

Institution: Cardiff University		
Unit of Assessment: Geography and Environmental Studies (14)		
Title of case study: Accelerating sustainable urban development interventions by the UN in transition economies		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 01/10/2013-31/12/2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Oleg Golubchikov	Reader	01/10/2013 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 01/10/2013-31/12/2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Following the collapse of state socialism, countries in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union experienced unprecedented social, economic and political restructuring. Cardiff's research steered the United Nations' (UN) efforts to understand key urban trends and promote more sustainable urban development in these ex-socialist nations. Key challenges facing cities in these countries were identified and Cardiff worked collaboratively with the UN to ensure these were tackled in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This work resulted in challenges specific to Eastern European countries being addressed in the UN's New Urban Agenda and its implementation mechanisms; informed national action plans for sustainable housing in Serbia, Moldova, Tajikistan and Armenia; and shaped UN-mediated international policy frameworks on inclusive and liveable sustainable cities.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The urban challenges faced by post-Soviet and other ex-socialist states, as countries with economies in transition, are numerous and complex. These include fragile urban economies, social and spatial inequalities, institutional deficits in urban administration and governance, outdated housing management and maintenance systems and the poor affordability and energy efficiency of housing.</p> <p>Since 2013, Golubchikov has drawn on his conceptually-informed and empirically-grounded analysis and expertise when leading research projects and publications, including in collaboration with researchers in the UK, Russia, Germany and other countries. These have provided contextual assessment of urban and housing change in the region [3.1-3.4]. Employing different modes of enquiry, from meta-analyses [3.1-3.3] to in-depth case studies [3.4], this research identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • patterns of urban change and the foundational role that cities play in the formation of new economic geographies, social differences and inequalities [3.1]; • factors underpinning geographical disparity and uneven economic and institutional capacities of cities in adapting to the new market economy [3.2]; • evolution of institutions of housing policy, urban planning and urban governance [3.3-3.4]. <p>2.1 UN-commissioned research</p> <p>Part of Cardiff's research was conducted directly in collaboration with the UN, to which Golubchikov has served as a consultant since 2008. Two UN bodies have commissioned him to produce policy-led research:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UN-HABITAT (United Nations Human Settlement Programme), the UN body that promotes policies for urban and housing sustainability; • UNECE (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe), a UN regional commission responsible for coordinating cooperation and policy transfer across its 56 member States in Europe, Central Asia and North America, and particularly focusing on providing policy and technical assistance to countries with economies in transition. 		

In 2015-16, Golubchikov worked in partnership with these UN bodies on the development of the New Urban Agenda (NUA), a milestone policy document setting global standards of achievement in sustainable urban development. He was solely responsible for developing a sub-regional analysis on post-Soviet nations (often referred to as the Commonwealth of Independent States, CIS). Cardiff's research constituted at least a fifth of the HABITAT III Regional Report for the UNECE Region – the principal input of UNECE to the NUA – which Golubchikov co-authored as a main contributor [3.3].

Through this and other projects and publications [3.1-3.4], Cardiff research helped the UN to identify key pressure points, dilemmas and priorities for sustainable urbanisation by:

- providing a knowledge base for understanding key vectors of change and the challenges that post-socialist cities commonly share, such as the concentration of resources in the largest cities; a lack of economic resilience in many other cities leading to their economic and political peripheralization; growing disparities in quality of life; elitist and exclusionary processes of decision-making; and housing affordability problems [3.1-3.3];
- demonstrating a lack of consistent and integrated urban and housing policies and the limitations of existing policy strategies in the field of urban regeneration that have largely focused on symbolic projects and benefited a small number of places [3.3-3.4];
- advocating for more socially and spatially inclusive forms of urban development and governance, reconciling the demands of capital and citizens in the provision of urban services and housing, and achieving more liveable and sustainable cities [3.3].

Golubchikov's research also encompassed other forms of urban transitions and their social and economic implications, including with respect to smart cities, digital and energy/low-carbon transitions. He evaluated existing strategies for low-carbon and smart cities and their implications for shaping new meanings of urban sustainability and associated policy debates [3.5]. The research also stressed the importance of addressing geographical disparities and place-based vulnerabilities in devising policies for transitioning more justly [3.6]. This research contributed to devising the UN policy framework on people-smart sustainable cities (Section 4).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[3.1] Golubchikov, O. 'The urbanization of transition: ideology and the urban experience', 2016, *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 57 (4-5), pp. 607-623, DOI:10.1080/15387216.2016.1248461.

