INTA WINTER SESSION 2

Urbanity, Well-Being and Crises

Global Urban Futures: Delivering Better and Affordable Housing

February 24, 2026

INTRODUCTION AND FRAMING - HELLE (PRESIDENT, INTA):

Welcome to our second lecture of the INTA Winter Session 2026. My name is Helle Juul, I am the President of INTA. I am joined today by Sabina Mujkic, Vice-President, from Ljubljana Slovenia, Etienne Lhomet, Vice-President from Bordeaux France, and Jacques Gally, based at our headquarters in Paris.

Our overall theme is Global Urban Futures: Delivering Better and Affordable Housing. Today we will focus particularly on the interconnection between urbanity, well-being and crisis.

Cities around the world are facing multiple and overlapping crises: climate change, social inequality, housing shortage, migration and public health challenges. In this context, the way we design, the way we govern and inhabit our cities becomes crucial.

The central question is: how can urban development not only respond to crisis, but strengthen resilience and human well-being? This is really at the core of our strategy.

SPEAKERS AND FORMAT

We are very pleased to have two strong voices with us for today's debate: Anne Bach Nielsen, Associate Professor at the University of Copenhagen, and Camila Jordan, environmental engineer, urban planner, and public policy researcher. Director of Institutional Relations and Advocacy of TETO Brazil.

Together we will explore how the principles of the humanising city can strengthen cities and enhance resilience in times of crisis. Each speaker will have 20 minutes for their presentation. After that, we will open the floor for debate and questions.

INTA'S ENGAGEMENT

Before giving the floor to Anne Bach Nielsen, let me briefly underline that INTA has a long history of engaging with these issues. The International Urban Development Association actively contributes to strengthening the global dialogue on health, resilience and quality of life in all aspects of urban development. We invite you to visit INTA's website https://inta-aivn.org/en/ and our LinkedIn profile https://www.linkedin.com/company/international-urban-development-association-inta-aivn.

We achieve this through strategic advisory services, international panel discussions, expert lectures and knowledge forums, cross-sector professional networks, and dialogue between public and private stakeholders.

All attendants will receive a summary and the presentations so that we can continually exchange and debate on how we are actually delivering better and affordable housing.

ANNE BACH NIELSEN

INTRODUCTION: A SOCIAL SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE

Thank you so much for inviting me, Helle, and thank you all for listening and joining the call today.

I am going to talk about crisis and urban well-being from a disaster and crisis perspective. I am a disaster and climate change scholar, but also a social scientist. That means I study disasters, crisis and urban well-being from a social science perspective, with a particular interest in questions related to people and power — very much related to the concept of the humanising city.

That also means that I am not an architect and not an urban planner. I am based at the University of Copenhagen — the building in the slide is an old hospital, built for the cholera epidemic in Copenhagen. I am affiliated with the Copenhagen Centre for Disaster Research, an interdisciplinary team of researchers trying to understand the interlinkages between disasters and society from many different fields of study.

I also have a fairly global outlook. I work quite a lot in Europe, but also abroad, often in close connection with local partners. Some of the examples I will give today come primarily from a project in Bangladesh and from research I conducted in India. It is important to me to give credit to the remarkable people who are in the field and who support the research we conduct on site.

Currently I have projects in Copenhagen, Bangladesh and Kenya, looking at disasters and vulnerability in cities, and thinking about how local actors can support a more resilient pathway for handling some of the crises we are seeing.

WHAT IS AN URBAN CRISIS?

Starting with a definition: what is an urban crisis? For many of you this may not be new, but in many circles working in crisis, emergency and disaster management, it is actually fairly provocative to argue that both crises and disasters are not something that comes from the outside or from above. They are something we create through the way we plan, design and live in our cities. That paradigm is really important for discussing the link between urban well-being, disasters, crisis — and certainly also housing.

The very way we construct and design our homes, and how they connect with urban spaces and the communities living there, is crucial for promoting urban health. When disasters — especially natural hazards — are normally handled in practice, they are often seen as much more technical and physical in nature.

The way I, and many disaster scholars, see disasters and crises is through a lens of social construction. To be able to respond to and handle the crises we see, we need to understand the economic, political and social structures that currently condition our cities.

A useful metaphor here is a prism: disasters magnify some of the problems and issues that are already at play. Think about the COVID-19 pandemic — here in Denmark, the main advice was to isolate and work from home as much as possible. Think about how difficult that response would have been in many places across the globe, for people living day to day to put food on the table. That very much shows the role of social, economic and political structures, and how disasters magnify and emphasise the issues that are already present.

