

Habitat III
Working Group of Higher Education for Sustainability

Impact of higher education in the sustainability of urbanization

Habitat III Europe Regional Meeting - Prague

Introduction

Important decisions have been taken to envision a sustainable planet and local governments are expected to play a pivotal role to ensure that local policies are rooted on sustainability principles. Given that more than half of humanity is living in urban agglomerations, this responsibility lies on city governments and local authorities. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in September 2015 sets a plan of action for making the world more sustainable and socially inclusive. This Agenda asks governments to work closely with sub-national levels, including local authorities, on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Since the adoption of the Agenda 21 in Rio de Janeiro (UNCED, 1992) the international community has been working on the urban dimension of sustainable development through the Local Agenda's 21 and Sustainable Cities Programmes. The work on Urban Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA) to resource efficient cities, eco-cities and various approaches to sustainable urban development underscore the importance of cities and urban planning as critical aspects of sustainable development. New generations will inhabit predominantly urban areas, thus urban practitioners and new generations of urban managers will need to have the knowledge and the skills to address the challenges of an increasingly urbanized planet.

Goal 11 of the SDGs, focuses on *making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*, seeks to address the challenges posed by urbanization both in developed and developing regions. It provides national and local governments, as well as communities with a set of targets to pursue a sustainable urbanization path.

In addition to this, Goal 4 brings attention to the importance of education for sustainable development but also for meeting the targets marked by the rest of SDGs. In fact, education, training and capacity building have been a priority area and key concern of the UN system as a whole.

The United Nations and, most specifically UNEP and UN-Habitat have been working intensively with various partners in recent years in education, capacity building and raising awareness on sustainable urbanization. Increased access to higher education in developing countries has translated into large numbers of qualified professionals ready to join the workforce addressing urban challenges. However, it has also become evident that knowledge, skills and know-how developed in the academia do not automatically find their way to practical application. Indeed, the pace at which educational programmes adapt and reform to meet contemporary challenges of urban development does not match the speed and dynamics of urbanization. Initiatives like GUPES, UNI and HESI among others, have been working towards addressing this gap.

Universities, colleges, research and training institutions and students alike play a critical role in finding and implementing strategies to realize the potential of urbanization for sustainable development, while dealing with issues of air quality, climate change mitigation and adaptation and contributing to the creation of more sustainable cities from various angles. The role of education in its broader sense including training and capacity building, communication, creating public awareness and enabling knowledge exchange, is thus critical for the transformation of human and institutional capacities, as well as enabling local communities strengthen their resilience and plan for inclusive, safe and sustainable cities.

Objectives

As part of the preparatory work for the Habitat III Regional Meetings and the Habitat III Conference, which will take place in Quito in October 2016, UNEP and UN-Habitat along with other partners have teamed up to develop an action program and a position paper on the role of higher education for sustainable urban development.

As a first step, UNEP and UN-Habitat are conveying a preparatory working group at the Habitat III Europe Regional Meeting in Prague (March 16-18, 2016). The working group will be articulated within the framework of the Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI) which UNEP will be chairing in 2016, but open to other partners including universities, city officials, majors and civil society, as well as the World Urban Campaign - General Assembly of Partners.

The working group will have two distinctive goals;

- a) Set the basis for a Programme of Action in Higher Education for Habitat III, which aims to answer the question: How can cities tap the potential of academic research and practice in improving their own sustainability goals?
- b) Design and conceptualize a Position Paper on the role of higher education for sustainable urban development. Taking as point of departure SDG 11, this paper will be a more foundational document focused on the role of education in the new urban agenda.

AGENDA

3/18/2016
9:00 and 10:30

Venue: Terrace II

Time	Agenda item
09:00 – 09:10	Opening remarks <i>Genie Birch – University of Pennsylvania. Chair General Assembly of Partners (GAP)</i> <i>Curt Garrigan – UNEP/DTIE</i>
09:10 – 09:20	Introduction and objectives of the meeting <i>Lilia Blades - UN-Habitat partnership with universities worldwide (UNI).</i>
09:20 – 09:30	Participants introduction
	Presentation of the roadmap and guided discussion
09:30 – 09:55	A global action programme for universities <i>Richard Berman – University of South Florida</i>
09:55 – 10:20	Position paper on the role of knowledge in the New Urban Agenda <i>Sahar Attia – Cairo University. Acting Chair Habitat UNI</i>
10:20 – 10:30	Wrap up <i>Bruce Stiffl</i>



Moderator:

Bruce Stiftel – Georgia Institute of Technology (USA). Global Planning Education Association Network (GPEAN) liaison to UNI.

Presenters

Curt Garrigan – UNEP/DTIE
Genie Birch – Chair General Assembly of Partners
Lilia Blades – UN-Habitat
Richard Berman – University of South Florida
Sahar Attia – Cairo University. Acting Chair Habitat UNI.

Rapporteur

TBC

