



Designing a better urban future

UN  **HABITAT**
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

+

**creative industries
fund NL**

In 2015, UN-Habitat and the Creative Industries Fund NL began collaborating in the field of urban development. Specifically, the partnership supports 20 designers who work together in teams at five urban labs in Mexico, Ghana, Philippines, Palestine and Myanmar.

The assignments are real and urgent, and in a number of cases they are located in conflict zones and/or complex political settings. The commissioning authorities and UN-Habitat are focused on implementing these plans. Therefore, the reality of the situation and the development of the proposals require the designers to have outstanding design skills – individually, as well as in teams. The design teams must also take a broad perspective and be interested in considering the proposal in terms of legislation, funding models and political context.

The participating designers spend a year working at one of the labs, collaborating with an international, multidisciplinary team on urgent assignments that are formulated based on recommendations from the related city or urban area. Rogier van den Berg, project leader of the Global Network of Urban Planning and Design Labs, supervises the participating teams in cooperation with local UN-Habitat branches.

Foreword

Since 2014 UN-Habitat has installed the Urban Planning and Design Laboratory at the Headquarters in Nairobi. This Laboratory is to meet the growing demand of city leaders to use urban planning and design in order to embark on a more sustainable and prosperous future of their cities. The Lab is bringing into practice key elements of a New Urban Agenda. Urban Planning as an integrative profession, a Participatory Process and Public Space are some of these elements that ensure cross-sectorial integration, stakeholder engagement and livability of our growing cities.

In the last two years the Urban Planning and Design Lab has engaged in over 30 cities with technical advice on urban planning, design and coordination of participatory processes and development of planning guidelines. The Spatial Development Framework 2040 of Johannesburg, Urban Planning Guidelines for the Union of Myanmar and a Planned City Extension for Bosasso under construction in Somalia are just some of the outcomes of the Labs engagement.

Implementation is a key focus of the Lab. Urban Planning has become highly technical in the last decades. Our cities do not wait for 'paper tigers' to mature. As planners we need to go back to the basics and bring design

in as a driver for change. This often requires new approaches to the planning process. The lessons learned in the Lab's engagements in over 30 cities will be shared in a publication to be presented at the Habitat III congress in Quito in October of this year.

The demand for urban planning and design is growing and so the Lab embarked on new ways of expanding effective planning methods by new collaborations. At the 25th Governing Council of UN-Habitat the Lab got the mandate to set up a Global Network of Urban Planning and Design Labs.

The collaboration with the Dutch Creative Industries Fund NL is part of this network and an example how specialized teams of designers that enter in a longer engagement of UN-Habitat and its member states can accelerate planning processes in local governments. Teams of 4 to 5 urban planners have worked on a broad range of assignments in Mexico City, Yangon, Tacloban, Accra and Gaza. The Venice Architecture Biennale in which UN-Habitat is actively participating is the perfect moment to discuss the mid-term results of this fruitful collaboration.

By Rogier van den Berg, Program Manager Urban Planning and Design Laboratory UN-Habitat



Introduction

An Integrated Approach to Urban Issues

'When planning cities, public authorities should facilitate a collaborative design process with a broad range of concerned stakeholders that develops a debate around concrete interventions, step by step. Design is the point of departure from which through debate and reflection, testing and improving, a common vision is reached.'

Ban Ki Moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations.

In 2015, the 193 member states of the United Nations adopted a new long-term development agenda with 17 ambitious goals, including ending poverty, hunger and inequality. Urban planning and landscape architecture are also included in the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals, but for the first time, they also specifically focus on the aim of improving the quality of these spaces.

Urbanization is a priority on all of the agendas. New cities are being developed and existing cities are expanding at a rapid pace. The challenge is complex: the ideal city functions as a coherent set of necessary, complementary and conflicting systems. Experience shows how complicated this can be, especially cohesively designing, developing and implementing these changes.

However, the need for an integrated approach is not limited to spatial challenges. Urbanization requires a comprehensive system for generating ideas, planning, financing and decision-making. This means that proposals for urban spaces must be supported by the residents, government and commissioning parties. The situation may differ by country. High-quality urban environments pose a (design) challenge in both emerging and stable economies, as well as in shrinking cities where downtown areas are degenerating.

