



The city of Quito in Ecuador and the host of the Habitat III Conference in 2016, © Rene Peter Hohmann (2016)

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National Urban Policies: a policy lever to foster a New Urban Agenda?

When national governments and stakeholders met at the first Preparatory Committee Meeting for the 3rd United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in Nairobi (Kenya) in 2014, not much was known about the New Urban Agenda (NUA) and its recommendations. While most Member States had been busy negotiating the rules and procedures of the Habitat III preparation process, a report on the progress of the Habitat II legacies and new emerging challenges to be considered in a NUA already suggested that “there is need for policies aimed at a more balanced distribution of urban growth. Such national urban policies could promote the growth of intermediate-size cities, with a view to avoiding excessive concentration in just one or two very large urban agglomerations and to reducing the negative environmental impacts often associated with large and rapidly growing urban agglomerations” (UNGA 2014: 16).

As a result, the implementation of the agreement through National Urban Policies (NUPs) became one of the key recommendations to Member States during the Habitat III preparation process. Unsurprisingly, the NUA which was eventually adopted in Quito (Ecuador) in October 2016 explicitly encourages Member States “...to enhance the ability of Governments to effectively implement national urban policies...” (UNGA 2017: 16). The Habitat III outcome document establishes a normative framework, which sets out voluntary commitments around three themes with corresponding focus areas as shown in Table 1.

A dedicated Global Policy Unit composed of 20 experts appointed by the Secretary General of the Conference and convened by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and UN Habitat (HIII Sec 2015; GA 2016), developed a draft policy framework and issue paper on National Urban Policies to reinforce their role in effectively implementing the New Urban Agenda.

Despite the clear consensus among Member States represented at the Habitat III conference to foster NUPs as a key vehicle to achieve its commitments, it remains yet unclear what constitutes a NUP and how such a policy could help catalyse the New Urban Agenda in all 193 member states of the United Nations.

This article therefore aims to shed light on these two questions to be able to cautiously approach a judgment on the relevance of these national policies in the context of a New Urban Agenda for Cities. Typologies of NUPs are presented to investigate to what extent existing National Urban Policies would be able to accommodate the Quito commitments in the New Urban Agenda. This paper reviews the current body of academic literature as well as policy assessments to analyse and categorise a sample of 19 countries with an explicit Natio-



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Thematic Commitments	Focus Areas
Sustainable urban development for social inclusion and ending poverty	Ensuring equal rights and opportunities, socioeconomic and cultural diversity, and integration in the urban space, by enhancing liveability, education, food security and nutrition, health and well-being, including by ending the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, by promoting safety and eliminating discrimination and all forms of violence, by ensuring public participation —providing safe and equal access for all, and by providing equal access for all to physical and social infrastructure and basic services, as well as adequate and affordable housing
Sustainable and inclusive urban prosperity and opportunities for all	Leveraging the agglomeration benefits of well-planned urbanization, including high productivity, competitiveness and innovation, by promoting full and productive employment and decent work for all, by ensuring the creation of decent jobs and equal access for all to economic and productive resources and opportunities and by preventing land speculation, promoting secure land tenure and managing urban shrinking, where appropriate
Environmentally sustainable and resilient urban development	Promoting clean energy and sustainable use of land and resources in urban development, by protecting ecosystems and biodiversity, including adopting healthy lifestyles in harmony with nature, by promoting sustainable consumption and production patterns, by building urban resilience, by reducing disaster risks and by mitigating and adapting to climate change.

Tab.1: Commitments and Focus areas in the New Urban Agenda

nal Urban Policy in place. Based on these findings, the article closes with a number of reflections on the potential pitfalls in promoting the New Urban Agenda through National Urban Policies.

This paper is organised in three sections. First, a definition of National Urban Policies is sought based on the existing literature. The second section is introducing a typology of National Urban Policies according to three policy continua. The final section suggests some concluding reflection on potential pitfalls in the promotion of the New Urban Agenda through National Urban Policies.

Defining National Urban Policies

The Habitat III outcome document praises the value of National Urban Policies as a tool for sustainable urban development. In contrast, the literature on what is coined today as National Urban Policies is limited (Holland 2014; OECD 2016; Turok 2014, Van den Berg et al 2007). Cochrane (2007:13) suggests that urban policies in general can be seen as “a product of a complex interweaving of meanings producing a changing pattern but with recognizable continuities”.

