

REPRESENTATION OF ISOCARP WITHIN THE UNITED NATIONS IN GENEVA – REPORT ACTIVITIES 2017

by Dr Charles LAMBERT – accredited ISOCARP representative to UN ECE. dec 2017 .

REMINDER

The United Nations Organisation operates through different bodies including the Economic and Social Council – ECOSOC - which aims to promote international economic and social co-operation and development , and which act as the place for contacts between the Governmental and the Non Governmental organisations within the United States.

A UN Committee dedicated to urban matters, housing and human settlements is based in the UN Geneva Headquarter. ISOCARP has been an active member of this Committee for more than 20 years.

The 2017 UN ECE Annual General Assembly (hopefully) decided to change the name of this Committee next year with the perspective to better express its focusses on the increasing Urban Dimension of the Planet. For this reason, it will be called « *the Committee* » in the rest of the present report.

HEADLINES of this 2017 Report

1 - After its very close involvement in the preparation and the running of the so called H III Conference, the Committee is now fully committed in the implementation of The New Urban Agenda decided in Quito.

2 – SDG (Sustainable development Goals) and HOUSING (the multiple conditions required to develop affordable Housing for all the different urban populations) are increasingly the two main focusses for the Committee's perspective of work during the five or ten years to come.

3 - The Question of The Refugees should become an important issue in the Committee's work

4 – The UN 2017 Geneva Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Housing and Urban Development

5 – My personal remarks on the evolution of the running of the Committee and the interest for ISOCARP to participate to the Committee Meetings without being a full member of the Bureau of the Committee

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE « NEW URBAN AGENDA » AND THE SDG 2030

To make it short :

The Committee will foster its interdivisional and interagency cooperation within the UN bodies.

The Committee will continue to develop panel discussions on the role of national governments in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the New Urban Agenda and « other relevant agreements ».

By doing so, the Committee gives effect to the European Urban Forum held in Prag in October 2017, when the panelists stressed the need for governments, for the UN

development system, and for the Committee to re-focus their activities to ensure effectively their support to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The next steps will be reviewed at the Regional Forum for Sustainable Development in the ECE region in March 2018 (which will include a round-table on urban development) and the High level Political UNECE Forum in July 2018.

Mainly, it was decided that the Committee shall give priority a) to the strategic role of cities and b) to the real objective to improve the life of the general population, making cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable as targeted in the SDG goal n°11.

The Committee was informed about the results of interdivisional cooperations and interagencies cooperations ; especially from and with UN Environment on housing issues and with UN-Habitat on the World Urban Forum to be held in Kuala Lumpur next year.

The Committee was informed on the issues of the UNDA Project and of the Working Party on building capacity in countries in transition's economy in housing and urban development (national Action plans, Guidelines, Policy papers /best practices). Criticism was formulated about the survey on Action Plans, i.e : surprise in the huge amount of problems to face, and questions on the character of the survey- policy papers or only outcomes, the lack of a defining role of the different stakeholders, are the best-practices listed those expressed by the consultant or those pointed out by the countries ?

AFFORDABLE, SUSTAINABLE AND ADEQUATE HOUSING

. A panel discussion was held on the topic « How to the Geneva UN Charter (prepared and approved by the Committee in 2014) is inspiring countries' practical steps instituted to promote sustainable housing at the different level required » in relation with the activities of the ECE-UN Habitat Cooperation program. The Committee was informed that three Geneva UN Charter Centres have already been established in three cities : Tirana, Tallinn and Glasgow, to provide support for the implementation of the Charter and its Strategy in these three respective countries.

. Panelists, also members of the Committee, stressed the importance from now on to develop in the Committee's concerns two different crucial present phenomenons :

1 The reception of The Refugees ,

2. The supply of adequate Housing for Migrants.....if only to limit their implications : to the kind of housing- its affordability in the different types and categories, plus the questions of the various inadequacies in the housing supply (type, equipment, location, social diversity) and the delicate question of the « community building » with its very controversial arguments.

As a contribution the UNECE permanent staff presents the substance of the ECE Housing for Migrants Study 2018 which examined the current challenges in housing migrants in the ECE region : It contains 68 informative practices in 23 countries. It highlights the various problems that migrants have to face, the financial challenges related to the integration of migrants in cities, and some key solutions experimented here and there, including integration through education and « regional » initiatives of additional housing programmes.

