

Event Reports

International Conference ‘Local Governance in the New Urban Agenda’, IGU Commission Geography of Governance, Lecce, Italy, October 19-21 2017

Carlos Nunes Silva, University of Lisbon, Lisbon, Portugal

Anna Trono, University of Salento, Lecce, Italy

The 2017 annual conference of the IGU Commission on Geography of Governance explored changes, challenges and opportunities confronting Local Governance in the context of the new urban paradigm associated with the HABITAT III New Urban Agenda, a 20-year strategy for sustainable urbanisation adopted in October 2016 in Quito, Ecuador. The Conference was held from the 19th to the 21st of October 2017, in the University of the Salento in Lecce, Italy, co-convened by Anna Trono (Department of Cultural Heritage of the University of the Salento in Lecce, Italy, and member of the IGU-CGoG Steering Committee) and Carlos Nunes Silva (Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning, University of Lisbon, Portugal, and Chair of the IGU Commission Geography of Governance), with the patronage of the University of the Salento, the Municipality of Lecce and Lecce Provincial Administration. Besides the opening and closing sessions, the conference comprised 14 parallel sessions and a Plenary session. The program included also several social activities - a tour to the city of Lecce, a reception and a concert - and a post-conference excursion.

The program proposed initially for the conference comprised 11 themes: (a) The role of local government in the definition and implementation of more inclusive, transparent, accountable, effective and transformational local policies for sustainable and resilient urban development; (b) Sustainable, people-centred, long-term, and integrated approaches to urban development; (c) New ways to plan, finance, govern, and manage cities and other non-urban / rural settlements; (d) Multi-stakeholder, multi-level institutional cooperation among all tiers of government. National urban policies and the changing role of sub-national government in urban development; (e) The roles of cities/city-regions within transnational / national planning and governance schemes; (f) Policy transfer across local and city-regional entities; (g) Global urban policy principles and local governance practices: correspondence and disjuncture; (h) Alternative visions and alternative models for local governance; (i) Climate change and the challenges for local governance; (j) The governance of smart, green and integrated urban transport; (l) Indicators for the governance of local sustainable development. Although

not all these themes have been discussed, the nearly 80 researchers from 33 countries, working in the fields of Local and Regional Studies, Geography, Economics, Political Science, Architecture, Planning, Public Administration, History, Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities explored and discussed during the two days of the conference, in 15 sessions, the changes, challenges and opportunities confronting Local Governance in a wide range of local policy areas and in multiple geographical scales, and from various theoretical perspectives, reflecting the wide range of methodological approaches employed in the multidisciplinary field of local governance.

The Plenary session included an introduction to the Commission and to the Conference, by the two co-conveners, followed by two papers, by Ilona Pálné Kovács on the *Changing Paradigm of Local Governance in Hungary*, and by Olga Glezer on *Prospects for Former Mining Settlements in Different Climate Conditions: Case Studies of the Russian North and North Caucasus*. The following 14 parallel panels addressed different issues that can be grouped in 15 thematic areas: sustainable urban development; local government reforms; urban management; citizen participation; identity, regionalism and citizenship; heritage and regeneration; ICT tools in urban governance; metropolitan governance; tourism and local governance; climate change; urban planning issues; housing; urban mobility; social cohesion; and urban governance challenges in Africa.

The ever-important issue of local government reforms was explicitly addressed in several papers, confronting trends towards centralization or nationalization in some countries with those in favor of increased decentralization in numerous other in Europe and in Africa as well. Different issues related to the division of tasks between central state and local government and about the role of inter-municipal cooperation have also been discussed. Somehow associated with the previous issues is the group of six papers that dealt with the governance challenges with which major urban areas are confronted with. At least four papers explored issues of metropolitan governance in different European countries and few others discussed similar governance issues in African cities. Four papers explored explicitly the theme of sustainable urban development in different countries, and discussed different aspects, namely the structural constraints on the implementation of local sustainable development policies, the strategies against violence in cities, and the slow city movement seen as a secure road towards sustainable development, questioning the role of local government in these processes. The search for new institutional models and for new planning tools for sustainable development at the level of these major urban agglomerations and the creation of new cities are certainly important contributions of this conference to the ongoing discussion on the role of local governance in the New Urban Agenda.

Key in the New Urban Agenda is also the development of new modes of urban planning and local development. Several papers in the conference addressed this challenge examining innovative approaches in different parts of the world, comparing planning systems in different countries, the role of non-institutional actors, and ground-breaking approaches for the co-management of natural risks in urban areas. Associated with urban planning is the myriad of urban management, urban heritage and urban regeneration issues that marks everywhere the local governance landscape. Papers in several panels touched or dealt predominantly with these issues of urban management, urban heritage, urban regeneration, smart city development, or local tourism development. Issues of sustainable development associated with the governance of cultural heritage issues and urban regeneration, namely papers focused on World heritage sites, mega-events such as the European Capital of Culture, adaptive reuse of architectural heritage, or quality indicators, and the role of local government in these processes were also lively discussed. The discussion of specific challenges with which urban governance is confronted, in particular in low-income urban areas, has also been an important contribution of this conference for the wider debates on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

The theme of citizen participation was addressed in several papers, which mostly discussed the role citizens can play for a more responsive local governance. Also, within the scope of the International Journal of E-Planning Research (IJEPR) are several papers focused on issues related to the use of

ICT in local and urban governance, experiences with the use of PPGIS tools in metropolitan planning and in the modelling of local development. Other important themes have also been addressed and discussed in the conference. Climate change and the role of local government in the implementation of mitigation policies at the local level have been explored, as well as the preferences of local government regarding mitigation and adaptation policies, and the strategies to mainstreaming climate change resilience in urban development plans. Social cohesion and social issues related to housing, urban mobility, smart mobility, tourism, and local economic development have also been at the center of the debates during the two days of the conference. Issues of identity, regionalism and citizenship in different countries and the challenges for local government have also been addressed in several papers. If most of the papers that dealt with the issues mentioned before having been mainly focused on European countries, the program included also an important group of papers that dealt with urban governance in South African cities, namely urban governance in Post-Apartheid South Africa, issues of urban informality, land management issues, and green urban policies in African cities.

The conference was also an opportunity for networking and for researchers to meet and discuss future research initiatives. A post-conference excursion in the Salento Region, which included meetings with local politicians and other stakeholders in several municipalities in the region, was also part of the program.

The full program, the abstracts, the PowerPoint presentations, and a photo gallery are available online in the conference website: <https://sites.google.com/site/geogov2017conference/>. A selection of the papers presented are expected to be submitted for possible publication in the International Journal of E-Planning Research.

Carlos Nunes Silva, PhD, Professor Auxiliar at the Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning, University of Lisbon, Portugal. His research interests are mainly focused on urban and metropolitan governance, history and theory of urban planning, urban planning in Africa, urban e-planning, urban planning ethics, local government policies, local e-government, and research methods. He is Chair of the International Geographical Union Commission 'Geography of Governance', and the founding Editor-in-Chief of the 'International Journal of E-Planning Research' (IJEPR).

Anna Trono is an associate professor in Political and Economic Geography at the Department of Cultural Heritage, University of the Salento (Lecce) Italy. She studies regional development policies, cultural tourism and environmental sustainability issues and has published numerous essays and books on these themes.