

World Social Science Fellows Program

Seminar "Sustainable Urbanization"

Quito, Ecuador, 25-30 March 2013



Introduction

With the World Social Science Fellows program, the International Social Science Council (ISSC) aims to create the next generation of social science leaders: World Social Science Fellows.

In the programme, talented early career social scientists are selected as Fellows and to participate in a seminar. Each seminar focuses on a global challenge/priority (with particular relevance to developing countries). At seminars, Fellows work together with other participants to identify pressing research questions and to design innovative interdisciplinary research strategies. Seminar activities are meant to be the beginning of new international research collaborations. The programme is sponsored by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). More information about the programme (including how seminars are designed, the selection process for Fellows and the governance of the programme) is [here](#).

The first seminar in the program took place in Quito, Ecuador in March 2013 and focused on developing new, interdisciplinary perspectives on sustainable urbanization. It was organized by the ISSC in partnership with the International Human Dimensions Programme (IHDP) and the Comparative Research Programme on Poverty (CROP). It was generously hosted by the Universidad Andina Simon Bolivar, Quito campus. This is a short report on that seminar, which includes a description of the work process followed, a brief summary of thematic discussions and a tentative outline of the structure of the book to come out of the seminar. A list of Fellows and senior scientists who came to Quito for the seminar is appended.

Untamed Urbanism: A book in progress

Discussions started at the seminar will be turned into a book, tentatively titled "Untamed Urbanism". Fellows and senior scientists who participated in the seminar will explore new perspectives on "sustainable urbanization", rethinking urbanization, what makes it (un)sustainable, and how the challenges it raises can be addressed differently. The authors aim to move into interdisciplinary perspectives on urbanization that will bring truly new questions and answers to the field. Publication of the book is scheduled for 2014.

Work process



Two objectives were leading in the design of the program for the seminar. First, the Fellows were to be in the lead for most of the work. Second, the activities at the seminar were to stimulate the emergence of truly new, interdisciplinary perspectives. With this in mind, an outline of the program was distributed before the seminar, with the provision that it was to be re-shaped if necessary.

The seminar started with two half-days of presentations by Fellows. Each Fellow was allocated ten minutes to explain what the three most urgent research questions were for a global age, based on his or her research background. Grouped in series of four presentations (by inviting volunteers for each session), there was no discussion time between presentations. Rather, an hour was allocated at the end of each set of four presentations to discuss themes emerging from the set. For each set of four presentations, two rapporteurs also made notes on themes, on Post-its that were collected on a wall.

Day three started with two lectures by senior scientists to place the discussions on sustainable urbanization in the context of global crises/resource flows/the smart city agenda and comparative research on vulnerability and poverty. On the basis of this input and on the themes on the wall, each Fellow was asked to identify a maximum of three specific topics to discuss in more depth. These topics were noted on Post-its and four larger thematic areas emerged, plus a cross-cutting theme:

- Climate change and the city
- Vulnerability, poverty and inequality
- Governance and planning
- Alternatives
- Cross-cutting theme: Research methodology

The rest of the day was spent in break-out groups to debate the four thematic areas, in order to define spheres of common interest, identify divergences and sharpen the key issues at stake. The report-backs on these discussions padded out the notes on the wall with new takes on the themes.

Day four started with a review of the notes on the wall. The impression emerged that the thematic discussions, as well as the common interest to question methodologies, could be worked into a book and make for a genuine contribution to the fields of sustainability and cities. This appreciation marked a turning point and inspired the organization of the rest of the seminar. After another lecture to put discussions in a broader context, break-out groups were organized in a "coffee shop" format. Four tables (the coffee shops) were assigned a theme each and Fellows then rotated to discuss the three themes they had not discussed on the previous day. This exercise yielded more perspectives for the wall.

During the second part of the day, the Fellows and conveners started the construction of a book proposal. Questions to fuel these discussions were:

- What will be the title of the section?
- What will be the three to five new, challenging questions that will be answered in the section?
- Who will write which chapter and what will the chapters be titled?

The fifth day was the last full day of discussions and started with a pitch by the four thematic groups on their book section. This was followed by further discussion of the questions above, and some participants started working on their abstracts. An important topic for discussion in the afternoon plenary was research methodology, and specifically transdisciplinary research, its implications for research design and performance and for the researcher(s) involved. This discussion will be continued on a blog by the Fellows.