The fact that improving the quality of urban spaces is now a goal of the United Nations shows how urgent and relevant this task has become. The demand for contributions from urban planners and landscape architects in addressing urban issues continues to grow. As a consequence, UN-Habitat or United Nations Human Settlements Programme as it is officially known, has initiated the project 'Global Network of Urban Planning and Design Labs'. It aims to advise local governments on urban development, in part through the involvement of international experts. In total, 40 cities have entered into an agreement as part of this programme.



Urban Lab Ghana

Ningo Prampram - Planned City Extension in the Greater Accra Region

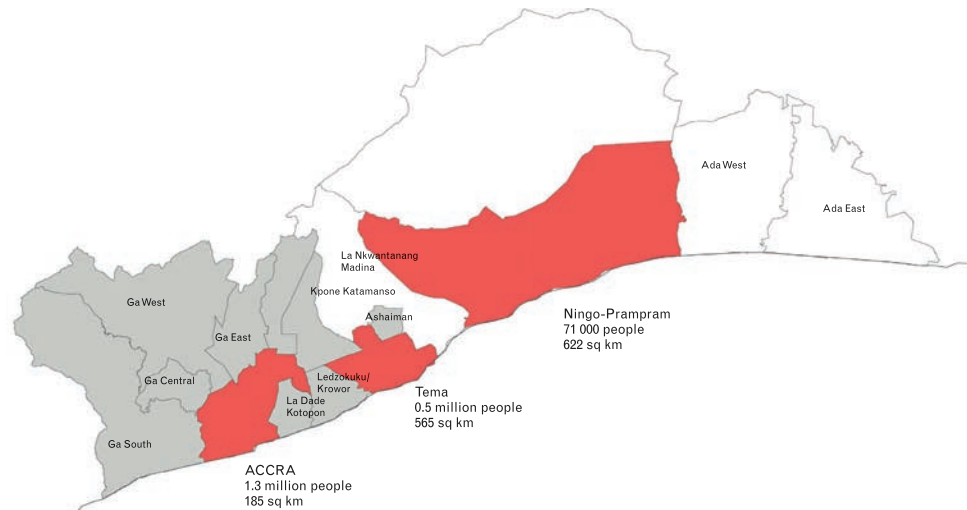
The growth of Accra is a matter of concern: within 30 years, Accra grew from a city with a radius of 10 km into a continuous, urban agglomeration that stretches over 60 km along the coastline. With a staggering growth rate of 4.6 per cent, the population is expected to grow from 2.5 million in 2011 to 4.2 million in 2020. In Accra, the speed of speculation has consistently outpaced the speed of planning, resulting in regular severe flooding, daily traffic collapse and the absence of basic utilities and basic services in many parts of the agglomeration.

Good spatial planning and design assistance directly affect the municipalities' capacity to meet these challenges and deliver a more liveable and resilient piece of city.

On UN-Habitat's initiative, a National Priority Project has been established that will entail a planned extension of Accra into the adjacent Ningo-Prampram district. Both local and national government – and the private sector – have shown considerable interest in the plan, and support its moving forward towards implementation with a steering committee that has the mandate to approve and a development body tasked with implementing the plan. The Ghanaian-Dutch team of planners, consisting of urban and landscape designers and water and infrastructure experts, is helping to further build this momentum and to design the city extension of Ningo Prampram, which encompasses a total land area of about 100 km. In the future it will be able to accommodate a significant amount of the growth predicted in the Greater Accra Agglomeration.

Planning a city extension for an assumed 1 to 1.5 million people is beyond what typically can be grasped by the experience of humans. One cannot design a city of that size. But one can put basic systems into place that allow a city to grow over time. The approach to the planned city extension in Ningo Prampram therefore consisted of three key aspects: How can a system be established that mitigates the biggest risk – regular flooding? How can a system be crafted that provides basic services, that can mature over time and that is relatively easy to understand and manage? How can the often finite ideas of ‘Newtownism’ be avoided, and instead room be made for growth and gradual maturing as an integral part of urban development?

