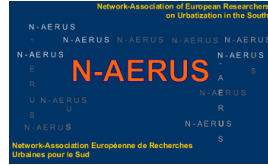


**SECURING POSITIVE CHANGE IN INTERNATIONAL URBAN POVERTY
REDUCTION POLICIES:
Is international action changing urban poverty on the ground or not?
9th N-AERUS Workshop 2008
CEHS, School of the Built Environment, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh**



SYNOPSIS OF WORKSHOP

- 1. Reports from workshops**
- 2. Conclusions from workshops**
- 3. N-AERUS Annual Meeting**

1. Reports from workshops

Forbes Davidson (IHS) set the scene for presentations and discussions with a presentation which addressed the question 'Does one size really fit all? Can generic international policies be relevant for local urban poverty reduction?', and explained the thinking behind the UN-HABITAT draft strategy 'Land and Housing for All'. This emphasized the risks involved in the application of 'big' ideas (privatization etc) in different contexts without reflection, and the lack of mature reflection and learning over time. Relevant local research is proposed as an antidote to this, with local ownership of research and communication of this to local decision-makers. The key challenges this sets for N-AERUS are:

- Promoting relevance - stronger link - research and policy and practice
- Creating stronger local linkages
- Focusing on issues relevant for practice
- Fostering the tuning of research for communication
- Lobbying to support funding

Discussion of this initial presentation raised the following points:

- Reaction of UN-HABITAT to proposed strategy and opportunity to comment on it – Forbes offered to circulate links to enable comment.
- There are questions around the real capacity to establish local research, though there are examples of institutions which have been successful in contributing to this and there is increasing internationalization of provision of training. A problem is the preference for MSc degrees with a weak focus. There are also traditions of uncritical education which are not helpful.
- Changes in policy (e.g. from deregulation to regulation) highlight the need for awareness among researchers of how to link with decision-makers and influence policy. The status of researchers in different contexts is important in this regard.
- The importance of local government needs to be acknowledged.

Workshop 1: Understanding trends and policy approaches related to urban poverty

Three papers were presented, each with the following main conclusions:

Flora Deville & Xavier Godard's paper on *La prise en compte de la mobilité quotidienne dans les politiques de réduction de la pauvreté*, based on a study of mobility of the urban poor in Antananarivo (Madagascar), concluded that:

- The poor are 'trapped' in less accessible areas characterised by fewer facilities and urban services.
- There are huge travel needs in developing countries, as well as a need to expand information and analysis on mobility conditions of the poor.
- Mobility/transport contributes to poverty reduction but is absent in international poverty reduction policies.
- Transport is an intermediate service which is essential to satisfy basic needs (and therefore to achieve MDGs), and which has to be coordinated with facilities location.

Javier Martinez-Martin presented a paper (co-authored by Karin Pfeffer, Isa Baud & Namperumal Sridharan) on *The role of Spatial Information Infrastructure in addressing urban deprivations in Indian cities*, which described a conceptual framework guiding a 5-year research programme by a team of Dutch, European and Indian scholars in case studies of four Indian cities. It concluded that:

- The conceptualisation of urban deprivations has to be done in such a way that it includes both households perspectives (demand side), as well as provision of and access to services (supply side) in the analysis.
- Spatial data required to support this analysis needs to be systematically collected and analysed and deduced knowledge matched to local governance.
- Local governance network analysis will give insights in the collection, sharing and exchanging mechanisms, providing insights into how Spatial Information Infrastructures (SIIs) should be built to provide access, usability and transparency in the process of local governance.
- Integrating knowledge deduced from this research will contribute to an SII that can help tackling urban deprivations effectively.

Adiwan F. Aritenang's paper *A Study on Indonesia Regions Disparity: Post Decentralization* presented the following main conclusions:

- Disparity between provinces in Indonesia is still severe in all calculation.
- There is convergent development in progress, with the level of revenue proportion of oil and gas and population growth as significant determinants.
- The level of human capital, capital fixed investment, and revenue proportion influences poverty rates. It was also found that revenue proportion shifts after decentralization did not have significant effect

Discussion in Workshop 1

A key focus of the discussion was the issue of production and use of information. This raised the following main points:

- The poor can be blanked out in policies through both graphic and textual omissions.
- Stakeholder workshops are a useful way of discussing concepts analysed by researchers and of raising awareness.
- The question of who participates is important, as those with voice are the most powerful.
- Linked to the above, there is often a lack of knowledge about local conditions at the level of the local municipality. The discourse is now changing in favour of local government intervention.
- There are examples of community-based gathering and production of own information (SDI).

- Politicians' involvement in decision-making is important – there are examples of community and government together prioritising slums according to conditions.
- Information is power. The issue is how to avoid it being hijacked by the powerful.
- The objective of information should be given careful consideration.
- Information production and use is linked to allocation of resources.

An additional point raised in the discussion was that transport in Africa cannot be resolved purely as a technical issues; it needs to be addressed jointly with more general planning.