Attempts to define National Urban Policies can be found in comparative urban studies and diagnostic work produced by multilateral organisations. Van den Berg, L., Braun, E., & van der Meer, J. (2007: 4) for example define NUP in their European review as policies that have been explicitly formulated to affect the development of cities. The authors distinguish between policies that are directly addressed to the benefit of cities (‘urban’) and those that have an indirect impact on cities, such as housing, transport and spatial planning policies.

Following this notion, Couch et al. (2003: 2) define urban policies as a field of public policy that seeks to counteract a broad range of challenging issues in cities, such as economic decline, social exclusion and environmental problems.

Another broad definition is suggested by Roberts (2000) for whom this kind of policy encompasses a “comprehensive and integrated vision and action which leads to the resolution of urban problems and which seeks to bring about a lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of an area that has been subject to change” (Ibid.: 17).

Turok (2014) ascertains that NUPs “cover the overall intentions that governments have, and what they actually do, within their towns, cities and metropolitan regions to make them function better – economically, socially and ecologically” (Ibid: 5). The definition provided by multiple preparatory documents to the Habitat III negotiations followed this broad conceptualisation and roughly defined a National Urban Policy as “both a process and an outcome that harnesses the dynamism of cities and urbanization...[which] helps align national activities with global priorities. A national urban policy sets out the principles from which urban policy interventions are formulated and implementation is conceived” (UNGA 2016: 2).

For the purposes of this article and to better contextualise these policies in the New Urban Agenda, a National Urban Policy is understood “as a coherent set of decisions derived through a deliberate government-led process of coordinating and rallying various actors for a common vision and goal that will promote more transformative, productive, inclusive and resilient urban development for the long term” (UN H 2014: 3).

Typologies of National Urban Policies

Following the definition of NUPs leads to the issue to characterise the policy content. A look into the legacy of national programmes in Western Europe, such as in the United Kingdom, reminds us of the diversity and particular historical circumstances in which these political ambitions of national

governments to the benefit of cities had been formulated: from programmes on urban reconstruction after the 2nd World War to urban renewal in the 1960 and 1970s, from urban regeneration in the 1980s to urban renaissance in the 1990s (Lees 2004).

In rapidly urbanising countries, traces of at least intentions to formulate NUPs can be found in approaches of the 1990s to respond to urbanisation with a particular focus on population distribution aimed at “measures to strengthen urban-rural economic interactions and to improve rural infrastructure so as to increase productivity” (GA 1993: XXI). Despite these intentional statements stemming from the preparations to the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994 and aimed at government approaches to curb urbanisation patterns, it was noted 20 years later that “very few African states have explicit policies to deal with urbanisation and intra-urban development challenges” (Smit and Pieterse 2014: 157).

However, this variety in the political ambitions already hints to the fact that NUPs may need to be best understood on a continuum embracing several sectors and policy priorities. Applying an institutional lens on NUPs, Holland (2015) distinguishes between a set of policy continua to characterise the content and the spatial focus of urban policies formulated at national level. According to the author, with a typology of policies, “one might be able to determine where there may be contradictory programmatic goals or synergies among those programs” (Ibid: 129).

Based on his conceptual framework, we can consider eight typologies of NUPs:

- Public-led, place-based, social.
- Public-led, people-based, social.
- Public-led, place-based, economic.
- Public-led, people-based, economic.
- Private-led, place-based, social.
- Private-led, people-based, social.
- Private-led, place-based, economic.
- Private-led, people-based, economic

These eight typologies stem from a characterisation of the policy initiatives along three policy continua: Public-led versus private-led policies; people versus place based as well as social versus economic oriented policy initiatives.

Public-led versus private-led policy initiatives are differentiated according to the policy’s basic intention to support state structures, such as ministries and/or local authorities, or the private sector to be the key delivery agent and initiator of the intended development interventions.

Whether a policy is targeted at places, such as for Special Economic Zones or deprived urban areas, or people, such as inhabitants facing a variety of disadvantages, can be considered as a second policy continua.

