Visioning how Small Scale Projects Could Be Strategically Extended to Large Scale Long Term Interventions. A Lesson from Uganda

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This paper describes how small scale design intervention could have a strategic function within longer term interventions. The concept will be explored through students and a community incremental housing unit project conducted recently in Kisenyi community (Kampala) in Uganda. The project demonstrates the important potential of giving the "right to the city" also to low-income earners through practitioner-developed design alternatives. The author in the role of practitioner, together with students, encountered merits and challenges in their roles played alongside of other city actors throughout the project. While this project does not set guidelines for scaling up, it does uncover crucial challenges and actors to be considered when setting the strategy for large-scale, long-term interventions. The importance of housing from a holistic development perspective is embedded in the students' work. This project demonstrates further implications and potentials for 'scaling up' to city level development.

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Introduction

Every year thousands of new scholars join the international architecture community, but they hardly manage to play their role facing the rapid changes in urban development. In the last fifteen years, small scale interventions are happening all around the globe, such as Torre David's project called 'The world tallest squat', which was presented at the Biennale de Venice to address the 'other 90%', achieving a lot of attention from the jury and visitors. There are more and more study programs focusing on understanding the relationship between formal and informal city fabrics. The architecture firms started to cross the boundaries of their professional expertise and to discover the overall complexity of the city. But still this is probably more out of curiosity than out of the actual recognition of the emergent need that calls for professional change and bigger scale of action. Hence, what role should we as professionals play?

There is a professional challenge to be taken which was traditionally not addressed in architecture, planning or design schools. One thing is to recognise the basic needs of affordable shelter without design qualities, design products, which are more practical than esthetical or new service interventions, which are assisting people who are left behind the city grid. But when it comes to scale, a larger impact and long term interventions, we struggle due to the lack of knowledge and good practice.

As it was stated in the World Urban Forum 6 by Joan Clos at the opening ceremony 'the antidote to slums is planned urbanization'. But how do we compete with rapid urbanisation changes which shape our cities and how do we actually plan/design the informal city? Even though there is fifteen years of 'production' of successful small scale interventions, these are not seen as potential pilot projects which could be scaled up and have a larger impact for the future urbanisation of the cities.

In this paper I will discuss and explore how small design interventions could strategically be extended and how city actors might become crucial for a successful scaling up process. My discussion will be based on incremental housing unit intervention done by students and the community in Kampala.

This intervention will be used as a lens for exploring the steps that need to be taken for scaling it up. Addressing the affordable low cost housing issues in Kampala will uncover not only the lack of proper legislation - like housing and urban policies improvement -, but it will also bring a better understanding of some city actors who are crucial elements in order to achieve the changes in policies and urban development. The understanding of the dynamics and the complexities of good urban governance will help us to define the steps to tackle the challenges we might face during the scaling up processes in our interventions.

Design as resource - Rediscovering the role of professionals

Design has been involved in development for the last 50 years as an element of humanitarian assistance. Only for the last 15 years design has started to be seen as a resource for development, but it is still struggling to be seen as more than merely a short-term action.

Today there are examples of successful design interventions that cultivates choices for the ones who hardly have any, but making these practices to strategy for scaling-up, rather than site specific isolated projects, is still a big challenge for professionals to face today.

The last years and especially months role of 'design' is not anymore exclusively questioned in the academic world, but also in the daily design media. Maybe this is due to the last event - the Biennale de Venice- that brought so much attention to the fact, that the informality needs to be addressed and rapid urban change in our cities should not be ignored any longer. As was shown in Tore David's project, if we will not recognise 'them', 'they' will adapt to 'us' and 'our' cities anyway.

'The tallest squatter' is just an example how professionals like architects, politicians, economist and others, who were involved during decision making, are now confronted with a reality that is out of their control. The attention in media shows a new turn in the profession, giving a stronger recognition for the 'other 90%' but neither our education, nor our experience as practitioners has prepared us for the changes or the different attitudes.

