



Introductory Report by the General Rapporteur

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For the first time in the history of civilisation, there are more people living in cities than in any other form of human settlement. The 42nd ISoCaRP congress is the first to be held in a world where urban population is in the majority. Borrowing the words of Michael Harcourt¹, we have become “homo urbanis” and therefore it appears logical that the nature of this congress is decidedly urban.

Globalisation is the epochal phenomenon that is restructuring our world. There is nothing new in this statement, nor, indeed, in the thought that the city is the main focus of globalisation. Nowhere are the actions and reactions of globalisation forces more evident than in urban settlements. This year, the Society has asked planners and urban experts to reflect on how such forces, which have been speculatively separated either as integrative or disintegrative, are shaping our cities.

Responses came from everywhere and in surprising number. The Congress features over one hundred papers from authors representing 38 countries from the five continents, with a remarkable gender balance. This participatory magnitude and broadness confirms the timeliness of the questions that were raised, and the interest of urbanists in sharing ideas and experiences in order to be better prepared to help cities face the challenges ahead.

On Integration

Authors have reflected on integrative forces from a variety of viewpoints, narrating, firstly, the strategies formulated by cities to position themselves in the global arena; secondly, the appearance of urban spaces resulting from these strategies; and, thirdly, the opportunities that exist for endogenous development supported by participatory approaches and the imbrication of cultural identity.

There is no shortage of institutional determination and stamina dedicated to address global competition. Global evaluators, when issuing economic indexes and risk ratings, consider the most competitive city to be that which best adapts its policy to the prevailing economic mantra: neo-liberalism and the volatile international capital, a model which, as Joseph Stiglitz² points out, has been operating almost incontestably for two decades now.

A number of contributors point out that cities sanitise their image and commoditise themselves in accordance to the perceived demands of the global marketplace. There is a growing confluence of strategic planning and other disciplines in preparing plans for the future, and the fields of urban marketing and place promotion have been frequently mentioned amongst them with a view to making the city's image more positive and consequently increase its attractiveness to global capital and mobile human resources. However, no marketing campaign can ever be a substitute for vision; rather, it will evidence the lack of it.

The need to link visibility initiatives with a city development plan frequently surfaces in the submitted literature. Emphasising the importance of comprehensive planning, cases deem as a missed opportunity the lack of coordination between the organisation of large scale events and urban planning. Efforts in filling in the list of must-haves of the global circuit, such as releasing land for new economic initiatives, investing in necessary new infrastructure, and relaxing taxes are

not differentiation factors anymore: they have become basic building blocks in the arena of competitiveness. This, papers argue, reveals the need to coordinate national policy, regional governance, city assets and entrepreneurial action through innovative and coherent frameworks.

Exposed to a similar set of requirements, operating logistics, and tendencies to adopt tested formulas to reduce risk, the physical outcome of integrative forces results in cities embarked in the global competitive framework results in urban sameness to a significant degree. The production line city, the copy-and-paste city and the franchise city are some of the tags that these physical outcomes have triggered. Prestige buildings and flagship projects, designed by the usual list of global architects result in déjà vu icons that some authors believe have no relationship to the spirit of the place.

But global architecture, albeit ephemerally, has the potential to make headlines. In the showcase city, mega-projects and mega-events are the engines for transforming derelict post-industrial land into thriving urban spaces with global qualities. Waterfront regeneration, as one of the first global disciplines in city-making, is the subject material of several papers. Although a number of projects have been able to raise city profiles, multiply land value and increase tax income, several authors point out that schemes seem unable to avoid standardisation of both content and appearance.

The public realm reflects a dual status quo. In a consumer society where spending capacity seems to be the general public's main quality, the nature of public space considers persons as buyers and identifies people as clients. Public squares are seen as corporate showcases where choreographed sponsorship, ubiquitous merchandise, and targeted marketing are programmed to fulfil civic needs. Some places go beyond this and are capable of linking their *genius loci* to retail, and its *raison d'être* to a capacity to attract bargain hunters. In addition to this commercial flavour, however, public space is still considered as a vital instrument for social integration: a realm for civic confluence and community pride, where people can reconnect from the impersonal world of ICT-based relationships.

At the other side of the coin of the widespread belief that attracting outside capital is the way for development lies the idea of progress achieved by building on endogenous assets such as human beings and their ancestral judgment, organised civil society, and collective identity, depicted amongst others by built heritage and vibrancy of cultural life.

