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DOES THE NEW URBAN AGENDA SUPPORT CITIES IN BRAZIL TO BECOME SUSTAINABLE?

For sustainable Brazilian cities responsible persons have to be informed about the New Urban Agenda and be involved in its implementation and monitoring.

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The New Urban Agenda (NUA) was signed by Brazil, Germany and 160 other countries in October 2016. The Agenda, together with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the so called SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals), is a powerful tool for making cities more inclusive, secure, resilient and sustainable. However, these two valuable initiatives cannot by themselves ensure that the above goals will be achieved. Many other actions and initiatives are called for to reach these goals, including enhanced international cooperation and the generation and transfer of information and knowledge on the subject.

Three steps need to be taken in Brazil:

A **first step** is to inform people about the existence and content of the NUA. Given that it is a complex, lengthy, wide-ranging mechanism covering numerous sectors and specialists' technical areas, this is not an easy task. Awareness-raising is already underway, but much more needs to be done. Many more stakeholders from different areas of knowledge and expertise need to become involved – the various levels of government, state-run and private companies, academia, non-government organisations (NGOs), CBOs (community based organizations), etc. While internet and social media are low-cost means of communication, especially suitable for Brazil and other developing countries, it is essential, however, that NUA-related messages are formulated in the kind of language that can be understood by ordinary people.

A **second step** is to actually implement the NUA – an equally complex task which demands efforts to be made on a wide front: internationally, nationally and locally. In Brazil's case, this task is compounded by the different realities existing between the 70 Metropolitan Regions, plus other cities and towns of the federation, that are home to 170 million (84 %) people out of the total population of just over 200 million. There are for example over 5,500 autonomous local governments (municipalities), with populations as small as 825 inhabitants (Municipality of Serra da Saudade) or as large as the city of São Paulo with 12 million inhabitants. This concentration of people in cities (the São Paulo Metropolitan Region alone is home to 21 million people in its 39 municipalities) justified the creation of the Ministry of Cities in 2003, aiming at reducing social inequalities, addressing urgent issues such as housing, public sanitation and urban transport and, in short, seeking to make cities more human spaces to live in. A further important initiative was the introduction by federal law in 2001 of the City Statute which

regulates the chapter in Brazil's 1988 Constitution on urban policy (specifically articles 182 and 183). This law also heralded the pioneering concept of the "right to the city" and is covered by the general guidelines of the NUA ensuring that all levels of government promote a democratic city management and acknowledge the social function of the city and urban property.

The "right to the city" is not a subjective concept but can be found in articles established in the City Statute (Federal Law 10.257 of 10 July 2001) as the principals of the right to regularization of consolidated settlements and combating property speculation in urban areas.

While this federal law plays an important role in the NUA implementation, further efforts are needed to encourage metropolitan, regional and local governments to take a genuine interest in drawing attention to the NUA. Universities and research institutions can also make an invaluable contribution by issuing technical documents to inform public policies, and organising other events such as technical meetings to discuss the NUA. Research centres that are committed to the NUA are also key players in the design of public policies and prospective relevant actions of companies, CBOs and NGOs. Understanding the relationship between the NUA items and the specificities and realities of the above-mentioned localities is obviously important for ensuring successful outcomes of pertinent actions taken in the NUA context. In this regard, international cooperation agencies will hopefully contribute not only with funds but – more importantly – share appropriate technical knowledge. Within the overall context of the NUA guidelines, the German-Brazilian Urbanisation Partnership could certainly make a worthwhile contribution to designing sustainable cities in Brazil.

Implementing the NUA clearly involves the type of training and capacity-building activities that are embedded in the DNA of our research centers. Targeted face-to-face or – increasingly – distance-learning courses are important mechanisms for organising and transmitting knowledge on urban actions that pursue an inclusive and sustainable vision of the urban environment. In addition, webinars and continuing education courses could be used to train technical staff to implement the NUA and its guiding paragraphs as well as providing a way of reaching out to the general population.

A **third step** is to oversee and monitor the implementation of the NUA. Governments and society need to know if the NUA is being implemented as initially conceived and wheth-



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Upgraded Paraisópolis favela

er it is proceeding at the planned pace and achieving the expected results. In this regard, any changes of direction must be formally recorded. Meanwhile, although oversight and monitoring will inevitably reveal to governments and

the public the many difficulties involved in implementing such a highly complex agenda, the outcomes of monitoring and evaluation will also demonstrate that strenuous efforts are being made to reach an overarching goal that embraces all citizens.

The University of São Paulo and our research group have developed a number of actions and initiatives that form part of the above three steps to deal with the NUA. We participated, for example, in coordinating the ABNT/CEE268 (Brazilian Technical Standards Association), the national mirror committee of ISO TC 268 on Sustainable Cities and Communities and were involved in a wide-ranging debate with different social stakeholders on the role of Brazilian cities in improving the quality of life for inhabitants (primarily considering income, health, sustainability, mobility, technology issues). One of our group's other activities has been to pursue the commitment to turn the seven university campuses occupying 76 km² – known as the University City – with 90,000 students and researchers in the State of São Paulo into a sustainable status.

Finally, we do believe that the New Urban Agenda is an important opportunity and contribution to efforts to press ahead with creating awareness of sustainability and urban social inclusion issues as ways to achieve a more just and egalitarian society.

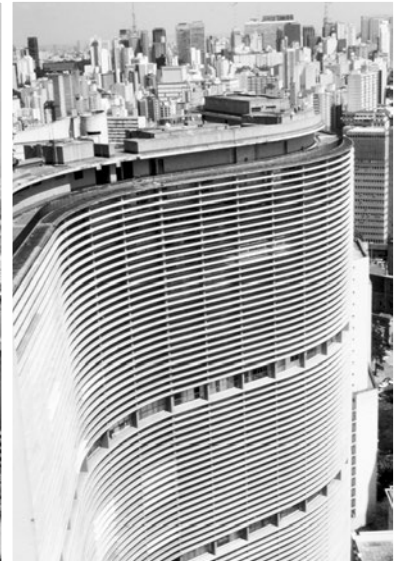
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São Paulo – varying urban neighbourhoods



Photos: André Müller

São Paulo is the biggest of the 5,500 cities and communities in Brazil and home to 12 million inhabitants. The city covers 1,523 km² – the metropolitan region counts for 7,947 km² – and stretches over numerous hills as well as it is characterised by varying neighbourhoods and a high population density. One of the buildings better known is one of the world's biggest residential buildings, COPAN, built from 1957 on and designed by Oscar Niemeyer. An utopia of urban society on more than 10,000 square metres vertically piled.