Acknowledging the values which our professions hold, the changes and challenges today brought for us by city dynamics calls for a need of different kind of professionals. Referring to it, our professional trainings need to be supplemented with 'reality studios' were students could be exposed to the real tasks of real projects. And it still leaves us with a challenge: how do we prepare the future generation of professionals to avoid just the role of charity and to act differently. In this paper, I will focus mostly on the challenges and role changes which architects and planners are facing today. Even though I will try to limit myself thematically, I will still be crossing the boundaries of our own disciplines, since it is probably the only way to work, when we venture into unknown territory to which we have never been exposed from before.

Whether and how we can scale it up?

The importance of design in informality has thus been recognized, the need for the changes of professionals' attitude also discussed, but the main question still has not been addressed over: whether and how, small design interventions can influence and impact city development.

What actually is scaling up and how much of success of this process can be influenced by design professionals? Referring to an urban theory scaling up complexity goes beyond impact in size and requires active political will. 'Scaling up means expanding, replicating, adapting and sustaining successful policies, programs or projects in a geographic space.' (Hartmann and Linn, 2008).

As a design interventions have its own limitations on how much they can be scaled up, it is still important the way we start the project at the community level and small scale intervention which will set the success for upgrading or up scaling to horizontal and vertical dimensions on the urban and national levels.

Up scaling is a complex process where the critical development issues need to be addressed and good city governance plays an important role.

The city governance is not just about the formal structures of the city government, but it includes a broader range of actors and relationships among them. 'It is these interactions and relationships – informal as much as formal' (Devas 2004). I see the scaling up as a learning process for all the stake holders when they are involved from the beginning of small scale intervention. Learning from mistakes and adding resources, knowledge leads to scaling it up to the city scale and even national wide interventions.

However, the scaling up is complex exercise for Urban development practitioners, but I will try to narrow it down to everyday practice where small design intervention can be successful 'kick off' for scaling up. I will use fieldwork intervention in Kampala from Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) Master Program of Urban Ecological Planning (UEP) as an example which has a potential for scale up. I will not go deep into to the discussion of steps for scaling up or good city governance, but rather focus on its constitutive elements.

In case of Kampala I will group these elements (city actors) as: community, practitioners and institutions (See figure1). City actors will work as a lens to analysed as crucial elements for successful scaling-up of urban development interventions. The discussion will be based on my previous practices and students design intervention in Uganda.

Work with people for people

Every second year our students have an opportunity to discover and understand the complexity of urban development by working with communities in Kampala city for two months. Last year, we had an extraordinary chance to be invited to participate in Uganda's slum Dwellers federation (USDF) on-going land sharing project in one of the centrally located slums in Kampala city (Image 1,2). Results of the fieldwork were so 'real', that it was hard to evaluate them just as a typical students' project. During the fieldwork students were challenged by real problems on the ground.

| Community based organizations	Practitioners	Institutions
SDI Slum Dwellers International	**NTNU** Students	**Local Authorities** Councillor of Kisenyi Paris Chairman of Kiti Zone
USDF Uganda Slum Dwellers Federation	**Makerere University** Students	**KCCA** Kampala Capital City Authority
	SDI Architect	
NGO Act together	**Actogether** Engineer	**Ministry of Lands,** **Housing and Urban** **development**

Figure 1. Structure of actors during the project. Elena Archipovaite © 2012

They tried to understand the community and work with them, to get familiar with local authorities, find out and discover leadership power tensions among organisations. It was their first introduction to the dynamic city's functions and experience of incidences when formal and informal interests meet and clash most of the time.

When students joined the project, the negotiation process among the squatter, federation and the land owner had been going on for some months. At first, students were given a task to get familiar with people who stayed on the land and shared the plot and then map it.

The second stage of the project was held together with the community discussing and trying to model the housing space design solutions considering their cultural, economical and physical aspects. At the end the community come up with space design for incremental housing unit which could be expanded according to the family needs and income.

