

Report of ISoCaRP's Side Event in "European Habitat" Conference, Prague

Moderator Mr. Didier Vancutsem (ISOCARP), Panelists: Ms. Regitze Hess (IFHP), Mrs. Dyan Currie (CAP), Mr. Eric Huybrechts (IAU), Mrs. Shipra Narang Suri (ISOCARP)

In preparation for the UN Habitat III Conference, the European Habitat regional consultative event took place in Prague from 15-18th March 2016. During the Conference, there were more than 1000 participants representing governments, professional, non-profit, and civic organizations, and 60 side events.

The ISOCARP UN Habitat III Task Force has engaged experts and planners from around the world in the revision of the 22 Issue papers of the New Urban Agenda process, the document "The city we need – the future we want 1.0", and submitted Urban Solutions as best practice. For the European Habitat regional event in Prague, the association continued its engagement in the UN Habitat III global campaign, by organizing one of the 60 side events on March 18th, in time to present conclusions and contributions to the Prague Declaration. The topic was the role and the future of planning profession in relation to the proposals for the New Urban Agenda (NUA). Secretary General Didier Vancutsem moderated the panel with representatives of the four global acting professional planners' associations: Regitze Hess, Special Adviser of the IFHP (International Federation of Housing and Planning), Dyan Currie, President of the Commonwealth Planners Association (CAP), Eric Huybrechts of the Institut d'Aménagement et d'Urbanisme d'Île-de-France (IAU IdF), and Shipra Narang Suri, vice-president of ISOCARP and vice president of the General Assembly of Partners of the UN Habitat.

Shipra Narang Suri opened the discussion by explaining the process leading to the Quito Conference and asked panelists and participants to address two main issues:

1. Having strong and relevant urban planning for the cities of the future requires that the organizations representing the profession embrace the New Urban Agenda and update their instruments, methods, and professional roles. Is this happening?
2. What changes are needed in education, theoretical, institutional, and professional work, at local, national, and global level to provide best possible contribution to sustainable, prosperous, healthy and just future cities?

Regitze Hess reminded the audience the 103 years long history of the IFHP organization, dealing with housing for generations of planners, being metaphorically long runners not the sprinters. There is, however, a mismatch in present times between fragmented disciplines active in the urban space (architects, planners, engineers, environmental scientists, etc) and the actual complexity of cities for which we need a much broader understanding. There is a need for different and new fields in the education of the urban professionals / planners of the future, for example to cover the livability agenda which goes far beyond traditional 'land use planning'

learning. For the same reason, the role of the profession should be reconsidered and planners should be prepared to 'mind the gaps' between different professions, attitudes, interests and needs.

Dyan Currie argued that the main concern for the future is around environmental challenges: this emerges from working with the 40'000 planners of CAP (Commonwealth Association of Planning) around the globe. Effective planning is fundamental to make the world a sustainable place, but unfortunately the planning profession has not been strong enough in encouraging appropriate development, improving access to services and housing. We should take a stronger leading role in promoting sustainable urban futures, and we should be loud in expressing why planning is important, especially since the engineering or real-estate perspectives have always been partial, and not inclusive of all aspects of urban living. Planners could use cost-benefit analysis techniques to assess the results and consequences of decisions related to urban environment and provide that information to people in a language they can understand.

Shipra Narang Suri argued that communication needs to be one of the main components of planning in advocating and arguing for sustainable development of cities. In addition, planning should be considered as an instrument of governance instead of being simply considered a technical profession. SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) No.11/3 sets specific targets for planning, and should be used for reclaiming a political space for the profession, bringing it back to policy making instead just drafting. In providing arguments for its political role in global development, there is a need for establishing the equivalent set of indicators used in evaluation and monitoring, more than the few currently used.

