

EDITORIAL

## Our commitment to implement contents related to public space included in the New Urban Agenda adopted at the UN Habitat III conference

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On the 20<sup>th</sup> October 2016, at the United Nations Habitat III conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, held in Quito, Ecuador, the New Urban Agenda (NUA) was adopted, providing a 20-year framework on how cities should be planned and managed to best promote sustainable urbanization globally<sup>1</sup>. The document, as reported by Dr. Joan Clos, Secretary-General of the conference and Executive Director of the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), should be seen as an extension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, agreed by 193 Member States of the United Nations in September 2015.


After the first conference in Vancouver (1976) and the second in Istanbul (1996), the third Habitat major summit to discuss the future of cities was attended by around 36.000 people from 167 different countries.

The preparatory process, along the road to Quito, engaged mayors, local, regional and governmental authorities, civil society organizations and community groups, the private sector and hundreds of urban planners around the world. A “zero draft” of the NUA was released in May 2016, after four months of political negotiations, that subsequently produced a series of additional drafts. The final text of the NUA was agreed at the UN General Assembly in New York in September, during an extraordinary informal negotiation session that lasted for more than 30 hours.

Some important recommendations for the drafting and implementing of the New Urban Agenda came from a group of 200 high-level experts, working on 10 Policy Units related to six areas, from August 2015 to February 2016. The 10 Policy Units explored the state-of-the-art research and analysis, identifying good practice and lessons learned and developing independent policy recommendations on particular issues regarding sustainable urban development.

That preparatory process of the NUA also included an extensive series of events, regional meetings, thematic meetings and several “Urban Thinkers Campuses” for stakeholders’ input. Some of them were focusing on Public Space, such as the one held in Stockholm, on 29 June – 1 July 2015, as part of the Future of Places conference, promoted by UN Habitat in collaboration with Project for Public Spaces and Ax:son Johnson Foundation<sup>2</sup> and the one held in Barcelona, on 4-5 April 2016<sup>3</sup>.

At the Habitat III conference in Quito, public space and its strategic role to create safe, inclusive, resilient and sustainable cities, according to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and particularly to SDG 11<sup>4</sup>, have been discussed by delegates from all over the world. Public space is more and more the frontier where many communities fight for their future, reclaim a civic and social role, pursue their wellbeing and seek healthy and sustainable development.



**ISSUE PAPERS AND POLICY UNITS MATRIX**

THE NEW URBAN AGENDA

AREAS	ISSUE PAPERS	POLICY UNITS
<b>1. Social Cohesion and Equity – Livable Cities</b>	1. Inclusive cities (a.o. Pro-poor, Gender, Youth, Ageing) 2. Migration and refugees in urban areas 3. Safer Cities 4. Urban Culture and Heritage	1. Right to the City and Cities for All 2. Socio-Cultural Urban Framework
<b>2. Urban Frameworks</b>	5. Urban Rules and Legislation 6. Urban Governance 7. Municipal Finance	3. National Urban Policies 4. Urban Governance, Capacity and Institutional Development 5. Municipal Finance and Local Fiscal Systems
<b>3. Spatial Development</b>	8. Urban and Spatial Planning and Design 9. Urban Land 10. Urban-rural linkages 11. Public Space	6. Urban Spatial Strategies: Land Market and Segregation
<b>4. Urban Economy</b>	12. Local Economic Development 13. Jobs and Livelihoods 14. Informal Sector	7. Urban Economic Development Strategies
<b>5. Urban Ecology and Environment</b>	15. Urban Resilience 16. Urban Ecosystems and Resource Management 17. Cities and Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management	8. Urban Ecology and Resilience
<b>6. Urban Housing and Basic Services</b>	18. Urban Infrastructure and Basic Services, including energy 19. Transport and Mobility 20. Housing 21. Smart Cities 22. Informal Settlements	9. Urban Services and Technology 10. Housing Policies

Fig. 1. Habitat III Issue Papers and Policy Unites Matrix.

The issue paper related to Public Space comes from the area number 3. Spatial Development, as part of Policy Unit number 6. Urban Spatial Strategies: Land Market and Segregation.