[3.2] Golubchikov, O., Makhrova, A., Badyina, A. and Brade, I. 'Uneven urban resilience: the economic adjustment and polarization of Russia's cities', 2015, in Lang, T., Henn, S., Sgibnev, W. and Ehrlich, K. (eds.) *Understanding Geographies of Polarization and Peripheralization: Perspectives from Central and Eastern Europe and Beyond*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 270-286 DOI: 10.1057/9781137415080_15

[3.3] Evans, B., Badyina, A., Elisei, P., Golubchikov, O., Küsters, C., Lenz, A., McAdams, J., Rosenfeld, O. and Saliez, F. *HABITAT III Regional Report: Housing and Urban Development in the Economic Commission for Europe Region. Towards a City-Focused, People-Centred and Integrated Approach to the New Urban Agenda*. 2016. Geneva: United Nations <http://habitat3.org/wp-content/uploads/HabitatIII-Regional-Report-Europe-Region.pdf> (ISBN 978-92-1-132744-1)

[3.4] Golubchikov, O. From a sports mega-event to a regional mega-project: The Sochi Winter Olympics and the return of geography in state development priorities, 2017, *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 9 (2), pp 237-255, DOI: 10.1080/19406940.2016.1272620.

[3.5] Thornbush, M. and Golubchikov, O. *Sustainable Urbanism in Digital Transitions: From Low Carbon to Smart Sustainable Cities*. 2020. Cham: Springer (ISBN: 9783030259464). Available from HEI on request.

[3.6] Golubchikov, O. and O'Sullivan, K. 'Energy periphery: Uneven development and the precarious geographies of low-carbon transition', *Energy and Buildings*, 2020, 211, 109818, DOI: 10.1016/j.enbuild.2020.109818

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Prior to Cardiff's research, there was a policy gap where urban and housing challenges for Eastern European cities were not visible enough in UN international agreements and were paid little direct and sustained attention in national-level strategies [5.1]. Golubchikov placed these challenges more firmly in international policy debates and shaped how UN policymakers and specific UN Member States (Serbia, Moldova, Tajikistan and Armenia) understand urban and housing challenges, leading to new policy frameworks and actions to promote sustainable housing and urban development. This work further contributed to the delivery of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG11, which calls for cities to be inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

The Head of the UN-HABITAT Project Coordination Office for Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States confirmed that *"Dr Golubchikov's academic research... has been highly valuable to our work, providing robust research-informed analysis contextualising our understanding of the specific issues, challenges, and actions needed to address the current urban transformations experienced in these countries"* [5.2].

As well as the specific impacts discussed below, Golubchikov's research was used in multiple UN reports on associated issues as their key knowledge base. For example, his work was cited four times in a UNECE/UN-HABITAT joint report on cities in the Commonwealth of Independent State countries [5.3], and 10 times in a UNECE study on informal settlements [5.4]. These reports underpin the development of new technical guidelines for countries with economies in transition.

4.1 Developing and implementing the UN's New Urban Agenda (NUA)

The UN's New Urban Agenda (NUA, 2016) is a global framework of policies and standards required to achieve sustainable urban development. Paola Deda, Director of UNECE Forests, Land and Housing Division, described Golubchikov's co-authored HABITAT III Regional Report for UNECE region [3.3], as *"one of the cornerstones of the NUA development process"* [5.1]. As well as contributing to the final output of the NUA at the global level, the Regional Report was also directly translated into the 'Geneva Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Housing and Urban Development' adopted by the 56 UNECE member States in 2017 [5.5].

The Ministerial Declaration is the first international agreement covering the whole UNECE region to directly promote sustainable urban development as an international (rather than only national or local) policy mandate [5.2]. This places the urban agenda more centrally in both international and national policy commitments. As the practical policy instrument for implementing the NUA at the level of the UNECE region, the Declaration commits all the member States to implementing recommendations from the HABITAT III Regional Report. Moreover, as Paola Deda confirmed, following Golubchikov's input in the Regional Report, *"the Declaration asserts more firmly than in previous UNECE policies the importance of...specific challenges faced in the Eastern (post-socialist) part of the region"* and *"provides a holistic approach for urbanisation in the region"* that takes these challenges into account [5.1].

The Declaration is based on the analyses, conclusions and recommendations of the HABITAT III Regional Report for the UNECE Region [5.5, p.6] and directly adopts a range of Golubchikov's recommendations derived from the Report as policy actions, including:

- addressing *"social and spatial inequality within and among the cities in the region"* [5.5, p.3];
- *"reducing the economic polarization in growing cities"* [5.5, p.3];
- *"promoting inclusive cities by addressing the multiple aspects of housing, urban poverty and exclusion"* [5.5, p.4].

In conjunction with the Regional Report, since 2017 the Ministerial Declaration mobilised governments across the region to address key urban and housing challenges. This *"affects millions of citizens in the 56 Member States of the UNECE"* [5.1]. These countries, with progress monitored by UNECE and reported on by national governments annually, have all committed to integrate the Declaration into their national programmes [5.2]. The Head of the UN-HABITAT Project Coordination Office noted that it has been *"particularly important for the CIS countries"* as

the Declaration fills their policy gaps in this field and also *“provides the recognition of specific needs of the post-socialist cities”* [5.2].

4.2 Developing UN-sponsored National Action Plans in Member States

In parallel with this impact, Cardiff’s research also informed the preparation of National Action Plans for sustainable housing and urban development in Serbia, Moldova, Tajikistan and Armenia. In 2016-17, Golubchikov provided evidence from his research on urban challenges and policy needs in the region through several workshops for these national governments to build capacity and develop National Action Plans [5.6].

