**Habitat III - Zero draft – comments**

**Dr Trevor Hancock**

**Professor and Senior Scholar**

**School of Public Health and Social Policy**

**University of Victoria**

**Canada**

**22 May 2016, 20.00 PST**

I write this as one of the pioneers of the now-global Healthy Cities and Communities movement, having been one of the orignal planning team members for the WHO Europe Healthy Cities initiative in 1986, and co-author (with Len Duhl) of the original background paper for WHO Europe.

I have three main points:

1. The focus should be on people and the planet, not on the economy

The most important concern I have is that there is very little explicit focus on people, and on human development. Cities are above all else collections of people, and if they have any purpose at all, surely it is to improve the level of health, wellbeing, quality of life and level of human development of their citizens. Indeed, this – along with being ecologically sustainable and socially just – should be their central purposes.

The purpose of development is not – or should not be – the development of the economy; the economy is simply a social tool, one means of improving the level of human development. We are not – or should not be – primarily in the business of growing the economy, but ‘growing’ people.

Admittedly, the Vision begins with “*Putting people in the center, and offer quality of life beyond the mere provision of infrastructure and services”.* But the text belies the vision. The term ‘human development’ occurs only once in the document (para 36), ‘quality of life’ appears only 9 times, ‘wellbeing’ only appears twice and while the term ‘health’ occurs 14 times, it is often in the context of health care systems and services.

In comparison, the economy is referenced 73 times, ‘social’ 46 times, participation is mentioned 42 times. Also of note is that ‘ecology/ecological’ appears only 12 times, ecosystem only 6 times (although ‘sustainable’ is mentioned 79 times, and in 25 of those cases, specifically as ‘sustainable development’), and the Anthropocene is not mentioned. Meanwhile - and oddly – the built environment appears just once (para 119).

**This is very revealing, suggesting that the predominant mindset behind the document is economic and social, and that the ecological and human dimensions of the city are of lesser concern. This needs to be corrected in future Drafts.**

**A good place to begin would be to amend the stated aim in Paragraph 1 to read:**

a New Urban Agenda that harnesses cities and human settlements as a critical means to achieve sustainable and equitable human development, eradicating poverty while living within the constraints of the planet that is our only home.

Note that in this version the focus is not on growth, but on redistribution, and global limits are explicitly acknowledged.

2. A stronger focus on health and wellbeing

There is no specific section on health and wellbeing; and while the term ‘health’ occurs 14 times, it is often in the context of health care systems and services. Yet we know that while access to such services are important, they are not the main determinants of the health of the population. The next Draft needs to take into account the broader understanding of health that can be found in the 30 year history of the Healthy Cities movement, and in particular the *Kuching Statement* (<http://www.thriveurban.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Kuching_Statement_FINAL.pdf> )

that was the product of the Urban Thinkers Campus on Health and Wellbeing in January 2016, as well as Draft 2.0 of *The City We Need* (<http://www.worldurbancampaign.org/sites/default/files/Annex%20I_The%20City%20We%20Need%20TCWN%202.0_0.pdf> ).

3. The Draft fails to present the “radical paradigm shift” that it calls for

The Draft calls for “a radical paradigm shift in the way cities and human settlements are planned, developed, governed and managed”. But this Draft is not a radical paradigm shift. On the contrary, as noted above, it is very economically and socially focused, and largely in a conventional way, and pays much less attention to ecology and human development.

A radical paradigm shift is one in which we acknowledge that

1. Cities should be focused on ensuring a high and equitable level of human development while
2. Living within the constraints of the one small planet that is our shared home.

Yet conventional thinking abounds. Thus in paragraph 3 of the Preamble we are treated to a classic, conventional oxymoron: “sustainable and inclusive growth”, while this becomes simply ‘inclusive growth’ in Paragraph 1 of the Declaration. But the obsession with economic growth (which is mentioned 14 times, in approving terms when applied to the economy, or in terms of planning for and managing urban growth) is what has led us into the global ecological crisis we now face, which some now call the Anthropocene. Continued growth is not sustainable: As Kenneth Boulding has observed, “anyone who believes in indefinite growth within a physically finite system is either insane or an economist!”. We need a steady state economy, and re-distribution within that economy.

So it is revealing that there is no questioning of the ideology of growth, and no criticism of GDP as a measure of progress; indeed, GDP is only mentioned once (in the preamble) and in the context of “more than 80% of global GDP generated in cities”. But we need alternative measures of progress, both globally and at the urban level, that measure progress in human and ecological terms. There is no discussion of this in the document.

A radical shift would include re-shaping cities to have a ‘one-planet’ ecological footprint, divesting from fossil fuels to create low carbon or zero-carbon economies, and re-distributing the Earth’s finite resources in a socially equitable manner both within and between nations. While climate change itself is mentioned 13 times, the term ‘low carbon’ is only mentioned once (para 77), ‘zero carbon’ and ‘divest’ (as in ‘divest from fossil fuels’) not at all and- even more bizarrely – the word fossil fuel does not appear once. How can a document about the future of cities, with an eye on at least the next 20 years and in reality on the entire 21st century (because most infrastructure created today will be in place for most of the 21st century, if not beyond), have any claim to be taken seriously when it so conspicuously omits any references to one of the key issues of the 21st century, namely becoming fossil-fuel free.