Rethink the City: New Approaches to Global and Local Urban Challenges

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Rehink the City Massive Open Online Course

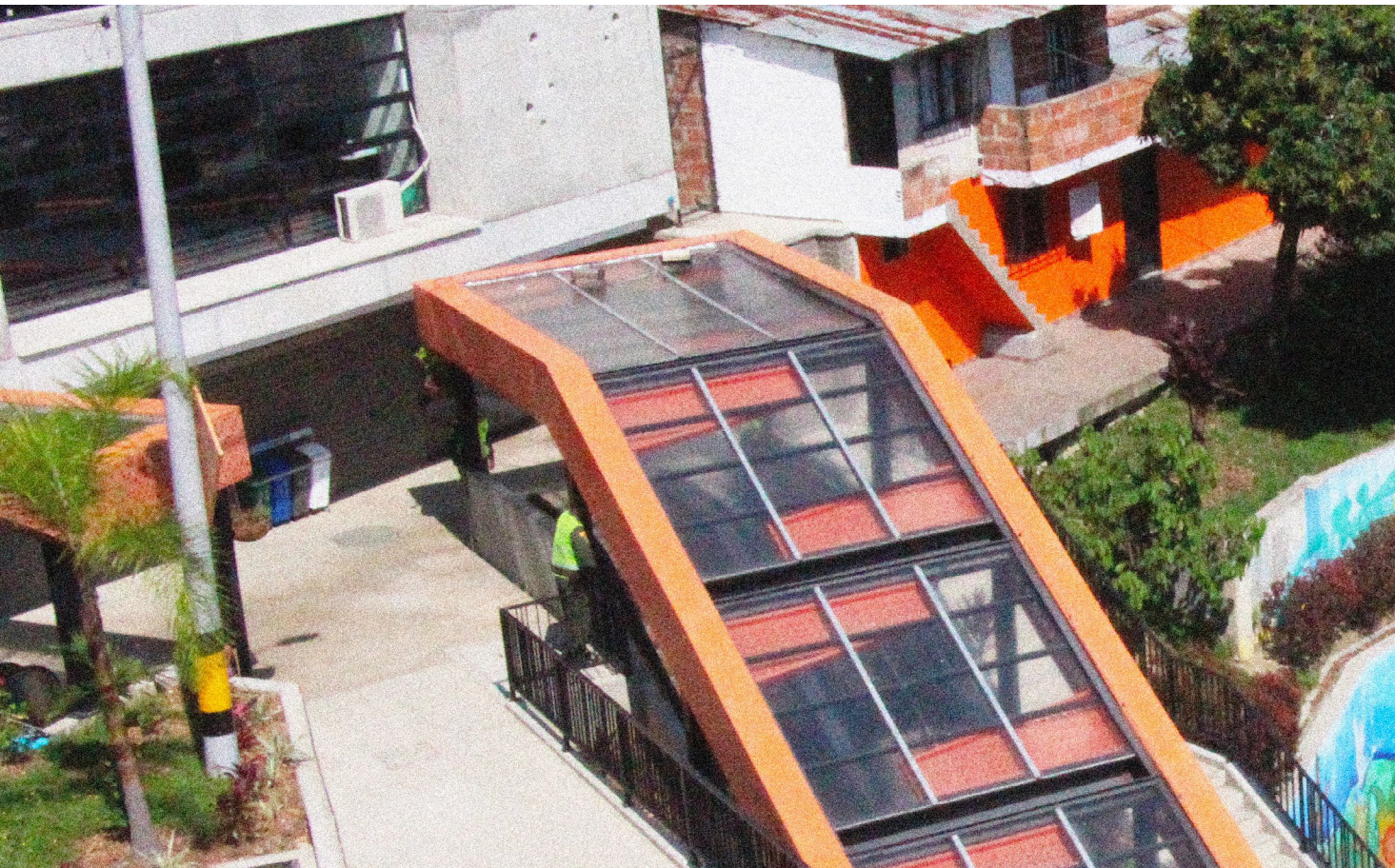
Participate in Rethink the City MOOC on the EdX platform or at
www.online-learning.tudelft.nl/courses/rethink-the-city-new-approaches-to-global-and-local-urban-challenge/

Why Rethink the City?

Foreword by Dr. Bea de los Arcos

Rethink the City began as a MOOC on edX in 2017. At the time of writing this brief foreword, it has reached over 30,000 learners over the globe. I will leave it for you to judge whether that qualifies as massive or not. What is undoubtedly clear to me is that Rethink the City is open. Let me explain why.

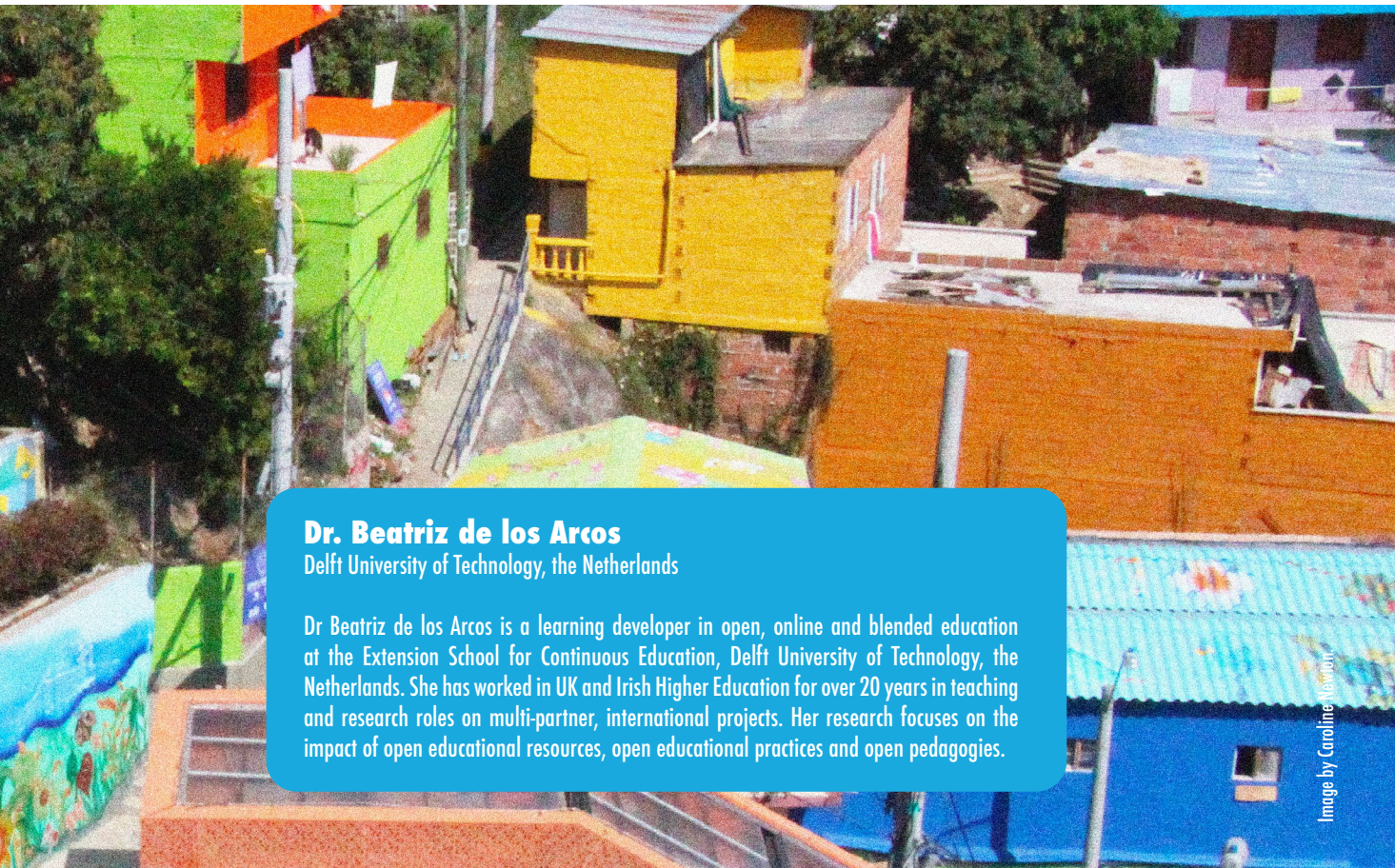
Being open means improving access to education. As our mission is to educate the world, and the world will never fit into a single online platform, Rethink the City exists also as OpenCourseWare, with no restrictions and asking for nothing in return. While English may be the lingua franca, it is not the world's only language. As such, video material has been subtitled in Spanish, Chinese, and Arabic. The course content is released under an open license that allows for adaptation, so that it can be translated into any other language. Download what is useful to you, add it to your own course, reuse it in your classrooms, modify it to suit your needs. You not only have permission to do this, but are actively encouraged to do so.



Being open means enhancing learning. Rethink the City was designed for learners not to consume information, but to apply it; for learners not to take the expert's word, but to adopt a critical stance in exploring issues that matter to them; for learners to recognise themselves in the stories they hear, to choose their own stories and how to tell them, and to share them. Above all, Rethink the City is for everyone, instructors and participants alike, to learn alongside each other.

Being open means empowering learners. Rethink the City seeks to equip people to solve the urban challenges of the Global South. This specific focus firstly serves to diversify the voices in instructional practice. The richness of perspective is then increased by inviting learners to look towards what is local to them, take the theories and tools they are given, and change their surroundings so as to change the world.

This book represents yet another expression of openness. The contributions of our learners in the MOOC have become part of a different something; their voices, their stories, their reflections, their desire to make it happen formed a body of knowledge on which others could build. They created the opportunity for the authors of these chapters to stand on the shoulders of giants. On the shoulders of the many rethinkers of this world.



Dr. Beatriz de los Arcos
Delft University of Technology, the Netherlands

Dr Beatriz de los Arcos is a learning developer in open, online and blended education at the Extension School for Continuous Education, Delft University of Technology, the Netherlands. She has worked in UK and Irish Higher Education for over 20 years in teaching and research roles on multi-partner, international projects. Her research focuses on the impact of open educational resources, open educational practices and open pedagogies.

Image by Caroline Newton

CORE MODULES

URBAN RESILIENCE

Aim: to shed some light on case studies of resilience and risk management that applies alternative approaches on the topic. It is imperative to go beyond that simplistic idea of struggling for survival. Emerging economies offer a fertile ground to conduct research on how to use these complex threats as an opportunity to build better urban environments.

SPATIAL JUSTICE

Aim: to analyse concrete cases of spatial justice and injustice in emerging economies and how contemporary theories apply there. It seeks to shift the attention given in the last few years to issues of spatial justice in the Global North, to issues of spatial justice in the booming metropolises of the Global South, where spatial fragmentation and inequality are extreme.

HOUSING PROVISION & MANAGEMENT

Aim: to review the opportunities for alternative approaches in affordable housing provision and management in different contexts around the globe. It covers the role of the State, the society, the private sector and the third sector in housing policies, exploring opportunities for ownership and rental models in different contexts.

GEOGRAPHIC MODULES

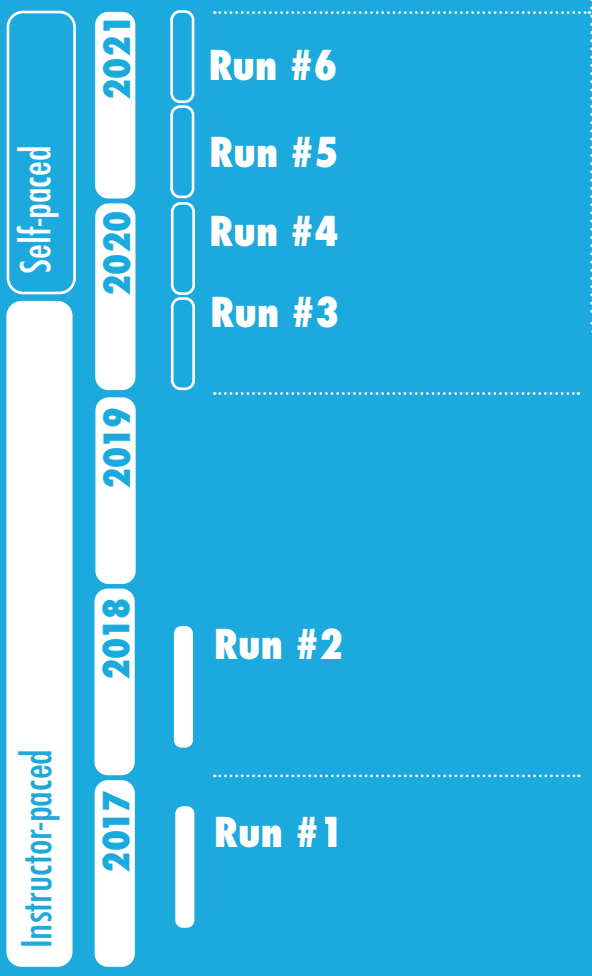
AFRICAN CHALLENGES

Aim: to contextualise the African region in relation to the urban challenges related to housing, resilience and spatial justice, and applies these concepts to case studies in Africa, with the help of professionals working on the ground.

MENA: MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA

Aim: to contextualize the MENA region with respect to the urban challenges related to housing, resilience and spatial justice, and applies these concepts to case studies in Arab cities in Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and more, with the help of professionals working on the ground.

Timeline of first 6 runs



Course update (2022)

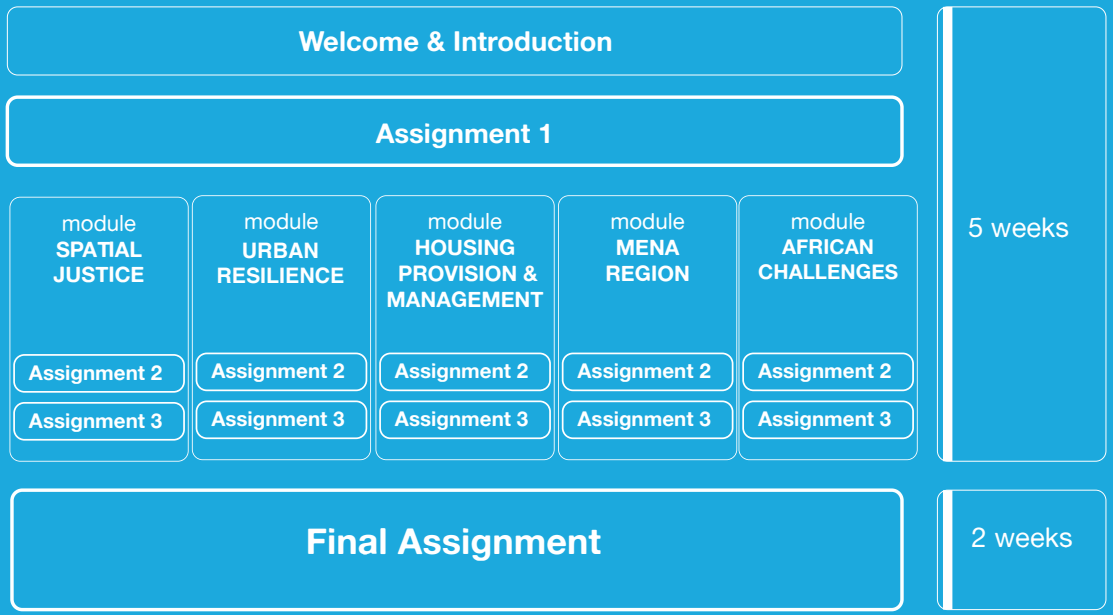
The Rethink the City team restructured and repackaged the course in 2022 to moderdnise the content, update references and create new material from researchers.
It's 3 core modules include ***Sustainable Urban Transitions, Spatial Justice*** and ***Housing Provision and Management***, with these modules absorbing many of the geographic regions.

In this newer, streamlined version of the course, learners can still access all old material in its **'Extra Content'** library so that no material is lost.

Geographical module added: MENA Region

Geographical module added: African Challenges

Course Structure



PART I.
Learning from Online Education

Ch.1 From Global South to Underrepresented Geographies

Changing Perceptions of the North/South Divide

rethink the city

In light of rapid urbanisation and the accelerating threats of climate change, scale and multitude are what set the Global North and South apart. Yet, as this course exposes, the issues faced by urban areas have resembling themes and characteristics, regardless of economic status or geographic location. Therefore, in the context of sustainable urban development, the binary dichotomy of the terms 'Global North' and 'Global South' must be contested. While a focus on Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, and the MENA region, Rethink the City attempts to understand the transboundary nature of urban issues and provide a platform to gather insights beyond borders. It is only by learning from other narratives that we can collectively address the complex challenges ahead.

Keywords:
Global South, Global North, language, underrepresented geographies, unbalanced, imaginary, perceptions, place-based, decolonise

Written by the editorial team:
Dr. Igor Pessoa, Anja van der Watt, Dr. Luz María Vegara and Dr. Caroline Newton

Image by Luz María Vegara

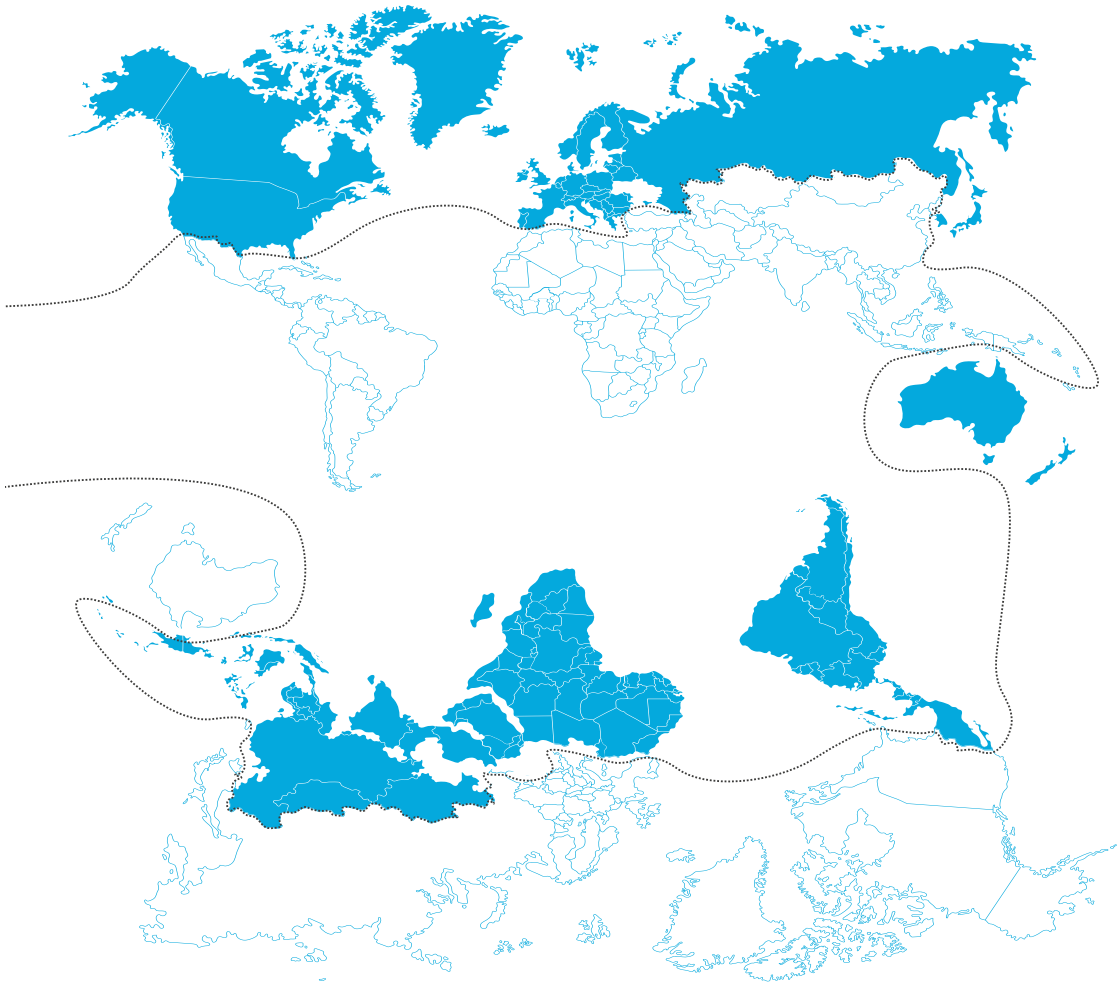


Figure 1: The imaginary line of the Global North/South divide. Which way up?
Visual created by Anja van der Watt

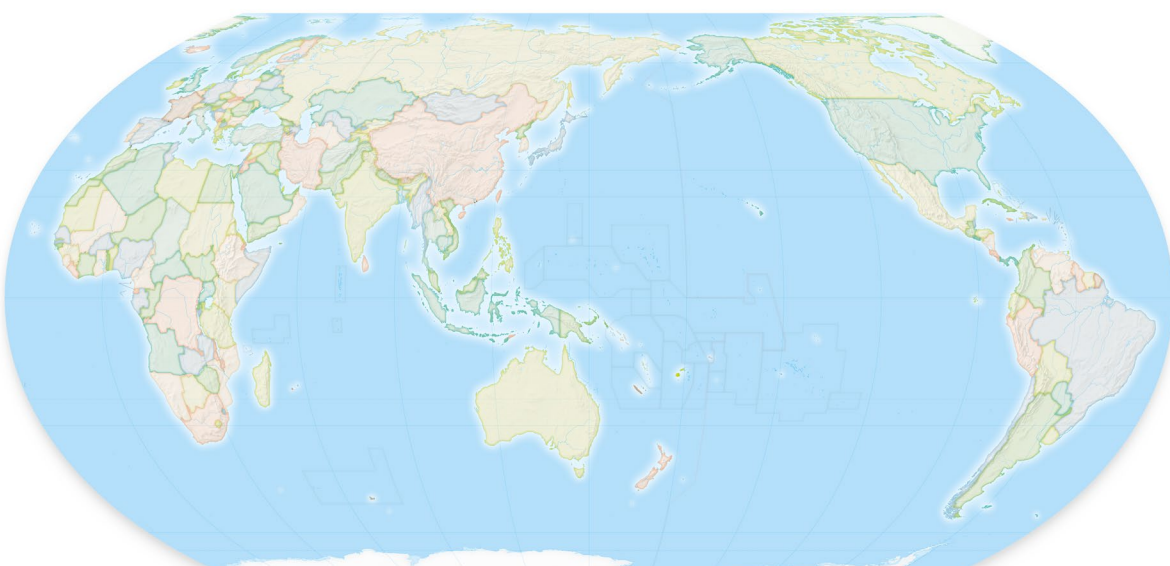


Figure 2: Same world, different view - the Equal Earth projection demonstratnig true sizes of nations relative to one another, set at 150 East
Questioning world view and Western bias. Map taken from EqualEarth.com

What is the Global South? A disclaimer about a limited terminology

During the creation, development, and delivery of the Rethink the City course, one of the most common questions that arose among the lecturers was: What is the Global South? The term seems inadequate to highlight a group of wildly diverse countries and we cannot clearly identify which commonalities to take into account. In a recent on-campus course, we developed a simple poll for students, gave them a list of countries, and asked them to identify which ones belong to the Global South. Some countries, like Brazil, Kenya, or Indonesia, were commonly linked to the Global South, but things became more complicated when we added such countries as North Korea and South Korea, or Guyana and French Guyana, or China and Taiwan. It is clear, to some extent, that the term builds not only on economic development, but also on political values. Additionally, in the public imaginary, the term seems to directly replace the notion of countries that at some point were referred to as 'third world' and later on as 'developing nations' – two terms coined in different periods (and internawtional contexts) that seem less pertinent nowadays. Perhaps 'Global South' is slightly less archaic than its predecessors, and even though we used it in our course, it still feels limited, inaccurate, and counter-productive. Another alternative is 'majority world', referring to where the majority of the population resides in contrast with the 'minority world'; however, this term emerged organically within the discourse of social scientists, policy makers, and activists as a critical response to traditional terminologies, but remains a niche term in literature.

