

## **THE MEDITERRANEAN URBAN OBSERVATORY**

### **Vision and Summary Action Plan (2016 – 2017)**

#### **FOREWORD**

*“... The increase and continuous worsening in social inequality has become a key theme of our time... It is common to consider that the task of controlling or eliminating social inequality is not of the urbanism resort, but rather falls under economic and social policies that the planner must understand, help and support. The hypothesis that I will defend here is partly different: it argues that urban planning must accept major and well defined responsibilities in the worsening of inequalities and that any policy that seeks to eliminate or combat these inequalities must take the city project as a starting point.”*

Bernardo Secchi: “La ville des riches, la ville des pauvres”; Métis Presses, 2014.

The Observatory will serve as a platform for documentation, investigation, exchange, dissemination, networking and advice on the issues of urban governance and urban political economy in the Mediterranean region. Starting from the vision of cities and system of governance and the stated or unstated political economy of cities, the Observatory will seek to document and study their impact on urban sustainability and dynamics – economic and social, inclusiveness - or lack thereof - and inequalities.

The increased attempts by migrants to seek a better life on the Northern shores of the Mediterranean are fuelled by insecurity, which derives for a good part from the neglect of the poor and of excessive rural-urban migrations in the Southern Mediterranean countries. Cities, once providing a hope for a better life, have become actors of inequalities and the birthplaces of extremism and despair.

Therefore, and instead of addressing solely urban morphologies and urban design, the Observatory will rather take on a different perspective in addressing urban issues, notably by focusing on the vision of the city for its future, urban politics and governance and its urban economic policy. It aims at confronting the prevailing trend – place branding and image of the city – in favor of a more equitable allocation of the cities’ resources. As shown by Terry N. Clark<sup>1</sup>, urban growth and attraction depends on the quality of the city’s services, its amenities and inclusiveness and by the way it addresses the right to the city. The Observatory will thus question the current prevailing trend of urban development and highlight its impact on urban inclusion and the right to a better future through the angle of governance and urban political economy.

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<sup>1</sup> «Terry N. Clark, Ed. : « The City as an Entertainment Machine », Elsevier 2011.

## **MISSION**

**To document and research urban governance and urban economic policies through networking & investigation, and to contribute to improving the prevailing conditions through dissemination, training and advocacy.**

### **1. Networking**

A scientific committee composed of reputed academics will oversee the work of the Observatory and will provide guidance for its programme of work.

A steering committee will be composed of representatives of the partner institutions that will constitute the operating network of the Observatory.

Around the Mediterranean, universities and structures similar to the Observatory will be invited to take part in its network and will contribute to its work in their respective countries.

### **2. Investigation & Documentation**

For this task, the Observatory will rely on:

- Universities' students at Master's degree level interning within the Observatory;
- Post-graduate students and researchers in residence;
- Tutors.

They will undertake documentation and research work on one of the topics of the Observatory under the tutorship of academics and/or professionals of the field.

The Observatory will use the information gathered through its research activities to advocate for effective solutions in improving governance in Mediterranean cities.

Note:

- A bibliography on Mediterranean Cities and urban governance is in progress, with about 500 references gathered since January 2015.
- A study on the arts market and another on the perception of the built heritage in Beirut have been produced.
- A full survey on the present economy of Mar Mikhael has been conducted and is under final review.

### **3. Comparative Research**

A core feature of the Observatory is its ability to connect with Mediterranean cities and to stimulate comparative research between cities on a given topic: e.g. gender issues, social justice, knowledge economy, urban strategy, vision, all being topics that, given a common framework for research, can develop into comparative work that would later become subjects of training or conferences. Shared experiences and solutions will be disseminated.

### **4. Training & Advocacy**

The Observatory will organize forums, seminars, training workshops, and publish their

reports.

Regular public conferences that bring together the civil society, scholars and practitioners from the region will be organized to discuss issues of urban governance throughout the Mediterranean Region. Sharing experiences, knowledge and know-how enables participants to broaden their perspectives for research and action, and provide the Observatory with new material to build upon. Those results are published and easily accessible to reach a wide audience, creating a network of urban actors from all kinds of background.

## **PROPOSED IMMEDIATE OBJECTIVES**

### **How much, of what, by when?**

For the 2016-2017 period, one in-residence researcher, together with two to three interns per year would contribute to develop documentation and research work. The following is a set of proposed permanent activities to be undertaken:

- Bi-annual bibliographic and database updates
- An intensive training for students + fieldwork investigation (duration and location to be determined with partner institutions)
- A framework to support ad-hoc, individual or collective urban projects/interventions
- Comparative studies in at least four Mediterranean cities<sup>2</sup>
- Online publication of the studies' results
- One thematic conference (national and/or regional)
- Regular follow-up of calls for projects funding.

A dedicated website will be made available, followed by an online library. Results of the studies that have been conducted over the past two or three years under the patronage of GAIA-heritage (s.a.l.) will also be published on the website.

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<sup>2</sup> A first international conference held on 9 and 10 June 2016 was jointly organized with the Lebanese American University on the topic of « Byblos : Culture and Modernity » with presentation about Genoa (Italy) Valencia/Peníscola (Spain) and Turkish small harbor cities. See : <http://gaiaheritage.com/project/symposium-byblos-culture-and-modernity/>