Special Interest Group CITEUS

Anders Utrecht

Pathways to Sustainability

Casco Art Institute: Working for the Commons

ACTOGETHER UGANDA
Joining Hands With The Urban Poor

Urban Action Lab

Department of Geography, Geo-Informatics & Climatics Sciences
MAKERERE UNIVERSITY

Report on workshop:

Citizens and university: how to sustain long-term collaboration for sustainable cities?

11 November 2021, 12.00 – 15.15

Place: Casco Art Institute, Lange Nieuwstraat 7, 3512PA Utrecht

Organisers: Ozan Alakavuklar, Francesca Pilo' and Kei Otsuki (Utrecht University)

Joint organisation by AndersUtrecht, the Open City Network, and CITEUS

Date
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About the Workshop

Solutions to sustainability challenges entail collaboration between a diversity of actors. Universities are increasingly engaged in transdisciplinary research, supported by the idea that they should partner with citizen initiatives, business enterprises and governmental agencies. In addition to producing knowledge, universities are expected to play an active role and contribute to transformations through these collaborations. However, collaborations often face challenges due to organisational and institutional differences, incompatible short term and long-term expectations and conflicting strategic orientations. Therefore, questions emerge: How do researchers and citizen activists as well as business entrepreneurs and public policymakers align their agendas and interests? How can collaboration be maintained and effectively developed to ensure the collective pursuit of sustainable and inclusive society building for the long term? What kind of strategies can be co-developed? Who should take leadership in collaborative projects? At Utrecht University, three initiatives directly and indirectly supported by the Transforming Cities Hub within the Pathways to Sustainability Strategic Theme: *AndersUtrecht*, *Open City Network* and *Citizen Engagement and Urban Sustainability (CITEUS)* came together to explore answers to the above questions. Researchers from these initiatives have been collaborating with various citizen initiatives and planned this workshop on 11 November 2021 in order to initiate the collective conversation. This report outlines the main discussion points of 20 participants from the citizen organisations and the university who are working on sustainable and inclusive city making in the global South and North; and how they exchanged their experiences and ideas through presentations, group discussions and a final debriefing.

Program:

12.00 – 12.30	Lunch
12.30 – 12.45	Welcome and introduction to collaborative projects (university/citizen initiatives In Utrecht – the Netherlands, and Kampala – Uganda)
12:45 – 13:10	*Sustaining AndersUtrecht: Challenges, tensions, and potentials* Speakers: Ozan Alakavuklar (School of Governance, Utrecht University) and Erik Uitenbogaard (CASCO Art Institute)
13:10 – 13:35	*University-industry-citizen partnerships for long-term urban sustainability:* *Lessons from the UrbanKNOW project in Kampala Uganda* Speaker: Teddy Kisembo (Urban Action Lab, Makerere University, Uganda) *Community organising for resilience in urban settlements through university-NGO collaboration* Speaker: Francisco Mawejje (Program Officer Advocacy and Documentation, ACTogether, Kampala, Uganda)
13:35 – 13:45	Q & A
13:45 – 14.00	Break
14:00 – 14:45	Working in groups on the different challenges identified in the first part of the workshop: How to overcome these challenges together? • What are the sources of the challenges? • How can we sustain the collaborations despite challenges? • Can we develop a common strategy for social change?
14:45-15:15	Debriefing: Plenary discussion on the group discussions and the future agenda

Welcome by CASCO

CASCO is a citizen art initiative, which has been collaborating with AndersUtrecht. They offered the venue for this event, and Erik Uitenbogaard from CASCO opened the workshop by welcoming the participants. In his introductory speech, he talked about the role of creativity and the way our mind works. He critically referred to the Cartesian split between mind and body and art and science, and emphasised the importance of creativity and the challenges to develop it. Currently, he argued, for most people, the brain functions in an unbalanced way and creativity is undermined: "Only when people use both left and right hemispheres of their brain, creativity follows". He added that the combination of art and science can recalibrate the unbalanced brain.