During the project a presence of federation in Kisenyi settlement was crucial for the successful exercise. Without them, the common ground, which community and students found at the beginning of the project, would never have been realised and had continuity, as it is now.
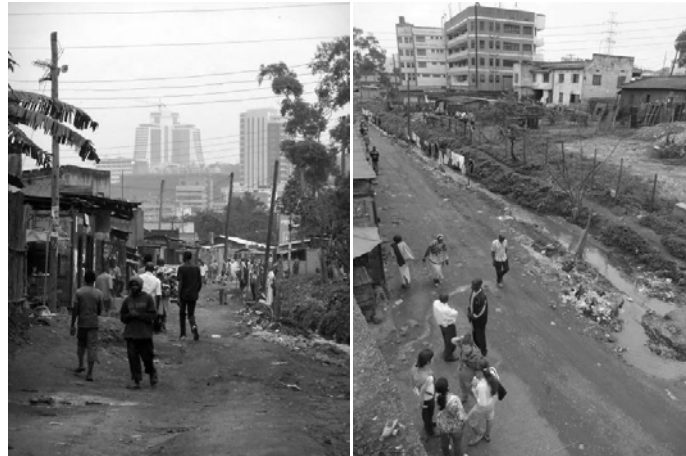
Image.1,2. Kisenyi settlement. Hans Skotte © 2011

The role we play

The exercise with students in Uganda is just an example which actually shows the needs of reconsidering and crossing the boundaries of our profession. It starts with an education and the need for students to be exposed to real projects. Even most of our students had a professional experience to work with informality; they were lost and affected by the Ugandan reality for the first two weeks. A possibility for the students to be exposed to reality during their studies makes them more responsible for their own presumptions, opinions and actions, which they never came across in their profession. This student's exercise showed us that there is a need for different professional approaches in urban development. Our students had architecture, engineering, geography and planning backgrounds. However if somebody would ask them, whether they managed to act in this project according to their education as professionals, their answer would be negative. 'Thinking outside the box', 'dreaming beyond the bricks', crossing the boundaries of their professions were the biggest challenges they faced during the fieldwork. It was not only to discover the unknown or to go to other disciplines' topics, but also to cross unknown relationships which actually created insecurity and tension among partners on the ground, without even knowing it. It happened for students when they interviewed the property owners in the fieldwork without informing federation and this caused the tension and mistrust between the owners and the community. But there is no school or professional training which could prepare us to handle these kinds of situations. It is 'learning by doing' process: where one faces the completely unknown and where the other has to face the consequences of it afterwards. These kinds of situations are not unique when we work in the environment owned by people. Similar situation I also experienced while constructing the community toilet in Kibera, Nairobi, where 'ownership' of the land was not clarified with community and the building was destroyed in one night. Considering my previous practice in the field and experience I had together with the students in Uganda, I assume that being professionals in complex urban environments we can contribute more as mediators between the actors and organisations, than the particular kind of craftsmen. I tend to think that our role is merely occupied by facilitating the process in the early stage of the project to ensure the possible success for scaling up.

Student's role

Even though there was a lot of tension on the ground during the fieldwork, after a while students discovered the strength they actually had. It is almost hard to believe that in two moths they established a partnership and trust within the community. At the same time they also communicated with local authorities as young professionals shared information and got inside of the city planning authorities. At the end it was amazing to see that they manage to bring all the people together for scaling up workshop which we had with Nabeel Hamdi for three days on 'scaling-up'. In this case the students' exercise unfolded the role of professionals as community architects acting as mediators between community and institutions which are important for common work to reach the larger impact in the process of scaling up.

