POLITECNICO DI TORINO

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Curriculum: Planning for the Global Urban Agenda

**GLOBAL GOVERNANCE AND LOCAL REALITIES:
THE IMPACT OF UN INITIATIVES ON SPATIAL
GOVERNANCE AND PLANNING IN AFRICA
- AN ETHIOPIAN CASE STUDY**

MASTER APPLICATION THESIS

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH TOPIC

The concept of global governance has emerged as a response to the increasing interconnections between countries and regions, which have redefined political, economic, and social dynamics at the international level. In an increasingly globalized context, the initiatives of international organizations, such as the United Nations (UN), United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), have taken on a central role in shaping development and land management policies in many parts of the world, including more vulnerable regions like Africa.

In Africa, spatial governance and planning are subject to a variety of influences, including the initiatives of international organizations that seek to promote sustainability, resilience, and equitable development in a context marked by social, economic, and environmental disparities.

This analysis, focusing on Ethiopia as a case study, explores how the initiatives of the UN, and in particular those of UN-Habitat and UNECA, have influenced spatial governance and planning in the country. Specifically, it examines the challenges and opportunities that arise when global guidelines interact with local needs and priorities, as well as the effectiveness of global policies in promoting sustainable land development that takes into account local peculiarities. Exploring this interaction provides important insights into how global governance can impact a critical area like spatial governance, which is crucial for the future of both Africa and Ethiopia.

1.2 RESEARCH POSITIONING AND OBJECTIVE

The objective of the research is to examine how United Nations policies and those of international organizations influence spatial governance and planning at the global, national, and local levels. Therefore, an effort has been made to assess the implementation and effectiveness of UN policies in Africa and Ethiopia and to explore the actual interaction between global and local actors. For this reason, the thesis is internally divided into three sections: the UN context in spatial governance and planning, the African context, and the Ethiopian case study with a focus on Addis

Ababa. Through this structure, the thesis seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of the influence of international policies at various territorial levels of analysis.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The UN context in spatial governance and planning:

- How does the UN contribute to spatial governance and planning to promote sustainable development, with a focus on the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

African case:

- How does UN-Habitat promote the adoption of national urban policies influencing spatial governance and planning in the African context?
- How do global policies and international organisations influence African spatial governance and planning systems?

Case study - Ethiopia:

- How do the UN and UN-Habitat operate in Ethiopia, what are the results of their initiatives in the region, and what are the changes in spatial governance and planning caused by these initiatives, affecting spatial planning policies, institutions and practices?

1.4 BRIEF MENTION TO THE METHODOLOGY

To achieve the thesis objective, multiple data collection methodologies were employed: document analysis, literature review, analysis of global and national policies, and interviews.

Document analysis was fundamental in examining the impact of the UN on spatial governance and planning. Official documents from the United Nations, UN-Habitat, and UNECA, as well as strategic plans related to the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, were reviewed. The literature review facilitated the study of academic publications and articles to understand the evolving role of international organisations in spatial governance.

The analysis of global and national policies enabled the evaluation of how UN policies, such as the Agenda 2030, those of UN-Habitat, and UNECA, could translate into concrete actions at the local level, fostering synergies with national policies.

These national policies serve as integration tools to implement global strategies through national development plans.

The interviews, on the other hand, provided valuable information that could not be obtained through the previously mentioned methods. The interview structure followed a mixed-method approach, based on an in-depth review of official UN documents and semi-structured interviews with officials from UN-Habitat and UNECA. This methodology allows for the study of how global policies promoted by international organizations are implemented in practical contexts.

1.5   STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The thesis is organized into seven distinct yet interconnected chapters, each analysing a specific aspect of the research while maintaining a coherent narrative to explore the role of the United Nations and other international organizations in spatial governance and planning at the global, African, and Ethiopian levels.

The first chapter introduces the analysis, positioning the thesis within the broader discourse on global governance and providing an overarching framework for understanding the phenomenon under study.

The second chapter provides a contextual framework for the research, illustrating how the studied processes influence other dimensions, specifically spatial governance and planning.

The third chapter delves into the various research methods employed during the preparation of the thesis. The methodology aims to ensure a rigorous analysis of the implementation of UN initiatives across different levels.

The fourth chapter examines the global context, focusing on the work of the UN and its international organizations in environmental sustainability. It analyses global plans and policies that impact various areas, from strategies to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to the implementation of projects aimed at fostering sustainable development and enhancing urban resilience worldwide.

The fifth chapter explores the African context and its urban development challenges, focusing on the rapid urbanization reshaping the continent's socio-economic landscape and driving the rise of informal settlements. Within this framework, the role of

international organizations in improving spatial governance and planning and supporting policies that effectively address these issues is examined.

The sixth chapter analyses the Ethiopian context, informed by interviews conducted during the research. Ethiopia currently represents a scenario where population growth and urbanization are interconnected phenomena, posing two critical challenges, that government agencies and international organizations must address collaboratively.

The seventh chapter synthesizes the findings of the previous chapters, serving as the culmination of the entire thesis. It reflects on their implications for future governance practices in Africa and draws overarching conclusions from the research. This chapter ties together all the key elements of the work, providing a comprehensive understanding of the role of the United Nations and international organizations in spatial governance and planning. Additionally, it discusses the limitations of the research and suggests areas for further study.

This structure offers a comprehensive overview of the work of the United Nations.

2. FRAMING THE CONTEXT

In recent years, spatial governance and planning have become a key component of sustainable urban growth in developing regions such as those found in the African context, and particularly in the Ethiopian context. The United Nations, through the organisations UN-Habitat and UNECA, has helped countries to develop national policies for equitable and sustainable use of space through the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals.

The comparative analysis proposed in this thesis is therefore situated within a field of study that overlaps spatial governance and planning systems, two key concepts for understanding the management and transformation of territories through global policies and international interventions.

Spatial governance refers to the way in which institutions, both national and international, define and manage a geographical space in order to meet the challenges of economic, social and environmental development. At the same time, spatial and urban planning is a concrete tool that allows strategic visions and governance objectives to take shape.

This chapter therefore defines the theoretical foundations of the comparative analysis and examines how interactions between global policies and local contexts manifest themselves in the management of space.

2.1 HOW INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS AND GLOBAL POLICIES INFLUENCE SPATIAL GOVERNANCE

World organisations such as the United Nations have a key role to play in guiding and shaping spatial governance and planning at global and local levels by providing technical assistance, guidance, financial resources and political support to improve land management and contribute to sustainable development. With programmes such as Agenda 2030, the United Nations has created goals that seek to address the major territorial challenges: rapid urban growth, resource scarcity, social inequality and climate change (Agenda 2030 per lo sviluppo sostenibile, 2016).

A clear example of how global policies influence spatial governance and planning is Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11), which aims to make cities safer, more

inclusive and sustainable. SDG 11 represents a global effort to protect cultural and natural heritage, improve housing conditions, reduce informal urbanisation and promote infrastructure and services that are accessible to all (United Nations, 2015). This goal therefore guides national and local governments in the development of integrated plans that link the different ideas of sustainability through strategic spatial planning.

In Africa, where urban growth is uncontrolled and creates major imbalances, global UN organisations such as UN-Habitat and UNECA play an important role in facilitating the creation of more robust governance systems (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2014).

Indeed, Africa is currently experiencing one of the fastest rates of informal urbanisation, with uncontrolled and haphazard urban growth resulting in serious land shortages, limited access to public services and a lack of proper spatial planning (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2022).

To address and overcome these problems, UN-Habitat and UNECA are working with African governments, particularly the Ethiopian government, to develop policies and strategic plans to manage urbanisation. The organisations are therefore promoting the implementation of national policies aimed at coordinating urbanisation in a sustainable manner, promoting resilience to climate problems, efficient use of resources and equitable distribution of economic benefits between urban and rural communities. In collaboration with UN-Habitat, several African countries have adopted spatial governance and planning plans that include measures to reduce the exploitation of natural resources, conserve biodiversity and improve access to basic services.

In addition, global organisations encourage coordination between national, regional and local governments, helping to build multi-level systems. However, the weakness and limitations of local institutions are a major obstacle to spatial governance and planning. UN strategies are therefore not limited to direct intervention on the ground, but also seek to strengthen institutional capacity by promoting legal and administrative reforms (National Urban Policies | UN-Habitat, n.d.). In summary, the guidelines developed by international organisations are coordinating African countries, and Ethiopia in particular, to create spatial governance plans.

2.2 How international organisations influence spatial planning

Spatial planning is a fundamental tool with which international organisations seek to translate their spatial governance policies into clear and measurable actions. The United Nations, UN-Habitat and UNECA support spatial governance and planning by promoting standards that foster sustainability, equity and inclusion at economic and urban levels. These international bodies provide guidance, pilot projects and technical assistance to help national governments manage territorial resources in a more coordinated and sustainable manner.

In the African context, where the rapid growth of cities is a multifaceted challenge, spatial governace and planning takes on greater importance. Many countries in Africa, with a focus on Ethiopia, are experiencing rapid urbanisation without proper spatial planning, resulting in disparities in access to basic services and infrastructure. At this point, international organisations are providing concrete support by offering technical expertise and targeted funding to bridge the gap in local planning capacity. For example, the United Nations, through UN-Habitat and UNECA, is implementing programmes and forming alliances to address the challenges of urbanisation, working with regional groups such as the African Union (AU) and Regional Economic Communities (RECs). These partnerships align urbanisation policies with continental development plans, such as the AU's Agenda 2063, a long-term plan for the African context that is strongly connected to the 2030 Agenda (Africa Urban Agenda Programme | UN-Habitat, n.d.).

In the Ethiopian context, the challenges of planning are numerous and complicated. The informal growth of cities, along with a fragmented urban system, limits the effectiveness of infrastructure and public services. Traditional and cultural principles of spatial organization often do not align with Western planning methodologies, making it difficult to implement standardized plans. In particular, the assistance of international agencies has simplified the creation of spatial planning tools that are better suited to the needs of local communities. The use of the 2030 Agenda in the country has promoted the strengthening of national urban policies aimed at combating informal urbanization and instead fostering organized growth that aligns with local

socio-economic realities (NSL - Netzwerk Stadt und Landschaft, 2018). Therefore, the role of global organizations in spatial governace and planning goes beyond mere guidance: it translates into building local alliances, sharing good ideas, and spreading a broader vision that fits various local contexts. This collaboration between global and local ideas helps manage the challenges of urban growth in a more systematic and sustainable way, contributing to the creation of stronger cities.

3. METHODOLOGY

In the current context of rapid urban change and global challenges, policies promoted by the United Nations and international organisations play a key role in shaping spatial governance and planning. However, the translation of these policies into concrete actions at the local level is often complex and influenced by multiple factors, including the dynamics between global and local actors, the specificities of regional contexts, and the operational challenges associated with implementation.

This study therefore proposes to explore how the global strategies of the United Nations and international organisations are adapted and implemented in local contexts, with a particular focus on Africa and Ethiopia.

3.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The objective of the research is to examine how the policies of the United Nations and international organisations affect spatial governance and planning at a global level. Specific objectives are:

- **Understanding the role of the United Nations in spatial governance and planning:** One of the main objectives of the interview is to assess the active role played by the UN in the development of spatial governance and sustainable planning policies. Similarly, it is essential to find out how global initiatives, such as Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, influence the UN's moves and resources to support local planning.

- **Examine the impact of international organisations and global policies on space governance systems and planning:** The second question explores the influence of international organisations and global policies on space governance systems in Africa. Specifically, it aims to identify the institutional linkages through which UN-Habitat programmes and other agencies promote national urban policies, and to assess how decision-making mechanisms and governance patterns on the African continent have been influenced by UN initiatives.

- **Assessing the implementation and effectiveness of UN policies in Ethiopia:** Focusing on the case study of Ethiopia, the interview aims to examine how the

United Nations, in particular UN-Habitat, works on the ground and what are the main outcomes of its initiatives. The interviewees should describe the changes brought about in the political and practical governance of the space, define the effectiveness of the strategies implemented and provide examples of successful modes and challenges.

- **Exploring the interactions between global and local actors:** Another aim of the interview is to learn about the dynamics of interaction between global and local actors, including national governments, and how these interactions influence the implementation of global policies. The aim is also to identify areas for improvement in order to ensure the effectiveness of UN policies.

- **Identifying successes, main challenges and opportunities for improvement:** The interview aims to explore what successes have been achieved and what UN initiatives still need to be improved. This includes: key successes, operational challenges and any opportunities to strengthen policies related to spatial governance and planning, so that global policies can better respond to local specificities and promote sustainable urban development.

3.2 TYPE OF INTERVIEW

The interview structure will be a mixed analysis based on an in-depth reading of UN-sponsored global urban development documents, in particular those of UN-Habitat and UNECA, and on semi-structured interviews with UN staff working at the analysis site and local academics. The field interviews address the effectiveness of official global urban development documents, the consistency of their text and content with approved global urban development frameworks, and the effectiveness of their implementation at the site of analysis.

The interviews allow us to examine how policies promoted by the United Nations and international organisations are implemented in practice. In other words, they provide an 'inside' level of analysis that reveals the operational dynamics and relationships between actors that are not always visible in official documentation. Furthermore, the stories collected through interviews help to assess whether the initiatives in question can really make a difference, i.e. whether global policies can bring about a significant

change in the dynamics of spatial governance, urban planning and institutional management.

The semi-structured interviews are thus directly linked to the research questions and provide qualitative insights that complement the documentary analysis. They provide an insider's view of practices and challenges, clarify the role and effectiveness of global and local policies, and offer insights into how international policies concretely influence spatial governance and planning in specific contexts such as Africa and Ethiopia.

3.3 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Methods for the *UN Context in Spatial Governance and Planning*

Research Question:

How does the UN contribute to spatial planning and governance to promote sustainable development, with a focus on the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

Methods:

- Document Analysis: Review of official UN documents, reports from specialized agencies, guidelines, and strategic plans related to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, with particular attention to SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities).

- Literature Review: Examination of academic studies, journal articles, and expert reports to understand the evolution of the UN's role in spatial governance.

- Analysis of Global Policies: Assessment of relevant UN policies, such as the 2030 Agenda and UN-Habitat's approach to sustainable urban planning, to identify key contributions and challenges.

Methods for the *African Case*

Research Questions:

How does UN-Habitat promote the adoption of national urban policies influencing spatial governance in the African context?

How do global policies and international organisations influence African governance systems?

Methods:

- Analysis of national policies: Examination of urban policies promoted by UN-Habitat in different African countries, focusing on the outcomes achieved and challenges faced during the implementation process.

- Review of international organization reports: Study reports from international agencies to understand how global policies influence African governance structures.

Methods for the *Ethiopia Case Study*

Research Question:

How do the UN and UN-Habitat operate in Ethiopia, what are the results of their initiatives in the region, and what are the changes in spatial governance caused by these initiatives, affecting spatial planning policies, institutions and practices?

Methods:

- In-depth case study: detailed analysis of un and un-habitat initiatives in Ethiopia, using qualitative data collected from project reports, official evaluations, and documentation from the involved agencies.

- Semi-structured interviews: gathering direct testimonies from UN-Habitat officials, Ethiopian government representatives, and local experts to assess the impact of the initiatives on spatial governance and planning.

- Direct observation and field data collection: where possible, on-site observations to understand the practical application of spatial governance policies and evaluate changes in institutional practices.

3.4 PROCESSING OF APPLICATIONS

The interview is divided into three main sections, each focusing on different aspects of research related to spatial governance and planning in the context of UN activities. Here is a detailed analysis of the sections:

Part 1: The United Nations context in spatial governance and planning

This part focuses on the overall role of the United Nations in promoting sustainable development through spatial governance and planning.

- General questions: These questions are mainly about the general perspective of the role of the United Nations in spatial planning and how the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals influence these processes. The aim is to learn, at a macro level, how the United Nations is involved in this area and to relate global strategies to the principles of sustainable development.

- Mechanism details: This section deals with the specific operational tools used by UN professionals. The questions aim to identify how the UN works, highlighting best practices and areas of success, thus providing a tangible picture of space governance initiatives.

Part 2: The African context

The second part of the interview focuses specifically on the African context, how the United Nations and UN-Habitat influence urban policy and spatial governance and planning in Africa. It is divided into two parts:

- Specific questions on UN-Habitat: this covers the role of UN-Habitat in promoting national urban policies in Africa and how these policies influence spatial governance in Africa. The aim is to understand not only how UN-Habitat influences African states, but also how global policies are adapted regionally.

- Impact of Global Policies: this part deals with the impact of global policies on African governance systems and seeks to identify concrete examples of how these forms of policy are implemented in decision-making processes and practices. The intention is to shed light on the gap between the theory of global policies and their practical implementation at the local level, in order to provide insights into critical issues specific to Africa.

Part 3: Case study - Ethiopia

Finally, the third part is a specific case study and concerns Ethiopia: a relevant context to observe the implementation of global policies at national and local levels.

It is divided into two sections:

- UN operations and UN-Habitat in Ethiopia: this part analyses how the UN and UN-Habitat operate in the Ethiopian territory, what programmes and instruments they use, who are the main actors at the national level and what is the end result of the interventions in the region. The main objective of this section is to document the direct impact of initiatives on the ground, and to compare and evaluate successes and areas for improvement.

- Impact on Space Governance policies and Practices: The questions examine the transformation of space governance practices following the implementation of UN initiatives, i.e. legislative and institutional changes. This part aims to analyse how international policies influence spatial governance and planning processes by identifying the concepts, tools and methodologies that have been introduced or changed in Ethiopia. The answer to these questions will be a crucial aspect in assessing the effectiveness and impact of global strategies at the local level.

3.5 INTERVIEW STRUCTURE

Part 1: The United Nations Context for Spatial Planning and Development

General questions:

- Can you briefly describe how the United Nations contributes to spatial planning and governance to promote sustainable development?
- How do the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) influence these contributions?