The Rethink the City team, being mostly based in Europe, noticed that there are many similar challenges being faced in European cities and those in the so-called Global South. Social and economic inequality, gentrification, and poor representation of marginalised groups are but a few examples of challenges faced in both the Global North and South. The aggregation of countries or cities under one label that inefficiently defines a collective of countries or trigger an old-fashioned imaginary seemed inappropriate. Internally, and in many discussions of the course, we adopted the term 'underrepresented geographies' that emerged organically in one of our early, preparatory discussions. We believe that the term is more appropriate for defining places that do not necessary fall into the dichotomy South or North, while having less of a political connotation.

The contextual scale that students were working on also played an important role in determining the terminology we used. Despite many of the challenges discussed occurring in cities globally, we wanted the assignments to be place-based. During the course, we worked on the scale of cities and neighbourhoods. In such a local scale, especially with the global trend of increased inequality, the representation

of an underdeveloped South and developed North can not only coexist in the same city, but perhaps also lie next to each other. In order to acknowledge these nuances, we must understand 'underrepresented geographies' as a term that can also represent different fragments of a city.

We decided to use 'Global South' in the beginning of the course, at which point we believed it would better communicate the course's geographical focus. It also worked well to communicate to a massive audience and attract more participants to debate since it is a more familiar term. Nevertheless, as the course develops and improves through time, we believe that the terminology should evolve with it.

Learning from underrepresented geographies

Planning researchers have long defended a southern shift on planning studies, including Watson, Caldeira, Carollini, and Santos. Not only is this based on the much-highlighted fact that the world is now majorly urban and that this accelerated urbanisation is concentrated in the Global South, but also because there is much to be learned from these underrepresented geographies.

Carollini (2018) shed some light on the unbalanced production of planning research and education focused on the Global North. She emphasised that this lack of focus on the Global South has generated poorly-trained professionals unaware of the local dynamics, and who have unsuccessfully tried to apply concepts and strategies from their North-American and Eurocentric training to cities in the Global South. According to Carollini, this leads to the replication of failed projects or the creation of developments that are disconnected to local identities and realities. The concentration of planning education and research in the Global North is fostering a second wave of colonisation of planning practices similar to the internationalisation of the modernist planning in the 1950s. This is what Vanessa Watson (2016) refers to as a reproduction of monoculture with increased 'inter-referencing of cities visions around the globe', which can be seen in new developments, such as towns which are 'look-alikes' of Dubai.

In the Rethink the City MOOC, we aimed to invert this logic and promote the use and exchange of Southern theories and case studies from underrepresented geographies that could also serve to inform the cities of the Global North. Despite being based at TU Delft, the course team was almost exclusively from the Global South and the course counted with many contributions from partners outside of the Netherlands. The MOOC format naturally helped with this collaboration because not only were the lecturers from the Global South, but so were a great

number of participants, who contributed with their lived local experiences and practices. They acted as facilitators and curators of these contributions, fostering a horizontal, lecturer–student collaboration rather than a traditional, top-down approach. This inverted flow of knowledge and way of practice is needed for a more inclusive and representative planning education.

Is the Global South hard to sell?

In Go South, Young Planner, Go South! (2018), Carollini argued that focusing on the Global South is somewhat hard to sell to on-campus students in the United States of America. However, the experience of the Rethink the City MOOC confirmed our impression that this is not the case when you go online. The course attracted many students from around the globe and, interestingly in each run, the USA was consistently ranked among the top 3 countries in terms of participation numbers (see Chapter 2). One could argue that online education offers the opportunity to reach other types of participants. Perhaps it is just the lower financial cost of attending a MOOC that generated the opportunity to reach a different audience. It is not possible at this stage to concretely determine why this happened, but our experience showed that online students seem to be open, curious, and motivated to learn from different and distant locations.

It is hard to define why many universities struggle to implement more diverse curricula for planning education on-campus. It could be that there is no demand due to the structural changes that need to happen for southern urbanism knowledge to be more appreciated. Rolando Vázquez (2021) defended that a critical analysis of modernity, broadly understood broadly as the Western project of civilization, could contribute to the decolonisation of knowledge in education. The Rethink the City MOOC hints on how to contribute, within a traditional Western structure of planning education, to a more diverse planning debate.

The perks of an online community

Building an online community is radically different from an on-campus community of students. What unites the students is not their shared backgrounds, the way they look, or the music that they listen to, but rather their interest in, and positions on, urban challenges. Hidden by the relative anonymity of an online platform, students were able to share their impressions and receive feedback from peers working on the same topic. Despite challenges being place-based, there were many similarities and differences to learn from that were not location-dependent.

Image by Caroline Newton

The course managed over 2,000 active students who were simultaneously adding their views to the debates proposed by the course team. This massive number of contributions created a strong network of knowledge exchange which forced the lecturers to act more as facilitators than as traditional educators. As educators, this is a change to which we are still trying to adapt. This will require time, as fostering knowledge exchange takes quite a different set of skills to only providing it. It also means that we need to rely more on collective knowledge and open ourselves to knowledge sources which differ from those of typical academic production. For example, many participants referred to alternative knowledge networks that have collected information about studies and practices in the Global South. Carolini (2018) also highlighted some of these: the Cities Alliance Network (https://www.citiesalliance.org/resources/knowledge-library), the United Cities and Local governments (https://learning.uclg.org), and the Slum Dwellers International knowledge hub (https://sdinet.org/publication/). These platforms are important sources of grounded knowledge that, despite being extremely useful, are not commonly used in traditional planning education. Rethink the City participants not only contribute to shaping the course itself, but benefit from this exchange of tips and alternative knowledge sources which aim to bring more diversity to planning education.

Final thoughts

In this chapter, we wanted to share some thoughts that challenge traditional perceptions on the knowledge flows and exchanges between the North and South. On the one hand, the term 'underrepresented geographies' adds the nuance of defining places that do not necessarily fall into the South/North dichotomy. On the other hand, a place-based understanding of our cities and neighbourhoods allows us to identify common urban challenges by considering territories from their local characteristics.

Conducting planning education within an online environment, as with the Rethink the City course, can offer an international perspective on current urban challenges without necessarily undermining local values of context-specific knowledge and understanding. Online educational tools can provide an open platform to encourage debates and explore Southern perspectives on current global issues, ranging from climate resilience to human rights and inequalities to participatory practices.

As educators and researchers, we must encourage the exploration of alternative learning experiences from contexts that are less portrayed in mainstream education. This provides an opportunity for urban practitioners to lift each other up and work together towards achieving a fairer and more sustainable urban future. It can encourage us to question the imaginary line that was drawn between the global 'North' and 'South' by our colonial past and embrace a shift in perspective. Through the pursuit of equitable access to, and representation in, educational processes, regardless of geographic location, we can achieve a fairer and more holistic approach when addressing the pressing issues ahead.

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Image by Caroline Newton

Ch.2 Rethink the City Course

Global community and Pressing Urban Challenges

Rethink the City supports the co-production of knowledge through collaborative efforts of the global community. Its ambition to broaden the academic study of urban challenges to underrepresented geographies is reflected in its form: A free, online course inclusive to all, regardless of location or background. However, despite its benefits, online education has evident setbacks. This chapter seeks to shine a light on various issues faced by this unconventional academic curriculum and what kind of measures were taken to overcome them.

Keywords:
Co-creation, co-production, online education, platforms, digital learning, participation

Written by the editorial team:
Dr. Luz María Vergara, Anja van der Watt, Dr. Igor Pessoa and Dr. Caroline Newton

Image by Luz María Vergara

Introduction

Recent higher education service paradigms have demonstrated a shift in seeing students as consumers to students as co-creators, co-producers, or participants in the development of meaningful educational experiences (Deng, R., & Benckendorff, P.,2021). The primary learning experience of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) is found in the discussions and interactions between learners and the course staff and in the amount and quality of material and knowledge created during the course's duration. Under a co-production paradigm, knowledge is perceived as a shared resource, which is jointly generated and publicly owned´ (Miller et al. 2006, p. 14). Learners are considered active collaborators, working with the course staff to co-create a body of knowledge through discussions, assignments, peer exchange, and feedback. This co-production is a prominent feature in *Rethink the City: New Approaches to Global and Local Urban Challenges* as between 2018 and 2021, students created 10.479 graphics, 79% of which received comments from other students or the course team.

Using the case of the online course *Rethink the City*, this chapter brings to light this relationship: the creation of new knowledge through the collaborative effort of a global community and the course staff. More particularly, we want to know what the features of the global community are; and how this community contributes to the creation of new knowledge in order to better understand local and global urban challenges. To that purpose, this chapter later discusses the characteristics of the *Rethink the City* participants and conducts a qualitative and quantitative study of the final assignments produced between 2017 and 2021 in six successive course runs. For the study, we evaluate the students' final project, which consists of a visual essay identifying the key local urban challenges in a given location and the suggested solutions that address them. We analyzed 902 assignments and organized them in an excel database based on the location of the urban challenge presented, the module in the course they most closely reflected, and keywords based on the titles provided.

In the following sections we will first describe the educational experience of the MOOC, then discuss how we understand inclusive global learning as a process with specific characteristics and challenges. Thirdly, we will explain how inclusive and global co-creation of knowledge is done through the MOOC and finally we will draw some conclusions and speculate on what form the course could take in the coming years.

The educational experience of the Rethink the City MOOC

The Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) *Rethink the City: New Approaches to Global and Local Urban Challenges* was produced by Delft University of Technology's Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment. The course seeks to gradually develop a critical perspective on local urban challenges in the Global South, while also reflecting on the relationship between global theories and local embeddedness. The course is part of the TU Delft Extension School's online portfolio and is available on the EdX platform. *Rethink the City* has conducted six iterations since 2017, reaching 29.047 learners from 184 countries across the world.

The course is divided into three themes: spatial justice, housing provision and management, and urban resilience. Each topic follows the same structure: a short theoretical lecture by a senior researcher, three case studies presented by PhD candidates, two practitioner testimonials, and two practical exercises. During the course, participants learn how to develop a critical approach to understanding their own urban environments and how to translate this knowledge into analytical tools and innovative urban solutions.

Recognizing the drawbacks of online education as compared to traditional classroom instruction, the course team created several methods to bridge the gap by providing online spaces where students could engage and learn from one another. Building a learning community is important for addressing aspects of conventional education that are difficult to mimic online, such as face-to-face classroom activities or fieldwork (Shapiro et al., 2017).

For this objective, three key tools were used: first, the course was a TU Delft pioneer in using the platform Sketchdrive, which allows students to submit visual content and offer feedback to one another's work in the form of comments or drawings. A second tool used by the course is the virtual forum incorporated in the EdX platform, which became the primary communication channel between the course team and the learners. This forum is intended for day-to-day interactions as well as holding debates on various issues. While these two platforms are the primary means of engagement throughout the course, a Facebook page was created to foster a feeling of community beyond the course's formal duration. With over 3500 followers, the Facebook page has supported a worldwide online community outside the edX platform.

Rethink the City has been edited and updated over the six-course versions to give a comprehensive learning experience: a course about frontline urban challenges requires continual revision to be relevant and up to date. Although the learning experience has improved over time, there are still significant challenges to overcome in online education, such as more equitable grading and assessment

methods, more personalized instructor-learner interactions, and socioeconomic and language barriers that continue to limit equal access to online education (Moreno Pessoa et al. 2019).

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought forward the ongoing popularisation of online education. The abrupt change from classrooms to virtual environments showed the relevance of having high-quality, stimulating, and engaging online educational experiences. Given the long-term consequences of these new educational settings in higher education, the lessons and information from MOOCs or comparable formats are more important than ever in refining online methods and fostering blended experiences.

Inclusive Global Trends and Challenges

As this course intends to broaden the academic study of urban challenges to underrepresented geographies, it was important to involve a diverse and global student demographic which reflects this. *Rethink the City* attempts to offer a level playing field for learners irrespective of circumstantial factors, as well as ensuring user safety to some degree. Students over the runs have represented a vast array of nationalities and cultures, adding invaluable insight into the regions they tune in from. The following section of the essay examines the formation of the global community before discussing how the team has attempted to overcome socio-economic, geographical, cultural, language, and infrastructural obstacles to inclusive learning.

Towards an inclusive, global community

Following the nature of MOOCs, its entirely digital format allows the content to reach a wider audience than an in-person course would otherwise be able to do, resulting in a global demographic (Weinhardta & Sitzmann, 2019). The first six runs of the *Rethink the City* MOOC saw learners representing 184 countries spread across six continents (see Figure 1 on the next page) extending far beyond those who live in close geographical proximity to, or can regularly travel to, the host institution. The community is first formed in threads on the course forum through informal introductions as their first assignment of each run. Members are encouraged to maintain these connections through ‘groups’ on social media platforms, offering a way of linking alumni from all over the world. As well as heated discussions on urban development topics, educational, professional and networking opportunities are often shared on these groups. This network continues to expand each year and is used as a digital meeting point enabling the continuation of inter-peer relationships after the completion of a run.


Image by Caroline Newton

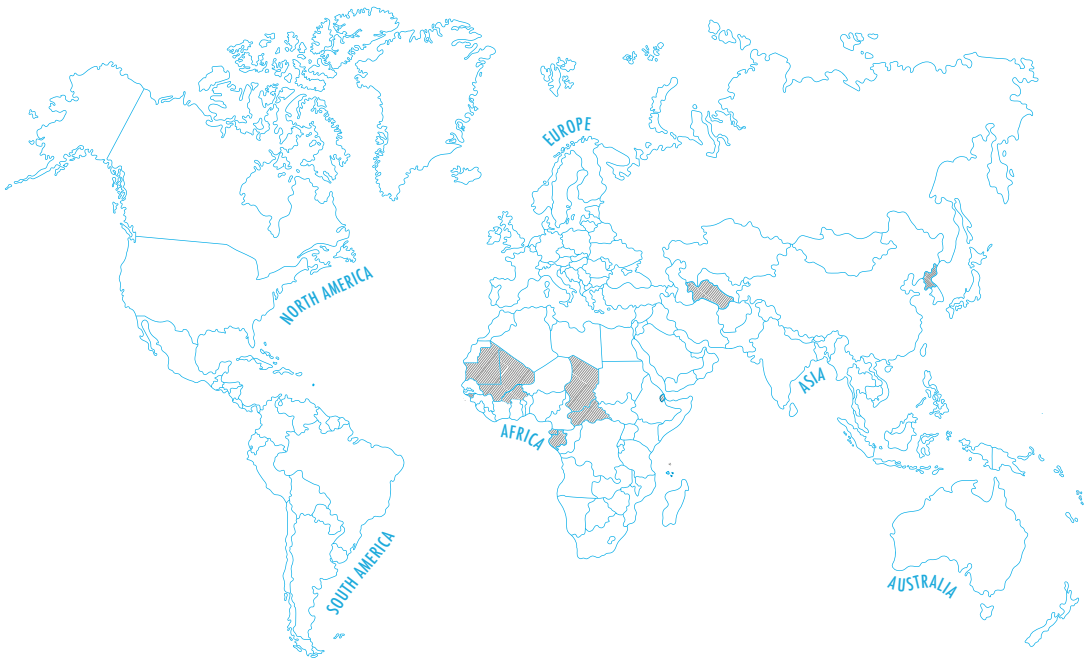


Figure 1: Student participation across 6 continents
Shaded areas represent nationalities that were not selected. Note that island states are not visuaally epresented in the graphic, and a proportion of the learners did selected 'unknown' geography rather than their country of origin.

By nature of open access, this community is considerably more inclusive than that of conventional, tertiary education. Being completely free to enroll in, it is technically accessible to everyone with a smart device and adequate internet connection. Costs of university education have long been criticized for being ineffective at addressing educational inequality through its unaffordability (Flavin, 2017). With the average university course in the Netherlands costing between 1.040 and 2.083 EUR annually for EU/EEA students and between 6.000 and 20.000 EUR for non-EU/EEA students, affordable courses like *Rethink the City* offer an alternative or complementary route to notoriously expensive university courses while providing participants with high-quality education, often still led by accredited teachers representing internationally recognised institutions (Mastersportal, 2022).

On a social level, by having a relatively loose program with only provisional internal deadlines, learners can experience flexibility around their varied lifestyles and prior commitments, reducing the need to compromise other aspects of life for education. The first three runs, in 2017, 2018, and early 2020, were "instructor-paced," which was the closest format to classroom teaching, also with the biggest student uptake totaling over 20 thousand enrollments. With defined assignment deadlines and recorded feedback sessions that could be viewed at any time, there was no need for scheduled meetings or live broadcasting. This drastically opened up the audience base to learners living in time zones which do not comply with that of the course team, and provided the learner with agency to study where and when it suits them. This level of freedom was increased further in April 2022 with the "self-paced" version, which eliminated

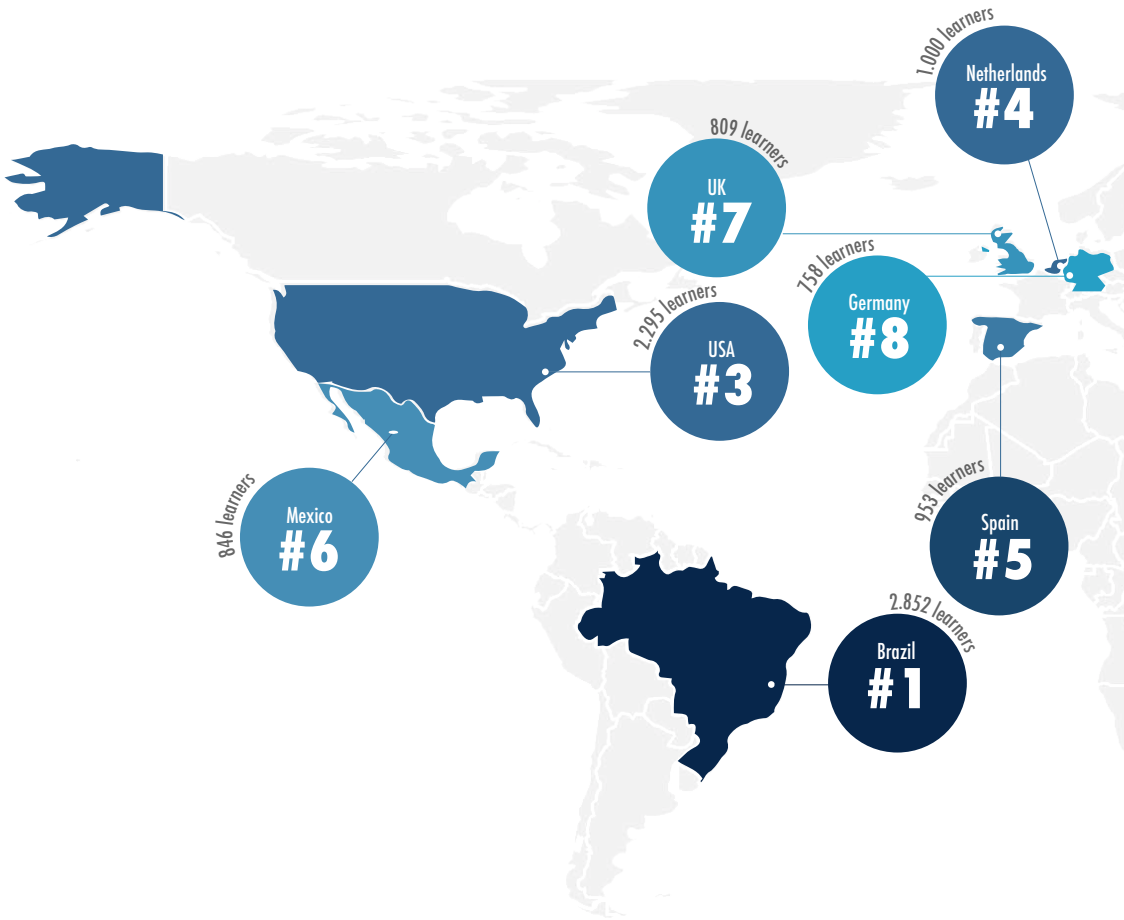


Figure 2: Top 10 participants nationalities from runs 2017-2021

internal deadlines and provided a foundation for self-driven learning. Although this meant that the intensity of interactions were less, inter-peer communication was sustained by assignments requiring students to provide feedback on at least one other's work in order to pass.

Overcoming the limits to inclusivity

Rethink the City attempts to offer a level playing field for learners irrespective of circumstantial factors, as well as ensuring user safety to some degree. The key data retrieved from learners included: gender, age, location, and level of education. Like most MOOCs, the course assumes a base level of academic knowledge from secondary education and above. Learners can enroll irregardless of their academic status, and there is no need for an assessment in order to be accepted.