Svetlana Ristić, Head of the national department responsible for housing policy in Serbia, was in attendance. She noted key factors from Golubchikov’s research discussed at the workshops, including the imperative of an integrated urban/housing agenda at the national level, social inclusivity, and energy efficiency [5.7]. Ristić stated that *“Golubchikov’s expertise was of great significance to us”* and that the findings he shared *“were important considerations raising awareness and capacities of our Government and experts”* [5.7].

Following the workshops, the Head of the UN-HABITAT Project Coordination Office noted that *“all four countries incorporated these key factors”* into their National Action Plans. The Plans, which represent the only national mechanism currently available to these countries to develop affordable housing and sustainable urban development, *“serve as important policy instruments in these countries, translating the ideas advocated by Dr Golubchikov into concrete action”* [5.2].

For example, Serbia’s National Action Plan supported the development of a more sustainable and inclusive housing sector [5.8]. Ristić confirmed that the work on the Plan has [5.7]:

- *“consolidated a number of ad hoc activities previously implemented on an individual basis and with different principles, in order to channel the development of the housing sector towards higher standards”;*
- *“identified key steps in national budget allocation and policy development process”;*
- *been “an important factor influencing development of Serbia’s first Sustainable Urban Development Strategy.”*

4.3 Shaping the first UN policy framework on ‘people-smart sustainable cities’

Golubchikov’s research continued to support the development of sustainable urban policies by shaping the UN’s flagship policy publication on ‘People-Smart Sustainable Cities’, approved by UNECE member States in October 2020 [5.9].

Influenced by the 2016 HABITAT III Regional Report and the 2017 Geneva Ministerial Declaration, in 2019 UNECE identified sustainable urban development as a *“high-impact nexus area”* that plays a key role in addressing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in an integrated manner [5.1, 5.9]. It recognised that ‘sustainable and smart cities’ could support countries to address multiple SDGs all at once. To advance this policy agenda, Golubchikov was commissioned to work with UNECE and coordinate their *“flagship”* [5.1, 5.9] framework publication. This work was co-funded through an ESRC Impact Acceleration Award (£13,185, June 2019).

Golubchikov formulated and wrote the framework based on his own research, as well as interviews and input from the UNECE Secretariat and Member State Governments. The draft, published in October 2020, provides UNECE and its Member States with an evidence base *“to better orient policies in designing integrated, cities-based solutions for SDGs”* [5.1]. It draws on Golubchikov’s research through:

- providing an overview of current trends, challenges and opportunities for promoting more liveable and sustainable cities in the UNECE region, with a particular attention to post-socialist countries;
- presenting good practices and recommendations to support policy-makers on how cities can activate their potential for sustainable development and SDGs;
- emphasising a spatially nuanced, socially just and people-smart (inclusive) approach to international policy for liveable and sustainable cities [5.9].

Paola Deda, Director of UNECE Forests, Land and Housing Division, confirmed that the framework – “*the first of its kind for the UNECE*” – provides “*a new vision and mechanisms for breaking siloes and working across different ministries and department... on urban matters*” [5.1]. It is important to guide UNECE and its Member States, as it “*draws the attention to a range of policy challenges and options*” and further develops the approach initiated through the New Urban Agenda in working towards SDGs [5.1].

In summary, Cardiff’s research identified the challenges faced by countries with economies in transition and filled key policy gaps, as urban issues are often neglected in these countries in favour of policies focussing on economic reforms and other sectors. This research placed policies addressing such challenges more firmly on international and national agendas by underpinning UN policy-shaping and policy-implementation mechanisms, National Action Plans in individual countries and the first UN policy framework on ‘people-smart sustainable cities’.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[5.1] Testimonial: Paola Deda, Director of Forests, Land and Housing Division, UNECE

[5.2] Testimonial: Head of UN-HABITAT Project Coordination Office for Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States

[5.3] UNECE/UN-HABITAT joint report on “CIS Cities: Towards Sustainable Future - The Commonwealth of Independent States Regional Report” (2016)

[5.4] UNECE review on “Informal settlements in countries with economies in transition in the UNECE Region” (2016)

[5.5] UNECE (2017): *Geneva Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Housing and Urban Development*

[5.6] UN report: Golubchikov’s contribution from the Report of the UNDA Workshop ‘Strengthening National Capacities for Sustainable Housing, Urban Development and Land Management: Development, Implementation and Monitoring of the National Action Plans’ (Belgrade, 2017)

[5.7] Testimonial: Svetlana Ristić, Head of Section of Housing Policy, Energy Efficiency and Public Utilities, Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure, Republic of Serbia

[5.8] ‘National Action Plan on Sustainable Housing and Urban Development for Serbia’ (2017)

[5.9] UNECE flagship publication: “People-Smart Sustainable Cities” (draft published October 2020, full publication December 2020)