Details on mechanisms:

- What are the main tools and strategies used by the UN to support spatial governance and sustainable planning?
- Can you provide concrete examples of UN projects or initiatives that have had a significant impact in this area?

Part 2: The African Context

Specific question on UN-Habitat:

- In the African context, how Un-Habitat and ECA differ? How do they work differently?
- How does UN-Habitat/ ECA promote the adoption of national urban policies that influence spatial governance in the African context?

Impact of global policies:

- How do global policies and international organisations influence African governance systems?
- Can you provide examples of how these influences manifest themselves in concrete spatial governance decision-making processes and practices?

Part 3: Case Study - Ethiopia

The UN and UN-Habitat in Ethiopia:

- How do the UN, UN-Habitat and ECA work in Ethiopia? Through which programmes and instruments? What are the results of their initiatives in the region?
- Who are their stakeholders at the national level?
- What changes in spatial governance have been brought about by UN initiatives in Ethiopia?
- How have these initiatives influenced spatial governance structures and legislation?
- How have they influenced spatial planning policies, instruments and practices? What are the main changes in spatial planning policies and practices in Ethiopia that can be attributed to UN, UN-Habitat and ECA initiatives?
- What spatial planning concepts, tools and methodologies have been introduced or changed in Ethiopia as a result of UN-Habitat, ECA and UN initiatives?
- How have spatial planning practices changed at the local level in Ethiopia as a result of UN initiatives?
- What do you see as the main successes and challenges of the UN initiatives in Ethiopia in the context of spatial governance and sustainable planning?
- As last question: What could be improved to increase the effectiveness of UN or ECA initiatives?

3.6 SELECTION OF INTERVIEWEES

The selection of interviewees has been one of the most complex phases of the research. Many emails were sent to a large number of UN professionals requesting their participation; unfortunately, not all of them responded positively to the invitation, thus reducing the sampling base. In the end, however, ten participants were recruited, all with key roles within the UN: five members of UN-Habitat, the UN agency for the promotion of sustainable cities and housing, and five members of UNECA, the Economic Commission for Africa. This distribution allows for good coverage and representation of the two key agencies in Ethiopian governance and spatial planning.

In addition, local officials were selected to provide a more 'inside' view of the Ethiopian reality. This methodological choice allowed for a broad and concrete view of UN practices and policies and how they are actually implemented at national and local levels, highlighting challenges, successes and areas for improvement in the dynamics of governance and spatial planning in Ethiopia.

The combination of international and local perspectives thus provides both a global and a local view of the role of governance dynamics. The interviews reveal not only the successes of UN policies and implemented practices, but also the tensions in the new mechanisms, such as the lack of inter-institutional coordination, the scarcity of financial resources and the need to adapt global modalities to local specificities. As a result, this methodology allows for a more realistic assessment of the UN's work and has identified areas for improvement in Ethiopia's sustainable spatial planning capacity.

A strict anonymisation policy was also adopted in the interviews to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the interviewees. For this reason, the names of the interviewees will not be transcribed or published in the research findings and therefore their identities will not be revealed.

In particular, the choice of local officials and the security of personal data help to ensure the ethical effectiveness of the research and the validity of the results obtained for the improvement of sustainable urban development policies.

3.7 PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

The interviews conducted provided an important range of information to analyse the internal dynamics and challenges of the United Nations. The questions were adapted according to the interviewee, as the roles of the respondents within the organisation varied. However, the general structure and objective of the question remained the same, so that a targeted comparison could be made between the different responses.

The interviewees are:

1	UN-habitat	Consultant as an urban economist
2		Country programme manager
3		In charge of the Finance and Economic Planning Section
4		In charge of human settlements
5		In charge of the Finance and Economic Planning Section
6	UNECA	Social affairs officer
7		Data analyst in the Gender Poverty Social Policy Division
8		In charge of social affairs
9		Senior Infrastructure Advisor
10		Economic Affairs Officer

Table 1-List of interviewees- re-elaboration from: Interview conducted

The sample of interviews allowed us to obtain a general picture of the role of international organisations in different contexts, such as socio-economic, urban, planning and environmental. This made it possible to achieve the original research objectives (see section 3.1) and to obtain a deeper understanding of the key issues and a more detailed understanding of the phenomena studied.

- **Understanding the role of the United Nations in spatial governance and planning**

  The interviews provided much insight into the role of the United Nations in the context of spatial governance and sustainable planning. The organisation Un-Habitat works at a purely local level with regional governments and

municipalities, while UNECA focuses on the implementation of national urban policies, influencing development plans through the production of guidelines and technical assistance. This information provided insight into how global efforts, such as the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, influence local policies (see section 6.3).

- **Examine the impact of international organisations and global policies on space governance systems and planning**

  The responses highlighted how global policies and global projects affect spatial management systems in Africa and Ethiopia. UNECA and UN-Habitat play an important role in supporting and shaping national urban policies through practical guidance. A key example is Voluntary Local Reviews (VLR), which help cities assess progress and simplify the achievement of the SDGs, thus demonstrating a direct link between global and local policies (see section 6.4).

- **Assessing the implementation and effectiveness of UN policies in Ethiopia**

  The analysis of the Ethiopian context, the case study of the research, showed that UNECA and UN-Habitat are working with the central government, regional governments and communities to implement policies and projects that can influence the governance system. Thanks to international assistance, Ethiopia has introduced new, more modern spatial planning tools that make spatial governance and planning more sustainable and equitable. (see sections 6.3.1, 6.4.2).

- **Exploring the interactions between global and local actors**

  The interaction between global and local actors was at the heart of the interviews conducted. Collaboration between international organisations and local actors is crucial to ensure that global policies are adapted to local needs and allow for the integration of different perspectives and resources to create more inclusive and contextualised solutions.

- **Identifying successes, main challenges and opportunities for improvement**

  The last interview questions asked for a personal view on the real impact of the United Nations in Africa and Ethiopia. This gave an insight into the challenges and main successes of international organisations. The main achievements are

the development of VLR (voluntary local reviews) guidelines and the promotion of regional participation in urban planning. However, significant challenges were also highlighted, such as the need for greater integration between national and local policies and institutional capacity building at the municipal level (see section 6.4.2)

4. THE UN AND ITS ROLE IN SPATIAL GOVERNANCE AND PLANNING

The United Nations (UN) plays a crucial role in spatial governance and planning at global, national, regional and local levels. Since its founding in 1945, the UN has sought to promote international cooperation. Over time, its mandate has expanded to address new global challenges, including sustainable development and the management of territorial resources. Through initiatives such as the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 11, the UN is working to make cities and communities more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. In this context, the role of UN agencies, such as UN-Habitat, is crucial in promoting effective urban planning policies and practices at the global, regional and local levels. This section examines the historical evolution of the UN, its organisational structure, funding sources, criticisms and challenges, and its contribution to urban planning and sustainable development.

4.1 STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION

The United Nations Organisation (UN) is an international arrangement, constituted as a federation of states with the aim of pursuing common goals. It has its own institutional structure, aimed at coordinating common actions. The UN ideally aims to bring together all the world's states and operates with a broad competence that is not limited to a single sphere (Re, C. C. L. ,2003). Its definition as an international organisation between states emphasises the voluntary membership of the parties concerned, which takes place through the manifestation of will. It presents itself as an organisation open to 'all peace-loving states', a characteristic that distinguishes it from other international organisations, highlighting its aspiration towards universality and representation of the entire international community (Conforti, B., & Focarelli, C., 2012) The United Nations Charter, Art. 7, (United Nations, 1945) identifies the overall structure with six organs that are considered 'principal' bodies, considered fundamental to the functioning of the organisation: the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Guardianship Council, the International Court of Justice and the Secretariat.
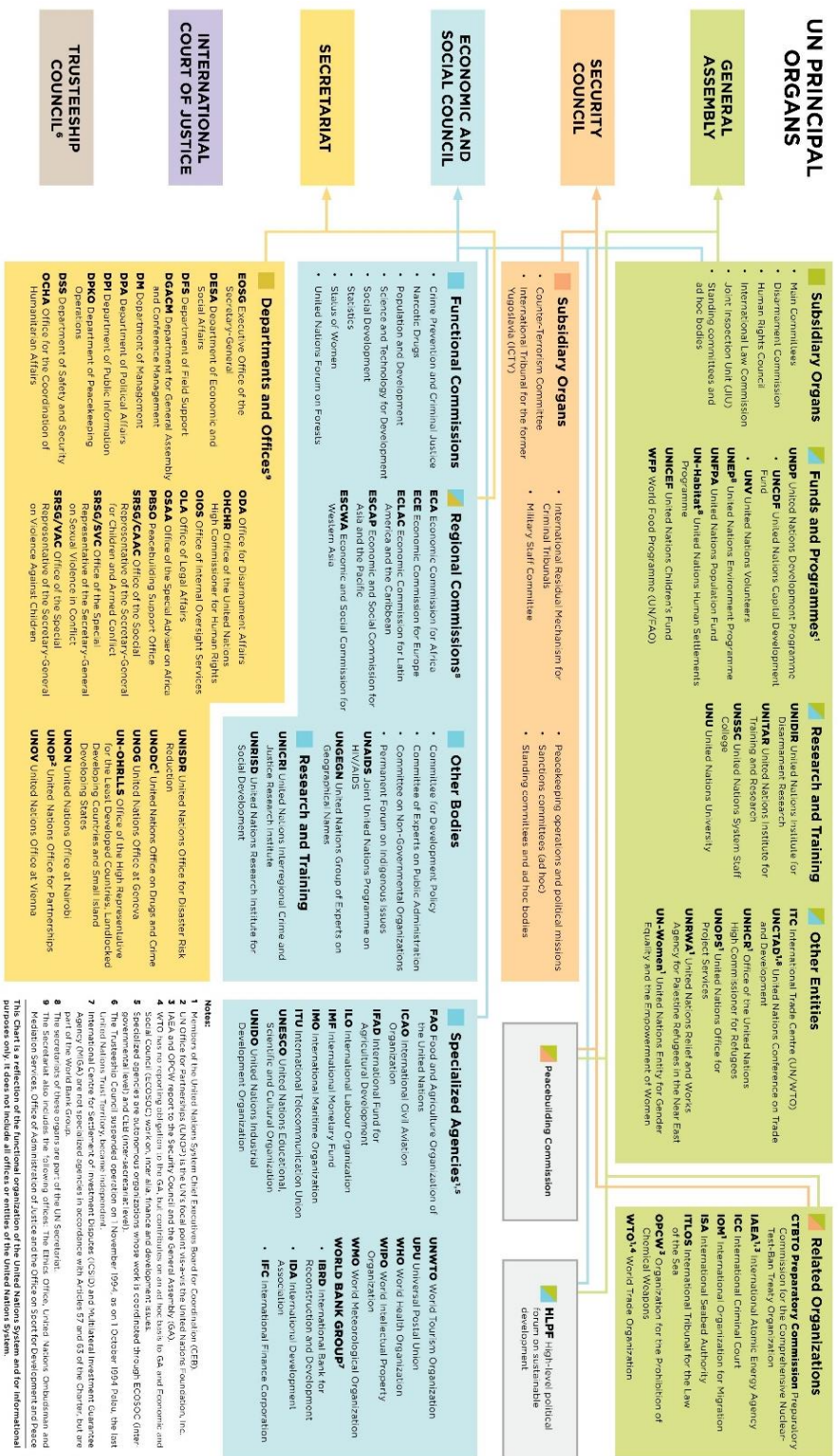
The United Nations System

UN PRINCIPAL ORGANS

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

SECURITY COUNCIL

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

SECRETARIAT

INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE

TRUSTEESHIP COUNCIL[6]

Subsidiary Organs
- Main Committees
- Disarmament Commission
- Human Rights Council
- International Law Commission
- Joint Inspection Unit (JIU)
- Standing committees and ad hoc bodies

Funds and Programmes[1]
- UNDP United Nations Development Programme
  - UNCDF United Nations Capital Development Fund
  - UNV United Nations Volunteers
- UNEP[2] United Nations Environment Programme
- UNFPA United Nations Population Fund
- UN-Habitat[2] United Nations Human Settlements Programme
- UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund
- WFP World Food Programme (UN/FAO)

Research and Training
- UNIDIR United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research
- UNITAR United Nations Institute for Training and Research
- UNSSC United Nations System Staff College
- UNU United Nations University

Other Entities
- ITC International Trade Centre (UN/WTO)
- UNCTAD[1][2] United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
- UNHCR Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- UNOPS United Nations Office for Project Services
- UNRWA[1] United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
- UN-Women[1] United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

Related Organizations
- CTBTO Preparatory Commission Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization
- IAEA[1][3] International Atomic Energy Agency
- ICC International Criminal Court
- IOM International Organization for Migration
- ISA International Seabed Authority
- ITLOS International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea
- OPCW[3] Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
- WTO[1][4] World Trade Organization

Subsidiary Organs
- Counter-Terrorism Committee
- International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY)
- International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals
- Military Staff Committee
- Peacekeeping operations and political missions
- Sanctions committees (ad hoc)
- Standing committees and ad hoc bodies

Functional Commissions
- Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice
- Narcotic Drugs
- Population and Development
- Science and Technology for Development
- Social Development
- Statistics
- Status of Women
- United Nations Forum on Forests

Regional Commissions[8]
- ECA Economic Commission for Africa
- ECE Economic Commission for Europe
- ECLAC Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
- ESCAP Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
- ESCWA Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

Other Bodies
- Committee for Development Policy
- Committee of Experts on Public Administration
- Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations
- Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
- UNAIDS Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
- UNGEGN United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names

Research and Training
- UNICRI United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute
- UNRISD United Nations Research Institute for Social Development

Specialized Agencies[1][5]
- FAO Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
- ICAO International Civil Aviation Organization
- IFAD International Fund for Agricultural Development
- ILO International Labour Organization
- IMF International Monetary Fund
- IMO International Maritime Organization
- ITU International Telecommunication Union
- UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
- UNIDO United Nations Industrial Development Organization
- UNWTO World Tourism Organization
- UPU Universal Postal Union
- WHO World Health Organization
- WIPO World Intellectual Property Organization
- WMO World Meteorological Organization
- **WORLD BANK GROUP**[7]
  - IBRD International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
  - IDA International Development Association
  - IFC International Finance Corporation

Departments and Offices[9]
- EOSG Executive Office of the Secretary-General
- DESA Department of Economic and Social Affairs
- DFS Department of Field Support
- DGACM Department for General Assembly and Conference Management
- DM Department of Management
- DPA Department of Political Affairs
- DPI Department of Public Information
- DPKO Department of Peacekeeping Operations
- DSS Department of Safety and Security
- OCHA Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
- ODA Office for Disarmament Affairs
- OHCHR Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
- OIOS Office of Internal Oversight Services
- OLA Office of Legal Affairs
- OSAA Office of the Special Adviser on Africa
- PBSO Peacebuilding Support Office
- SRSG/CAAC Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict
- SRSG/SVC Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict
- SRSG/VAC Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children
- UNODC United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
- UNOG United Nations Office at Geneva
- UN-OHRLLS Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States
- UNON United Nations Office at Nairobi
- UNOP[2] United Nations Office for Partnerships
- UNOV United Nations Office at Vienna
- UNISDR United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction

Peacebuilding Commission

HLPF High-level political forum on sustainable development

Notes:
1. Members of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB).
2. UN Office for Partnerships (UNOP) is the UN's focal point vis-a-vis the United Nations Foundation, Inc.
3. IAEA and OPCW report to the Security Council and the General Assembly (GA).
4. WTO has no reporting obligation to the GA, but contributes on an ad hoc basis to GA and Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) work on, inter alia, finance and development issues.
5. Specialized agencies are autonomous organizations whose work is coordinated through ECOSOC (inter-governmental level) and CEB (inter-secretariat level).
6. The Trusteeship Council suspended operation on 1 November 1994, as on 1 October 1994 Palau, the last United Nations Trust Territory, became independent.
7. The World Bank Group includes the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) and Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) are not specialized agencies in accordance with Articles 57 and 63 of the Charter, but are part of the World Bank Group.
8. The secretariats of these organs are part of the UN Secretariat.
9. The Secretariat also includes the following offices: The Ethics Office, United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services, Office of Administration of Justice and the Office for Sport for Development and Peace.

This Chart is a reflection of the functional organization of the United Nations System and for informational purposes only. It does not include all offices or entities of the United Nations System.

Figure 1- UN Structure- source from: UN Organization Chart – United Nations, n.d

As can be seen from the conceptual map, all the different parts of the organisation are interlinked, creating a complex hierarchical structure. It shows the various organs, specialised agencies at each level, programmes, commissions and offices. This structural model allows the United Nations to address various global issues in a multidimensional way and to create multi-level cooperation that promotes efficient solutions. In addition, the existence of organs and commissions dedicated to specific geographical areas and thematic issues allows the UN to adapt to the needs of different contexts and to mobilise specialised resources and expertise to respond to specific challenges.

Reflecting on what has been written before, the United Nations Charter, Art.7, (United Nations, 1945) not only identified the internal bodies but also defined the organisation's objectives. The aims, therefore, are (Cecchini, 1987):

- to maintain international peace and security;
- to develop friendly relations between nations, based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples;
- to achieve international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian nature, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms without distinction;
- to build a centre for coordinating the activities of nations to achieve these common ends.

The UN thus interacts to improve living conditions in the most disadvantaged countries through a series of initiatives aimed at promoting sustainable urban development and social and economic well-being. Among these initiatives, an important connection can be made with the idea of building a centre for the coordination of the activities of nations to achieve common ends.

4.1.1 HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE UN FROM ITS ORIGINS TO ITS CURRENT STRUCTURE AND GLOBAL ROLE

The historical evolution of the UN is a complex story reflecting the changing dynamics of international relations, global politics and the evolving challenges of the world

faces. The UN was founded in 1945 as the need arose after the war to establish an effective international organization to prevent future conflicts and regulate cooperation among nations. The Charter of the United Nations was signed on June 26, 1945 by 50 countries in San Francisco, California, and officially entered into force on October 24, 1945 (United Nations, n.d).