Eric Huybrechts said that, in his international and local experience, most of development is being done without planning. Considering the causes of this situation, he suggests that the tools and position of planning should be to support, not to control development, either produced by people in informal settlements, or big companies. For example, by providing technical support and mediation with politicians, as informal planning has not yet been addressed by planners in any substantial way. On another front, there are more and more district and developments produced for the real estate markets rather than habitation, with empty buildings in Dubai, Egypt, Ahmedabad, London, new towns in China etc. showing another trend of misallocation of land. The role of the planner should not be to curb the property market, but to national and local governments to ensure provision of development and services in cities for citizens not only for investment.

In recent politicians are not looked up to anymore and people are starting to do things by themselves. Planners should look not only at politicians, but also involve better the population and support other actors, offering a mediated position, facilitation and technical support. The profession should offer stronger arguments for people-centered developments and participate in their realization, not only at the level of policies and strategies, but by being an actor in implementation.

Open Debate

Jeffrey Soule of the American Planning Association drew attention to the widened role adopted by his Association as representing the professional world but also inclusive and open to students, mayors, or other professional institutes. In his view, there are two parallel approaches for planners in future: they need to be actively involved in changing policies, instead of just complaining about governmental dysfunctionality, for example in new legislation about transportation efficiency. The second approach is especially related to the role of heritage. In the European Habitat conference there hasn't been enough talk about the role of cultural heritage, about the historical urban landscape recommendations done by ICOMOS (International Council of Monuments and Sites) and UNESCO, where planners and governments could learn from the cultural patterns and historic cities about the place making methodology, about the sustainability, livable, walkable cities, recycling materials, etc.

Martina Juvara, a practicing professional and member of ISoCaRP, stated that the distinction between controlling and supporting development is important in the fast process of urbanization. For example, UK government adopted the Localism Act that gave people the chance to prepare localized plans themselves. It is challenging for planners to assist the community in the preparation of their plan: solutions are proposed by consensus, but formalization of the plan is taking up all the efforts, and the burden of bureaucracy has been killing the enthusiasm. One role for future planners might be to mediate between the governance and the people, where planners and planning organizations should work on simplifying the bureaucracy, and the layers of procedural complexity.

Richard Blyth from the Royal Town Planning Institute in the UK urged on providing protection to planning. The anti-planning lobby in the UK (and in other rich countries) is powerful, strong, data heavy, and claims that planning costs the country £3 billion pounds through obstacles, delays, etc. In contrast, there has never been an evaluation of benefits of planning, that may look at a longer term than the free market development. It might be challenging to produce the figures in favor of planning based on the future quality of cities v.s. very real free market investment gains.

Another point raised was that of ethics, especially if planning is not only physical or procedural, but becomes part of governance. Ivan Tomicz, from Budapest and the URBACT program, told the audience how the government gave exceptional rights to build new museums on the allegedly protected central green areas of Budapest. There was public opinion opposing building on open space, but the planning profession stayed quiet and rushed to join the design competition. Professionals should have been working for the best solution, mediating between the public and the governmental agendas, with the help of the international organizations, guidelines, etc. There should be more international guidance and support, especially for places where development pressure is very high.

In response, Shipra admitted that there still is a fundamental crisis in the planning profession. The UN Habitat International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning could be a first step

towards supporting and providing a refreshed ethical basis for planning. The practice of planning has been too close, self-referring and formalized, and this plays in the hands of anti-planning movements. Planning needs to find new energy and legitimacy by becoming more inclusive, and engaging much more with informal and other types of formal planning systems, and by working hard to simplify the bureaucracy. There is desire in the 2030 agenda to take a fresh look at the planning system, procedures, bylaws, and everything related to the bureaucracy of planning.