This brings me to the second point: we need to think not just about exposure, but about vulnerability. Who is vulnerable, and why are these people vulnerable in the first place? We need to acknowledge the enormous imbalances we see both across the globe and within cities. Acknowledging this is essential to creating better and more resilient urban spaces.

THREE MACRO TRENDS

This brings me to three current macro trends that are important for understanding the housing emergency we see in many places, particularly in low-income areas and in the Global South.

The first, and perhaps most important, is the massive urbanisation trend. The huge influx of people into cities is creating housing emergencies in many places. Dhaka, Bangladesh — one of our field sites — is one of the places that really embodies this experience: a massive number of people moving to the city every day, seeking work and improved livelihoods. In many ways, the city cannot absorb the demand for housing and services, and that creates very precarious and risky living conditions for many residents.

The second trend is globalisation and the massive interconnectedness we see in today's world. Everything moves much faster today than it did many years ago, and that interconnectedness creates a huge level of complexity when we want to handle disasters and crises. Think about the financial crisis of 2008, or again the COVID pandemic, and how quickly both spread because people and capital simply move rapidly across the world.

The third is the environmental crisis — or multiple environmental crises. The planetary boundaries framework describes it well: we are overshooting on so many levels in terms of what our planet can carry. Climate change is very important for understanding both the issues cities face and the housing emergency that accompanies them. Natural hazards have already intensified and will continue to do so. And climate change does not impact all of us the same way: people who live in unsafe places — on floodplains, in spaces with very little green infrastructure — face far higher risks of flooding and extreme heat.

ADAPTATION PATHWAYS

Because of these macro trends, we are seeing quite significant adaptation efforts at many different scales and levels across cities in the world. Some of these efforts are grounded in a clearly defined strategy and a structured implementation process, and lead to positive outcomes.

Others lead to what we can call maladaptation — unintentional consequences that compound the problem.

We also need to remember that in many places we see adaptations that happen simply because people are forced to do something to improve their livelihoods — particularly in the face of environmental impacts. Moving from rural coastal areas into the city to sustain oneself and one's family is one such example, and it tends to lead to disaster risk creation more than anything else.

FIELD CASE: DHAKA, BANGLADESH

This drone photograph, taken by my colleague Ekta Kha, shows the field site we work in in Dhaka, Bangladesh. We are trying to understand how migrants coming in from rural and coastal areas settle in informal and unsafe locations, how they are serviced — in terms of power, water and health facilities — and how that impacts their overall livelihoods.

What happened during our project was that Bangladesh experienced political unrest, a protest movement and a change of government. The impact of this political upheaval on our field site was significant: half of the people we were following were very suddenly evicted. What you can see in the drone footage is that on

one side of a newly built road there is an empty land plot, and on the other side the remaining cluster of informal housing — sheds and shacks made of iron and tin.

When we spoke to people after the eviction, two things were very clear. First, even though the conditions were not good — an informal settlement on a floodplain, built on top of a former rubbish dump — many of them had settled there over many years, some for 5, 10, even 15 years. They had developed a genuine sense of place, a sense of stability, a local community, and a sense of belonging.

Then, from one day to the next, they were told to leave, and the entire community was demolished.

The story I want to tell with this example is both about the massive risk created for people forced into these precarious settlements, and about the continuous loop of disaster risk creation these people face. From moving from rural and coastal Bangladesh into the city, they keep experiencing the same cycle of instability and marginalisation again, continuously forced into the most precarious corners of urban settlements.

FIELD CASE: CHENNAI, INDIA

This is a study I conducted over three years on the Chennai Resilience Strategy, trying to understand what this strategy was actually doing for the people living there.

One of the main outcomes of certain resettlement programmes in the early 2000s was that people were moved from coastal areas — many of them heavily affected by the 2004 South Asian tsunami — to modern housing in peri-urban areas, often quite far from the coast.

The intentions were very good, and in many ways, people were indeed less at risk of flooding. However, a great many new problems arose when they were moved far from where they used to work, where they used to fish, and from the communities, cultures and places they belonged to.

In the second round of interventions, NGOs and all the partners involved asked: how can we improve this, and how can we avoid making the same mistakes again? Projects were designed that much more meaningfully involved communities, aligned with people's aspirations and their sense of belonging.

One example is an urban garden project — still very much ongoing today — where the flat rooftops so characteristic of Chennai were transformed into green, productive spaces supporting community activities, food security, and greening the city, helping with the extreme heat it regularly experiences. These are examples of lessons learned, where projects are genuinely trying to take maladaptation into account.

