

CCI Professor working with top Chinese university

Professor Steffen Lehmann, Director of the Cluster for Sustainable Cities, has been appointed as 'Distinguished Visiting Professor' at Xi'an Jiaotong University (XJTU) in Xi'an, China. This appointment will focus on urban transformation and is funded through the prestigious National Science Foundation of China (NSFC).

Each year, high ranking Chinese universities can apply for funding to bring foreign experts to China, and there are three categories, with the Distinguished Visiting Professor being the highest out of three categories. Xi'an Jiaotong University is one of China's oldest and high-ranking universities; it was selected by the government as a 'Key University' to develop into a 'global first-class university' by 2025.

Professor Lehmann has recently been successful with a British Council (Newton Fund) and NSFC funded workshop at XJTU that will focus on urban regeneration and resilience of Chinese cities. Here Steffen talks about his interest in China and the urbanisation process.

Q: When did you visit China for the first time and what is your relationship to the country?

SL: I first went to this large and immensely interesting country in 1990 and have been visiting on a regular basis since. Obviously, at this time, the Chinese urbanisation rate was less than 30 percent and the cities looked very different compared to today. Since then, I have visited China almost every year. We must remember, the urbanisation of China has lifted over 500 million people out of poverty in less than 30 years and led to the rise of China's middle class. In 2003, I was a Visiting Professor at the Architecture School of Tongji University in Shanghai and in 2010 at Tianjin University in Tianjin, which enabled me to get a deeper understanding of China's fascinating urbanisation process. From 2010 to 2014, I was Founding Director of the China-Australia Centre for Sustainable Urban Development at the University of South Australia; this was a joint centre with offices in Adelaide and in Tianjin. We found that cities are always hungry economic engines. In future, most urbanisation will take place in the developing countries of the Global South, especially in Asia and Africa.

Q: What experiences do you have of organising workshops in China and what are the aims of the INSIGHT workshop at XJTU?

SL: In 2014, I was leading a group mission to Beijing and Tianjin, and organised a symposium funded by the Australia-China Council. Recently, we received funding from the British Council (Newton Fund Researcher Links Programme) and from the National Science Foundation of China to organise a 3-day workshop at Xi'an Jiaotong University in Shaanxi Province. This workshop will bring 20 early career researchers from the UK to work with 20 Chinese academics on the topics of urban regeneration and resilience. The main aim of the INSIGHT workshop is to promote the international exchange of knowledge and experiences around novel theories, strategies and methods on urban regeneration, discussing integrated strategies for inclusive growth, resource-efficiency and urban resilience. The participants are all experts in the field of inclusive urban regeneration and we are interested in novel approaches to urban resilience, brownfield development and inclusive growth that will help to address multiple societal challenges and generate long-term benefits. This is likely to also generate tangible economic benefits in terms of new job opportunities and the regeneration of urban areas generally. The workshop will run for 3 days and will include public engagement activities.

Q: What will be the particular focus of your work at XJTU?

SL: Urban population growth and climate change impact has now shifted our focus on new approaches of regeneration. By 2022, China aims to relocate over 10 million people from unhealthy slum areas, and Shaanxi alone will relocate 1.2 million people. The Shaanxi Land & Resources Bureau commissioned XJTU to evaluate the socio-economic impact of this. Sustainable urbanisation is now a priority and therefore, the workshop is very timely. Local government have indicated an interest in specific topics that are to be addressed, including: Poverty alleviation through urbanisation; localising resilience strategies for brownfield sites; the circular economy; the One Belt-One Road strategy (Xi'an is the starting point of the new Silk Road); and the ageing population (by 2025, 34 percent of all Chinese will be older than 60). The interdisciplinary focus of the workshop will explore these issues in great depth.



Xi'an City in China