

LIVEABLE CITIES: URBANISING WORLD, MEETING THE CHALLENGE

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CLOSING AND CONCLUSIONS

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After these three productive and highly exciting days we spent exploring and discussing urban liveability from different perspectives, the time has come to put together the results of the three-day work, and see the main findings and results of this professional exchange.

The fruitful four days period of the Congress started with the lectures of three very distinguished keynote speakers who delivered inspiring speeches about urban liveability, planning approaches and methodologies, and the new and innovative techniques for making planning more sensitive to climate change, and climate related aspects of urban physical planning and design.

The Congress was to a greater degree oriented towards practice than theory, which is consistent with the nature of our Society and our mission. The Call for papers strongly emphasized that point, as we wanted to have an array of issues to be explored emerging from the on field experience.

In our five workshops 88 papers were presented, coming from different parts of the world. There were 37 countries present, papers and case studies from more than 60 cities and towns. We had an extraordinary and, to a certain extent, out of the usual run of things international exchange, having authors from China presenting papers and case studies from Germany, USA and Canada, colleagues from Japan talked about Kolkata, while authors from Germany presented case studies from Vietnam. Such an interchange speaks about who we are, and indeed, about the fact that ISOCARP is truly an international society.

IMPLEMENTING LOW CARBON ENVIRONMENT

The parallel session on **implementing low carbon environment** brought together papers and case studies focused on strategies and solutions which are specifically designed for urban areas to secure the reduction of carbon emissions. Concrete examples of completed projects were presented and discussed here, as they provide valuable knowledge on how low carbon communities could be developed, how they work, and how they could serve as good practice paradigms for others to follow. The papers set out arguments, presented policies, plans and projects, and demonstrated innovative solutions regarding methods and techniques to be used in creating, and monitoring urban environment.

As it is usually the case when it comes to professional meetings, a substantial proportion of time and workshop work was devoted to the question of different approaches, and issues of relevance for planning methodology, either by critically examining the status quo in the profession, or by bringing in fresh and new ideas in order to be further explored. Roughly, two distinguished concepts were examined: one, deeply rooted in a comprehensive approach, well known and previously used around the world, more or less successfully, and the other, much less used, but still in the “if then” phase, but with thoughts and suggestion that inspire. The latter favors adaptive strategies as a milieu for planners’ work in their quest for pragmatic and practical ways of solving problems. The rationale behind is that current course of urbanization processes is dynamic, unpredictable, and discontinuous. While both approaches have many positive sides, they also have the drawbacks we should not ignore. Neither one could be taken as a recipe; both are dependent on the context and concrete situation in which planning is taking place, and their successful implementation depends on local circumstances, respectful institutional arrangements, or legal and regulatory framework which countries have. It is the wider context and the specifics of the city or area in question that influence or guide the decision on which path to take, notwithstanding the sophistication of the model itself, professional knowledge and expertise.

Several papers focused on the relationship between sustainability and the spatial development model as a core issue for the workshop debate. A variety of spatial models were explored, like the case of Kolkata and the Randstadt metropolitan area, as opposed to the Hong Kong case study. The case study of Belgrade, or a cross comparison of three cities - Stockholm, Marseille and Newcastle, illustrated diversity and differences in understanding city structure, and a delicate relationship between the existing settings of cities, and strategies they employ in making them liveable.

A challenge of the relationship between the sustainable and affordable was raised and discussed here. The case studies presented and explored here, send a clear message that there are many cities and towns in the world that can hardly cope with the issue of carbon pressure in the way urban places in the more developed world can. The Sub-Saharan cities cannot embark on any change so radical yet, due to enormous pressure of other, much more needed areas, such as providing decent and affordable shelters, food, employment opportunities, all to support the very basic living conditions for their citizens. The end result of a lack of resources and a limited space to maneuver is that their choices are restricted. In spite of that, they keep looking for, and implementing solutions which could work for them, example being the case of Amani Village in Kenya, where the “affordable” and “sustainable” were successfully linked. Their experience, as a “good practice” will be further explored and implemented in other African Coastal towns.

Many valuable concluding remarks have been generated in this workshop about which you will hear in more details from the workshop rapporteur. My remarks go to the way we proceed in making our selection of the most appropriate tools and time to intervene. For that, we have to look at:

- The speed with which the goals should be attained;
- We should look for solutions that are compatible with existing administrative, political and judicial frameworks, and with economic structures;
- Policy instruments we propose should be politically acceptable for all involved and affected;
- We should look at the complexity of application, and ease of monitoring and enforcement;
- The policy measures should be consistent with the overall development of environmental strategy, in particular referring to implementation of low carbon urban environment”

(Interpretation from: UMP: Toward Environmental Strategies for Cities, The World Bank, 1994, p.58).