The last half day of discussions was used to agree on a process and deadlines for writing the book (as well as on evaluation of the event and a discussion on career paths).

As was the intention, Fellows were in the lead for most of the discussions at the seminar. The role of the senior scientists present (aside from delivering lectures on the context of the discussions) was to extract overarching themes, keep discussions moving forward if necessary and challenging Fellows to look beyond their own research perspectives to formulate new, interdisciplinary perspectives.

Thematic discussions

The summaries of thematic discussions below are presented as introductions to the different book sections.

Greening the urban age: Perspectives and Trajectories

The section on "Greening the urban age: Perspectives and Trajectories" will focus on the interactions of a city and the natural systems in the direct surrounding and in the distance. The underlying problem lies in the unsustainability of the current interactions. The way cities are currently configured has no future because of the over-consumption of many environmental resources and ecosystem services. Resources are subsequently degrading and becoming more expensive and thus less economically viable. What we need is a reconfiguration and a re-embedding of the city in nature. Guiding questions to lead the exploration will ask how we need to rethink the relationship between urbanisation and ecosystem services and how cities will need to be reconfigured to achieve sustainable resource flows and urban footprints.



The discussion on this section departed from a number of case studies. The importance of wild life for food security in an urbanising Amazonian wilderness is researched by Luke Parry and gives important clues about the drivers of catches and hunting and interactions with other environmental stresses, such as droughts. In the case of Kolkata, the sustainability of waste and resource flows are investigated in detail at the peri-urban interface by Jenia Mukherjee and challenges and opportunities are identified. For African cities, a focus is given to the configuration and reconfiguration of infrastructure for the sustainability of various flows supplying the cities by Mark Swilling. The urban form including population structure and settlement distribution is further investigated based on Mexican cities by Landy Sanchez. The urban form has important implication for household energy consumption and related green house gas (GHG) emissions. Finally, GHG emissions are further studied in a global comparison of their scaling behaviour with varying population size by Dominik Reusser. Different possible causes for non-linear scaling are tested for their explanatory power. The different case studies are presented and discussed in the different chapters of the book section.

When Communities Innovate: Emerging Transformative Practices of Sustainable Urbanization

Throughout history, resilient communities have always found ways to respond to change. In the 21st Century two powerful forces compelling adaptive and innovative community responses are urbanization and environmental change. In this section of the book we seek to draw attention to the everyday realities of communities, primarily in the Global South, as they cope with change and adversity. We acknowledge that there are systemic and institutional reasons for poverty and we do not wish to underestimate the constraining effects of poverty on lives and individual aspirations. However, we see the need to move beyond the commonly held view of communities, especially of the urban poor, as characterized by notions of "the lack of..." or as passive recipients of outside intervention. Without making the mistake of glorifying survivalist adaptation or ignoring the real potential of problematic mal-adaptation, there is a need to explore the reality and potential of innovative responses of communities as transformative agents of their own lives and contexts.

We recognize that responses to change always reside on a spectrum ranging from clear and beneficial success to tragic failure. Our intent is to focus on the real and potential ways communities can influence their own future aspirations as well as positively impact the larger urban region of which they are a part. Several important questions are explored in the theme: 1) What are the emerging practices with which urban citizens respond to socio-environmental change? 2) To what extent are the researched practices innovative and transformative of existing power relations and poverty dynamics?; and 3) How can we transform existing narratives of the role of poor communities in producing innovative urbanization? Salient themes informing our exploration include two important sets of interactions; those between social identities and urban processes as well as those between formal and informal institutions and city inequalities.



Both Chipo Mubaya's and Taibat Lawanson's chapters trace the innovative potential of communities through residents' ability to adapt livelihoods, work collectively toward common goals or social protection, and partner with existing municipal and national initiatives. For Mubaya, the combination of unplanned urban expansion and rising vulnerability to extreme climate events in Dar es Salam, Tanzania have made local residents vulnerable, but not passive. For Lawanson, the analysis emerges from a study of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT Analysis) found in local survival strategies in Lagos, Nigeria. Mauricio Domínguez, *et al*, examine current urban processes in the region of Merida, Mexico, showing how emerging practices of water acquisition interact with poverty and inequality. Andrea Lampis' work is taken from three Colombian cities and challenges the dual biases created by dominant perspectives on the urban poor: one that underestimates or ignores individual agency in shaping one's own reality and a second that minimizes significant variation within groups understood as "the poor". John Harris focuses on the potential of more sustainable modes of urban sanitation and examines the potential of community-outsider partnerships for more sustainable urban services in Accra, Ghana.

