

Editorial

Urban Futures – Reinventing Our Cities

Kjell Skvillstad* Editor in Chief

In our Editorial *Cities for All – Implementing the New Urban Agenda* (Vol. 16), June 2018 we reported on the 9th World Urban Forum assembling 22,000 participants from national and city governments, academia, civil society and grass roots movements in the Malaysian city of Kuala Lumpur on February 7 – 11 on the general theme of Cities for All.

In 2016 following the adoption of the New Urban Agenda in the Ecuadorian Capital of Quito on October 22, the UN Habitat issued the following Guidelines for Implementing the New Urban Agenda:

Governance Structure

The NUA is anchored in participatory urban policies that mainstream sustainable and territorial development as part of integrated development strategies and plans, supported by institutional and regulatory frameworks linked to transparent and accountable finance mechanisms.

Social Inclusion

Development must protect the planet and enable all inhabitants, whether living in formal or informal settlements, to lead decent, dignified and rewarding lives, and to achieve their full human potential.

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Spatial Development

Balanced territorial development that accounts for different scales of cities and human settlements, strengthens their role in food security and nutrition systems, puts housing at the centre, builds infrastructure and services, facilitates trade, and connects farmers and fishers across value chains and markets.

Urban Prosperity

Inclusive and sustainable economic growth, with full and productive employment and decent work for all, is a key element of sustainable urban development where can people live healthy, productive, prosperous, and fulfilling lives.

Environmental Sustainability

Unsustainable consumption and production patterns, loss of biodiversity, pressure on ecosystems, pollution, natural and man-made disasters, and climate change and its related risks, undermine efforts to end poverty and to achieve sustainable development. See www.unhabitat.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/WCR-%20Full-Report-2016.pdf

Likewise, following the adoption of the NUA in 2016 the UN General Assembly set aside a two-year period for local governments to put in place institutional frameworks and innovative mechanisms for review and follow up.

One major European mechanism was an initiative taken by the European City of Design Graz (Austria) to arrange an annual Urban Future Global Conference with the city of Vienna hosting the first event as conference venue on February 28 – 30, 2018, and then moving on to a different European city every year. The UFGC project is part of a network of around 100 international partners including the European City Network Eurocities, the Covenant of Mayors, the Research institute LSE cities and the UN Cities Program.

In 2018 Vienna needed its grand Messe hall to accommodate more than 50 sessions on topics ranging from climate protection, sustainable building to urban management and attended by more than 3000 participants coming from over 400 cities, 50 countries and four continents.

One of the highlights of the conference, featuring 230 speakers worldwide, was the signing of 36 mayors from cities across Europe of a declaration to increase energy efficiency and the use of sustainable energy sources. This Covenant of Mayors was adopted in support of the EU energy target for reducing CO₂ emissions by 40% before 2030 and develop urban strategies for dealing with the consequences of climate change.

The acceptance of the offer of Oslo – the green capital of Europe – to host the 2019 conference signaled a growing understanding of an urgent need for informed and resolute urban action to face rising environmental threats.

It was during a special session Reinventing Cities at the Oslo Urban Future Global Conference on May 22 – 24, 2019 that 5 European Cities – Madrid, Milano, Paris, Reykjavik and Oslo were especially honored as winners of a competition announced by Anne Hidalgo. Mayor of Paris:

“I am launching a new global competition called Reinventing Cities to stimulate zero carbon development across the worlds cities and celebrate innovative solutions to environmental and urban challenges”

In fact, the theme of cutting emissions and saving our environment took new center stage among the presentations of the 85 sessions and 36 field trips occupying the three days of The Oslo Urban Future Global Conference as it did for the 20 000 school children marching through a rainy Oslo to demand Action Now from our politicians.

The members of the JUCR staff and Board of Editors living in Bangkok and Osaka city have experienced all too well the environmental hazards that threaten life in our Eastern megacities. The fight for a cleaner city gives new dimension to the meaning of urban culture and its challenges and a clear motivation for an ongoing urban reinvention and renewal.