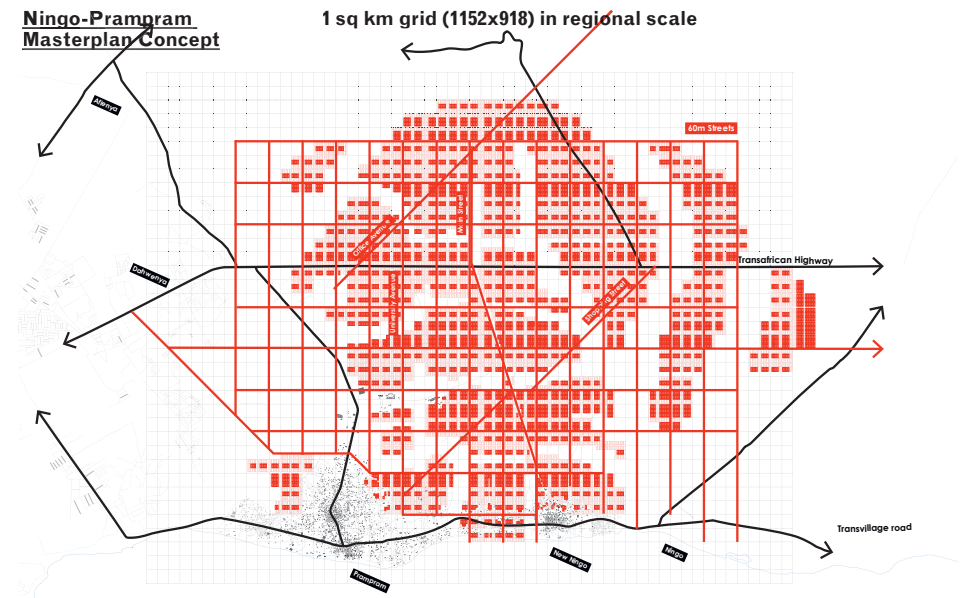
Making a big plan never works without local rooting. In dialogue with local planners, representatives and through site visits, the design team defined the plan’s key objectives. In these conversations it became obvious that creating broad support is essential to making the plan happen on the ground. Consequently, recent focus – besides on refining the plan – has been on activating all key players in the process, from the local stakeholders to the President of Ghana. So far this has been successful on all political levels. In a next step the plan has to find the acceptance of the local population and start attracting investment from both the private sector and global institutions. A much greater challenge, but one that is essential to inclusive planning.



Sources:
PDF/Addressing Rapid Urbanization Challenges in the Greater Accra Region

Team:

- Markus Appenzeller – MLA+, mlaplus.com
- Eric Frijters – Fabric, fabrications.nl
- Martin Knuijt – OKRA, okra.nl
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Mexico

Urban Lab Mexico

Urban Renewal Strategy in Doctores, Mexico City

In Mexico, urban renewal has become a major development strategy. In the case of about 7 million houses built in remote areas, increasing commuting costs have forced many residents to move, abandoning their homes. An adequate framework for urban renewal could tackle sprawl, reduce congestion and bring residents closer to their work. In this context, the national housing programme Sustainable Urban Development (DUI), introduced in the late 2000s, could become a powerful tool for sustainable housing. Combined with urban renewal strategies, DUI can contribute to the supply of low-income housing in a way that is less environmentally damaging and more socially inclusive. UN-Habitat is organising an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) to discuss the urban renewal of seven project areas in Mexico Federal District.

The establishment of a planning lab will enable Dutch planners to engage in one of the salient urban challenges in Mexico. The planners can tap into international expertise by using the recommendations and instruments suggested by the EGM and applying them to an in-depth strategy for one of the seven project areas. For local counterparts, this is an opportunity to tackle the complex legal and financial context behind urban renewal with a project approach.

The UN Mexico team is working on Doctores, a central neighbourhood in Mexico City. Doctores has a rather low density – like most of central Mexico City – and is slightly run-down. SEDUVI (Secretaría de Desarrollo Urbano y Vivienda) sees chances to densify and improve Doctores so more people can profit from its proximity to jobs and infrastructure. The creation of an SAC (Sistema de Actuación por Cooperación) should open up development. But this is a new and mostly economic-judicial instrument. The key challenge is to show how the application of the SAC can be used to direct urban quality and give opportunities to different social groups in the area. The UN team defined the following ambitions:

- **Densify:**
Intensify the area with a mixed programme to reach a more compact city, respecting existing qualities and scales, and intensify green space within organic and flexible growth.
- **Social Mix:**
Mix existing and new inhabitants, to avoid gentrification. Build new housing for social groups, including a mix of functions and

- urban economies for different groups.
- **Co-create:**
Develop with smart governance, public-private collaborations and strategies, smart rules and financial mechanisms and interweave participation in the process.
- **Sustain:**
Doctores is the pilot project for sustainable urban renewal.

