Building Bridges, Shaping Better Cities: A Journey Toward 2027

ICCCASU's 2026 China Visit: Conference Preparations and Urban Field Studies

Introduction: In October 2026, against the backdrop of China's autumn season, preparations for the 7th International Conference on Canadian, Chinese and African Sustainable Urbanization (ICCCASU7), planned for China in 2027, brought together longstanding partners and new collaborators. Professor Huhua Cao of the University of Ottawa, Co-President of ICCCASU, joined colleagues on an intensive journey combining conference planning, institutional meetings, and urban field visits. Travelling through Shanghai, Guangdong, Beijing, and Shanxi, the team engaged with academics, government representatives, industry leaders, and international partners, both in person and online. Guided by a shared belief that better cities are built through collaboration, each meeting opened new possibilities for advancing sustainable urban development across Canada, China, and Africa.

1. A Decade of Collaboration: Looking Ahead to ICCCASU7 in China in 2027

Since its inaugural conference in Ottawa, Canada, in 2015, ICCCASU has held successive biennial international conferences in Yaoundé, Cameroon (2017); Chengdu, China (2019); Montreal, Canada (2021); Nairobi, Kenya (2023); and Ottawa, Canada (2025). Over the past decade, these gatherings have helped build a growing network of international collaboration connecting Canada, China, and Africa (www.icccasu.org).

With preparations now underway for the seventh conference, ICCCASU is once again looking to China as its next host country in 2027.

In late October, Professor Huhua Cao reunited with Professor Dingping Gu of Fudan University in Shanghai. Professor Gu has been actively involved with ICCCASU since its early years and has remained a dedicated supporter, participating in its activities almost every year over the past decade. He has also played an important role in academic coordination and international collaboration. In 2025, he travelled to Ottawa to attend the sixth ICCCASU conference. Their reunion provided an opportunity to discuss preparations for ICCCASU7 in 2027 and strategies for engaging international partners, bringing renewed momentum to a longstanding collaboration spanning more than a decade.





In Shanghai, Professor Cao also held in-depth discussions with Professor Jiannan Wu, Chair Professor at Shanghai Jiao Tong University and Academic Vice President of Xiangtan University, and Professor Chao Liu, Associate Dean of the School of Public Administration at Xiangtan University. Their discussions focused on the possibility of Xiangtan University hosting the 7th ICCCASU International Conference in 2027. They exchanged views on the conference theme, organizational structure, academic program, international guest invitations, and the involvement of local governments and industry partners. They also explored how Xiangtan and Hunan Province's longstanding economic and trade ties with Africa could help expand cooperation on sustainable urban development among Canada, China, and Africa. In addition, the discussions covered preparations for the Second Canada–China Housing Workshop, including opportunities to integrate housing policy research, green building technologies, and industry collaboration into the planned activities. The shared vision is to make ICCCASU7 a dynamic international platform that brings together academic exchange, policy dialogue, and practical cooperation.





Professor Zacharias, whose research has long focused on urban development, urban space, and planning practices in China, also contributed to broader discussions on China's urbanization, urban governance, international comparative studies, and opportunities for future research collaboration.

Professor Cao subsequently met in Shanghai with Professor John Zacharias, Chair Professor at Peking University and former Vice President of ICCCASU, and Professor Yupeng Wang of Southeast University. Their discussions focused on the proposed theme, conference framework, and academic collaboration for ICCCASU7 in 2027.



Meanwhile, preparations continued through a series of online discussions with longstanding ICCCASU partners, including Professor Yangfan Li of Xiamen University, current Vice President of ICCCASU; Professor Xingping Wang of Southeast University, former Vice President of ICCCASU; and Professor Xiaofen Yu of Zhejiang University of Technology, Director of the China Housing and Real Estate Research Institute. These discussions addressed the academic program, housing policy research, partnership opportunities, and organizational arrangements for ICCCASU7, the Second Canada–China Housing Workshop, and related activities. The participants offered valuable suggestions to help advance the next stage of preparations.

The proposed theme for ICCCASU7 is "**Connecting Canada, China and Africa to Shape Cities: New Gateways for Global Ideas and Local Solutions in the AI Era.**"

The concept of "Gateways" carries two complementary meanings. First, Xiangtan and Hunan Province could serve as a geographical and economic gateway (Geographical Gateway), building on their established economic and trade ties with Africa to foster broader cooperation among Canada, China, and Africa in industry, education, and sustainable urban development. Second, ICCCASU itself serves as a gateway for knowledge and policy exchange (Knowledge Gateway), bringing together academics, governments, businesses, and international organizations to promote knowledge sharing and locally relevant innovation.

