

On August 27th, 2019, The Spindle, in collaboration with the Humanity Hub, organised Future Session #6 of the year about Economic perspectives on urban futures and resilience building. This session was hosted by Paula Nagler and Anne-Marie Hitipeuw who inspired the participants on their expert fields in urban development.



The Spindle

In the series of three Future Sessions, urban development is a topic of discussion. In this article, you'll find the main learnings of Future Session #6. Worldwide cities grow with an immense speed which leads to emerging challenges that urban dwellers face. In 2050 more than 50% of the total population in the world will reside in urban areas. Already in 2030, there will be 41 megacities of 10 million or more people. This means huge challenges and possibilities for NGOs and other civic organisations.

The session, with about 30 participants, consisted of a plenary part of two talks, followed by lively group discussion. Economist and urban expert at the [IHS Paula Nagler](#) facilitated the session and talked about the most pressing issues with which fast-growing cities currently cope with. Chief Resilience Officer at City of The Hague [Anne-Marie Hitipeuw](#) introduced the strategy to approach resilience in Dutch cities, inspired by the [RC100](#) initiative. The general talks provided the input for four group discussions in which urban challenges, solutions and stakeholders were discussed and presented.

Urban resilience in The Hague, shocks and stresses

Anne-Marie opened with the first talk on what strategy The Hague takes to build and improve resilience in the city. Using the shocks and stresses method, the municipality seeks to prevent instability and learns from other cities, especially from 'the South' that have overcome severe shocks, becoming high adaptive units. Infrastructure is currently under pressure by three macro processes: climate change, urbanisation and globalisation. According to the United Nations, cities worldwide must brace themselves to mitigate vulnerabilities against extreme shocks such as pollution, congestion, lack of housing, and insecurity. Multifunctional & multi-stakeholder design is one of the main approaches to build resilient cities.

- First, shocks and stresses must be identified. This should be done in a relevant context. This means that every city that works on resilience sets its priorities and takes a suitable strategy to approach them.
- Second, these shocks and stresses must be transformed into opportunities. Examples of this are multifunctional/-stakeholder planning design that combines the drainage of excess water with public squares. Marginalised groups should be prioritised in the process of creating opportunities.

Two inspiring projects on building resilience: [School of Shapers](#) and [Fablab](#). See [the PowerPoint presentation](#) for more!

Urban (youth) labour markets and the informal sector

Paula Nagler provided a broad overview of urban issues. After an introduction of the current state of fast-growing and geographic expanding cities, the question of why people massively migrate to cities was addressed. Push and pull factors drive the outflow of rural populations. Rural population pressure on land, lack of jobs, and limited public services stimulate (young) people to come to cities. However, urban job markets are lacking behind severely. Migration does not follow job creation (in contrast to Europe during industrialization)! Countless issues arise from this, amongst which:

- Growing informal job market and vulnerable employment
- Increasing exploitation of workers and stigmatisation for being illegal
- Declining quality of & lack of access to services due to the large competition
- Pollution, congestion, lack of security, lack of decent housing

Taking (youth) unemployment as a focus here, there are some important guidelines towards solutions.

- It is a precondition that key actors work together towards a common goal.
- General recognition of the informal job market and knowledge about its structure is key to address and change circumstances also in hybrid forms.
- Participatory (digital) platforms are needed to contribute to common solutions.
- Legal recognition by governments of unemployment (e.g. in South Africa 50% of young people are unemployed!) and the important function of the informal sector is also paramount.
- Provision of the accessible basic infrastructure of public services
- Provision of improved and affordable transport
- Inclusion of pro-poor worker initiatives in municipal budgets
-

Entrepreneurship can play a key role in building an agency of individuals in both formal and informal sectors. There is a need to acknowledge the potential of local start-ups which are wide-spread throughout the global south. Four inspiring examples of bottom-up innovations that fitted their context are: [Yoco](#), [Kobo360](#), [Safeboda](#), [Mpesa](#).

