

Envisioning urban futures from multiple angles

Conveners:

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Theory and practice of urban development are guided by notions of urban improvement, in various realms including the infrastructural, the economic, and the social. However, in several contexts of the Global South, urban utopias are often contradicted by dystopian images of the future. Understanding both extreme perspectives of urban futures may help situate the ‘real’ city, its specificities and the tools needed to de-code urban heterotopias. Urban heterogeneity, perceived from a multiplicity of angles, reveals at the same time various possibilities. By capturing this diversity, contributions to better thinking about the ways of unleashing the potential of cities of the Global South may emerge more clearly. Urban development, increasingly equated with the improvement of infrastructure and with reducing urban inequalities, is today specifically addressed internationally, which opens new opportunities for building more robust theoretical and practical instruments. The growing and recurrent interest on the urban and on urban development is evidenced namely in the recently dedicated United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goal number 11, devoted to cities – *Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable* –, and in the New Urban Agenda set at the Habitat III Conference of 2016. This panel aims at bringing together scholars and development practitioners to discuss the features and tendencies of urban development, most particularly the relations between the images and aspirations of the Global South city and the realities, as perceived and lived by a variety of urban stakeholders:

1. Urban residents’ perspectives of an improved urban life, based on better infrastructure and economic opportunity, the deceptions of lived realities, and strategies to cope with them;
2. Urban planners and policy makers, between prospective thinking and the multiple, contextualised, constraints;
3. The private sector, operating both at small and large scales within a predominantly neoliberal context;
4. Global and international guidelines of urban development and the diversity of national and local challenges;
5. Entanglements, conflictualities and articulations between the numerous actors and perspectives involved, as they impact on (re)settlement, housing, livelihoods and infrastructure;