At first, the UN focused on rebuilding war-torn countries, but with the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, the UN was faced with new opportunities, including an expansion of UN membership (Our History, n.d.). In the 21st century, the UN has faced a number of complex and interconnected challenges; to address this, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were developed in 2000 and, later, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015. Through a wide range of agencies, programs and initiatives, the UN works today to address urban challenges such as poverty, access to clean water, decent housing and environmental sustainability. Embodying the principles of multilateralism and collective action, they aim to build inclusive, resilient and sustainable urban communities, thereby contributing to a more equitable and prosperous world for all.

4.1.2 RESOURCES OF FINANCING FOR THE UN

Global problems and crises require global management, a task that the UN takes on. The UN's funding system is based on the mandatory and voluntary contributions, without limits or guidelines, of the 192 states. The entire UN financing system, purely voluntary, currently covers about $26 billion of the UN's total estimated annual expenditures, including all the various bodies, agencies, programs and funds worldwide. (Weisser, E. 2009).

Currently, the UN's focus is on financing sustainable development initiatives. As discussed in the previous chapter, the UN has faced a number of complex and interconnected challenges during the 21st century, including climate change, global health pandemics and humanitarian crises. In 2015, the United Nations adopted the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the main objective of which is to increase available financial resources and align economic, social and environmental policies. In broad terms, financing for sustainable development includes both public and private

resources. These resources include funds generated within individual countries, such as through taxation, as well as funding provided by one country to support another in achieving its development goals, such as through grants and low-cost loans. Specific areas for action in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda include domestic public resources, international private enterprise and financing, international development cooperation, international trade, debt and debt sustainability, and addressing systemic issues. Although pursuing the Addis Ababa Agenda is a complex task, UN Secretary-General António Guterres called for an economic stimulus of at least USD 500 billion to significantly increase accessible and long-term financing. The High-Level Dialogue on Financing for Development on 20 September 2023 at the United Nations marked a critical moment to review the implementation of the Addis Agenda and presented innovative and practical solutions to unlock better financing and address the wide financing gap between developed and developing countries (Martin, 2024).

4.2 CRITICISMS AND CHALLENGES: EFFECTIVENESS AND BUREAUCRACY

The UN, however, also faces a number of criticisms and challenges that question its real effectiveness and its ability to adequately respond to global challenges and demands coming from struggling states such as, for example, in the political sphere, when the world has been dangerously affected by rivalries between major powers, found during the heated political debates of 2023. In this context, the criticism directed at the UN concerns its real effectiveness, which, however, is inherently dependent on the willingness to comply of its member states, which often prioritize national interests over international obligations (Khasru, S. M., n.d.).

In the area of sustainability, a common criticism directed at UNs concerns their limited capacity to effectively implement mandates, especially in the area of implementing actions for sustainable development. Citing the 2030 Agenda (which we will discuss in more detail in section 4.3.1.1), it represents an ambitious global plan of action to address sustainability challenges, although its implementation depends on the capacity the UN has in ensuring that member states meet these set goals.

This problem is often attributed to the bureaucratic inertia of these, which are characterized by a complex and slow structure that prevents a rapid response to

emergencies and global challenges by slowing down decision-making and, thus, preventing an effective response to crises that undermine the organization's credibility. In addition, the sustainability critique also affects the UN's ability to coordinate actions among the various stakeholders involved in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. This problem manifests itself because the sustainability strategy relies on short-term, small-scale partnership projects instead of focusing on long-term, transformative, multi-stakeholder partnerships with the potential for far-reaching impact (United Nations, n.d.). Multi-stakeholder partnerships enable all stakeholders to make concrete contributions to the implementation of the goals outlined in international development plans. The need to involve these stakeholders in the planning phase has become more urgent due to the financial crisis and global recession, making partnerships an effective vehicle for promoting sustainable development in a globalized world (Challenges to Sustainable Development | UN DESA | United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.). Coordination among different parties is therefore essential to ensure an integrated and synergistic approach to sustainability challenges, but it can be difficult to achieve because of the diversity of interests and priorities among governments, businesses, civil society and other stakeholders.

The criticisms of the UN are complex and closely linked to their primary objectives. However, these issues also emerge because of the challenges the UN faces socially, geopolitically, and economically. Geopolitical challenges relate to the lack of a collective vision because economic, social, and environmental development priorities differ among some states of the nations, and this situation can overshadow collective global action (International, 2024). Social divisions and geopolitical tensions are seen as challenges and obstacles to collaboration on emerging global challenges (Risk Management 360, 2022).

Environmental challenges, on the other hand, are linked to wider sustainability issues, such as social and economic. Significant changes in any dimension affect the socioeconomic environment. The change cannot come only from traditional policy responses or simply from a change in technologies. To avoid a developmental stall, consumption patterns, everyday behaviours, and individual and collective mindsets

must also change, moving away from consumerism, short-term and small-scale planning vision. Picking up on what was written earlier, strong coordination of the international community is needed to be able to define global action for sustainable development (Sustainability Challenges, 2023).

4.2.1 STATE SOVEREIGNTY ISSUES: ANALYSIS OF CONCERNS AND TENSIONS REGARDING NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY IN UN CONTEXTS.

The main criticisms that can be identified when discussing the United Nations are those related to state sovereignty, which generate analyses and tensions regarding national sovereignty. First, national sovereignty represents the fundamental principle that a state is independent and autonomous within its territorial boundaries and has supreme authority over its territory and population. This concept is considered one of the pillars of the structure of the international order. (Zanellato & Zanellato, 2023).

However, with the rise of globalisation and the increasing interconnectedness of states, there has been a need for global challenges which cannot be solved individually to be tackled collectively, and this new world situation, which is characterised by international trade within a framework of common rules, has brought to light growing and critical weaknesses (Visco, I., 2014).

Although the UN Charter (see section 4.1) recognises the full independence of all its members, but many people question the impact of the UN on the dimension of state sovereignty, arguing that it excessively limits the autonomy of member states. However, Article 2 of the UN Charter requires the organisation not to intervene in matters within the internal competence of states. The article specifies that no provision shall authorise the United Nations to intervene in any matter which is exclusively within the internal competence of a State, and further emphasises the fundamental principles of sovereign equality of the parties concerned by stressing that all shall be treated on an equal footing (Sovereignty, Treccani, n.d.). The UN therefore recognises and respect the sovereignty of states and respects their political, economic and social borders.

However, this general principle partially limits the scope of UN action and is seen as an obstacle in situations of tension. In fact, Article 2 is seen by some as a potential

barrier to UN action in cases of serious human rights violations within member states (Sovereignty, Treccani, n.d.). However, as analysed in the previous section, the UN cannot impose its decisions because its effectiveness depends heavily on the willingness of states to comply with the global collective strategy (Khasru, S. M., n.d.). Indeed, the issue of national sovereignty presents a challenge to the realization of supranational forms of government that can effectively address global challenges. Although the UN is an international organization, it faces limitations in its ability to act decisively on projects and strategies of global importance.

Its main powers to maintain international peace and security are concentrated in the Security Council (see section 1.1). However, the structure of the Security Council can hinder effective action in response to crisis situations. Critically, the voting rights of permanent members can block the adoption of Council policies, even when there is general consensus among other members. The tension between the national sovereignty of member states and the need for coordinated international action is evident in this context. On the one hand, Member States see the right to vote as a key element in ensuring respect for their sovereignty and protecting their national interests; on the other hand, the international community recognizes the importance of coordinated action to address global challenges, which often require a collective and multilateral response (Prevenire I Conflitti Violenti, n.d.).

4.3 THE UN'S ROLE IN SPATIAL GOVERNANCE AND PLANNING AND HOW IT CONTRIBUTES TO PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The UN acts directly in the context of spatial governace and planning through initiatives that define specific development tools, methodologies and guidelines for spatial governance and sustainable and spatial planning.

Before examining the initiatives in detail, it is appropriate to give a definition of sustainable development. It is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. To achieve sustainable development, it is important to harmonize three key elements: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection (Agenda 2030 for Sustainable

Development, n.d.). Here are some of the programs in detail (THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development, n.d.):

- The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs (section 4.3.1.1): The United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda as a tool to address global challenges such as poverty, climate change, and economic and social inequality. These goals (SDGs) integrate spatial planning into national and local policies to ensure linear and sustainable development.

- UN-Habitat (Section 4.3.2.1): This UN program focuses on sustainable urban development and provides guidance, technical assistance and funding to improve spatial governace and planning and access to basic services in cities.

- United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) (section 4.3.3.1): works with African countries to promote inclusive spatial planning and sustainable development through research, training and technical advice.

Through the above projects, the UN supports sustainable development through:

- Sustainable production and consumption patterns: Promoting resource efficiency and the adoption of production and consumption practices that reduce environmental impacts (Martin, 2023).

- Green infrastructure: Promoting the development of infrastructure that integrates nature-based solutions to improve urban resilience and reduce environmental impact (Sustainable Consumption and Production | Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.).

- Access to basic services: Ensure access for all to basic services such as clean water, sanitation, clean energy and adequate housing (Martin, 2023).

In parallel with these initiatives, the United Nations facilitates dialogue and cooperation between different levels of governance by promoting the exchange of knowledge, experience and land-use planning practices. This process of information exchange helps improve planning and land-use capacities, enabling communities to address sustainable spatial planning challenges in a coherent way (UN AND OECD: Sustainable Development is Strongly Linked to the Future of Cities, 2022).

This collaborative approach has shifted UN initiatives from a hierarchically ordered system of regulatory mechanisms to a model determined by goals and outcomes. This paves the way for a gradual transformation of development as a policy goal. Indeed, the goals and results approach imply a greater focus on the type of planning to be undertaken at the local level and the forces/energies to be activated. Here, spatial governance, understood as the set of modalities (approaches, processes, decision-making architectures, tools) through which actors in a given territory interact for a common goal, becomes central. Through spatial governance, UN initiatives acquire concreteness and are translated into a realistic system of achievable goals within a certain time frame. In addition, governance can bring even sometimes conflicting goals into a unified framework. Taken to the extreme, it can be said that development is actually a problem of governance and spatial planning, and that the first step towards its realisation is the identification of the spatial matrix to which to refer (Sustainability as a problem of territorial governance. The case of peri-urban green infrastructure, n.d.).

4.3.1 GLOBAL LEVEL

At this level, the UN operates through the Global Compact, which is the largest form of global partnership involving a wide range of stakeholders: states, governments, private companies, nongovernmental organizations, civil society representatives, and the United Nations. The Global Compact is nothing less than the world's largest corporate sustainability initiative. The initiative was created by former U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan who, at the 1999 World Economic Forum, invited business leaders to work with the organization to create a global compact of shared values and principles to put a human face on the global marketplace. Today, the Global Compact plays a key role in mobilizing the private sector to contribute to global sustainability by providing tools and resources and promoting responsible and sustainable business practices. The Global Compact calls on companies to align their strategies and operations with ten universal principles related to human rights, labour, anti-corruption, and environment (United Nations, 2022).

The ten universal principles of the UN Global Compact, divided into four main subcategories, are:

Human Rights	1	Businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights;
	2	Businesses should ensure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses;
Labour	3	Businesses should uphold the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining;
	4	The elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour;
	5	The effective abolition of child labour;
	6	The elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation;
Environment	7	Businesses should support a precautionary approach to environmental challenges;
	8	Undertake initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility;
	9	Encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies;
Anti-Corruption	10	Businesses should combat corruption in all its forms, including extortion and bribery.

Table 2-Ten universal principles – re-elaboration from: United Nations, 2022

The global role of the United Nations is therefore crucial in promoting sustainable development and addressing global challenges. Through the Global Compact, different actors are mobilised to work together for a more sustainable future. These sustainability goals link to another key pillar of global action, the 2030 Agenda.

4.3.1.1 AGENDA 2030 AND THE SDGS

In recent decades, as we have seen in the previous paragraphs, the model of environmental sustainability has received particular attention globally. In this context, we can mention the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, also known as the Earth Summit or Eco92. It defined the first sustainable development goal, which was to promote policies to address the problems posed by climate change on a global scale.

In addition, it is important to recall the Millennium Declaration adopted by the General Assembly in 2000, in which all member states of the United Nations committed to achieving the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. These goals included the establishment of a global partnership to build a more inclusive, equitable and sustainable world (United Nations General Assembly, 2000).

Finally, the Paris Agreement (2015), an international climate change treaty that emphasized the need to limit global warming, strongly influenced the environmental goals of the 2030 Agenda.

These global sustainability initiatives set the stage for a new initiative. In fact, in 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be achieved by 2030.

This is based on five key concepts, also known as the "five Ps" (Ministry of Environment and Energy Security, n.d):

- People: represents the social dimension, with the goal of eradicating hunger and poverty and ensuring dignity and equality;
- Prosperity: represents the economic dimension, with the goal of ensuring responsible use of resources;
- Peace: represents the social and political dimension, with the goal of promoting peaceful, just and inclusive societies;
- Partnership: represents the external dimension, with the goal of implementing public-private partnerships;
- Planet: represents the climate dimension, with the goal of protecting the planet's natural resources and climate for future generations.

To understand in more detail what this new initiative represents, the definition given by the world organisation: "*L'Agenda 2030 per lo Sviluppo Sostenibile è un programma d'azione per le persone, il pianeta e la prosperità sottoscritto nel settembre 2015 dai governi dei 193 Paesi membri dell'ONU. Essa ingloba 17 Obiettivi*

per lo Sviluppo Sostenibile – Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs – in un grande programma d'azione per un totale di 169 'target' o traguardi. L'avvio ufficiale degli Obiettivi per lo Sviluppo Sostenibile ha coinciso con l'inizio del 2016, guidando il mondo sulla strada da percorrere nell'arco dei prossimi 15 anni: i Paesi, infatti, si sono impegnati a raggiungerli entro il 2030. Gli Obiettivi per lo Sviluppo danno seguito ai risultati degli Obiettivi di Sviluppo del Millennio (Millennium Development Goals) che li hanno preceduti, e rappresentano obiettivi comuni su un insieme di questioni importanti per lo sviluppo: la lotta alla povertà, l'eliminazione della fame e il contrasto al cambiamento climatico, per citarne solo alcuni. 'Obiettivi comuni' significa che essi riguardano tutti i Paesi e tutti gli individui: nessuno ne è escluso, né deve essere lasciato indietro lungo il cammino necessario per portare il mondo sulla strada della sostenibilità." (ONU Italia, 2015).

The main goal is to reduce all forms of poverty and hunger, inequality and injustice, and to promote policies that ensure gender equality, inclusive and equitable education, decent work, economic growth, environmental sustainability and public health. The 2030 Agenda therefore provides a global vision of sustainable development, as reflected in its definition, as it is not limited to developing countries as in the case of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Sustainable Development, n,d).

The Agenda defines also the sustainable development goals (SDGs), which represent 169 micro-goals, but the most important are 17. Those SDGs are:

Figure 2-SGDS –source: Barta, Belanche, Flavián, & Terré, 2023

The SDGs take a balanced view of the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. This integrated approach reflects the recognition that to be truly sustainable, development must balance economic and social needs while protecting the environment and promoting the sustainable use of natural resources. These three dimensions are interlinked and indivisible, meaning that progress in one area affects the others (Balocco & Balocco, 2024).

Each country is required to integrate the SDGs into its national development policy and to monitor progress against a set of more than 240 indicators, which will allow regular assessment of performance by the UN and national and international public opinion. This approach is crucial because each country faces specific and unique challenges in the struggle to achieve sustainable development (L'Agenda 2030 Dell 'ONU per Lo Sviluppo Sostenibile - Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development, n.d.). Thus, the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda provide a universal guide for addressing the major global challenges of our time and promoting equitable, inclusive and sustainable development for all.

4.3.1.1.1 SDG 11

As we saw in the previous section, one of the main pillars of the Agenda is the close interrelationship between the different goals, but only a few of them directly address the issue of spatial governance and planning, as we will see with SDG 11 (Keesstra et al. 2016).

SDG 11 aims to transform cities into environments that promote the social, economic and cultural well-being of citizens. To achieve this goal, it is essential for cities to achieve safe and adequate urban spaces while maintaining the integrity of the surrounding neighbourhoods (Akuraju, et al., 2020).

Urban centres, which are the location of more than half of the world's population, are largely responsible for global warming, growing inequality, and pollution problems. Therefore, SDG 11 pays special attention to large cities and aims to make them resilient and sustainable. Here are the main challenges associated with this goal:

Rapid urbanization	The growth of urban centres often occurs without proper planning, leading to problems such as uncontrolled urban sprawl, the creation of slums, and increasing social and economic inequality.
Pollution and environmental degradation	Urban centres are responsible for the majority of global carbon emissions and energy consumption. Air pollution and ineffective urban waste management pose serious threats to public and environmental health. In addition, lack of access to clean energy, clean water and adequate sanitation in slums has negative health impacts.
Transportation and mobility	The increase in the number of cars creates problems of traffic congestion, fuel consumption, pollutant emissions and environmental degradation.
Vulnerability to natural disasters	Urban centres are particularly vulnerable to natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, and storms. The lack of resilient infrastructure and management plans increases fatalities and economic losses.
Social and economic disparities	Inequalities in access to basic services, education, health, and economic opportunity are exacerbated in urban areas.

Table 3-Challenges related to SDG 11- re-elaboration from: Admin, 2020, United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, n.d

Here are the main opportunities associated with this goal:

Investment in sustainable infrastructure	Increased investment in public transport systems and sustainable urban infrastructure can reduce environmental impacts and promote inclusiveness and safety in cities.
Technologies and innovations for sustainability	The use of smart technologies and innovative solutions, such as sustainable transport systems, energy-efficient buildings and waste management technologies, can help create more sustainable and resilient cities.
Protecting cultural and natural heritage	Protecting the world's cultural and natural heritage by promoting sustainable tourism and enhancing the cultural and natural resources of cities.
Reducing environmental impact	Reducing the negative environmental impact of cities through sustainable management and the adoption of sustainable consumption and production practices.
Disaster resilience	Increasing the resilience of cities to natural disasters by building resilient infrastructure, planning and adopting integrated climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies.