Together, these two gateways reflect ICCCASU's guiding principle of “Global Ideas – Local Solutions”: connecting international knowledge, experience, and innovation with the specific needs and realities of local communities. In this spirit, ICCCASU7 in China in 2027 represents more than another international conference. It is an opportunity to build on over a decade of collaboration and open new avenues for international research, policy dialogue, and practical cooperation.

2. Learning from China's Innovative Urban Governance Practices: The “Three Questions to the People” Approach

Sustainable urban development is not only about urban planning and infrastructure investment. It is also about responding to residents' needs, improving everyday life, and ensuring meaningful public participation in urban governance.

During his visit to Shanghai, Professor Huhua Cao was invited to participate in an expert review of outstanding urban governance practices organized by Shanghai Jiao Tong University under the “Three Questions to the People” initiative. The event brought together experts from universities, research institutions, and government agencies to exchange insights into innovative approaches to urban governance and community engagement in China. “The **“Three Questions to the People”** approach - asking residents about their needs, seeking their ideas, and evaluating results based on their feedback - emphasizes people-centred governance. It encourages local authorities to listen to residents, involve them in decision-making, and assess the effectiveness of public policies through tangible outcomes.



The event featured **28 innovative urban governance practices** from cities including Shanghai, Chongqing, Hangzhou, and Shenzhen, highlighting the diverse approaches being developed to improve local governance and community services. Each city offered distinctive experiences. **Shanghai** has focused on revitalizing older neighbourhoods and encouraging resident participation, using community consultations to improve public spaces and residential facilities. **Chongqing**, with its unique mountainous urban landscape, has explored community services and

governance approaches tailored to local needs. **Hangzhou** has leveraged digital technologies to better connect residents' concerns with public service delivery. **Shenzhen**, characterized by a highly mobile population, has developed innovative approaches to engaging diverse communities and improving local public services.

Together, these practices illustrate a broader shift in urban governance—from a primary focus on physical infrastructure toward greater emphasis on citizen participation, public service delivery, and measurable improvements in governance outcomes.

One particularly noteworthy example for Professor Cao was China's 12345 Public Service Hotline, which provides residents with a centralized channel to report concerns related to transportation, the environment, neighbourhood facilities, and public services. These requests are then directed to the relevant government departments for coordinated responses. This resident-centred approach, which encourages cooperation across government agencies, offers valuable insights into how cities can become more responsive to public needs.

These discussions also prompted reflections on urban governance in Canada. Canadian cities face many similar challenges, including housing affordability, population aging, public space management, social inclusion, and community service delivery. How can residents participate more effectively in local decision-making? How can municipal governments and community organizations work more closely together? And how can public policies better respond to the diverse needs of urban populations? These are important questions that deserve continued attention and research.

Of course, Canada and China differ in their governance systems, social contexts, and stages of urban development. Approaches developed in one country cannot simply be transferred to another. Nevertheless, field observations, comparative research, and international dialogue can offer valuable perspectives, helping researchers, urban practitioners, and policymakers explore solutions adapted to their own local circumstances.

From innovative community-level governance practices in China to urban policy approaches in Canada, ICCCASU seeks to foster precisely this kind of international exchange—bridging research and practice, encouraging cities to learn from one another, and translating global ideas into practical local solutions.

3. **From Foshan to Beijing: Exploring New Opportunities for Canada–China Housing Cooperation**

Housing affordability has become a major urban challenge in many countries. Reducing construction costs and building times while improving housing quality, energy efficiency, and environmental sustainability is an increasingly important policy priority in Canada and beyond.
During his visit to China, Professor Huhua Cao paid particular attention to advances in prefabricated construction and modular housing. A key focus was exploring how China's expertise in industrialized construction could be combined with Canada's high-quality timber resources and advanced wood construction technologies to develop more affordable, efficient, and sustainable housing solutions through Canada–China cooperation.



In Foshan, Guangdong Province, Professor Cao visited several companies specializing in prefabricated construction, modular housing, and related building technologies, including **Sainier** and **Zeno**. These visits provided firsthand insights into China's advances in industrialized housing construction.
The companies demonstrated the entire production and assembly process, from architectural design, standardized component manufacturing, and factory prefabrication to module transportation, on-site lifting, and rapid assembly. Unlike conventional construction methods, modular housing allows significant portions of the building process to take place in a controlled factory environment, where structural components, walls, interior finishes, and some electrical and plumbing systems can be completed before being transported to the construction site for final assembly. This approach has the potential to shorten on-site construction time, reduce material waste, and improve consistency in construction quality.