Governance and Urban Planning

The discussion began informally with each member discussing their own experiences in terms of research and their wider experiences related to the context in which they are embedded. We began to formulate some questions which needed to be addressed. This was broken down as follows: In what ways are discourses of sustainable urbanization embedded in urban planning and governance? How can narratives of urban planning and governance be transformed? Finally, we asked what the challenges to such might be.

Our brain-storming session produced a number of ideas related to the issues around governance and sustainable urbanization. The aim became about understanding the various strands that come together to form 'sustainable urbanization' and set out to examine how structures of governance might be changed to achieve them. Initially, it is proposed that examining the way in which planning includes particular ideals of sustainability would form a basis for developing an introduction to our section. This includes ideas such as 'green urbanism', 'the compact city' and issues such as the 'just city'. It is thus a significant challenge to address the wider dynamics of sustainable urbanization. At the end of the seminar, each of the group members planned to take on specific elements, such as land taxation, everyday planning approaches, technology, community planning, and governance structures. These will be structured in such a manner as to understand the complexities of urban governance in relation to sustainable urbanization.

Liberating Alternatives

'Liberating Alternatives' explores peoples' narratives of living and thus creating cities. Recognising that alternatives exist in a variety of forms on many levels, this section steps away from social

movement theory to investigate socio-environmental change in the urban everyday, depicting new narratives that challenge marginalization and re-invoke citizens' rights to the city while creating new spaces and tensions to bring about change. Questions explored within this theme's chapters are:

- What is the destabilizing capacity of everyday practices?
- How can we understand urban life and everyday practices beyond needs?
- What factors or qualities make practices 'alternatives' or 'untamed' to the mainstream?
- What fractures emerge in the friction between everyday practices and social regulation?
- To what extent are 'alternatives' transformative?

Chapters touch on a range of contemporary, contentious issues experienced in cities throughout the world, including gentrification in Jorge Sequera's research into the micro-resistance of everyday life in Buenos Aires, the concepts of employment, marginality and freedom as experienced in a Brazilian favela by Moises Lino e Silva, public spaces as incubators for change as lived in Cape Town by Diana Sanchez Betancourt, the negotiation and contestation of urban spaces by women in Harare, Zimbabwe, by Manase Chiweshe, and the exploration of non-capitalist economies with respect to property rights in Greece by Irene Sotiropoulou, and with respect to alternative food economies in Sydney, Australia, and Caracas, Venezuela, by Ferne Edwards.

Based on primary research conducted into the lived, every day experiences of peoples' experience of 'the city' from around the world, this theme explores the richness, diversity, and plethora of understandings and practices that challenge 'conventional', regulated governance approaches, to acknowledge and ask who has the right to dictate how cities can and should be lived.

Tentative structure of the book



Introduction

Section: Greening the urban age: Perspectives and Trajectories

1. Hungry for sustainability in an urbanising Amazonian Wilderness by Luke Parry
2. Sustainable flows between Kolkata and its peri-urban interface: challenges and opportunities by Jenia Mukherjee
3. Reconfiguring infrastructures for sustainable resource flows in African cities by Mark Swilling
4. Beyond population growth: households, energy + urban form in Mexico by Landy Sanchez
5. Is big sustainable? Global comparison of city emissions by Dominik Reusser

Section: When Communities Innovate: Emerging Transformative Practices of Sustainable Urbanization

1. Local level opportunities for building resilience to climate risk in Dar es Salaam by Chipso Plaxedes Mubaya

2. Municipal Governance Systems and Urban Livelihoods in Sub Sahara Africa by John Harris, Taibat Lawanson, Chipu Mubaya and Alok Tiwari
3. Potentials of the Urban Poor in Shaping a Sustainable Lagos Megacity by Taibat Lawanson
4. When Societies Fragment: A Cross Continental Study of Gated Communities in Emerging Urban Scenarios by Taibat Lawanson, Mauricio Dominguez, Andrea Lampis, Chipu Mubaya and John Harris
5. Unequal Narratives: Low-income Households Vulnerability in Bogotá, Cali and Manizales by Andrea Lampis
6. The Potential of Community Based Innovation for Expanding Sustainable Sanitation in Accra by John Harris
7. From water access inequalities to innovative urbanization in Merida, Mexico by Mauricio Domínguez Aguilar *et al*