Table 4-Opportunities related to SDG 11- re-elaboration from: United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, n.d., Takase, C. n.d.

In order to successfully address the many challenges and seize the opportunities mentioned above, SDG 11 includes specific targets, or micro-objectives, such as (United Nations, 2015): ensure access to adequate housing for all (11.1); ensure access to safe transport systems (11.2); ensure inclusive and sustainable urbanisation (11.3); provide universal access to green spaces (11.7); and support least developed countries (11.C).

Micro-objective 11.C is a crucial aspect of the research as it analyses the creation of international partnerships between non-governmental organisations, states, NGOs and the private sector, which is the focus of the following chapters. Developing countries are supported through multi-level cooperation, which enhances the capacity of individual governments to develop plans and projects that align with and achieve the SDGs. Through technical assistance, training programmes and the implementation of guidelines, local leaders acquire the necessary skills to apply innovative elements of sustainability to national policies. In this way, Goal 11.C promotes equitable and sustainable development and also provides significant opportunities for local economic development (United Nations, 2015).

4.3.2 NATIONAL LEVEL

At the country level, UNs work directly with individual member state governments to provide advice, support, and assistance in implementing projects and initiatives that promote sustainable development, health, and human rights. Consequently, the role of the UN in providing technical and financial assistance to countries to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the UN-Habitat program (discussed in the next section), and other initiatives is critical. In fact, UN programs affect all countries and all individuals, and no one should be left out or left behind on the path needed to get the world on the road to sustainability.

The UN supports countries through various actions, including:

Action Plans and National Strategies	It helps countries develop and implement national strategies consistent with the global sphere. This includes setting goals, monitoring progress and reporting on results. It also provides technical assistance and guidance to ensure that these strategies are effective and inclusive.
Partnerships and cooperation	It promotes partnerships between governments, local authorities, civil society and the private sector, which are key to addressing global challenges.
Capacity building	This includes training government officials, improving capacity for data collection and analysis, and providing resources for better governance and policy implementation.
Funding and resource mobilization	Mobilize financial resources to support sustainable development projects at the national level.
Monitoring and reporting	It plays a key role in monitoring the progress of individual governments. Through committees of experts, the organization monitors and evaluates each country's progress in implementing conventions, international treaties and SDGs.
Cooperation with specialized agencies and programs	It facilitates direct cooperation between national governments and specialized UN agencies and programs, such as UH-Habitat, which provide direct support to governments in various areas.
Presence of national/regional offices and facilities	Presence of offices, training centres and logistical facilities in several countries.

Table 5-UN actions at National Level- re-elaboration from: Ministry of University and Research, 2021

The UN's approach with States is based on direct cooperation to actively involve governments in the implementation of a global strategy. This approach includes the mobilisation of resources and continuous monitoring to ensure that global goals are achieved through local action.

4.3.2.1 UNITED NATIONS HUMAN SETTLEMENTS PROGRAM (UN-HABITAT)

One of the most important United Nations initiatives at the country level is the UN-Habitat or United Nations Human Settlements Program. It is a United Nations agency established in 1978 following the first United Nations Conference on Human Settlements held in Vancouver in 1976 (UN Habitat - Treccani - Treccani, n.d.).

This is the UN's flagship program for governments and sustainable urban development, in collaboration with international partners, guides debate, research and practice on the global localization of the SDGs.

Thus, UN-Habitat can be said to be more than a technical tool; it is an inclusive and participatory decision-making process that addresses competing interests and is linked to a shared vision, a global development strategy and policies at the national, regional and local levels. It is a key component of spatial governance and planning that promotes national democracy, participation, inclusion, transparency, and accountability, with the specific goal of ensuring sustainable forms of urbanization and spatial quality, i.e., a powerful tool for reshaping the forms and functions of cities and regions to generate endogenous economic growth, wealth, and employment, while meeting the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized people (Italian Society of Urban Planning, 2020).

Based on an equitable development strategy, UN-Habitat has defined the five principles of sustainable planning to address contemporary urban challenges such as uncontrolled urban sprawl, social inequalities and environmental degradation. The five principles are (Chookah, Mushtaha, Alsyouf & Alkhalidi, 2021):

Principle 1	Create an adequate and efficient road network. It includes a hierarchy of roads, arterial routes and local roads serving different traffic rates.
Principle 2	Adapting to a high-density population directly responding to rapid population growth and global urbanization, this principle aims to promote sustainable urban sprawl and avoid urban sprawl.
Principle 3	It aims to develop a compatible range of activities and land uses in appropriate locations, with the flexibility to adapt to market changes over time. It also aims to support local jobs, increase the local economy, provide closer public services, and support mixed communities.
Principle 4	Social mixing by offering houses in different price ranges to accommodate people with different income levels. This principle aims to build relationships between different social classes living in the same community.
Principle 5	Limit specialized land use, that is, limit the singular use of blocks or neighbourhoods. This Principle aims to adjust the use of functional zoning to implement mixed land use policies.

Table 6-The five principles of UN-Habitat- re-elaboration from: Chookah, Mushtaha, Alsyouf & Alkhalidi, 2021

Therefore, it is important to focus on UN-Habitat's principles to achieve comprehensive planning for the sustainable city of the future. The agency is promoting several key approaches to successfully implement the five pillars of sustainability, one of which is achieving the 2030 Agenda through Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs). VLRs assess local governments' progress towards achieving the SDGs and work with data that is only available at the local level, generating a wealth of information and

detailed analysis that can enrich national reviews (UN-Habitat, 2022). VLRs can therefore play a key role in two ways (UN-Habitat, 2022):

- by encouraging a shift in thinking toward a holistic understanding of sustainability within national and local governments;
- by broadening community participation through raising awareness, building a sense of co-responsibility and mobilizing around the SDGs.

Un-Habitat therefore promotes the achievement of environmental, social and economic sustainability through multi-level collaborations for a better and more inclusive urban future.

4.3.3 REGIONAL LEVEL

The UN works at the sub-national level to address region-specific issues and promote regional cooperation. By working at this level, the organisation can facilitate dialogue, mediation and resolution of economic, social and environmental problems between countries in the same geographical area, thereby contributing to stability and territorial security (Levi, n.d.).

The international body operates through various modalities, such as sub-national offices and centres, regional agencies and programmes, regional economic commissions, and through partnerships and cooperation (UN-Habitat, 2021) (Ufficio federale dello sviluppo territoriale [ARE], n.d.).

The Regional Economic Commissions (RECs) play a key role in adapting the global objectives to the specificities and needs of each region. Each focus on a specific regional area and facilitates cooperation among member countries to address common economic and social challenges and promote sustainable development.

There are currently five RECs (UN-Habitat, 2021) (Ufficio federale dello sviluppo territoriale [ARE], n.d.):

- The Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), established in 1947 and is responsible for promoting the economic and social development of the countries of Europe and Central Asia and deals with a wide range of issues, including trade, energy, environment, transport, urban development and cross-border cooperation.

- The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), established in 1947 and promotes economic and social development in Asian and Pacific countries. It deals with issues such as poverty reduction, sustainable development, regional trade, technological innovation and cross-border cooperation.

- The Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), established in 1958 (see next section) and works to promote the economic and social development of African countries. It focuses on issues such as economic diversification, infrastructure, agriculture, climate change, governance and human resource development.

- The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC), established in 1948 that promotes economic and social development in Latin America and the Caribbean. It deals with issues such as reducing inequality, environmental sustainability, regional trade, economic integration and financial cooperation.

- The Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (UNESCWA), established in 1973 and promotes economic and social development in West Asian countries. It focuses on issues such as governance, sustainable development, energy, education, health and regional cooperation.

- Regional Partnerships and Cooperation: The UN promotes partnerships and cooperation with regional and subregional organizations to address common challenges. For example, UN-Habitat works with the African Union and other African regional organizations on sustainable urban development.

In addition, regional economic commissions facilitate cooperation and sharing of best practices among member countries. This exchange of knowledge and experience helps replicate successful initiatives and address common environmental and economic challenges. Finally, regional reports take advantage of the VLRs discussed in the previous section, which allow regions to monitor and report on progress toward achieving the SDGs. These reports provide detailed data at the regional level, thereby increasing transparency and accountability (Emilia-Romagna Region, n.d.).

4.3.3.1 UNECA

In this section we will focus on the importance of the Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the UN regional body dedicated to economic and social development on the African continent, which is explored in more detail in the following paragraphs. Founded in 1958, this plays a crucial role in promoting economic growth, poverty reduction and sustainable development in Africa. Through its mandate, UNECA works to identify the unique challenges facing Africa and to develop effective strategies and policies to address them. In addition to playing a coordinating role among African countries, it provides technical assistance and financial support for the implementation of projects and programs aimed at improving the living conditions of citizens in African regional areas. UNECA's strength stems from its role as the only UN entity charged with working at the regional and subregional levels to mobilize and channel resources toward Africa's priorities (About the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, n.d.). Its contribution also looks at advancing the 2030 Agenda, and thus a sustainable global strategy, which focuses on three core functions:

Convening role	Facilitating specialized regional intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder forums that lead to the endorsement of development policy frameworks, benchmarks, and implementation strategies that strengthen multilateral cooperation at the regional and subregional levels.
Thought leadership	Conduct interdisciplinary research and analysis that promotes the fusion of sustainable development dimensions, encouraging the inventive design of public policies.
Operational role	Providing policy advice at the country level through tailored support that addresses the needs of member states in areas consistent with its normative and analytical activities, in collaboration with the UN system's collaborative efforts at the country level.

Table 7-UNECA Agenda 2030 contribution- re-elaboration from: About the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, n.d.

Through these functions, UNECA aims to fulfil its core mission of providing ideas and actions for an empowered and transformed Africa, based on the 2030 Agenda. The core mission is guided by the five new strategic directions, which are (About the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, n.d.):

- Enhance UNECA's position as a leading knowledge institution;
- Develop macroeconomic and structural policy options to accelerate economic diversification and job creation;
- Design and implement innovative financing models for a transforming Africa;
- Help find solutions to regional and cross-border challenges;
- Defending Africa's position globally and developing regional responses as a contribution to global governance issues.

Through its functions and new strategic objectives, UNECA plays a crucial role in promoting sustainable and inclusive economic transformation in Africa.

4.3.4 LOCAL (URBAN) LEVEL

The United Nations operates at the local level through a range of specialized agencies, programs, and funds that work in public-private partnerships with national governments, private agencies, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The various actors seek to address socio-economic, environmental and humanitarian challenges at the local level. With a focus on environmental goals, they support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through various modalities:

Supporting local sustainable development strategies	Providing technical assistance and guidance to local and regional governments to develop strategies and action plans in line with the 2030 Agenda.
Working with local governments through UN Country Teams UN	Country Teams (UNCT) work closely with local and regional authorities to coordinate UN support for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the national and subnational levels.

Table 8-How the UN supports SDGs at the local level-re-elaboration from: SeCTeuR, n.d., Business Operations, n.d.

All these modalities define local networks that promote the implementation of Global Compact principles (see section 1.3.1) through an integrated approach that includes training, partnerships, advisory services, advocacy and monitoring. These efforts contribute to creating an enabling environment for environmental, economic and social sustainability. For example, the aforementioned UN Country Teams (UNCTs) work with local governments and private organisations to raise awareness and provide guidance on compliance with the 10 principles of the global programme, which cover human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption. (Global Compact Network Italy and Global Reporting Initiative. n.d).

Based on what has been analyzed, it is possible to say that the United Nations is working on several fronts to ensure that the urban, regional, national and global levels are closely interconnected in promoting sustainable development.

5. THE AFRICAN CASE

The previous chapter examined the role of the United Nations in global spatial governance and planning. This section links issues of spatial governance and global policy to the African context, exploring the institutional and governance characteristics that define the continent. The role of national and regional institutions in spatial management is crucial, but often constrained by structural and operational limitations. New territorial approaches adopted by local institutions, which seek to respond to growing urban needs with innovative and context-specific strategies, are analysed. However, African spatial governance remains complex, characterised by critical issues such as lack of coordination, limited resources and growing demand for public services. The chapter shows how UN policies and initiatives, particularly those of UN-Habitat, apply to the African context, where urbanisation is often chaotic and unplanned. It examines the challenges of urbanisation and the contribution of international organisations in supporting sustainable urban development. This linkage between chapters shows how the UN's global principles are adapted to specific African needs, providing a framework for targeted interventions to address the continent's critical spatial and urban issues.

5.1 CHALLENGES AND CRITICALITIES OF AFRICAN URBANISATION

Urbanisation is one of the most profound transformations the African continent is facing in the 21st century. Since 1990, the number of cities in Africa has doubled from 3,300 to 7,600, and their total population has increased by 500 million people. African cities are therefore the fastest growing cities in the world. Urbanisation offers immense opportunities to accelerate progress towards the 2030 Development Agenda (see Chapter 4.3.1) to promote the integration of the African continent (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2022).

However, urbanisation in Africa poses a number of significant challenges and critical issues that need to be addressed in order to fully realise the potential for economic development and improved living standards. These challenges and critical issues are:

Rapid and Unplanned Urban Growth	As previously reported, the number of cities in Africa has increased significantly since 1990, from 3,300 to 7,600. This rapid urbanisation has often outstripped the capacity for planning and infrastructure development. The lack of controlled and adequate planning has led to the uncontrolled growth of cities, with negative consequences for the quality of life and urban management.
Infrastructure Deficit	African cities have serious infrastructure deficits, particularly in the areas of electricity, water and sanitation. For example, only 20% of rural households have access to electricity, compared to 80% in large cities. This disparity highlights the need for significant investment to improve urban infrastructure and provide basic services to the entire population.
Limited Administrative Capacity of Local Authorities	Local authorities often lack the resources and capacity to manage and regulate urban growth and provide adequate services. Limited administrative capacity hinders the planning and implementation of sustainable urban policies.
Informal Economy and Employment	Much of Africa's economic activity and urban employment remains informal, reducing tax revenues and worker protection. Economic informality is a major challenge to inclusive economic growth and social protection.
Housing Shortage and Informal Settlements	Rapid urbanisation has led to the growth of slums and informal settlements in many African cities. The lack of effective housing policies has contributed to the proliferation of precarious settlements, with serious implications for the health and safety of residents.

Table 9-Issues of African urbanization- re-elaboration from: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2022

The main challenges are:

Challenges Linked to the Environment and Climate Change	Urban growth leads to increased pollution and environmental pressures, while many cities are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Sustainable management of the urban environment and adaptation to climate change are essential to ensure the resilience of African cities.
Economic Transformation Challenges	Although urbanisation offers economic opportunities, many African cities have not experienced the rapid economic transformation seen in other regions. The lack of industrialisation and service sector development limits the potential for sustainable economic growth.
Regional Inequalities	There are significant disparities between large cities and smaller urban areas in terms of infrastructure, services and economic opportunities. These regional disparities contribute to internal migration by exacerbating urban problems.
Cross-border Integration Challenges	Many urban agglomerations cross national borders, but trade barriers limit economic integration. Cross-border cooperation is essential for the balanced development and economic integration of cross-border urban region.
Transport and Connectivity Issues	Inadequate transport infrastructure limits inter-city links and economic integration. Investment in efficient public transport and improved road networks is needed to facilitate urban mobility and support economic development.

Table 10-Challenges of African urbanization- re-elaboration from: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2022

«Africa is a particularly pertinent example of the problems under consideration because it has the fastest population and urban growth in the world, the lowest rate of

development and economic growth, and many of the poorest countries, especially in tropical Africa. It therefore reflects with stark realism many of the most serious difficulties facing urban health and ecology » [Clarke 1993: 260].

Despite these challenges and critical issues, urbanisation in Africa represents a tremendous opportunity to promote economic development and improve living standards, if managed in a strategic and integrated manner. The key to addressing these critical issues lies in the development of comprehensive policies and targeted investments that can harness the potential of urban growth while promoting balanced and sustainable development.

5.1.1   History of urbanization in the African context

In order to fully understand the process of urbanisation on the African continent, it is necessary to analyse past events. Urbanisation in Africa has a complex history, shaped by various socio-economic, political and environmental factors.

Urbanisation began long before the colonial period, with important ancient cities such as Timbuktu in Mali, Greater Zimbabwe and the Swahili coastal city-states. These cities were centres of trade, culture and political power, often linked by extensive trade networks across the Sahara and along the coast.

Their existence proves that urbanisation in Africa is not a recent or imported phenomenon, but has ancient and indigenous roots on the continent.

This pre-colonial urban history is important for understanding the long-term development of African cities and their role on the continent (Hope, 1998).

Subsequently, the colonial period (late 19th to mid-20th century) greatly accelerated the urban process. Colonial powers established cities as administrative centres and hubs for resource extraction.

Cities such as Nairobi, Lagos and Johannesburg grew rapidly as colonial authorities-built infrastructure to support their economic activities. Urban planning during this period was often segregated, with separate areas for Europeans and Africans, resulting in lasting spatial inequalities (Hope, 1998).

Colonial cities were planned with a clear separation between residential areas for Europeans and those for Africans. This residential inequality was evident in cities like

Nairobi, where European neighbourhoods had better infrastructure and services than African neighbourhoods.

Spatial inequality led to unequal distribution of urban resources and services. Areas inhabited by Europeans were well served by modern infrastructure, while African areas suffered from shortages of basic services such as drinking water, electricity and health care. These inequalities had long-term consequences and contributed to the formation of slums and informal settlements on the urban periphery, which persist to this day (Andersson, 2016).