BUILDING SUSTAINABLE NETWORKS

Riverfronts, ecological greenways and green networks, expansion of regional urban space based on green smart growth, how people use and perceive urban open spaces, linking non-urbanized areas and eco-sustainable planning, as well as opportunities to develop low carbon urban spaces and green city clean waters program, were the papers topic explored in the workshop on **building sustainable networks**.

The importance of having this workshop in our congress may be illustrated in the best way by following quote:

“The history of human culture suggest that “landscape” is one of the earliest and most obvious concepts for perceiving and describing our changing environment, be it artificial or not. It is at the landscape level that changes of land use, naturalness, culture and character become meaningful and recognizable for human interpretation. In that sense, landscape is as much vision as it is reality”(European Environmental Agency, Urban sprawl in Europe, p. 45, European Commission, Joint Research Center, 2006).

A number of inspiring and challenging questions were explored in this workshop, and many good messages and suggestions came out from a lively discussion.

The variety of topics explored here again shows that there are no universal answers applicable on the whole as a model or a standard. The only general rule, like in many other aspects of development is that providing responsive solutions is a contextual variable, and goes hand-in-hand with local conditions, geography, climate, social and cultural context.

Regardless of the variety of planning and design responses, there are certain principles, and solutions which could be found virtually anywhere in the world. Establishing a balance between built and non-built environment and taking natural habitats and ecological features as development assets, change our understanding of urban life, and open up new opportunities in making cities

liveable. These has been rightly observed and justified by a number of case studies presented in this workshop.

What have we learned from each other and what would be the messages for planners, and all those who are engaged in place-making? While the workshop rapporteur will go into details, and emphasize a number of particular points, herewith I would like to share with you the following:

- Establishment of the urban green corridors, and open space network, have significant implications on how cities use their land and environmental and development standards, the feedback message being that we, the planners, are not alone in this game. Much more is needed, and many others should be involved to achieve this goal and make it work.
- In addition to urban, there are also regional green corridors which increase the open space connectivity, enhance diversity and complexity of the green network.
- Creation of a network of green spaces at the urban scale may promote or even establish a new mobility and accessibility system, enhance and enlarge the facilities network promoting urban activities, or increment urban quality in the neighborhoods next to the water and open spaces, and integrate them in the urban context.
- In addition to the often repeated importance which open spaces and green networks have by enhancing environmental qualities of spaces and places, there are successful examples that illustrate another added value they have: to protect and give value to the built heritage assets.
- There are messages for planners and urban designers: work on integrating a variety of types of open spaces within a unifying, coherent structure; work on equity and accessibility; connect and link; build on intrinsic values-quality, beauty and identity; expand the quantity and quality of natural values in the city; make feasible solutions, provide space for flexibility, and keep making cities a safe and healthful place to live.

To wrap up what have been explored and said over the last three days in this workshop, may I quote a piece from one of the papers, “Water and spaces have etched images to the city - London and the Thames, Venice, Ganges and India. Parks and plazas have created history – Reagent’s, Bryant’s, Vistas of Versailles, the garden city of Bangalore are just a few illustrations of open spaces and imageability. In the contemporary era, open spaces exude a brand value spelling, health, ambience and lifestyle of the neighborhoods”. We have reached the stage, at which open spaces have become a way of life” (Prosperi, USA).

TRANSPORTATION NETWORKS: MAKING SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION A REALITY

In another parallel session, we explored the issue of **transportation network, and how we can make sustainable transportation a reality.**

The discussion here was taken beyond the usual themes of traffic congestion and the negative traffic-generated impacts imposed on urban environment. It was not reduced to the repetitive calls for reduction of individual traveling and giving priority to public transit. The themes of presentation varied from whether urban form affects travel behavior, effects of transport cost on residential location choices, the ROD and POD facilities around transit system, transport pricing, commuter choice and transport policy, with some of the issues related to transport scenarios in Chinese cities in general and Wuhan in particular.

A more comprehensive account on the work held here you will get from the workshop rapporteur while I have singled out only several questions, in my report.

Opening up new perspectives, and turning to our own field of work by asking what we as planners can and ought to do, is a difficult and challenging task. Making a change is never an easy duty, but today, more than ever before, we have knowledge and capacity to do it. Cities and towns will respond in different ways. Some will place an emphasis on land uses and integrated development, especially along the transportation corridors. The others will rely more on technology and technical solutions, looking for remedy under their auspices. Small countries and compact regions will try to find spatially responsive solutions through the system of cities, integrated urban development, developing urban clusters, compact cities, or by stimulating an increase of public transport.