Section: Governance and Urban Planning

1. Planning implications to the transition to a sustainable urbanization path by Natalie Rosales
2. Prospects and limitations of urban land taxation for promoting sustainable urban development in a West African Oil Frontier by Franklin Obeng-Odoom
3. Unveiling potential role of Technology in Sustainable Urban Water Governance and Livelihood creation in Addis Ababa by Alok Tiwari
4. Are You Really Listening to Me? Planning with the Community in Urban Revitalization Projects by Mintesnot G. Woldeamanuel
5. Beyond an Imaginary or Power? The role of Governance in Achieving Sustainable Urbanization by Philip Lawton

Section: Liberating Alternatives

1. Fracturing urban governmentality and gentrification policies. Micro-resistance of everyday life in Buenos Aires by Jorge Sequera
2. A conversation on a dentist's chair: employment, marginality, and freedom on the borders of a Brazilian favela by Moises Lino e Silva
3. Public Spaces as Incubators for Change in Cape Town? Untamed Urban Practices in a Contested City by Diana Sanchez Betancourt
4. Negotiating and creating urban spaces in everyday practices: Experiences of women in Harare, Zimbabwe by Manase Kudzai Chiweshe
5. Everyday practices in Greece in the shadow of property: Urban domination subversed (?) by Irene Sotiropoulou
6. Towards the productive city: Exploring socio-environmental change through non-capitalist food economies by Ferne Edwards

Section: Reflections on research journeys

To be based on the blog by Fellows

Cross-cutting readings

Appendix 1

Participants Sustainable Urbanization seminar

(Affiliation information correct at the time of the seminar)

Fellows

Manase Chiweshe is a post graduate fellow in the Sociology Department at Rhodes University and a research associate of Ruzivo Trust in Harare, Zimbabwe

Mauricio Domínguez Aguilar is an associate researcher and project coordinator at the Observatorio Metropolitano de Yucatán, Mexico

Ferne Edwards is a PhD candidate at the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health at the Australian National University, Australia

John Harris is a visiting lecturer at Florida State University in Tallahassee, USA

Taibat Lawanson is senior lecturer and coordinator of postgraduate programmes in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Lagos, Nigeria

Philip Lawtton is lecturer in culture and urban development at the Centre for Urban and Euregional Studies, within the Department of Technology and Society Studies at Maastricht University, the Netherlands

Moises Lino e Silva is a post-doctoral Fellow in Social Anthropology at Harvard University, USA.

Chipo Plaxedes Mubaya is senior programme officer for the African Climate Change Fellowship Programme (ACCFP) and a social science researcher based at the ACCFP Secretariat at the Institute of Resource Assessment in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Jenia Mukherjee is the coordinator of an Environment and Development course and conducts research projects at the Institute of Development Studies Kolkata, India

Franklin Obeng-Odoom is a Chancellor's Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Technology Sydney, Australia

Luke Parry is a Lecturer in Ecosystem Services at the Lancaster Environment Centre, Lancaster University, United Kingdom

Dominik Reusser is a researcher at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, Germany

Natalie Rosales is a PhD candidate in Sustainable Development from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain

Landy Sánchez is a scholar at the Center for Demographic, Urban and Environmental Studies at El Colegio de Mexico, Mexico

Diana Sanchez Betancourt is a researcher at the Human Sciences Research Council, South Africa

Jorge Sequera is a Ph.D. candidate in the department of sociological theory of the Complutense University of Madrid, Spain

Irene Sotiropoulou is a researcher on a project concerning grassroots solidarity structures in major urban centres of Greece

Mintesnot Woldeamanuel is an assistant professor in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning, California State University Northridge, USA

Alok Tiwari is Assistant Professor at the Institute of Urban Development Studies, Ethiopia

Zheng Yan is an assistant research fellow of the Institute for Urban & Environmental Studies (IUE), Research Centre for Sustainable Development (RCSD) of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). [Due to visa issues, Zheng Yan could not attend the seminar.]

Senior scientists

Adriana Allen is senior lecturer at the Development Planning Unit, University College London, United Kingdom

Andrea Lampis is associate professor focusing on social vulnerability at the National University of Colombia, Colombia

Mark Swilling is Academic Director of the Sustainability Institute Stellenbosch, South Africa