CONCLUSIONS: THE THREE P

Let me close with the Three Ps — an approach that resonates well with what INTA is already doing in urban planning, and that adds a social science dimension to it.

The first P is Place: acknowledging people's sense of place and sense of belonging, and the local context and local culture. Who is the city for? Who has access? Who can live where, and why?

The second P is People: empowering local communities to develop and implement housing solutions, because community-driven approaches foster resilient outcomes to a far greater degree than top-down interventions.

The third P is Power: who is moving people around, and who is moving around the money that finances so many of these projects — these are crucial questions for achieving lasting outcomes. The Dhaka eviction example puts this in sharp focus. People had built genuine stability in these informal settlements over many years. Then political unrest, combined with the informality of their situation, put them on the streets overnight. This shows very clearly how important it is to understand who decides who gets what, when and how — a critical dimension of the current housing emergency.

Thank you for listening. Please do stay in touch if you would like to continue this conversation.

Q&A — AFTER PRESENTATION 1

HELLE

A truly brilliant presentation — thank you Anne. I would like to ask an immediate question. When you work in Dhaka for quite a long period:

- Are you collaborating with developers, municipalities or anyone who could take the lead on doing things differently?
- Or is that outside the scope of what a University of Copenhagen research team can do?

ANNE BACH NIELSEN

The key point here is that we only work in Dhaka because we have local partners.

We work with a migration research NGO and with the University of Dhaka. Both have genuine political influence, and it is a real partnership — we co-analyse what comes out of the data together. We also do a great deal of health analysis: for example, tracing bacteria and infections to understand how things connect to behaviour and services. Some of this laboratory work is done in Copenhagen because the facilities are simply much better here, though we also try to build local laboratory capacity.

For the more political dimensions of influence, we largely leave that to our local partners, who know the context and how to manage it. A great deal of this governance is also extremely informal — and that is a critical point. The governance around services in these settlements had been quite stable for many years: services were provided, even if illegally, supported by government officials and politicians — just not on paper. Understanding those dynamics is essential for analysing and potentially improving the livelihoods of the people who live there.

CAMILA JORDAN

INTRODUCTION

Thank you so much for having me. For you this is a winter session; for me it is a summer session since I am in the Global South — but I am very happy to be here. I think we need more spaces like this, where different countries and different perspectives come together.

My name is Camila Jordan. I am an activist, environmental engineer and practitioner, and I have a master's in public administration with an emphasis on urban and housing policy. I am from Colombia, and I just completed a social urbanism post-graduate degree here in Brazil — a methodology presented to the world largely through Medellín in Colombia.

The most important thing to know is that I started as a volunteer at TETO — a Latin American organisation — and have been with them on and off for the last 13 years in different capacities, from volunteer to Executive Director and now Director of Institutional Relations.

THE BRAZILIAN CONTEXT

In Brazil, we have 59 million people living in poverty — almost the size of the entire country of Colombia. In terms of numbers, Brazil is one of the countries in Latin America with the most people living in poverty.

- 16 million people living in favelas (informal settlements)
- 6 million units: quantitative housing deficit
- 25 million households with some form of qualitative housing deficit

Most housing built in Brazil was produced through auto-construction — not necessarily with the support of an engineer or even an architect.

An important piece of context: the large, consolidated, well-known favelas — those that appear when people search for images of Rio de Janeiro — are the exception, not the rule. These communities have been around for many years. They have social capital, contacts with governments, grassroots organisations. They face enormous challenges, but they are on a path toward greater urban integration.

What TETO focuses on is different: what we call the housing emergency from the hyper-vulnerable favelas. According to our data, in the communities we have worked in or mapped in Brazil, 40% of people still live in wooden shacks or structures made of makeshift materials.

THE HOUSING EMERGENCY: AN INVISIBLE CRISIS

Today, there is no public policy in Brazil that addresses the families living in what we call the housing emergency. When we discuss housing, everything tends to be consolidated around the housing deficit — and while these families are included in that figure, they do not receive the specific visibility needed to bring real solutions for them.

The main avenue for housing policy in Brazil — Minha Casa Minha Vida [PT: My House, My Life — Brazilian federal housing programme] — is a credit programme. Families living in wooden shacks today cannot access credit.

What defines the housing emergency? It is a house that is very precarious and self-built, not connected to any formal sanitation system. It is not insulated for extreme temperatures. It is highly susceptible to flooding, located on the least desirable land — close to rivers, small canals, or areas prone to landslides. There are unsafe water and electrical connections. The structures are fragile, built from reused materials. There is no internal privacy: multiple family nuclei often share the same space, with children living and sleeping in the same room as their parents. And these structures are generally not resistant to heavy rain.