During the site visits, discussions covered not only modular housing production technologies, construction costs, and market applications, but also the potential for introducing these products to the Canadian market. Canada currently faces several housing challenges, including insufficient housing supply, high construction costs, lengthy building timelines, and labour shortages in certain regions. Chinese companies' experience in industrialized production, standardized design, and supply chain management offers valuable insights into alternative approaches to housing construction. Particular attention was given to how existing modular housing products could be adapted to meet Canadian requirements, including cold-climate conditions, building codes, fire safety standards, energy efficiency, and transportation regulations. Such adaptations would be essential to making these technologies suitable for the Canadian market.





In Beijing, Professor Cao held constructive discussions with Mr. Guoli Liu, Head of Forestry Innovation Investment China (FII China), and Ms. Stephanie Zhang (Ruoya Zhang), Manager of Government Affairs and Policy. Their discussions focused on Canadian timber resources, modern wood construction technologies, green building materials, and developments in China's prefabricated construction industry. They explored opportunities for future technology exchange, industry partnerships, and joint research and development (R&D). Particular attention was given to combining Canada's strengths in sustainable timber products and advanced wood construction technologies with China's expertise in modular manufacturing, industrialized construction, and supply chain integration. Such collaboration could open new opportunities for developing affordable housing solutions and advancing low-carbon construction in both countries. The discussions also focused on preparations for the **Second Canada–China Housing Workshop**, planned for 2027, including the possibility of FII China's participation in the workshop and related activities. The workshop aims to strengthen collaboration among researchers, government institutions, and the construction industries of both countries, creating new opportunities for housing innovation, green building technologies, and public policy research.

During his stay in Beijing, Professor Cao also paid a special visit to Professor Chaolin Gu of Tsinghua University. As an early partner and former Vice President of ICCCASU, Professor Gu has been a longstanding supporter of sustainable urban development cooperation among Canada, China, and Africa. The reunion of these two longtime colleagues and friends provided an opportunity for warm and productive discussions on China's urbanization, housing policies, prefabricated and modular construction, and related issues. Drawing on his extensive research

experience, Professor Gu shared valuable insights on advancing housing construction technologies, strengthening connections between academic research and industry practices, and expanding international collaboration. His perspectives offered new ideas for ICCCASU's future research and partnerships.



These visits and discussions form part of ICCCASU's ongoing efforts to strengthen international cooperation in housing research and policy. In 2024, with funding from the **Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)**, ICCCASU successfully organized the **First Canada–China Housing Workshop** in Ottawa. The workshop brought together researchers and partners from both countries to exchange knowledge and perspectives on housing policy, housing affordability, and sustainable urban development (https://icccasu.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Housing-Workshop_News-Brief_final-MD-18June2024.pdf). Building on this successful initiative, ICCCASU is now preparing for the **Second Canada–China Housing Workshop in 2027**, with the aim of expanding research and practical collaboration in green building technologies, timber construction, modular housing, and related public policies.

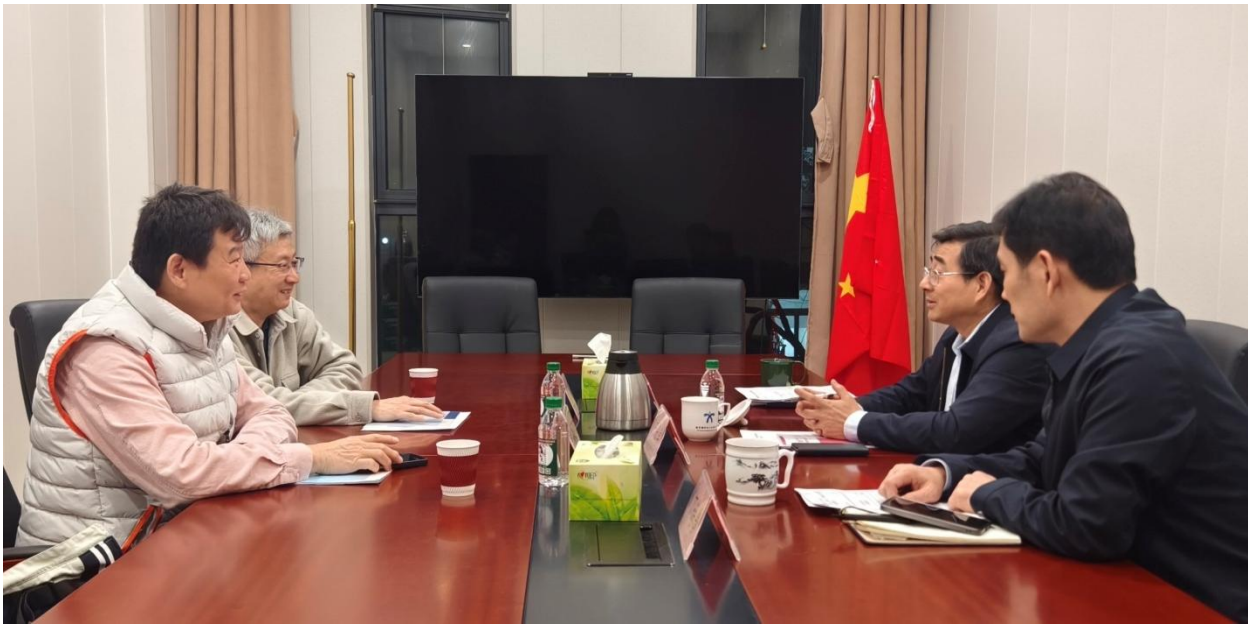
From prefabricated housing companies in Foshan to Canadian forestry representatives and Tsinghua University in Beijing, a common theme emerged: the importance of connecting housing policy research with technological innovation and industry collaboration. For ICCCASU, international cooperation goes beyond exchanging ideas. Its broader purpose is to explore practical housing solutions that respond to the diverse needs and challenges of cities across Canada, China, and Africa.