Home beyond bricks

Although the task, which was given by the Slum Dwellers federation, was to look for housing space design solutions, students understood quickly that they need a different approach to deal with the task that applied in the design studio. Students conducted a 'dream house' workshop together with the community to find out what the house and the home is. At this workshop I observed that the community clearly knew, what their needs are, and students tried to contribute with their skills to visualise the ideas. The community and students enjoyed the dreaming house exercise, however lately they discovered a big challenge to developed ideas further on. 'Designing a house does not solve the housing problem' (Hamdi, 2012). We could learn a lot from similar housing intervention done in Uganda. In order to be successful, in addition to the physical form there is a need to address the social and economic aspects of the house as 'home' with people and their livelihoods as an integral part of it (Image 3,4,5). After the workshop students visited local planning authorities to find out if there were any alternative solutions which addressed the housing deficit of today. The exercise done by students exposed the lack of a housing policy which could ensure and address the needs of the urban poor. According to the statistics, Kampala alone has a housing deficit of 100.000 units. The city grid is not prepared or has never been planned to accommodate this size of population. Even though there are a lot of private developers coming into this 'urban jungle', they do not plug into any proper legislation which could control the development process. As architect Harry Kazahuura admitted, 'Uganda lacks both housing policy and an urbanisation policy to regulate and accelerate the construction of housing units' (New Vision, 2012). The challenges Kampala is facing today are too big for any country government to handle. It is clear that there is a demand of private sector to rediscover this field, join the forces with government and communities to create housing innovative product for low income earners.

Image.3. 4. 5. Kawama Housing project in Jinja. Jinja project helped the students to understand what is 'home beyond the bricks'. It is not only in low cost building techniques and materials, but also the choice for the site: distance from center, need of basic infrastructure and plan for sustaining the livelihoods of new comers. Ayda Ayoubi © 2011

How does it work?

As I briefly presented the city's actors which play critical role in a land sharing project are local community and its representatives USDF, students and practitioners who worked with them and also local and national authorities which were involved during the project. This student fieldwork project highlighted the importance of these actors' presence, as well as relationships and networks these actors had or were established during the project. I will try to illustrate (See figure 2) the role of these actors and discuss it through the three stages of the project: when the project was initiated by the students and the community during the 'fieldwork' (1), how it was developed into the Mock-up exhibition '3months later' (2), and what actually happened when we left and stayed for 'Today' (3).
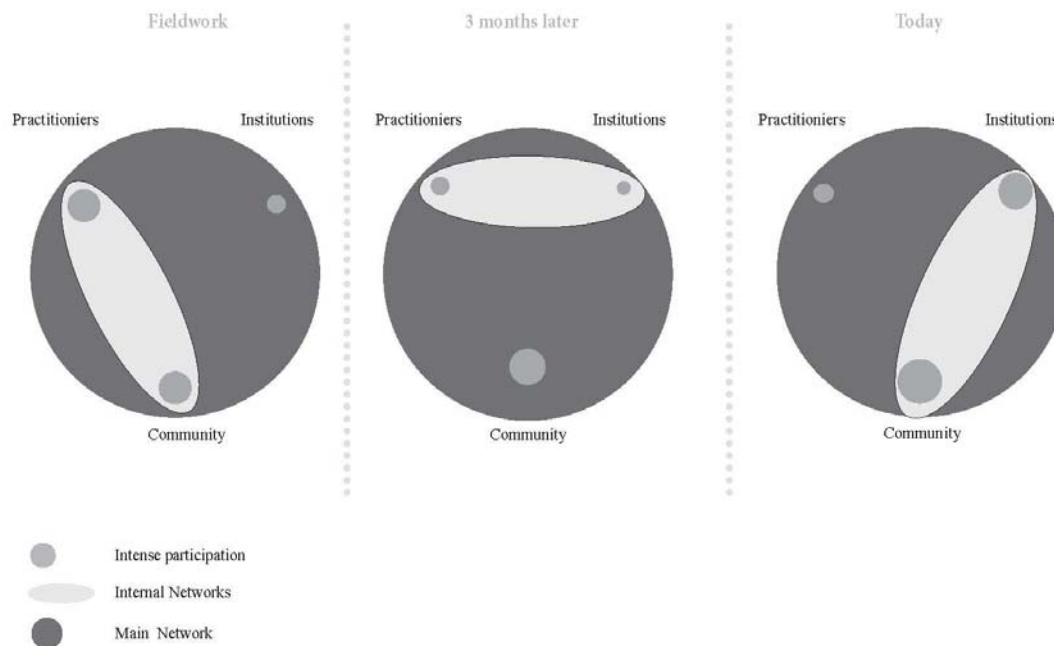