At the moment, the UN Mexico team is developing different densification scenarios using the SAC rules. Densification is connected to improved, sustainable public space structures. By taking the mechanism of building, land, rent and sales prices into consideration, we are trying to discover what housing types are feasible (or can be made feasible). Finally, we are focusing on new ways of trading potential air rights, to connect supply and demand at fair and transparent prices. The challenge remains how to develop a clear strategy that aligns with existing regulations, clearly shows the value for all stakeholders and can be incorporated into the urban renewal process in the next decade.



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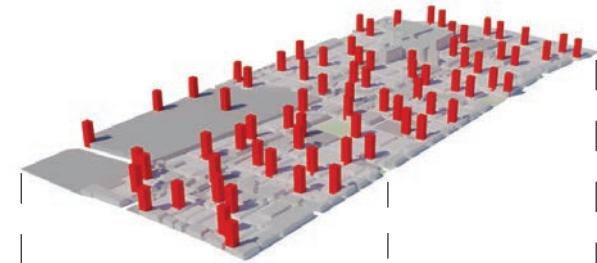
With:

UN Habitat Urban Lab (Nairobi), UN Habitat (Mexico City) and SEDUVI (Mexico City)

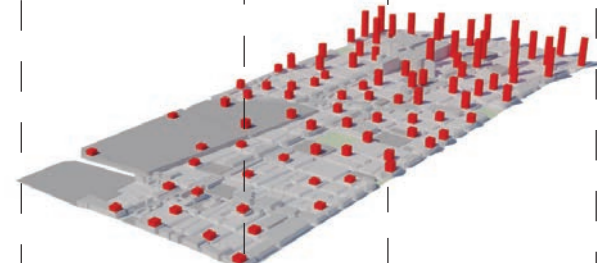
Mexico

density scenarios on top of the regulation plan

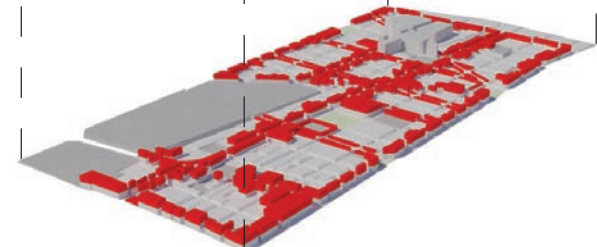
tower scenario



gradient scenario



street scenario



existing density regulation plan





Urban Lab Myanmar

New Economy and New Paradigm, Yangon

Myanmar stands at a defining point in its recent history. Since 2011, the country has seen a general trend towards social and economic liberalization and a more market-oriented economy, which will inevitably lead to increasing urbanization. Ambitiously, the country is anticipating this growth by preparing plans for over 200 cities. The new planning law, which is expected to come into effect at any moment, encourages cities to make plans and offers a unique opportunity to define the future of many of Myanmar's cities.

The current urban development practice, however, has to deal with the multifaceted pressures of rapid urbanization and can best be described as lagging-behind or reactive planning: the governmental bodies have limited capacity, limited resources of valuable data and are operating in a period of governmental restructuring, while awaiting the new planning law. There is a great demand for a new comprehensive planning vision. Establishing a lab of Dutch planners collaborating with local planners enables them both to significantly contribute to a better urban future for Myanmar.

The assignment is to create a comprehensive master plan for an exemplary city extension for the township of Htantabin, located in the western part of the Capital of Yangon, which is planning six new expansion areas to accommodate its rapid growth. The Htantabin city extension site is currently mainly agricultural land with a few villages and limited infrastructure. The projected population for the Htantabin city extension in 2040 ranges from 2.4 to 2.7 million people. The aim is to develop a master plan and implementation strategy together with local planners, using the recently formulated Guidelines for Urban Planning by UN-Habitat as a starting point. Now that Myanmar is decentralizing its planning expertise, the process includes a strong 'learning by doing' component for the local counterpart.

Htantabin is located along the main roads to the west coast and to the agricultural lands in the north known as the 'ricebowl of Yangon'. Because of this and its proximity to central Yangon, the Htantabin area is under great pressure from growing industrial sites, (private) residential developments and the sprawl of the informal settlements of rural-to-urban migrants. At the same time it faces a multitude of issues: both flooding and insufficient water provision, polluting solid waste management, traffic congestion, (illegal) land speculation and all challenges related to the typical 'Arrival City'.

The aim is to tackle these issues not with singular solutions, but through an integral master plan that functions as a strategic framework rather than a blueprint design, thereby setting ambitious goals for future urban plans.