Despite the course's vast demographic reach, there is a weak correlation between national populations and learner enrollment. The MOOC is accessible for learners through the EdX platform, whose reach is unrelated to the country's size or to how engaged a population is in the themes covered in *Rethink the City*. The number

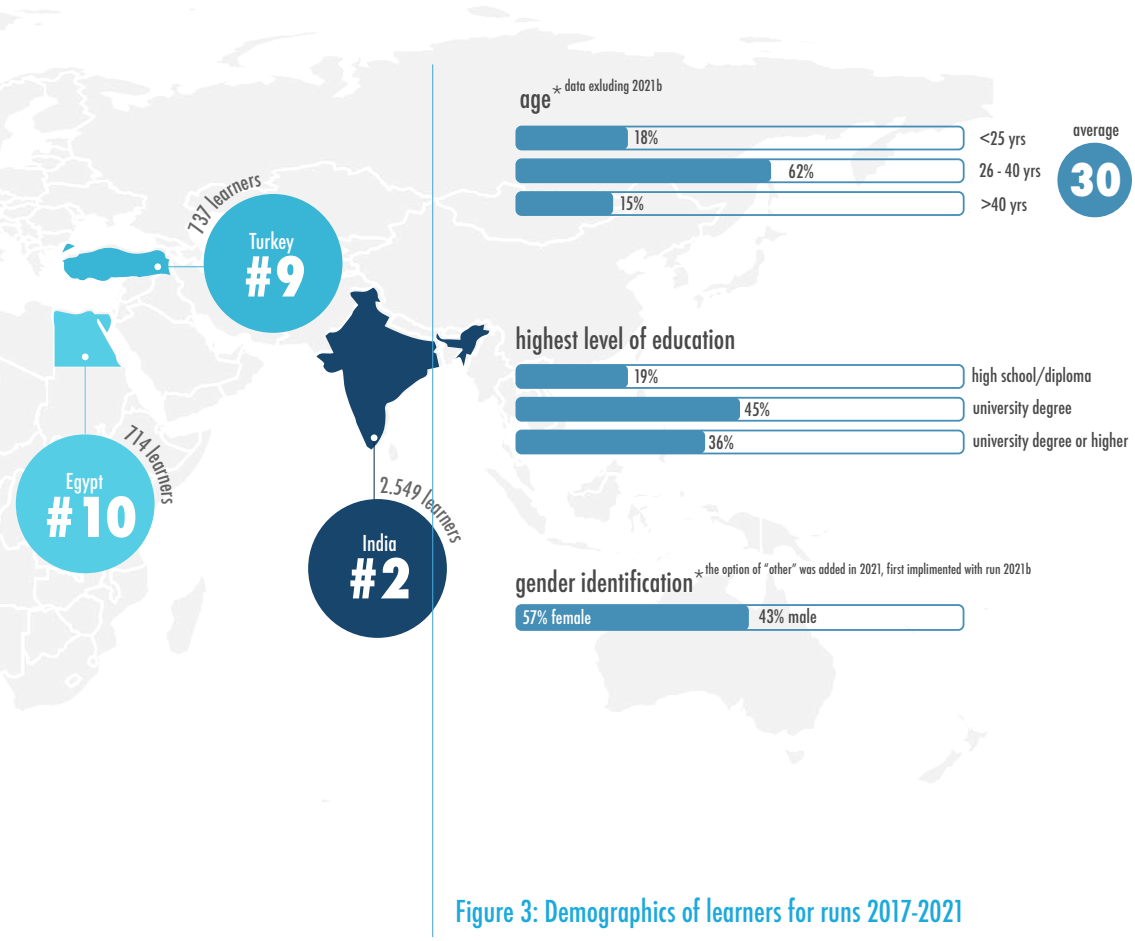


Figure 3: Demographics of learners for runs 2017-2021

of enrollments is likely to be connected to the EdX platform's popularity in specific nations in contrast to other online learning platforms, as well as geopolitical, cultural, or social circumstances.

Unsurprisingly, countries such as India, US and Brazil, ranking second, third and sixth most populous countries world wide, together represent almost one third of the total learners. However, other countries are less well represented considering their size (UN DESA, 2022). Indonesia, Pakistan, Nigeria, Bangladesh and Russia ranking fourth, fifth, seventh, eighth and ninth in the world population chart respectively, together they amount for only 4.3 percent of the learners. In terms of gender distribution, it is encouraging to see that people identifying as females or "other" have represented over 50% for each of the runs: a trend now reflected in traditional institutions, too (UNESCO, 2021).

Cultural and political differences, in addition to providing depth of knowledge and understanding among peers, can be a deciding factor in whether someone enrols in the course or not; and, if enrolled, can be both a powerful motivator or a barrier to the quality of their learning experiences. Preset ideologies or cultural expectations may restrict what a learner chooses to express in their work and could limit a student's confidence to engage honestly and inquisitively with certain debates,

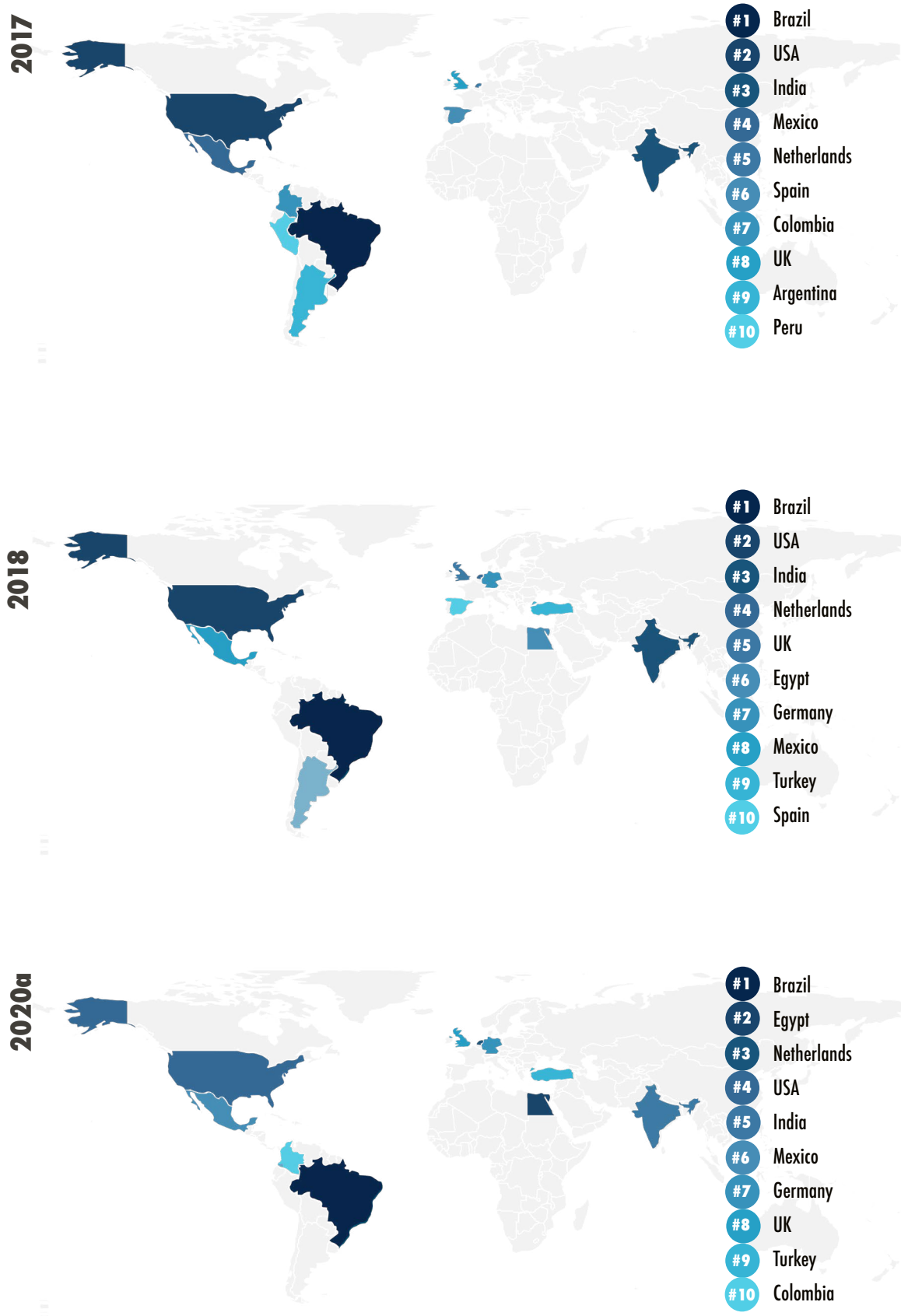


Figure 4: Top 10 participating countries per run

2020b

#1 India
#2 USA
#3 Brazil
#4 UK
#5 Philippines
#6 Netherlands
#7 Indonesia
#8 Germany
#9 Canada
#10 Mexico

2021a

#1 India
#2 USA
#3 Turkey
#4 Netherlands
#5 Germany
#6 UK
#7 Brazil
#8 Spain
#9 Mexico
#10 Italy

2021b

#1 India
#2 USA
#3 Turkey
#4 Netherlands
#5 Germany
#6 Indonesia
#7 Brazil
#8 Canada
#9 UK
#10 Mexico

Rooftop view, Morocco. Image by Anja van der Watt

especially during peer-to-peer exchanges on the forum. This is especially true for certain sensitive topics discussed in the course, such as gender, religion, political views, or sexual orientation, which, if communicated openly, might represent a risk to the student in certain settings.Through allowing students to pick their own username or pseudonym, anonymity is an option for those who want their identity to remain anonymous: this can bolster unilateral learner participation without inter-peer bias. To avoid further dangers in terms of accountability of behaviours, forum moderators make sure that comments are screened for any potentially offensive or abusive language from learners.

An interesting case which posed a challenge to inclusion is that of China: being the most populous nation in the world in 2022 and representing the largest number of internet users globally at 1.02 billion, it accounts for 0.01% of enrolled learners in the *Rethink the City* course (Statistica, 2022b). Restricted access to an internet connection evidently stifles the ability for people to take online courses. In a few exceptional cases, for example, in countries where the internet is censored or has restricted access, learners have been impeded or prohibited from legally accessing the EdX platform or must use VPNs.

In addition to demographic inequalities, language has been another obstacle to inclusivity, and multiple efforts have been made to overcome language barriers and regional reach. A majority of the videos, transcripts and assignments are set to English by default as it is considered to be the language of science (Crystal, 2003). With Spanish being the primary language for communication across the global population (World Population Review, 2022), all videos have been transcribed into Spanish with the hope to encourage larger participation from Spanish-speaking countries, particularly in Latin America. In February 2020, the geographic module MENA (Middle East and East Africa) module was released in collaboration with EDRAAK - an Arabic MOOC platform - and saw that its content was translated to Arabic. A previous effort in 2018 attempted to increase reach to students throughout other parts of Africa through the African Urban Challenges module in 2018. This focused specifically on pressing issues in the African continent. It is difficult to predict whether the content should be translated into a vast array of languages, with the number of people using the English language increasing with time in parallel with technology making it easier than ever to translate online content. Internet translation tools and browser plugins have already achieved instantaneous web page translations: yet these are not without faults (De Vries et al, 2018). In line with the advancement of such technologies, the future looks bright in terms of lessening the linguistic barriers posed to online learning. In the next section, we will discuss the opportunities and limitations of digital, online learning in a global climate.

Children on their way to school. Image by Caroline Newton

The digital divide

A pressing and ongoing challenge with any online education is disparities of data infrastructure. Whereas in much of the Global North including the Netherlands where the course was conceived, fast internet connection is taken for granted, this is not the case in many other regions. In April 2022, only 63% of the world population had access to the internet: of this, 92.6% was being accessed through a mobile device (Statistica, 2022a, 2022b). 90% of the population in developed nations have regular access to the internet in comparison to Least Developed Countries (LDCs), standing at 27% (ITU, 2021). The divide is also prominent between the rural and urban communities, with urban dwellers being twice as likely to use the internet as those in rural locations globally (ITU, 2021b). This is even greater for the continent of Africa, with 50% of urban dwellers being online regularly, compared with only 15% of the rural population (ITU, 2021b).

MOOCs can penetrate national borders, yet are evidently unable to break through infrastructural barriers countries may face. One way *Rethink the City* has been able to overcome some of the digital disparities is through its ability to be followed using smart phones and other mobile devices, which are more widely available than PC or laptop access: over 83% of the world population owns a smartphone (Statistica, 2022c).It aims to be user friendly to those without reliable internet connection through having a video-lecture library where videos can be downloaded as and when internet access is available, reducing the dependency on constant or reliable connection. Additionally, assignments do not require access to specific hardware or software aside from a browser, giving the learner the option to submit plain text to avoid the need to use expensive equipment such as cameras. Undoubtedly, tools can impact the visual quality of a submission and therefore influence to what degree it is considered of “good quality”. Online courses strive to bridge this divide, with digital tools such as Sketchdrive allowing a more standardised format for submissions.

2018-2021 Global and local urban challenges: building a non-conventional source of knowledge

Confronting traditional, top-down approaches to education, *Rethink the City* is a course that has been co-produced, evolving iteratively over time. After each run, the course team scans its content to assess its relevance and to ensure its terminology gets updated where applicable. It is co-curated by learners themselves, with the forum embedded on the EdX platform acting as a discussion ground for students to express their ideas, thoughts and concerns regarding the content openly and democratically, often with these ideas being fed back into the course itself. The objective behind this communal co-curation is for learners to help build a course that they can feel ownership over, inspire future learners, and experience a feeling of connection to the larger *Rethink the City* community. An optional end-of-run survey that captures anonymous learner reflections and constructive feedback enhances the possibilities for continuous improvement. This intentionally means that the course is continuous dialogue, with its trajectory being guided collectively by the team, students and current affairs, considering a multitude of world views.

URBAN RESILIENCE

SPATIAL JUSTICE

HOUSING PROVISION & MANAGEMENT

The course material was divided into three thematic modules that examined urban issues through the lenses of spatial justice, urban resilience, and housing provision and management. These interconnected and interdependent concepts served as the course's backbone, integrating theoretical methods with real-world case studies. Between 2018 and 2021, learners uploaded 902 final assignments where they presented, analysed and provided solutions for these challenges.

The final assignment consists of a visual essay in which learners develop a critical analysis on a specific urban challenge of their choice. The visual essay considers the presentation of the problem, its analysis with theories and case studies and perspectives to tackle it. The essay conveys the message in a poster using a combination of images and texts. At the end of the six runs, we gathered 361 final assignments related to spatial justice, 327 about urban resilience and 208 about housing provision and management. Besides the connection to the main thematic modules, the assignments did not consider a predefined content, meaning that the learners were free to choose the location, urban challenge and topics addressed in their visual essay. The overview of the keywords of the assignments (see Figure 5) shows the main thematic topics (e.i., housing, urban resilience and spatial justice and injustice) but also specific subjects such as "right" in relation to the right to the city and the right to housing, "water" and "floods" in connection to the climate crisis and the management of natural resources. The predominance of urban challenges in contrast to the rural environment was evidenced in the relevance of the words "cities" and "city". Among the other themes covered by a larger number of students were "gentrification," the role of "communities" in urban planning, and the concept of "informality" in housing and public space.

Figure 5: Wordcloud showing the most frequently used keywords in all final assignments between 2017-2021

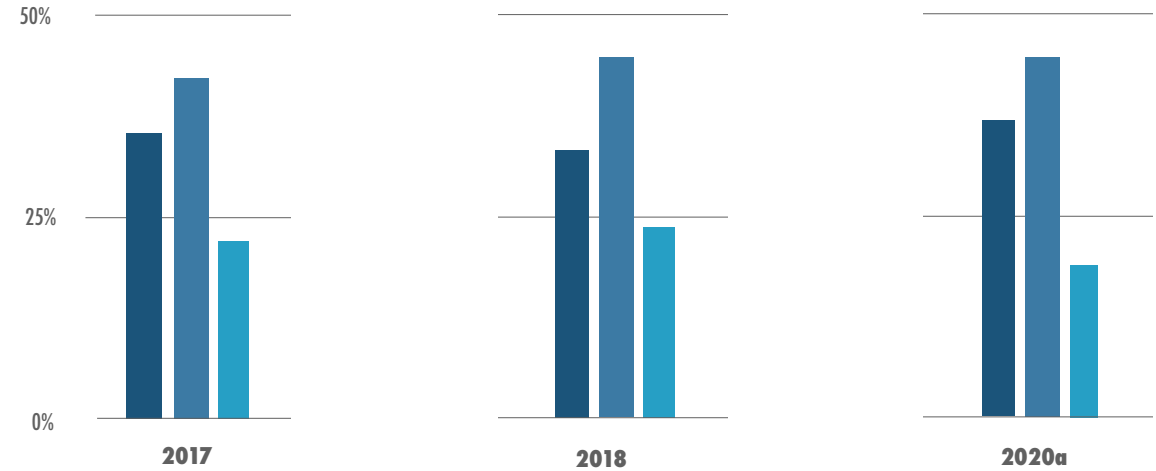


Figure 6: Percentage of main topics chosen for final assignments per year

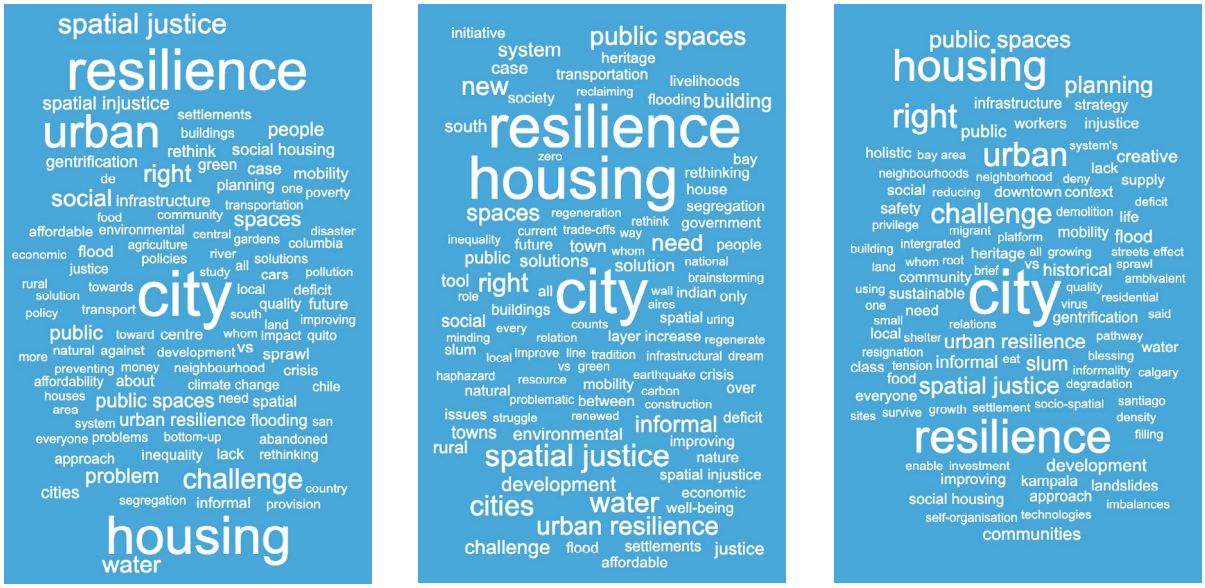
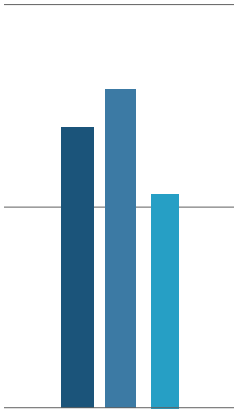
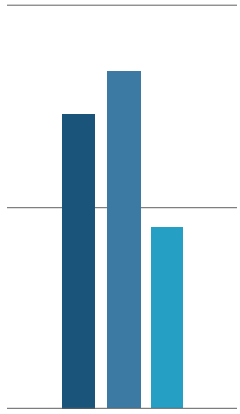


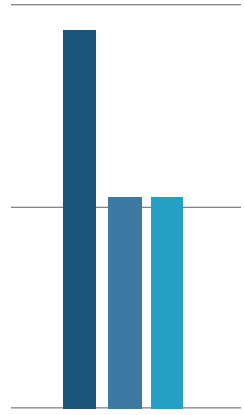
Figure 7: Wordcloud for keywords used in final assignments per year