Workshop Introduction

Following Erik's inspiring welcome talk, Francesca Pilo' explained the motivation behind the workshop with the contextualisation of relevant questions and challenges on the forms of collaborations between universities and citizens' initiatives. She said that the idea of organising this workshop came from a common interest in sustainability and transdisciplinary collaborations developed at Utrecht University's Pathways to Sustainability research strategic theme, more specifically between AndersUtrecht, the Open City Network, a new project at the Centre for Global Challenges (UGlobe), and CITEUS. Among the researchers from these initiatives, there was a consensus that: "While sustainability challenges need collaborations between a diversity of actors, and different disciplines and perspectives, when these collaborations happen, there are also different challenges that emerge (e.g. organisational and institutional differences, short term and long-term expectations, different strategic orientations, etc.)". Francesca emphasised that the objective of the workshop was to discuss how we could tackle and overcome the challenges after the collaborations were established, in order to promote spaces for more horizontal and collaborative sustainability transformations. To encourage the collective thinking and discussion among the workshop participants, the following open questions were proposed:
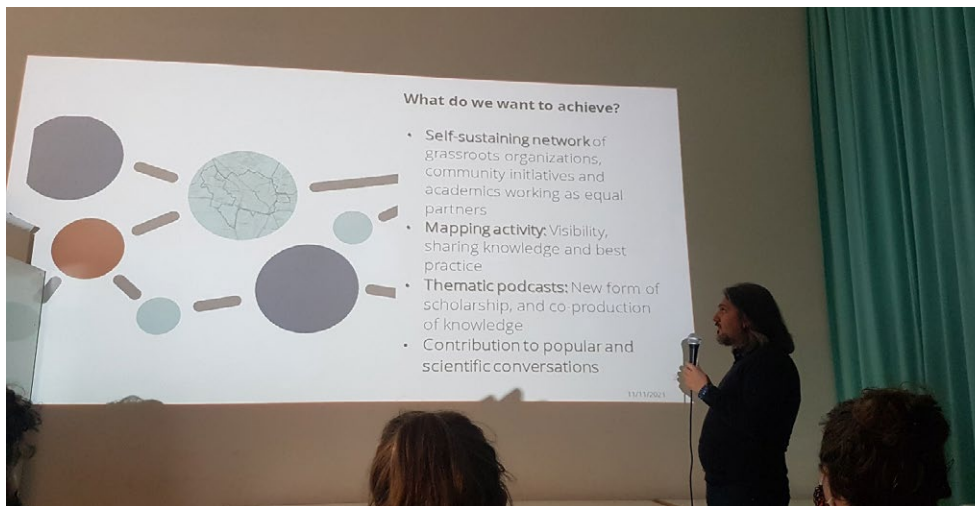
- **How do researchers and citizen activists as well as business entrepreneurs and public policymakers align their agendas and interests?**

- **How can collaboration be maintained and effectively developed to ensure the collective pursuit of sustainable and inclusive society building for the long term?**

- **What kind of strategies can be codeveloped for social change? Who should take leadership in collaborative projects?**

After the introduction, two sets of presentations took place to set the scenes: one collaboration through AndersUtrecht in Utrecht, the Netherlands and through UrbanKnow in Kampala, Uganda.

Sustaining AndersUtrecht:
Challenges, Tensions, and Potentials

The first presentation was given by Ozan Alakavuklar, associate professor at School of Governance of Utrecht University and a founding member of AndersUtrecht project. For the AndersUtrecht, the university team members consider that grassroots organisations are innovators who tackle the challenges of socio-economic inequalities and the impact of climate change on urban settings. These organisations are the source of new imagination and practices and alternative solutions. The project thus invited the organisations to start a conversation about postcapitalist bottom-up sustainability transformation in the city. By doing so, the researchers and the organisations bring together theory and practice and create synergy in this interaction.