At the dawn of independence in the late 1950s, about 14.7% of Africa's population lived in urban areas. Between 1950 and 1975, Africa's urban population grew rapidly from 14.7% to 25.7%. This increase was fuelled by both internal migration and natural growth of the urban population. The number of cities in Africa doubled from about 3,300 to 7,600, adding about 500 million people to the urban population. This period saw significant migration from rural to urban areas as people moved to the city in search of better economic opportunities and services. Urbanisation was driven by the need for administrative centres, industrialisation and the expansion of education and health services. With independence, many African nations established their capitals and administrative centres in existing or new cities. These centres became centres of attraction for people seeking employment and government services (Hope, 1998).

In the 2000s, Africa's urban population increased to 37.2 per cent. This period was characterised by rapid urban growth, often outstripping the capacity of cities to provide adequate housing, infrastructure and services. Economic challenges have led to reduced public investment in urban infrastructure and services, increased urban poverty and the proliferation of informal settlements (Hope, 1998).

The lack of adequate investment in physical infrastructure and human capital has prevented cities from reaping the economic benefits of urban agglomeration, such as increased productive efficiency and job creation. As a result, many African cities have seen an increase in the informal sector, with the proliferation of slums and precarious settlements housing a significant proportion of the urban population (Overseas, 2021).

To date, urbanisation in Africa continues at a rapid pace, with projections suggesting that by 2050 almost 60% of the continent's population will live in urban areas (Hope, 1998). In fact, approximately 50-57% of Africa's population already lives in urban areas, and projections indicate that this percentage will increase to almost 60% by 2050 (Belgrano, 2018).

This phenomenon of urbanisation is accompanied by impressive population growth, with the continent potentially home to around 2.3 billion people by 2050. Rapid urban growth has put a strain on existing infrastructure. Many African cities struggle to provide basic services such as clean water, electricity, sanitation and adequate housing. The lack of effective urban planning has led to chaotic and unregulated urban expansion. This phenomenon is accompanied by the marginalisation of suburbs, where living conditions can be worse than in rural areas (Cacciolatti, 2022).

In addition, urban sprawl often occurs at the expense of natural habitats, leading to loss of biodiversity and destruction of ecosystems. Air and water pollution is also a growing problem, contributing to disease and mortality (Alice for Children, 2023).

The future of urbanisation in Africa will depend on the ability of governments and institutions to address these challenges through international cooperation and sustainable and inclusive urban planning. It is essential to integrate the economic, social and environmental performance of cities to ensure balanced development and improve the quality of life of urban dwellers.

5.1.2 UNPLANNED URBANISATION AND TERRITORIAL IMBALANCES

As analysed above, Africa is undergoing a period of rapid urbanisation, which poses significant challenges and creates territorial imbalances. Although this phenomenon offers opportunities for economic development, it is often uncontrolled and generates a number of social, economic and environmental problems. Urbanisation in Africa is characterised by a number of key aspects.

- The proliferation of slums: Many African cities are characterised by the proliferation of slums, where living conditions are extremely precarious. The prime example is perhaps Nairobi, which is home to some of the largest and poorest slums in the world, with significant shortages of basic services such as

running water and electricity. About 60% of Nairobi's population (estimated at 5.5 million) lives in 110 slums surrounding the city centre. These slums occupy only 6% of the city's surface area, highlighting the serious problem of overcrowding (Adminalice, 2024).

The second example is Ethiopian cities, which provide significant examples of the presence of slums and thus of precarious living conditions. In particular, in the capital Addis Ababa, around 80% of the population live in areas that are considered slums. Only 7% of homes are connected to a sewerage system. 25% of the population does not have access to adequate sanitation. The 35% of dwellings consist of only one room, highlighting severe overcrowding. (Henrietta, 2023).

- Urban expansion: Cities are expanding rapidly, often without proper planning. This leads to uneven growth and inefficient use of urban land. Urban expansion in Africa is rapid and often uncontrolled, leading to territorial imbalances with sharp contrasts between rich and poor areas. Western-style skyscrapers stand next to vast areas of slums and shantytowns (Oltremare, 2021).

Figure 3-Example of the city of Addis Ababa Ethiopia. Camilla Paris - Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, December 2023

Figure 4-Example of the city of Addis Ababa Ethiopia. Camilla Paris - Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, December 2023

In fact, many African cities lack effective urban plans and proper urban management. Many urban plans in Africa have been developed using Western models, which almost always do not fit the local context (Fig. 1/2).

This can result in plans that do not effectively respond to the specific realities and needs of African cities. In addition, local authorities often lack the financial and technical resources to implement and enforce comprehensive urban plans. On the other hand, conflict and political instability drive people to seek refuge in cities, increasing the pressure on urban infrastructure. The concentration of investment and economic development in large cities attracts large populations from less developed areas. (Oltremare, 2021).

- Concentration of resources: Financial, human and infrastructure resources are often concentrated in large urban areas, leaving rural and peripheral areas without adequate investment. This leads to a widening gap and territorial imbalances between developed cities and less developed areas. Most economic activities are concentrated in cities, leading to fierce competition for resources between urban and rural residents. This leads to the migration of agricultural workers to cities, resulting in a decline in food production in rural areas and an increase in economic inequalities between urban and rural regions (Alice for Children, 2023). The concentration of resources in large cities can lead to the marginalisation of informal settlements and slums. For example, the neighbourhoods of Kirkos, Tolu Dimtu, Haiatt are slums in Addis Ababa that have been negatively affected by urban growth and development in the core area. Resources allocated to urban renewal and infrastructure development often do not reach these peripheral areas, leaving them with limited access to basic services such as clean water, health and education (Cosa Resterà di Addis Abeba | L'Espresso, n.d.).

- Environmental impact: Rapid, unplanned urban expansion is often at the expense of natural resources, leading to environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity. Cities often expand at the expense of surrounding natural areas, resulting in the destruction of natural habitats. This environmental degradation is exacerbated by a lack of investment in physical facilities and human capital, making it difficult to reap the expected economic benefits of urbanisation (Oltremare, 2021). Urbanisation also contributes to air pollution and increased greenhouse gas emissions. Although Africa accounts for only 3-4% of global

emissions, the continent is extremely vulnerable to climate change, with significant impacts on agriculture, the energy sector and local economies (Carbone et al., 2024).

Technological innovations and progress do not always go hand in hand with improving the environment. While large-scale urbanisation in Africa has highlighted the problems of overcrowding and lack of services and stimulated the search for solutions, it has also created problems of environmental devastation, bio-climatic change, crime and inequality

5.1.3 PROBLEMS OF URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUBLIC SERVICES

Lack of adequate infrastructure is a widespread problem in Africa.

Most urban residents have limited or no access to urban infrastructure that provides basic services such as water, sanitation, transport and energy. Decisions on infrastructure planning and development often ignore where new informal developments are actually taking place, the needs of the population are not being met, and the cost of poor-quality services can be prohibitive. As a result, infrastructure planning and investment tends to benefit only the better-off. For example, low-income commuters mainly walk, cycle and use public transport, but more than 95% of road space is taken up by cars and lorries.

Informal transport therefore, minibuses, motorbikes, tricycles, collective taxis and tok tok, serve most cities in Africa because reliable public transport is not available.

Informal transport - minibuses, motorbikes, tricycles, collective taxis and tok-tok - therefore serves most cities in Africa because reliable public transport is not available. City authorities often ignore and tolerate these services because officials lack the capacity to regulate the many small and large independent formal and semi-formal services. Frequent power outages, up to 25 per month, also place a heavy burden on businesses and informal settlements.

An interesting example of inadequate infrastructure is Addis Ababa, which received a substantial loan from the World Bank to expand its sewerage network, but the proportion of the population served has only increased from 10 to 20 per cent because the sewerage lines were extended only to households with proof of land ownership,

ignoring the thousands of people living in mud and tin shantytowns who make up the majority of the social base. With almost half of the city lacking title deeds, most households were forced to dispose of waste in an inappropriate manner. This shows how the lack of formal housing and adequate infrastructure acts as a barrier to the provision of public services.

In most growing cities on the African continent, gaps in municipal public services are filled by a network of informal and semi-formal providers, from community organisations and other private companies. These alternative service providers provide essential services, but what they offer can sometimes be expensive or of poor quality, partly because government authorities provide limited oversight and rarely regulate delivery. (*Executive Summary | Seven Transformations for More Equitable and stainable Cities*, n.d.).

5.2 SPATIAL GOVERNANCE AND PLANNING IN AFRICA

Spatial governance in Africa is characterised by a complex interaction of historical, political, economic and social factors. Different countries have adopted various forms of spatial governance to address the challenges of ethnic diversity, power distribution and conflict management. The colonial legacy (see section 2.2.1) has left a deep imprint, with national borders drawn by European powers often disregarding pre-existing ethnic and cultural divisions. This led to internal conflicts and rivalries that continue to this day. The governance structures, imposed during the colonial period, have influenced post-independence administrative and political institutions creating a complex and often problematic environment.

Some African countries have adopted federalism as a means of managing ethnic diversity and promoting territorial integration. Ethiopia, Nigeria and Somalia, for example, have adopted federal constitutions in response to ethnic demands for autonomy and self-government. However, the results have been mixed. In Ethiopia, federalism facilitated cultural and linguistic plurality, but failed to reduce exclusion and improve equitable access to power for all groups. Another example is South Africa, which adopted a political order with strong federal characteristics to balance

interests during the post-apartheid transition without formally declaring itself a federal state (Yimenu, 2024).

In addition, in recent decades many African countries have embarked on decentralisation processes to improve governance and bring decision-making closer to local communities. This process has transferred some prerogatives to regional authorities and local communities to ensure the recognition and security of land rights. However, decentralisation has faced several challenges, including (Kappy, 2024).:

- Limited resources and lack of transparency in the management of local affairs;
- Inability of the territorial administration to coordinate government action at the decentralised level;
- Socio-political tensions and security crises that further complicate local spatial governance and planning.

These problems are directly linked to unplanned urbanisation, where rapid urban growth often occurs without adequate spatial planning. The lack of effective local spatial governance and planning, exacerbated by the challenges of decentralisation, contributes to the emergence of informal settlements and the proliferation of urban areas lacking basic infrastructure and services (see chapters 5.1.2, 5.1.3). Moreover, weak local institutions and insecure land rights encourage practices such as land grabbing, which exacerbate territorial imbalances and widen socio-economic disparities.

Thus, while decentralisation aims to strengthen local governance, in the absence of adequate resources and transparent management, it can actually contribute to uncontrolled urban growth and further territorial fragmentation. In this context, it is essential that decentralisation processes be accompanied by integrated urban planning strategies and local capacity building in order to effectively manage urban growth and ensure a more equitable distribution of territorial resources. (Oltremare, 2021).

5.2.1 ROLE OF NATIONAL AND REGIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN SPATIAL GOVERNANCE

African governance has a variety of institutional and governance characteristics that reflect the continent's complexity and diversity. The African Union (AU), formally established in 2002, is one of the most important governance institutions on the

continent. It emerged from the transformation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), which was created in 1963 to promote unity and solidarity among African states and to complete the process of decolonisation. The objectives of the AU include (Centro Di Ateneo per I Diritti Umani - Università Di Padova | L'Unione Africana: Storia, Obiettivi, Funzioni E Principali Organismi, n.d.):

- Promoting the economic and political integration of the continent.
- Assist African states in the context of the global economy.
- Address social, urban management, economic and political problems.
- Addressing environmental and climate change challenges

The AU consists of several key bodies, including:

African Union Assembly	The supreme decision-making body of heads of state and government.
Executive Council	Composed of ministers of foreign affairs or other designated ministries who take decisions on political and development issues.
African Union Commission	The administrative and operational body of the AU, headed by a chairperson and composed of eight Commissioners responsible for different areas such as peace and security, political affairs, energy, trade, social affairs, rural economy, human resources and economic affairs.
Pan-African Parliament	It was created to ensure the participation of African peoples in the development and economic integration of the continent.

Table 11 - AU 'bodies- re-elaboration from: Centro Di Ateneo per I Diritti Umani - Università Di Padova | L'Unione Africana: Storia, Obiettivi, Funzioni E Principali Organismi, n.d.

In line with the AU's development and cooperation strategy, the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) are key intergovernmental organisations for economic, political and social integration in Africa. RECs promote development and seek to improve existing regional infrastructure, such as transport and energy networks, to enhance

connectivity and support economic development. Indeed, as analysed above, Africa lacks adequate infrastructure (Centre for Environmental Rights, 2024).

Institutions such as the African Union (AU) and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) are playing an increasing role in continental governance. These organisations promote economic, political and urban integration, conflict resolution and cooperation between states. However, the effectiveness of these organisations is often limited by national sovereignty and political differences among members.

In addition, economic and development initiatives are often central to African spatial governance and planning. Governance is seen as a key factor for sustainable development, improving the quality of life, regulating uncontrolled urban sprawl, improving the economy and reducing informal employment, and improving the political environment and stability in Africa. However, its practical implementation faces a number of difficulties, including (Magazine, 2023):

- Neopatrimonialism: A model in which state resources are used to maintain political control, often at the expense of economic development and political stability.

- Corruption and institutional weakness: Endemic problems that undermine the effectiveness of democratic institutions and the separation of powers.

- Legitimacy crisis: Frustration over broken promises and the enrichment of political elites has fuelled protests and social unrest, especially among the youth.

On of the most significant development initiatives is the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), launched in 2001 by the African Union (AU). NEPAD focuses on (African Union - Enciclopedia - Treccani, n.d.):

- Economic development;
- Private sector development;
- Economic and urban governance.

There is an interesting link between NEPAD and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) (see section 4.1.2). This link lies in the fact that the AAAA was strongly inspired by the NEPAD initiative; indeed, their common economic governance

objective is to improve socio-economic conditions in Africa through sustainable development strategies. NEPAD can be seen as one of the main instruments through which African countries can realise the ambitions of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. The AAA advocates the need to strengthen programmes such as NEPAD through international support and development finance cooperation. Furthermore, NEPAD, with its emphasis on African leadership and local solutions, complements the principles of the AAA by promoting the economic autonomy of the African continent and contributing to the achievement of the SDGs within the framework of a global partnership (NEPAD / AU Development Agency | African Union, n.d.).

Another initiative is the African Union's Agenda 2063, which includes a series of key programmes designed to stimulate Africa's growth and economic development. These programmes aim to improve infrastructure, promote industrialisation and strengthen the continent's ability to compete globally

Agenda 2063 is structured around several key aspirations (P,2022):

- Inclusive and sustainable economic growth;
- Continental integration;
- Good governance and democracy.

National governance in Africa is characterised by a combination of formal institutions and informal practices that reflect both democratic aspirations and the continent's structural challenges. Initiatives such as the African Union and NEPAD represent significant efforts to improve governance and promote development, but many challenges remain to fully realise these goals.

5.2.2 ROLE OF LOCAL INSTITUTIONS: THE NEW TERRITORIAL APPROACHES

The local dimension of African governance aims to propose decentralised territorial units. This objective proposes the creation of local development areas. This approach allows new decision-making and management centres for spatial governance and planning to emerge closer to the actors, strengthening governance at the local level to reconcile divergent interests and transform the multiple citizenships that coexist into a nationalisable citizenship. In this case, decentralisation (see section 2.3) becomes an attempt to reconstruct the state in such a way that the lower level can serve the other

territorial levels. The local that is created is thus a new version of a combination of vertical networks between local and national institutions. It is at the local level that people become aware of their geographical base and their needs, and that they fully assume their various responsibilities. It is also in the local context that consensual and participatory management takes place. Therefore, the primary importance of the local is to create a new alliance between national and local elites to promote the development process.

The other objective of the local is to change the current mode of governance, linking the management of public services to different geographical levels to ensure better management within the municipal territory.

The management of public services can be more effective if it is coordinated between different levels of government. For example, local authorities can manage day-to-day services, while higher levels can plan and finance long-term infrastructure. Strengthening municipal services could also enable the more dynamic and better organised socio-cultural groups to create a real competition for development within the population. Overall, the development of the local level through decentralisation allows a break with past practices that gave excessive powers to central government. It is from the local level that we can hope to reconcile populations with the promises of modernity, in the context of a social contract that provides the basis for a new citizenship within African states. Finally, building the local can be a springboard for discussions on cross-border cooperation (Igue, n.d.)

However, this new decentralised territorial approach presents substantial challenges that must be managed to realise its full potential.

They are:

Capture of power	One of the main criticisms of decentralisation is the risk of local elites capturing power and replicating the dynamics of exclusion at the national level. This can limit the effectiveness of local governance and hinder the real community development.
Conflicts of Jurisdiction	Decentralisation can lead to conflicts between different jurisdictions, particularly over access to infrastructure and management of natural resources such as land. These conflicts can further complicate local governance and undermine stability.
Limited institutional capacity	Many local governments in Africa lack the financial resources and institutional capacity to effectively manage the new powers and responsibilities resulting from decentralisation. This limits their ability to provide adequate public services and promote local development.

Table 12-Challenges of the new territorial approach – re-elaboration from: Ercolessi & De Simone, 2017

The local dimension of African governance is crucial to the continent's development process, representing a fundamental pillar for the restructuring of the changing state and the promotion of a more inclusive citizenship. Through decentralisation, the way has been opened for a more participatory governance, in which local communities take a central role in defining their own future. This transformation not only favours a better distribution of power between the various levels of government, but also strengthens the bond between populations and institutions, renewing confidence in the state's ability to respond to local needs.

5.2.3 CRITICISMS AND CHALLENGES IN AFRICAN SPATIAL GOVERNANCE

African spatial governance, particularly in urban and economic management, faces several critical issues and challenges that affect the continent's development.

Good spatial governance should include three interrelated attributes: decentralisation, which promotes progressive and inclusive decision-making and service delivery; entrepreneurship, which promotes efficient use of resources and sustains the livelihoods of urban populations; and democratisation, which leads to transparent and accountable governance.