4. **Strengthening International Partnerships: From Institutional Engagement in Beijing to the Global Urban Governance Network**

Advancing sustainable urban development requires more than academic research and technological innovation. It also depends on sustained collaboration among government institutions, international organizations, and policy research bodies. During his visit to China, Professor Huhua Cao combined in-person meetings with online discussions to strengthen ICCCASU's partnerships developed in China over the past decade while exploring new opportunities for international cooperation.

In Beijing, Professor Cao visited the **China Center for International People-to-People Exchange (CCIPPE) under the Ministry of Education**, where he met with its Director, Mr. Changxue Yu, and other senior representatives. Their constructive discussions focused on preparations for ICCCASU7 in 2027, the Second Canada–China Housing Workshop, and opportunities for international academic and people-to-people exchanges. They also explored how universities, research institutions, and international organizations could leverage their respective strengths and resources to advance practical cooperation among Canada, China, and Africa in sustainable urban development, housing research, and capacity building.





Meanwhile, Professor Cao also held an online meeting with Mr. Guoli Gao, Director of the China Center for Urban Development under the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC). The Center was one of the co-organizers of the third ICCCASU International Conference, held in Chengdu in 2019, and has maintained a longstanding collaborative relationship with ICCCASU. During the meeting, both sides reflected on their previous collaboration and exchanged

views on China's new-type urbanization, urban governance, housing policies, and international comparative research. They also explored opportunities to renew and expand cooperation in policy research, academic exchange, and practical approaches to urban development.



In Beijing, Professor Cao also reunited with his longtime friend and colleague, **Dr. Tonton Mundele, Trade Commissioner at the Embassy of Canada in China**. Dr. Mundele has been actively involved with ICCCASU since its inaugural conference in 2015. A former Vice President of ICCCASU, he has played an important role in organizing, planning, and participating in successive conferences, bringing extensive knowledge of ICCCASU's mission, operations, and international partnerships. The reunion gave the two longtime collaborators an opportunity to reflect on more than a decade of shared efforts to advance sustainable urban development cooperation among Canada, China, and Africa. They also conducted a detailed review of preparations for ICCCASU7 in 2027, identifying outstanding issues and discussing next steps. Particular attention was given to inviting international speakers, mobilizing Canadian and African partners, and strengthening government and industry engagement. Their longstanding friendship and close working relationship made the discussions both productive and personally meaningful, further strengthening the foundation for the next phase of international collaboration.

Joining the Global Urban Governance Network: A New Milestone in ICCCASU's International Collaboration

Another significant development during the China visit was ICCCASU's participation in a new international partnership initiative. At the invitation of Professor Jiannan Wu of Shanghai Jiao Tong University, ICCCASU joined the newly established Global Urban Governance Network (GUGN) as one of its founding members, marking an important step in expanding international cooperation in urban governance.

The Global Urban Governance Network was officially launched on November 3, 2026, during the **2026 Global Urban Forum** in Shanghai. As a major event of the 2026 World Cities Day Global Conference on Sustainable Urban Development, the forum brought together more than 300 representatives from United Nations agencies, universities, research institutions, government organizations, and industry. Under the theme **“Refined Urban Governance and Urban Safety**

and Resilience," participants explored key issues including innovations in urban governance, digital transformation, artificial intelligence applications, and urban resilience.



