



**47<sup>th</sup> ISOCARP CONGRESS**  
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# Press Release

**Nov. 2011 - by General Rapporteur Milica Bajic Brkovic**

The Congress entitled *Liveable Cities: Urbanising World. Meeting the challenge* explored different aspects of urban liveability vis-à-vis the challenges that cities and towns are faced with as the growing urbanisation continues to evolve. The Congress brought together participants from 37 countries, 88 papers were explored and discussed in five workshops, and case studies from more than 60 cities were presented to the audience.

The Congress started with the lectures of the three very distinguished key note speakers: Edward Ng, Professor at Chinese University of Hong Kong, Zef Hemel, Deputy Managing Director of the Urban Planning Department of the City of Amsterdam, Netherlands, and Pierre Laconte, ISOCARP President 2006-2009. Special contribution was given via video link by Joan Clos, Executive Director of the UN-HABITAT from Nairobi. The key note speakers inspiringly spoke about urban liveability, the corresponding 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 contributions were explored in five parallel sessions:

1. Implementing low carbon environment
2. Building sustainable networks
3. Transportation networks: making sustainable transportation a reality
4. Heritage and the environment: retro and reuse in transition
5. Regions and hinterland looking toward liveable environment

1. 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.

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, illustrate 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.

2. 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 variety of what was explored by the authors gathered in this parallel session, shows again that there are no general answers, nor universally applicable models. The only general rule, like in many other aspects of development is that providing the responsive solutions is a contextual variable, and goes hand-in-hand with local conditions, geography, climate, social and cultural context.

However, there are certain principles, and solutions that could be found virtually anywhere in the world: establishing a balance between built and non-built environment, taking natural habitats and ecological features as development assets, change the meaning and understanding of urban life, and opening up new opportunities in making cities liveable. These have been rightly observed and justified by a number of case studies presented in this workshop.

3. In a third parallel session the issue of **transportation network, and how the sustainable transportation could become a reality** was explored.

The discussion here was taken beyond the usual themes of traffic congestion and the negative traffic generated impacts impose on urban environment, and the discussion was not reduced solely to the repetitive calls for reducing individual traveling and making public transit a priority. 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.

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 is needed, sometimes, to provide sustainable mobility for all.

4. 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”.

There are many valuable conclusions and messages developed in this workshop, 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 to invent places of 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.

5. The papers presented in the parallel session on **Regions and hinterland looking toward liveable environment**, 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 so highly placed globally. 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.

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 hardly can 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.

### **Concluding words and messages**

A number of good messages for doing better have been developed in the Congress. Those that are of the universal values and that all participants can share, include at least the following:

- Stay open minded and always ready to explore new and different
- Think of the variety of approaches that may exist, look for them and explore them
- Think from the point of view of all those who are involved in the game of place-making even if they look 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
- Undertaking spatial actions and projects with social implications
- Mobilize knowledge and action
- Look for alternative resources, they may not be visible right away, but often are there
- Cooperate with others, keep the interdisciplinary and synergistic environment as a framework for planning activities

As a general Rapporteur of the 47th ISOCARP Congress, I would like to extend my thanks to all 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 the papers, and to all the colleagues 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 great experience to work with them.