How should our cities and towns be structured and organized and how can urban fabric and form contribute to a more sustainable and carbon neutral settlement are crucial questions for urban planners. Reducing car traffic, favoring public transport, cycling and walking are relative only if the transportation issue is taken as an integral part of the planning and designing task. Urban fabric, where emphasis is on environment conducive to pedestrians, bicycle and public transport, does support urban sustainability, and indeed, contributes to making sustainable transportation a reality.

The relationship between mobility, accessibility and social justice, was another theme examined in this workshop. While the participants shared the view that there is no universal cure for making transportation more sustainable, nor to have the problem resolved in the immediate future and on a large scale, the examples explored here illustrate that the responsive and sustainable solutions are already there. Case studies from China, Mexico and India eloquently demonstrated how little it sometimes takes to provide sustainable mobility for all.

In order to make sustainable transportation a reality, it is necessary also to look in the own backyard, and critically examine our planning paradigms, and the ways and means we carry out in our everyday planning practice. Planners, as place-makers, have a tremendous power in their hands, which we often do not recognize, nor use. The power of knowledge of making things

different, introducing new concepts and new ideas, and widening our planning realm by expanding collaboration and working together with others, are the gifts only a small number of professions have. Examples presented and explored in this Congress convincingly speak about the change and what we could do to make our cities and towns more humane, and closer to the citizens' needs.

HERITAGE AND THE ENVIRONMENT: RETRO AND REUSE IN TRANSITION

How can we advance the discourse and practice of urban planning by enhancing our understanding and knowledge of **the realm of heritage** in contemporary and future cities, was a theme around which gathered together a large number of authors from different parts of the world. Underlying all papers and discussions was an overwhelming enthusiasm for safeguarding cultural heritage of our cities, towns and regions, as well as addressing the very basics: "what people value the most and how we promote such values as a community of urbanites seeking to embrace a collective purpose, unique identity, higher expectations, and grand aspirations".

Heritage is a multifaceted entity comprised of many different aspects interrelated and structured in a more or less coherent way. These long lasting territorial marks could be distinguished as physical on one side, and cognitive on another (Magnaghi, 2004). For some, heritage is an expression of social dynamics characterizing particular community, or specific time, for others, it is more closely linked to the physical, or eco-features of the regional and local surroundings, their natural habitats and environment (Bajic Brkovic 2011).

In urban areas, it relates most often to the way people build and use places over a longer period of time of their existence in the same area. The papers submitted to this Congress and debated over the last three days, mainly focused on this aspect of a heritage. Generally speaking, and justified by the case studies explored here, but also by the world-wide evidence, the days when urban heritage was under a threat and when our main concern was primarily to preserve and conserve, are mainly behind us.

Yet, not all the problems have been solved. On the contrary, and paradoxically: the more problems we solve and leave behind us, the more of the new ones emerge before us. Globalization, technological advancement, but also natural disasters, climate change, accidents due to human error, or even a global financial crisis, create an entirely different environment for planners to work in, and significantly affect our attitudes toward heritage as well. Not long time ago, planning profession was mainly focused on making the old and new working together, or dealt with criteria and procedures of integrating development planning, and conservation. Consequently, the focus was on inherited structures and their values that were to be preserved for future generations. Nowadays, we talk about, and are engaged in projects where heritage is undertaking a function of a development engine, and plays an important part in making cities more affluent and better-off. This shift has

been accurately recognized in this Congress and debated over several case studies from different parts of the world.

Within such a context, a question of industrial heritage was examined in particular, and the importance it has in transforming cities and making them more sustainable. And indeed, the transformation and re-use of the industrial heritage or development of the ex-industry sites have changed many of our cities and towns, not only in physical terms, but also in the way people perceive them, and how they use these places.

Cultural heritage on a regional scale was another topic to which a considerable attention was given in this workshop, development of cultural landscape, cohabitation between development and conservation, all the way to the delicate relationship and possible resolution of potential conflicts arising from the energy production on one side, and safeguarding the cultural heritage on the other.

There are many valuable conclusions and messages developed in this workshop over the last two days. Let me focus on several that are of universal value, regardless of where we live, or what our local conditions are.

- There is a continual objective of keeping a balance between cultural, socio-economic development and the built up environment, by integrating the needs for development with those for protection;
- Planners should understand the importance of local values and culture, and significance of taking the issue of identity into the built environment;
- Solutions should rest on local resources, potentials and local distinctiveness; this does not exclude innovative and new solutions, introduction of new ideas, or even invention of places with the new identity;
- We should continuously work on decelerating the loss of cultural landscape and identity, and redirecting the trend of developing urban uniformity and the “all-alike” places.

