

Partnership for Change

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Turning the Tide

We need a new model for social change. This was the message from former Norwegian Prime Minister and Board member of PFC Kjell Magne Bondevik at the opening plenary session Turning the Tide of this years Partnership for Change conference, bringing together political and business leaders, social and cultural activists and NGO's from many countries. The space allows me to give only a short overview of main issues discussed during some of the conference plenary sessions with special connections to urban culture.

First of all, pointing to the decision by EU to adopt tools measuring social progress Michael Green, Executive of the Social Progress Imperative (www.socialimperative.org) agreed in the opinion shared by many conference participants that no longer could world affairs solely be governed by GDP measures of economic success or failure alone if we are going to prepare a sustainable future for our children.

But will a social progress imperative like the one we attempt to explore and promote at the Urban Research Plaza then be enough to save us from looming crises? Dr. Ernst U. Von Weizsäcker, Co-President of the Club of Rome, responding to the conference theme of sustainability, contended that international capital does not allow states (and with them local authorities) to follow social and environmental goals. As an alarming example he pointed out that half of African nations in fact live by selling nature to foreign companies.

He could of course have included Asian nations allowing land grabbers of urban and rural areas for short time profit to freely operate. After his presentation Dr. Weizsäcker repeated to me the reason for presenting this bleak picture of our future: Nations are becoming hostages to international capital. Turning the Tide becomes an overreaching imperative.

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The City as a Changemaker

After the participation by a PFC board member at the 13th Urban Research Forum in Bangkok (March 2-3, 2015) the recent challenges facing urban development were given a special place in the PFC conference program aiming at encouraging cooperative action world wide. The aim of this plenary session was to explore new models of action locally and globally: How can we meet the challenges of urbanization while still ensuring safe and sustainable living conditions,

Thore Vestby, Vice President of the Mayors for Peace, pointed out the role mayors play in promoting urban peace, exploring non violent solutions to conflicts that causes suffering for millions of citizens throughout the world.

On the local plane finding a way forward will involve giving people of all groups a voice to participate in suggesting and finding solutions to urban problems and challenges. This was the background for the Novoville urban project (www.novoville.com) founded by Kyriakos Pierrakakis, Greek politician and Director of Innovation at Athens Tech College. He is likewise a Senior Analyst at “Dianeosis” a new think-tank focusing on creating a plan for sustainable growth and exploring as member of the team negotiating with the European Union a new way forward for the national economy.

Novoville is an online system which allows direct communication with city authorities about urban issues and conflicts, allowing for a new level of democratic involvement, a daring innovation promoting a new dimension in day to day democratic citizen interaction.

Battle for Humanity - The Role of Youth in Countering Violent Extremism and Promoting Peace

This final plenary session has as somber background the alarming rise in religious extremist groups threatening security world wide. The Program explains the conference aims: »This session will focus on how States and civil society can manage and support young people as they negotiate multiple sets of complex identities and prevent violent extremism from taking root in societies near and far. One former radical Islamist who recently started an organization *Just Unity* in the Norwegian capital with the aim of de-radicalizing urban youth and helping their families was invited to present his experiences, while the keynote speaker Laila Bokhari serving as State Secretary at the Office of the Norwegian Prime Minister gave a report on the role of the Norwegian government in counteracting the recruitment of urban youth by jihadist agencies. Norway like other nations who have themselves been victim of extremist terror affecting their cities is ready to renew and strengthen nationwide efforts through all channels available to counter violent extremism and promote peace.

Joining new partnerships and exploring new ways forward in this concerted effort will be a central part of our social imperative for a sustainable future.