



# ISOCARP

The impact of spatial planning, urban design, and built form on urban sustainability

International ISOCARP Congress  
Nairobi, Kenya, 19-23 September 2010  
Introductory Report Workshop 2:

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## **INTRODUCTORY REPORT WORKSHOP 2:**

### **The impact of spatial planning, urban design, and built form on urban sustainability**

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In the past few decades, global transformations including climate change, depletion of natural resources, as well as urbanization of world cities have instigated a shift towards sustainable urban development. The implications of global events on local development issues have set new parameters for spatial planning and future development regarding sustainability as an explicit goal. Yet, sustainable development goes beyond the boundaries of environmental issues to include socio-cultural and economic dimensions. Key indicators include environmental protection, quality of development, equity, and economic growth. The most commonly cited definition of sustainable development is that of the Brundtland Commission, defining sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Yet, cities represent the focal points of sustainable development consuming goods and services, while draining resources out of peripheral regions that they depend on. The ecological impact of cities extends beyond their boundaries due to their intricate interdependencies with the surrounding environments. Furthermore, cities are at the center stage in environmental policies and politics. Cities should thus take into account their "ecological footprint," consider human development; values; and differences in cultures, and be viewed as the nucleus for new political processes that are based on equity, inclusion, participation in decision-making processes, and alternative governance.

Urban sustainability thus involves a re-examination of urban development policies and practices, including environmental, social and economic, as well as acknowledgement of the role of cities in local, regional, and global environmental change. Sustainable urban development should take into consideration development choices that respect the



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relationship between the three "E's"-economy, ecology, and equity affording cities economic growth, an equal opportunity for all, while ensuring environmental protection.

In recent times however, many developing countries have been facing unprecedented challenges towards attaining sustainable development as they strive to balance economic growth and environmental considerations. Addressing these challenges require a comprehensive approach appreciating the aforementioned interconnections. The rich mosaic of selected papers for Workshop 2 includes contributions from Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, and Latin America that explore these issues and interconnections. For the purpose of the workshop presentations, the 24 papers received have been organized into three sessions.

The first session includes papers that explore planning and design for eco-efficient and green cities realizing the impacts of global events and climate change. The submitted papers investigate the implications of global warming on urban form arguing that traditional forms of building are sustainable and recognize environmental and socio-cultural determinants. Case studies of towns and cities from various parts of the globe trace the implications of low-carbon development on planning and design affirming the notion as a means of responding to global climatic change. The papers endorse inner city regeneration strategies as an approach to sustainable development in developing countries and provide useful tools for planning eco-efficient and sustainable model towns for the future. Collectively, the papers argue that the quality of open space networks in cities contribute to their territorial cohesion and promote sustainability.

The second session explores sustainable interventions and urban management approaches. The submitted papers are classified into two groups. The first, emphasizing the significance of proactive urban management approaches, mitigating strategies, and adaptation measures including environmental protection; risk management; and hazard mitigation in promoting sustainable urban development. Lessons learned from various global experiences provide guidance and recommendations for urban sustainability thus decreasing vulnerability to natural hazards. The second group of papers illustrates sustainable development initiatives and interventions as exemplified in case studies from around the globe. The papers identify the challenges involved, demonstrate development strategies, and adopted approaches. An argument is also made in favor of design competitions as a platform for improving the quality of built environments and attaining sustainable urban form.

The final session addresses the socio-economic aspect of sustainable development in cities. Papers in this session assert the need for sustainable human development as a means to urban sustainability emphasizing issues such as, equity, inclusion, access, participation in decision-making processes, and equal opportunity. Case studies from various part of the globe emphasize the negative impact of bad practices on fragile urban structures, recognize the planning challenges involved in securing sustainable urbanization, and illustrate how these impacts can be mitigated by planning choices. The papers explore the diversity and multiplicity of various projects, towns, and cities and attempt to draft possible approaches and choices that promote social diversity and integration within communities, and contribute to sustainable human development. The papers thus provide the platform for further



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discussions offering an excellent opportunity to reconsider intricate characteristics of a sustainable development from a socio-economic perspective.

Accordingly, it is anticipated that the rich variety and diversity of submitted papers in Workshop 2 will serve as the spring board for stimulating ideas, while providing the platform for engaging in an inspiring discourse and fruitful discussions.

## Inspiring Questions

The main questions to guide the workshop discussions will be the following:

- *How are spatial planning and urban design involved in the process of achieving environmental, organizational and socio-economic sustainability?*
- *Is there a clear notion about their role, and about the role of the urban form, to improve urban sustainability?*
- *Which are the most essential aspects to make spatial planning and urban design's interventions effective for urban sustainability? Which types of proactive approaches work better and in which kind of places and scales of intervention?*
- *Which are the most important measures to avoid the negative involvement of spatial planning and urban design in sustainable development?*