Finally, NUPs may be more focused on interventions to increase social capital of targeted beneficiaries, such as community-based interventions at neighbourhood level, or to build up economic assets to foster productivity, such as Local Economic Development Strategies.

This framework can be used to cluster and map NUPs according to their policy content allowing not only to reflect the diversity and mixtures of policy intentions at the national level, it also directs the necessary attention to the multiple and sometimes inherently contradictory intentions that national governments may pursue under an umbrella of a NUP.

The following section applies these existing typologies to a sample of countries that have already been formulated and implemented a National Urban Policy to better understand the character of the policy contents and their potential to become a policy lever for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

Reviewing existing National Urban Policies in 19 countries

The body of existing literature providing a comparative review of National Urban Policies can be considered as rather thin. A first and comprehensive review of National Urban Policies was undertaken in the European Union by Van den Berg et al in 2007, however not repeated in consecutive years. A first global review beyond the European Union was undertaken by Turok in 2014 providing for the first time a snapshot of National Urban Policies formulated in around 20 countries, with an emphasis on low and middle-income countries. In 2017, a global report on the state of National Urban Policies was launched by UN Habitat and OECD in May 2017 but has not been published to date. The launch of the global report may indicate that a more regular monitoring of NUPs is envisaged in the context of the review processes of the New Urban Agenda.

Despite the lack of comparative works on NUP, the literature on single country reviews has increased in recent years, especially through the initiative of multilateral organisations, such as the World Bank and the OECD. This growing body of urbanisation reviews by the World Bank aims at providing a structured account of urbanisation trends in single countries and the changing patterns of access to key public services, such as Water, Sanitation and Housing (World Bank 2011, 2015 a, b). The territorial review series undertaken by the OECD in over more than 50 countries and regions focuses more on the territorial dimension and spatial manifestations deriving from the national policy environment, for example through macroeconomic, urban and rural policies as well as governance reform initiatives (OECD 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016).

Based on this combined body of country-level reviews, a first analysis of the policy contents and typologies of NUPs can be undertaken. For this exercise, a sample of 19 countries with an explicit NUP has been chosen to apply the categorisation as introduced in the previous section. This article is based on a literature analysis on NUPs in the respective countries under review and different sources of evidence were validated by cross-checking wherever possible. However, nor the scope of the review covering 19 countries neither the depth of the single cases does justice to fully represent the state of formulation or implementation status of the NUPs. It can however provide a suitable point of departure to a more comprehensive cross-national research endeavour on NUPs, especially in the forthcoming periodic reviews of the New Urban Agenda by the United Nations.

Table 2 below provides an overview of the countries reviewed and categorises their respective NUPs according to the presented typology.

The selection of cases was based on availability of information and does not claim to be representative of geographical regions, state of implementation or government structures. However, a mix of OECD, low and middle-income countries were

selected to ensure complementarity of economic status of the countries under review as well as to apply a universal geographical lens under which the New Urban Agenda is sought to be applied. Mapping those policies to the policy continua produces two distinct clusters of typologies as shown in Figure 1 below.

Cluster I combines all National Urban Policies that are primarily formulated for government agencies to implement a set of initiatives in cities to foster social cohesion and inclusion. Cluster II encompasses economically driven initiatives that aim to provide a conducive economic environment by state agencies in cities. Australia with its clear focus on private sector entities to drive economic development in cities appears to be an exceptional case.

It should be noted that most NUPs have combined various, sometimes conflicting elements in their policy. In this sense, they can indeed be considered as situated on a at least one policy continua between two opposite objectives. This mapping exercise allows already to formulate two key observations.