Team:

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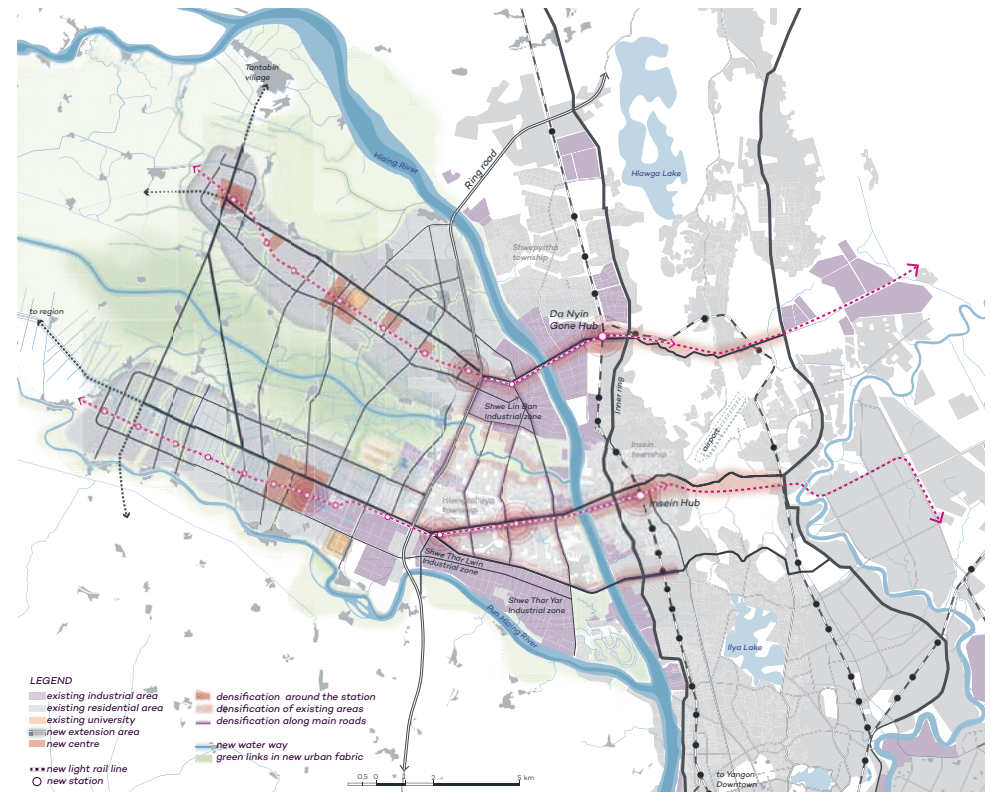
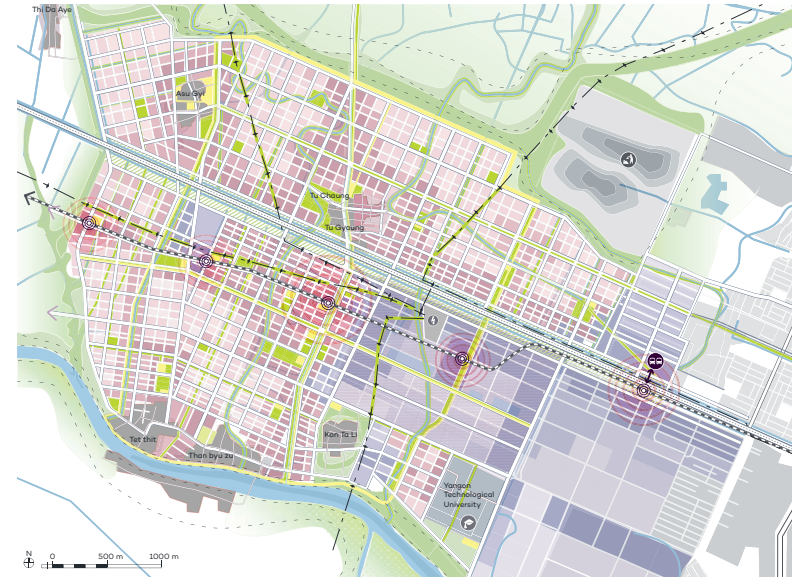
UN Habitat Myanmar, Ministry of Construction (MOC) and Yangon City Development Committee (YCDC)

During a first mission in February, the team took a group of local planners from the Ministry of Construction (MOC) and the Yangon City Development Committee (YCDC) through the design process of analysis and assessments towards synthesis and concept development.

