

FACILITATING THE LINK BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE GENERATION AND GLOBAL POLICY-MAKING TOWARDS HABITAT III – A CITIES ALLIANCE AND N-AERUS PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITY IN EUROPE

OVERVIEW

Urbanization is transforming social, economic, cultural and spatial conditions in cities, requiring urgent action to both hasten achievements in these conditions and cope with negative consequences of urban growth. This action is all the more relevant within the context of on-going preparation for the Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development in October 2016 (Habitat III). Within the broad range of issues in the new urban agenda, international negotiations on the future global development framework (Sustainable Development Goals-SDG/Post 2015) revealed for example the need for further evidence on urbanization patterns and their transformative impacts on whole countries, the role of informal economies for sustaining city economies, and evaluative investigations of policies addressing urbanization and the growth of slums.

European universities and institutions have undertaken a large array of individual and joint research projects and participated in knowledge exchange partners in the global South. However, not only have most European Union governments failed to fully draw on this research and training to design their support programmes and policies, but they have also lately been reducing their support for development research and aid. The Cities Alliance and N-Aerus Partnership was conceived with these needs in mind, aiming to facilitate the link between global policy making and knowledge generation. For the members of the Cities Alliance Secretariat advocacy work in support of the new urban agenda is essential, and facilitating discussions between academic institutions and networks with development partners across Europe an important objective. N-Aerus

as a pluri-disciplinary network was created two decades ago with the objective to mobilise and develop European institutional and individual research and training capacities on urban issues in the South.

The Habitat III conference is an outstanding opportunity for both organisations to fill crucial gaps in evidence to support investment in cities and urban research. Cities Alliance is able to identify the strongest arguments towards an urban agenda expressed in international negotiations, N-Aerus can identify evidence that could address these concerns. In this partnership, three strategic priority areas have been identified: Informality, Governance, and Housing & Planning.

KEY-RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND RESEARCH:

Informality

The focus on informality highlights its growth in a context of growing inequity, becoming the norm in many places. Despite decades of studies and interventions in the South, 'recognising informality' is still a key issue; even though informal practices are increasingly also taking place in the North. In a new context of inequality, with a growing number of citizens deprived of their basic rights, the creation of solidarity and the development of mutualism are alternatives to the crisis of governmentality and to the incapacity of public institutions in responding to the 'demand for city'. Hence, the acceptance of informality is a pre-condition for structuring appropriate responses in order to manage urbanisation. We need to address the reasons for such lack of recognition, which range from lack of political will and power imbalances that favour minority



economic interests, through organisational incapacity, to lack of understanding of the contributions from all sectors of society in producing and managing urban space. In relation to policy we therefore need to:

- **Acknowledge the lack of capacity and/or willingness of 'formal' state, international agency and private sector organisations** to provide for the needs of large sectors of the population, and support 'alternative' means to access housing, infrastructure and services.
- Define as a key aim of urban policy (including in relation to 'informality') **the achievement of rights to the city and equity**, to impede speculative actions in urban development.
- Develop integrated and context-dependent responses to specific local conditions at local and city-wide scales.
- **Produce policies that acknowledge and consider the existence of 'informality'** in all its manifestations (practice, production, and representation).

In relation to **research** we need to:

- Accommodate for an **evolving and alternate definition of 'informality'** in both research and practice;
- **Applying trans-disciplinary approaches**, to explore ways in which informality can support the achievements of the right to the city through new de-centred and de-westernised approaches to urban studies;
- **Emphasise the role of the local authorities** in labelling, defining, recognizing and deciding the formal-informal classifications/scales;
- Avoid the **dangers of romanticising informality**, through its terminologies and interpretations.

Governance

Governance is crucial to manage the tremendous challenges that lie ahead for urban development. The city is a never finished product, and its processes and transformations are dependent on the interactions, conflicts, and negotiations of many stakeholders. Normative, binary, and technical thinking on urban governance leads to the assumption that urban challenges can be overcome by providing the "right" solutions. This thinking contributes to a stagnant production of knowledge that mainly repeats what is already known. Since there are no universal solutions to the manifold urban challenges, it is more likely that local problems can be solved with context-based solutions. To make the New Urban Agenda universally applicable yet locally adaptable, we believe that it is necessary to develop the concept of governance further in order to create in relation to policy:

- **Flexible and adaptive frameworks** for policies and strategies that build on local specificities, refrain from binary or silo thinking, ensure voice for all stakeholders, and promote innovative solutions;
- **Learning institutions**, capable of developing and furnishing capacities needed to address transformative urban challenges, that are adaptable to a variety of local contexts, rather than the universal, "one size fits all" solutions.;
- **A balance of power** of where different stakeholders are equipped with unequal power, finding equilibrium between more public, private, and societal interests;
- **Connectivity** within different sectors, aspects, and spheres of urban development, as interactions that also influence actions.

In relation to **research** we therefore recommend that it:

- Provides **evidence-based knowledge** on specificities of urban conditions and transformations to create a better understanding of challenges and potentials to support effective, local-self-governance;
- Create the basis for a **shift within the development of flexible and adaptive frameworks**, by researching the reasons why global solutions have had little success in fostering sustainable urban development and improved governance (e.g. global versus universal solutions);
- **Explores the conditions and circumstances** under which development actions can successfully reach sustainable, equitable, and local goals;
- **Informs and builds the capacity of citizens** in all positions and institutions.