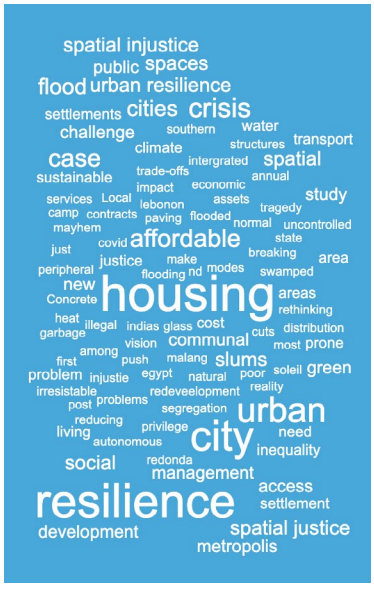
2020b

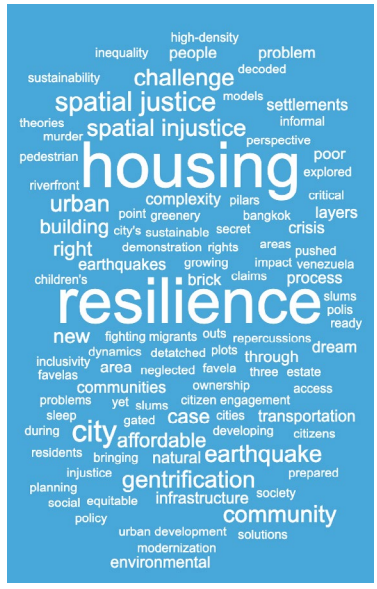


2021a



2021b





highest number

Brazil
India
Mexico
Ecuador
Turkey
Colombia
Chile
Peru
USA
South Africa
Spain
Argentina
Egypt
Italy
Greece
UK
Canada
Philippines
Venezuela
Paraguay
Indonesia
Uruguay
Germany
Nigeria
Ethiopia
Jordan
Taiwan
Thailand
Bolivia
France
Ghana
Guatemala
Uganda
Zambia
Australia
Bogota
Lebanon
Portugal
Bangladesh
Iran
Ireland
Netherlands
Nicaragua
Pakistan
Dominican Republic
Russia
Singapore
China
Costa Rica
El Salvador
Iaq
Israel
Kenya
Mozambique
Panama
Poland
Puerto Rico
Romania
Vietnam
Ivory Coast
Japan
Kyrgyztan
Morocco
Nepal
Palestine
Scotland
Senegal
Swizerland
Syria
Albania
Angola
Bulgaria
Cordoba
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Denmark
Finland
Guanbara Bay
Guwahati
Haiti
Honduras
Hungary
Lativia
Macedonia
Malaysia
Malta
Mauritius Namibia
Netherlands Papua
New guinea Qatar
Serbia Somaliland
South Korea
South Sudan Sri
Lanka
Sudan Yemen
Zimbabwe

lowest number

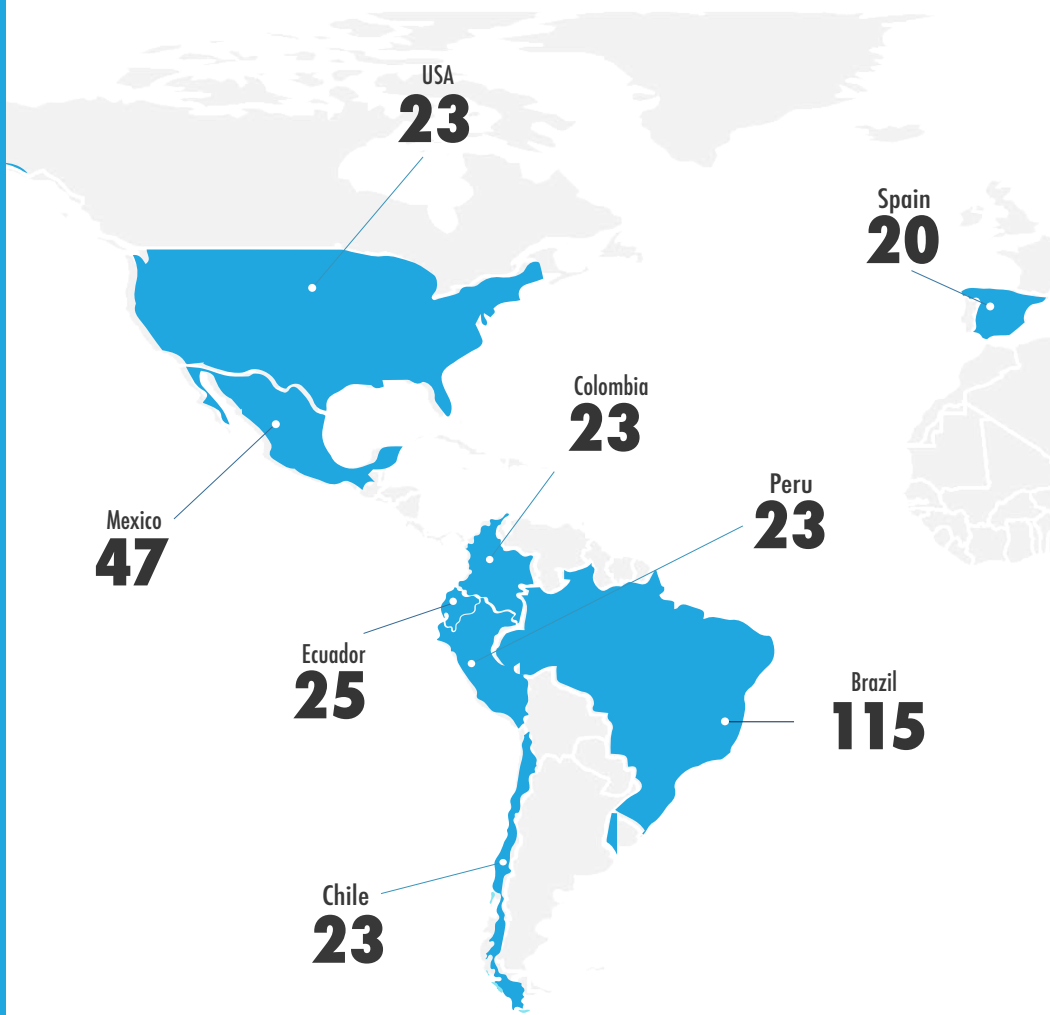
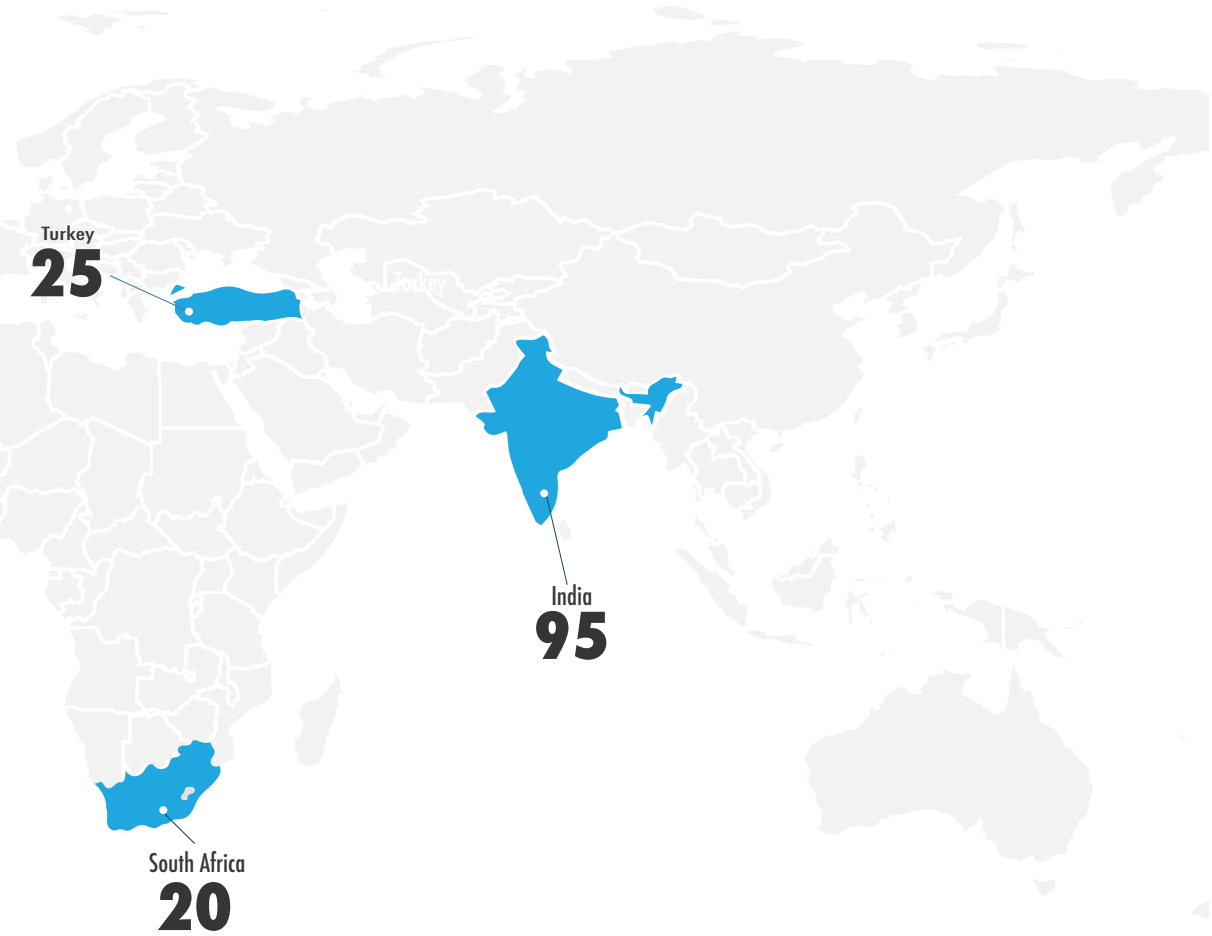


Figure 8: Map showing countries that are the subject of 20 or more final assignment submissions
A total of 100 countries were the subject of final assignments between 2017-2021 (left)


Turkey
25
India
95
South Africa
20

Because the assignments were uploaded to a shared platform, the course content was enriched with the participants' local experiences. As seen in Figure 8, learners supplied unique urban issues from cities and locations in 99 different nations, with Brazil (116) and India (112) dominating, followed by Mexico (53), Turkey (28), and Ecuador (24). Colombia, Peru, Spain, Chile, the United States, and South Africa each had more than 20 submissions. This delivers not only a large multitude of issues in terms of quantity, but also an original collection of case studies that are frequently unseen or undocumented. The fact that these challenges were chosen by the learners based on their own experiences provided a rich and unique source of information filtered via the participants' local lenses rather than the course team's. Assignments described the political situation in Yemen city from the perspective of conflicts and resilience; the problem of spatial justice of South Sudan refugees who fled the civil war and moved to refugee camps in Uganda; the garbage crisis in Colombo, Sri Lanka; and the growing housing deficit in Bolivia, to name a few topics and geographic locations.

The emergence of these types of cases provides an opportunity to reflect on the way knowledge is produced and reproduced in education. In the classrooms, students learn from successful experiences, often labelled as best practices chosen by the lecturers. Cases are selected because they are highly documented, being an important and validated source of knowledge. However, the same cases are often reproduced and taught over time, sometimes without a reflection of their relevance for the students´ context. The ´best practices´ that are well-known and widely disseminated tend to be northern-centric, providing lessons and experiences often too far away from the reality of southern countries and localities. As pointed out by Amirahmadi (1992) textbooks glorified western history, culture and achievements and ignored those of the non-Western societies producing a distorted picture of human history. The inclusion of non-conventional experiences can complement and diversify the body of knowledge, providing perspectives to

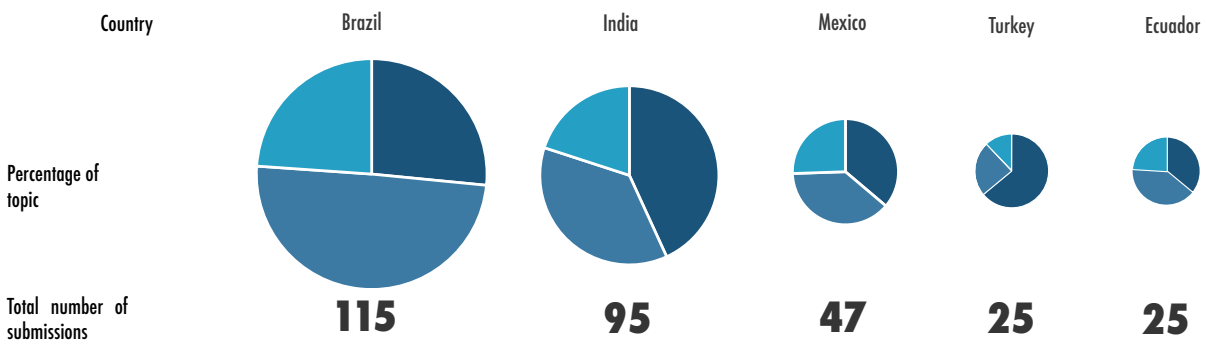
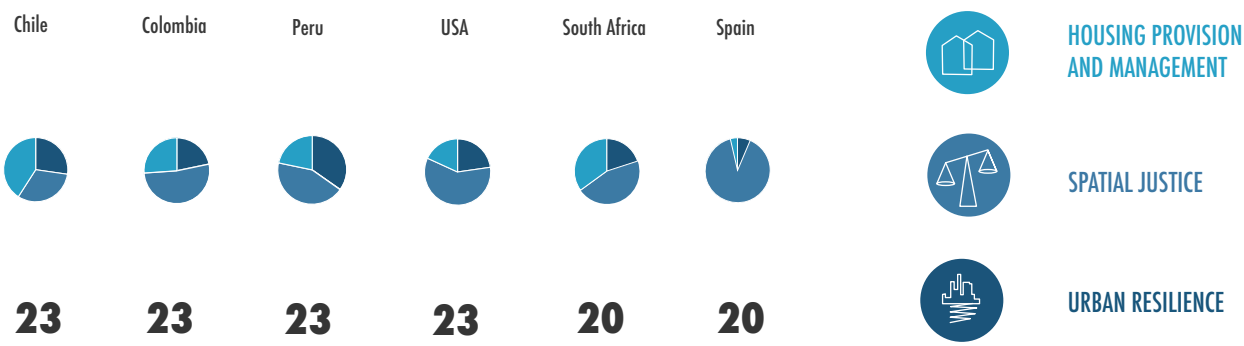


Figure 9: Pie charts demonstrating the distribution of core topics chosen per country in submitted final assignments

learn and extract lessons closer to different political, economic, and sociocultural realities. This can also be extrapolated to urban planning practices, where the transfer of models, processes, policies, or regulatory frameworks from Europe, the US, or UK has been part of a long history in planning in the global south (Watson, 2009).

Diving into the local approaches, the analysis of assignments per country provides insights for the global-local relationship. Figure 9 shows a comparative analysis of the thematic topics in countries with more than 20 assignments. We observed that the percentage distribution of the subjects varies by country and, in certain cases, is considerably different from the general distribution, where 41% are largely spatial justice concerns, 36% are urban resilience, and 23% are housing provision and management. In countries like Spain, US, Brazil and Colombia spatial justice challenges are more predominant, and in the case of Spain, they account for almost 70% of the submissions. Challenges of spatial justice in Spain are related to gentrification and the impact of tourism in cities like Madrid and Barcelona, mobility and the negative effects of cars in these cities, and citizen participation considering the voice of minorities. Urban resilience challenges are relevant in India and Turkey, representing 68% in the latter. In the case of Turkey these challenges are mainly connected to the management of natural disasters, particularly to the earthquake hazards, followed by migration and forced relocation. Housing challenges acquire more relevance in countries like Chile and South Africa. In Chile they are related to the need for adequate housing, particularly the quality of the social housing and the access to housing for migrants.

This analysis does not intend to provide an accurate picture or diagnosis of the urban environment in these countries; rather, it aims to provide some suggestions of the difficulties that are significant to local voices, in this case, *Rethink the City* MOOC participants. Students and instructors co-created a body of knowledge with alternative views to urban challenges, emphasising local voices and adopting techniques that foster cross-learning in an attempt to transcend the north-south divide.



Conclusion

The Rethink the City MOOC has provided a unique learning experience for a global community of learners. Since its inception in 2017, the course has been offered six times and has reached 29,047 learners from 184 countries. One of the key components of the course has been fostering a sense of community among these learners, which has proven to be both important and challenging.

One of the defining features of the *Rethink the City* MOOC is its emphasis on co-creating knowledge. More than 10,000 often graphical reflections on urban challenges have been created through various exercises and activities. This approach to knowledge production contrasts with the use of established Western theories or best practices. Instead, the course showcases attempts to address urban issues from a wide variety of contexts, including both the "traditionally represented" geographies (e.g., Brussels) and the "underrepresented" geographies world (e.g. Lebanon, Chile).

This emphasis on co-creation and the inclusion of diverse perspectives is essential in decolonising knowledge production. As Mitova (2020) points out, "we live in an epistemically colonial world" where the dominant ideas about what constitutes knowledge and sensible ways of knowing are still heavily influenced by Western perspectives. By providing a platform for sharing diverse perspectives and experiences, the *Rethink the City* MOOC challenges this dominant narrative and encourages learners to think critically about how knowledge is produced and disseminated.

Furthermore, using participatory and interactive methods in MOOCs like *Rethink the City* contributes to the decolonisation of knowledge. By providing opportunities for learners to engage with the material and each other in more active and collaborative ways, *Rethink the City* has fostered a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. This approach allows learners from the majority world to shape the course's direction and the knowledge produced rather than simply being passive recipients of information. This example shows that the potential for MOOCs (like *Rethink the City*) to contribute to the decolonisation of knowledge is significant. By promoting diverse perspectives and the inclusion of the majority world in the creation of new knowledge, MOOCs, in general, can help challenge dominant Western narratives in academia and urban studies. In doing so, they can play a small but essential role in the further decolonisation of the production of knowledge.

In addition to promoting decolonisation, the co-creation of knowledge can also improve the knowledge's quality and relevance. By involving a wide range of voices and experiences, the course can provide a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of urban challenges and potential solutions. This approach also allows for incorporating local knowledge and expertise, often overlooked in mainstream discussions of urban issues.

Overall, the *Rethink the City* MOOC offers a unique learning environment that challenges dominant narratives and encourages the co-creation of knowledge by promoting decolonisation and the inclusion of diverse perspectives.

Image by Caroline Newton

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Image by Luz María Vergara

PART II.
Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Urban Challenges

Ch 3. From Contestation to Reclamation:

The Strive for Spatial Justice

This chapter explores the spatial manifestations of social justice beyond the hegemony of the 'Western city' by examining specific instances of spatial justice and injustice in urban areas across the globe, which face an array of multi-faceted and complex challenges, such as intensifying spatial fragmentation and inequality. Written in the context of the Spatial Justice module, this chapter is organised around the four primary themes arising from the student submissions, namely unequal spatial distribution of resources and services, multiple disadvantages facing vulnerable communities, austerity and the privatisation of public goods, and grassroots intervention. Ultimately, it argues that urban spaces, as primary sites for the manifestation of injustice, remain significant in the fight for reclaiming the right to the city, and calls for dynamic and context-sensitive solutions that can cater to the specific needs of diverse localities, and can respond to the complexities and intricacies that shape the every-day lived experiences of urban dwellers.

Keywords
Spatial justice, urban space, urban inequality, public space, right to the city

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Image by Luz María Vagara

Introduction

Urban spaces constitute part and parcel of our everyday social reality in cities. The significance of urban spaces lies not in their mere physical existence, but rather in the functions, values, and meanings that we collectively assign to them. It is through this 'collective intentionality' that spaces become symbolised beyond their material presence and, in so doing, contribute to the construction of our social reality (Madanipour, 1999). However, it should be noted that collective intentionality does not entail a unified or static interpretation of urban spaces. What a space symbolises for one group of inhabitants – bound together by various markers of identity, such as age, class, ethnicity, and religion, or an intersection of these – may differ from another. Similarly, the symbolism and functionality of a space can change over time. Spaces in our cities are thus multifaceted, dynamic, and ever-evolving.

Understanding the multiplicity of views and relations to urban space is key to unpacking its contested nature. Claims to urban space are made in the context of structural realities, such as socio-economic inequality, institutional racism, and socio-spatial fragmentation. Meanwhile, broader forces, such as the neo-liberalisation of urban spaces, gentrification, and spatial segregation, further exacerbate the existing inequality and fragmentation in our cities. One of the primary sites in which structural inequalities manifest spatially in cities are 'public' urban spaces, defined as spaces that are not clearly delineated as private, and accommodate activities for public purposes (Ahmadi, 2017). Public spaces have always carried political significance, to the extent that control over them has become essential in maintaining the balance of power in cities (Madanipour, 1999). Traditionally, heavily surveilled and controlled public spaces have symbolised centralised state power. Citizens would in turn use these very spaces to challenge the power of the state. As such, public spaces would become sites of resistance through the hosting of demonstrations, occupations, and even revolutions. In today's complex cities, however, governments can no longer be regarded as the only source of monopolised power. In fact, many of the forces which impact our public spaces operate beyond the local or even national scale. Global market forces, multi-national corporations, geo-political conflicts, and neo-colonial relations all impact how public spaces are shaped, perceived, and transformed. Public spaces are thereby sites of constant contestation and negotiation.

This chapter explores the spatial manifestations of social justice in urban areas by examining specific instances of spatial (in)justice in emerging economies, as well as the application of contemporary urban theories in these contexts. Firstly, it is

important to underscore what is regarded here as spatial justice. Spatial justice is a utopian goal. It invokes a process whereby urban policy and decision-making produce outcomes that are just, in so far as they advance an equal distribution of power and resources across members of society, regardless of their social standing; and are spatially just, in that they manifest in space. Spatial justice is, in other words, measured by the equity of spatial outcomes (Feinstein, 2009). Susan Feinstein (2009, 2010) placed spatial justice at the heart of her pivotal 'Just City' model, contending that such justice represents efforts that 'reframe discussion about spatial planning so that poorly represented groups, especially low-income minorities, will benefit more from the uses to which land and the built environment are put' (2009, p. 4).

Secondly, this chapter builds on, and contributes to, ongoing discussions that aim to address spatial justice issues beyond the hegemony of the West. Despite recent efforts by non-Western scholars to foreground the importance of studying urban phenomena in developing countries, urban scholarship remains largely focused on Western cities. Urban theory, as geographer Jennifer Robinson argues in her book, Ordinary Cities (2013), often overlooks non-Western cities, and posits them as secondary or inferior to cities in the so-called Global North, and measures their development based on the degree to which they succeed in following Western models of urbanisation. This has led multiple scholars to call for a 'de-colonisation' or 'de-Westernisation' of urban theory, whereby dichotomous categories, such as 'Third-world city vs. Western city', 'developed vs. developing', 'global city vs. small or secondary city', and 'order vs. disorder', are challenged and deconstructed in an effort to transcend the neo-colonial divides of North vs. South (Choplin, 2012; Robinson, 2016; De Boeck et al., 2010; Simone, 2001; 2010; Edensor, & Jayne, 2012; Elsheshtawy, 2008; among many others). Following this line of critical inquiry, this chapter seeks to expand our focus beyond the hegemony of the 'Western city', and towards issues of spatial justice in urban areas across the globe, which face an array of multi-faceted and complex challenges, such as intensifying spatial fragmentation and inequality.

This chapter is contextualised within the Spatial Justice module, which encourages students to examine issues pertaining to spatial justice in their own cities through a set of three assignments. The first explores the everyday experiences and strategies of urban dwellers in asserting their right to the city. The second asks students to identify and document specific instances of spatial injustice in their cities by gathering visual evidence. The third and final assignment comprises a visual essay, whereby students make use of their collected visual material to reflect critically upon the theories explored throughout the course, and to examine them within the specific and unique context of their city.

Township in Lukasa, Zambia. Image by Evan Wise on Unsplash, edited by authors. Unsplash-licensed.

The content of the present chapter thus derives from the documentations, observations, and critical analyses of the Rethink the City students. The following section synthesises the four primary themes that emerged from their submissions:

1. Unequal spatial distribution of resources and services;
2. Multiple disadvantages facing vulnerable communities;
3. Austerity and the privatization of public goods;
4. Grassroots interventions

1. Unequal spatial distribution of resources and services

One of the major recurring themes arising from the submissions was the unequal distribution of resources and service provision across a city's territory. As posited by Edward Soja (2009), 'the fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and the opportunities to use them' comprises a first step towards achieving spatial justice. Geographically uneven development and underdevelopment across urban areas can solidify into rigid structures of privilege and power, producing long-lasting injustices that manifest not only spatially, but also socially, economically, and geopolitically (Ibid). Below is an example from Lusaka, Zambia, in which the student captures the extreme extents to which the provision of services and resources can vary across different parts of a city.

"[Photographs are taken from] one of the oldest townships in Lusaka. Clearly people in this part of Lusaka do not have access to services that are needed for their health and well-being. It also depicts the uneven or lack of allocation of resources by central government. This has resulted in people having no control over how their urban space is imagined, planned, designed and lived. [Photographs] show an access road and children watching movies at a makeshift cinema and depict different stalls and a hair salon at the garden township market. [Other imagaes] show a paved street and a shopping mall in a low-density area in woodlands in another part of the city."

- Student, Lukasa, Zambia

Underserved areas are often faced with a multiplicity of challenges, such as limited state funding for necessary intervention, lack of planned infrastructure (transportation, educational, recreational, community-building, commercial, health, etc.), limited amenities (e.g., libraries, public bathrooms, playgrounds), and lack of quality green spaces. On the contrary, more affluent neighbourhoods often enjoy functional and well-maintained public spaces, parks, and green fields, and are deemed more attractive to public and private investors. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has further uncovered the unequal ways in which different communities are provided with services in the face of a crisis. The following submission (on the next page) from Lima, Peru points to such unequal distribution.