REGIONS AND HINTERLAND LOOKING TOWARD LIVEABLE ENVIRONMENT

The workshop no 5, **Regions and hinterland looking toward liveable environment**, was not originally planned to be part of the Congress. However, a pleasant surprise came along once we announced the congress and opened the congress paper platform. A large number of submitted abstracts raised the issue of liveability on a regional scale, and draw our attention to the “extra mures” challenging questions. It must be that this was a unique case in our ISOCARP history that our members on such a large scale contributed to the development of the congress theme.

The papers presented in this parallel session fall into two distinctive categories. Within the first one, the current practice and conventional

approaches have been critically examined, including the development of the non-central parts of the metropolitan regions, and interrelations between the core and periphery in the age where regional integration is globally placed so highly. The workshop pledged for ensuring liveability on a regional level by conceiving and implementing solutions for the regions, and not only for selected cities, sites or part of it.

Integrating regional and local development perspectives in conceiving policies and planning solutions may lead to the win-win solutions for both the regions and individual settlements. Within such a context, the position of rural areas and rural settlements was debated. There are many good examples which show that rural settlements often do have capacity to develop into the nodes of sustaining regional development, or, considering their size and settings, could take over part of the burden imposed over cities due to the climate change. This discussion has been strongly supported by the case studies which explored sustainability on a regional level by focusing on regional policies, metabolism of low carbon cities, development of guidelines for low carbon structures, and planning instruments to be used to prevent urban sprawl.

In dealing with sustainability and liveability on a regional level, many different aspects have to be taken into account, and the scope of questions by far exceeds what conventional approaches usually contain, including the quality of eco systems, natural heritage, or threats and opportunities for sustainable development. Regional problems are complex problems by their nature, and individual efforts or singular policies can hardly help to solve these problems, and take regions forward to the ideal of liveability. On the other hand, coordinated actions have capacity to deal with the complexity of these problems, and with a wholeness of a region itself.

How to address and manage complex problems is always a challenging task. Some of the responses provided here include: “(1) Taking a broad approach—thematically and geographically; (2) Having a long term perspective; (3) Ensuring flexible management as part of an ongoing process; (4) Reflecting local needs; (5) Working with natural processes; (6) Involving different actors and related stakeholders; (7) Mobilizing support and involvement of the relevant administrative bodies; and (8) Using a combination of instruments” (Environment for Europeans, No 9, February 2002, p.12).

The issue of energy was a topic which was also discussed in this congress, based on several case studies and examples from the Netherlands and Serbia, presenting the qualitative examples of the step by step transition to sustainable regional development. And indeed, the more acute the question of climate change gets, the more emphasis should be placed on green energy options, and energy production that goes hand-by-hand with ecological standards, minimal negative effects on the surrounding areas and eco-quality in particular.

Concluding words and messages

What have we achieved over the last three days, and where should we proceed from here?

The workshop rapporteurs and chairs will talk about the particular messages and conclusions they have reached in their respective workshops. In my report, however, I would like to summarize the findings I got by exchanging impressions with you all,

The key messages for doing better:

- Stay open minded and always ready to explore different approaches and options
- Accept the fact that one's own way of approaching issues may be limited
- Show willingness to think from the point of view of other disciplines even if they seem to have little relevance for the situation in question
- Carefully listen to the community, work with community, be sensitive to their needs and aspirations
- Establish an effective communication with all that are concerned
- Explore other people's experiences and good practices
- Undertake spatial actions and projects with social implications
- Change the way resources are being used, distributed and allocated
- Mobilize knowledge and action
- Recognize that creative thinking is a serious input to any planning exercise
- Cooperate with others, keep the interdisciplinary and synergistic environment as a framework for planning activities

It is with these last words - calling for cooperation and working together, that I would like to greet you, and thank you for your attention. I would like to extend my thanks to all of those who made this Congress happen, The People's Government of Wuhan Municipality, Local Organizing Committee, Urban Planning Society of China, ISOCARP EXCO, ISOCARP Secretariat, and ISOCARP Scientific Committee, all the volunteers who made themselves available over the last three days regardless of the time of the day, and to all others who patiently worked on all the big and small details to make this event so magnificent.

Most of all, I would like to thank the authors of these fantastic papers that we all enjoyed so much, and to you all who so devotedly participated in this extraordinary event of the knowledge-sharing and knowledge-creation.

Last but not least, I want to extend my warm and friendly thanks to my team. It was a privilege and a fantastic experience to work with you all.

Thank you.