This is an invisible and ongoing housing emergency that preceded — and is now being amplified by — the climate crisis. The structures of vulnerability were already in place, already built by us as a society. Now everything is getting worse for these families because they were already living in a state of urgency, and that has become an emergency in the context of the climate crisis.

A HUMAN STORY

I know the woman who used to live in the house in this picture. She lived there with her ten-month-old baby, and every time it rained, the house would flood to 60 or 70 centimetres, and snakes would come through holes in the floor. She would stand on a table for hours with her daughter, afraid of what was going to happen. This woman was utterly depressed and utterly alone.

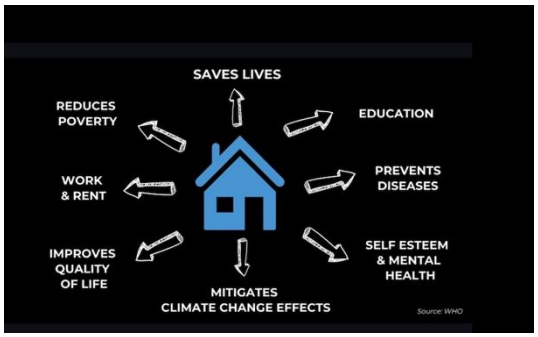
When we built her a new house, it gave her an outlook on a new beginning — the opportunity to think about tomorrow and about her daughter, who had not been crawling or walking because conditions were too unsanitary to be on the ground. The daughter started crawling, then walking, faster than one would normally expect.

"The houses for us are not just homes — they are hope."- Community leader Lidwina

WHY THE HOUSE MUST COME FIRST

We believe that the house must come first. Even if we are talking about a transitional, emergency house, we still need to think about these solutions — because people are living day to day in a constant emergency that precedes climate change.

Even a transitional house makes it possible to:



- Save lives and increase access to education
- Prevent a wide range of diseases
- Restore self-esteem and support mental health
- Mitigate the effects of climate change at the household level
- Improve quality of life, economic productivity, and reduce poverty

This is also the position of the World Health Organization, which recognises the fundamental importance of adequate housing to human health.

THE TETO MODEL

TETO is a Latin American organisation — "*techo*" means "roof" in Spanish; "*teto*" also means "roof" in Portuguese.

We are almost 30 years old in the region, originally started in Chile, and today are present in 18 countries in Latin America.

What is distinctive about our work is that we mobilise young volunteers to build houses in partnership with communities and families. Over the last 30 years, our model has evolved from just building houses to focusing on habitat more broadly — because once families have adequate housing, they gain the mental space to look at other aspects of their community life.

Our methodology is built around mutirão [PT: collective community work activity] — a word also prominently used by the Brazilian government during COP30. When we build houses, we do not build just one at a time. We build 5, 10, 15, 20 houses in the same weekend, mobilising hundreds of volunteers and the community together.

In Brazil, TETO has:

- Impacted over 5,200 families
- Mobilised over 100,000 young people
- Active operations in six states and the Federal District

THE SCALE OF THE CHALLENGE

If we urbanised one favela per week in Brazil — which is already of course impossible — it would take 230 years to include all these territories in the fabric of our city.

Brazil has over 5,000 municipalities. Most lack the resources and technical capacity to address these challenges. What happens in practice with smaller or less developed communities — those without social capital, without collective voice, whose residents are simply surviving day to day — is that they are ignored. The groups most affected by the housing deficit in Brazil are Black women who are single mothers, and they carry an extraordinary burden.

THREE PROTOTYPES: TETO'S HOUSING SOLUTIONS

Emergency House — built over 30 years across Latin America. Constructed in two days by volunteers. The family participates in the build, bringing a great deal of transformation to how the family sees themselves and mobilising the community.

Seed House — a larger house with a room, kitchen and bathroom. Takes approximately 10 full days to build. Requires more technical expertise. Designed in part to attract government partnerships.

Resilient House — prototyped in 2024, deployed in 2025. This is the focus of today's presentation.

THE RESILIENT HOUSE

The Resilient House is a concrete way to invest in preparing informal and human settlements to protect lives and to address historical inequalities. It is essential that we do not leave the most vulnerable behind.