Gamarra, Commercial Emporium in Lima, Peru. Image by Barrigo, modified by authors. Public domain

"In the city of Lima, we live two different realities relating to public space. The first reality is the public spaces of districts with the highest economic acquisition, for example the San Borja district, which has proposed widening and extending bicycle lanes in order to decrease the use of motorized transport and to provide the space to adhere to the social distancing requirements during quarantine. The second reality is what happens in the other less privileged districts. 70% of the population in Peru has an informal job. This is the same population that has to find a way to get some money to survive. This fact is reflected in "Gamarra, Comercial Emporium", a space where people buy different things and then sell them without any care and social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic."

- Student, Lima, Peru

San Borja district in Lima, Peru. Image by David G79 and edited by authors. CC 2.0 license

It is thus crucial to further unpack the processes through which the uneven development and distribution of resources in our cities rigidify into uneven power structures if we are to collectively imagine and conduct the necessary interventions for achieving spatial and territorial justice. Unequal spatial distribution of resources further occurs against the backdrop of existing inequalities, and along class-based, racialised, and gendered lines, which exacerbate the conditions of the communities rendered marginalised by these very axes of power and disadvantage.

Dwelling on the outskirts of Philipsburg, Sint Maarten (image by the author)

2. Multiple disadvantages facing vulnerable communities

In the excerpt below, the author addresses the complex nature of the socio-spatial disadvantages that marginalized groups often face in urban areas. A fundamental factor in producing spatial injustice is locational discrimination (Soja, 2009), which is created through a set of biases imposed on certain populations due to their geographical or geo-political location. Locational discrimination is strongly linked to the issue of unequal distribution of services and goods addressed in the previous section and plays a significant role in creating and maintaining spatial structures of inequality and marginality. A notable way in which such locational and spatial discrimination manifests is through residential segregation. A direct outcome of the political organization of space, residential segregation happens when a group resides separately and in different parts of an urban environment and is marked by spatial concentration, uneven distribution, tightly clustering, and minimal exposure to majority members (Massey and Denton, 1988). Segregation further happens along the main axes of power and privilege, such as race, class, gender, religion, and sexuality, to name a few.

"In one of my earlier assignments on spatial justice I uploaded a photo of how a migrant worker was forced to sleep on the pavement in Delhi due to the lack of over-night accommodation. [...] The exodus of migrant workers towards their native villages, following the Covid-19 virus outbreak, shows their vulnerability in these very urban centers, even as they form about 22 percent of the population of these areas. This clearly indicates that in India 'Cities do not belong to all'. At the root of this is the fact that laborers from rural Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand flee their native villages in the first place, either in search of better incomes or fearing the caste-based violence. This population forms the majority of the daily wage workers in Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and other metropolitan centers of India.

The absence of resilient urban structures and spatial justice for the marginalized people has been the very cause of this exodus. [...] The fact that for thousands of migrant workers leaving urban centers was the only viable option during a viral outbreak, points towards the grave spatial injustices facing migrant workers in Indian metropolises."

- Student, Dehli, India

Segregation is by no means the only outcome of locational discrimination along racial, economic and gendered lines which impacts marginalized communities. Other examples of exclusionary socio-spatial practices that have historically exacerbated the marginalization of minority groups include the redlining of investments, exclusionary zoning policies, institutionalized gentrification, social control measures such as policing and racial profiling, and the creation of other spatial structures of privilege and oppression that operate on the local as well as global scales. South African cities provide important sites for understanding how spatial discrimination creates long-standing structures of inequality that continue to operate without the rigid forms of institutionalized segregation that shaped them in the first place. The following example documents the extreme differences that exist in close proximity in Cape Town, highlighting the socio-spatial inequalities that persist in defining the every-day lived reality of urban dwellers in South African cities post-Apartheid.

"This image perfectly encapsulates the issue of spatial injustice which exists in all parts of the country. This image itself is of an informal settlement, Imizamo Yethu, existing in the green, leafy beach-side suburb of Hout Bay, Cape Town. The image displays a gross land imbalance which was designated and segregated by "apartheid spatial planning". Today, the economic and wealth imbalance keeps areas such as this strictly segregated. People now have the freedom to move and expand, but no wealth to do so. It is also worthwhile to note that Imizamo Yethu, and Hout Bay, are far out from the city centre, and whilst that part of the city has an efficient public transport bus system in place, it can still be too expensive for those who live on so little, many of whom reside here. Access to the city thus remains an important issue.

- Student, Cape Town, South Africa

Imizamo Yethu (left) and Hout Bay (right), Cape Town, South Africa. Image from Google Earth and edited by authors.

3. Austerity and the privatization of public goods

Neo-liberal ideals have increasingly penetrated the planning and regeneration of urban areas over the past decades. A quintessential component of neo-liberal governance is austerity. Austerity comprises an array of punitive measures designed to respond to the economic crises (as an inherent by-product of late-capitalism), i.e., the further dismantling of the social state, reduction of state funding, the privatisation of public services, increased direct and indirect taxation, and outsourcing the management of public goods to 'external' private parties so as to minimise public risk, thereby increasing private control over public assets (van Lanen, 2020; 2017; Peck, 2012). Since urban areas have been key crisis-production sites (Tonkiss, 2013), they have been at the receiving end of such post-crisis punitive policies. The experiences of austerity are further geographically and spatially differentiated (van Lanen, 2017). It is therefore unsurprising that the harshest consequences of urban austerity affect those who rely on social services the most: the urban poor, racialised communities, and marginalised populations. The privatisation of state-owned housing is one such measure that has been widely

Alexandra Road Estate, London, UK. Image by Stephan Richards and edited by authors. CC2.0 License

adopted across European cities in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. In the example below, the author underscores how privatising public housing estates in London has led to a shortage in affordable housing, further exacerbating the already-existing spatial injustices in the city.

The inherent shortage in affordable housing in many cities has further resulted in the creation of a precarious and speculative housing market, which favours lucrative, short-term solutions (e.g., Airbnb rentals) over ensuring adequate affordable housing for all. Furthermore, in line with local urban governments increasingly adopting neo-liberal political outlooks, the focus of public policy has broadly shifted from the 'redistribution of resources' to 'national and global competitiveness' in attracting capital through market-enabling approaches (e.g., state-led gentrification), which ultimately benefit market players at the expense of ordinary people. This further echoes van Lanen's (20147) argument that austerity, through what he has called a time-space expansion, removes services, facilities, and opportunities from deprived urban areas, and increases the travel time necessary for daily needs, which most often affects poorer populations, thus reinforcing and intensifying socio-spatial inequalities.

"The image [on the previous page] shows the Alexandra Road Estate in London, originally intended to provide social housing for the London borough of Camden. Development of the social housing estate shown in the image above was completed in 1978. The 'Right to Buy', a piece of legislation delivered in 1980, provided subsidized purchasing of state-owned social housing for current tenants, with a reported aim of "transferring the wealth of the state to the people".
However, as these properties were bought and later sold to other private-buyers, the state-owned property pool, to
be made available to individuals with a high level of need, was reduced at a faster rate than new properties could be constructed. This later contributed to a shortage of housing for lower-income individuals, and meant that the remaining social housing was more likely to be of a lower build quality, widely accepted as an example of spatial injustice, particularly as the social-housing pool closer to the center of cities was sold off, forcing lower-income families to move to housing estates further away from opportunities for work."

- Student, London, United Kingdom

Image by Caroline Newton

4. Grassroots interventions

While the previous sections have outlined the primary issues pertaining to spatial (in)justice in urban area across the globe, this section explores some of the grassroots strategies that have been created by local residents in order to combat such inequalities. From occupying public spaces to using graffiti and other art forms to express dissent, micro-level interventions are used by grassroots forces to reclaim city spaces, re-assert their rights to the city, emphasise a collective desire for inclusion and participation in the decision-making process, and ultimately as survival mechanisms for those whose needs have been rendered invisible by state and market forces. The excerpt below provides an example of how an entire neighbourhood has emerged in the outskirts of Sao Paulo as a de-facto response to such issues as housing shortages and insufficient infrastructure. Another submission shows how make-shift urban spaces were reappropriated in Luanda, Angola to create opportunities for employment and social contact. Grassroots and bottom-up interventions can thus provide necessary, albeit short-term, solutions to the socio-economic and geographical inequalities that plague our cities. More importantly, they have the potential to create and foster powerful networks of resistance that are essential to achieving long-term socio-spatial justice.

"[Grassroots practices] are capable of creating solutions to respond to the needs of the community, serve as means of resistance to the lack of quality urban infrastructure, and provide a collaborative platform in the fight against socio-spatial inequality and in the search for a place of collective construction. [...] From the moment grassroots forces are inserted in efficient urban networks - be it mobility-based, infrastructural or even environmental – they form a strong sense of community. Seeing themselves as part of the city, local residents are able to share a collective existence, generating habits and practices that impact and reshape spaces in the city. [Grassroots place-based interventions] and their participatory agents have formed an appropriate stage for the constitution and practice of citizenship."

- Student, Sao Paulo, Brazil

Image by Caroline Newton

Conclusion

While the previous sections have outlined the primary issues pertaining to spatial (in)justice in urban area across the globe, this section explores some of the grassroots strategies that have been created by local residents in order to combat such inequalities. From occupying public spaces to using graffiti and other art forms to express dissent, micro-level interventions are used by grassroots forces to reclaim city spaces, re-assert their rights to the city, emphasise a collective desire for inclusion and participation in the decision-making process, and ultimately as survival mechanisms for those whose needs have been rendered invisible by state and market forces. The excerpt below provides an example of how an entire neighbourhood has emerged in the outskirts of Sao-Paulo as a de-facto response to such issues as housing shortages and insufficient infrastructure. Another submission shows how make-shift urban spaces were reappropriated in Luanda, Angola to create opportunities for employment and social contact. Grassroots and bottom-up interventions can thus provide necessary, albeit short-term, solutions to the socio-economic and geographical inequalities that plague our cities. More importantly, they have the potential to create and foster powerful networks of resistance that are essential to achieving long-term socio-spatial justice.

"With a little bit of paint and some crates these women created their bar to make a little bit of money and to provide for social contacts in their slum. Just in front some kids created a football square."

- Student, Luanda, Angola

"The Vila Bela neighborhood, located on the east side of Sao Paulo, emerged in the mid-90s as a rural residential area. The neighborhood was created through the occupation of farmlands which belonged to a traditional São Paulo family, a fact that continues to generate conflicts with regard to land ownership to this date. In fact, none of the 16,000 inhabitants legally own the land. The changes in the spatial configuration of Vila Bela over the years, caused mainly by the same socio-spatial dynamics that acted on the outskirts of the city of São Paulo as a whole, generated great demand for urban infrastructure: drinking water supply, public lighting, electricity, paving of roads, etc. These and other achievements came from organization, struggle and community resistance, which resulted in the self-construction of hundreds of houses, as well as the installation of some elements of infrastructure."

- Student, Sao Paulo, Brazil

"We have been through the idea that every context is different and that is a fact. However, by considering an integrated approach whereby the context-specific physical, social and cultural needs are thoroughly analyzed, it is possible to create solutions that work everywhere. To quote the German political scientist and architect Gerhard Matzig, "Yes, there are conflicts over allocation; yes, there is a housing shortage; but yes, this also provides an opportunity to reinvent the city and to reanimate its essence….. ""

- Student, Malta/Germany

"The takes on urban spatial justice are well delivered. It raises questions as to which degree a person can own, utilise and appropriate the civic environment and, how might we learn from the changing nature of the city. As an urban researcher myself, the modules allows me to explores the different sides of the city, many of which we often take for granted."

- Student, Waitana Songpetchmongkol

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Ch4. From Resistance to Resilience

A Paradigm Shift in Coping with Unpredictable Environmental and Societal Challenges

Ongoing global urbanisation and industrialisation have brought great challenges to the development of cities and their environments. In particular, urban areas in the Global South have been exposed to a broad range of environmental and societal challenges, such as climate change, ecosystem degradation, air and water pollution, resource depletion, poverty, social inequality, and an eroding quality of life. Thus, the complexity and uncertainty of socio-economic systems and environmental changes require a paradigm shift in development models and societal organisation. In response, the concept of resilience has emerged as an approach to enhancing the adaptive capacity of urban systems to maintain functionality. This section discusses a potential paradigm shift from resistance to resilience at both physical and societal levels in addressing global challenges and risks. Here, the focus lies on the urban context of the Global South due to its social complexity and particular susceptibility to environmental risk. The section concludes with a summary of urgently needed lessons regarding the development of resilience in collaborations between policymakers and societal stakeholders, as well as in a strong social awareness of uncertain risks.

Keywords
Resilience, climate change, societal challenges, paradigm shift, Global South

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Image of by Caroline Newton

“Both Urban Resilience and Spatial Justice modules were particularly interesting to me through the lectures’ content and the interviews of cases of projects taking place in different cities. The depth of each subject allowed me to gain a fresh perspective on projects in my own professional field.”

-Andrea Chaves, Costa Rica, student
Gran Área Metropolitana

Global challenges

Globally, cities are becoming more densely populated and interconnected than ever before. Consequently, urbanisation and industrialisation processes have imposed enormous pressures on land use, resource availability, and environmental quality, as different societal functions require space and pose complex challenges. In many cases, economic activities have been prioritised at the cost of environmental systems. Along with these rapid urbanisation and industrialisation processes, cities have been exposed to a broad range of risks and challenges. On the one hand, urban areas must now confront environmental challenges, including climate change, increasing pollution, declining biodiversity, and energy and resource shortages. On the other, cities have had to manage growing societal challenges, such as poverty, social inequality, mobility, and well-being.

Natural disasters, socio-economic crises, and pandemics seem to have become the new normal. Among other challenges, climate change is viewed as one of the greatest threats to economic viability, societal safety, and environmental sustainability (Adger et al., 2013). Unpredictable natural disasters, such as floods, droughts, heat waves, and other extreme climate events, are occurring ever-more frequently, threating populations and assets in highly-dense urban regions.

Moreover, different types of socio-economic and political systems, governance models, and levels of socio-economic development result in different degrees of coping capacity of cities in response to climate-related risks (Francesch-Huidobro et al., 2017). While technological advances (in most cases with hard-engineering approaches, such as the Delta Works in the Netherlands) and the division of institutional sectors in contemporary society has created many development opportunities, these changes have often increased the vulnerability of urban systems in terms of infrastructural and technological failures. This vulnerability is reflected in largely-siloed governance models in which multi-layered sectors command a range of planning and infrastructure development activities. These different sectors and levels of stakeholders have historically worked in isolation, leading to a lack of a systematic approach of dealing with the complexity of social and environmental challenges. In addition, many societies rely on centrally-controlled systems run by officials that tend to lack an awareness of, and preparedness for, uncertain risks at the bottom level (i.e., communities). In recent decades, many natural disaster events have demonstrated that this model, with its high dependence on centrally-controlled systems, can lead to tremendously negative consequences when these systems fail. For example, in 2012, the destructive effects of Hurricane Sandy in New York carried the important lesson that the stronger the physical system, the greater its vulnerability.

In this context of global challenges, cities in the Global South currently face greater risks due to their increased exposure to climate-related hazards, limited resources, and relatively low governmental capacity to support local adaptation measures to withstand natural disasters (Figure 1). Cities in the Global South have been struggling to respond to rapid urbanisation with adequate infrastructures. Many people live in unplanned and under-serviced neighbourhoods, often located in the more hazardous parts of cities. The impact of natural disasters can be extremely destructive to vulnerable communities, such as the urban poor. Furthermore, global consumer culture has resulted in serious environmental degradation, partly due to the high concentration of industries in the Global South (Robertson, 2012). For example, until 2016, China processed nearly half of the world's plastic, metal, and paper waste. Accordingly, the nature–human relationship has been severely disrupted, resulting in risks to biodiversity, food security, and human well-being.

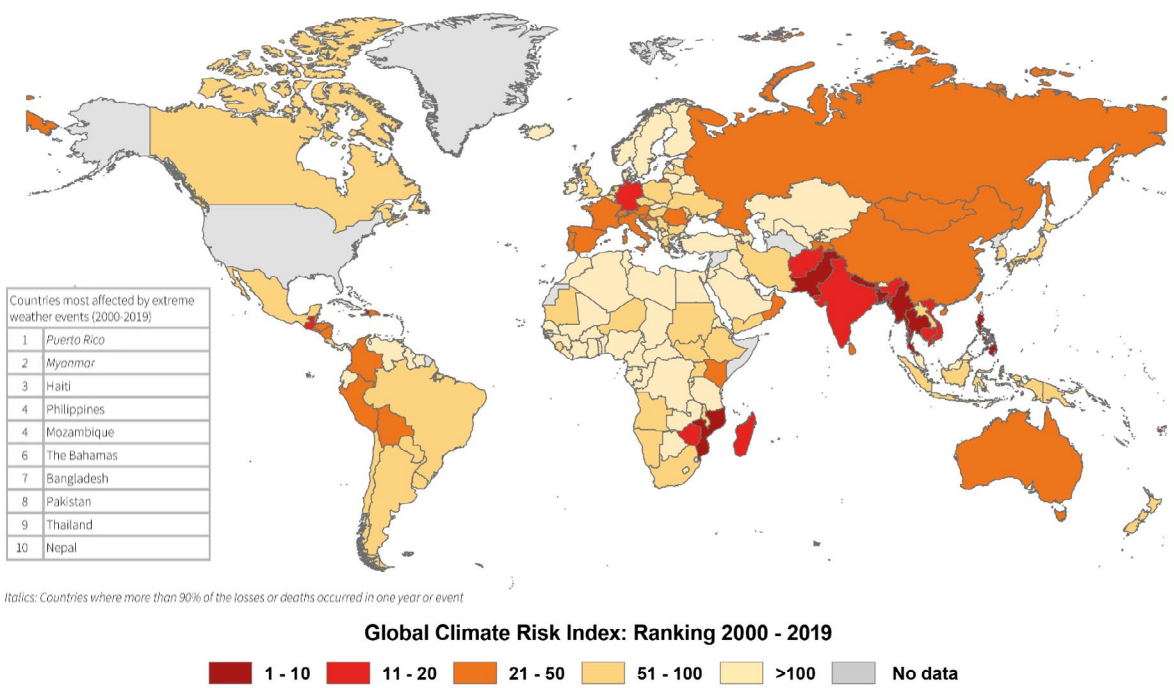

Figure 1. World map of the global climate risk index (2000-2019)
Source: Global Climate Risk Index 2021, with permission (https://www.germanwatch.org/en/19777)

A paradigm shift: From resistance to resilience

These highly-unpredictable environmental and societal challenges call for a paradigm shift to enhance the adaptive capacity of socio-ecological systems (Tschakert & Dietrich, 2010). In response to these challenges, resilience has, in recent decades, become an increasingly important concept in both scientific discourse and political agendas (Brown, 2013; Meerow et al., 2016). Generally speaking, resilience can be defined as a system's capacity to buffer or withstand natural variation, recover from disturbance, or adapt to changing conditions (Klein et al., 2003; Folke, 2006). As a concept, the scope of resilience is broadly discussed and critically debated in engineering, ecological, and social science discourse (Davoudi, 2012).

The notion of resilience provides insights for addressing challenges in complex socio-ecological systems, particularly in highly complex and dynamic urban contexts (Ribeiro & Gonçalves, 2019). The 100 Resilient Cities (100RC), pioneered by the Rockefeller Foundation, defined urban resilience as 'the capacity of individuals, communities, institutions, businesses, and systems within a city to survive, adapt, and grow no matter what kinds of chronic stresses and acute shocks they experience'. This statement stresses the importance of the bottom-up power of society and community involvement in resilience building. The concept of resilience is salient to areas with high environmental risk and social complexity, such as the Global South, in that spatial patterns and societies must be able to adaptively respond to disturbances and transform their systems in order to remain functional and sustainable (Tai, 2018; Borie et al., 2019).

The implementation of resilience strategies is typically twofold at both the physical system and the societal levels. At the physical system level, adaptive measures and alternative solutions have been applied to enhance the robustness of urban systems to absorb external disruptions. Increasing attention has been paid to natural values and the evolutionary processes of natural systems. For example, in delta and coastal landscapes, natural dynamics, such as sedimentation and erosion processes, as well as the development of ecosystems, have been highlighted in strategies in contrast to previously-dominant engineering approaches. For instance, the concept of nature-based solutions (NbS) has been explored to enhance ecosystem resilience and support multi-functional socio-economic development with ecosystem-based adaptation measures. When coupled with resilience, NbS approaches can address deep societal challenges, such as food security, climate change, water safety, human health, natural disasters, as well as ameliorate existing social and economic development approaches (Cohen-Shacham et al., 2016; Nesshöver et al., 2017).

At the societal level, 'thinking globally and acting locally' is a general principle of resilience development. Regarding the complexity of urban physical and social systems, the transition from resistance to resilience shows a paradigm shift in spatial development from centralised governance to more societal involvement that can withstand temporary disturbances and contribute to the repair of damaged systems (Meyer et al., 2010; Carter et al., 2015). Proactive planning and decentralised decision-making approaches have also begun to be enacted to generate greater societal flexibility when facing great uncertainties that challenge vulnerable systems. Furthermore, the concern over climate change and its uncertain impacts, together with the growing societal need for a better quality of life, has driven policy transitions and an increasing awareness of environmental sustainability, adaptation to climate change, and socio-economic transitions (van Veelen, 2016). Thus, it is essential to accommodate and prepare for evolving shocks in urban systems with resilience approaches by using local wisdom and sharing global experiences. In this context, many broad networks have been established to exchange knowledge and experiences towards a resilient future, such as the Resilient Cities Network (https://resilientcitiesnetwork.org/).

Regarding the 'acting locally' principle, a diverse array of actions can be seen in the Global South, such as community involvement, public participation, bottom-up initiatives, and political protest. In spatial development practice, planners and designers often address community involvement as a key strategy for enhancing resilience. Community involvement in developing and managing resilient infrastructures locally can generate collective knowledge and strengthen community cohesion, and thus contribute to social welfare and inclusiveness. In particular, low-income and vulnerable communities living in informal settlements in high-risk zones are seeking survival strategies against social inequality and poverty, as well as such environmental challenges as flood and landslide risk. These communities share local wisdom to live with nature, thus bolstering their own identities. For example, community-rooted actions for resilience took place in Brazil's favelas to share information, raise funding, and enhance public awareness to address the COVID-19 crisis.