However, most African cities are overburdened by rapid population growth and lack of resources, and are therefore unable to realise the basic attributes of urban governance. This results in the expansion of informal settlements and the informal economy, increased social tensions and uncontrolled urban sprawl, with neighbourhoods cut off from transport and basic infrastructure. These problems are exacerbated by the direct and indirect effects of climate change, as people, goods and economic activities are concentrated in areas of high climate vulnerability. African cities therefore suffer from inadequate urban governance, manifested in weak functional and fiscal devolution frameworks, insufficient human resources and capacity, limited financial resources and ineffective planning. This hampers the ability to plan, finance and manage urban infrastructure and service delivery. Although there is a growing interest in smart city development in Africa, the lack of basic infrastructure and funding is a significant challenge (African Development Bank, 2022).

Indeed, the African economy is characterised by a large informal sector. This phenomenon is accompanied by growing inequality and poverty, which weaken the resilience of economic growth. The lack of jobs in the formal economy is a major obstacle, especially for future generations (OCSE,2019).

Moreover, regionalism in Africa has only partially met expectations in terms of economic development and security. The multiple memberships of African states in various sub-regional organisations and the absence of a strong hegemon further complicate economic integration. The institutional capacity to improve economic governance in Africa is therefore limited, hampering private sector development. Declining GDP and rising public debt further limit the scope for investment in infrastructure and services (L'Africa, Tra Crisi Locali E Sfide Globali - Enciclopedia - Treccani, n.d.).

Spatial governance in Africa faces significant challenges in urban and economic management, requiring institutional reforms, targeted investments and an integrated approach to promote sustainable and inclusive development.

5.3 GLOBAL POLICIES AND THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN AFRICAN URBANIZATION

International organisations play an important role in African urbanisation and spatial governance and planning, addressing various challenges and facilitating development. They facilitate the transfer of global policies and knowledge between different regions, often from North to South, through transnational information networks and international forums. This process includes the dissemination of spatial policies and innovative practices, such as those produced by UN agencies such as UN-Habitat and UNECA. However, in some cases this transfer can be unidirectional and does not always take into account local specificities, with the risk of imposing standardised solutions that may not be appropriate to the African context (World Bank, 2013).

One of the main challenges facing international organisations in this context is the continent's severe financial constraints. Agencies often provide development assistance, but the quantity and quality of this assistance can be limited and inconsistent. Urban development is rarely prioritised as a separate sector, which can lead to fragmented efforts that do not adequately address the complex needs of urban areas. Indeed, African cities often suffer from weak governance, with local governments that are often marginalised and lack the resources and authority to manage urban development effectively. Decentralisation efforts are not accompanied by adequate financial support, further complicating international support for good urban governance (McGranahan et al., 2009).

International agencies therefore emphasise the importance of regional cooperation to effectively manage urbanisation and implement governance reforms. Agencies support initiatives that involve local and national governments, as well as grassroots organisations, to address urban challenges such as infrastructure management, economic growth, poverty reduction and environmental sustainability. By fostering regional dialogue and cooperation, these organisations help to develop strategies that can be implemented across national borders (McGranahan et al., 2009).

The activities of international agencies also focus on fighting urban poverty and inequality, which are widespread in many African cities. Indeed, urbanisation in Africa is often characterised by the urbanisation of poverty, where rapid population growth outpaces economic development. This results in high levels of urban poverty and hence informal settlements. Many urban areas are unable to generate sufficient formal economic opportunities, leading to precarious livelihoods for many residents (Gutman & Madden, 2020).

Here, organisations work to improve infrastructure, provide access to essential services and develop clear urban policies on the ground. These efforts are crucial for transforming African cities into engines of economic growth and social development (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2014).

5.3.1 UN ACTIONS TO PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

The United Nations has played a key role in promoting sustainable urban development in Africa, recognising the rapid urbanisation of the continent and the need for inclusive, resilient and sustainable cities. UN action in this area includes various programmes, initiatives and partnerships aimed at addressing the challenges of urbanisation.

The UN has fostered partnerships with regional and local organisations in Africa to promote sustainable urban development. These partnerships often involve working with the African Union (AU), regional economic communities (RECs) and local governments to align urbanisation policies with regional development strategies. The UN's Agenda 2030 (see chapter 4.3.1.1) is closely linked to the AU's Agenda 2063 (see chapter 5.2.1), a long-term development plan for the continent. Both agendas aim to promote inclusive and sustainable urban economic development, improve quality of life and ensure peace and security. Both place a strong emphasis on sustainable development. Agenda 2030 provides a global framework, while Agenda 2063 focuses on how these principles can be applied specifically in the African context, taking into account the continent's unique challenges and opportunities. The programmes also aim to promote inclusive urban economic growth. Agenda 2063 aims to achieve these goals through infrastructure development, industrialisation and continental economic integration, in line with the SDGs of Agenda 2030 (P, 2022).

Thanks in part to the interconnectedness of the UN and Africa, many African countries are integrating the SDGs into their governance and national development plans. African leaders have recognised the importance of aligning Agenda 2063 with the 2030 Agenda to ensure coherence in development policies. This alignment ensures that African development priorities are integrated into the broader global agenda and facilitates access to international resources, partnerships and technical support for the implementation of the SDGs in Africa. For example, Uganda was one of the first countries to change its governance structure and develop a national development plan in line with the SDGs. Other countries, such as Ethiopia and South Africa, are working with UN country teams to raise awareness of the SDGs among government officials, parliamentarians, civil society and private sector actors (Comunicazione, 2023).

The UN is also deeply involved in helping African cities address the impacts of climate change, a critical aspect of sustainable urban development. Through initiatives such as the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy and the Cities and Climate Change Initiative, the UN is helping African cities develop strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate risks such as floods, droughts and heat waves.

The Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy is an international alliance of over 9,000 cities and local governments on the African continent committed to climate leadership. The initiative focuses on three main pillars: urban mitigation, adaptation and access to clean energy (ICLEI, 2022).

The United Nations has a key role in promoting sustainable urban development in Africa by supporting African cities in addressing climate challenges and integrating the SDGs into national policies, helping to build more inclusive, resilient and future-oriented sustainable cities on the continent.

5.3.2   UN-HABITAT

UN-Habitat plays a crucial role in promoting sustainable urban development in Africa through several initiatives and programmes that address the unique challenges faced by rapidly urbanising regions.

The first initiative is the Participatory Slum Rehabilitation Programme (PSUP), which aims to improve urban management and transform slums into sustainable and liveable neighbourhoods. This programme focuses on several key aspects:

Improving access to core services	The PSUP works to ensure that slum dwellers have access to basic services such as clean water, electricity and adequate sanitation. This is key to improving the quality of life and reducing the health risks associated with unhealthy living conditions.
Infrastructure enhancement	The programme supports the development of urban infrastructure that can support sustainable and inclusive growth by improving roads, transport and public facilities in informal areas.
Security of tenure	Tenure security is a key element in improving the stability and security of slum dwellers. The PSUP promotes the regularisation of informal settlements to ensure that residents have legal rights to land and housing.

Table 13-PSUP' aspects – re-elaboration from: UH-HABITAT, n.d.

The participatory approach of the PSUP is crucial to its success, as it involves local communities, governments and financial partners in a collaborative process to find solutions and develop sustainable national plans. This approach intervenes in spatial governance and planning and ensures that solutions are tailored to the specific needs of communities and that residents are actively involved in improving their living conditions. However, the process of slum upgrading poses several challenges, including the complexity of local governance, lack of financial resources and difficulties in coordinating action between the various actors involved. In addition, uncontrolled urbanisation and population growth continue to put pressure on urban resources, requiring innovative and sustainable solutions. (UH-HABITAT, nd).

In addition, UN-Habitat is actively involved in strengthening urban resilience to climate change through two initiatives:

Nature-based solutions (NbS)	The programme supports the implementation of NbS to improve the climate resilience of cities by integrating green infrastructure and sustainable urban planning practices. This approach helps reduce the vulnerability of cities to climate threats, and supports the achievement of multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
Africa Urban Resilience Programme (AURP)	Developed in collaboration with the African Union and other partners, the programme focuses on strengthening urban risk management policies and building institutional capacity to address urban risks. It promotes inclusive urban planning and resilient infrastructure development.

Table 14-Initiatives of Un-Habitat-re-elaboration from: Kiribou, R. et al, 2024

AURP encourages collaboration between different sectors and stakeholders to ensure a holistic approach to urban resilience. This includes promoting partnerships between governments, international organisations and local communities to leverage resources and expertise. The programme focuses on strengthening the capacity of African countries to implement effective national urban resilience strategies and plans. This includes training and equipping governments and local institutions with the necessary tools and knowledge to respond to urban (Kiribou, R. et al, 2024).

UN-Habitat therefore provides a framework for the development of national urban policies that serve as a comprehensive guide to urban development. These policies address critical issues such as slum prevention, access to land, basic services, infrastructure, urban legislation and urban planning regulations. National urban policies, developed with the support of UN-Habitat, provide an overarching framework that coordinates action between different levels and sectors of government. This integration is essential to align urban development with national development goals and to ensure that urbanisation contributes positively to economic and social progress (National Urban Policies | UN-Habitat, n.d.).

5.3.3 SOCIAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA: UNECA

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) plays a key role in promoting sustainable economic, urban and social development in Africa. Through a range of strategic interventions, UNECA assists African countries in transforming urbanisation into an opportunity for sustainable growth and development.

The Organisation contributes to this process by:

Integration of urbanisation into national development planning	UNECA is working to integrate urbanisation into national development planning by developing frameworks that align with global and national goals, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union's Agenda 2063.
Economic and spatial planning	UNECA stresses the importance of economic policies that are aligned with the spatial development of cities. UNECA is helping African states to harness the potential of urbanisation to promote economic growth.
Capacity building and technical support	To strengthen institutional capacity, UNECA provides technical advice to national and local governments to improve the design, implementation and monitoring of urban policies. This includes operational projects and practical guidance on effective urban planning and management.
Facilitating political dialogue and regional cooperation	UNECA facilitates policy dialogue by bringing together Member States and regional economic communities to address the challenges and opportunities of urbanisation. This approach promotes consensus and regional cooperation on critical urban development issues.

Table 15-UNECA's strategic interventions on urbanisation- re-elaboration from: Contributions of UNECA to Urbanization and Development Section | United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, n.d.

In summary, UNECA plays a strategic role in integrating urbanisation into national development policies, building institutional capacity, promoting sustainable practices and facilitating regional cooperation. These efforts are key to improving spatial governance and ensuring that urbanisation contributes positively to economic and social progress.

6. THE CASE STUDY: ETHIOPIA

This chapter presents a detailed analysis of spatial governance and planning and urbanization dynamics in Ethiopia, delving into the planning mechanisms and key stakeholders involved in the country's spatial development process. The choice of Ethiopia as a case study is not random: it stands out from other countries in the African context, analysed in the previous chapter, due to a strong level of international inclusion. The chapter examines the role of the United Nations, specifically UN-Habitat and UNECA, in implementing policies and initiatives capable of influencing the governance and planning system across various territorial levels. Most of the information in the text is derived from field interviews, which provide insights and reflections on national urban policies and territorial planning tools.

6.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE COUNTRY AND ITS TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT AND URBANISATION DYNAMICS

Ethiopia's current territorial landscape is characterised by a federal system that aims to decentralise governance. This approach allows regions to manage their own economic, urban, territorial and social affairs. However, significant challenges remain, particularly in terms of resource management and regional disparities.

The Ethiopian government has therefore initiated various regional development policies to improve infrastructure and services in both urban and rural areas. These initiatives include strengthening spatial governance and planning and administration systems to support economic growth and reduce conflicts over resources. However, the unequal distribution of resources and economic opportunities between different regions has created significant disparities, leading to political tensions and local conflicts. More developed regions, such as Addis Ababa, often find themselves in competition with less developed regions, further exacerbating inequalities (Overview, n.d.).

Ethiopia is also undergoing significant urbanisation, with projections suggesting that the country will remain predominantly rural until 2050. However, urban areas are growing rapidly, driven mainly by economic development and migration from rural areas. This process is largely concentrated in Addis Ababa, but is also influenced by

emerging intermediate cities that serve as economic hubs. Urbanisation presents both opportunities and challenges for Ethiopia. While cities are becoming centres of economic activity, the wealth gap between urban and rural populations is widening. Poverty reduction efforts have been more effective in urban areas than in rural areas, where multidimensional poverty remains prevalent (OECD/PSI, 2020).

The government has recognised the need for integrated plans to address these disparities. Current policies focus on strengthening inter-regional cooperation, improving access to basic services and promoting sustainable livelihoods for both urban dwellers and rural communities (Egziabher, 2000).

Therefore, to effectively address the challenges of urbanisation, Ethiopia's future strategies should emphasise inclusive development that bridges the gap between urban and rural areas. This includes improving infrastructure in rural towns to better connect them to larger cities, while ensuring that local needs are met through participatory governance models (Afsasite & Afsasite, 2020).

Ethiopia's journey through land development and urbanisation reflects a complex interplay of historical legacies, cultural diversity and modern challenges. As the country evolves, it continues to address regional disparities while promoting sustainable growth, which will be key to achieving equitable development in both urban and rural landscapes.

6.2 SPATIAL GOVERNANCE AND PLANNING IN ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia's approach to spatial governance and planning has changed significantly, particularly with the involvement of international organisations such as UN-Habitat and UNECA. This change is key to managing rapid urbanisation and ensuring sustainable development throughout the country.

Ethiopia's governance structure is characterised by a federal system that divides responsibilities between national, regional and local governments. The Ministry of Urban Planning and Infrastructure serves as the focal point for urban planning initiatives, coordinating efforts across sectors. This multi-dimensional governance framework allows for spatial planning that takes into account local contexts while remaining consistent with national objectives. The government has therefore

recognised the importance of integrated planning as a tool to manage the complexity of the country, especially in light of the rapid growth in population and land use (Joornaalii Seeraa Oromiyaa, 2018).

In terms of spatial governance and planning in Ethiopia, all land is considered public or state-owned. The government therefore recognises user rights, but restricts the sale or transfer of land. This situation has led to a complicated legal landscape where different laws coexist, often leading to conflict and inefficiency. The Ministry of Agriculture and Urban Planning and Infrastructure plays a crucial role in the supervision of territorial administration at the federal level, but regional autonomy has led to overlapping responsibilities among local authorities, making efficient administration difficult (LPSAManager, 2024).

To address these problems, new key mechanisms have been defined, such as (Urban Governance | UN-Habitat, n.d.):

- Regional planning: UN-Habitat UNECA has introduced a regional spatial planning approach that provides cities with a broader framework for development. This contrasts with previous practices that focused mainly on city-level master plans, allowing for a more integrated vision.

- Urban-rural linkages: Recognising the importance of linking urban centres with surrounding rural areas, the planning process emphasises the need for broad-based development strategies. This helps to identify potential resources and economic opportunities that can benefit both urban and rural populations.

- Capacity building: Here, UN-Habitat has been instrumental in training city managers and mayors on various urban issues, including governance, municipal finance and sustainable development practices. These capacity-building efforts aim to improve local and regional governance structures and limit overlap in decision-making processes.

Ethiopia's spatial governance and planning is undergoing significant change through regional planning initiatives led by UN-Habitat and UNECA. By promoting integrated approaches that link urban and rural areas while strengthening local capacities,

Ethiopia aims to create sustainable urban environments that can effectively respond to the challenges of rapid urbanisation.

6.2.1   THE ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

Ethiopia is a federal parliamentary republic with a complex administrative structure reflecting internal ethnic and cultural diversity.

The 1995 constitution introduced major changes by defining a federal system based on ethnic regions. The transition to a federal government defined the reorganisation of historical provinces along ethnic lines.

This system has generated criticism and political tensions, but has also allowed the different ethnic communities to live on an equal footing. Therefore, Ethiopia's administrative structure is a model of ethnic federalism that attempts to balance the needs of different populations within a unified framework, while facing important challenges related to national cohesion and civil rights (Ethiopia - Encyclopaedia - Treccani, n.d.).

The Ethiopian government has a bicameral parliament:

- House of People's Representatives: composed of 547 directly elected members.
- House of the Federation: composed of 108 members elected by the regional assemblies.

The Prime Minister, who is elected by Parliament, exercises executive power, while the President of the Republic has a largely ceremonial role.

Ethiopia is currently divided into eleven regional states (called Kililoch) and two autonomous cities, Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa.