Figure 2. The role of actors during Mock up exercise. Elena Archipovaite © 2012

The process

From the early stage, this student exercise had a contention not only as a stage for learning, but also as a place to generate ideas and try to put them into action. From early beginning we were invited to work on land sharing project with USDF. The federation is the best example of the Slum and Shack Dwellers organisation which was formed to offer the partnership for the city and the national government to advocate the urban poor. In this case students and SDI architect from South Africa represented the role which in most cases the professional or so called 'community architect' would play. As the community looked for the product the students to deliver, the first project steps were hard. From the early beginning of their field work, students tried to figure out what they can achieve in a short two months period. Little by little they pictured out themselves as a part of the process, where in together with the community they tried to find out the opportunities on how the land sharing plot could accommodate slum dwellers' homes

and their livelihoods. They understood that the community architect's role is nothing more than to lead the process creating the place for creative thinking as these communities do not have opportunity to explore it under current circumstances.

The community in Kisenyi was united by the USDF and is a part of the SDI. They also established a partnership with the local planning authorities and Makerere University before. This is a good example of the all city actors trying to work together. For example, the university, which trains future planners and architects, could easily contribute to reality if they worked together with local organizations and institutions.

From the beginning the land sharing project tried to accommodate all these partners together: city planning authorities, the land owner, the federation and the developer. The ministry role was to try to find subsidies for the land and contribute with the housing policy changes, where this pilot project of land sharing could become a slum upgrading strategy. Of course, the students' role cannot go beyond their knowledge and capacities, and they cannot contribute to the negotiation part among the actors in the land sharing project. Although during the fieldwork students felt their limits and lack of information, they managed to mediate among the local NGO, federation and planning authority to make their contributions. While there was a clearing process and negotiation happening among the partnering organizations (between the land owner, federation and land and housing ministry, students together with SDI architect took a leader's role of the space design process. With the help of the federation, the community and the households were directly involved into the project process from the beginning. In two weeks they managed to map out all the land sharing area, to conduct the dream 'housing workshop' and to make a special proposal of incremental housing unit.

After the dream housing workshop we managed to invite the community, local planning authorities, federation members and other organisation to the Scaling up workshop that was conducted by Nabeel Hamdi - bringing the actors together to share and discuss the ways for scaling up. It was a mile stone exercise which actually eliminated boundaries between all actors. In the two days' workshop Hamdi helped them to explore and understand the possibilities and potential of small scale interventions being scaled up (Image 6, 7).

Mediator role

Two days' workshop helped to establish better communication among the actors (like inviting planning authorities to sit together with the community around the table), as well as to find how the small income charcoal activity could be scaled up and generate the income in most of the settlements of Kampala city. Actors managed to discuss together on 'what is', as well as on project strategies 'what it could become'. In these sections our students played a beautiful moderator's role; they managed to soften the relationship and attitudes between the officials and the community's member just by being there and leading the discussions.

This workshop on scaling up also made students to rethink about what they could leave behind eventually and to envisage what could be scaled up afterwards. The idea of building the incremental housing unit model in a 1:1 scale emerged. The part of this continuity was to leave behind the local Makerere University students to supervise the exercise of building this mock up.

Even though the NTNU students left and SDI architect was not around anymore, the 'actors' and the roles stayed the same. This Mock-up event was projected as an arena where the community, organisations and local authorities could come together to address and discuss the housing issues of Kisenyi. I think it was the best idea we could manage to accumulate at that time.

We did not know what would happen and how we would do it, but we decided to try. It was good to leave something continuing for the community, but on other hand it also raised their expectations from us.

