

## **Excerpts of Induction Report of Feasibility Study for an International Urban Research Network**

### **Goals and Objectives**

In the exploration of an innovative research network, we suggest a set of basic principles as a starting point (crossing continents, S-S-N, integrating disciplines, aware of own limits, nurturing experimental thoughts, promoting creative milieus, smart use of technologies in knowledge management). Subsequently, alternative scenarios for its organizational and financial structure will be sought, explored, compared and challenged. Last but not least, the sustainability of the model will be critically assessed.

### **Key attributes of International Urban Research Network**

The International Urban Research Network will be the key platform and point of reference for urban research teams, practitioners and experts from other organizations around the world. In particular, institutions and networks from the South – currently underrepresented in the international academic debate – will be supported in becoming equal members in the international urban research community (e.g. through special training events).

The International Urban Research Network obviously will – to a different degree - involve members of the Habitat Partner University Initiative. But, departing from the present process of self-promoted membership, a limited number of exceptional research institutions might be identified and invited to join. As indicated above, the composition of the network will be interdisciplinary and thus break with many university structures, which tend to be specialized. Its engine is curiosity and usefulness for its members. It will come up with constructive findings to overcome the well-known list of urban problems rather than the academic obligation to add yet another volume to the existing pile of publications to be quoted by colleagues.

We would call it a post-disciplinary approach that is aware of the researcher's own limitations (i.e. ideologies, ethical boundaries). Part of the network would consist of teams that gather around specific topics for a relatively short period (i.e. a two-week retreat or a one-month virtual conference) and then switch to another team in order to establish the necessary number of knowledge nodes in a multifaceted and complex urban configuration. Education in regard to sustainable development may be another focus of the network and operate through student & young researchers programs.

### **Key thematic areas**

We observe a fast succession of themes and concepts in urban research over the last years like fashions. As long as not only the wording, but also the interpretation of the problem advances, this is nothing to worry about, but rather a sign of progressing analytical understanding. In that case, ruling paradigms are not simply replaced but add up to a more complex perception of reality. At present, predominant themes include participatory governance, urban violence prevention, mitigation of and adaptation to climate change, depletion of resources and biological diversity, cultural identity and space, also including urban heritage, reappearance of mass housing programs, and social segregation and exclusion.

Still, the challenge for the network will lie more in anticipating future key concerns. In this context we propose to work on three thematic levels: 1) Sector topics, 2) Cross-sector topics, 3) Overarching Trends and Dynamics.

### **Examples of Sector Topics**

- Urban Development and Management,
- Land and Housing,
- Environment and Climate Change,
- Water Sanitation and Infrastructure,
- Urban Economy and Financing Shelter,
- Risk and Disaster Management,
- Social Inclusion, Information and Monitoring

The sector topics stem from the core of UN-HABITAT's agenda. They facilitate the recruitment of projects and representatives, the categorization of results and the collaboration with other agencies.

### ***Cross-sector Topics***

The cluster of cross-sector topics represents core problems related to research, policy and sustainable urban development.

- Research policy nexus
- Role of planning
- Theory and critique
- Privatization in urban development (Role of public, private, and civil sectors)
- Urban management, decentralization and local governance

### ***Trends and Dynamics in Contemporary Urbanization***

This group comprises the cutting-edge and up-to-date topics.

- Rapid urbanization
- Peripheral development
- Multiplex urban regions and urban networks
- Visions for the city of tomorrow (post-fossil city)
- New urban theories

The report will include a list of matrices of the most important pending research issues as extracted from the different interviews and from a Metaplan exercise during an experts meeting. But more importantly will be a proposal on how to update that list in a cybernetic manner through the network members to keep track of the constantly emergence of new research interests in the academic and professional urban development community.

### **Governance structure**

The exploration of possible governance structures are – together with the financial models - the core of the proposed study and will eventually lead to a set of recommendations. Methodologically we will use scenario or alternative models that we construct from the analysis of other existing networks and from the interviews that we conduct.

In response to complex settings and frequently changing requirements, the International Urban Research Network should operate with a strong core panel and a soft edge of thematic working groups and semi-permanent partners.

It is envisioned that a chair, a management team, and an advisory board form the core of International Urban Research Network. The chair as well as the board should be elected for a firm period (possibly three years). The management team should be recruited by the hosting agency (UN-HABITAT, or alternatively by the consortium of UN-HABITAT and sponsoring institutions. The board consists of a group of elected representatives of UN-HABITAT and the main stakeholders (researchers, funding institutions, other associated organizations). Several regional as well as thematic committees will complement this structure. The detailed composition of the regional and thematic boards is dependent on the respective topic.

In fact, numerous networks and institutions such as UN-HABITAT's HS-Net or scientific networks such as N-AERUS successfully apply this model.

The aforementioned teams develop cross-sectoral issues, key topics and the research agenda through regular meetings attached to the typical events which a large proportion of members attend anyway (e.g. the WUFs). A community of research teams, young researchers, students and other associated groups (from representatives of other international organizations, government bodies, NGOs, junior UN-officers, etc.) makes up International Urban Research Network's 'softer' periphery. They work on specific projects.

