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## WE HAVE A NEW URBAN AGENDA: WHAT NOW?

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Between 7 and 9 June, the department of Urbanism organised an Urban Thinker Campus (UTC) to discuss how to integrate the New Urban Agenda into higher education. But what is a UTC and what is the New Urban Agenda, and why should it be integrated into higher education? Why should we care about it at all?

Let's start with Habitat III, the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development that took place in the historic city of Quito, the capital of Ecuador, in October 2016.

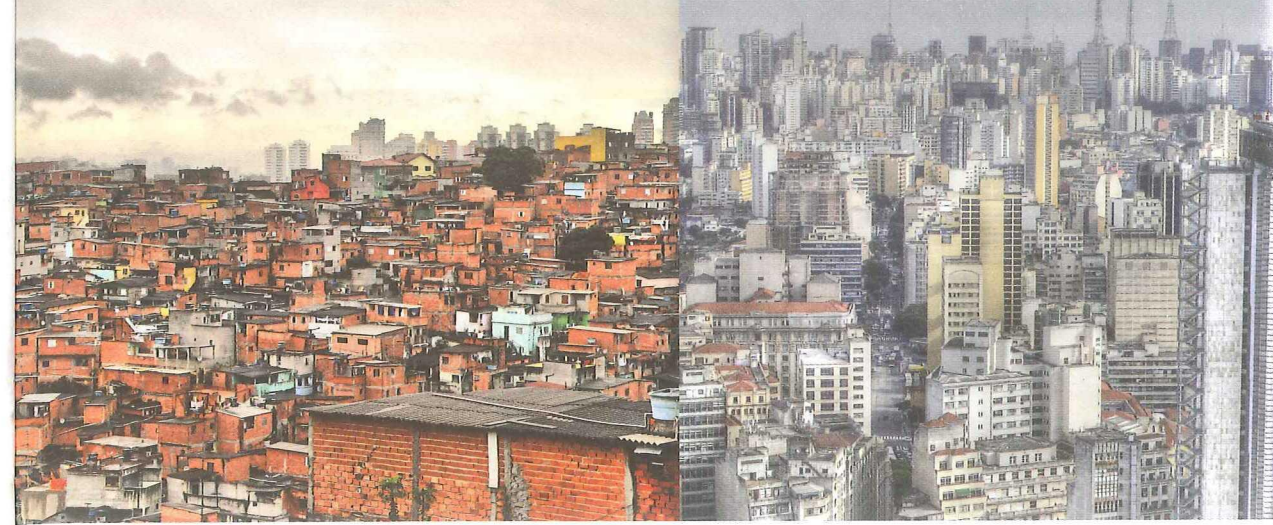
Contrary to what you might think, this was not a boring gathering of arrogant technocrats discussing cities from their desks. It was a colourful, lively and oftentimes overwhelming festival of all kinds of people and institutions working to make cities liveable, fairer and sustainable all over the world. Numbers vary, but as many as 45,000 people attended the conference based in a park in Quito, with universities and conference centres around the city overflowing with parallel and alternative events.

The two previous Habitat conferences had a great influence on the way we think about cities. It is important that we understand how, so we can foresee the influence of Habitat III. Habitat I took place in Vancouver in 1976, four years after the momentous 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the world had witnessed unprecedented urban growth and governments started to notice the negative effects of rapid and unplanned urbanization.

In Vancouver, governments recognized the impact of rapid urbanisation on the well-being of people, but the emphasis was largely on the provision of housing and services, often based on very technical discourses which put national governments at centre stage, and left local authorities out of the equation.

This happened well before the report that has shaped our understanding of the relationship between human settlements and the environment was released: 'Our Common Future', also known as the Brundtland Report, was published in 1987, and



District of Cabuçu (left), in the extreme eastern peripheral area of São Paulo (Brazil), where citizens have little access to services and infrastructure. In contrast with the central area of São Paulo (right).

launched the idea that we must seek “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

If you are young, it might be difficult to imagine that before that report, talking about sustainability was seen as something of an oddity. The emphasis was on growth, production and technological progress.

This was the world before the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), a world locked in the Cold War stalemate, with two main competing and mutually exclusive narratives about the path to take and the danger of a nuclear holocaust looming in the horizon. Those who warned about the dangers of unsustainable urbanisation to the environment were not taken seriously enough.

