Synthesis of Online Survey: "A New Urban Research Initiative"

As part of the follow-up to the Scoping Meeting held at Royal Holloway, University of London on February 21-22, 2014, the Urbanization and Global Environmental Change Project formulated an online survey to better gauge the opinion of the wider UGEC network on the meeting's main discussion points. A total of sixteen individuals took the survey.

1) **What are the key urban research/policy questions to be addressed moving forward?**

Many of the answers to this question focused on local solutions, such as:

- What are the most effective ways of bringing nature to the city? How can a city's relationship with nature be improved?
- How to change policymaker's opposition to urban growth?
- How can synergies among different challenges at the local level be used to generate more sustainable ways of living?
- How to deal with the problem of growing exclusion, inequality, and poverty in urban areas?

Answers also dealt with how we should address the impacts of, and adapting to, climate change. One responder addressed the issue of how a city in disarray can still work to adapt to climate change, which requires an orderly process and compliance. Another individual expressed the desire to see more research on how to motivate individuals and enhance their abilities to respond to climate change impacts.

2) **What are the research gaps/needs for future urban research?**

Those surveyed focused mainly the integration and communication of knowledge between groups at different levels. This included between:

- Different Local groups and between local groups across the globe
- Young Researchers and more seasoned scholars
- The Global North and South
- Researchers and policymakers
- Different disciplines

Others mentioned the need for more comparative studies of cities. One person mentioned the need for a study of cities that have positive comprehensive policies towards urban growth and to "compare social, economic, and environmental results in such cities in which policymakers have attempted to resist urbanization."

One thread that seemed to be included in answers to each question was the need for more research into the social impacts of global environmental change (GEC), and the impacts of GEC on social groups. In the instance of this question, answers focused on the importance of social sustainability, a framework for the integration of social, ecological and infrastructure, and managing/imagining the environmental and social values of urban residents toward sustainable, eco-smart personal ethics and ethics of urban governance.

3) **Who are the potential key partners we must include in the endeavor to advance a new urban international research agenda?**

Key partners and groups that were mentioned included:

- Local governments/municipalities/communities
- Local residents
- Scientists and young researchers
- The private sector, including multinational corporations and other businesses
- Civil society, especially democratizing countries
- Indigenous peoples, including non-urban ones
- The poor and their advocates
- Artists
- Women
- Children
- Built-environment professionals and engineers
- Religious groups
- UN Groups, such as UN Habitat, UNEP, UNFPA, and UNESCO
- IGOs, such as the World Bank and the EU
- NGOs, such as the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population

4) **What other critical components must be considered in the design of a new interdisciplinary urban project under the auspices of Future Earth?**

Knowledge and data were a theme that permeated across the answers to this question. Namely, the acquisition, transfer, and sharing of knowledge and data across scales. Other answers included:

- Collaboration between researchers on a global and local scale.
- Ensure that financial resources for research, travel and interface would be available.
- Avoid the creation of a research and policy bureaucracy.

5) **How can local and regional science and policy communities be best incorporated in this new initiative?**

- Promoting, popularizing, and helping local and regional scientific communities.
- Link groups to appropriate scale projects, seed as many small projects as possible.
- Through religious organizations and traditional educational institutions.
- Creative participatory spaces that do not give final precedence to scientific or political considerations.
- Promoting crowd participation in information generation, knowledge and policy sharing.
- Integrating social / humanistic / technical / natural science / business perspectives and expertise.