



Parallel session 3B-2.2

Collaboration and participation: Experiences

Tuesday 12 November, 14.00 – 15.30

DPU Room 101

Chair: **Iromi Perera**, researcher and activist

African Fabbers Cities: new opportunities for self-organisation and self-production in the African urban context

Dr Paolo Cascone, Scientific Director, African Fabbers School; Senior Lecturer, School of Architecture + Cities, University of Westminster
Maddalena Laddaga, Teaching Fellow, African Fabbers School

This paper will focus on the African Fabbers Project [AFP] case studies developed in cities around Morocco, Ghana, Mali, Burkina Faso and Senegal. The project bridges informal and advanced approaches with the aim of reshaping public spaces as spaces of relation and production through collaborative practices. Such an approach is based on the exploration of new paradigms on circular economies and “local industry” potentials for African cities’ post-colonial growth.

Of the 500 million people living in urban areas in Africa by 2020, 90% will still be living in slums (UN-Habitat). The problems of African societies are often depicted by our media as just an object for humanitarian aid. However, as explained by major international analysts, three powerful positive trends are likely to sustain Africa’s growth in the coming years. First of all, as mentioned by UNDP, the continent has a young population with a growing labour force – a highly valuable asset in an ageing world. Secondly, Africa is still urbanising and much of the economic benefit lies ahead. Productivity in cities is three times as high as in rural areas and, over the next decade, an additional 187 million Africans will live in cities according to the United Nations. Thirdly, African economies are well positioned to benefit from rapidly accelerating technological changes that can unlock growth and leapfrog the limitations and costs of physical infrastructures in important areas of economic life.

Based on this premise, the above-mentioned case studies will be compared and analysed with the aim of developing possible design-to-build processes able to bridge vernacular, spontaneous and advanced cultures, generating new opportunities of self-organisation and self-production for an African urban context. Thanks to the support of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the AFP has therefore recently implemented the African Fabbers School (Douala-Cameroon): the first community-oriented school of urban ecologies and self-construction in Africa.

Coproducing knowledge for urban equality: processes and tensions in community-led city-wide partnerships

Dr Barbara Lipietz, Associate Professor, The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, UCL
Brenda Pérez-Castro, Sociologist, Urbanist and international development practitioner

This paper explores the knowledge-for-action developed in the context of diverse cities in the South East Asian region, connected through the learning platform of the Asian Coalition of Housing Rights (ACHR). The ways such community-led processes address their participants' material living conditions and empower communities has been widely documented, and much of the success of these processes is known to be built on developing knowledge as a basis for negotiation with the state, indeed for refocusing (parts of) the state on its 'public' function. Less visible in these accounts are the diversity of actors involved in the 'people processes' and the mechanisms of their co-production.

The last four decades have witnessed a growth in the co-production of knowledge on, and collaborative responses to, urban (in)justice. In a context marked by increasing socio-spatial and environmental inequalities, and the growing vulnerability of precarious neighbourhoods, viz. the financialisation of the urban, new or reinvigorated platforms of solidarity, advocacy and action have emerged. Bringing together a constellation of actors, these platforms are characterised by a focus on developing 'counter-knowledge' on urban processes, their effects on those largely marginalised from planning, and alternative urban development pathways. Coming to grips with the mechanisms and the potential of these alliances for urban transformation is a key priority in the search for more just urban futures and the fulfilment of the SDGs and NUA. Drawing on archival data analysis and interviews, we centre our reflections on unpacking the partnerships supporting community-led processes in place, spanning community networks, NGOs, community architects, academics, professionals, community mobilisers, financial institutions and sympathetic actors in the state; the particular configurations of assembled knowledge-bases these represent; the mechanisms by which an ecology of knowledge is negotiated; and the tensions that arise in the process. We reflect on the contribution of the combined knowledge repertoires to the overall legitimacy of community-led development, the ways in which particular external challenges activate different knowledge-bases, and the challenges around knowledge translation, objectivity, validity and legitimacy of the different knowledge at play.

Storytelling as Sentipensante: A Co-designed Platform for Learning on Slum Upgrading Strategies

Dr Catalina Ortiz, Associate Professor, The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, UCL

How can cities across regions learn from slum upgrading strategies using transmedia storytelling? Learning across cities is vital to building cities that leave no one behind. Even though learning about slum upgrading strategies [SUS] across cities is imperative for urban governance and planning, how such learning occurs and the types of knowledge that are valued, documented and circulated have been less scrutinised and understood. This paper will explore a novel methodology to understand and foster the often dispersed and fragmented efforts of promoting SUS by introducing the practice of transmedia storytelling.

Using storytelling as method allow to foster empathy, to understand the meaning of complex experiences and to inspire action. The methodological approach builds on decolonial debates about the urban as it questions the existing geo politics of urban knowledge, it is territorial and relational, amplify narratives often silenced, engages with the pluriverse, links emotions and reason, and points for imagination of the future action. The project uses as pilot case the city of Medellin that has been considered a benchmark for SU strategies and focuses on the co-design of a transmedia platform involving local grassroots organisations working on informal settlements, local city officials, civic hackers, and leaders of transnational development networks. We contend that visual storytelling and digital platforms for public deliberation and policy debate can enhance methods for learning across cities and galvanise collective action when different stakeholders are involved. Framing storytelling as sensing-thinking offers a decolonial approach to urban learning recalibrating the epistemologies for trans-local learning.