The main regions are:
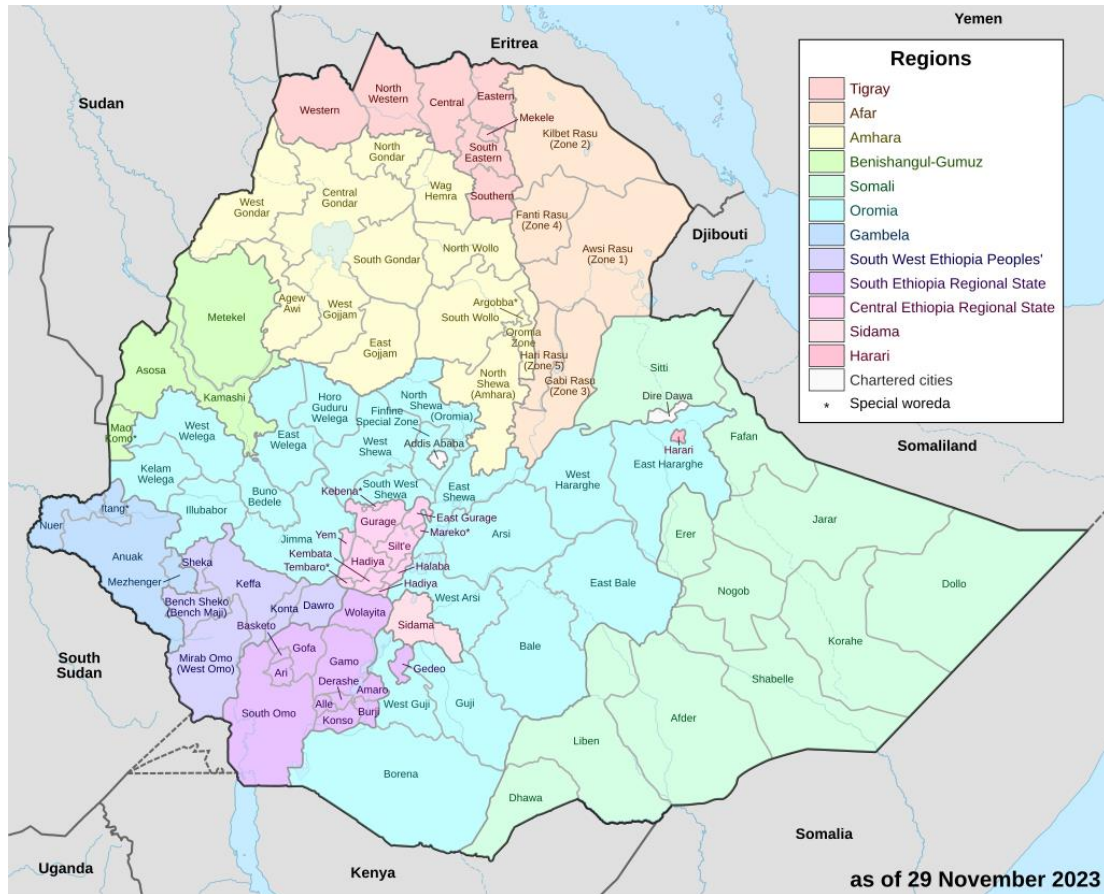
Figure 5-Ethiopian regions-source from: contributori di Wikipedia, 2023

Each region has a parliament and a local government and enjoys a high degree of administrative autonomy. Therefore, each region has the right to establish its own government and laws in accordance with the federal constitution.

The regions are further divided into 68 zones, which in turn are divided into 556 districts (called Woredas), six of which have special status.

The zones act as intermediaries between the regions and the districts, managing issues of development planning and resource allocation. Each zone has its own council, which coordinates administrative activities and public services.

The districts, on the other hand, are the basic administrative units as they are responsible for the organisation and delivery of many basic services such as health, local infrastructure and education.

The lowest level is the district (Kebele), which is the smallest administrative structure. Each kebele has its own local leadership that manages the local community and relations with the central government (Politica interna Etiopia, n.d.).

6.2.2 THE LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

Ethiopia has a complex legal system based on the 1995 Constitution, which provided the basis for federal government and citizens' rights. The constitution defines several fundamental rights, including (Parliament of Ethiopia, 2019):

- Decentralisation of power: Regional states have the right to self-determination with strong legislative and executive powers.

- Land use rights: Land is owned by the state and cannot be transferred to individual ownership. However, both individuals and communities can be granted land use rights.

- Protection of human rights: Protects the rights of individuals and communities, including ethnic minorities.

The decentralisation of power has also allowed the development of regional legislative structures, with each region having its own constitution and parliament. This local autonomy is particularly reflected in policies related to spatial governace and planning and sustainable urban development.

Therefore, in parallel with the implementation of the constitution, the government has placed a strong emphasis on sustainable development by initiating a series of environmental laws (Taddese, 2008):

- Ethiopian Environmental Policy EPE (1997): promotes sustainable development by integrating environmental protection into economic and social development policies.

- Proclamation No. 299/2002 on Environmental Impact Assessment: This decree makes environmental impact assessment mandatory for major development activities.

- Proclamation No. 300/2002 on Environmental Protection: this law established a legal framework for the efficient management of natural resources and waste.

The Ethiopian government subsequently also initiated a series of laws on urban development and land use. These laws include (Taddese, 2008):

- Government Urban Design Guidelines and Plans Proclamation (Proclamation No. 574/2008): This law provides guidelines for urban development and land use planning through long-term development plans for urban centres.
- Rural System Proclamation (Proclamation No. 456/2005): Regulates the land use rights of the rural population, promotes land tenure security andpreserves state land.

In response to the increasing challenges of urbanisation, the Ethiopian government has developed housing policies to address the housing shortage in urban areas. The most important of these policies is the Housing Development Programme Proclamation (Proclamation No. 370/2003), which is still in force today. It aims to promote the construction of affordable housing and improve living conditions in urban areas (Taddese, 2008).

Ethiopia's legal framework thus reflects the government's efforts to balance economic development, environmental sustainability and urban rights in a context of rapid urban transformation and spatial governance and planning challenges.

6.2.3 MAIN ACTORS ENGAGED IN THE SPATIAL GOVERNANCE

In Ethiopian spatial governance and planning, several stakeholders are involved in the decision-making process and play a key role in the implementation of spatial policies.

The central government, through the Ministry of Urban Development and Infrastructure and the Ministry of Urbanisation and Construction (MoUDC), implements spatial policies. In Ethiopia, for example, the MoUDC works with UN-Habitat to develop national urban policies that integrate spatial planning into broader development programmes.

Regional governments have spatial planning offices. They are key entities in the process of developing land-use plans and managing land-use conflicts. The offices work with various stakeholders, including local governments, civil society organisations and the private sector, to ensure that policies are inclusive and participatory (Land for Life, 2022).

International organisations are also active in Ethiopian spatial governance and planning. The United Nations, through its agency UN-Habitat, and other agencies such as UNECA (Economic Commission for Africa) and UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) provide technical, financial and advisory support for sustainable urban development and spatial planning projects (Urbanisation in Ethiopia: Building Inclusive & Sustainable Cities, n.d.).

In addition, civil society organisations have become increasingly important actors in Ethiopia's spatial governance and planning, particularly in supporting land rights and community engagement. The Land for Life programme launched in 2018 is an important example of how civil society organisations can collaborate with government actors to improve governance system in Ethiopia. Through meetings and conferences with government agencies, such as the MoUDC and the Ministry of Urban Development and Infrastructure, they identify injustices and issues that need to be addressed and improved. In addition, various local and international NGOs are involved in spatial planning projects focusing on sustainable natural resource management and rural development (Land for Life, 2022).

In addition to the formal structures mentioned above, informal actors have a significant influence on governance, particularly in land transactions (Beyera Abebe, 2023):

- Land brokers: These individuals often facilitate land transactions in urban areas, acting as intermediaries between landowners and buyers.
- Local residents: community members play a key role in informal settlements, influencing spatial governance and planning decisions through grassroots movements.

These actors operate in a context characterised by major challenges such as rapid urbanisation, sustainable management of natural resources and the need to adapt to climate change, making cooperation between different levels of government and international actors crucial.

6.2.4 THE SPATIAL PLANNING TOOLS

In the Ethiopian context, urban planning is characterised by several levels, each with a specific role and multiple objectives. It is important to specify that it was not easy to

find the necessary information, but thanks to the interviews conducted, which provided a lot of useful information, and thanks to the publications of the UN and UN-Habitat and UNECA, it was possible to better understand how planning tools work in Ethiopia. These contributions provided a clearer picture of the different levels of planning and the challenges the country faces in the urban development process.

The main planning levels can be categorised as follows:

National Planning	The aim is to outline the basic principles that should guide the financial and geographical progress of the entire nation.
National Urban Spatial Development Plan (NUDSP)	It guides the distribution of urban settlements and their future development, promoting balanced land use.
National Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP)	A strategic plan for socio-economic development, including policies for urbanisation, infrastructure and industry.

Table 16-National level: planning tools- re-elaboration from: Growth and Transformation Plan II, n.d

Regional planning	The main objective is to adapt national plans to the different regions of the country.
Regional Development Plan (RDP)	This plan is developed by each region in line with the National Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) and addresses land use.
Transport corridor planning	This planning tool defines strategic infrastructure frameworks that link regions and facilitate industrial, agricultural and urban development.

Table 17-Regional level: planning tools- re-elaboration from: Interview conducted

Cities and Metropolitan Areas	The main objective is to guide the urban development of metropolitan cities such as Addis Ababa and secondary cities.
Addis Ababa Integrated Development Plan	Comprehensive plan that analyses key urban development issues.
Addis Abeba Light Rail Transit (LRT)	Urban plan to improve mobility and reduce traffic congestion.

Table 18-Metropolitan area: planning tools- re-elaboration from: Interview conducted

Local Planning	The main objective is to respond to the specific needs of local communities by providing a framework for sustainable urban development.
Local Development Plans (LDP)	Strategic urban development and regeneration plan and neighbourhood level (Kebele).
Land Use Development Planning (LUDP)	This urban planning instrument regulates land use in the residential, commercial and industrial spheres, ensuring equitable spatial governance and planning.

Table 19-Local level: planning tools- re-elaboration from: UNIDO ITPO Italy, n.d.

Special planning	The aim is to address the challenges of urbanisation with the help of international organisations.
N-HABITAT	Durable solutions for internally displaced persons (IDPs): The plan focuses on planning settlements that accommodate IDPs and meet the needs of those moving from rural to urban areas. Proactive urban planning: UN-Habitat supports proactive planning to effectively manage rapid urbanisation. This includes encouraging cities to develop master that integrate informal settlements into formal planning processes.
UNECA	Urban development plans: ECA promotes sustainable urban development in Ethiopia, particularly in the city of Addis Ababa, by seeking to integrate comprehensive urban policies into national urban development plans.

Table 20-Special planning: planning tools- re-elaboration from: Interview conducted

This multi-level system allows Ethiopia to address the multiple challenges of development and urbanisation.

6.2.5 MAIN CHALLENGES

The spatial governance and planning context in Ethiopia, with a focus on Addis Ababa, presents a number of complex and interrelated challenges that are the result of historical, cultural, economic and social factors that influence urban development and land resource management.

Addis Ababa is one of the fastest growing cities in Africa, yet more than two thirds of the population live below the poverty line, often in villages or informal settlements. This rapid urban growth has put additional pressure on infrastructure and services, which are unable to meet the needs of residents due to excessive population growth.

Analysing and coordinating the development of the formal and informal sectors is crucial for finding sustainable solutions to these problems and developing sustainable planning strategies (NSL - Netzwerk Stadt und Landschaft, 2018).

Another challenge is the highly fragmented urban structure of Ethiopia's major cities, particularly Addis Ababa. The Ethiopian city is made up of unconnected areas, making it difficult to plan urban areas and manage infrastructure.

The lack of a comprehensive structural network limits the urban organisation of neighbourhoods and the spatial distribution of services. This problem is exacerbated by the cultural concept of space, which does not always coincide with Western urban planning principles (Addis Ababa also teaches, n.d.).

Ethiopian culture also influences the way urban space is perceived.

The Ethiopian way of life defines an ever-changing physical and spatial space outside the constraints of traditional planning principles. Local traditions influence expectations about the use of space and the preservation of historical architectural elements, making the implementation of standardised urban plans difficult.

Another major challenge for sustainable spatial planning in Ethiopia is environmental issues. Environmental problems associated with rapid urbanisation include pollution and water management. Indeed, accelerated urbanisation has contributed to an increase in air and water pollution. Ineffective management of urban waste has led to the creation of uncontrolled landfills, which contribute to environmental pollution and the spread of disease. One example is the rivers and reservoirs in Addis Ababa. They are often polluted by industrial effluents and domestic waste, compromising the quality of drinking water (NSL - Netzwerk Stadt und Landschaft, 2018).

Therefore, addressing spatial governance and planning challenges in Ethiopia requires an integrated and complex approach that considers multiple dimensions. It is crucial to develop urban development strategies that promote social inclusion, environmental sustainability and effective governance in order to manage rapid urbanisation and improve the living conditions of the population.

6.3 HOW THE UN, UN-HABITAT AND UNECA OPERATE IN THE COUNTRY

The information in this text comes from interviews I conducted with UNECA and UN-HABITAT officials. They helped me to understand and learn more about the role of international organizations in Ethiopia. The United Nations, through its own agencies, works with African governments to develop durable and sustainable projects. Although the two international organizations have similar goals, they work at different operational levels.

UNECA works at the national level with African governments by creating urban guidelines and helping to generate economic progress. UNECA's main function is knowledge production. Or rather, it is like a think tank in that it produces information for its 54 member states that is needed for national urban policies. In Ethiopia, the organization studies critical issues in the urban environment and seeks to provide policymakers with better knowledge of how a cohesive urban plan is essential for long-term economic growth. For example, the organization has produced the State of Urbanization Report, which highlights urban trends and their implications for African countries. It also provides technical assistance to member states through specialized assistance. In Ethiopia, for example, UNECA works directly with the Ministry of Finance and Planning and also consults with other ministries, depending on the country's specific needs. Working with Ethiopia's leaders, the agency helps integrate urban needs into national growth plans and promotes policies that empower cities to improve spatial planning. In this way, UNECA seeks to ensure that local governors are provided with the resources and expertise to manage the rapid development of cities in a sustainable manner.

UN-Habitat works at the subnational and local levels. In Ethiopia, it coordinates urban renewal and waste management plans at the city level and works with Addis Ababa to strengthen urban infrastructure and reduce the impact of informal settlements. The agency also supports local development through training on topics such as economic spatial governance and sustainable planning. Despite the very different roles of UNECA and UN-HABITAT, it is crucial that the two organizations work together to

address the difficult challenges of urbanization in Africa. A key example of this collaboration is the voluntary local reviews of the SDGs.

Both organizations are helping cities take a hard look at the results of their progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

For example, UNECA provides support in collecting and analysing data at the national and local levels, while UN-HABITAT works to implement proposed strategies through targeted projects and training. This collaboration between the United Nations and the Government of Ethiopia allows interventions to be aligned with global standards but applicable to the local context (Conducted interviews, 2024).

6.3.1 RESULTS AND CONSIDERATIONS OF THE SITE VISITS CONDUCTED

The opportunity to see Ethiopia, and especially to stay in Addis Ababa, was a very interesting experience. This country is undergoing, as previously analysed, a period of significant change marked by rapid urban growth, which, however, has not resulted in genuine economic improvement. During the fieldwork, I was able to conduct several interviews and study the daily lives of people. This experience allowed me to closely observe African and Ethiopian realities, with a special focus on Addis Ababa.

I had the opportunity to observe how the government is carrying out a complex urban redevelopment project, which has, however, triggered a strong process of social and territorial gentrification. The government has started demolishing traditional, low-income neighbourhoods to implement sustainable urban development plans more typical of Western culture than Ethiopian tradition. For example, to construct green corridors and main arteries, they destroyed informal settlements where families had lived for generations, disrupting long-established neighbourhood relationships. The government also dismantled small traditional tin shops where small and medium-sized vendors sold essential goods for survival.

The poorest families have been relocated from central areas and moved to large buildings that can house up to a thousand families, often lacking access to basic services like drinking water and electricity.

Figure 7-Demolition of neighbourhoods for the new urban project-Addis Abeba 2024-Camilla Paris

Figure 6-New green corridor- Addis Abeba 2024-Camlla Paris

This new urban reality exacerbates the lives of vulnerable inhabitants, and for this reason, organizations like the UN, UN-Habitat, and UNECA have started to take action. Through data analysis, they have attempted to examine the broader socio-economic impacts of the project. However, the rapid displacement of the population and commercial activities, with little notice, has resulted in insufficient data collection on the number of people or businesses affected.

Through an interview conducted, it was highlighted that the lack of data is a major obstacle in assessing the success of urban redevelopment projects like the Green Corridors. Without reliable data on government actions in the urban context, it is difficult to understand the impact of such actions on communities and city finances. Nonetheless, these international organizations have sought to draft guidelines for the Ethiopian government to follow, to assist the struggling population (Conducted interviews, 2024).

Despite the described challenges, Addis Ababa is developing plans connected to green corridors. These are key initiatives to support urban sustainability. These plans follow

the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG) and aim to create green spaces and eco-friendly routes that seek to contribute to (Standard, 2024):

- Environmental Sustainability: Developing green corridors to improve air quality and reduce air pollution.

- Green Mobility: Promoting the use of green transportation means like bicycles and pedestrians by creating dedicated paths.

- Social Inclusion: Providing accessible public spaces for all to improve the well-being of local communities.

In short, as Addis Ababa changes its urban identity, it is essential to ensure that this process does not exclude the most vulnerable but instead fosters genuine and lasting inclusion. The path toward sustainable and equitable urban development is complex, but current efforts may represent an important step toward a better future for all the inhabitants of Ethiopia (Conducted interviews, 2024).

6.4 CHANGES TO SPATIAL GOVERNANCE AND PLANNING INSPIRED BY UN ACTION

From interviews with UNECA and UN-Habitat officials, key insights emerged underscoring the profound impact of their initiatives on spatial governance and planning in Ethiopia. UN-Habitat introduced a novel approach to urban planning, shifting from traditional city-specific master plans to regional spatial planning. This broader strategy considers a large geographic area, linking urban centres with surrounding rural regions. Regional planning assists cities in addressing not only immediate needs but also the broader role they play in the region. This model involves developing a regional spatial framework that guides cities to focus on particular zones, extending planning beyond administrative boundaries to integrate regional resources and economic activities, thereby fostering harmony between urban and rural areas and improving resource management.

UNECA, in contrast, plays a vital role in fostering collaborations between national and local authorities, an essential factor in Ethiopia where rapid urban growth demands multi-level governance. This cooperation is driven by national development plans that incorporate urbanization and spatial planning as core elements, with the central

government providing guidance, resources, and financial support to cities for sustainable urban growth management. UNECA supports this process through initiatives that facilitate dialogue and meetings between local and national representatives, ensuring continuous information exchange. This approach enables national urban policies to fully understand local issues and respond to real territorial needs. Simultaneously, UNECA has worked directly with Ethiopian cities to improve local financial management and enhance cities' capacity to generate local revenue, which is crucial for funding urban development projects. For example, in Addis Ababa, UNECA has developed projects to enhance tax collection and create new financing opportunities, allowing more resources to be allocated to urban infrastructure and services. These local finance programs are essential in helping cities fund their development projects, ensuring that urban strategies are implemented effectively, thereby improving residents' lives and supporting local economic development.