Lessons learnt for a resilient future

Of course, no single or easy solution exists for developing a resilient future for cities. This process requires multi-dimensional approaches for tackling challenges and creating site-specific solutions that are systematically integrated, risk-aware, socially inclusive, and environmentally sustainable. From international experience – and especially practices in the Global South – we can summarise some key messages of the lessons learnt.

First, a paradigm shift from resistance to resilience is essential. A retrospective view is required on the challenges and development opportunities that will arise not only today and in the future, but also to assess the paths society has previously taken. The traditional engineering-based paradigm of mastery over natural processes has shown its limitations and must transition to a more respectful attitude towards ecological systems. Living in contemporary societies facilitated by modern infrastructures should not let us ignore what has historically shaped cities. Indeed, history has taught us important lessons and shaped our identity in relation to nature, such as the traditional Chinese philosophical notion of the 'unity of humans and nature'. Thus, a strong social awareness of natural values is crucial to stimulating innovative ideas that incorporate multi-dimensional challenges and development opportunities by following natural rules and using natural dynamics.

Second, these transitions should not only rely on central governments and upper-level institutional organisations. Rather, local initiatives should be encouraged and empowered to develop small-scale incentive actions with collective power. On the one hand, many stakeholders have expressed a strong wish for governments to take action to enhance living conditions and protect society from risk. On the other, an increasing number of local initiatives have emerged through engaging in shared responsibilities, fostering local wisdom, and empowering vulnerable social groups. For example, protest is regarded as a powerful representation of resilience whereby societal groups can express their social, political, environmental, and economic demands.

Finally, the resilience approach creates more flexibility in urban and societal systems by accepting uncertainty, preparing for unpredictable risks, and adapting to drastic changes. As science and technology cannot fully predict an uncertain future, both natural and social systems should be designed and/or restored with adaptive capacities that allow for external disturbances while maintaining system functionality and robustness.

Image by Luz María Vegara

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View of Kathmandu, image by Anja van der Watt

Ch5. Rethinking the Basics

Post-COVID Housing Provision in the Global South

In the aftermath of the global pandemic, populations of the Global South who are living in poor housing conditions are in need of decisive policy actions. As the pandemic has demonstrated, health and housing conditions are strongly interrelated. For the special issue of Rethink the City, this article first examines the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in housing conditions in the Global South based on a review of published academic articles between 2020–2021 in order to grasp the housing issues recorded during the pandemic's critical period. Issues examined in the literature review are related to topics presented by students on the Rethink the City course. The article then discusses the links of global responses regarding the right to adequate housing as defined by the UN. Understanding the COVID-19 housing issues through the lens of this right is a proposal to think about solutions from an integrated policy perspective that can innovate and change housing provision in the future.

Keywords
Housing provision, right to housing, Covid19, governance, vulnerable people

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"This module deepened my knowledge about slum upgrading and housing solutions in the Global South, 2 topics that I am particularly interested in at the moment. Confronting with real case studies and applied best practices from the South revealed to be extremely inspiring for challenges faced in our Northern societies. We have a lot to learn from those people and, in that sense, this course is a must for young practicioners all over the world."

- Tom Detry, student
Brussels, Belguim

Introduction

Our planet and its urban population require urgent re-thinking to address basic human needs, such as housing. In 2020, the global COVID-19 pandemic asked people to stay at home, which showed the central of an individual's residence to their safety and health. In the aftermath of the pandemic, people of the Global South who are living in poor housing conditions are in need of decisive policy actions. As demonstrated by the pandemic, health and housing conditions are strongly interrelated. For Rethink the City's special issue, this article explores the pandemic's effects on housing conditions in the Global South based on academic articles published between 2020–2021 so as to gain a fully understanding of the most pressing issues. The literature review of published articles in this time-period is not extensive, but are related to topics that were presented by students of the Rethink the City course. These included cases across the globe grouped in the following categories: (i) Affordability as a global challenge, (ii) Quality and maintenance of housing provision, (iii) Housing policies and programmes, (iv) Vulnerable groups, and (vi) Collaborative and community-led initiatives. To discuss the housing issues reported in the literature review, the right to housing is used as the main framework to position the policy or programme strategy. The right to housing is defined as the right to 'adequate' housing by the UN, and it includes seven different aspects: tenure security, access to basic services, affordability, accessibility, location, habitability, and cultural adequacy.

These seven characteristics were first presented by the UN in the 1950s, and they relate to elements and meanings of housing in people's lives. The first aspect of the right to an adequate house concerns security of tenure, meaning that a household should have no risk of eviction due to stable renting or buying contracts. Furthermore, it means secure mortgage or lending arrangements that can ultimately secure the tenure of the house that someone is buying or building. The second aspect involves the importance of availability of basic services, such as drinking water, sewage, and electricity, but also of materials and facilities for construction and infrastructure. The third aspect concerns affordability, meaning that the costs associated with housing should not compromise the satisfaction of other needs, such as food, education, health, or recreation. Affordability means affordable financial mortgages, but also affordable rent or even affordable materials for construction.

The fourth component is about the physical condition of the dwelling, which should be secure and safe against the cold, heat, rain, or any other weather conditions and natural hazards. When the physical condition of the dwelling is deficient, indoor air quality becomes unhealthy. Deficient habitability conditions are associated with health problems, as mentioned by the World Health Organization (WHO) in the 'Health Principles of Housing' (1989), which has become even

Image by Caroline Newton

more relevant in recent years. The fifth aspect concerns accessibility for those disadvantage groups with physical or mental disabilities, and victims of wars and natural disasters. The sixth component is about location, which underscores that, to be adequate, housing should be located close to employment opportunities and readily-accessible to schools, health, and food services in both urban or rural contexts. Lastly, the seventh aspect concerns the cultural adequacy of housing. This aspect points to how housing should be built according to cultural identity, which can be expressed through the built environment. These components are useful for guiding policy assessment, and the design and implementation of mainstream housing strategies in development projects. They are standard components and form part of the UN's definition so as to enable all countries to follow common indicators to report improvements on housing (Alacho, 2021; Levytskyi & Savytskyu, 2021).

It is often said that the world has changed since the recent pandemic. In this new context, prioritising the needs of those who are most vulnerable is obligatory within development policies aiming to make cities more resilient to natural or anthropic disasters (e.g., pandemics). Universities and research scholars played an important role during the pandemic, not least in the so-called Global South, which encompasses low- and middle-income countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Mahler, 2018).

The literature review is discussed under the framework of the right to housing. This means looking at the interdependencies between different components of this same right or with other human rights. If the policy being implemented only focuses on the seven aspects of adequate housing (as defined by the UN), some other critical aspects important in the local context of the housing system could be neglected. The right to adequate housing is interdependent with other rights, such as health, education, and security (Rocco, 2020). For instance, when the goal is to solve the affordability aspect, the common indicator would be knowing of how many households spend more than 30% of their incomes on housing expenses. However, that is only a part of the financial difficulties households may face. The affordability problem might be linked to other components of the right to housing, such as location or household preferences, or indeed health policies. A household might be able to both rent and afford a unit to live in, but may only find such a place within a segregated area of the city lacking good transportation or employment opportunities (Valenzuela-Levi et al., 2021). Those costs associated to other interdependent factors of the right to housing are important to examine when studying and addressing the progressive achievement of the right to housing, especially in the context of post-COVID-19 recovery.

Some of the seven aspects of the right to adequate housing became even more relevant during the pandemic, such as the habitability of one's living quarters. In

terms of habitability, some basic questions of housing quality and maintenance arise, placing issues on long term sustainability under scrutiny. This means focusing on some of the physical characteristics of the individual units, as mentioned before, but these perspective mostly include a view from the individual unit. In most urban environments, affordable housing is built under high-density schemes. Little is said about the complex governance arrangements of housing complexes necessary to maintain multi-family communities. Both building blocks and housing complexes sharing common elements, such as playgrounds, patios, lift facilities, or even complex drinking water systems and pumps, require maintenance. The habitability of units may be compromised if the building's governance is inadequate. From an integrated policy perspective, it is useful to think that to solve deficient habitability in urban environments, it is necessary to think back to who is in charge their maintenance, their governance, and institutional mechanisms.

Considering all the different forms of tenure existing around the world, each has a different governance arrangement regarding maintenance. Habitability is therefore not only a concern for newly- or informally-built dwellings. Habitability is important for people living in dense urban environments, with long standing places to live. Their maintenance depends on ownership institutions, either individual or collective (Ward, Jiménez & Di Virgilio, Donoso & Elsinga, 2018; Vergara, Gruis & van der Flier, 2019).

COVID 19 and prioritizing the most vulnerable

During the first months following the UN's declaration of the global pandemic (WHO, 2020), publications across the globe warned about the particular vulnerabilities being faced by populations living in informal settlements or marginalised neighbourhoods – especially those in cities in the Global South. The immediate response to COVID-19 had to overcome traditional top-down emergency response systems to bring innovative and long-term solutions to vulnerable populations living in precarious settlements (Wilkinson, 2020; Corburn et al., 2020; Sethi & Creutzig, 2021). The pandemic forced a renewed consideration of housing problems in cities. Such issues as lack of rent contracts, lack of potable water, or lack of sanitation became barriers to the universal health recommendations being issued for all. It became evident that cities inadequately fulfilled or guaranteed the basic components that constitute the right to adequate housing. Table 1 summarises the issues reviewed in this section regarding the right to adequate housing.

In the case of cities in India, Sethi and Mittal (2021) correlated the impact of COVID-19 contagions with socio-economic conditions of households, such as neighbourhood quality and overcrowding. They found that these conditions were more significant in poor households and also with migrants. They also found that

COVID and Housing problems (1)	Right to adequate housing
Deficient quality of neighborhood	Insecure or bad location
	Lack of basic services provision
	Lack of sustainable transportation modes
Rent insecurity	Tenure security
Overcrowding	Habitability
Changing housing prices	Affordability
Lack of drinking water	Basic services
Lack of sanitation	Basic services
Other:	
Lack of data	
	Non-Discrimination by race or socio economic status
Homelessness	Violation of the whole right
Deficient governance arrangements and management	Right to the city, urban planning and policies

Figure 1: Table with housing problems during covid and the right to adequate housing, elaborated by author
Sources: Course work of Rethink the City, Housing and managmeent module. And literature review.

people with informal rent contracts confronted either evictions or increases to rent prices, thus placing them in more vulnerable situations, such as having to face the pandemic on the streets. Other studies described the context in cities and informal settlements in some African countries. In South Africa, Nyashanu, Simbanegavi and Gibson (2020) argued that population density and overcrowded housing conditions, along with a lack of clean drinking water and adequate sanitation, made it impossible to adopt the same preventative measures as suggested by more developed countries. Smit (2020) also highlighted this in other African countries. These authors add to previous studies that have pointed to the lack of public health information and data of people residing in informal settlements, which in turn hindered the registration and management of the pandemic and its impact on people living in the most vulnerable conditions. In Kenya, Quaife et al. (2020) concluded that COVID-19 has increased economic and food insecurity, underscoring the fact that long-term public health measures are unsustainable if they lack proper social protection measures. Research into African countries have also mentioned that tenure insecurity, together with lack of income, food scarcity,

and lack of access to education (affecting mainly children and women) should be at the centre of strategies aiming to reduce the impact of the pandemic (Smit, 2020).

Within the Latin American context, scholars have studied examples where different civil society organisations provided immediate responses to the pandemic for populations living in informal settlements (Duque, Ortiz & Samper, 2020; Gil et al., 2021). Those collective actions focused their aid on food security and popular education to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 infections, thus alleviating the impacts of the sanitary emergency at the neighbourhood level. As in other parts of the world, sources of income and informal employment disappeared when measures to stay at home became the main political response to stopping the spread of the virus, affecting migrant populations and women in particular (Gil et al., 2021). In such cities as Bogota, Quito, and Mexico City, the use of public spaces was reduced due to health measures, thus closing the income sources of those informal vendors that depended on urban activities outside their homes (Marino, Vargas & Flores, 2020; Carrion & Cepeda, 2021). Vergara, Correa and Aguirre (2020) found an important correlation between housing prices and the spread of the pandemic in Chile. Places where both rent and housing prices were lower coincided with the use of low quality construction materials and overcrowding located in low-income neighbourhoods. In turn, these sites correlated with higher rates of COVID-19 infections.

It is interesting to note how housing needs in relation to the pandemic converged, exposing both the physical and social conditions existing in informal settlements. Wilkinson (2020) discussed the problems associated with population density, inadequate access to water and sewage, and a lack of good information sources to measure actions. Corburn et al. (2020) also noted the lack of preparedness to confront the health crisis in informal settlements due to the chronic pre-existing needs associated with the lack of basic infrastructure and essential public services. Sethy and Creutzig (2021) focused on the challenges of the urban poor in conforming to COVID measures amid the deprived housing conditions and insalubrity of their surroundings.

The literature reports similar issues from different countries around the Global South. Poverty and socio-economic conditions are important factors during emergency responses. However, working to improve the housing conditions of all might be a fundamental factor to consider when preparing cities for future health emergencies. Thanks to the research and global reports that have been advanced in the wake of COVID-19, it is possible to again position housing as a basic human right and essential element within health crisis response. Resilient communities begin by having the right to adequate housing.

Governance of both land and housing policies

When considering the right to housing in a COVID-19 context, it is critical to position how the questions of governance and management will work. When explaining the diversity behind the concept of habitability, the importance of who is in charge of maintenance was highlighted above. However, (land policy) governance arrangements are also a concern at a higher rank in policy making – i.e., when determining how people will agree to implement or invest in housing improvement, financing, and so forth. Implementing measures to improve housing essentially requires a comprehensive understanding of social, economic, and urban policies, and the role of actors and their position in the network of these systems. Land is necessary for new housing provision, and this requires several agreements with either the public and private sector to make room for new housing, or to embark upon urban renovation projects.

The view of housing policy as only a strategy implies that the methods for financing house purchases needs to change (Rolnik, 2013, Wijburg, 2021) in order to attend to different housing problems – not just the affordability of newly-built dwellings. The governance of housing policies need the same systemic approach of integrated urban policies. Indeed, policies which focus only on financing have only considered one of the seven components of the right to adequate housing.

Issues that can be explained under the lack of tenure security, such as the lack of clarity that exists with rent contracts and land property, high land costs, and administrative capacity of states and other institutions, are real challenges that policies should take into account (Sethi & Mittal, 2021). Post-COVID-19 recovery strategies present open opportunities to deepen the decentralisation of housing policies and programmes in hand with local financing coming from land management strategies (Whitaker et al., 2020). Land management instruments can help to innovate or improve the rental stock to provide more adequate and affordable housing to vulnerable groups by increasing land banks (Sethi & Creutzig, 2021). At the same time, it is also an opportunity to connect housing to other urban policies, such as cycling infrastructure, so as to increase resiliency, equity, and sustainable mobility (Valenzuela-Levi et al., 2021)

Ortiz and Di Virgilio (2020) argued that a post-pandemic green recovery requires urban governance and public policy that operates under intersectoral coordination schemes at multiple levels of government. The social and ecological function of land, social inclusion, and climate justice are principles that should guide this recovery and governance. For their part, Ortiz and Boano (2020) affirmed that the nature of governance influences how housing can increase or reduce inequality depending on its level of adequacy. They argued for governance to be related to

Image by Caroline Newton

human and local development to produce cities committed to social cohesion. Moreover, for Latin America, Ortiz and Di Virgilio (2020) also stressed the need to generate intersectoral, regional alliances that promote renewed programmes for the comprehensive improvement of healthy neighbourhoods with collective property and cooperative housing schemes. For migrants, they highlighted the relevance of linking housing policies to socio-economic integration programmes.

Smit (2020) indicated that strengthening and reforming governance processes is also a key condition for reducing the risk of present and future infectious diseases in informal settlements on the African continent, while also reducing social inequalities. He suggested that informal residents and other marginalised groups be included in decision-making processes about improvements to these areas. The governance process in these cases should also include national governments as other actors for guaranteeing the transfer of resources to local governments, in addition to including NGOs and communities. Finally, Smit (2020) called for a halt to evictions, a stop on the demolition of slums, and an end to relocating residents to urban peripheries as has been done in past pandemics, as these can increase social exclusion and vulnerability.

Concluding remarks

The COVID-19 pandemic and how it deepened urban and housing problems for the poor in cities of Latin America, Asia, and Africa has been extensively studied, with the results being somewhat concerning due to the levels of impoverishment found in vulnerable populations. Governance and comprehensive urban policies and planning instruments are necessary to introduce housing policy actions from both national and local levels. The review of basic housing questions addressed in this article sought to reconsider housing problems during the pandemic as a problem concerning the right to housing in the Global South. Current policies that only finance newly-built dwellings are insufficient for solving the level of preparedness that cities must reach for the next health emergency. Rethinking such basic questions on housing is urgently needed in a planetary context that is calling for new ways of thinking and implementing housing policies.

Image by Caroline Hewson

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PART III.
Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Geographic Urban Challenges

Ch6. Insider / Outsider

Who has a Voice in Contemporary African Architectural Discourses?

Aerial view of CapeTown. Image by Anja van der Watt

The Rethink the City MOOC challenges students to consider their own role within the processes of urban planning and architectural design. Within the Africa course module, students are confronted with three analyses of contemporary situations: The proliferation of New Towns across the continent, the demolition of traditional sefer neighbourhoods in Addis Ababa, and the co-design of rural development projects in Kenya. Student reflections on this module present a number of insights and point towards two main underlying questions: Who gets to contribute to the design discourse? Which knowledge systems are valued? These questions are used to structure this chapter and explore ideas related to participatory design, mutual learning, and the role of the student, designer, or researcher 'from outside'. Through this exploration, we arrive at some conclusions about the necessity of an intersectional approach and the need for education design to be more suited to the reality and future of urban development in African contexts. We identify these critical steps as part of an ongoing progression towards truly sustainable, just, and inclusive design that capitalises on a combination of insider (local) knowledge systems and outsider (researcher/designer) expertise.

Keywords
African urbanization, New Towns, architectural discourse, intersectionality, indigenous knowledge systems

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Rural village in Ethiopia. Image by Katrina Hemingway, with permission

Introduction

This section addresses a geographic entity: the continent of Africa. A huge land mass, Africa is larger than Brazil, China, and the USA combined. It is home to a range of landscapes, from snow-capped mountains to lush forests and blazing deserts. Fifty-four countries and two disputed territories claim this land, and official systems are interwoven with tribal allegiances and thousands of languages. What can then effectively be said about such a diverse and multifaceted collection of places?

The designers of the MOOC course acknowledges this complexity and asked students to confront it by focusing on specific design questions. Accordingly, students from around the world identified and addressed a number of urban challenges and opportunities across this continent through the lens of their personal expertise and experiences.

In one module, students explored the phenomenon of contemporary New Towns and planned cities across Africa. They analysed current design approaches and critiqued the application of generic planning solutions without regard for environmental or social idiosyncrasies. In another, students researched Addis Ababa's sefers (traditional urban neighbourhoods), and the local policies that are slowly replacing these communities with high-rise apartment housing in urban peripheries. They discussed the need to balance economic and infrastructural improvement with support for social networks, existing identities, and community participation. In the third module, students reflected on rural development projects through an example in Kenya, noting the need for co-productive participation models and tools to encourage self-sufficiency.

From a continental perspective to a single neighbourhood, the topics moved across scales, echoing a designer's iterative approach. Almost like an itch across these modules and geographic scales, students repeatedly came up against the same aggravating, underlying difficulties: Who gets to contribute to the design discourse? Deeply intertwined with the first, the second question is rather more conceptual: Which knowledge systems are valued? These questions challenge us to think critically about the implications of our own interventions as designers and researchers, and our roles as outsiders involved in cross-cultural exchange. This chapter is therefore structured around these interrogations and attempts to delve deeper into the intricacies of the roles played by researchers, designers, and students in urban African contexts.

Balogun Market in Lagos, Nigeria. Image by Victoria Oshinusi, Wearthly Studio, with permission

Who gets to contribute?

The systemic depletion of African people, lands, and resources in the name of empire and capitalism has been carefully reported (Kolapo & Akurang-Parry, 2007; Amin, 2009; Myers, 2003). Centuries of colonisation in many African countries has impacted not only contemporary wealth indicators, such as gross national product (GDP) and gross national income per capita at purchasing power parity (GNI (PPP)), but even educational and planning policies still applied today (Agbor, 2015; Rostowski & Stacescu, 2008).

With this history in mind, we can interpret the question of who gets to contribute to the design discourse in different ways. We may ask who can contribute to the contemporary, international discourses around African urbanisation in academic publications, or even ask which community members get to contribute to a co-produced local design. Another way of considering this question is to ask which voices are not being heard, and why? And who benefits from this silence?

Despite repeated calls for new ways of theorising African city-ness (Robinson, 2006; Pieterse & Simone, 2013), contemporary discourse on African urbanisation still struggles with what Ergin and Alkan termed 'academic neo-colonialism': 'The epistemological implications assign southern knowledge to the status of "data" for the use of "northern theory"' (2019, p. 259). This imbalance problematises African cities in juxtaposition to their European counterparts, rather than accepting that all cities are diverse and dynamic places in constant states of flux.

The academic design world is not immune to the Western tradition of exoticizing and even fetishising 'the Global South', 'developing countries', or 'emerging economies' as single monoliths. We see this in the celebration of European-designed 'tropical architecture' by such designers as Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew, contrasted with the total absence of vernacular building typologies in mainstream architectural education (le Roux, 2003). This gives us a clue as to whose voice is being heard, and whose is being ignored.

Similar struggles affect design schools across Africa, who often teach an irrelevant and damaging curriculum populated by long-dead, white, male architects (Agbo, 2018). What does it teach a student to be exposed to only one way of seeing so far removed from their own experience? In a 2009 TED Talk, Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche described a childhood spent writing enthusiastically about snow and apple orchards while, outside her window, only mangos grew (Adichie, 2009). The architectural equivalent of this anecdote might be found in what Senegalese architect and educator Mamadou Jean-Charles Tall has called 'something that looks like the race to modernity… which comes to the situation where we don't know ourselves, we don't know our history, we are losing our

Aerial view of Ikoyi in Lagos, Nigeria. Image by Victoria Oshinusi. Wecrafty Studio, with permission

culture… In schools, when we talk about the history of architecture, we will study Mies van der Rohe and Bauhaus, but we never talk about African architecture' (Tall, 2018).

Architectural discourse is enriched when groups with different literacies are included. The more voices we bring into a discussion, the more robust and honest that discussion becomes. However, discussions also become more complex and entangled when we remove our blinders and intentionally aim for an inclusive approach. This uneasy process is the only way in which to answer the aforementioned question. Who gets to contribute? Everyone.

Which knowledge systems are valued?