. In other panel discussions, additional items were developed by different panelists invited to address the Committee :

- « housing indeed but Living, and not only Housing ! »,

- « by 2030, ensure access to cities which are also Sustainable Communities »,
- « housing costs representing more than 30% of the family's income should be included in criterias of inadequate housing »,

as well as some very controversial statements linked to the housing market were made by speakers but not debated by the Committee. For instance: « transformation of places should lead to the transformation of the housing market , and not the opposite ! » a statement made by the Planning department of the University of Glasgow.

The UN 2017 GENEVA MINISTERIAL DECLARATION on Sustainable Housing and Urban Development

This year, UNECE celebrates the seventieth anniversary of the establishment of The Committee.

In order to mark this event the Committee has invited Ministers in charge of Planning, Urban Development and Housing in the different Members Countries to adopt a Ministerial Declaration .

This Declaration was prepared by the Committee in extension of its work. A first draft was prepared last year and revised in december 2016 ; then the Bureau of the Committee prepared a second version which was submitted during an informal meeting in june 2017 and circulated for final comments. The text was then fully endorsed by the Committee during this 2017 Annual Session and was officially approved by the Ministers attending this special dedicated session in the Committee's Agenda.

The complete text of this « 2017 Geneva Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Housing and Urban Development » is available on the Committee's website as well as the « 2014 Geneva Charter » produced and approved by the Committee in 2014(see former reports).

This Geneva Ministerial Declaration :

- select and describe 6 major trends developed in an Annex to the Declaration :
Urbanisation and demography,
Economy of Cities,
Living in Cities,
Housing,
Environment and Disaster risks,
Governance.
- invite national, regional and local governments and authorities, and other relevant stakeholders to work together to address a listed Housing and urban challenges :
Economic challenges,
Social dimension,
Environmental dimension,
Principles of governance, and

Regional cooperation for implementation of the Geneva UN Charter, *including : the creation of regional networks of governments, experts and stakeholders organising workshops, study trips and other capacity building activities to promote the implementation of the Charter (but the attempt from the real-estate representatives to lobby for the shortening of a list of appropriate experts to be include or annexed to this Ministerial Declaration, did lead the Bureau of Committee to the supression of any mention to a list of relevant experts to be involved in these processes, even us urban and regional planners !)*

PERSONAL REMARK ON THE EVOLUTION OF THE RUNNINGS OF THE COMMITTEE

I feel I have to close this report with a personal remark on the evolution of the running of the Committee and in the interest itself of ISOCARP to continue participating to Committee Meetings without being a full member of the Bureau of the Committee

We now have to face a paradoxical situation for an influential NGO.

After more than fifteen years of works within UNECE as a representative of our Planning profession, I shall say that the relative success in our inputs to favour/enhance the importance given by this Committee to urban matters and not only to land administration and to environment as it was years ago) has provided an evolution which is now difficult to get on with !

As a matter of fact, this enlargement of the scope and jobs of the Committee has justified the development of a real expertise within the UNECE staff with in-house skilled, wise and thoughtful employees who are also now allocated with a budget for external inputs (surveys, monitoring,...).

So, the Bureau of the Committee became progressively the permanent counterpart and partner for these very efficient internal resources given the pace of the different tasks carried out they would need to be led and guided more than ones or twice a year in plenary meetings.

As a consequence, the Agenda of the Committee's plenary Sessions is getting longer and longer and with such a large number of invited speakers and panellists in a limited two days format, that it becomes for a Committee member as we are, really impossible to intervene in session and to express any point of view or additional item. The Bureau seems to be the only place in a position to influence the course of the work at end . But to be eligible to the Bureau (in fact or in law) one should represent a Member State and have received subsidies from one's institution to cover the expenses occurred by a program of work, which would need several meetings a year in Geneva !.

Finally, the room left in practice nowadays to NGO's like ISOCARP is becoming very limited.

I should hope that these last two years were particular because of the running of the Habitat III Conference and its consequences on UN Staff. I hope that this Committee will recover the character of a very unique place where countries and other parties with experience can exchange diagnosis and solutions to prepare the future of their cities and their urban regions. *I will stay alert and remain optimistic since the Committee Members have given a positive sign in this direction when they decided to change next year the Committee's official name next year to better reflect this direction !.*

23rd december 2017 -