Firstly, the majority of NUPs in the sample considers the state and government institutions as primary change agents for the implementation of urban policy, despite the differences bet-

Countries	Policy Name	Typology	Source
Australia (Aus)	Smart Cities Plan 2016	Private-led, place-based, economic	OECD 2016; Ludlam 2013
Burkina Faso (BF)	POLITIQUE NATIONALE DE L'HABITAT ET DU DEVELOPPEMENT URBAIN	Public-led, place-based, social	MHU 2008
Chile (CN)	Política Nacional de Desarrollo Urbano 2013	Public-led, place-based, economic	OECD 2016; OECD 2013; Turok 2014
Czech Republic (CZ)	Zásady urbánní politiky 2010	Public-led, place-based, economic	OECD 2016
France (FRA)	Politique de la ville 2006	Public-led, place-based, social	OECD 2016; Dikeç 2006
Germany (GER)	Nationale Stadtentwicklungspolitik 2007	Public-led, place-based, economic	OECD 2016
Ghana (GH)	NATIONAL URBAN POLICY FRAMEWORK and Action Plan	Public-led, place-based, social	Turok 2014; World Bank 2015a
Hungary (HU)	National Settlement Policy	Public-led, place-based, economic	OECD 2016
Korea (KR)	Comprehensive National Territorial Plan (CNTP)	Public-led, place-based, economic	OECD 2012, 2016; KHRIS 2011
Mexico (MX)	National Urban Development Programme 2014-2018	Public-led, place-based, economic	OECD 2015, 2016; World Bank 2011
Morocco (MA)	Politique de la ville	Public-led, people-based, social	Turok 2014
Poland (PL)	National Urban Policy 2023	Public-led, place-based, economic	OECD 2011, 2016
Portugal (PT)	Sustainable Cities 2020	Public-led, place-based, social	OECD 2016
Spain (ES)	Estrategia Española de Sostenibilidad Urbana y Local 2011	Public-led, place-based, social	OECD 2016
South Africa (ZA)	Integrated Urban Development Framework	Public-led, place-based, social	CGTA 2016; Udesch et al. (2006)
Turkey (TR)	Integrated Urban Development Strategy and Action Plan 2010-2023 (KENTGES)	Public-led, place-based, economic	OECD 2016, World Bank 2015b
Uganda (UG)	Uganda National Urban Policy	Public-led, place-based, economic	Turok 2014
Vietnam (VN)	Vietnam National Urban Development Strategy	Public-led, place-based, economic	World Bank 2011

