

Indicator 3.2 The number of solution-orientated communities of practice created or supported with active involvement of HSRC researchers

A solution-orientated community of practice (COP) is a fit-for-purpose, short-term ‘think tank’, usually multi-disciplinary and problem-orientated in nature. It comprises at least five regular members/active participants, of whom at least one is from the HSRC, and its existence is evidenced by a dedicated web presence, and communication or activities during the period under review.

Provide the COP topic/purpose:

City Occupied: A community of practice on informal land and building occupations

This community of practice brings together a network of scholars, activists and practitioners interested in urban housing occupations as practices of urban transgression and (re-)design, suggesting that these are sites of both immediate struggle and possibility. The COP is rooted in an understanding that informal land and building occupations are the inevitable result of systemic housing crisis – in cities of the global North and South. As such they are integral features of urban landscapes that indicate transformative possibilities for reimagining and redesigning cities in more equitable and democratic ways. Yet policy makers and the public often view occupiers as criminals and their practices as unlawful and illegitimate. This COP aims to rectify popular misconceptions and prejudices and support progressive policy approaches towards housing occupations through offering the following:

1. A networking platform for scholars, predominantly from the global South, to examine the causes, nature and possibilities of informal housing occupations across different geographical contexts.
2. A space for deliberation, experimentation and learning among scholars, practitioners, activists, occupiers and policy makers to identify practical measures and progressive policy approaches to support informal housing occupations in transitioning towards more adequate dwellings.
3. A series of seminars or workshops to discuss aspects of or related to informal housing occupations in depth, including issues of regularisation and formalisation, legal framework of property, urban commoning, urban governance and solidarity economy.
4. A tangible opportunity for publication in reputable journals with high visibility that showcases latest research and practice on informal housing occupations, with an opportunity to strengthen Southern theorising.

Provide details of the convener(s) of the COP:

Convenors:

Dr Andreas Scheba, Senior Research Specialist, Equitable Education and Economies, HSRC
 Ms Diana Sanchez-Betancourt, Senior Researcher, DCES, HSRC
 Dr Suraya Scheba, Lecturer, Environmental and Geographical Sciences, University of Cape Town

Provide details of the COP membership:

(Must have at least 5 regular members/active participants & at least 1 from the HSRC. Members can be drawn from academia, civil society and/or government, in any combination)

1. Dr Andreas Scheba, Senior Research Specialist, Equitable Education and Economies, HSRC and Centre for Development Support, University of the Free State
2. Ms Diana Sanchez-Betancourt, Senior Researcher, DCES, HSRC
3. Dr Suraya Scheba, Lecturer, Environmental and Geographical Sciences, University of Cape Town
4. Dr Nate Millington, Presidential Fellow in Urban Studies, University of Manchester
5. Mr Bevil Lucas, Reclaim the City;
6. Ms Karen Hendricks, Reclaim the City;
7. Ms Robyn Park-Ross, Ndifuna Ukwazi
8. Mr Ryan Fester, Development Action Group
9. Mr John Giraldo Diaz, Task Team Altos de la Estancia, Bogota, Colombia
10. Ms Leticia Costa, Federal University ABC, Sao Paulo, Brazil

Provide the hyperlink to the COP website/landing page accessible via the HSRC website:

www.city-occupied.net

Provide details of the activities of the COP during the year under review:

(Activities may include meetings to synthesise existing evidence, debate or discuss aspects of the topic within the group or in the form of seminars or webinars, monitor policy uptake, undertake literature reviews, study new methodological approaches to research or problem-solving to a social problem, designing demonstration studies, or producing a joint research proposal).

1. Documentary production and screenings

The COP in collaboration with occupiers, a filmmaker and research assistants produced a documentary called “City Occupied”. This documentary compares land and building occupations across Bogota (Colombia), Cape Town (South Africa) and Sao Paulo (Brazil). It is available in English and Portuguese on the project website. The documentary was screened at the occupations in each of the three cities during 2022. Besides COP members and residents, urban scholars and practitioners were invited to the viewing, which opened up collective discussions and reflections about the challenges and opportunities of occupations.

2. Community engagement events with occupiers in Cape Town (Cissie Gool House; November 2022), Bogota (Altos de la Estancia; Jan and March 2023) and Sao Paulo (Sao Joao; Jan 2023). These events were organised as part of a research trip from members of the Cape Town team to Bogota and Sao Paulo in January 2023 to visit their Brazilian and Colombian colleagues. The trip allowed the team to collectively deepen their analysis of informal occupations and future pathways, discuss research findings with occupier communities, and plan internally the writing of scholarly outputs as well as funding proposals.

3. Regular team meetings

In addition to organising specific community engagement events, members of the COP engaged regularly (at least once per month) with occupations in Cape Town (Cissie Gool House) and Bogota (Altos de la Estancia). Besides COP members, occupiers, activists and practitioners participated in these meetings, where current challenges and opportunities of the occupations were debated. These meetings also provided a platform to discuss what concrete research interventions are needed (e.g. community indicators in Bogota; or research on how the regularisation processes in Brazil can be applied in Cape Town) and to reflect on how to maximise the impact of engaged scholarship. The lessons and experiences were shared in meetings within the larger COP to analyse informal housing occupations comparatively across geographical contexts.

4. Development of joint research proposals

COP members developed and submitted research proposals in response to open calls. Two proposals were successful and will provide financial means into 2023/24 to continue our engagement with occupations, support the development of practical and policy interventions, and produce academic outputs to further global theoretical debates.

- Occupations as practices of south design. Grant funding from the Governing through design research collective.
<https://www.koozarch.com/interviews/south-designs-for-planetary-futures>
- Urban vacancy, occupation and communing: Advancing a global comparative urbanism. Urban Studies Foundation Seminar Series Award.
www.urbanstudiesfoundation.org

5. Conference panel

COP members successfully submitted a proposal for a panel session at the upcoming EADI conference in July 2023. The panel is entitled “Housing as commons: Sites of struggle and possibility”. We received and accepted four abstracts of papers. In addition to facilitating the session, COP members will jointly present a paper “City occupied: comparative study of land/building occupations in Bogota, Cape Town and Sao Paulo”.

6. Development of knowledge products

COP members submitted two journal articles and published on HSRC Review article during the year under review.

*** Attach DCEO: Research approved COP report for upload on the RMS.**
(See attached template for the COP report to be compiled)

DCEO: Research approval of the Community of Practice report:

Signature: _____

Name of DCEO: R: _____

Date approved: _____

Community of Practice (COP) report (1 Page report for DCEO: R approval)

City Occupied: A community of practice on informal land and building occupations

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Information on the COP is readily available at www.city-occupied.net and on the HSRC, EEE webpage at:

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Ms Diana Sanchez-Betancourt, Senior Researcher, DCES, HSRC

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Dr Nate Millington, Presidential Fellow in Urban Studies, University of Manchester

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