This scenario had changed substantially when Habitat II took place in Istanbul in 1996, also four years after another crucial gathering concerned with the environment, the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit of 1992. Habitat II was popularly known as the ‘City Summit’ and recognised that cities are engines of growth, but sustainable urbanisation should be a priority.

It also called for a bigger role for local governments and citizen participation, giving rise to a wave of

devolution and participatory policies. Cities (and citizens) finally started to take centre stage.

20 years down the road, and a lot has changed. The effects of climate change are now undeniable and the world is more interconnected than ever. Humanity has come to the realisation that the resources of our planet are indeed finite, and many governments have taken serious steps towards renewable energy sources, while humanity has become, for the first time in history, predominantly urban.

Habitat III in Quito and its outcome document, the New Urban Agenda, take all this in stock and reinforce the idea that sustainable urbanisation is an engine for development. But urban sustainability here is much more holistic, embracing its three essential elements: environmental, social and economic.

The NUA seeks to create a mutually reinforcing relationship between sustainable urbanization and development, but it pays much more attention to the social and political aspects that underscore sustainability.

The idea is that by addressing Sustainable Development Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable), we can



The central areas of São Paulo (Brazil), with informal commerce, locally known as "ambulantes".

address most of the other SDGs agreed by the United Nations in 2015.

If we wish to ensure "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs", then we must find the political, economic and technological tools that will allow that to happen.

The NUA also introduces three 'enablers' for sustainable cities: local fiscal systems, urban planning, and basic services and infrastructure. In doing so, the NUA explicitly recognises the role of spatial planning and urban design as crucial tools that can steer and coordinate the efforts of a large number of stakeholders with conflicting interests towards agreed goals.

Because the NUA is a binding document agreed and

signed by UN member states, it does have the potential to influence policy-making. According to some, it offers the first comprehensive approach to sustainable urban development for many countries.

The NUA has important shortcomings. Among other issues, it fails to spell out the 'right to the city' in its text, although it is very much implicit in several passages. Its main deficiency, however, is a lack of provisions to tackle the causes of some urban issues: financialisation of housing provision, extreme income disparities, red tapping that hinders the deprived households, etc. Many would argue that these issues are beyond what the New Urban Agenda can do.

I don't agree with the critique that says the New Urban Agenda is too generic, however. It needs to be generic if it intends to speak to almost two hundred countries with very different urbanisation processes.

I also don't agree with the opinion that it is too top down, simply because this is not true. The NUA is the result of a long and arduous process of negotiation and input collection from a myriad of stakeholders from all over the world.

Obviously, some countries were more successful in incorporating citizens in the discussion than others, but independent NGOs were active everywhere collecting input from citizens, and Urban Thinkers Campuses like the one we organised were one of their tools.

UTCs are UN-Habitat sponsored open platforms for critical exchange between urban researchers, professionals, and decision-makers who want to have a real influence on urban development. They are also a platform for consensus-making among partners engaged in specific actions to make cities more sustainable, inclusive and fair. In the run-up to the New Urban Agenda, Urban Thinkers Campuses were instrumental to collect input from grassroots.

Now, Urban Thinkers Campuses are being organised again to discuss what became the main issue arising after the enactment of the NUA: IMPLEMENTATION. In the current round, 77 UTCs are being organised around the world, but the one organised at TU Delft is the only one exclusively dedicated to a key element in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda: EDUCATION.

This is because the university is fully aware of its key role in preparing the young professionals and critical citizens who will implement the NUA in the next 20 years, and has fully embraced Sustainable Development Goals and specially SDG 11 in its own vision.

One important step in this direction was the creation of Delft Global Initiative, the university's "portal, platform and booster for Science and Technology for Global Development".

Bouwkunde is not lagging behind, as demonstrated by the many studios and research groups dealing with issues of global urban development, and more recently, with the three As initiative promoted by our Dean, Peter Russell.

The 'A is for Africa!' initiative, for example, is seeking for active partnerships with African institutions to help train young African professionals and aims to bring BK closer to Africa. The 'A is for Agility' initiative has also an important role to play in helping educate young generations of designers and planners from the Global South.

BK's UTC was titled "Education for the City We Need" and gathered almost 40 professionals, educators and policy-makers to discuss how to best integrate the NUA in higher education, during three days of intense debate and exchange.

The outcome of the UTC will be made available in its website: [utctudelft.org](http://utctudelft.org) and in a publication to be launched in the second semester of 2017.

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