Tab.2: Sample of Countries with an explicit National Urban Policy

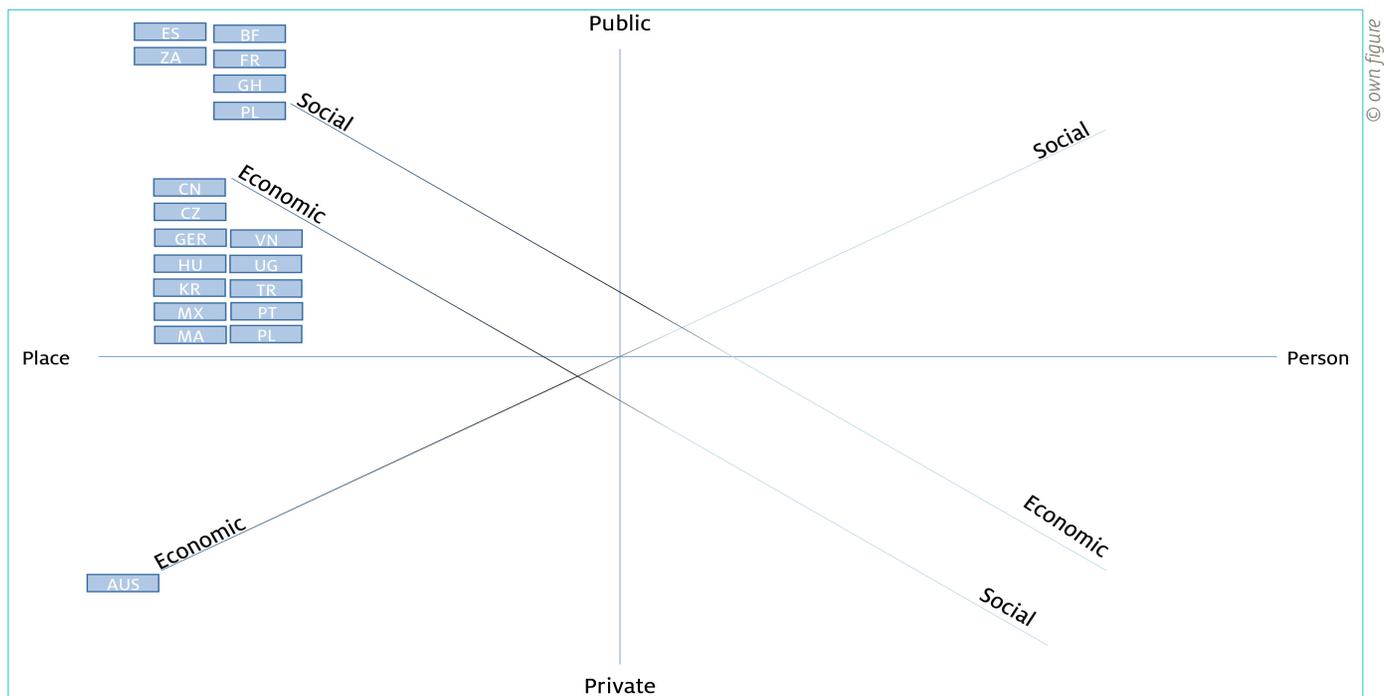


Figure 1: Typologies and Clusters of National Urban Policies in comparison

when the countries' own political system and constitutional circumstances. While the objectives may differ between more socially or economically driven motives, NUPs can predominantly be conceived as a policy vehicle for improved planning and service delivery by the state. This is clearly in line with the ambitions of the New Urban Agenda and the recognition by the Member State of "the leading role of national Governments, as appropriate, in the definition and implementation of inclusive and effective urban policies and legislation for sustainable urban development, and the equally important contributions of subnational and local governments, as well as civil society and other relevant stakeholders, in a transparent and accountable manner" (UNGA 2017: 6).

Secondly and related to the observation above, is the lack of NUP examples that are distinctly people-based in the formulation and implementation of the policy. It has to be acknowledged that due to their orientation to social development issues, Cluster I NUPs foster for example area-based initiatives addressing socio-economic inequalities. However, the absence in this sample of explicitly people-centred NUPs may pose a significant hurdle to the New Urban Agenda's aim to "adopt sustainable, people-centred, age- and gender-responsive and integrated approaches to urban and territorial development" (UNGA 2017: 5).

Thirdly and more related to the applicability of the framework developed by Holland (2015) is the observation that despite its first merit to categorize and characterise NUPs according to their policy objectives, this conceptual lens could be further strengthened through broadening of categories, not at least through adding environmental policies as a characteristic feature of many contemporary NUPs.

Potential pitfalls in promoting the New Urban Agenda through National Urban Policies: concluding reflections

Mapping the policy contents of existing National Urban Policies has shown that these policies are primarily based on state-driven development interventions fostering either more social or economic development objectives. These can therefore be indeed seen as appropriate policy umbrellas to accommodate the wide range of themes that have been incorporated in the normative commitments of the New Urban Agenda. Since the New Urban Agenda has not generated a distinct action plan with specific outcome indicators, a basic complementarity of the major intentions of the New Urban Agenda with existing policy contents of National Urban Policies can be confirmed. However, reflecting upon the developments in the emerging field of action around NUPs, at least two potential pitfalls can be formulated.

Pitfall 1: National Urban Policies are conducive to but not sufficient to achieve sustainable cities.

One of the most politically sensitive issues could be seen in the question whether an urban policy should be situated at the national level or at other tiers of government that may be closer and effective to formulate and implement these policies. Many of the arguments around this question emphasise the legal and policy environment needed at the national level to steer economic growth (Buckley and Kallergis 2014), to provide support to local authorities in managing urbanisation process (Smit and Pieterse 2014) and to assume planning functions beyond municipal and regional administrative boundaries in support of a vibrant system of cities (Roberts and Hohmann 2014).

The New Urban Agenda wishes to “enhance the ability of Governments to effectively implement national urban policies, as appropriate, and to empower them as policymakers and decision makers, ensuring appropriate fiscal, political and administrative decentralization based on the principle of subsidiarity” (UNGA 2017: 16). Realising this aim requires a shift in focus from national governments to the agency of local governments and their institutional setting in which they operate. A qualitative benchmark assessment undertaken by United Cities and Local Governments Africa (UCLGA/Cities Alliance 2013, 2015) on 50 African countries considers National Urban Strategies as only one out of 10 criteria restricting or enhancing the capacity of local governments to act. It is however noteworthy that the results of these assessment also indicate that those countries with some of the most conducive national institutional enabling environments for local governments to act at the time of the review, such as South Africa, Uganda, Morocco, are also considered to have NUPs formulated. At the same time, there are countries, such as Egypt, Ethiopia and Malawi that have NUPS in place but are considered as countries with a rather restrictive institutional enabling environment for cities and their governments to act.