The key take-aways are as follows:

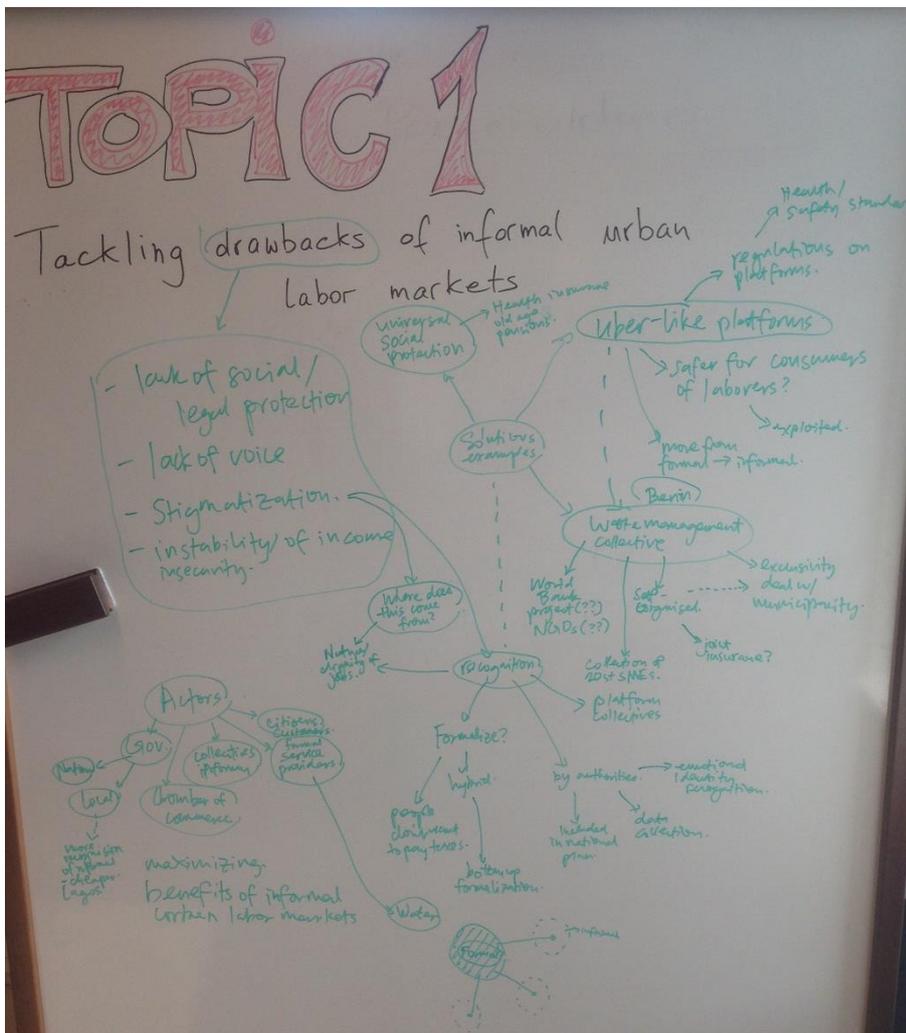
1. There is a large informal sector in fast-growing cities that needs to be recognised. Especially providing youth employment is challenging and deserves attention.
2. Coordinated efforts among key-actors are required to ensure inclusive cities

Brainstorm towards solutions

After the plenary part, the audience split up in four groups to discuss four distinctive topics. The groups were very diverse in terms of backgrounds, professions and demographics. This is what the groups discovered:

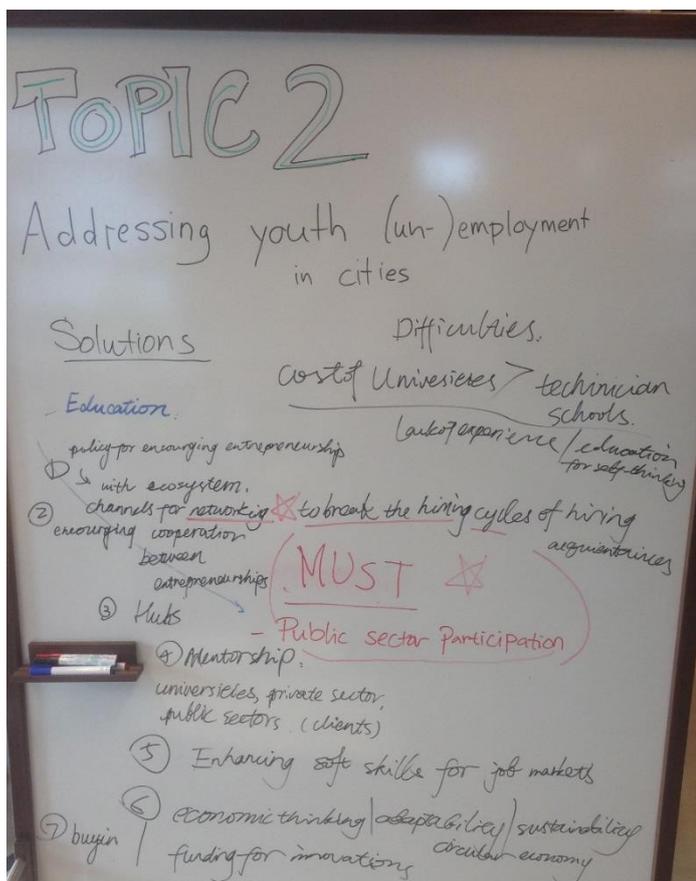
Group 1. Tackling drawbacks of the informal sector.