The current concept master plan is based on a series of principles, an elaboration of the five principles of UN-Habitat. The next step will be to elaborate the plan in conjunction with the governmental bodies within the urban development framework for Yangon City, as part of the 100 days programme of the new government, as well as the formulation of an Implementation strategy, based on legal and economic foundations.

Moving forward to a new planning paradigm, the main challenges in this process will be the following:

- Making the switch from a lagging-behind, reactive planning practice to a more proactive one with the current limited capacity and available resources.
- Dealing with the international 'help overdose'. There is an influx of international consultancies and NGOs to assist these governmental bodies in capacity building to an extent that their limited manpower is being challenged.
- Dealing with the aspect of identity: Is the identity of a place a result of cumulated developments or a prescribed one based on a vision? And how does one maintain one's genius loci with the above-mentioned foreign influx?





Urban Lab Palestine

Build Back Better in Khuza'a

Extensive destruction of housing and infrastructure, displacement and insufficient shelter, scarcity of land and territorial fragmentation resulting from the Israeli occupation in Palestine are among the main challenges facing the Palestinian human settlements today. The massive scale of physical damage suffered after the 2014 conflict in Gaza has displaced over 500.000 people. Many are housed in refugee conflict camps or temporary shelters, while others live in the ruins of their cities and villages. At the same time, settlements have seen an influx of displaced people, leading to uncontrolled development and expansion in the cities and around the fringes of towns, encroaching on agricultural land. Beyond damaging the housing stock, the crisis has left Gaza with significant damage in road infrastructure, water, electricity and waste.

The damage has been devastating for the livelihood of Palestinians, as the already fragile economy dependent on Israeli policies and restrictions has been further impaired by the physical destruction of many economic centres and a great deal of agricultural land. In the Palestinian town of Khuza'a the post-conflict situation of 2014 is persisting to this date, as the international community has been hesitant to step in and rebuild the town under the Hamas-led de facto government of the Gaza Strip.

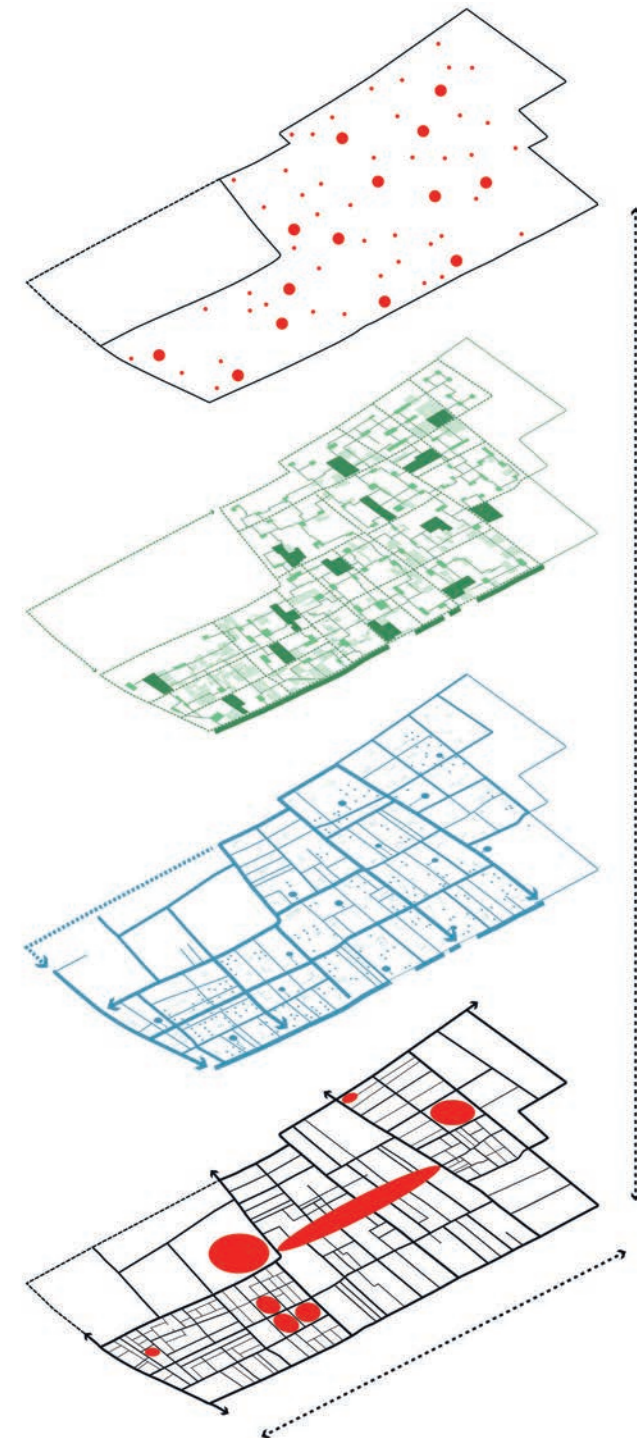
Recently, UN-Habitat has taken the initiative to show that a participatory design approach can work in post-conflict situations and has assembled a local team of planners (NTSC) to support the Khuza'a municipality in drafting a master plan, under the motto 'Build Back Better'. Working in a challenging context,