（GUGN 启动仪式）



At the network's launch ceremony, **Dr. Claude Meutchehe Ngomsi**, Director of UN-Habitat's Central Africa Regional Office and a liaison for cooperation between UN-Habitat and ICCCASU, and **Professor Benjamin Gianni** of Carleton University, Vice President of ICCCASU, delivered congratulatory video messages. Both expressed their support for the initiative and their hopes for its future development. Their participation also reflected the longstanding and close collaboration among UN-Habitat, ICCCASU, and their international academic partners.

For ICCCASU, joining the network represents more than participation in another international event. It offers an important opportunity to expand its global partnerships. Since its establishment in 2015, ICCCASU has worked to strengthen cooperation among Canada, China, and Africa in sustainable urban development.

As a founding member of the Global Urban Governance Network, ICCCASU will be better positioned to strengthen connections with international organizations, universities, research institutions, and urban practitioners. The network also opens new possibilities for joint research, the exchange of best practices, policy innovation, and capacity building.

With **ICCCASU7 planned to take place in China in 2027**, this new international platform comes at a particularly important time. It offers opportunities to broaden international participation in the conference, deepen academic exchanges, and foster practical cooperation in urban governance across regions and continents.





From its founding more than a decade ago through collaboration with UN-Habitat to its role today as a founding member of the Global Urban Governance Network, ICCCASU continues to expand its international partnerships, building stronger bridges between global ideas and local solutions.

5. **Exploring Shanghai's Residential Communities: From Urban Renewal to Innovative Community Governance**

Beyond a busy schedule of meetings and partnership discussions, Professor Huhua Cao took advantage of his free time to visit several residential communities in Shanghai, particularly older neighbourhoods, to observe firsthand China's approaches to urban renewal, community planning, and local governance.

Shanghai was among the first major Chinese cities to experience significant population aging. As the city has evolved and residents' needs have changed, many older residential communities have faced growing challenges, including aging infrastructure, limited public spaces, parking shortages, and increasing demand for age-friendly services. Improving living conditions within densely developed urban areas, while ensuring that residents of all ages can enjoy convenient and comfortable community life, has become an important priority for urban renewal.

From installing elevators in older residential buildings to maintaining public facilities, managing parking spaces, improving neighbourhood environments, enhancing accessibility, adapting infrastructure for older residents, introducing waste sorting systems, and revitalizing public spaces, these seemingly small improvements can make a meaningful difference in residents' daily lives. The installation of elevators in older residential buildings is particularly significant. Beyond improving mobility for seniors and people with limited mobility, such projects often require negotiations among residents, agreements on cost-sharing, and support from public policies. They illustrate how physical improvements to neighbourhoods are closely connected to community participation and local governance.

Professor Cao also observed newly built or upgraded sports and recreational facilities in several residential communities, including basketball courts, swimming pools, fitness areas, and public spaces designed for older residents to exercise, socialize, and enjoy leisure activities.

In some neighbourhoods, residents can now play basketball or exercise just steps from their homes, while seniors have welcoming spaces to gather and interact. These facilities do more than improve the physical living environment. They also bring greater vitality to neighbourhoods, strengthen community connections, and encourage interaction among residents of different generations.







Of particular interest was Professor Cao's visit to a community dining hall in Shanghai, where he experienced the daily meal services available to local residents. He also took the opportunity to learn more about its operating model, services, management arrangements, and how residents use the facility in their everyday lives.

Community dining halls provide convenient and affordable meals not only for older adults but also for other residents who may benefit from such services, making them an important part of neighbourhood-based public services. Unlike conventional commercial restaurants, these facilities place greater emphasis on accessibility, affordability, and the practical needs of local residents, while also serving a broader social purpose. For seniors living alone, older adults with greater care needs, and people with limited mobility, access to a reasonably priced, nutritious hot meal can make a meaningful difference in daily life. Beyond reducing the burden of preparing meals, community dining halls also offer opportunities to leave home, meet neighbours, and maintain social connections.



From an urban governance perspective, the significance of community dining halls extends well beyond providing meals. How community resources are allocated, how responsibilities are coordinated among government agencies, community organizations, and service operators, and how service quality, operating costs, and long-term sustainability are balanced are all important public policy considerations. Equally important is ensuring that services remain accessible to residents who need them most. During his visit, Professor Cao paid particular attention to how community dining halls respond to residents' needs while exploring financially and operationally sustainable models.