- Recognition is key. In legal terms by authorities in the form of stable labour contracts, but also on a micro basis, where fellow citizens respect each other. Participatory (digital) platforms are suitable places to develop recognition from bottom-up and create knowledge exchange, voice & empowerment.
- There is a need for hybrid forms of formalising which will not condemn the informal but cooperate and creatively involve them.
- A wide variety of actors is needed to address and tackle the negative externalities of the informal market. This goes from governments to local initiatives and efforts of motivated individuals who commit to a common goal.
- Social protection, which many rural dwellers lack, should not only be offered in relation to formal working contracts but as basic rights for all citizens.



Group 2, Addressing youth (un)employment in cities

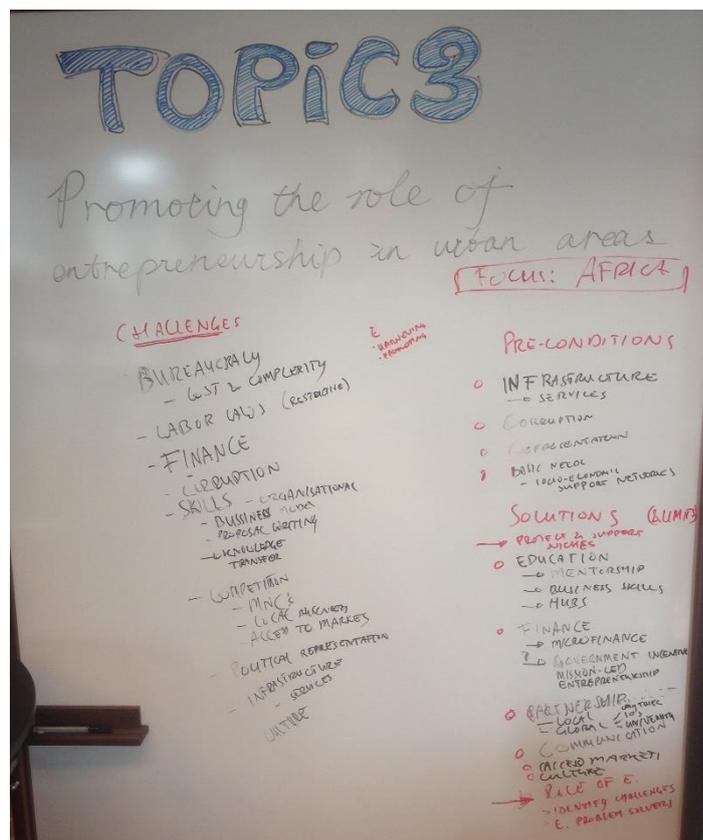
- Maybe the most important question of all. Is unemployment a problem? One might start reflecting on the functioning of the system in which (young) people working seems to be the norm. Is the universal basic income an option?
- In thinking towards solutions for unemployment, encouragement of networking & mentoring between youth as a target group with important stakeholders that employ them is important.
- Policy should focus on the encouragement of an ecosystem of entrepreneurial behaviour. It should additionally create a free environment in which small (instable) businesses can thrive.
- Encouragement of self-organised environments. There is a need to merge formal expertise with innovative and creative spaces where people are educated by doing and sharing.
- Mentorship is needed in the form of social support. The public sector should function as a coach for other sectors.
- Tailoring the educational systems to the demand from society. The connection of knowledge provided at universities should connect to relevant skills that future cities demand. Mainly soft skills can come in handy.
- Change the mindset of the entire society. This can be done through education by proposing a circular economy, embedded in the long-term objective of sustainability.
- Stimulate innovation which is driven by a genuine conviction to change.
- Think beyond the scope of the city. This entails the prospect towards the future in which cities will become too crowded. It may be expected that rural areas will become popular in the long run, but face a threat of being backwards. They must be made attractive to young people by encouraging smart agriculture (feed the city), vocational training and activities etc.



Group 3, Promoting entrepreneurship in urban areas.