Key features:

• Flood protection: always built elevated from the ground

• Solar panels, biodigesters and other sanitary solutions: compatible additions

- Reduced carbon footprint through a dry construction system
- Improved water tightness and durability through new panels
- Natural lighting, reducing electricity dependence
- Thermal comfort: ventilation with a rooftop flap allowing hot air to exit automatically
- Cross ventilation through strategically positioned windows
- Modular and adaptable to many different environments and terrains
- Rapid construction: two to three days by volunteers
- Recycled materials, especially in the roof tiles
- 18 m² — internal layout organised by the family using curtains or dividers

In 2025, TETO reached 86 families with this new prototype. The Resilient House was recognised at the World Smart City event in Barcelona in 2024.

THE SOCIAL TECHNOLOGY

TETO is not a construction company. We do not go in, build, and then say goodbye. We have a complete process and methodology for accompanying families, mobilising communities, and bringing tools for community development processes. Active listening is embedded in our DNA as an organisation.

The combination of technical work, social work and community development ensures that the impact goes beyond the physical construction. The mobilisation of young people and community participation is also very important for changing the paradigms around communities that have been made invisible — whose members have felt invisible for most of their lives.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Mirjeli — photographed a few weeks after the construction of her house — said:

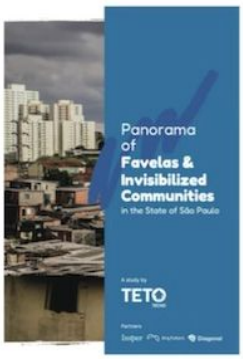
"Together we built the house with volunteers, and we did it in two days. On the third day, it rained heavily. If I had still been in my old shack, I would have lost everything."

Paulina — after losing her belongings multiple times to flooding and being too ashamed to receive visitors in her old house — said at the end of her interview:

"Now my children sleep. And now, they also dream."

If you forget everything I told you today, I hope you think about what the future of a child looks like when that child is now able to dream.

RESEARCH AND RESOURCES



We have a strong tradition of research and impact evaluation at TETO. I invite you to consult the Climate Panorama — a study conducted on how residents in 119 communities across all regions of Brazil perceive climate change, what solutions are already emerging from within those communities, and what solutions they want governments to invest in.

If we approached the adaptation process from a bottom-up perspective, it would be much faster — because communities already know what needs to be done. All publications referenced today are available in English.

Q&A — AFTER PRESENTATION 2

HELLE

Camila, how do you organise the financing and the collecting of all these materials? How did all of this begin, and how do you gather and sustain so many volunteers?

CAMILA

Basically, almost everything in our organisation is organised by the volunteers themselves. We have a very small paid team relative to the impact we achieve. In every city and state where we work, we have a local team led by two or three hired staff, and then 80 to 120 volunteers who work weekly and make everything happen.

One of the most striking things about our organisation is that the most important decision — who receives a house — is made by volunteers. I myself, am here because of my experience as a volunteer over several years.

We are a non-profit organisation and we fundraise every year — from individuals and from companies. Unfortunately, in Brazil, we have not yet been able to establish government partnerships. Other countries have been able to do so: Chile, Argentina, and especially Mexico, where significant government partnerships have emerged in response to major climate events in recent years.

Housing remains a difficult cause for fundraising in philanthropy. It had a wave of visibility around the right-to-the-city movement about ten to twelve years ago, but it has been steadily declining since. How many houses we can build really comes down to funding. We organise four to five construction weekends per year per city.

Volunteering is part of our DNA — but we must actively plan and implement a strategic approach to bringing in young volunteers and keeping them over time. We want people to stay for two, three, four years, moving up in responsibility and technical competency.

PARTICIPANT

How do you manage water supply, sewage and waste collection? Do you have any support from local authorities on those matters?

CAMILA

It really depends on the community. TETO itself does not manage these systems — we always work together with the community.

On water: in most communities, people usually have at least one to three water supply points. The problem is that people must find a way to bring it to their house — either using pumps to fill tanks close to the house or carrying buckets. When we have funding for water projects, we install rainwater collection systems with filters in homes.

On sewage: when we have sufficient funding we install biodigesters that connect to multiple houses at the same time and can produce gas for people to use in their stoves at home. In many communities, however, waste still flows into the nearest canal, which is the most common outcome in the absence of formal infrastructure.

In Brazil, over the last few years, there has been a growing movement to bring sanitation to informal settlements — even where land disputes remain — because of severe river pollution. There has been more construction to address this, though it is still not enough.

HELLE — CLOSING

Thank you so much — a truly fantastic afternoon. What is really striking from both presentations is that there is a word that comes to mind: both of you have used the words dignity and self-esteem. And this is about human beings — their well-being and their sense of self-worth in all these situations.

We will send all attendants a summary and the presentations. If anyone has ideas — regarding funding, networks, or anything else — please do stay in touch. Thank you very much. It has been a real pleasure.

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