Housing & Planning

Even after 40 years of progressive urbanisation policies and 'agendas', lacking, or inadequate, housing remains a central characteristic of rapid urbanisation and of structural change at many places world-wide. More than 1,2 billion people were estimated to live in substandard housing or to be overburdened by high housing costs in 2014. Housing is a widely acknowledged fundamental need and basic right. Though understanding of the interrelation between sustainable urban development and affordable housing is well established, inequality within housing access continues to remain a challenge. Driven by standardised urban forms, financially lucrative outcome-based policies, inadequate planning models and codes, design standards etc., socio-economic and spatial segregation persists. Despite numerous effective and innovative approaches for the implementation of affordable and accessible housing, their adoption and adaptation remain a challenge due to stakeholders benefitting from the status quo and fail to be up-scaled or framed within a given locale's specificities. In relation to policy we therefore recommend:

- Housing needs to be handled as a **comprehensive social, economic, and cultural process** that is a **fundamental component of urban co-production** and planning transcending the formal/ informal binary and its related dichotomies.
- From the perspective of legislation and governance, **land and housing markets need to be regulated by identifying stakeholders validating and reinforcing change**, example, the capacity of local governments closest to the people, the vulnerable and poor.
- In terms of planning and design, housing need to become an integral part of urban development schemes. Both, new and regeneration approaches **should be based on the paradigm of mixed use, high-density and connected urban tissue**, meaning also that approaches can be **learnt and derived from the spontaneously self-built and historically layered city** by recognising its assets in terms of programmatic assemblage, proximity and conviviality.

- In the context of economics and finances, one of the cities' key assets, taxation and management of urban land, should be effectively employed to **influence housing affordability and increase access to a wider range of social groups by redistributing value and diversifying options**.

In relation to **research** we therefore recommend:

- Fully **acknowledge postcolonial theory and decolonizing knowledge methodologies** to help us understand how cities can develop, and use comparative research to **scope the value and applicability of urban models** (e.g. smart cities, compact cities, etc.) as well as inform innovative approaches that can tackle the current scale, speed and form of urbanisation.
- Research policies and funding programmes should **stress comprehensive frameworks and social justice perspectives** looking into the implications for urban sustainability of all forms of urban development.
- By acknowledging the importance of a political-economic perspective, to deepen insight into how specific stakeholders, **including market actors, influence housing markets and planning standards**. The interrelations between the so-called 'formal' and 'informal' dimensions of urban development and transformation should not be overlooked.
- **To allow for key housing and planning issues to be addressed by the academic and operational research communities** within funding/ financial institutions so as to allow for: (i) freedom for researchers' critical and independent thinking; (ii) contrast the influence of developers or industrial lobby powers on research agendas and; (iii) complement the programmes of multi- and bi-lateral funding agencies.

PARTICIPANTS

The results of the Cities Alliance - N-Aerus partnership (notably, the elaboration of three policy papers on informality, governance, housing and planning) will be presented at the networking event: "THE NEW URBAN AGENDA IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH: ENGAGING RESEARCH IN POLICY MAKING", during the international United Nations Conference Habitat III, in Quito, in October 2016.

On the eve of the adoption of a global new urban agenda (NUA), it is critical to find new ways to empower urban policy makers and other stakeholders through access to current research from established knowledge institutions and networks. With rapid urbanisation and the pressures of globalisation being felt now more than ever in cities of the global south, applied urban research networks are well placed to offer data, analysis and recommendations that could strengthen policy responses to pressing housing and service delivery problems. This event will bring together research networks from different regions to share experiences and debate how to better engage with the policy makers, ministers, local governments and practitioners in general. With the support of Cities Alliance, three



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networks dedicated to sustainability challenges in the global south are joining forces to host this event - the African Urban Research Initiative (AURI), the Network Association of European Researchers on Urbanization in the South (N-AERUS) and the Network of Sustainable Urban Development Study Centres in Latin America and the Caribbean (REDEUS_LAC)- to bring together Ministers, Mayors, civil society organisations, urban practitioners and academic researchers to engage in dialogue on ways to improve access to and translation of urban research to enhance policy formulation.

The following researchers have been working on the elaboration of the policy papers and will present these research results at the Habitat III conference, in Quito.

- Alain Durand-Lasserve (FR)
- Alexander Jachnow (NL)
- Alexandra Linden (GIZ)
- Anja Nelle (NL)
- Anna Mazzolini (IT)
- Anthony Boanada Fuchs (CH)
- Boris Zerjav (Serbia)
- Cecilia Cabrera (Argentina)
- Els Keunen (NL)

- Enrico Michelutti (IT)
- Eva Alvarez (SP)
- Gabriel Fauveaud (Canada)
- Geoffrey Payne (UK)
- Harry Smith (UK)
- Jaime Royo Olid (Sri Lanka)
- Javier Martinez (NL)
- Jean-Claude Bolay (CH)
- Luisa Moretto (BE)
- Marcello Balbo (IT)
- Mariano Scheinsohn (Argentina)
- Melanie Lombard (UK)
- Paola Alfaro d'Alençon (DE)
- Peter Gotsch (DE)
- Rene Hohmann (*Cities Alliance*)
- Serge Allou (*Cities Alliance*)
- Sukanya Krishnamurthy (NL)
- Valerie Clerc (FR)
- Viviana d'Auria (BE)
- Wolfgang Scholz (DE)

