

REPORT 2015/2016*

REPRESENTATION OF ISOCARP WITHIN THE UNITED NATIONS IN GENEVA

reported by Dr Charles LAMBERT – accredited ISOCARP representative to UN . Dec 2016

REMINDER

- The United Nations Organisation operates through different bodies including the Economic and Social Council – ECOSOC- which aims to promote international economic and social co-operation and development . ISOCARP is registered in ECOSOC as an accredited NGO to UN.
As the UN Economic Commission for Europe – UNECE- is the ‘regional’ grouping of the 52 nations located all around the northern hemisphere (from the Bering Detroids to the Bering Detroids), representing a total population of about 1,4 billions with more than 50% within large and middle sized cities.
A UN Committee specialized in urban matters is based in the UN Geneva Headquarter.
Formerly called the Committee on Human Settlements about twelve years ago it became The Committee on Housing and Land Management : UNECE-CHLM.(called « *the Committee* » in the rest of the present report).
- ISOCARP has achieved to build year after year a rather significative influence within this Committee for about 20 years, even not being one of the 56 member countries of the UN ECE ‘Region’ nor one of the numerous official Agencies from the UN or from the European Commission. This quite permanent contribution was enlightened for instance :1- in co-writing within a UN dedicated task force in 1998 a publication on « Major trends characterzing human settlements development »(5 chapters : megatrends-norms,values and aims-trends-driving forces)(ISBN 92-1-116695-0) ; 2- in co-organizing in the UN Geneva Headquarter, a special joint session of 2004 ISOCARP’s annual world Congress in co-operation with the UN official Representation .
As an evidence of the progresses made by UN in motion towards the aims of our ISOCARP society, one can mention the last inviting document for the 2016 Annual general Meeting of these UN Committee on Housing and Land Management sent by the UN services to the Member States, which was entitled : « For smarter sustainable cities and human settlements » !
- * The present report covers the last two year-period of collaboration (December 2014 – end of 2016) as these UNCommittee’s 25 mouth of works where mostly dedicated to a two-years program of preparation and finilization of two important publications : the UNECE contribution to the preparation of the HABITAT III Conference and the initiative to prepare for UN approval a Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing (see : under).

HABITAT III: Preparation of the Regional Report from the UNECE Region

During this 2015-2016 period the Committee met three times in 3 (+ 1 special in early December 2016) plenary sessions with the attendance of the official delegations of most of the 56 member countries + UN bodies + EU bodies). Between these plenary sessions the Committee organized three special expert-meetings dedicated to the preparation of the UNECE Region to the HABITAT III Conference with a selected format from the Committee including ISOCARP and other *ad hoc* bodies or UN Commissions arranged in different configurations with special participations of European and UN official Agencies according to the special agenda of each meeting . These attendances included aside ISOCARP : WHO, UN-Habitat, UNISDR, European Commission's DG Regio, European Joint Research Center, OECD, the European Investment Bank, UN-Habitat Moscow office, H III Bureau Member Ms Szolgayova , International Organization for Migration, ... and special representatives of selected universities : Milano, Cardiff, Paris, Perugia , INU (Pietro Garau).

In order to prepare the Committee's contributions to H III and partly to the preparation of the International Guidelines (*see under*), UNECE appointed two international Experts in assistance : our colleague Brian Evans from the Glasgow School of Art (in charge of the final redaction) and our distinguished colleague Vice President of ISOCARP-Pietro Elisei (who had to prepare the report on developments in motion in the former eastern european countries), when the US official delegation prepared a report on the evolutions occurred in North America since the Habitat II Conference .

Meetings were organized in Geneva (12.2014, 07.2015, 12.2015, 01.2016, 09.2016, 12.2016), in Brussels (09.2015), and in Mailand (06.2015).

The Committee prepared also the draft-text for a ' Prague Declaration' to be submitted to the audience of the joint International Conference « EUROPEAN HABITAT- Conference on sustainable housing in liveable cities for Europe » which was held in Prague in March 2016 and considered as the 'high level regional meeting for the preparation of Habitat III' (several ISOCARP members including EXCO Member and Head of several National Delegations represented ISOCARP on this occasion). It is necessary to point out that plenty of the ideas and the ' way of thinkings' developed by the Committee during the successive preparatory meetings have moved on and have lost a lot all over this chain of meetings leading to this Conference (*as mentioned under*).

After discussions and amendments this text has been adopted by the Heads of UNECE National Delegations participating in this Prague Conference in March 2016 and became an official UN document.

In accordance, the final version of the UNECE official 'regional' Report to HABITAT III moved from « Urban trends : urbanization and development, urbanization and economy, urbanization and social equity, urbanization and governance » to « Trends and patterns of urbanisation, the economy of cities, housing, environment, governance, trends and future scenarios » !!.

Let's mention some examples of wise or worth important contents of planning issues which are present or lacking in the final version of the UNECE final report to H III :

- (selection of good quotations extracted from the final version) :
« *At its heart, the Habitat Agenda strives to achieve the 'inclusive city' where everyone, including the vulnerable, can contribute productively and enjoy the benefits of urban life* » ! // « *The inclusive city is just, pluralist, sustainable and productive* » ! //

« As globalization continues, diversity will become more, rather than less, important. And the successful governance of diversity will distinguish the most accomplished and creative cities » !