A good example of public sector efforts in adjusting regulations to actual society was reported by Eric Huybrechts: the big reform that changed 3000 pages of the urban planning codes in France to 150 pages after 5 years of debates. The aim was to make it simpler for planners and developers and update the fundamentals, now more focused on sustainable cities, ecology etc. This is a good move, but for formal planning the reduction can only be limited because of the need for regulations. In Cambodia, a country without planning, planners, and regulations, planning consultants first provided a very useful strategy for the government to attract investors and to open the market to international businesses. Few years later, the government needed a detailed regulation plan for the city because the World Bank introduced the cadaster, necessary as warranty for investments. In just the few years in which the city was not regulated, developers made big profits: there are 629 skyscrapers on narrow streets, lacking infrastructure, etc. Cities need planning for different reasons in different environments: to safeguard space for roads and infrastructure, to control land ownership, for climate change mitigation etc. There must be some kind of regulation, different for different cities and there is an important role for planners in changing the system, suggesting financial instruments for achieving desirable developments, and not only by relying on planning instruments. Education is the tool for providing ethical and professional knowledge to planners. We have to share good examples of delivering better development from all over the world: international good practice and projects can inspire local practice.

Some other points were raised by members of the audience.

It was questioned if the importance of aesthetics is not overstated within the education of architects/ planners or there must be a stronger emphasis on ethics? In the education of engineers there is always a reminder about the professional responsibilities, whereas in architecture schools aesthetics take priority. Professionals are passionate about Jan Gehl's book "Cities for People", but to have cities for people we need people for cities and a stronger sense of values than just attractive spaces.

A practitioner from Belgium raised the issue that, in developed countries, the younger generation will not be making cities any more, they will only design parts of it for developers. This will require a new approach (perhaps "spatial diplomacy") and a less technical framework for sustainability to achieve balanced communities. Buildings are getting greener and more intelligent, but have lost all the other good characteristics. To consider the broader aspects of sustainability and livability, we should develop a better assessment method, maybe not

quantified, to somehow evaluate assets. The SDGs have been rather new tools and good general instruments in the global urban agenda, but should be supported with local sphere manuals for governments and municipalities to make their choices. Governments are sectoral in their approach and the Green House Gasses (GHG) reduction targets ruled development. There is a chance maybe to use the same approach and urge the use of SDGs as an overall, multidisciplinary, multispectral approach.

Ivan Tomicz suggested a need for stronger legislation. For the EU financed projects, receiving countries are obliged to follow zero-carbon demands, and that might be the model to introduce to add broader sustainability and democracy in planning regulations.

A Czech student expressed his skepticism about the ethics of planning, planning for people, communities, while all stakeholders have their own interests. He argued that there is nothing like an objective planning system. He suggested that a possible radical model of planning could consider open competitions on priorities. The problem is that capital and profit-making will win in most places.

Another person suggested that architects and urbanists should be using other professions more – for example psychologists - to better understand the notion of 'good cities' by all criteria.

Another comment raised the poor communication between planners themselves, taking different roles within the same procedure, the same city and proposing different points of view from within the same profession. This is another challenge: to listen to other people's perspective. Planners are to blame as obstacles to development in all parts of the world. They should take their part of responsibility and change: there is transition for cities, for governments and there must be for planners as well.

Concluding Remarks

In their final remarks, the panelists argued that governments have to become more agile: not to abandon rules, but to be prepared to find solutions even outside of the rules where necessary and respond to the contemporary unexpected problems that cities are facing – for example the refugee crisis in Europe. For this to be possible, planners need good ethics and commitment to fair processes. Their role should be to bring together all parties in urban and territorial development, and to play the role of 'invisible glue' to put all interests, and all segments of society together.

The time for small changes is over. The profession needs to push for the serious, long term change of planning, based on strong ethics, less bureaucracy, more inclusion, international inclusion, neighborhoods engagement etc.

In the process of implementation of the SDGs and the NUA there is a need to translate them to the small scale, adjusting them to the local level. There is a need for new implementation tools and they should be presented and discussed in Quito. Proposals for Quito should be brief, short and substantial, providing tools for institutions to serve professionals, citizens, businesses. The

profession should act fast, to take advantage of a rare chance of being part of the World Urban Campaign.

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