The key aim of AndersUtrecht is to create a self-sustaining network, which does not rely only on academic institutions, scholars or extra funding. There are mainly two activities to achieve this aim. First, the mapping of grassroots initiatives in the city of Utrecht: who is doing what, in which urban domain? With this map, member organisations become visible, and sharing of knowledge and best practices between diverse groups becomes possible. Secondly, the project has recorded and launched thematic podcast episodes as a new form of knowledge creation and dissemination, to set apart from dominant research practices and contribute to both popular and scientific bodies of knowledge.

When it comes to the question of how to build a common strategy and vision among all the members, Ozan talked about the difficulty of having a shared perspective and using a common framework that would cover all the initiatives in Utrecht to create socially just and ecologically sustainable cities together. Another challenge for the initiatives is more practical, considering constraints in time, labour and funding. Ozan mentioned that the AndersUtrecht project can assist in tackling some of these practical challenges by assisting university students in spending time with the organisations through a genuine relationship (instead of an instrumental data collection orientation) and create opportunities to learn from each other.

As a strategic partner and one of the grassroots organisations of AndersUtrecht, Erik followed up Ozan's presentation and shared his views on behalf of CASCO on the tension between bottom-up initiatives and top-down approaches. In his talk, he also explained that CASCO uses the commons as a playground for creativity, involving citizens to recalibrate the unbalanced world. For him, CASCO views transformation as a grassroot process. There is usually a balance to be found between the bottom-line where the grass grows and top-down directions. Since grass is always rooted, rooting and growing are a bottom-up process. But, there is also an idea and then people try to reach the roots from this pre-existing idea. Thus, there is a tension. Yet, artists nearly never only use a top-down approach but look for energy available in surroundings for finding where the roots are located. They go out into the field and meet people on the spot. In the field, questions arise, which leads to rooting, growing, and finding common interests. Then for Erik, the key question concerning collaborations is, how to ensure the common interests in creating a better world? And how to help others in this process?

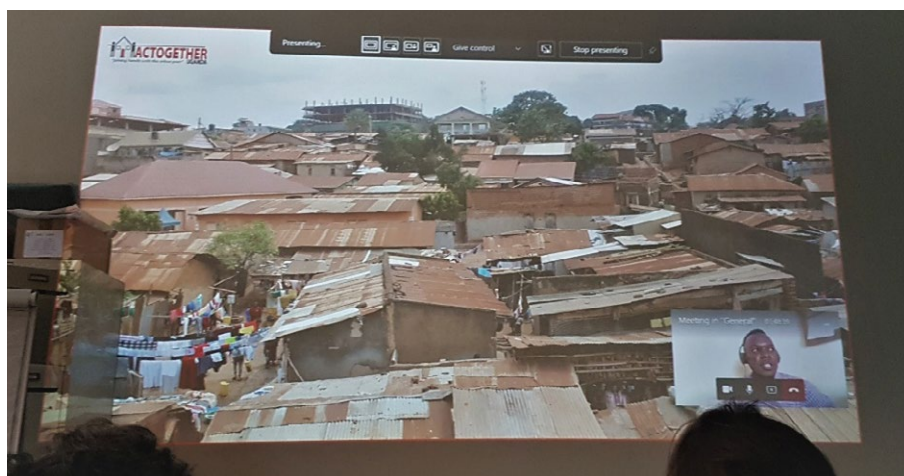# Experiences of University-NGO Collaboration from the Global South: Kampala, Uganda

The second sets of presentations were given by Teddy Kisembo from Urban Action Lab of Makerere University in Kampala and its civil society collaborator ACTogether, represented by Francisco Mawejje. First, Teddy presented Makerere University's experience with the project UrbanKNOW in Kampala, Uganda's capital city. The project has focused on addressing urban equality by employing sustainable infrastructure and energy projects, especially in informal settlements where over 60% of the city's citizens live under precarious conditions. Through co-designing of knowledge on energy production such as briquettes for cooking or waste management, which aim to improve lives of women in informal settlements, the project collaborates with various organisations that operate within the settlements. They ask: what pathways are we creating? And what lessons can we draw from the knowledge co-production experiences?

