



UCL-Nature Sustainability Panel on urban science-policy interface

Project Briefing
May 2017



The challenge

Urban policy and urban science are at a critical juncture. Many policymakers and scientists gathered for a once-in-twenty-years opportunity of the Habitat III summit that launched the UN's New Urban in Quito in October 2016 both reiterated how this momentous occasion was flawed by poor science-policy interfaces. Science, as argued in *Nature*, is “disparate, marginalized and ill-prepared to interact effectively with global policy”, whilst as other argued evidence-based policymaking is “dysfunctional in many parts of the world.”

In January 2017, the first ever UN World Data Forum in Cape Town, reiterated the role of science in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in launching a Global Action Plan for Data. Yet policymakers and scientists remain in effect unprepared for the encounter needed to monitor and implement an effective ‘new urban agenda’ for cities the world over. To redress these limits and advance the development of more integrated (cross-disciplinary) and policy-engaged research on cities, [Nature Sustainability](#), the new interdisciplinary journal of Nature Research, and the City Leadership Lab at University College London have established a ground-breaking Expert Panel on the urban science-policy interface for global sustainability.

Aim

To redress the science-policy interface limits of urban research (and practice), and advance the development of more integrated (cross-disciplinary) and policy-engaged research on cities in the wake of SDGs, NUA and other global agendas

The Panel

In May, University College London and *Nature Sustainability* have launched a UCL-*Nature Sustainability* Expert Panel on the urban science-policy interface for global sustainability. This initiative is aimed at responding to the many science-policy challenges that have emerged in the wake of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement on climate change, the New Urban Agenda and several other global processes.

The Panel runs between April and November 2017 with an expert meeting being held in London on 3rd-4th July 2017 and leading to a report to be issued in November. The Panel aims to review the state of the art of the interface between urban science (broadly construed across STEM, social science and humanities) and policy. It will assess the viability of forging a more cohesive body of urban expertise in relation to the challenges of Agenda 2030 and the 11th Sustainable Development Goal, producing and disseminating widely a report in collaboration with *Nature Sustainability* and recommendations published in the journal in January 2018. The Panel brings together a range of internationally recognised urban experts from a variety of disciplines, geographies and research backgrounds to build an interdisciplinary assessment of the urban science-policy interface. Panel outputs will be at heart of a special event at the 8th UN World Urban Forum in Kuala Lumpur in 2018.

The expert group approach

The Panel is chaired by three senior urban scholars, Michele Acuto, Susan Parnell and Karen Seto, and overseen by the chief editor of *Nature Sustainability*, Monica Contestabile, with support from UCL Office of the Vice-Provost (Research) and UCL Grand Challenge of Sustainable Cities. This model builds and improves on an approach previously tested on several occasions by UCL through its global expert groups (like the UCL [commission on health and climate change](#) with *The Lancet*), and benefits from the support of a key group of stakeholders.

Unique to this UCL-*Nature Sustainability* Expert Panel on the urban science-policy interface is the specific focus on a highly interdisciplinary group of international experts, a feature that speaks directly to *Nature Sustainability*'s broad editorial remit. This is also a clear response to a policy challenge such as that of supporting better and more inclusive implementation of Agenda 2030 aspirations in cities the world over, typical of the City Leadership Lab and its parent Department of Science, Technology, Engineering and Public Policy (STeAPP) at UCL.

Project funding and collaboration

The core conveners of the Panel are the UCL City Leadership Laboratory, based in UCL's Department of Science, Technology, Engineering and Public Policy (STeEP) and *Nature Sustainability*. The Panel benefits from the support of the UCL Office of the Vice-Provost (Research) and UCL Grand Challenge of Sustainable Cities, as well as the International Council for Science (ICSU), UCL's Development Planning Unit (DPU), and the Prince of Wales's International Sustainability Unit – which have already been engaged with UCL and several other partners in issuing a global call for action “[Knowledge for Sustainable Urban Development](#)” ahead of the United Nations' Habitat III forum in 2016.

The experts

Chairs

Prof [Michele Acuto](#), Professor of Urban Theory, University College London, UK
 Prof [Susan Parnell](#), Professor of Geography, University of Cape Town; South Africa
 Prof [Karen Seto](#), Professor of Urbanization Science, Yale University, USA

Editor

[Monica Contestabile](#), Chief Editor of *Nature Sustainability*

Expert Panellists

Prof. Adriana Allen, Professor of Development Planning, University College London, UK
 Prof. Sahar Attia, Professor of Architecture, University of Cairo, Egypt.
 Prof. Xuemai Bai, Professor of Urban Environment and Human Ecology ANU College of Medicine, Biology Department, Australia
 Prof. Michael Batty, Professor of Planning, The Bartlett, University College London, UK
 Prof. Luis Bettencourt, Director and Professor, Mansueto Institute, University of Chicago
 Prof. Eugenie L. Birch, Lawrence C. Nussdorf Professor of Urban Education & Research
 Prof. Harriet Bulkeley, Professor of Geography, Department of Geography, University of Durham
 Dr Maruxa Cardama, Urban Adviser, Cities Alliance.
 Dr Charles Ebikeme Program Director, ICSU, Paris
 Prof. Yasser Elsheshtawy, Professor of Architecture United Arab Emirates University, UAE
 Prof. Patricia McCarney, Professor of Political Science and CEO World Council on City Data University of Toronto, Canada
 Prof. Sheela Patel, Chair, Slum/Shack Dwellers International
 Prof. Mark Pelling, Professor of Geography, Department of Geography, Kings College London

Prof. Edgar Pieterse, South African Research Chair in Urban Policy & Director, African Centre of Cities, South Africa
 Prof. Carlo Ratti, Professor of the Practice, Senseable City Lab, Department of Urban Studies and Planning, MIT, USA
 Prof. Aromar Revi, Director Indian Institute of Human Settlements, Bangalore, India
 Prof. Robert Sampson, Professor of Sociology, Harvard University, USA
 Dr. David Satterthwaite, Senior Fellow International Institute for Environment and Development, London, UK
 Prof. Richard Sennett, University Professor of Humanities at New York University, New York, USA; Professor of Sociology at LSE, London, UK
 Prof. Nick Tyler, Professor of Civil Engineering Department of Civil, Environment & Geomatic Engineering, UCL, London, UK
 Prof. Thomas Elmqvist, Professor in Natural Resource Management Stockholm Resilience Centre, Stockholm University, Sweden

Project team

[Adriana Allen](#), Professor of Development Planning and Urban Sustainability, Development Planning Unit, Faculty of the Built Environment, UCL;
[James Paskins](#), Grand Challenges Sustainable Cities and London Agenda, Provost and Vice Provost Offices, UCL
[Enora Robin](#), PhD Candidate at UCL STeEP and researcher for the UCL City Leadership Lab
[Clementine Chazal](#), research assistant for the UCL City Leadership Lab
[Sam Lane](#), research assistant for the UCL City Leadership Lab

About the Lab

The **UCL City Leadership Laboratory** brings together world-class academic scholarship, public authorities, international organizations, the private sector and local SMEs to create a unique environment for urban experimentation, research, teaching and – most importantly – action. The Lab builds on three years of projects, grants and activities of the City Leadership Initiative, a joint effort of the World Bank Group and United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), with funding from the UK Government's Economic and Social Research (ESRC) and Engineering and Physical Sciences (EPSRC) Research Councils. The Lab sits within UCL's policy-focused **Department of Science, Technology, Engineering and Public Policy** (UCL STeEP) and has links across UCL's network of urban research and practice.

Learn more about the Lab at:

www.cityleadership.net - @CityLeadersLab