These firsthand observations brought urban governance beyond policy discussions in conference rooms and into the everyday experiences of residents. From a newly installed elevator and a revitalized public space to a neighbourhood dining hall serving daily meals, these examples illustrate a broader shift in urban renewal: from a primary focus on improving the built environment toward a more people-centred approach that emphasizes quality of life and community services.

From an international comparative perspective, community planning is an important component of Canada's urban planning system, emphasizing residents' needs, public services, neighbourhood environments, and public participation. As Canada's population continues to age, supporting older adults to remain in their familiar homes and communities through accessible housing, neighbourhood services, and improved public spaces has become an increasingly important policy priority. This approach is widely known as “Aging in Place.” China's evolving approaches to urban renewal, community services, and local governance, when considered alongside experiences in Canada and Africa, offer valuable opportunities for comparative research on Community-Based Urban Regeneration and Governance. Importantly, international cooperation is not a one-way process of learning from others. Canada's experience in community planning and public participation, together with African cities' innovative approaches to managing rapid urbanization, improving informal settlements, and strengthening community-led initiatives, can also offer valuable insights for urban development in China. Through this exchange of experiences and perspectives, cities across the three regions can learn from one another and develop solutions adapted to their own local contexts.

Starting with everyday life in Shanghai's residential communities and drawing connections to urban renewal and local governance practices across different countries, these observations reflect ICCCASU's guiding vision of “Global Ideas – Local Solutions”: ensuring

that international cooperation ultimately responds to the real needs of urban residents and improves their quality of life.

6. Housing Cooperation Across Continents: From Housing Affordability to Social Inclusion

Housing is not only a fundamental component of urban development but also a critical factor in residents' quality of life, social equity, and urban sustainability. During his visit to China, Professor Huhua Cao examined not only technological innovations such as modular housing and green building, but also China's dual-track housing system, in which government-supported affordable housing and market-oriented commercial housing operate alongside each other.

Under this system, government-supported housing programs aim to meet the basic housing needs of low- and middle-income households and other eligible groups, while the commercial housing market provides a wider range of housing options to meet diverse residential needs. China's dual-track approach encompasses various housing assistance programs, including economically affordable housing, public rental housing, and government-supported rental housing, alongside policies governing the supply, demand, and regulation of the commercial housing market. Balancing market-oriented housing development with public housing support, allocating resources effectively between government and market mechanisms, and meeting the needs of different income groups remain important challenges in China's evolving housing policy. These experiences also offer valuable perspectives for international comparative housing research.

Housing affordability involves far more than housing prices and rents. It is closely connected to land policies, housing finance, demographic change, social protection, and urban governance. In recent years, Canada has faced growing challenges related to high housing costs, insufficient supply, and rising construction expenses. Meanwhile, many rapidly urbanizing regions in Africa continue to confront housing shortages, inadequate infrastructure, and the expansion of informal settlements. Although national institutions and development conditions differ considerably, countries share a common challenge: how to increase housing supply, reduce construction costs, and ensure that people across income groups have access to adequate and affordable housing.

In response to these challenges, ICCCASU is expanding its international network for housing research and policy collaboration, exploring how policy innovation, technological advances, and cross-border partnerships can contribute to more equitable, efficient, and sustainable housing solutions.

Expanding Beyond Canada–China Cooperation: Canada–Europe Housing Policy Research

Alongside preparations for the Second Canada–China Housing Workshop in 2027, ICCCASU's international research partners are also advancing housing policy cooperation between Canada and Europe. With funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), ICCCASU is planning a Canada–Europe Workshop on Housing Policy and Sustainable Communities in Ottawa in May 2027. The workshop will bring together researchers and partners from Canada and seven European countries—France, Germany, Spain, Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom—to examine housing affordability, housing policy innovation, urban spatial change, and sustainable community development.

Beyond academic research and international knowledge exchange, the workshop will feature a Policy Lab designed to facilitate dialogue among researchers, policymakers, and practitioners. A central objective is to explore how findings from international comparative research can be translated into practical, evidence-informed policy recommendations.

From comparative housing policy research between Canada and Europe to China's dual-track housing system, green building technologies, and modular construction, and further to housing supply and community development challenges in rapidly urbanizing African cities, ICCCASU is working to connect policy experiences, research findings, and technological innovations across regions. These efforts are gradually building a broader international network for housing research and cooperation.

This direction reflects a defining characteristic of ICCCASU as an international think tank: its commitment goes beyond exchanging ideas about urban development. Through cross-national research, policy dialogue, and practical partnerships, ICCCASU seeks to address the specific urban challenges facing different countries and translate shared knowledge into locally relevant solutions.

