

Urban Challenges  
and Sustainable Technological Revolution



## Special Session Proposal

### Innovation and Sustainability in Developing Countries

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### Abstract

Developing countries have been experiencing a new phase of urban transition since the early 2000s. Urban agglomerations are becoming increasingly dense. They have become a major space for economic and social activities. In a few decades, this massive and sometimes brutal urbanisation has generated profound upheavals in the nature and scale of economic production as well as in lifestyles. This poses enormous challenges in terms of environmental degradation, social inequalities, decline in regions outside economic centres and the ever-increasing expectations of citizens and businesses for services and infrastructure.

These impacts increasingly challenge our ability to develop new solutions based on the capacity for technological, organisational and social innovation. This is a promising way to create a less gloomy<sup>1</sup> outlook for cities seeking a place on the international scene. This quest opens the way to a 'protean' innovation with a double social and contextualised character. On the one hand, through its capacity to 'forge the territory' by fuelling socio-economic development and improving living conditions<sup>2</sup>, but also through the processes of learning, imitation and improvement. On the other hand, since the pioneering works of Aydalot, we know that innovation is not universal and that it is deeply contextualised in the environment to provide adapted and creative responses to local development needs<sup>3</sup>. The successful experiences of European cities with sustainability suggest that SD cannot be an

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<sup>1</sup> Laperch B., Levratto N. and Uzunidi D. (2012), *Crisis, Innovation and Sustainable Development*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Northampton.

<sup>2</sup> Forest et Hamdouch (2015), *Introduction générale in Quand l'innovation fait la ville durable*. LyonTech.

<sup>3</sup> Aydalot P. (1986), *L'aptitude des milieux locaux à promouvoir l'innovation dans* Federwisch J., Zoller H. G. (Eds), *Technologie nouvelle et ruptures régionales*, Economica, Paris.

entirely dictated and controlled process. It requires adaptability and flexibility. It cannot therefore be entirely top-down. It should be endogenous, integrative and contextualised.

Although shaped in the North, sustainable development is an opportunity to catch up and a challenge for the countries of the South, at all territorial levels. It is also all the more crucial for territories whose development creates uncontrolled impacts and multiform crises affecting both their attractiveness and their quality of life.

Thinking about sustainability in the cities and territories of developing countries implies broadening our field of investigation and reflection. It is a question of seeking to produce new development models and alternatives adapted to the socio-economic and environmental epistemology of the cities of the South, based on their advantages and potentialities linked to their skills and resilience. Fortunately, the economic literature and public policies on innovation have abandoned a restricted vision centred on the technical dimension alone, which is well suited to the countries of the North. Looking at innovation through the broader prism of innovation and innovation policy allows it to be considered as a relevant path and strategy for the sustainable development of cities and territories in the South. This suggests - as Pugh (2013)<sup>4</sup>, Barthel and Monkid (2011)<sup>5</sup> and many others point out - that, against a backdrop of supposed global convergence, the countries of the South need to invent their own sustainable development systems while drawing on the models, policies and tools of the pioneering cities of sustainable development.

The focus of this special session is to question these models and policies in order to understand to what extent developing countries are able to produce sustainable development systems adapted to their reality. Theoretical reflections on the diversity of innovations in the South as well as quantitative proposals can be included in this session.

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<sup>4</sup> Pugh C (2013), *Sustainable Cities in Developing Countries*. London, Routledge

<sup>5</sup> Barthel P.A and Monkid S. (2011), Introduction. *Cairo and sustainability: a provocative issue? Égypte/Monde arabe*, 8/2011, document 8, Online since 01 September 2012.