More info at: <https://unhabitat.org/issue-papers-and-policy-units/>

We officially launched The Journal of Public Space at the Habitat III Urban Library on the 19<sup>th</sup> October 2016, during a talk with our partners from UN Habitat Public Space Programme, Laura Petrella and Cecilia Andersson, and with our supporting partner at The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hendrik Tieben. The talk was very well received and was attended by more than 90 people. Interest in our new journal was high, many

attendees have voiced the need of an independent, free and accessible platform to share ideas, researches, experiences and strategies to design, manage and appropriate public spaces.



Fig. 2-3-4. Pictures from the talk we gave at the Habitat III Urban Library, where we officially launched The Journal of Public Space (19<sup>th</sup> October 2016, Quito, Ecuador), together with our partners at UN Habitat (Laura Petrella and Cecilia Andersson) and at The Chinese University of Hong Kong (Hendrik Tieben).

Public space, as a topic of research, still fascinates and challenges several academics, but often bottom-up tactics by community groups are the most incredible example of how people are always passionate about their cities and their environment. What was evident in Quito, is how academia, industry and community groups would highly benefit in working together and discussing together about public spaces. Often academic research does not reach end-users because it is hard to access or simply because does not speak the language end-users understand. Industry is really active in promoting their design propositions, but an evaluation of the actual success of structured and complex public spaces is often just notional. Community groups would benefit in accessing ideas and examples to inform and foster their activism in promoting, building and developing their own public space.

Our first issue for 2017 try to address these complexities collating a series of papers covering different disciplinary domains and addressing different geographical areas. In the Overview section, Plummer, with Geofroy and Alvaez, addresses gender issues in public spaces. Using the Caribbean as a case study, the authors explore physical spaces,

cultural practices and their influence on human behaviours and development. Brott challenges the notion of *Star Architects* questioning if iconic projects are producing an effective improvement of the performance of cities and their public places. Lamb suggests different unstructured ways to explore public spaces and build new urban narratives. In the Space, Society and System sections we give voice to researchers on the built environment, reporting different research projects aiming to better understand our cities, our public spaces and their ecologies. In the Viewpoint section, Day shares his personal experience with building, intended as a physical exploration of the affordance of our built environment. Richards share the point of view of an established practitioner about the design of cities and communities. Garau reports on the Biennial of Public Space, a major event for engagement and discussion, which takes place in Rome, at Università di Roma TRE, inviting all us to join the upcoming fourth edition on 25-27<sup>th</sup> May. In the viewpoint section we include also a report of the presentation we gave at the Habitat III Village, Pop Up Public Space, in Parque El Ejido in Quito<sup>5</sup>, of our cinematography and experimental activities under the name 'Urban Visions. Beyond the Ideal City', and a report of the networking event 'Stand up for Public Space!' that we coordinated. The networking event was included in the official program of the Habitat III conference, after being selected among more than 1.000 proposals received in response to a global call. 'Stand up for Public Space!' is a research project established by City Space Architecture in collaboration with the Queensland University of Technology, The Chinese University of Technology, LASE+CityUrb Ecuador and The University of Auckland<sup>6</sup>. Its aim is to spread awareness about the importance of public space in our cities, through the engagement of common people, sharing pictures of their favourite public spaces on social media. As in Quito was evident that we cannot try to reduce public space to a simplified physical space, in our current issue we aim to show the variegated and different approaches to the design, research and lived experience of public spaces.

## Notes

- (1) [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/the-conversation-global/habitat-iii-is-over-but-w\\_b\\_12632068.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/the-conversation-global/habitat-iii-is-over-but-w_b_12632068.html)
- (2) <https://unhabitat.org/public-space-urban-thinkers-campus-in-stockholm-kicks-off/>
- (3) <https://www2.habitat3.org/barcelona>
- (4) <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/cities/>
- (5) <https://habitat3.org/village/44-pop-up-public-space/>
- (6) <http://www.standupforpublicspace.org/> - QUT Ethics Approval Number 1600000966

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