

PRESS RELEASE

First-of-A-Kind Comparative Review of Urban Observatories Launched

28 January 2021 – A new report, [Urban Observatories: A Comparative Review](#), provides a review of 'urban observatories,' which explores the various features, functions, and activities these institutions have and perform and reveals the critical role urban observatories play in knowledge mobilisation and urban governance.

The Report has been released alongside a companion working paper and podcast, both focused on the COVID-19 crisis, and was produced jointly by the [Connected Cities Lab](#) at the University of Melbourne, University College London Department of [Science, Technology, Engineering, and Public Policy \(STePP\)](#), and [UN-Habitat](#).

This first-of-a-kind landscape review examines 'urban observatories,' which are boundary-spanning institutions working at the interface between knowledge production and decision-making that perform an explicit monitoring role on a range of urban issues in one or more human settlements. It builds upon earlier scholarly research on knowledge mobilisation for urban governance and developing a global science to guide city policy. It also informed a recent scholarly publication on urban observatories' role in mobilising urban knowledge for sustainable development against the context of the COVID-19 crisis. Further, the report is complemented by a working paper and associated podcast episode, which focus on the value observatories demonstrated as well as the challenges they faced during COVID-19, drawing on the experiences of six case study observatories.

The report outlines the operations of urban observatories, their 'value proposition' and their challenges in a variety of urban contexts around the world. Drawing from 32 case studies in cities equally across the Global North and South, the report offers tangible comparative evidence of the functioning of these institutions and contextualises their functions, activities, and outputs against the current COVID-19 crisis.

The report emphasises the important role these institutions play in urban governance in several ways. First, urban observatories support evidence-based decision-making with robust, longitudinal data and analytical expertise, either through strategic advisory roles or through capacity-filling roles in cities where state data is weak. Second, observatories play a key role in bringing multiple forms of knowledge to inform the evidence base used by decision-makers, advocating for recognition of the diverse urban realities experienced by city dwellers rather than a singular vision that does not account for the complexities and variance within a single locality. And third, observatories network knowledge within and between cities, making knowledge inclusive and accessible to a wide range of stakeholders and giving cities the opportunity to reference the successes and failures of other places when attending to their own challenges.

The report findings provide a snapshot of the dynamics of knowledge mobilisation and urban governance in cities today and suggests the critical role urban observatories play in enabling just, inclusive, and sustainable cities for tomorrow.

The comparative report, working paper, and podcast as well as the three referenced scholarly works can be found on the Connected Cities Lab website: sites.research.unimelb.edu.au/connected-cities/projects/urban-observatories

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For more information contact:

Robert Ndugwa, Head, UN-Habitat Data and Analytics Section – Robert.ndugwa@un.org

Michele Acuto, Professor and Director of the Connected Cities Lab – michele.acuto@unimelb.edu.au

Ariana Dickey, Research Assistant at the Connected Cities Lab – a.dickey@unimelb.edu.au

Carla Leanne-Washbourne, Associate Professor at University College London – c.washbourne@ucl.ac.uk