Image.6, 7. Scaling up session with representatives from Kisenyi community and city planning authorities. Dream house workshop, UEP students and representatives from Kisenyi community. Hans Skotte © 2011

Coming back after three months

Meantime we were able to secure additional funding; I was back on the ground. However this time I faced more challenges apart from the supervision of students. The responsibilities were different, expectations from the community and other stakeholders were also higher than before. I came for only three weeks to build a physical structure out of the proposal by the students in cooperation with Kisenyi community. The challenges proved to be bigger than I expected and planned for. People on the ground were not ready for this event at that time. The organizational issues between the stakeholders, community dynamics and other logistics were pushing us back.

Dynamics on the ground

We had an idea took take photos of recently evicted people from the Kisenyi settlement and to put the portrait of these people on the top of the housing structure, that it would represent and address the housing issues for the one who is in a need. No one wanted to be presented as the one evicted, because they felt ashamed, they were scared of consequences that can come after it and they did not want to represent the community anymore as they felt alone facing the reality of evictions.

Till the last minute we were not sure if we could be able to build this structure at all. It was the first ever live project for the frontrunners. They faced not only the lack of personal or professional experience and skills, but also did not approach their responsibility towards the community in a favourable way. It would have been easy if the task would be just to build a structure.

This Mock-up exercise was not only to be a physical intervention showing a possible housing unit, but also a social event, a 'housing event', which would bring together all the stakeholders to discuss the housing situation of the urban poor by presenting the incremental housing approach as an alternative and more appropriate housing strategy.

The role of actors

As from previous small scale interventions done in Brazil, this Mock up exercise showed us a way more than just addressing housing issues in Uganda and need of innovative space design solutions for housing unit. It actually clarified and uncovered the role of actors and power structures during the processes we tried to build the mock up and organize the event. It was the similar case in small light installation exercise in favela when it took me 3 days to agree with local and even external government actors to get the power cable to the site to turn on the light for 24 hours in one of the public space.

The same happened in Kibera when we tried to get the water pipes. These struggles during the basic service project show that it is crucial that all the actors have to be involved and informed from the beginning of the project.

By 3th of March the Minister of State for Housing, Sam Engola, launched the Mock-up exhibition. The event caught the attention of the local community, planning authorities and the media and thus focused public attention on the housing challenges for the urban poor at least for a day or two (Image 10).

The gap between policy and reality

Students found out that the existing housing policy not even covers what the urban poor like Kisenyi's community could afford. Even the minister launching the Mock up exhibition in March asked me where a master bedroom in this unit was. He was surprised when I said it was behind the curtain in the kitchen. Furthermore, the urban commissioner was so overwhelmed with the idea that a space on the top of the bathroom could be used for children's beds or as a storage room, that he literally called it the most innovative thing he had ever seen before.

These are the examples of how the people who actually have impact to the policy changes are not expose to reality or innovation as they would call it. This is so simple example that students' and the community's small design intervention managed to get the attention form the authorities just by showing the unit that they could affords and contribute to make it real. Without the students it would be hard for the community to start discussion on housing challenges they face.
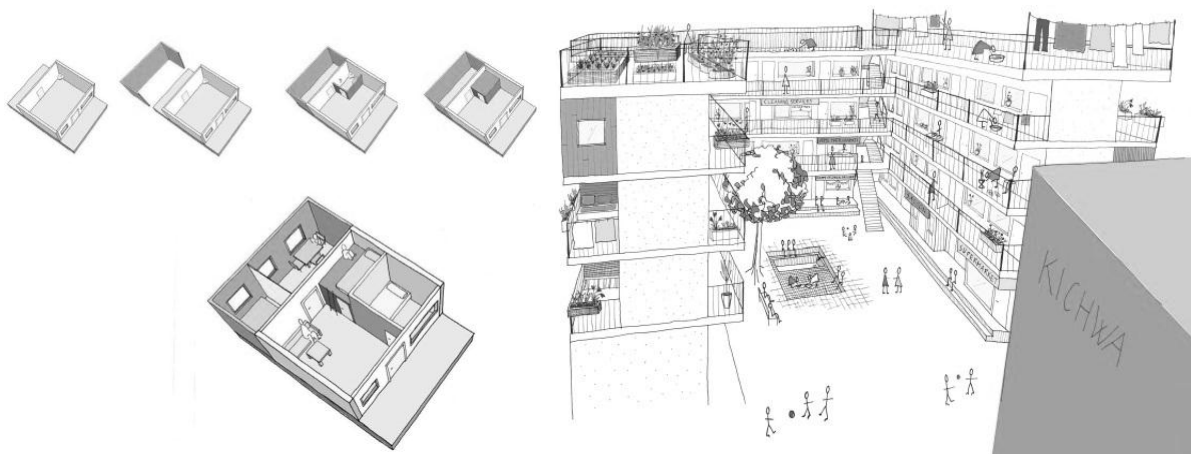
Image.8,9. Incremental housing unit model design by Kisenyi community and UEP students during the fieldwork. Perspective of the cluster made by the incremental units. UEP archives © 2011

