- At the interface of research, politics and public
 - Promotes research by sponsoring research projects
 - Gives advice to politics, based on research findings
 - Informs the public, based on research findings
- Bridging the gap is part of the duties of UBA
- Transfer to practice (Manuals, brochures, etc.)
 - Transfer to research (Which problems need more research?)



Source: Martin Stallmann / Umweltbundesamt

→ However, it is still a challenge over and over again

Hier steht ein schöner Präsentationstitel

Literatur

Bansal, Bertels, Ewart, MacConnachie, and O'Brien (2012). *Bridging the Research-Practice Gap. The Academy of Management Perspectives*, 26(1), p73-91.

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Thank you for listening!

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