

# International Symposium on Co-design for Urbanization in China and Asia-Pacific Region

Xiamen, 21-23 October 2015

[this version includes comments received in the final plenary]

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## Outcomes Statement

Urbanisation has positive and negative consequences for human wellbeing and sustainability both within the urban areas and in their rural hinterlands. It is a major social trend globally, though we lack a full understanding of its net implications in different contexts. The International Symposium on Co-design for Urbanization in China and Asia-Pacific Region has explored many dimensions of these changes in this region and reached the following conclusions, as summarised by its Scientific Steering Committee.

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**Affirming** the rapid rate of economic growth and urbanisation in China and the Asia Pacific region and the increasingly dominant role of cities not only in the consumption of global resources and the creation of environmental impacts, but also in terms of the capacity to address such problems, including by technological and cultural innovation; which means that without resolving the challenges of sustainability in urban settings we will not achieve global sustainability at all;

**Noting** the immense opportunities arising from the facts that about 60% of the urban infrastructure needed by 2030 is yet to be built, and that about \$57trillion will need to be invested in global infrastructure by 2030<sup>1</sup>;

**Asserting** that many key challenges in achieving good outcomes from city development arise from poorly managed trade-offs and uncaptured synergies among aspects of city planning that are often dealt with in isolation, so that a systems view of urbanisation has a great deal to offer;

**Recognizing** the need for and opportunities arising from the co-design of knowledge, decision-making and action for sustainable urbanisation; and,

**Responding** to the globally agreed policy directions recently adopted in the form of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);

**This community is committed to work towards:**

1. **Supporting decision-making** that is coordinated across policy domains and across scales **to realise people-centred urbanisation and sustainable urban systems** that deliver human well-being and health in the long-term, recognising that this requires a balance among urban and rural outcomes that is sensitive to the geographic and cultural context, and involves cultural and spiritual as well as technical aspects of becoming “differently urban”.
2. The widespread implementation of **co-design and co-production in urban research** in the Asia Pacific region, with an active link between researchers and city mayors, urban planners, urban communities, the media and other urban stakeholders, as well as their rural counterparts, for example through active engagement with various existing city networks, learning from practice in cities, and through supporting the need to report against the SDGs. Through this research should build trust with decision makers through successfully delivering useful, evidence-based advice.
3. The **establishment of an Asia-Pacific network** which will be a critical contributor to the Future Earth Urban Knowledge Action Network, in close collaboration with the science programme on

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<sup>1</sup>Seto *et al.* (2011) *Plos One* 6; Dobbs *et al.* (2013) Infrastructure productivity. McKinsey Global Institute.

- “Urban Health and Wellbeing: a Systems Approach” and other programmes and initiatives, with a specific focus on solutions-oriented, urban systems thinking in this region which is crucial to global sustainability and could provide guidance to other regions such as Africa.
4. Promoting the need for **funders to change their modes of operating** to support more co-designed, integrative and interdisciplinary systems research on cities, which links systems thinking about social-ecological-technical systems with identifying opportunities for the development of new management technologies and processes.
  5. Pursuing approaches to **education and training** in the region that develop a new generation of urban decision makers and researchers who are well versed in systems thinking and new competencies for co-design and co-production of urban sustainability, with reformed incentives for young researchers to encourage these paths of learning.
  6. The identification of and mobilisation of researchers around **key solutions-oriented research issues in urban systems**, including the following issues identified during the Symposium:
    - a. Develop a better **understanding** of:
      - i. Urbanisation and urban systems as complex processes of coupled urban-(town-)rural systems with multi-dimensional regional and global impacts, including their institutional and governance drivers
      - ii. The multi-dimensional (e.g. climate, resource use, social, cultural) costs and benefits of different urban-rural arrangements in different contexts
      - iii. How people value nature, culture and social inputs and outcomes in the urbanisation process
      - iv. How to include natural, social, cultural and economic values, including ‘hidden’ costs/benefits/footprints, into the monitoring and assessment of alternative urbanisation pathways at different scales
    - b. Identify **solutions** by:
      - i. Co-designing technical, social and institutional innovations to resolve potential conflicts among values, e.g. environmental (e.g. resource use efficiency, circular economies), social (e.g. health, jobs, social support) and cultural outcomes, with a special focus on air pollution, human health and low carbon development for Asia
      - ii. Developing policy tools for promoting particular urban-rural configurations (e.g. size of cities and urban clusters, rural productivity, and their connectivity)
      - iii. Determining how an understanding of different values can promote transformations in consumption patterns
      - iv. Assessing and applying traditional and local knowledge in urban design at all scales
    - c. Develop **processes** for:
      - i. Approaches to ‘collective intelligence’ by understanding how to carry out co-design and co-production for sustainable urbanisation, including developing ‘living laboratories’ for “learning by doing”
      - ii. Exploring the potential of big data, social media, robust integrated systems modelling tools and collaborative platforms for supporting urban decision making
      - iii. Engaging with humanities and psychology to bring cultural and spiritual considerations more deeply and openly into urban systems, and their relationships to their rural counterparts.
      - iv. Linking beyond government only to communities, the private sector, and industries such as the services and e-commerce sectors.

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*[Draft: Mark Stafford Smith, Guoxiong Wu, Xuemei Bai with input from SSC members and final plenary session, 23/10/2015]*