From Housing Security to Urban Social Inclusion

Housing challenges do not exist in isolation. Population mobility, poverty, social exclusion, homelessness, and the management of public spaces are all closely connected to housing security and the basic living conditions of urban residents.

During his visit to China, Professor Cao also took an interest in how Chinese cities address the needs of migrant populations, promote social integration, support vulnerable groups, and deliver community-based public services. These observations offered meaningful connections to ICCCASU's ongoing research and policy initiatives on urban social governance in Canada.

On April 30, 2026, ICCCASU organized a **roundtable discussion on panhandling at urban intersections** at the University of Ottawa. The event brought together representatives from government agencies, municipal authorities, community organizations, academia, and social

service providers to examine the complex relationships among street panhandling, homelessness, public safety, social inclusion, and human dignity (https://www.icccasu.org/data/News_brief_icccasu_v3.pdfc).

Although panhandling at road intersections may appear to be a localized issue of public space management, it often reflects deeper challenges related to housing insecurity, poverty, gaps in social services, and the social integration of vulnerable populations. How can cities maintain public safety while respecting the dignity of every individual? How can housing policies, community support, and social services work together to reduce social exclusion? These are shared challenges facing cities across different countries. This perspective highlights an essential dimension of sustainable urban development: beyond innovative construction technologies, improved infrastructure, and effective housing policies, cities must also pay attention to people whose needs and circumstances are too often overlooked in the process of urban development (University of Ottawa: *Where Human Dignity Meets Public Safety: A New Perspective on Panhandling*).





From China's approaches to community governance and housing security to Canada's challenges of housing affordability and social inclusion, and the growing demand for housing and public services in rapidly urbanizing African cities, ICCCASU continues to broaden the scope of its international comparative research. Making housing more affordable, communities more inclusive, and the benefits of urban development accessible to more people lies at the heart of ICCCASU's mission to advance international cooperation in housing and urban governance.

7. An International Think Tank Powered by Volunteers: Turning a Shared Vision into Reality

Organizing an international conference requires more than discussions around meeting tables. It also involves countless conversations, coordination efforts, and exchanges across countries and time zones.

Throughout his visit to China, Professor Huhua Cao maintained close contact with ICCCASU's partners in Canada, China, and Africa. Through in-person meetings, video conferences, and telephone discussions, he continued to advance preparations for ICCCASU7 in 2027 and the Second Canada–China Housing Workshop.

From selecting the conference venue, developing its theme, and shaping the academic program to engaging partner institutions, inviting international speakers, and encouraging participation from government and industry, every aspect requires consultation, coordination, and collective effort among partners in different countries. Even seemingly straightforward arrangements often depend on repeated communication and relationships built over many years.

What makes ICCCASU particularly distinctive is that it is an international think tank operated entirely through the voluntary commitment, support, and contributions of its members and partners. Since its establishment in 2015, scholars, partners from government institutions and international organizations, professionals, early-career researchers, and volunteers from Canada, China, Africa, and beyond have generously contributed their time, knowledge, and expertise. United by a shared commitment to sustainable urban development, they have sustained an international platform that brings together people, institutions, and ideas across national and cultural boundaries.





What brings these individuals together is neither administrative obligation nor financial reward, but a shared vision and commitment: to contribute their professional knowledge and practical efforts to sustainable urban development worldwide, helping create more livable, equitable, inclusive, and sustainable communities. This common aspiration also reflects the spirit of **"Better City, Better Life."**

Through their involvement, volunteers contribute not only their knowledge, time, and experience but also continue to learn and grow through international exchanges, academic collaboration, and community engagement. Their participation creates opportunities to combine personal fulfillment with meaningful contributions to society. For them, ICCCASU is more than an international cooperation initiative. It is a way to translate the principles of sustainable urban development into

concrete action and to fulfill a shared commitment to urban residents, society, and future generations.

Without a large permanent staff or an elaborate administrative structure, ICCCASU relies on a community of dedicated individuals united by common values, supported by the trust, friendships, and partnerships built over more than a decade. This spirit of voluntary commitment and collaboration has enabled ICCCASU, despite limited resources, to continue organizing international conferences, producing academic publications, advancing cross-border research, facilitating policy dialogue, and expanding into new areas of cooperation.

