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COFER WelCit: Welcoming Neighbourhoods. Sustainable Migration in North and West African Cities

Summary

The future of global settlement is in densified urban spaces. In the next few decades, urban inhabitants are expected to increase to at least 60 per cent of the global population, and the increasing differentiation in modern societies is most pronounced in cities, especially in urban areas with a highly mobile population.

Cities in the Global South are expected to experience the highest rates of urban growth. In Africa, mobility is a significant contributor to urbanisation, especially internal rural-urban and South-South movements (UN-Habitat 2014). While cities are engines of production, innovation, and growth, urbanisation can also have a negative impact on local and global pollution, equality, and health. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development commits to making “cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (Goal 11)”. The global urban agenda, including Habitat III (Quito, October 2016), encourages planning for the transition to sustainable cities. Thus, a key question for our future is: how can cities develop such that their mobility-induced growth does not negatively impact the health and wellbeing of the population, increase economic and ecological risks, or raise the likelihood of discrimination and conflict?

The interdisciplinary project “Welcoming Neighbourhoods: Sustainable Migration in North and West African Cities” seeks to understand the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion dynamics among mobile people (internal and external migrants, circular migrants, commuters) in specific neighbourhoods characterised by diversity (in terms of the life histories, and particularly the mobility experiences, of the people who live there) and their contribution to social, economic, and cultural innovation.

With our focus on innovation, we wish to contribute to several of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’s goals, in particular Goal 11 (inclusive, safe, resilient and, sustainable cities), Goal 3 (healthy lives and wellbeing), Goal 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions), Goal 12 (sustainable consumption and production), and Goals 8 and 9 (economic performance and work).

WelCit includes the organisation of five workshops (WS), four of them in selected North and West African cities (Addis Ababa, Fez, Dakar, and Abidjan). We plan to use innovative methods to improve WS outcomes, in particular the inclusion of site visits to innovative projects in specific neighbourhoods. In this way, we will combine conceptual work with empirical investigation.

The main outcomes of this project are: (1) intensification of project-oriented cooperation between universities in the Global North and the Global South in developing a

common research project, strengthening the already established network; (2) teaching tools covering topics such as human mobility, urbanisation, sustainable development, and belonging (citizenship); (3) publications reporting the experiences, conceptualisations, and confrontations during the project; and (4) policy recommendations concerning diverse neighbourhood development aiming to reduce vulnerability and improve economic, social, and cultural innovation.

Our network will put together people from different disciplines interested in cities in the Global South and working on topics related to innovation, sustainability, and the impact of human mobility and circulation in cities.