### **Relationship between International Urban Research Network, SUD-Net and the Habitat Partner University Initiative**

International Urban Research Network will be closely associated with the existing SUD-Net initiative. The network of the Habitat Partner University Initiative, which represents the Education, Training and Research component of the SUD-Net will be one of several base elements of the model. It is conceivable that, in the future, the Habitat Partner University Initiative network may promote excellence in teaching and education while the International Urban Research Network's main pro-file will be in the promotion of urban research networks. In addition, the International Urban Research Network would explore synergies with the other elements of SUD-Net such as the Sustainable Urban Development Network and the Cities in Climate Change Initiative through mutual events and projects. International Urban Research Network's regional boards will cooperate closely with UN-HABITAT's Regional Technical Cooperation Division offices.

### **Mutual benefits for all partners**

The establishment of the International Urban Research Network provides extensive mutual benefits for all key partners: UN-HABITAT's, and in particular the SUD-Net's representatives and all key partners from academia, internal organizations, city governments and funding institutions. UN-HABITAT gains access to cutting-edge research, state-of-the-art innovation and a vast independent pool of autonomous assessment and evaluation of its policies and programmes. The organization may also benefit from the access to a vast pool of young talent from the knowledge sector. The external institutions win by thriving on UN-HABITAT's catalytic ability to promote collaborations, link up crucial stakeholders and distribute results through its strategic role in the international development cooperation.

### **Initialization**

The network should be set up with a focus on consolidating existing activities and core topics of UN-HABITAT. An evaluation meeting immediately following a UN-HABITAT or related conference with some 30 invited stakeholders would be an effective means of initializing the venture.

### **Model research projects**

UN-HABITAT will not finance research itself, but it will be a key player in defining the upcoming research agendas, acting as a market place for research ideas (and third-party funding, too) as well as research staff. It is conceivable that UN-HABITAT teams up with other funding institutions to realize research programmes. Being the originator of many research projects, it is also the ideal (electronic) platform for exchanging and distributing the generated knowledge.

### **Financing the Network**

The financial viability of the proposed network is a central challenge. Several scenarios for the financial structure of the Network can be envisioned. All of these and others will be explored in the course of the development of the network.

- Scenario 1: Core team (e.g. management) financed by UN-HABITAT.
- Scenario 2: Core team (e.g. management) financed by a public holding consortium composed of UN- HABITAT, research foundations, and/or development agencies.
- Scenario 3: Core team financed by a public-private partnership with representatives from the corporate sector

It is envisioned that, in all of these cases, the network works on a not-for-profit basis. The funding is concentrated on the management and financing of research programmes, as well as on mobility, infrastructure grants, publications, etc. The elected bodies such as the scientific board and the chair should work on an honorary basis.

### **Methodology and structure of the feasibility study**

The proposed study will achieve its goals using a set of interdisciplinary methods. These range

from literature study to the sampling of websites, stakeholder mapping, key-informant interviews, SWOT analysis as well as scenario-planning methods.

### ***Assessment of relevant networks***

The study will assess various potential stakeholder organizations and networks and evaluate previous experiences along with the interview guides that we propose and have included in the attachments. The interviews will be conducted either personally at UN-HABITAT headquarters with the UN-HABITAT staff, in other academic events that we visit during the project period (like the IFHP 54th World Congress in Porto Alegre) or via telephone and Skype. We prefer this method since questionnaires tend not to be returned and the questions are often not understood. The preliminary list comprises initiatives based in the UN family and other international organizations, as well as other globally, regionally and thematically focused urban research networks. In addition to this, the applicant can draw on the researcher's experiences as the coordinator of two research networks (N-AERUS and TRIALOG).

### ***List of relevant networks to be assessed (preliminary):***

- UN-HABITAT: SUD-Net, Global Land Tool Research Network (GLTN), HS-Net
- Other UN organizations:
  - Agriculture and Health Networks,
  - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) ,
  - United Nations University,
- Existing Partner Universities (Habitat Partner Universities),
- Other international organizations of different size and orientation:
  - the World Bank Institute,
  - Urban Research Network (URN),
  - Network-Association of European Researchers on Urbanization in the South (N-AERUS)
  - International Network for Urban Research and Action (INURA),
  - Global Planners Network (GPN),
  - International Network for Housing and Planning (IFHP),
  - International Association for People-Environment Studies (IAPS),
  - The Earth Institute
  - European Science Foundation (ESF),
  - URBAN-NET ,
  - The European Network for Housing Research (ENHR),
  - The European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN),
  - European Urban Research Association (EURA),
  - Association for Scientific Research into Planning and Building in the De-veloping World TRIALOG e.V.;
  - LASDEL , Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (Codesria) ,
  - Agence Universitaire Francophone (AUF) ,
  - African Network of Scientific and Technological Institutions (ANSTI),
  - Global University Network for Innovation - Asia Pacific, Urban Research Plaza (Osaka University),
  - Fukuoka Asian Urban Research Centre...
- National Organizations
  - Institute des Sciences et des Techniques de l'Equipement et de l'Environ-nement pour le Développement (ISTED)