

**(Extracted from the Report of the Second Session of the World Urban Forum)**

**SUMMARY OF THE SECOND PLENARY MEETING**

**Submission of the Report of the Universal Forum of Cultures**

Monday 13 September

Speakers:

1. Ms. Mireia Belil, Forum Universal de las Culturas 2004
2. Mr. Jordi Borja, Urban Technology Consulting
3. Ms. Margarita Gutman, Universidad de Buenos Aires y New School University, New York
4. Mr. Gianni Longo, ACP-Visioning and Planning
5. Mr. Bernardo Dujovne, Universidad de Buenos Aires
6. Ms. Raquel Rolnik, Secretaria de Programmas Urbanos – Ministerio das Cidades, Brasil

Documentation: None

Slide Presentations were made on the Barcelona 2050, Buenos Aires 2050 and New York 2050 Projects.

Overview

The session was organized to receive the report on aspects of the Universal Forum on Urban Cultures, which was relevant to the theme of the Second Session of the World Urban Forum.

The main issue discussed in the session is the urban challenge and the need to look at the future of an urban world. The just concluded Universal Forum on Urban Cultures brought together people from diverse backgrounds. The main thrust of the dialogue supported by side cultural events was the urban future of the world: the implications of rapid urbanization, conurbation, and regionalization of urbanization to service delivery, quality of human life and peaceful coexistence in diversity by the world's peoples. Discussions at the Forum centered on the sustainable use of critical resources like water, land, air and energy. Participants were generally pessimistic about the urban future, noting that there was no single model city as each city had its own peculiarities. However, the real challenge is to have proper institutions to promote democratic governance, drawing on available human and technological resources within the locality. The discussions at the Forum were centered on two main themes: a) Overcoming Urban Poverty; and b) Ensuring a Sustainable Urban Future. Three slide presentations were made on the Barcelona 2050, Buenos Aires 2050 and New York 2050 Projects to demonstrate how each of the cities are imagining the future, and making it happen.

## Overcoming Urban Poverty

The main conclusions were that urban poverty must be overcome through more effective service delivery if an urban future is to be sustainable. Cultural diversity is considered important in upgrading neighbourhoods. Since tourism promotes the role of the city as a mirror of diversity, by bringing several people together who would not have known each other, it is a key to overcoming poverty. Tourism is also identified as a key tool for conserving cultural and historical heritage. In this regard, fair tourism is to be promoted as a tool for development.

Cities need to be compact and not dispersed to facilitate more efficient service delivery, but this should be based on a well-defined public policy. What are the expectations? What does the society need? How do we arrive at an acceptable answer for all? There is a high level of bystander apathy fuelled by citizens' ignorance of their neighbours. Their perceptions, which are driven by fear, frequently blur the reality. We need to build cities that promote citizenship by building community spaces, simple but workable community information systems and community recreation and public spaces.

To achieve effective urban service delivery for poverty reduction, the activities of three high impact groups – scientists, politicians and media – need to be well-coordinated and already, a number of models and policies are being put forward. One of the main outcomes of the discussions on water supply is the Memorandum of Understanding signed between UN-HABITAT and the Green Cross International.

There is no consensus on what resources to use for urban planning. Some argue that the new should be built on the old like Manhattan, Buenos Aires, and Barcelona. There is broad-based agreement that there has to be minimum transport, service delivery, etc. While this argument may be acceptable for the compact city, there is no clear approach to the fringes and more far-flung areas that spread into the region.

To realize the Barcelona, Buenos Aires and New York 2050 projects, intensive interactive forums, visioning processes, dissemination of information, and mobilization of political resources followed public debates. All three cities have realized the potentials of the 2050 projects as opportunities to understand what citizens want, what they desire and demand for the future, identify critical issues and matters, share and inspire leaders to think big to change the way decisions are made, and expand the horizons of planning.

## Ensuring a Sustainable Urban Future

A sound public policy to sustain an urban future must be centered on the principle that the people's right to the city are inalienable. At the core of this are the critical resources of land, water, air, and energy. These elements must jointly belong to the people and should be removed from private control. To prepare for lack of natural resources for the future, the resources have to be made an integral part of social policy and legislation.

The Buenos Aires 2050 and New York 2050 projects started as responses to deep trauma and crisis, which impacted on the people. New York faced the crisis of a shrinking vision and small plans with a US\$120 billion investment without a blueprint, all following the 11 September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre. Buenos Aires faced an economic and political crisis. Barcelona on the other hand is facing a crisis of success. These projects, which started off in 2001, 2003 and 2004 respectively use peoples' imagination and expert knowledge to promote and influence the future and growth of their city. While emphasizing the importance of thinking in the long-term, even if it is in small steps, citizens are encouraged to imagine their future and make it happen by articulating images and draw pictures of what they want. The projects are aimed at changing the way the city does business by expanding the horizon and scope of civic participation.

Cities must not be allowed to drift rudderless. The 21<sup>st</sup> century must be devoted to metropolitan areas, local participatory spaces and global development strategies. The concept of a super municipality, which has set in with decentralization, has given identity and individuality to cities as bastions of autonomy. So the challenge for professionals is to understand what people want at that level and translate this vision to sustainable plans. To achieve this, there will need to be a desirable mix of experts, knowledge, and citizens. Information to the people is where the power lies. If they are well-informed, they can stop almost any project that does not fit into their vision for their city.

The session concluded by posing questions on some unresolved issues. Given that the vision of the urban future is independent of political office, how do we ensure that elected officials with limited terms understand and accept this long-term approach? Where urban geography does not agree with political geography of councils and states, we need to study processes by which we may not have to "produce more of the same". This can be through the education and socialization process by which we transmit values to the next generation even in meeting simple and daily needs such as health, education, and shelter.