Additionally, achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 11, is a key priority for both UNECA and UN-Habitat. The goal is to adapt global guidelines locally to create sustainability plans. This objective led to the creation of Voluntary Local Reviews, which measure SDG progress in specific contexts, adapting urban sustainability indicators to local priorities and making data on progress accessible to local authorities.

In this way, each city can identify its priorities for spatial governance and planning, ensuring that local development is guided by concrete objectives. This localization process helps individual urban areas to recognize focus areas for urban development programs, thereby supporting sustainable, long-lasting development (Conducted interviews, 2024).

6.4.1 EFFECTS ON SPATIAL PLANNING POLICIES, INSTITUTIONS AND PRACTICE

The actions of international organizations have had a significant impact on spatial governance and planning in Ethiopia. These influences have extended across multiple areas, helping to make urban planning more durable, inclusive, and long-term oriented.

Thanks to the technical assistance and guidelines promoted by UNECA, such as the African guidelines for voluntary local reviews, land-use planning has been

incorporated into national policies. This has empowered local authorities to improve spatial governace and planning, with a heightened focus on cities' roles within national development frameworks. In a rapidly urbanizing country like Ethiopia, this increased awareness is crucial to ensure coordinated and sustainable urban growth.

Additionally, actions by the United Nations have encouraged the alignment of local plans and policies with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), facilitating the integration of sustainability principles into urban planning. This process has materialized through adapting the SDGs at the urban scale, as Ethiopian authorities have tailored these goals to meet local needs. UNECA has also partnered with local institutions to implement sustainable development policies and plans, thereby enhancing governance and planning capabilities.

Another key element is the strong cooperation between UN-Habitat, UNECA, and Ethiopian local authorities. This collaboration has enabled the creation of a strategic and coordinated approach to spatial planning. UN-Habitat, working closely with local governments, has helped develop plans and programs that directly address the needs of local communities. This collaboration has led to projects that provide tangible examples of best practices, influencing current Ethiopian government policies. Through dialogue platforms that bring together national, regional, and local levels with international bodies, it has been possible to exchange skills and experiences, thus enhancing the quality of decision-making in spatial governance and planning.

Moreover, UNECA has developed guides and manuals to assist local authorities with land-use planning. These tools simplify decision-making and offer a well-defined strategy for implementing urban policies. For example, the Spatial Development Framework (SDF) tool, developed in Ethiopia, supports participatory planning by involving experts, communities, and local administrations.

The United Nations has also introduced innovative sustainability and non-motorized mobility concepts in Ethiopia. In certain cities, like Addis Ababa, they have implemented dedicated bicycle paths, restricted-traffic areas, and public green spaces, promoted sustainable mobility and improved urban quality of life.

Thus, it can be said that the actions and initiatives of international bodies have contributed to reshaping spatial governace and planning, supporting the integration of sustainability into national plans, and strengthening collaboration between local and international entities (Conducted interviews, 2024).

6.4.2 Assessment of challenges and opportunities arising from the implementation of UN initiatives

During the interviews, it was interesting to analyse the main obstacles that international organizations face when collaborating with governments. These challenges and opportunities come to light particularly during the implementation of UN projects, especially in the urban development context. Many initiatives require reliable and real-time data for effective planning and guidance. However, in many African countries, data is not publicly accessible, which limits the ability to monitor progress towards the SDGs, particularly goals related to spatial planning like SDG 11.

Another significant challenge is the implementation of policies at the local level, as there is often a gap between national directives and their local application. Local governments frequently lack the resources and capabilities to fully execute national policies, thereby limiting the effectiveness of sustainable urban development strategies. At the same time, African cities are urbanizing at a pace that exceeds local governance structures' capacity to manage this growth, leading to other issues such as the expansion of informal settlements, inadequate infrastructure, and environmental problems. Addressing these issues requires targeted, strategic planning, which is challenging to achieve in a local context lacking resources.

Moreover, even though UN agencies share similar goals, their operational differences sometimes hinder collaboration. For example, as mentioned previously, UNECA primarily works at the national level by developing guidelines, while UN-Habitat operates at the subnational level, directly engaging with local governments and communities.

Despite these challenges, UN initiatives also present significant opportunities for addressing spatial governance and planning issues in Africa. For instance, UN-Habitat has introduced new spatial governance tools at a supra-municipal level; these tools,

implemented through regional policies, enable local governments to carry out municipal growth plans and strategically manage Ethiopian land. This new approach allows for the creation of guidelines to promote sustainable and infrastructure development.

Additionally, it is important to recognize the emphasis on digital transformation as an opportunity identified by African countries, with UNECA's support. Digital solutions can enhance service delivery, simplify data collection, and increase available resources for cities. Technologies such as satellite and census data provide crucial support for spatial planning, ensuring more accurate policy decisions and development forecasts. Such platforms will also enable the reliable data collection needed to monitor SDG progress and address both current and future urban needs.

Another opportunity is found in UN programs aimed at strengthening the connection between urbanized and rural areas. It is increasingly essential to create integrated national economic plans that connect resources in rural areas with those in urbanized areas and vice versa. This approach can help reduce economic disparities across different geographic areas, which currently exist within both African and Ethiopian contexts. Supporting urban-rural linkages also enables more balanced and inclusive growth, helping to control and limit internal migration (Conducted interviews, 2024).

6.5 CONSIDERATIONS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Addis Ababa today represents a reality where population growth and urbanization are interconnected phenomena, posing two decisive challenges, that government bodies, institutions, and non-governmental organizations are called upon to address. Ethiopia is a complex environment facing issues stemming from multiple factors: ethnic diversity, overpopulation, drought, war, along with significant distrust of external aid. Recently, however, there has been a gradual acceptance of short- and long-term planning projects for better spatial governance and planning. Ethiopia's uncontrolled population growth demands greater urban and technical capacity, which is still limited. The concept of sustainable development and spatial governance is beginning to take hold in Ethiopian culture.

In this context, the work of international agencies becomes essential for a process of urbanization that would be impossible given the challenges in communication between central and local organizations. However, the path forward remains challenging. In Ethiopia, especially in Addis Ababa, unchecked urbanization has led to the emergence of informal housing settlements, even in central areas, made up of shanties and tin structures. These informal settlements have nonetheless provided a social model for the extended family for decades.

Today, the large-scale urban renewal efforts are entirely reshaping the urban and social landscape of the city. Within this context, the role of the United Nations becomes even more critical from a long-term perspective.

7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The thesis analyses the theme of spatial governance and planning at the global level through the lenses of the role of international organizations; at the national level, within the African context; and at the local level, through the case study on Ethiopia.

The research aims to study how the UN and its organizations influence spatial governance and planning at the national and local levels, through the implementation of its global development and aid programs.

From a thorough examination of the structure and evolution of the United Nations, it was possible to understand its functioning and challenges, as well as its contributions to sustainable development at different territorial levels. Globally, the UN, through the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), influences national policies and promotes strategies aimed at making cities more sustainable and fostering a more resilient society. Nationally, the organization works directly with individual governments to promote the drafting of programs, guidelines, and policies that support sustainable development. At this territorial level, the most important UN initiative is the UN-Habitat Program, the United Nations Human Settlements Program, which leads the global discussion on localizing the SDGs through the implementation of multi-level partnerships. At the regional level, the UN addresses the specific challenges of each region by promoting regional cooperation. Here, the most significant initiative is the regional body UNECA, the Economic Commission for Africa, which promotes sustainable economic and urban development. At the local level, the United Nations works directly with local communities and non-governmental agencies to promote equitable and sustainable socio-economic development.

Interviews were conducted to fully understand the impact of global policies and international organizations on the African and Ethiopian contexts. As gathering data through documentary research proved more challenging than it was expected, officials from UNECA and UN-Habitat were interviewed to obtain a solid general overview of these entities' actual results and their role is shaping spatial governance and planning at the different territorial levels. Overall, the collected evidence shows that the rapid

urbanization that had characterised the African context has caused significant territorial imbalances in a context of urbanization without growth that did not contribute to strengthened societal structure (Interview conducted, 29 October 2024). In this light, global policies promoted by international organizations aiming at a more sustainable development play a crucial role, as shown in the thesis in relation to the contributions of UN-Habitat and UNECA. When it comes to the chose case study, the research has shown that Ethiopia is currently experiencing rapid urbanization due to high internal migration from rural areas. Statistical projections indicate that more than 42 million people will live in major urban areas by 2037 (Urbanizzazione in Rapida Espansione, n.d). To manage the latter, the country has equipped itself with a spatial governance and planning model pivoted around an administrative structure that reflects internal ethnic and cultural diversity and represents a model of ethnic federalism that seeks to balance the needs of diverse populations within a unified framework (Etiopia - Enciclopedia - Treccani, n.d.).

More in detail, spatial governance and planning operates through partnerships among multiple stakeholders, such as the national government, regional governments, and international organizations. Central government leaders, in collaboration with the United Nations, implement national policies that adhere to global guidelines but can also be applied locally. Regional governments work with the local level to define sustainable and inclusive territorial planning. The interviews revealed that the UN, through UNECA and UN-Habitat, has had a significant impact on spatial governance in the analysed area. Both organizations have collaborated with the Ethiopian government to implement essential sustainable urban policies aimed at reducing the territorial imbalances caused by rapid urbanization. UNECA has primarily worked at the national level by developing guidelines, while UN-Habitat has worked at the subnational level directly with local governments and communities. Overall, the thesis highlights the importance of multi-level spatial governance, where collaboration among global, national, and local actors is necessary to address the challenges of informal urban growth sustainably and to improve the quality of life in the African continent.

7.1 The peculiarity of the Ethiopian case study

Field analysis and interviews highlighted the main challenges and opportunities tied to the collaboration between the Ethiopian government and international organizations. The field work conducted in Ethiopia, and in Addis Ababa in particular, allowed for a first-hand examination of the spatial deficits created by limited spatial governance at the regional and local levels. Indeed, the lack of financial resources and reliable data constrains the implementation of policies and plans that could be truly effective. However, Ethiopia is striving to be continentally competitive by implementing projects, such as green corridors and large infrastructure initiatives, which reflect a more Western than national urban model. This approach has led to the loss of local traditions and community ties, which are essential elements of Ethiopian culture.

Based on the findings, it emerges how the country should focus more on addressing its own internal challenges, rather than a-critically emulating foreign spatial governance and planning practices, which has in reality emphasized the infrastructure limitations of the local context, such as the lack of connection between urban and rural areas. Indeed, one of the main challenges that characterise Ethiopian spatial governance and planning is the lack of links between cities and surrounding areas, which results in internal socio-economic marginalization. Developing a regional infrastructure network could promote a more inclusive, sustainable, and locally rooted pattern of urban and economic growth. At the same time, Ethiopian spatial governance and planning is characterized by multiple territorial levels, each characterised by its own spatial planning tools. However, the analysis reveals the absence of a true local master plan capable of regulating territorial organization and rapid urbanization. This deficiency has led to an overlap of shanties and skyscrapers in urban areas, built without following a national development plan, often necessitating their demolition to make way for new urban projects.

Moreover, since the land is state-owned, private property does not exist, and people often find themselves having to face, without any assistance, new national development plans that can drastically alter the urban landscape. For example, under the new Green Corridors project, many families and shopkeepers were given only a

few days to vacate their properties without any support. In this context, international organizations have helped the Ethiopian government mitigate damages and increase technical capacity in spatial governance.

UN-Habitat and UNECA have developed new national and regional planning tools to integrate informal settlements into planning processes. For instance, cities have been encouraged to create strategic master plans to develop an overall spatial framework and define development objectives. Moreover, international organizations have aimed to decentralize some competencies and responsibilities in spatial planning to the regional level. This is because many national urban policies did not reflect the actual needs of urban areas and often could not be applied at the regional or local levels. This approach has sought to improve the technical efficiency of regional governments and local entities in managing available resources more effectively and quickly, reducing regional disparities, such as those between cities and rural areas, thereby promoting more equitable development. However, the action of the UN remains limited, as international organisations mostly assist countries in drafting strategies and guidelines, but often find themselves ill-equipped to persuade national governments to implement new urban policies or change existing ones.

7.2 RELEVANCE OF THE FINDINGS FOR THE AFRICAN AND GLOBAL SOUTH CONTEXTS

Urbanisation in Africa is a unique process because urban growth is taking place in the so-called Global South. This geographic concept arose to describe the development of vast areas that were originally marginalized, economically and socially, compared to those in the Global North. The distinction between these two poles is, of course, more symbolic than literal, it represents a theoretical perspective that highlights global inequalities. Nevertheless, the urbanization processes occurring within these two regions are vastly different: in the Global North, urban growth within cities has been gradual, spanning multiple historical periods; in the Global South, urbanization is extremely rapid and is known as urbanization without growth, where urban expansion has not generated the economic progress experienced in more developed countries.

Africa's key challenge is the speed of its urbanization. Over the past 10 years, the average population growth rate in cities has been 3.3% per year, with only 22 of 54

countries below this threshold. Ethiopia, for example, has a growth rate between 5-7%, significantly above the average (Interview conducted, 29 October 2024).

The United Nations acknowledges the need to support countries in the Global South, particularly to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined in the 2030 Agenda, through international collaborations that can help these states attain concrete outcomes. International organizations, together with the African Union, have developed Agenda 2063 with the goal of fostering the continent's economic development and mitigating rapid urbanization. This program aims to make the continent globally competitive; in fact, Agenda 2063 is closely aligned with the 2030 Agenda and focuses on how SDGs can be applied specifically in the African context, taking into account the continent's unique challenges (P, 2022).

For example, the interviews revealed that UNECA has focused on the localization of the SDGs, particularly SDG 11, by adapting global frameworks to African realities. This has been achieved through the development of guidelines for national governments on how to implement and monitor progress on the SDGs, as well as technical support for conducting Voluntary Local Reviews (VLR) to assess progress on their sustainability objectives. In Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia, UNECA has collaborated with national governments to localize the SDGs through initiatives such as monitoring urban GDP (gross domestic product) and municipal revenues.

Additionally, innovative methodologies have been introduced to improve data collection and usage in support of spatial governance and planning. UN-Habitat has developed African urban platforms to gather data on settlements, basic services, and urban inequalities. In Addis Ababa and Nairobi, the organization has piloted projects to enhance the collection of data related to municipal finances and environmental sustainability. These official data and innovative methodologies represent a critical tool for addressing the challenges of urbanization in the Global South, enabling governments to make informed, evidence-based decisions.

In this framework, a multilevel partnership has helped many African countries integrate the SDGs into their spatial governance and planning and national development plans.

One of the primary tasks of the United Nations is to work towards narrowing the socio-economic gap between the Global North and South by supporting governments in implementing effective national policies.

7.3 LIMITS OF THE RESEARCH

The research faced three main limitations: data accessibility, limited documentary bibliography on Ethiopia, and a restricted sample size for the interviews.

As previously noted, the Ethiopian government has not made public much data regarding the urbanization process currently transforming the country. The lack of official data restricted both the field analysis and the precise assessment of national urban policies.

Similarly, gathering information on spatial planning tools proved challenging, as many plans and projects only surfaced and were examined during the interviews. The absence of a comprehensive picture of the current housing situation and the Ethiopian government's concrete objectives limited the formulation of long-term considerations. Additionally, a limited presence of academic documentary bibliography on spatial governance made it difficult to conduct a comparative analysis between certified data and well-established theoretical approaches.

The final research challenge was the limited interview sample size, as only 10 UN officials were interviewed. Although the structure of the interviews allowed for an analysis of multiple perspectives, such a small sample may not have captured key actors in the decision-making process and the implementation of urban policies. Furthermore, some participants did not fully answer certain questions, limiting the comparative analysis of the responses obtained.

Despite these limitations, the thesis aimed to conduct a comprehensive study that would analyse various aspects of African and Ethiopian spatial governance and planning.

7.4 FUTURE RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

The research conducted represents a starting point for future in-depth studies, as it provides a preliminary analysis on which to base and build further investigations. This is because it examines an extremely complex process, considering multiple factors

from various local and global contexts. For instance, the rapid urbanization in both Africa and Ethiopia is not a short-term phenomenon but rather a gradual transformation process involving multiple socio-economic, environmental, and political dimensions. These changes take time to understand and require guidelines at different territorial levels to be managed and regulated in order to promote sustainable development that is mindful of the urban realities affected by this phenomenon.

The fact that this is only an initial step can also be seen in how Ethiopia stands out among the countries of the Horn of Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa for its notable level of international inclusion. The presence of the UN and the African Union makes the country a hub for dialogue between Africa and the rest of the world, bridging the Western world and a rapidly developing reality in terms of social, urban, and international progression.

However, UN initiatives, as already mentioned, need time to be implemented, as they often require coordination—which is sometimes lacking—between local needs and global guidelines. Additionally, managing the outcomes at the national level requires ongoing monitoring and adaptation of policies to address new challenges that have emerged and will continue to emerge during the development process. The complexity and diversity of local contexts, along with the necessity for long-term commitment, make the results of the UN's initiatives with the governments of individual states a gradual and sometimes slow process.

As for Ethiopia, as of December 2024, significant steps in cooperation and dialogue between international bodies and the Ethiopian government have been made. However, the extreme fragmentation of Ethiopian society, due to the coexistence of multiple ethnic groups, traditionally in conflict, makes the implementation of any decision highly complex. We will only be able to study and assess the validity of the guidelines currently being followed in a few years' time: indeed, acceptance times and adherence to new and innovative directives pose a considerable challenge in Ethiopia, as the Ethiopian people do not consider themselves integrated into the dynamics of Sub-Saharan Africa.

It will be interesting to see how the African continent addresses the issue of urbanization without development and, at the same time, how Ethiopia will respond to international directives in this sector.

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10. ANNEX

The qr code shows all interviews conducted, with UN officials precisely from UN-Habitat and UNECA, during the course of the thesis.

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