It points to the fact that if NUPs are considered to be a distinct feature in the New Urban Agenda, these policies need to be sharply differentiated from those reform initiatives that are constitutionally, legally and financially influencing the capacity of local authorities.

Pitfall 2: A prescriptive global National Urban Policy template may turn out to be harmful to local innovation.

In a more interconnected world, in which ideas and fashions are accelerated through the use of new technologies and global platforms for exchange, the growing field of research on policy mobilities could be considered as a very important concept to better understand the consequences and potential pitfalls of international agreements, such as the New Urban Agenda (Peck and Theodore 2011, 2015; McCann and Ward 2011). Assessing transnational policy transfers and the danger of local misinterpretation, Peck and Theodore (2001, 2015) have coined the term ‘fast policies’, referring to policy instruments which are transferred from one country to another, often promoted and accelerated by global actors at high speed. The authors acknowledge though that local contexts can significantly alter the trajectory of policies, but often these global templates of policy ideas that are “pushed by well-resourced multilateral agencies” are favoured by governments “over organically grown, endogenous approaches to policy innovation” (Ibid, 31-32). In other words, policy makers and development partners may need to be aware of the pitfalls of promoting ‘silver bullet’ solutions to avoid jeopardising the creation of local policy innovations that are more suitable to national and local contexts.

An example on the challenges of such fast policies can be found in the review on the popularity and trans-national promotion of conditional cash transfers (Peck and Theodore 2015), a policy that promotes social transfer payments upon

behavioural compliance of recipients. Similar fast travelling policies, which have been critically assessed, is the concept of Creative Cities (Pratt 2010) or Smart Cities (Kitchin 2015, Watson 2013) as well as “mass scaled supply-driven approaches to housing provision” in Africa (ACC 2015: 14).

Turok (2014:6) therefore rightly summarises that “one cannot assume that urban policies mean the same thing in different contexts simply because they are called urban policies. There is also no single model or approach guaranteed to produce a desirable outcome that can be replicated in different situations. Attempts to introduce an NUP need to be responsive to the national context and sensitive to the political culture and appetite for such a policy. This makes it vital to understand the distinctive history and evolution of urban policy in each place, including the role of other territorial, rural and regional policies”.

Given that National Urban Policies are based on a very broad definition and indeed can only be broadly characterised, there is an inherent danger of prescribing a global policy template of what National Urban Policies should be composed of, especially in those countries that have not yet formulated a response to urbanisation and sustainable urban development. Caution may therefore be called upon any global trends to formulate toolkits, guidelines and other forms of advice promoted by primarily development partners in response to the review and follow-up of the New Urban Agenda and specifically in support of National Urban Policies as a potential policy lever for its implementation at the national level. ■

Remarks

The article is based on the author’s own analysis and does not represent the views of the Cities Alliance nor its hosting entity, the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS).

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Schlüsselwörter: Neue Stadt Agenda, Habitat III, Nationale Stadtentwicklungspolitik

Keywords: New Urban Agenda, Habitat III, National Urban Policy

Zusammenfassung: Nationale Stadtentwicklungspolitiken gelten als das wichtigste politische Instrument, durch das die neue städtische Agenda umgesetzt werden soll. Allerdings ist nicht viel über den Inhalt dieser Nationale Stadtentwicklungspolitiken bekannt. Dieser Artikel zielt daher darauf ab, diese Wissenslücke durch eine Auswertung vorhandener Literatur sowie eine Kartierung von 19 Ländern mit einer expliziten nationalen Stadtentwicklungspolitik, zu schließen.

Abstract: National Urban Policies are considered to be the key instrument through which the New Urban Agenda shall be implemented despite a lack of a clear definition of both concept and content. This article aims to contribute to closing this knowledge gap by reviewing existing available literature as well as analysing and mapping National Urban Policies in 19 countries.