In the second module of this course, students were introduced to a situation in Addis Ababa where neighbourhood communities from traditional, low-rise sefers were being re-housed in high-rise condominiums. Almost all students remarked on the need for local empowerment and community participation in the design process, as they easily recognised the threat to social support networks and livelihoods presented by the change in spatial organisation. These calls for public participation and co-design are far from new, and, as any experienced designer knows, they are often required by planning boards, NGOs, and even development corporations. However, as any experienced designer also knows, these requirements are often perceived as annoying checklists to be ticked off, rather than valuable tools to achieve inclusive design.

The challenge lies in implementation. Many African communities have rich oral traditions, and discussing ideas repeatedly and in great detail until consensus is achieved is a celebrated skill (Bujo, 2009). This requires time, humility, and patience on the part of the designer. These skills are not part of contemporary curriculums, and they may exceed the resources available to the designer. When implemented successfully, however, the fruits of a truly participatory design process are evident. By working closely with a community to understand their needs and desires, co-produced designs can achieve both cultural authenticity and a more equitable distribution of opportunities and space, as well as align the long-term consequences of design decisions with the long-term goals of the community itself. The ethical standard implicit in participatory design is that 'it recognizes the accountability of design to the worlds it creates and the lives of those who inhabit them' (Robertson & Simonsen, 2012, p. 6). When students, designers, and researchers assign value to local knowledge by incorporating it

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Athens, Greece

“My favorite modules were MENA and African Challenges. These are topics didn’t have access to before…”

into a resulting project or design process, the end result becomes immeasurably richer and more contextually appropriate.

Unfortunately, we frequently see research and design processes that (unintentionally) disregard or marginalise local lived experiences and expertise. One example can be found in the erasure of pre-colonial urban history in Africa. Outside of urban historians, very few people are aware of the rich tradition of intentional spatial organisation and sophisticated bureaucracies that characterised ancient urban environments from Axum to Great Zimbabwe. Erasing an urban history implicitly facilitates external interventions, and it is not difficult to imagine the benefits to colonising powers. If there is no indigenous tradition of city-making, the nefarious argument went, then why not introduce an approach from elsewhere?

While we cannot change the past, we can commit to prioritising historically-marginalised knowledge systems. Part of this process involves bringing awareness to our own roles as students, designers, and researchers from other places that study and design in African contexts. Information exchange through cross-cultural dialogue is complex and demands that designers and researchers both commit to a process of mutual learning between the insider and the outsider (Winschiers-Theophilus, Bidwell & Blake, 2012). The idea of 'outsideness' can be uncomfortable, but for the designer or researcher committed to good practice outside of their own cultural context, it is necessary to actively confront this discomfort and examine their own roles, biases, and ignorance.

The other side of this coin is the immobilising suspicion that, as outsiders, we may have nothing to contribute. Our thoughts may follow a logical route that concludes: 'I am not from there, therefore I can never fully understand the problem or the local dynamics, therefore I can never design a successful solution'. For the designer or researcher, regardless of their place of origin or study, the expertise and personal experiences that have informed their development remain valuable and contribute to an ongoing migration of ideas. Balancing the weight of their own perspectives with those of others remains a constant and necessary practice. As the social psychologist Shose Kessi reminds us, social justice is an essential element of research, and therefore research and activism are deeply intertwined in any effort to upset the intersecting legacies of racism, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy in Africa (2017).

Towards a more just and inclusive urban future

Towards a More Just and Inclusive Urban Future
This chapter is structured around two questions underlying the student's work in the African Urban Challenges module: Who gets to contribute? Which knowledge systems are valued? Considering these questions leads us to some ideas about historical inequities and the need to address them honestly. Imbalances of

Township on boundaries of CapeTown. Image by Anja van der Watt

Expansive road, South Africa. Image by Anja van der Walt

power, academic valuation, and types of knowledge remain violently present in global politics, in language, in the histories we learn, and in the subtleties of our interactions with others. We can see this in the planning policies that remain in place in many African cities, and the lack of knowledge around pre-colonial urbanisation processes in Africa. When confronted with these imbalances, it may be useful to interrogate the colonial legacies that continue to inform the way architecture and urban planning is practiced and understood. These relics have no place in future development. As students of the Rethink the City course have rightly pointed out, sustainable development must be based on social and environmental justice, value indigenous knowledge, and emerge from a decolonising perspective.

A fundamental key to moving towards this goal lies in architectural and planning education. Design schools both within and outside of Africa require better resources so as to provide an education that equips designers for a future wherein the African continent will continue to be the fastest urbanising region, and effective urban planning and management will be priorities (OECD, 2020). Established knowledge institutions, such as the African Centre for Cities in Cape Town and the newly-opened African Futures Institute in Accra, have shown promise in challenging Western planning paradigms and architectural dogmas.

Not only students, but also established designers and researchers need the tools, support, and confidence to address topics and ideas that fascinate them. It is easy to become immobilised by the thought, 'who am I to contribute to this?' For students and experts alike, the answer is simple: There is value in an outsider's perspective when that outsider also recognises the privileges and biases that accompany their views.

The MOOC's Africa module not only challenges us to 'rethink the city', but also to reconsider the role we play in interpreting the city and intervening in its development. This is difficult, but rewarding work: There is no easy or universal solution for reaching truly just and inclusive development, and as researchers, designers, and students, we have a responsibility to be curious and reserve judgement in striving for this goal. By placing ourselves in a position of mutual learning and engaging in participatory processes, we can collectively aim for a more just and inclusive outcome, and delight in being part of a complex and fascinating world.

Street in Ethiopia. Image by Katrina Hemingway, with permission

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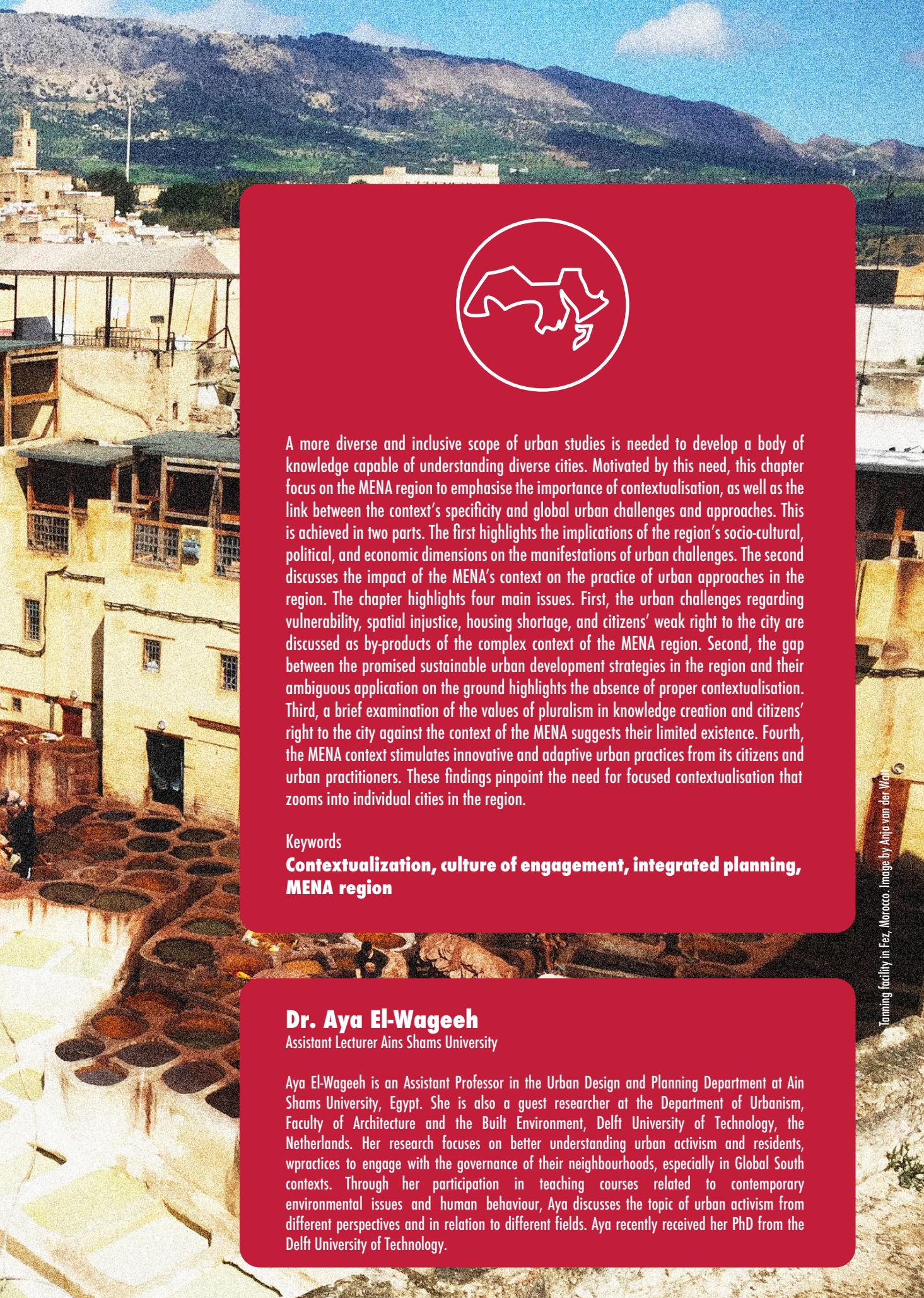
Ch 7. Contextualizing Global and Urban

Challenges and Approaches in the MENA Region



A more diverse and inclusive scope of urban studies is needed to develop a body of knowledge capable of understanding diverse cities. Motivated by this need, this chapter focus on the MENA region to emphasise the importance of contextualisation, as well as the link between the context's specificity and global urban challenges and approaches. This is achieved in two parts. The first highlights the implications of the region's socio-cultural, political, and economic dimensions on the manifestations of urban challenges. The second discusses the impact of the MENA's context on the practice of urban approaches in the region. The chapter highlights four main issues. First, the urban challenges regarding vulnerability, spatial injustice, housing shortage, and citizens' weak right to the city are discussed as by-products of the complex context of the MENA region. Second, the gap between the promised sustainable urban development strategies in the region and their ambiguous application on the ground highlights the absence of proper contextualisation. Third, a brief examination of the values of pluralism in knowledge creation and citizens' right to the city against the context of the MENA suggests their limited existence. Fourth, the MENA context stimulates innovative and adaptive urban practices from its citizens and urban practitioners. These findings pinpoint the need for focused contextualisation that zooms into individual cities in the region.

Keywords
Contextualization, culture of engagement, integrated planning, MENA region

Tanning facility in Fez, Morocco. Image by Anja van der Walt

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Myrto Karampela-Makrygianni
Patras, Greece

“Having graduated from a Greek University with a strong focus on the European context it was very interesting for me to familiarize with the MENA and African Challenges.

Although the assignments focused more on the local context, they helped me realize the global connections between the issues of Urban Resilience, Housing Provision and Management and Spatial Justice.”

Introduction

A 'Global South' perspective is needed to develop a body of knowledge capable of understanding diverse cities (Allegra et al., 2013; Parnell & Oldfield, 2014). In this regard, widening the scope of urban research to include different contexts and regions can answer the call to decolonise urban studies and support knowledge production from ex-centric locations (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012). Besides this continuous need to understand excluded contexts, it is important to avoid reducing the different experiences of countries in one region while drawing general conclusions (Abdou, 2020). Motivated by these arguments, this chapter highlights the manifestation of global urban challenges and the main urban planning approaches for dealing with them in parts of the MENA region.

Urban challenges related to housing provision, vulnerability, and spatial injustice are occurring on a global scale. To deal with these, such urban approaches as integrated urban planning and effective citizens' involvement (Andrews et al., 2008) are developed. When adopting these approaches, it is crucial to consider the specificity of the context under investigation (Parnell & Oldfield, 2014; Roy, 2009). Socio-cultural, political, economic, and environmental historical contexts shape the emergence of such urban challenges and the approaches that respond to them in their cities (Patel, 2014; Watson, 2009). This is a process of contextualisation that focuses on examining and understanding global urban issues from within the studied context. Based on this, the context of the MENA region includes the influences that led to the manifestation of global urban challenges in its cities. Additionally, it includes the local efforts that operationalise global urban approaches to respond to these challenges locally. With a particular focus on the MENA region, this chapter emphasises the importance of contextualisation and the link between context specificity and global urban challenges and approaches. This is achieved by exploring several urban challenges and solutions in parts of the MENA region.

The MENA region has a shared political and cultural history spreading over a wide geographical boundary. Politically, the MENA region shares a history of post-colonial regimes that adopted state socialism and nurtured Arab nationalism ideologies (Mansour, 2020). These regimes rely on authoritarianism and centralisation to remain in power (Bayat, 2013). From Morocco to Bahrain and in between, the Arab Spring released destabilising, political forces in the region. However, most of these forces struggled to positively change the centralised and authoritarian regimes (Grinin et al., 2018). Culturally, MENA countries share language, religions, and many customs and traditions (Mabry, 2013). Geographically, the wide geographical boundary of the MENA region includes wealthy and resourceful countries, as well as economically- and politically-struggling ones (UN-Habitat, 2012). The resultant implications of these shared and complex cultural, historical, and political layers

Rooftops of Morocco. Image by Anja van der Watt

are produced and experienced in the urban realm of the region's cities (Allegra et al., 2013).

That said, MENA cities have two main variations. First, there are old cities with a complex relationship with modernity and globalisation, such as Baghdad, Cairo, Beirut, and Damascus. Second, there are Gulf cities that sprint towards modernity with 'concentrations of corporate skyscrapers, luxury lifestyles, and world-class cultural institutions', as seen in cities like Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Doha (Andraos, 2016). In these two variations, local and grassroot efforts are taking place to contextualise and develop global urban approaches. To balance between shared urban issues in the MENA region while acknowledging the diverse experiences of its countries, this chapter focuses on cities from economically- and politically-struggling[1] countries. The chapter is organised into two parts: The first links the context of these countries to its urban challenges, while the second discusses the impact of the MENA's context on the practice of urban approaches in the region.

The implications of the MENA's context on the urban challenges in the region

The MENA region faces major challenges related to population and urban growth, unemployment, political instability, severe water shortage and resources depletion, slow and incomplete economic and governance reforms (League of Arab States, 2016), and undefined civil rights regarding civil societies' participation in the urbanisation of their cities. This section highlights the implications of the region's socio-cultural, political, and economic dimensions on the manifestations of such urban challenges as vulnerability, spatial injustice, informal settlements, and absence of citizens' 'rights to the city' (Lefebvre, 1996).

The political context of the region significantly discourages citizens from engaging in urban governance. Typically, the region's regimes adopt centralised planning and governance (Bayat, 2013). Therefore, the citizens became entirely dependent on the state for urban planning, governance, and management. Accordingly, decentralisation and public participation in urban planning and governance are restrained. Despite the Arab Spring and the resultant voices calling for a new mode for urban practice (see, for example, Ibrahim, 2014), the repressive practices of the authoritarian regimes constrain organised change in urban policies (Harb, 2019). In consequence, post-Arab Spring regimes were unable to empower the resultant strong sense of activism (Meijer & Butenschøn, 2017) and connection to urban spaces. In Egypt, public participation had been adopted by its central planning institution for decades. However, these participation practices were relatively low

[1] These are states undergoing political change in which they are either gradually sliding back to stricter authoritarian regimes or on a shaky transition to democratic ones, or engaged into civil wars (see Mansour, 2020; Sika, 2019)

on the 'ladder of participation' (Arnstein, 1969) and function within constraining structures of elitism, fear, and mistrust (Stephen Connelly, 2009). Despite the state's support to few community-based urban development projects (see MADD Platform, 2015; Zaazaa, 2019), Cairo experienced a continuous neglection of public participation in the urban upgrading projects of its neighbourhoods (see Ashoub & Elkhateeb, 2021; Elkhateeb, 2020; Sayed, 2021). This selective manner towards citizen engagement questions the presence of political will to involve citizens in the future of their cities.

The states' dominance over urban planning and governance does not only discourages citizen engagement, but also shapes an unfamiliar culture towards citizens' engagement in public life. The culture of engagement is 'a set of norms and expectations of what kinds of political interactions between state and citizens are appropriate and possible' (Steve Connelly, 2010, p. 335). The authoritarian regimes in the MENA region control and undermine citizen engagement in public life under the pretext of keeping the state's order and security. According to Elwageeh et al. (2020), the continuous controlling attitude from states causes an incrementally negative connotation to citizens' engagement in urban aspects. Therefore, citizens' right to shape and produce their cities is not an integrated part of citizens' rights in these contexts. This makes the right to the city neither state-supported nor widely claimed by the citizens.

The MENA regions' economic context played a major role in the existence of spatial injustice in its cities. The neoliberal reforms in the region were economic and led to states retreating over financial and service provision (Bayat, 2013). States' retreats and the weak presence of grassroot initiatives to maintain the urban quality resulted in an urban deterioration of historic centres in many cities (League of Arab States, 2016). Moreover, urban development plans and budgeting in specific cities led to a concentration of wealth, job opportunities, and better services within them (see, for example, Shawkat & Hendawy, 2017; Shawkat & Khalil, 2016). The wide gap in urban development between cities in the same country led to mass migration from small cities and rural areas to major cities. Consequently, major cities are unable to provide enough jobs, affordable housing, and basic services (UN-Habitat, 2012). The citizens responded to these unmet needs by building informal houses and self-providing urban services. As a result, the spread of informal areas and the urban deterioration of many old districts continue to challenge cities in Morocco, Egypt, Iraq, and Algeria (League of Arab States, 2016). The spread of the unplanned and informal settlements showcase the significant urban segregation and spatial injustice in the cities, especially when compared with neighbouring new elitist and exclusive urban communities in the same cities.

The shift from socialist governance to neoliberalism in the MENA region resulted in 'neoliberal urbanism' (Abdelmonem, 2016). This urbanism focuses on new investments and developments from a market perspective (Hourani, 2014). The neoliberal urbanism ambition shaped the development plans for new neighbourhoods around the old cities, such as New Cairo in Egypt, and the urban upgrading plans of city centres, such as Beirut's Downtown and Amman's Abdali Urban Regeneration Project. Abdelmonem (2016) and Hourani (2014) described these new projects as forced, distant, and disconnected from their surrounding urban fabric. This has led to more exclusive living cultures where proper public services have become the privilege of high-income neighbourhoods and gated communities (Mahmoud & Rashid, 2016). The market-driven urbanism is now growing and leading the new plans for private investment of Egypt's 'New Administrative Capital' (MHUC, 2021; UDC, 2015), with the state becoming more of a tenant and/or partner (Abdelmonem, 2016). The continuous expansion of this exclusive living culture increases the division in social structure and exacerbates cities' vulnerability to spatial injustice.

Finally, man-made and natural hazards risks are significantly present in the MENA region. Regarding the former, the region's state of conflict has been continuing for decades in the form of internal disputes and external invasions and occupations. The resultant unprecedented flows of forced migration and displacement have hindered cities' abilities to provide proper living conditions for refugees and thus, many refugees are forced to live in unsafe areas (League of Arab States, 2016). The prolonged state of conflict has turned temporal refugee camps into permanent housing, which are then re-appropriated by refugees to become more responsive to their needs (Dalal, 2014). Even the post-conflict recovery of demolished cities in Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria is torn between reconstruction and recovery (Alharithy, 2021), as well as how to balance between what to restore or replace (Barakat, 2021). Regarding natural hazards, they vary between high risks of flooding, earthquakes, dust storms, and severe droughts (The World Bank, 2014). According to Waha et al. (2017), the region is one of the world's most exposed to the negative impacts of climate change. The presence of these man-made and natural risks exposes the urban, environmental, and social vulnerability of the cities in the MENA region (The World Bank, 2014), especially among the vulnerable groups of refugees and internally-displaced persons (Eltinay, 2019).

This overview of the context's cultural, political, and economic influences shows how they have produced the urban challenges and experiences in the cities of the region. These influences created a culture of dependence on the government in urban planning and governance. This dependency is accompanied by security and state control over civil society. It has resulted in a deep socio-cultural disadvantage in which the citizens are largely unfamiliar with citizen engagement in decision-

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“The Geographic Regions, Middle East and North Africa, and African Challenges, were the topics I enjoyed the most because I didn’t have access to such subjects before...”

making and urban governance. This challenging context has made cities in the MENA vulnerable, spatially unjust, and lacking in citizens' involvement in urban planning and governance.

The impact of the MENA's context on practicing global urban approaches in the region

Various urban approaches have been developed and generalised to respond to global urban challenges. In an abstract form, these approaches focus mainly on addressing three aspects: urban planning, stakeholders and their mutual relationships, and the role of urban practitioners and scholars. Regarding urban planning, a holistic and integrated approach has been globally introduced (see Borie et al., 2019; Kuhla von Bergmann et al., 2013; Yigitcanlar & Teriman, 2015). This approach values different disciplines and the perspectives of different actors. It establishes pluralism in acquiring knowledge, and the operation of the urban planning system in a holistic manner rather than a sectoral one. Concerning stakeholders and their mutual relationships, effective citizen involvement in urban planning and governance has been widely advocated. Studies have focused on establishing 'enabler and responsive' governments that support 'willing, able, and equipped' citizens for effective involvement in urban governance and management (Andrews et al., 2008). Finally, the role of urban practitioners is being increasingly directed towards adopting flexible and adaptive planning strategies, as well as acting as mediators, and sometimes even as politicians in stakeholder interactions (Johnson, 2012).

These approaches are general and applicable to many contexts, therefore, the core issue is to contextualise them to the regions. For instance, the Arab New Urban Agenda declared the adoption of sustainable development objectives regarding equity and social integration, housing and basic services, prosperous living for all, integrated and sustainable human settlements, and urban resilience against climate change (League of Arab States, 2016). These objectives include strategies for integrated planning and effective citizen involvement. However, such strategies are insufficiently contextualised to the cultural, economic, social, urban, and environmental specificities of the countries. These strategies continue to be ambiguous on the local and operational levels. According to Göll et al. (2019), the MENA region is progressing modestly in fulfilling the sustainable development objectives. The decision-makers in the MENA region need to face the local challenges and prioritise the contextualisation of the urban strategies and approaches for achieving their Urban Agenda.

To achieve contextualisation, Salama (2019) highlighted that understanding a context in terms of its content should be an important driver rather than an end goal. In this perspective, deciding on the adoption and application of urban approaches is driven by the particular issues of the context. Thus, the context is not overshadowed by the global urban approach, but rather, it is a source for improving the existing approach or developing parallel ones. Abdelatif et al. (2015) proposed a framework for contextualisation that focused on abstracting the values inside the urban approach, and then examining them against the different political, economic, environmental, and socio-cultural dimensions in a context. Applying this to the MENA region, the contextualisation of integrated planning, citizen involvement, and adaptive, enabled, and skilled urban practitioners depend on defining the values within these approaches and the possibility of their existence in the context. These values include – but are not limited to – pluralism in knowledge creation and citizens' equal rights in shaping, using, and producing urban spaces.

