

# Foreword

by

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## A book, a bridge

The problem of the sea level rise – one of the most evident outcomes of the climate change on global human settlements – certainly stands up among the main critical subjects taken on by the UNESCO Chair in “Sustainable Urban Development and Urban Culture, notably in Africa”. While there are various scientific predictions for sea level rise all of us are well aware that even a small increase of the sea level can have devastating impacts on many coastal environments (sea, rivers, wetlands and lakes). The majority of the world’s cities with over five million inhabitants are settled in very critical coastal zones and this figure is destined to increase. Not less than one billion people live in very low lying areas along shores of diverse nature; higher sea levels would force many of them to abandon their homes and relocate. The situation will be dramatic in humanitarian and economic means necessary to engage the solutions. In fact many amongst the most vulnerable nations do not have the economic resources and the technical knowledge to face a problem that is global and many nations in every continent do not have the cultural awareness to prepare for it. Considering the human *impacts*, the *economic damages* and the *adaptation costs* of the *sea level rise*, at least twelve countries on the African Continent consistently appear in the top rankings of cities at risk including Tanzania, Mozambique, South Africa; Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, Cameroon; Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Morocco. It is a vast group of nations of very different economic and technological resources, each and every one of them needs to be involved in as many international initiatives of scientific and cultural cooperation as possible. This is just the case for which the UNESCO Chair was established. In fact, among the specific objectives of the Chair are “to ensure and promote the public awareness on the importance of environmental sustainability, cultural diversity and access to knowledge” with fostering “the exchange of knowledge in a South-South and North-South-South dynamic” and strengthening “the cooperation between stakeholders at a national and international level through the exchange of data and know-how on policies and practices among diverse urban cultures” (from the Agreement between the UNESCO and the Sapienza University concerning the establishment of the UNESCO Chair). In this respect the collaboration between the The UNESCO Chair in “Sustainable Urban Development and Urban Culture, notably in Africa” and the *Consortium for Hydro-generated Urbanism* CHU co-founded by Professors Martha Kohen and Nancy Clark, based at the University of Florida, Gainesville, is of primary importance. As Professor Martha Kohen points out in her introduction to this book, the operative collaboration had its start at the *UIA 2014 World Congress* held in Durban, South Africa. The Durban Field Studio 2014, *Reconnecting Warwick Junction with the Waterfront* that was organized and run in collaboration with Durban University of Technology. That

event represented a very favourable opportunity for an intense and positive know-how exchange between diverse urban and technological cultures. Teachers and researchers from China (Tsingua University, Beijing) India (Manipal University, Manapur) Japan (Hosey University, Tokyo) France (ENSA Nantes, Nantes), Eritrea (Asmara) provided valuable contributions. In the framework of the UNESCO Chair in “Sustainable Urban Development and Urban Culture, notably in Africa”, the *Consortium for Hydro-generated Urbanism* CHU proved to be an indispensable partner as holder of a rare, advanced scientific and cultural experience in the field; an expertise that makes CHU an essential reference for any institution and any designer who intends to examine in depth the problems represented by the human habitat “settled about or arisen from water”. Their research adopts a multidisciplinary and integral way of designing – that is “of thinking” – that enhances the great opportunities, both functional and environmental, of this situation. This book is a decisive step ahead for our collaboration: it publishes the important results of some CHU research endeavours and gathers around them a broad collection of other international experiences worthy to be among the discussion subjects of our UNESCO research and teaching activities. In this respect, the book is actually a bridge toward two main upcoming appointments: the first in March 2016, the *Winter Field Studio 2016 in USA*: New York (NY); Miami, and Gainesville (Florida) prepared by the UNESCO Chair and the CHU on the theme: *Sea Level rise and the future of coastal urban settlements; evolving concepts in urban and cultural adaptation to changing environments*; the second in September 2017, the *UIA World Congress in Seoul* to which we will actively participate.