

## 1. FINAL PUBLISHABLE SUMMARY REPORT



*“URBANSELF - A North-South-Network on Urban Self-Organisation and Public Life in Europe, India and China”* built on existing contacts of cooperative research and knowledge exchange. The objective of URBANSELF was to bring together and integrate competences on urban processes in Europe, India and China with a specific focus on urban self-organisation and how this can contribute to the development and enhancement of public dialogue within and between the three

participating areas. Thus as well as seeking to further the role of civil society within Europe, India and China, URBANSELF intended to strengthen the North–South dialogue. In the “urban age” as Mike Davis indicated, this is of particular relevance, because urban problems are increasingly global challenges and it is vital to share knowledge and understanding of these challenges and how to address them. The bringing about of change in governance, policy and politics aimed at enhancing the role of the citizens, and their self-organising activities, will facilitate the rise of organisations that enable the articulation of interests and the creation of supporting socio-economic practices. Accordingly, urban governance has to interface with these citizen-based organisations. The support of self-organisation is the crucial process for such a transition towards real citizen participation. Consequently in the aim of URBANSELF, self-organisation was seen as a necessity for urban global sustainability. The key objective was to understand these forms of organisation through comparative discussion and knowledge transfer of existing research on European cities and rapidly growing cities in India and China. This allowed us for empirically founded theoretical conclusions which in turn provided the basis to identify innovative approaches to urban challenges from an actor-oriented perspective. The scientific results of urban self-organisation and associated developments in the public sphere were addressed to the relevant stakeholders (local organisations, administration, and politicians).

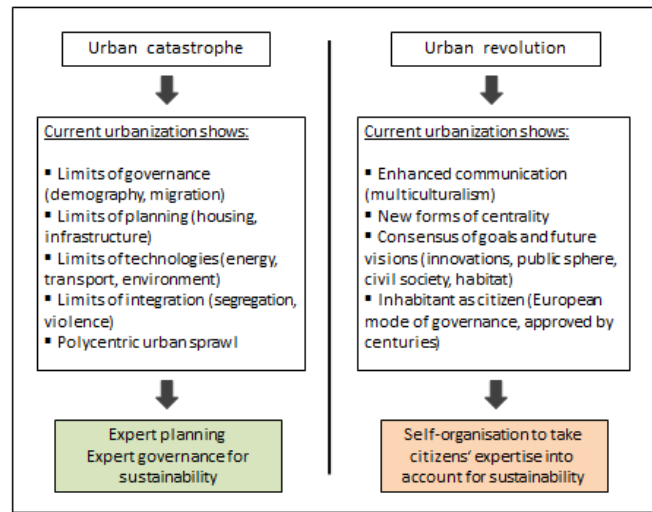
### **URBANSELF: Advances beyond State-of-the-art**

An innovatory aspect and particular strength of URBANSELF lied in the fact that it followed an actor-centred approach emphasising local knowledge, communication and survival strategies instead of technical expertise as the main forces driving urban development. Thus citizens are integrated into the research process as subjects; this means that rationalities and interests can be taken into consideration even for those who are not fully integrated into a market economy. Usually such rationalities and strategies are linked to individuals and face to face personal relations. Here UrbanSelf used the discussion on social capital and common property resources as one background to turn to “collective actors”, and social cohesion, which lead to the analysis of organisations. Organisations fulfil multiple requirements. As local self-organisation they have a spatial component by connecting a collective with a specific space. These localities do not have to co-exist with administrative boundaries or neighbourhoods as they are spaces created and defined by forms of self-organisation and interaction. Beyond this organisations facilitate collective works, form networks of mutual support and allow the articulation of political interests. Thereby they have a strong impact on the city.

URBANSELF argued that urban governance and planning need to be based on the competences and knowledge of citizens, instead of merely training inhabitants to be able to cope with expert planning. Integrating citizen into urban governance means that visions of future urban development, necessities for planning and urban reconstruction must be shared, and thereby supported by most citizens. Sustainable development requires such a shared vision,

because only if the people act accordingly can sustainability be realized. To improve sustainability in a fragmented city characterized by exclusion, where most inhabitants are not recognized by the administration, as it is the case in Chennai is impossible. Similarly, even if the administration is able to implement development plans based on top-down management rather than participation, as in Kunming, sustainability is not improved.

URBANSELF connected various disciplinary as well as practical spheres to gain an integrated new perspective offering a wider scope of solutions and insights. Most projects deal with the technical challenges of sustainable urban development (modelling and development of indicators for mathematical prognosis, development of infrastructure etc.) URBANSELF took this into account, but points to the need to take approaches modelled on a citizen approach as the basis for Agora-Governance.



### Reached objectives and outcomes:

- (1) URBANSELF followed a new, innovative perspective: Our starting point was that a city is first of all a centre of communication. Accordingly, structures of communication, i.e. organisations in a wide sense from formal associations to informal self-organisation, are regarded as the basis for sustainable urban development.
- (2) A core objective of URBANSELF was to identify working solutions in cities of the Global North and South promoted by forms of self-organisation. This is based on the assumption that sustainable urban development requires a shift of perspective from inhabitants as objects of planning decisions to citizens as active subjects in urban development.

To be sustainable, urban development has to be based on a consensus of goals and future visions (innovations, importance of the public sphere, civil society and habitat) for all people living in the city. Thus, pattern of exclusion resulting from power relations, valorisation of knowledge and expertise have to be modified to allow for participatory inclusion in decisions about the future development of cities. This means that “inhabitants” must be transformed into citizens. Such a change requires and gives rise to organisations that enable the articulation of interests (public sphere) and the creation of supporting social and economic practices (self-help, mutual cooperation, business networks, informal sector). Accordingly, urban governance has to interface with these organisations. Self-organisation is the crucial process for such a transition towards real (rather than virtual) citizens' participation. Consequently, self-organisation is a necessity for urban sustainability. As noted above, it is in slums that many of the most significant examples of self-organisation are currently to be found and from which we learnt for the urban global North how to relearn collective action. The main outcome of URBAN-SELF was therefore to identify working solutions in cities promoted by forms of self-organisation and to disseminate this findings to various stakeholder groups.