with limited logistics and resources, the team of international experts are helping the local partners develop a new and innovative approach to urban reconstruction that could be tested in Khuza'a and replicated in other areas in Gaza.



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Philippines

Urban Lab Philippines

Resilience to climate change, Tacloban City

Tacloban was one of the cities severely hit in 2013 by typhoon Yolanda. This typhoon was one the strongest tropical typhoons ever recorded and killed at least 6.300 people in the Philippines alone. The local government of Tacloban has, with support from UN-Habitat and the United Nations Development Programme, organized several planning charrettes to brainstorm and discuss strategies for the spatial development of Tacloban, addressing emergency, recovery and long-term rehabilitation needs. The city is visited by on average of 20 typhoons a year, and 42 of the city's 138 villages are classified as danger zones.

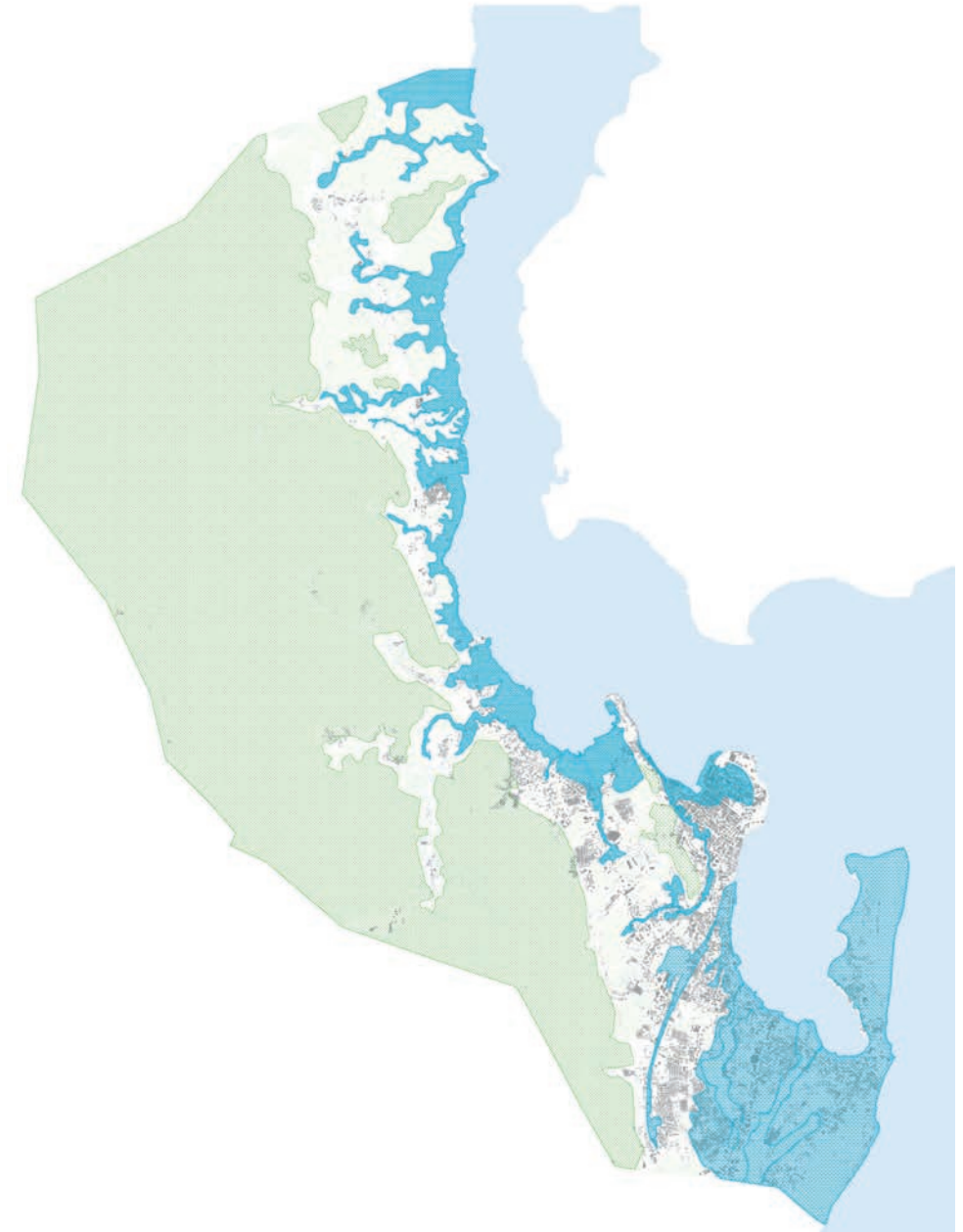
Besides reconstruction issues, however, rapid urbanization also poses a great challenge to the country's ability to achieve sustainable urban development. Urbanization in the Philippines is expected to increase from 50 per cent currently to 84 per cent by 2050. This growth is expected to happen not only in the capital city Manila, but mainly in small and intermediate cities such as Tacloban. The only way to obviate this growth by urban planning is to take the post-disaster and flooding context into account very carefully.