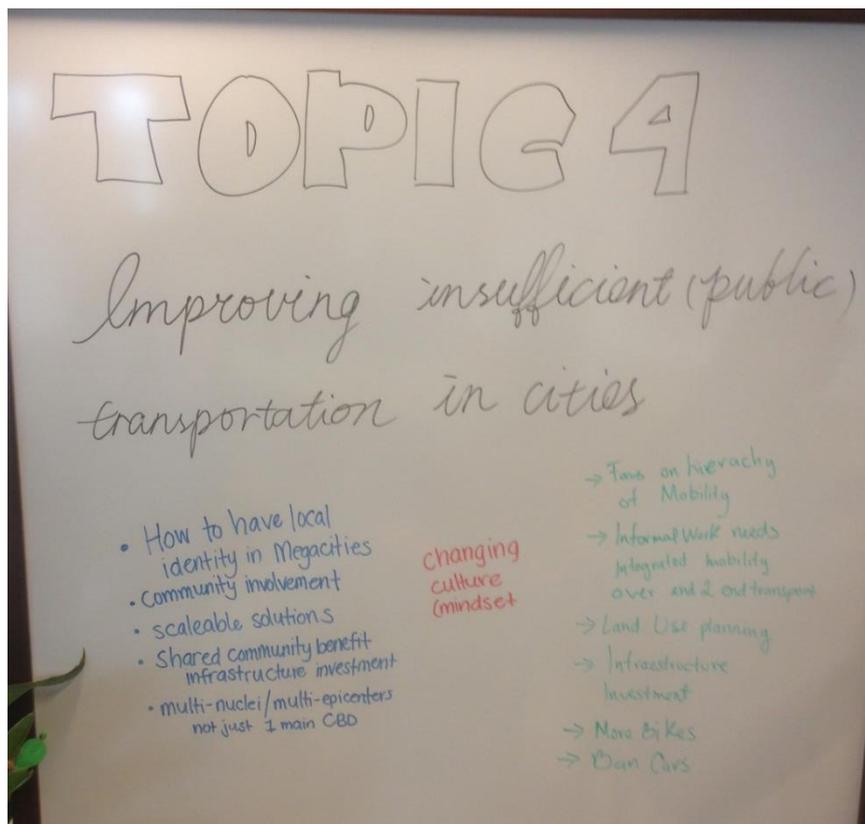
The reflection of this group was centred about the question: what is the role of entrepreneurship in the theory of change.

- Firstly, it is key to view entrepreneurship as a way to create solutions. This is somewhat contrary to the view that (informal) entrepreneurship is lacking security.
- Challenges arise at different levels and at different scopes, which makes the identification of these dimensions key to find suitable solutions.
- Preconditions for constructive entrepreneurship are:
 - Eradicating corruption and 'nepotism'
 - Coverage of basic needs
 - Insurance to enable innovation and taking risks
 - Representation and recognition
- Solutions:
 - Focus must be put on how to accelerate entrepreneurship and make them realistic. Public funding and other (micro) investments can incentivise it.
 - Global and local partnerships are needed to harness entrepreneurial behaviour and to further stimulate it. Communication amongst these actors is then key.
 - Access to local, domestic and international markets must be realised.
 - Education plays an important role in providing skills of which entrepreneurs can profit.
- Key findings:
 - Protect what is there in term of initiatives and stimulate new things.
 - Reflection about the role of entrepreneurship in the theory of change is important.



Group 4, *Employing insufficient (public) transportation in cities*

- It is important to have a local identity regarding the transportation network. Community ownership of bottom-up actors can create this identity.
- Scalable solutions are important, but no blueprints exist! Innovations in transportation networks must be tailored to the cities' needs.
- The revival & upcoming of (secondary) centres in rural or suburb areas needs to prevent one hub from becoming dominant. One large city centre is not preferred per definition above a plurality of cores.
- The concept of transportation and infrastructure needs to be rethought. The concept of mobility is more suitable to address diverse patterns of transportation within cities. These do not have to be the most efficient pathways, but rather circular in some instances.
- The planning of multiscale solutions for transportation issues must be designed for the long-term and address different levels of society.
- A thorough analysis is needed on who will invest projects. A change in vehicle is possible to make transportation more sustainable. Ban cars and stimulate the use of (electric) bikes.
- Take home message: It boils down on changing the mindset of people.



Interested to discover more about important trends and their relevance for the future of development cooperation? Join us in the next Future sessions! The upcoming two sessions will still focus on the future of cities. The next one will be on [How the circular economy can generate opportunities for developing cities and will take place on September 24](#). Sign-up and join us!