The intensive and productive visit to China was also made possible by the dedicated efforts of team members working behind the scenes. Mr. Zhang, ICCCASU Project Manager, was responsible for organizing and coordinating the visit activities in Beijing and Shanghai. He also accompanied Professor Cao during these visits, handling meeting arrangements, institutional contacts, partnership discussions, and travel logistics. Mr. Xu, ICCCASU China Project Director, primarily coordinated and accompanied visits to other cities, providing essential support for institutional exchanges and partnership discussions.

From arranging a meeting and contacting a potential partner to coordinating international video conferences and advancing new collaborative initiatives, these detailed and often unseen efforts form an essential foundation for sustained international cooperation.

Over the past decade, many scholars and partners who participated in ICCCASU's early conferences have remained actively involved in its development. Some have grown from conference participants into longstanding collaborators, while others have helped establish new connections across countries and institutions. These enduring friendships and international partnerships have become one of ICCCASU's most valuable assets.

Reflecting on the China visit, a clear theme emerges from the academic exchanges and community visits in Shanghai, the prefabricated housing industry visits in Foshan, and the meetings with government institutions, international partners, and universities in Beijing: **connecting urban development experiences across countries, linking academic research with public policy and industry innovation, and transforming friendships built over more than a decade into new opportunities for collaboration and action.**

From ICCCASU's founding in Ottawa in 2015 to the clearer articulation of its guiding vision, **“Global Ideas – Local Solutions,”** at the sixth international conference in 2025, and its participation in establishing the Global Urban Governance Network in 2026, ICCCASU has continued to grow as a platform for international cooperation.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CANADIAN, CHINESE AND AFRICAN SUSTAINABLE URBANIZATION (ICCCASU)

ICCCASU6 – Day 1 Newsletter, July 28, 2025

Celebrating a Decade of Global Dialogue on Sustainable Urbanization



From left to right: Professor Huhua Cao, H.E. Prosper Higiro (Rwandan Ambassador and Chair of the African Diplomatic Corps in Canada), Senator Yuen Pau Woo, MP Caroline Desrochers, Lin Bin (Deputy Chief of Mission, Chinese Embassy to Canada), and Claude Ngomsi (Head of Central African Office, UN-Habitat)

The 10th anniversary of the International Conference on Canadian, Chinese, and African Sustainable Urbanization (ICCCASU) was held on Monday, July 28, 2025, at the University of Ottawa. Under the theme *"Humanizing Urbanization: Housing, Livelihoods, and Resilient Cities in a Changing World,"* the sixth edition of the conference brought together global voices to explore inclusive, people-centered approaches to urban development. The full-day event featured opening remarks, keynote presentations, a lunch talk, special roundtables & panels, and eight diverse research panels. These sessions facilitated meaningful discussions on urgent global challenges—

Looking ahead to 2027, the **7th International Conference on Canadian, Chinese and African Sustainable Urbanization (ICCCASU7)** is planned to take place in China, offering new opportunities for researchers, government institutions, industry representatives, and international partners from Canada, China, and Africa to come together.

The conference is expected to foster knowledge exchange and practical collaboration on shared challenges, including housing affordability, urban governance, climate resilience, migration, and urban innovation in the age of artificial intelligence. While countries differ in their development conditions and urban challenges, they share many common aspirations: more livable cities, affordable housing, healthy communities, and a better quality of life.

This is the essence of ICCCASU's guiding vision, **"Global Ideas – Local Solutions"**: enabling countries to learn from one another's experiences and translating global knowledge into practical solutions that respond to local needs. Sustainable urban development has never been a task that any single country or group of researchers can accomplish alone. It requires a growing community of people willing to exchange ideas, share experiences, collaborate, and take action.

The vision for ICCCASU7 is gradually taking shape.

Our heartfelt thanks go to everyone who has taken the time to meet with us, share ideas, and explore the future of our cities together. We are equally grateful to the volunteers and partners whose quiet dedication and contributions behind the scenes make this international collaboration possible.

A journey across cities and continents, united by a shared vision of better cities and better lives.

As we look forward to ICCCASU7 opening in China in 2027, we hope that the seeds of cooperation planted throughout this journey will blossom into lasting partnerships and meaningful achievements.

See you in China in 2027!

The International Council on Canadian, Chinese and African Sustainable Urbanization (ICCCASU) was founded in 2015 by the University of Ottawa, UN-Habitat, and academic and NGO partners from Canada, China, and Africa. For over a decade, ICCCASU has advanced trilateral cooperation aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through international conferences, training, policy dialogue, research, and publications. Representing regions that together account for approximately 30% of the world's urban population, ICCCASU has become a recognized platform for cross-continental collaboration, fostering a distinctive model that bridges traditional North–South and South–South cooperation while strengthening Canada's global leadership in sustainable urban development.

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