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HABITAT III Issue Papers

Comments from Members of the National Habitat Committee of Finland

Issue Paper 1. Inclusive Cities

In general, in all the issue papers, urban challenges are often viewed from the point of view of the developing world where more challenges exist related to, for example, equity in cities. However, these issues also need attention in Finland. We do not have slums, however, we have increasingly unequal income distribution that manifests itself in cities, also as increasing spatial segregation between different ethnic and socioeconomic groups. Living conditions in all neighborhoods are relatively good, however, in this context relative, spatially concentrated poverty may limit the opportunities available to residents and have a detrimental effect on social cohesion.

Chapter B. Establishing the pathway to inclusive cities (subchapters 1, 3, 5):

There are practices in Finland that are effective or at least useful tools to achieve more inclusive cities:

- The Land Use, Housing and Transport Agreements of Intent can be used to promote and set targets for issues related to “Social Cohesion and Equity - Livable Cities”. Related goals include, for example, the prevention of spatial segregation or homelessness.
- There is evidence that social mixing policies can, in the long-term, improve the well-being of the disadvantaged when achieved by voluntary, housing-option enhancing strategies. In Finland, and especially in the Helsinki Metropolitan Area, social mixing has been used in this way as a *preventive* measure against segregation, whereas in many other countries it has been applied afterwards to change an imbalanced social structure by, for example, involuntary displacement of disadvantaged households. This has led to inefficient and problematic results. Therefore, mixed residential settings and housing option-enhancing strategies should be considered in growing cities when planning new neighbourhoods.
- There are also good experiences in using “positive discrimination measures” to prevent spatial segregation by allocating extra public resources e.g. for school and health care services situated in the more deprived neighborhoods.
- In Finland, there are good experiences in using GIS-methods in gathering information on neighborhood safety or satisfaction, also from more vulnerable groups such as children or minorities.

Issue Paper 2. Migration and Refugees in Urban Areas

When looking into issues related to migration and refugees, it is important to highlight the link between global migration and urban resilience, as well as, managing climate change and disaster risks.



Issue Paper 3. Safer Cities

In Finland, accessibility, in addition to crime prevention, is seen as an integral part of urban safety. In this issue paper, women are highlighted as the most affected and vulnerable group. However, elderly and ethnic minorities have also proven to be strongly affected by perceptions of safety. Fear of crime or harassment alters the behavior of these minorities and their access to the city. Even in societies with low crime rates, certain minority groups have a considerably higher risk to become victims of violence.

Issue Paper 6. Urban Governance

The use of smart technologies for citizen participation is mentioned on page 9 of the issue paper. This is a very positive proposal and could be elaborated further, for example, through a reference to the use of open data in urban development.

Participatory city decision-making and active citizenship via platforms engaging youth, women, minorities, communities and all citizens are mentioned in the issue paper. In further development of participatory planning, new approaches are needed to deal with the current power structures and blocs in urban planning as well as with regard to new participatory planning techniques.

Issue Paper 8. Urban and Spatial Planning and Design

On page 4 of the issue paper it is stated that *“sprawling areas reinforce unsustainable mobility patterns and congestion because they generally force people and goods to travel further distances; reduced connectivity further compound this and reinforce segregation. Compact and connected urban form, on the other hand, has facilitated accessible, low carbon, human-centred environments, and can influence a community’s health in the long term (e.g Seattle, USA, Brussels, Belgium). The importance of connectivity is exemplified by data on land allocated to streets: in a sample of cities in developing countries this averages 6-12%, as compared to cities in developed countries, which averages 29%. The layout and quality of public space is also important, with lively multifunctional streets delivering greater urban benefits than monofunctional ones”*.

Finland supports the promotion of compact and connected urban form, as the benefits that will follow are significant. We would, however, like to challenge the feasibility of measuring the quality of urban form by the percentage of land allocated to streets. As it is rightly pointed out in the issue paper, the layout and quality of public space are important. However, more streets do not necessarily correlate with compactness and connectivity, whereas more open market places, green spaces, public transport, and non-motorised transport do.

As such, a more compact city structure is not of intrinsic value. It should be linked to smart design in which different functions and housing are well connected to nodes of public transport, and where green spaces are located within the urban structure to support well-being, health, and a non-motorised



transport. Especially in developing countries, due diligence should be paid to the existence of, and access to, green spaces and smart urban structure, in order to achieve positive health impacts. Nature-based solutions that promote ecosystem service delivery and create jobs are important when striving to solve societal issues in cities.

Issue Paper 13. Jobs and Livelihoods

With regard to jobs and livelihoods a perspective to be added is the ability of post-industrial cities to create new jobs and welfare. This viewpoint is eminent in many of the cities in the developed world.

Issue Paper 17. Cities and Climate Change

When discussing multi-hazards (page 4) caused by the climate change, a point that has been missed is that, in the long run, climate change causes migration. This can take place domestically, as in the case of New Orleans, or internationally through increasing migration from the third world to more developed countries.

Green procurement could be added to the issue paper as an important component for promoting climate-friendly solutions and technologies

Issue Paper 18. Urban Infrastructure and Basic Services, including Energy

The paper rightly points out that basic services are linked to the realization of human rights and that it is therefore crucial to ensure that basic services are available, physically accessible, affordable, and culturally adapted to all.

In the section on “fostering and applying technological innovation” (page 7-8) we are happy to note that reference is made to “green infrastructure” which is defined as a network of multifunctional green spaces that can provide a multitude of “ecosystem service benefits” such as improving resident’s health and well-being, providing food, reducing storm-water run-off, and reducing energy use.

Issue Paper 19. Transport and Mobility

Finland supports the principles of decreasing travel demand, shifting to more sustainable means of transport and improving vehicle and fuel efficiency. As stated in the issue paper, we would also like to underline the importance of integrated land use and transport planning and the use of ICT in transport and mobility. With regard to “semi-motorised” transport, we would like to stress the significant role that electric bicycles (E-bikes) can play as a solution in striving towards sustainable transport in cities.

Issue Paper 20. Housing

On the page 4 of the issue paper it is stated that: *“Government interference in the housing sector has been minimal...Housing has had a low priority in the allocation of national resources and almost all public and*



Ympäristöministeriö
Miljöministeriet
Ministry of the Environment

corporation houses have been sold. Subsidies have been reduced and, where they remain, they are usually poorly targeted and unsustainable.”

The aforementioned is probably true in many countries, but not that significantly in all of them. For example in Finland, the state-subsidized housing constitutes a rather large share of the total housing stock. The social housing stock is also kept in relatively good condition, and when building new social housing estates, the issues of quality and social and ecological sustainability are thoroughly considered.

Issue Paper 21. Smart Cities

The definition of the smart city is contemporary and well updated, covering the human/citizen approach. What could be added to the definition is a citizens' ability to use the smart city. This is a crucial element in developing smart cities. The paper refers to the ITU focus group on smart cities which takes into account the whole life cycle impact of smart devices which is very important in order to find the optimal solution based on sustainable principles.