Workshop 2: Appropriate responses for urban poverty reduction

Three papers were presented, each with the following main conclusions:

In *Still top-up and bottom-down. From Nairobi to Caracas*, Ilaria Boniburini & Luisa Moretto compared principles, approaches and strategies which have emerged from experiences in improving slum dwellers' life and environment in Nairobi and Caracas. In addition they explored alternative principles and approaches proposed by urban planners at the World Social Forum in 2007.

Regarding knowledge and power they concluded that:

- *Practice VS theory*: conceptualisation of alternative practices is a fundamental issue in "securing positive changes in international poverty reduction policies".
- *Academics / experts VS social movements*: there is frequent separation of the academy from the struggles of everyday life and the actions of civil society.
- *Local / traditional knowledge VS institutionalized*: the differences of power-knowledge relations of subaltern groups are central

Regarding 'the right to the city' they concluded that:

- Principles have not been explored comprehensively at policy/implementation level.
- Discussion about the right to the city appears to be an ideological struggle between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic culture.

Antje Ilberg, in her paper *Beyond Paper Policies: Planning practice in Kigali*, drew on three years experience working with the Kigali city administration in Rwanda as urban planning technical advisor, and reflected on theoretical discourses at governmental level and exchange with civil society, and the channelling of this into a practical project intended to improve housing and land tenure conditions. Main conclusions were:

- A balance is needed in new neighborhoods, permitted construction in existing urban fabric, and upgrading.
- When trying to reach this balance consideration should be given to the following questions:
 - Can low cost housing schemes be misused and boost expropriation and involuntary resettlement?
 - With good laws and policies, don't actions still usually depend on individual decisions?
 - Can policies be too flexible to be misinterpreted?
 - Are perceptions of objectives usually different?

Pranita Shrestha's *Critical analysis of 'Participation' at grassroots-led squatter resettlement project Kirtipur Housing Project, Kathmandu, Nepal* reached the following main conclusions:

- The process of *community participation* at all stages of the project was limited to non participation and a degree of tokenism – it never reached the level of *real citizen participation*.

- In spite of being claimed to be a “*grassroots-led squatter resettlement project*” the *decision making* processes were very much top down and driven by vested interests of powerful individuals.
- The degree of *transparency* and *accountability* in the project was very limited as most decision were made behind closed doors although the project claims to initiate a high degree of *community participation* in the decision making process.
- In the specific case of Kirtipur Housing Project, there was a lack of proper local adaptation of internationally promoted processes such as participation, negotiation, etc
- Therefore, in spite of the good intentions and efforts of both the national and international agencies, the outcomes of Kirtipur Housing Project may not have been able to secure positive change in international urban poverty reduction policies and really change urban poverty on ground.

Workshop 3: The role of international aid and research in urban poverty reduction

Harry Smith and Eleni Kyrou briefly presented 3 papers on behalf of authors who were unable to attend the workshop. The session ended with a fourth paper by Harry Smith and Paul Jenkins.

The paper by Carlos Marmolejo Duarte & Natália Júlia Batista D. de Souza (reported by Harry Smith), *La relación entre estructura urbana y la segregación residencial en Maceió-Alagoas-Brasil*, explored whether there is a linear correlation between urban quality and residential segregation using the case of Maceió. It concluded that:

- There is a positive correlation between the level of urban quality and social diversity (from the point of view of income and educational levels); and that there are different levels of segregation as well as different forms of occupying space.
- Areas with acceptable urban services are also the most socially diverse.
- The poorest served areas are enclaves of poverty, social specialisation and hyper-concentration, which probably foster social isolation.

The objective of Mariano Scheinsohn & Cecilia Cabrera’s paper (reported by Harry Smith), *Más allá del Capital Social. La producción de hábitat popular en Buenos Aires. ¿Puede considerarse el “capital político” como un recurso valioso inexplorado para las políticas urbanas de reducción de la pobreza y desigualdad?*, was to propose a new case study-based conceptual development which allows a more rounded view of the potential for urban development on the basis of social movement actions. It concluded that:

- There are limitations to the interpretative and explanatory power of the notion of social capital in relation to the complex social processes it is embedded in.
- Two relevant experiences in Buenos Aires show that the mobilisation and availability of resources linked to social capital imply a struggle in which politics have an important role.
- This view is based on an understanding of political capital as the ‘valorisation’ of a resource which is linked to the construction of public voice, shaping of internal leadership and external legitimacy.
- The potential for social movement and CBO housing actions to be scaled up and become an urban development agent depend on the development of their operational capacity, the attainment of concrete outcomes and their long-term sustainability as urban actors.
- These latter are linked to the development and consolidation of an important political capital which allows symbolic valuing of social capital.

The paper by Corrado Minervini & Sergio Oliete-Josa (reported by Eleni Kyrou), *Can urban planning accelerate the achievement of the MDGs? The case of the European Commission policies and an urban planning exercise in Freetown (Sierra Leone)*, highlighted the challenges of promoting cross-sector approaches in multi-institutional areas like urban development. They concluded that:

- Urban planning is the way to engage with the complexity of urban development.
- But there is a lack of recognition of planning in Sierra Leone, especially at the local level.
- In addition, the donor community has not instrumentalised urban planning in an integrated manner as a way of addressing urban poverty.