When the team arrived in Tacloban, it soon became clear that it was dealing with a post-relief-planning situation instead of post-disaster-planning: typhoon Yolanda and its aftermath had started a dynamic and elaborate rehabilitation planning process with many relief organizations providing financial and expert support, volunteers organising mapping marathons, and local government being invited to many planning workshops.

The team immediately reformulated its original assignment: instead of designing rehabilitation and resettlement plans, it focused on giving advice on the comprehensive land-use planning process and integrating the numerous constructed settlement sites and infrastructural works into an integrated and clear structural urban

plan. The availability of extensive site data made it possible to make detailed specialist studies such as geo-hazard maps, land value analyses and space-syntax maps. The organic state of the planning process as well as the challenging economic and infrastructural situation on the ground required the team to work with adaptive and flexible planning procedures and principles that will allow Tacloban to continue the most positive development in the future.

While writing this text the team is in Tacloban working on the final formation of the comprehensive land-use plan in collaboration with UN-Habitat and the City of Tacloban. In June the plans will be presented to Tacloban's inhabitants in a public consultation.



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Closing words

Urbanization is one of the most pressing challenges worldwide. The Netherlands recognizes the importance of high-quality urban development for improving living conditions and combating climate issues. The Ministry of culture and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands support in their policy goals the development of solutions for the great societal challenges. Our goal is a contribution to a safe, just and sustainable world.

The Creative Industries Fund NL is committed to forging coalitions that link design skills to other disciplines, such as civil engineering, smart technology, financial expertise and water management.

Solution-oriented Dutch urban planning, carried out in collaboration with a variety of stakeholders, is internationally distinctive. Research by design is used to develop several long-term scenarios. Part of the unique Dutch approach includes integrating

urban planning with expertise in social and environmental issues. Collaboration often begins with an exploratory study or pilot. The next step is organising coalitions that link design skills to other disciplines (such as civil engineering, smart technology, financial expertise and water management). This type of approach is demand-driven, assumes long-term international cooperation in specific regions and contributes to solving societal issues.

This offers Dutch designers the opportunity to use their expertise in (urban) areas with major humanitarian and spatial planning problems. It results in further development and intensification of international urban development and contributes to demonstrating the distinctive abilities of the Dutch in the areas of architecture and urban planning.

Marjan Hammersma, Director General Culture and Media, Ministry of Culture, The Netherlands

The Creative Industries Fund NL is a Dutch cultural fund that provides grants for innovative architecture, design and e-culture projects in the Netherlands as well as abroad. Projects that are eligible for grants enhance social and economic value from a cultural perspective. The Fund also supports projects that develop and promote the distinctive qualities of the design sector to strengthen the global reputation of the Dutch creative industries. The collaboration with UN-Habitat contributes to these objectives.

UN-Habitat is the United Nations programme working towards a better urban future. Its mission is to promote socially and environmentally sustainable human settlements development and the achievement of adequate shelter for all. For close to forty years, UN-Habitat has been working in human settlements throughout the world, focusing on building a brighter future for villages, towns, and cities of all sizes.

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