The homogenisation of behaviour resulting from a univocal economic model finds a natural counterbalance in the surge of localised collective identities. Authors have documented people's capacity for self-organisation as a reaction to the disappearing welfare state. This seems to happen through grassroots associations, reciprocity networks and new associative practices which help to set up basic yet effective survival mechanisms encompassing mainly food and health related initiatives but also access to transportation and telecommunications.

It has also been stated that increased community participation in local governance leads to greater support for government policies. There is resistance in some public and private sectors to public involvement as, it is feared, it would only delay and disrupt development momentum. This is a near-sighted view that misunderstands the benefits of participatory processes. Consultation informs decision-making, rather than being joint decision-making or decision-making by referendum. Active variations of the plan-making process, such as *test planning*, are also proposed to bridge the gap between overview and creative assessment.

Culture has been identified as a strategic element and a main resource for a city's development. Built heritage is tangible evidence of collective identity that most authors believe should demand careful consideration. But the benefit of preservation has not been easy to convey and many cities now find their patrimony dilapidated. Since there is a finite supply of the historical past, this demand is met through what one author refers to as "simulacra", counterfeit reconstructions of the historic stock. To this extent, preserving urban identity does not mean plagiarising from the past,

but instead, thoroughly researching its principles and providing a contextual continuation in our generation.

On Disintegration

A significant number of contributions reflect on how cities have become exposed to tides of disintegrative forces, depicting, firstly, the effects of neo-liberalism in urban form and service provision; secondly, the polarisation of the city and the emergence of segmented dwelling in slums and gated communities; and, thirdly, the disregard for social inclusiveness and the welfare of the vulnerable.

The free market values entrepreneurial interests and establishes business-friendly conditions. A number of authors agree that the doctrine of deregulation, privatisation and decentralisation is shaping cities which mirror the cult of individualism. Its negative face calls for physical dispersion, where the lack of urban physical continuity burdens on the environment, infrastructure, and social fabric. It also serves to deconstruct the welfare state as a provider of basic services such as housing, health, water, energy and waste collection, education, transport, and communications, which in private hands can become luxury services. It can formalise the disengagement of national and local governments, allocating the latter with significant responsibilities but without access to sources of municipal funding.

The polarisation of urban dwelling typologies has attracted significant attention from authors, especially and importantly, the emergence of gated communities. Papers from developing countries report that the income gap widened in the 1990s, bringing about a new class with fresh demands and consumer patterns who want to differentiate themselves from the less privileged. In addition to being a status symbol for the international elite, gated communities grew out of perceived urban insecurity, which the media reflects and occasionally exaggerates with bold tabloid headlines. These two preconditions seem to feed each other creating a negative stream of segmentation and mistrust. The gated community tries to solve the problem of the city by leaving the city, abandoning it for a sanitised, homogeneous and controllable environment. Public space is really private space in these almost-independent mini-municipalities. They have their own roads, parking, utilities, garbage collection, management of open spaces, and, importantly, security services. However, the security of a gated community is a fake reality: it only happens within the gated enclosure – but what is happening outside its enclosing walls?

It is paradoxical that many of these islands of prosperity are surrounded with slum settlements, particularly in rapidly growing economies. Experience has shown that physical proximity may not guarantee socio economic integration; rather, it will foster the contrary. Reports from India indicate that slum dwellers' lack of skills and lack of access to skills perpetuates a vicious cycle leading to significant unemployment in spatially segregated neighbourhoods. This cultivates an urban underclass for which only the informal economy guarantees survival. In both India and China, papers document the magnitude of the decanting processes which occur as cities rapidly expand. The vulnerability of the relocated is stressed by the fact that most of the occupants of slums are workers in the informal sector and, having been undocumented unregistered for decades, have no evidence of tenure, and hence, receive no compensation. Additionally, the compensation payout for those who are granted it is more often than not insufficient to allow them to purchase a house in their original area of residency.

Authors have pointed out that the continued disregard for social inclusiveness has a number of very costly consequences for the urban system. Among them, for example, an unbalanced urban development yields a decrease in land value, an increase in urban poverty and, as a consequence, a lack of skills will result in lower tax yields. Hence, the social contract makes not only social sense, but it also has an underlying economic logic. To the vulnerable, the widespread erection of



walls –in the Mexican border, the West Bank, the gated communities– is the physical evidence of their invisibility to and dissociation from the political system and society as a whole.

For those citizens who inhabit marginalised urban areas and remain excluded, deprived of any possibility of ever becoming real citizens, the importance of ensuring participatory mechanisms, therefore, cannot ever be understated.

¹ Harcourt, Michael. Speech at the World Urban Forum, Vancouver, 2006

² Stiglitz, Joseph E (2003). *The Roaring Nineties*. London: W.W. Norton