- (selection of glaring lacks in the Report) :
// Nothing clear about the vicious and virtuous circles (or 'cycles') experienced in the management of existing cities, except a very simple 'classic' diagram of former compact cities ! // Nearly any attempts to challenge the huge concentration processes in motion nearly everywhere in the region with wise and creative relations to be established between distinct nodules of urban values (often confused with the compact-city concept). // Complete silence about the place that from now one should be made for the industry in the city ! // Nothing about the costs of non-planning ! // Nothing also about the skills and conditions required to produce and regenerate urban territories and urban living conditions, with in particular : a) the ability to discern signals (even weak) emitted by the general-population or related to the economic and environmental contexts with the idea to anticipate what could be the incoming leverage effects to be expected or that could be generated, b) the ability to drive permanent public participation processes, being considered as cultural and social drivers for the community, c) the skills required to be prepared to discuss /debate about the competitive factors operating between different territories , ... and plenty other important missing issues.

The Geneva UN Charter on Sustainable Housing

The Committee stressed that according to UNECE studies, housing is the least affordable human right. Hundred million people in the UNECE region spend more than 40% of their disposable income on housing, making other human rights increasingly unaffordable (as an exemple, although data are limited, it is estimated that 52.08 million people in the EU cannot keep their homes adequately warm and 41.74 million face arrears on their utility bills. Countries are facing enormous challenges in providing adequate housing to all and uncontrolled urbanization phenomena have expanded informal settlements with lack of security of tenure, social inclusion and public services.

To debunk a frequent sense of fatality and to provide solutions, the Committee and the UNECE Member States decided to devise a 'Charter on Sustainable Housing' to be endorsed for final formal approval by the the UN General Authorities.

The main purpose of this (so-called by the UN Services) 'historical document' on sustainable housing is to ensure/secure the access to decent, affordable and healthy housing to the population in general.

The Charter is based on 4 key principles : Environmental protection, Economic effectiveness, Social inclusion and participation, and Cultural adequacy.

After a five years period of exchanges and production of works, this Charter was finalized by the Committee in December 2014 as « The GENEVA UN CHARTER ON SUSTAINABLE HOUSING ». It was endorsed by UN ECE at its 66th session on 16th April 2015 and was forwarded to the Conference Habitat III with the purpose to be included/associated or mentioned in the future « New Urban Agenda ».

The way in which the implementation of this *Geneva UN Charter* will be controlled in motion within the different Member countries, has become from now one a recurrent point in the Committee's Agenda and is reviewed at each plenary session. In particular, the Committee

will co-ordinate and report the activities to be developed in « Charter centres » stressed by the Committee to be launched in the different countries on a voluntary basis. Albania, Estonia and the United Kingdom start this year 2016.

For more information, one can visit : <http://www.unece.org/housing/charter>

Ongoing future points on the Committee's Agenda

After this last two/three year period of special priority given to the above two main subjects, the Committee is now focussing again on its permanent businesses, including the management of its two dedicated specialized bodies: the Working Party on Land Administration (WPLA) and the Real Estate Market Advisory Group (REM).

As examples : four highlights of the current businesses of the Committee :

- 1 - A two-day special session of the Committee took place these last 1st and 2nd of December 2016 in Geneva to report about the H III Conference and prepare the 2017's program of works for the Committee . :
 - a) – two reports of the Habitat III Conference

one from the Secretary General of UN ECE : He was very enthusiast with the intensity of the Conference and its important side-events hold in Quito, and with the perspective and the messages given to the world with the New Urban Agenda. He announced the organization of a UNECE regional Forum on Sustainable Development to be expected in April 2017;

one from a representative of UN-Habitat : He was more descriptive and less unquestioning on Conference's issues and perspectives of future work. He presented the New Urban Agenda « that reasserts a positive notion of the city and promotes sustainable urbanisation processes as a driver for the Sustainable Development ». He confirmed the formal endorsement by H III of the International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning (IG-UTP) prepared and published in 2015 by UN HABITAT and its partners (*including ISOCARP according to my own memory of the personal involvement of our former President Milica if I am right*). Among other announcements (World Urban Forum in 2018 ...), he also announced : that UN HABITAT is now open for voluntary commitments and has opened an online platform : <https://habitat3.org/quito-implementation-plan> , and that UN HABITAT is committed to publish every four years, a Report on the progresses of the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, with the first to be submitted during the 72nd Session in Sept 2017 (*if I have well understood !*).

b)- review and endorsement of the 2016-2020 mandate given to the WPLA (UN Working Party on Land Administration) with the perspective of a submission of this mandate to the UN ECE Executive Committee for formal approval,

c)- preparation of the draft for the declaration that should conclude the « Ministerial meeting » to be held in 2017(*see under*);

- 2 - The launch of the global initiative 'United for Smart Sustainable Cities(U4SSC)'
- 3 - The open cooperation for the Revision of the Key Performance Indicators on Smart Sustainable Cities in the perspective of addressing the achievement of Sustainable development Goals (ref. ECE/HBP/2016/4)
- 4 - A joint UNECE-UN-Habitat programme on capacity-building for urban planners in countries with transition economies (+ possible joint activities to be started with the

Espoo Convention secretariat on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in urban planning)

In addition,

the Committee is also preparing (for conclusion to be expected in 2017) :

- The Ministerial meeting mentioned above (Ministers from the 56 member countries invited to attend) which will be organised by the Committee in Geneva in autumn 2017(November 8th or 9th). The idea is to produce with the Committee's permanent members,(*including ISOCARP*), an international platform for a high-level exchange on issues related to sustainable housing and urban development, land administration and management, spatial planning and real estate market stability in the UN ECE 'region'.
 - A 'Declaration on housing and urban development' to be drawn up for further endorsement by the UN Executive Committee, and conceived as a milestone in the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Committee in 2017.
 - A compilation of best practices of activities in the member-countries which are in line with the (above) Geneva UN Charter
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Dr Ch. Lambert – 11.12.2016