What is taking place today

When I left students were not directly involved in the process of land sharing project anymore. The community was also not so actively involved due to the tension and power dynamics in organisations. It is hard to speed it up when all the actors are not 'on the same page at the same time'. In the last 4 months Federation and a local NGO managed to solve the partnership tension they had before. Ministry of housing, influenced by the event or this Mock up exercise, started to talk more in the media about the housing issues and problems Uganda is facing today. For the last months the leading newspaper in Uganda 'New Vision' devoted space to highlight the plight of slum dwellers looking at how a housing policy is set to give people better housing facilities in slums (New Vision, 2012).

Just 3 weeks ago NTNU managed to address and present the students' and the community's fieldwork results by building the Mock up as a university stand in World Urban Forum in Naples. The visitors of the stand received a very positive impression of the University. They also expressed their interest about a school of architecture in Norway which creates a space for its students to experience and discover the strategic and global role of the architect and the planner. This stand generated the platform where more Ugandan officials got the knowledge of the partnership between the University and the local community to address the housing issues (Image 11). The stand was also a hub for the Norwegian Junior Minister and other representatives from ministries to become more familiar with the exercise and to discuss the opportunities to proceed it further as a pilot project.

Image.10. Minister of State for Housing, Sam Engola, launched the Mock-up exhibition, where the grassroots organisations, community and other stakeholders where present to discuss the affordable housing challenges in Kampala city.

*Image .11.*World urban Forum 6 NTNU university stand. Commissioner Samuel Mabala from Uganda Ministry for Land, housing and urban development explains for the visitors how UEP incremental housing model works. Hans Skotte © 2012

Conclusions

Although the need of scaling up is discussed a lot nowadays in the field of urban development research, it is still hard to find everyday good practices of small scale design interventions which were successfully scaled up. Probably the gap between the practice and research is still too wide. This student exercise illustrated more challenges we might face, than the solutions of scaling up. However it indicated the need of all actors: practitioners, community and institutions to expand each own boundaries and rediscover their own field capacities to find the solutions for the problems we face today. The student fieldwork and Mock up event unfolded the power and strength of a local community organisation which has to be taken into account from an early stage of a project. The challenges students faced as practitioners represent the demand of non-conventional practitioners and call for the changes to be made in education system. Reconsidering our perception towards the city it would not only open up new opportunities for design professionals but also create a ground for urban poor to make a choice which normally is not provided by nature informality. The presence and partnership with institutions has a potential to narrow the gap between the policies and real issues, as it happened in Mock up exhibition where innovative ideas presented by students working together with the community was so 'innovative' to the officials. The energy moderated by small scale interventions need to be taken over by the other actors who could make an influence in the policy changes which could lead to a larger impact. Self-help initiatives need a system support to scale it up and local institutions, which could have political commitment, are the only ones in the end to turn in to reality. The small process of scaling up we achieved by now is lasting dialog between the community organisation and local authority.

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