

## Research Project

### Making the City: Agency, Urbanity and Urbanisation in Ordinary Cities

#### Third-party funded project

**Project title** Making the City: Agency, Urbanity and Urbanisation in Ordinary Cities

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**Organisation / Research unit**

Departement Gesellschaftswissenschaften / Visuelle und politische Ethnologie (Förster)

Departement Gesellschaftswissenschaften / Architectural, Urban, and Territorial Design (Herz)

**Department**

**Project Website** [https://forschdb2.unibas.ch/inf2/rm\\_projects/object\\_view.php?r=3490218&type=5](https://forschdb2.unibas.ch/inf2/rm_projects/object_view.php?r=3490218&type=5)

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Current research on urbanisation in the Global South lingers between complaints about the ungovernability of mushrooming cities and the appraisal of urban inventiveness. Comparative approaches that consider and reflect both the agency of the actors and the city as a structured setting are still rare and almost non-existent in urban anthropology. This project aims at over-coming this impasse by comparatively looking at actors and their agency in four cities. It asks: How do urbanites make their cities as social, cultural and architectural spaces? The project adopts a comparative perspective. It asks how and in what contexts urbanites encounter or distance themselves from others; how they engage in the formation of social spaces across cityscapes; and how these cities are transformed by such practices. It presumes that the formation of urbanity is a dialectical process that is equally based on the agency of the actors; their perception and conception of urban space and their imagination of the social, as well as on the structured social and material environment that is simultaneously shaped by them. At an empirical level, the project compares the formation of urbanity in four cities in the Global South: Goma, DR Congo; Cartagena de Indias, Colombia; Johannesburg, South Africa; and Yaoundé, Cameroon. Each case study identifies and juxtaposes settings that are more likely to produce distancing and social difference to processes that foster encounter and inclusion. Leisure and security are transversal themes that link all four case studies. At a practical level, the choice of field sites is a selection of four cities, based on the pre-sumption that the formation of urbanity and urbanisation becomes more visible in an unbiased comparative perspective across different cultural and social backgrounds. Our choice also reflects feasibility of empirical research and the competences of the researchers. Long-term field research is conducted by two senior scholars at the University of Basel, Profs. Till Förster and Manuel Herz, two postdoc researchers, Dr. des. Barbara Heer and Dr. Silke Oldenburg (partly funded by the SNSF), and two PhD students (funded by SNSF) conjointly with partners and MA students from Basel and our partner institutions. The findings will contribute to an understanding of urbanity and urbanisation in these cities and serve as basis for further comparisons and analyses. At a general comparative level the project aims at elaborating a balanced understanding of urbanity and urbanisation and contributes to general debates in urban studies on how to frame the urban and its specific sociality. Finally, it will lead to a deeper theorization of urbanity and the formation of urban space in general. The project is based on the interdisciplinary conceptual work in the field by the senior scholars and the two postdoc researchers. It is a building block of the new Urban Studies program at the University of Basel. The three new chairs of the new program will become members of the advisory board and are expected to

engage in the theoretical debates about the findings of this project within the framework of an interdisciplinary research group. The project will be relevant to social scientists, architects, and urban planners as it generates an analytical framework that goes beyond the current pre-occupation with the deficiency of cities in the Global South and enables re-searchers to address questions of urban change from an empirical and comparative perspective. Main partner institutions are the African Centre for Cities, Cape Town, and research partners in the respective countries

**Keywords** Urbanisation, Comparative Urbanism, Global South, Agency, Urbanity

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**Follow-up project of** [2190013 Corruption, Conflict and Cities in West and East Africa](#)

[2718736 Art/articulations: Art and the formation of Social Space in African Cities](#)

**Add publication**

**Add documents**

**Specify cooperation partners**

ID	Kreditinhaber	Kooperationspartner	Institution	Laufzeit - von	Laufzeit - bis
4528602	Förster, Till	Guiblehon, Bony, Professor	Université de Cocody	01.01.2018	31.07.2022
4528603	Förster, Till	de Sardan, Olivier, Professor	Université de Marseille, Centre d'études avancées	01.01.2018	31.07.2022
4528604	Förster, Till	Kasfir, Nelson, Professor	Dartmouth College, Harvard University, Yale University	01.01.2018	31.07.2022
4528605	Förster, Till	Resins, Joan Ramon, Professor	Stanford University, chair of Roman Studies	01.01.2018	31.07.2022