Challenges that the project encounters centre on difficulties in developing and sustaining collaborations, especially with the city government authority as well as with citizens. As a facilitator to overcome the challenges, the university needs to address the following issues:

- A lack of institutional support for the project by the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA)
- Absence of legislation backing up community initiatives such as solid waste collection
- Needs for more sensitisation for the citizens
- Having sufficient space to dry the waste and briquettes is too often a limitation in informal settlements

Teddy has also pointed out that community-based initiatives and citizens in informal settlements do put pressure on academic institutions such as the university to build sustainable solutions to urban challenges. The UrbanKNOW project acknowledges this pressure and tries to seek ways to engage and develop capacity for the actors, especially citizens, within the solid waste management or briquet production. In practice, it is important to consider: how to manage community expectations while keeping on engaging with them; and how to overcome the lack of institutional support or legal framework.

Francisco Mawejje, Program Officer Advocacy and Documentation at NGO ACTogether followed Teddy as a collaborator in the UrbanKNOW. He has presented that the main aim of ACTogether Kampala was to provide technical support to citizen groups within informal settlements in order to improve people's livelihoods in precarious living conditions in four main areas: infrastructure upgrading, collection of community data, advocacy for community's wellbeing, and capacity development. The community organising activities are the biggest source of social protection and enhancement of cohesion.

Francisco summarised the importance of:
- Community dialogue in urban forums where citizens come to share their ideas and experiences with the project and community priorities.
- Peer-to-peer model, which facilitates knowledge sharing, co-production.

- Data collection, which is community-led. People themselves collect relevant data for reporting the project findings. It is vitally important as citizens are then enable to make informed decisions, understand community priorities and address issues they face.

Discussions with the Workshop Participants

The workshop participants then asked questions. First, *how do you cope with the lack of institutional support, or what kind of support is needed for the university-community collaboration?* Universities and NGOs both play a facilitator role in co-designing the project and getting the citizens together. In Kampala, the Ministry of Land Housing and Urban Development and the Kampala Capital City Authority were supposed to partner with the collaboration. Initially, they did participate in some activities for community sensitisation and creating awareness. However, they showed up only when they saw some direct benefits for them, instead of looking into how the benefits of the project would go to the citizens through the multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Second, *what is the specific role of the university?* The role of the university can be to cultivate relationships with communities, create spaces for the exchange of ideas, and look out who needs to be involved in the discussion. They can find out what is happening and amplify this voice. It is also the strength of the university is that it has students who can be on-board and facilitate the connections.

Teddy has emphasised that the importance of co-learning with the community. The knowledge and insights are from the community. But the university is seen as having a certain legitimacy in front of fomal institutions to facilitate the connection. Francisco also added that: ACTogether is the facilitator in the community, but the university has this role to link to various institutions. That's why the network is very important. Also, there is a distance to the outer world. This can often be too far, especially for the smaller organisations.

After the presentations from two cases of collaboration, the participants were divided into two groups to discuss further challenges and solutions concerning the future of such collaborations.

Breakout Session 1
The fundamental question is: Why is a network important? This is a mandate from various fronts: when you are a civil society organisation, you need partners to mobilise public interests. But the network consists of various organisations, each with its own complexity and agenda. It is thus important to find a general common need, based on track-records, alliances, and 'make-believe' in what you are aiming for. Sometimes there is no concrete agenda.

Alliance, this is the first thing, to share knowledge, alignment, shared values; a real engagement is important to the core point of the organisation. When you bring different stakeholders together, sometimes conflicts of values happen, and how do we address the underlying power relations?