Finally, Harry Smith presented the paper on *Potential and limitations of Europe's academic research infrastructure as a resource to help tackle urban poverty*, co-authored with Paul Jenkins. This offered a reflection on the future of UK-based and/or resourced research capacity in the field of urbanisation in the South, as well as suggestions on collaborative ways forward. Its concluding questions and proposed answers were:

- Is there a continuing role for Northern academic / research institutions in the South? Yes as there is a concentration of resources, including intellectual legacy, but this needs active 'de-construction'.
- How can Northern agents engage with Southern partners in collaboration while managing to survive the neo-liberal turn in academia? There is a need to discuss and create a united front vis-à-vis funding organisations for urban research as well as lobbying for 'outreach' role which can operate on 'subsidised' basis.

Discussion related to Workshops 2 & 3

Papers presented in Workshops 2 & 3 were discussed in a single session. This raised the following main points and questions:

- Who has the power to define? Who are the actors who shape discourse?
- We need to analyse perceptions, conceptions and experiences.
- There is a problem of willingness to implement what is said in policy.
- Acknowledging rights allows the possibility of people claiming or appealing. But claims depend on how definitions are interpreted – e.g. what is 'adequate housing'?
- Power has no single location. It is continually being negotiated.
- There is a danger involved in political capital – allegiance to party. But what is meant by 'political capital'? Is this the same as 'empowerment'?
- Scale is an important issue that was only raised in one of the papers throughout the workshop.
- Urban issues are falling in international aid agendas around Europe (UK, Sweden, Spain), and also within multilateral bodies. We are now in a 'rural hype' phase.
- There is need for action at N-AERUS level to avoid the urban falling off the agenda. This requires getting through to senior decision-makers (example of the IHS/DPU produced Urban Development Guidelines, commissioned by DfID for EU).

2. Conclusions from workshops

Following the individual workshops, the plenary identified the following key conclusions from the day's discussions:

- Issues around the production of information are important, as well as their relation to power.
- There needs to be an understanding of local issues.
- The link between understanding and decision-making is important.
- We need to be aware of how discourse frames thinking and interactions. In the case of the workshop topic, the proposed international action as embodied in international policies is framed by the neo-liberal approach.
- The disappearance of the issue of urbanisation in aid/funding agency agendas is a threat that needs to be addressed. Doing so includes understanding the current economic and political changes in the world.
- However, the links between urban and rural should be borne in mind. The focus on poverty should not necessarily be one or the other. Planning, since its inception, has included both urban and rural, and linked research does not need to produce only urban policy. Many key urban problems are linked to lack of investment in rural areas. The dual conceptualisation urban/rural may become a problem, and a conceptualisation such as 'territorial development' may overcome this – be mindful of the neo-liberal conceptualisation of regional competitiveness'.
- There is a need to shift the debate to equality rather than poverty. Equality has more political implications than poverty.

3. N-AERUS Annual Meeting

N-AERUS 2008 activities

Harry Smith and Forbes Davidson briefly reported on the N-AERUS events at WUF in Nanjing.

Way forward

A wide ranging and lively discussion produced the following ideas:

- N-AERUS to produce position papers. **Action:** All to suggest topics for position papers and people to lead on these.
- Need to enable ongoing discussion among N-AERUS members. This is a possibility that the current N-AERUS coordinators have already been exploring. **Action:** N-AERUS co-ordinating group to continue to develop this.
- N-AERUS to be at the next WUF.
- Respond to consultation on UN-HABITAT draft strategy. **Action:** Harry Smith to forward participants' email addresses to Forbes Davidson to circulate consultation.
- Put consortia together to respond to calls – e.g. at European level. Action: Luisa Moretto to monitor and inform on calls.
- Use a future conference to evaluate N-AERUS and plan common actions. Next conference a possible opportunity given that it will be N-AERUS's 10th conference. **Action:** Conference hosts & N-AERUS coordinators to consider including this in 2009 conference.
- N-AERUS members to work together to produce common outputs (publications, reports). One possibility is to produce a collaborative product as a result of the next conference – La Cambre is willing to host the 2010 N-AERUS conference and has funding available to publish the N-AERUS proceedings.
- Knowledge production was suggested as a theme for a N-AERUS event which would lead to a product.

N-AERUS 2009 Conference

The next conference will be held at IHS, Rotterdam.

Forbes Davidson reported on initial discussions held at IHS for the conference. Two initial ideas for conference theme are:

- What have we learnt from the past?
- Getting the message from research through – successes and failures.

Another idea is not to have a single theme but link into other events in Rotterdam, such as 'open city' (linked to Moroccan Mayor), 'city of youth'.

Ilaria Boniburini suggested including a session on issues that are to come out of international agencies.

There is a high potential for publication from the conference.

Several dates for the 2009 conference were discussed. Agreed date: 10th-12th September 2009.