Indeed, focused research is needed for defining more values related to each approach. However, these two values are briefly examined against the context of the MENA and its resultant culture of engagement. As previously explained, the culture of engagement defines what society believes as possible and appropriate in citizen–state interactions. Additionally, the controlling and unappreciative view of the regimes towards citizens' involvement in the MENA region dominates societal perceptions. This dominant perception suggests a limited existence to the values of pluralism in knowledge creation and citizens' right to the city in the region. A paradigm shift is needed to (re)define these values in the perception of society. The road to this paradigm shift is long and requires persistent collective efforts. These should bring these values into the society's culture, and eventually become reflected in integrated and citizen-oriented responses to the urban challenges in the region.

So far, the MENA's context has been framed to shape urban challenges in the region and as an obstacle hindering resilient, integrated, and citizen-centred urban approaches. However, the closer we observe the different cities in the MENA region, the more we notice how grassroots initiatives and urban practitioners work on shifting societal cultures and expanding the limits of what is possible and appropriate in the context. Such expansions are occur from within by practicing integration, resilience, and right to the city. These practices mobilise a gradual change in the culture of urban planning and governance in the region. Additionally, these local practices in such challenging contexts enrich the body of knowledge by introducing innovative and adaptive responses in the planning theory and practice.

For instance, the urban poor in many of the region's cities practice 'quiet encroachment' (Bayat, 2013) as a form of survival and urban improvement. The Palestinians are practicing 'insurgent planning' to resist occupation-based urban plans (Meir, 2005). In so doing, they problematising the use of the 'informality' term in a context with a settler-colonial nature (Ayoub, 2020). Social innovations by grassroots initiatives in deprived neighbourhoods in Egypt adopt the 'shadow approach' for implementing urban interventions apart from local authorities (El-Azzazy & Zaazaa, 2017). In post-conflict Iraqi cities, the citizens' adaptive capacity (Alkhalefy et al., 2016) and their physical and social resiliency (Al-Rawi, 2021) are paving the road for gradual urban recovery.

Despite the MENA region's problematic contexts, urban activism by practitioners and researchers exists. However, Harb (2019) mentioned that their possibilities are limited to 'knowledge production and changing the terms of the public debate on the city'. In Lebanon, The Beirut Urban Lab (2006) documents and analyses ongoing transformation processes regarding the themes of urban recovery, citizenship, and planning and informality. In addition, the lab has devoted a special focus to Beirut's urban recovery after the recent port blast in 2020. In Egypt, The Built Environment Observatory (2015) aims to support scholars, civil society, and officials with policy analyses, fact sheets, and resources to pursue equitable development. Meanwhile, Tadamun (2012) offers 'know your city', 'know your government', and 'voices of Cairo' as initiatives to mobilize, raise awareness and support the citizens to improve their communities and demand their urban rights. In Morocco, small movements have focused on researching urban issues related to informality, housing, and service provision without criticising the urban polices (Harb, 2019). Urban practitioners in the MENA region are struggling to experiment with ideas, approaches, and tools for building partnerships and engaging citizens. However, several practitioners have produced real alternative solutions led by community engagement approach and integrated urban planning and development strategies, such as Public Work (2012) in Lebanon, Cluster (2011), Takween (2009), Athar Lina (2012) in Egypt, and the Association of Tunisian Urban Planners in Tunisia (Harb, 2019).

Medina streets in Marrakesh, Morocco. Image by Anja van der Wal

Conclusion

Starting from a multi-central approach in the production of knowledge in urban studies, this chapter has contextualised global urban challenges, and some of the approaches responding to them, in the MENA region. This contextualisation pinpointed four main impacts of the MENA's context. First, the urban challenges of vulnerability, spatial injustice, housing shortage, and weak citizens' right to the city are by-products of the region's complex content. Second, the gap between the promised sustainable urban development strategies and their ambiguous application on the ground highlights the absence of contextualisation in the region. Third, the brief examination of the values of pluralism in knowledge creation and the citizens' right to the city against the context of the MENA suggest their limited existence. Accordingly, re-shaping a culture of engagement that includes these values in the MENA region requires a paradigm shift in public perception. This reshaped public perception can redefine power relations, the role of different actors, and the rights of citizens in the context. Fourth (and against the odds), the MENA context stimulates innovative and adaptive urban practices from the region's citizens and urban practitioners.

That said, the potential exists to stimulate a change regarding the urban challenges in the MENA region and the approaches responding to them. While the highlighted efforts in different cities are inspirational, they appear to be scattered and uncoordinated. Therefore, there is an urgent need to move forward with the region's contextualisation and zoom in to individual cities in the region. This could provide a deeper understanding of the cities' unique contexts. Additionally, it can provide a critical analysis of these scattered grassroots efforts and their influence on shifting the culture of citizens' engagement in cities. This focused contextualisation aligns with Gaventa's (2006) recommendation for understanding the culture and improving it from within to deepen a change in challenging contexts. This can be achieved through persistent and collective work from policymakers, academics, and professionals in the region.

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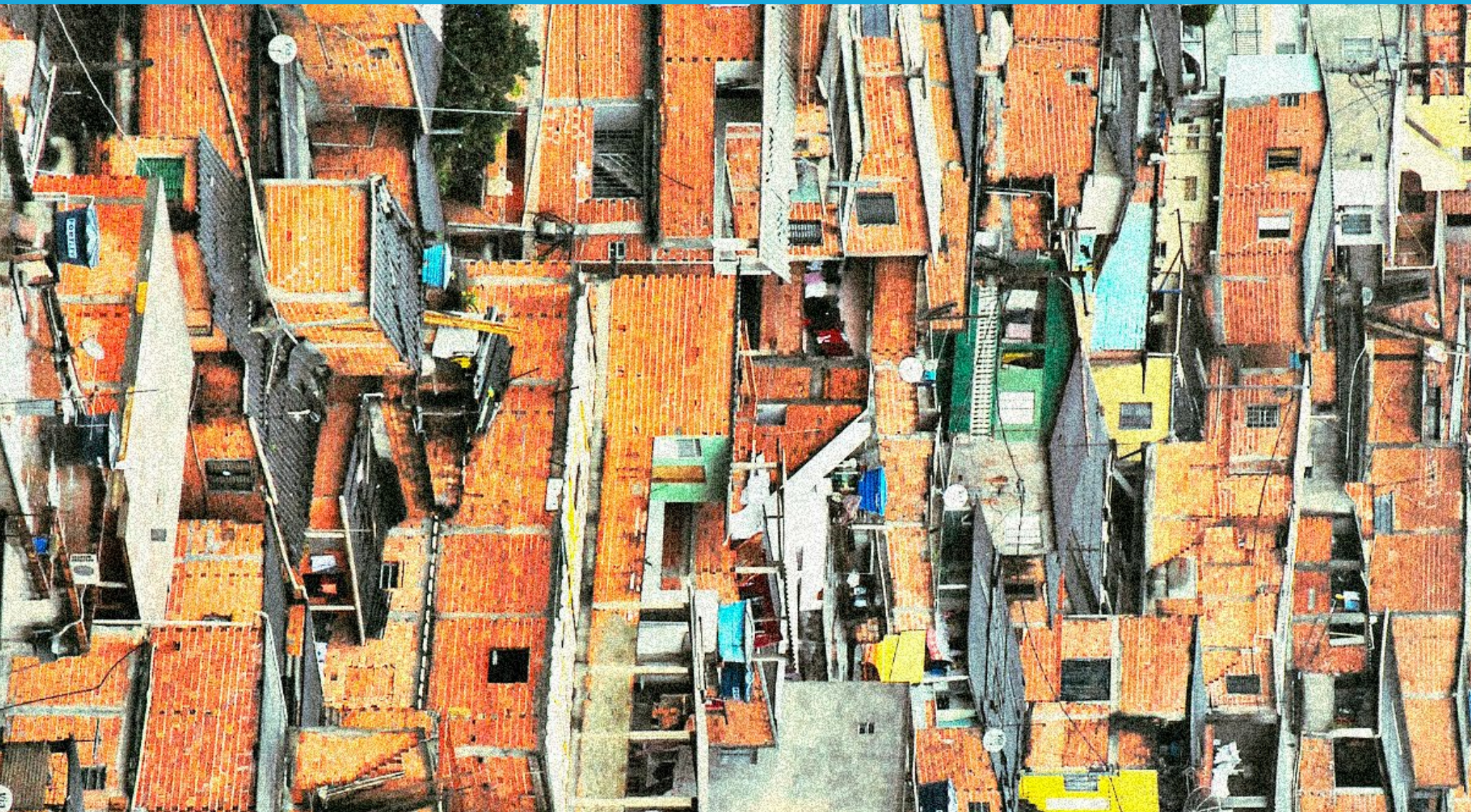
PART IV.
Conclusive notes



Rethink the City: a Path to Innovative Urban Solutions in the Global South

Dr. Roberto Rocco

Who would have known a few years ago, when a group of TU Deft PhD candidates led by Igor Moreno Pessoa and Luz Maria Vergara came up with the idea to organise a MOOC on issues of urban development in the Global South, that Rethink the City would have been such a resounding success?

Rethink the City filled a gap in urban development studies by addressing issues with an integrative approach based on analysing the interaction of actors, technologies and institutions rather than focusing on technology and design alone.

As urbanisation accelerates around the world, cities in the Global South face unique and complex challenges that cannot be addressed through "solutionism", that is, the belief that complex societal problems can be solved primarily through technological or design-based solutions. Solutionism often overlooks the causality and underlying complexities and social nuances of urban development issues, leading to an overreliance on quick fixes and neglecting broader systemic considerations. These broader systemic considerations were addressed by the course in interactive and participatory online exercises, often peer-reviewed.

The three main topics of the course (Spatial Justice, Housing Provision and Management and Sustainable Urban Transitions) address urban development challenges and embrace their full complexity. Technology certainly plays a role in addressing urban development issues, and design remains central for a future-oriented imagination of better and fairer cities. However, solutions must also rely on the governance of socio-technical systems in constant evolution and change, by which I mean understanding and designing the relationships between a multitude of actors in the public sector, the private sector and civil society within formal and informal institutions, and within evolving socio-technical regimes.

Rooftops of São Paulo. Image by Roberto Rocco

Decisions must also rely on values, by which I mean the valuation of the multiple paths to take according to different societies' and communities' norms, values, objectives and capacities. Urban solutions don't happen in a vacuum and are most certainly not "neutral". "Neutrality" in technology and design is a fallacy that hinders the addressing of urban problems in their full complexity. The fallacy of neutrality in technology and design is the mistaken belief that these fields can be entirely objective and devoid of bias. In reality, choices made in design and technology often reflect the values and perspectives of their creators, potentially perpetuating societal biases and excluding diverse perspectives in problem-solving. The question should not be about including values in the design process but about whose values are included, who is around the table, and whose voices are heard in planning and design processes. This idea underscores the concept of co-design and co-planning, which speaks to spatial justice as a guiding framework for action.

Spatial Justice emphasises the fair distribution of the burdens and benefits of urban development, which necessitates just participatory planning processes and the full recognition of the aspirations, values, histories and trajectories of diverse groups in society.

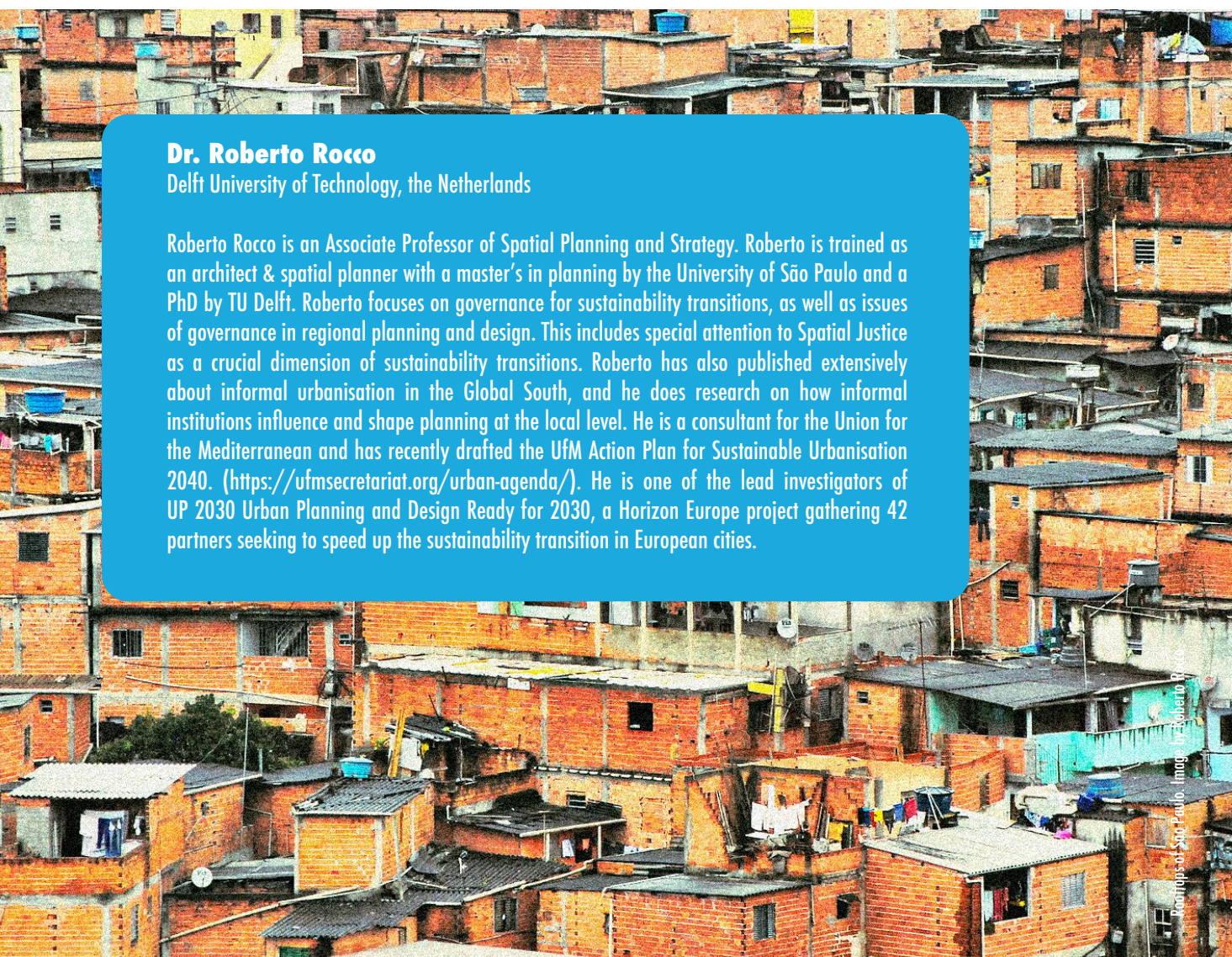
Cities in emerging economies often grapple with issues of inequality and access to resources. The concept of spatial justice is central to addressing these issues. In Rethink the City, students delve into topics such as multi-level networked governance, regional planning, and informal urbanisation, gaining a deep understanding of the challenges and opportunities in achieving spatial justice.

Housing Provision and Management focuses on the growing demand for housing in the Global South. Traditional approaches may no longer suffice, and alternative methods are required. Through comparative international perspectives and an exploration of social innovation in housing, students gain insights into how housing can be provided and managed more effectively. This includes examining concepts like co-production and sustainable urbanism, which are crucial for addressing housing challenges.

Sustainable Urban Transitions explores the complex interplay between social, economic, and cultural factors in achieving sustainable urban transitions. Students grapple with questions related to socioeconomic inequality, community-led housing initiatives, and the balance between environmental sustainability and social justice. Case studies from diverse regions provide valuable insights into how these challenges manifest in different contexts.

Throughout the course, students gain not only theoretical knowledge but also practical skills. They learn to apply analytical tools and innovative solutions to real-world urban challenges. The course encourages students to develop a critical perspective on their own urban environments, empowering them to identify and address issues in their local contexts.

The success of Rethink the City is evident in its impact on students and the broader urban planning community. Graduates of the course have gone on to become advocates for more inclusive and sustainable urban development. They may apply the knowledge and skills gained to address pressing urban challenges in their respective regions, making a tangible difference in the Global South. Moreover, as the course's global reach and interdisciplinary approach have attracted thousands of participants worldwide, it has fostered a rich exchange of ideas and experiences among participants. This diversity of perspectives enhances the quality of the learning experience and promotes innovative thinking.



Dr. Roberto Rocco
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Roberto Rocco is an Associate Professor of Spatial Planning and Strategy. Roberto is trained as an architect & spatial planner with a master's in planning by the University of São Paulo and a PhD by TU Delft. Roberto focuses on governance for sustainability transitions, as well as issues of governance in regional planning and design. This includes special attention to Spatial Justice as a crucial dimension of sustainability transitions. Roberto has also published extensively about informal urbanisation in the Global South, and he does research on how informal institutions influence and shape planning at the local level. He is a consultant for the Union for the Mediterranean and has recently drafted the UfM Action Plan for Sustainable Urbanisation 2040. (https://ufmsecretariat.org/urban-agenda/). He is one of the lead investigators of UP 2030 Urban Planning and Design Ready for 2030, a Horizon Europe project gathering 42 partners seeking to speed up the sustainability transition in European cities.

Rooftops of São Paulo. Image by Roberto Rocco

Student testimonies

Views from learners

Image by Caroline Newton

"Personally, the influence of this course on my practice is huge. After finishing the course, I decide to move forward with my graduate degree in urban design, which led me to dive even deeper on notion of urban walkability mind the global binary, the research topic that intrigue me and the interest that was built up during the course. The course changes the way I think, draw, and approach certain topics in my research and design practice - and for that I would recommend the course to any practitioners or curious learners out there."

Wattana Songpetchmongkol
Bangkok, Thailand

"This is the first course that formally enables me to deal with such research themes. This simply strenghtened my interest and desire to dig into those topics in the future while bringing first keys, inspiration and tangible content to similar issues."

Tom Detry
Brussels, Belguim

"The course was a motive to research more, think more and organize my thoughts, create a solid opinion on many different topics. The knowledge the course gave me was important and I am happy for participating."

Konstantina
Athens. Greece

Zahra Ramezanian
Kelardasht, Iran

"The course helped me to experience an international atmosphere and encouraged me to further my education in international universities. The course, furthermore, introduced different views about urban resilience and rethinking our policies which are related to cities."

Wattana Songpetchmongkol
Bangkok, Thailand

"The overall course was brilliant in its entire duration. Lectures are concise and to-the -point, while sub-sequential video are useful in further study as it provide a strong foundation should one want to explore more on the topics of interest. In short, the course is constructive, useful and intriguing - suitable for the curious

Tom Detry
Brussels, Belguim

"Studying online offers some flexibilty and allows to learn at your own pace. Videos et reading materials were quite complete and clearly identified in-depth topics [...] Reviewing other participants' homeworks opens your mind and offers an amazing database from all over the globe. This brings you to many different contexts and completes the course content."

"The MOOC format was easy to navigate and to follow in my free time while the online portfolio offered great opportunities for interaction with fellow participants greatly enhancing the experience. The selected material, texts and assignments not only helped in educating us about the topics but also acted as the beginning of many interesting conversations and questions among the participants."

Myrto Karampela-Makrygianni
Patras, Greece

"I got the chance to enjoy the interaction on the course platform, the assignments and course dynamic allowed and encouraged the interaction between peers in a different way taking into consideration other online courses I have taken [...] The content explained in each module allowed me to gain a fresh perspective on projects in my own professional field, exploring more in-depth particular subjects within the practice."

Andrea Chaves
Gran Área Metropolitana, Costa Rica

Zahra Ramezanian
Kelardasht, Iran

"I believe that online education is the future of education throughout the world, therefore it can help more people to further their education without difficulties... The interesting thing about online peers is that there are may people from various cultures and also different perspectives that gives overarching views about topics. This makes constructive criticism towards better judgement and strategies."

Myrto Karampela-Makrygianni
Patras, Greece

"All of the modules greatly enhanced my research interests and my overall understanding of the contemporary issues and definitions connected with the built environment."

Wattana Songpetchmongkol
Bangkok, Thailand

Online peer review allows for the knowledge exchange beyond the contemporary classroom. This provides chances for students to explore what a typical physical lecture cannot and thus, is very beneficial in learning - through second hand - experiences on the other side of the world."

"The peer-to-peer feedback and the possibility to go through the online portfolios was a significant part of the learning experience. I just wish that there was a way to keep in touch with the group taking the course at the same time with me."

Myrto Karampela-Makrygianni
Patras, Greece

"Confronting with real case studies and applied best practices from the South revealed to be extremely inspiring for challenges faced in our Northern societies. We have a lot to learn from those people and, in that sense, this course is a must for young practicioners all over the world."

Tom Detry
Brussels, Belguim

"The course helped me to experience an international atmosphere and encouraged me to further my education in international universities. The course, furthermore, introduced different views about urban resilience and rethinking our policies which are related to cities."

Zahra Ramezanian
Kelardasht, Iran

A thank you

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Rethink the City Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)

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Housing in Nepal. Image by Anja van der Watt

Rethink the City: New Approaches to Global and Local Urban Challenges

Rethink the City is a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) of the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment at the Delft University of Technology. Since its creation in 2017, the MOOC Rethink the City has had more than 25.700 learners, involving students from over 180 countries, and 37 lecturers from 20 different nationalities. The purpose of the course is to progressively build-up a critical perspective on local urban challenges in the Global South around the themes of spatial justice, housing provision and management, and urban resilience. After five runs, the course has consolidated a strong online community that has contributed with nearly 10.000 first-source visuals from all over the world, and developed multiple debates around pressing global and local urban challenges.

This book draws inspiration from the online learning experience: its aim is to navigate through local narratives and international perspectives by developing reflections based on the students' work. The book builds a comprehensive overview of the local urban challenges we face in a global context, considering rapid urbanisation, the climate crisis, the increasing financialisation of cities, and socio-spatial inequalities. The main themes of the course: housing provision and management, urban resilience, and spatial justice are revisited with critical essays that combine students' and experts' perspectives. The goal is to trigger the debate on topics regarding the right to the city, adequate and affordable housing, resilience strategies, the relation between space and diversity, and planning in times of uncertainty. This publication intends to be a source of inspiration for students, academics and professionals who look for alternative approaches to urban design and planning based on a learning experience and knowledge exchange beyond geographical borders.

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