We need to think about a global alliance, and simultaneously decolonising collaborations: How do we all become equal partners?

One advantage of university is that it is semi-permanent; NGO are ofgen ephemeral. Thus the university can sustain the bridge that is being built between different actors.
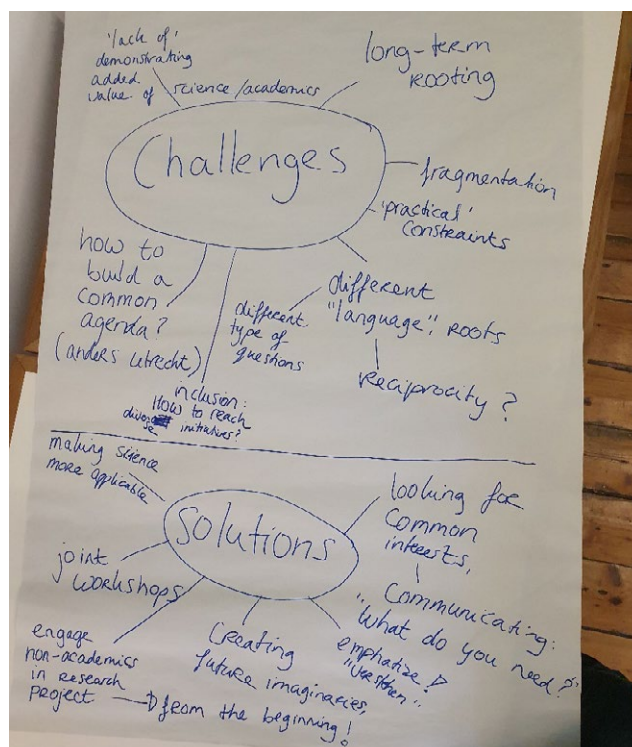
Breakout Session 2
The session began with identifying challenges related to collaborations between academics and other citizen initiatives. Each participant shared one specific challenge, whereafter they discussed potential solutions. After that, the conversation focused on the challenges of AndersUtrecht. In his presentation, Ozan had addressed the issues as to how to build a common agenda and story, but also other challenges in collaborating, such as practical constraints (money, time, etc.); different languages between members and reciprocity relations (what do you need from us?). It was also mentioned that sometimes it was difficult to recognise the value of researchers and make the organisations see that academic partners have something to add to the collaboration.

There were a couple of suggestions which the network members already implemented, such as organising joint workshops. Furthermore, the instrumentality, reciprocity and visibility aspects of such networks were discussed. Another suggestion was to directly communicate and identify what is expected from academic partners, and what the needs of grassroots organisations are. The needs might be diverse such as childcare, time etc. if they are expected to attend events. Overall, long term rooting as a challenge was discussed with the participants.

In response to these challenges, some solutions were suggested:
• to create future imaginaries which can help initiatives to think about the future.
• to engage non-academics in research projects from the beginning in the form or identifying research questions together and involving network members in the research process.
• Integration of the talk with the walk.

What's Next?

As the participants were dominantly from university, there is a need to think about the roles of the students and education in general when we think about university-citizen collaboration for the long-term. We can think of how to effectively send students to help grassroots and citizen organisations and initiatives, build theory-practice relationship, and modules with skills components. We will need to involve more organisations in such a dialogue. The participants collectively discussed, if we want to follow-up, what would we like to do?
• To build an online platform to exchange ideas and experiences, e.g. following CITEUS + member organisations.
• To have more regular occasions to exchange ideas, have a conversation (and fun)
• To think about a funding proposal for community-engaged learning and co-production of knowledge, spanning global-local actors

We propose the next workshop to be organised, also outside at the university, such as Both Ends (Dutch NGO working across various countries through partnerships). We could also think about meeting 'nomadic', that is, each time someone else is hosting the workshop.

Appendix

Presentations: AndersUtrecht, UrbanKNOW-Mekerere University/ACTogether are available upon request.