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Knowledge for better Cities

ISOCARP Comments on UN Habitat III Issue Papers, July 2015

Introduction

The society of professional urban planners – Isocarp – would like to thank the Habitat II Secretariat for the opportunity to comment on the 22 issue papers. The issue papers were analyzed on one hand by a small group of UN Habitat III experts of Isocarp and on the other hand additionally by some members interested in the subject.

As a society with a particularly broad professional background of members, Isocarp feels very addressed in all the subjects focused in the 22 issue papers. We hope to support the further work with our inputs, and would be glad to help in all phases of the New Urban Agenda process.

We would like to make the following comments:

General Comments

In general the issue papers cover appropriately the challenges of the wide range of present urban challenges and summarize them conveniently. It will be now the task to design policies of the New Urban Agenda, which meet all the requirements lined out in the mentioned challenges. A major effort is needed to define the priorities among these policies.

To avoid a very theoretical and academic language, we like to recommend to focus in the issue papers in general, and while elaborating the New Urban Agenda, on achievable solutions: not only to describe what is to be done, but how to achieve it.

We would like to suggest to integrate the need for a comprehensive education in the related fields of urban planning as an important action. As lined out with 22 issue papers, the challenges for the urban future is more complex than ever and requires professionals with broad and interdisciplinary backgrounds.

Designing policies, the chance for closer relations and cross-border cooperations should be integrated. Global challenges like climate change could only be solved by global politics, which start on regional or national levels. Without the cross-border cooperations as a matter of course the global challenges of a sustainable urban development couldn't be meet.

Issue Paper No.1 Inclusive Cities

The issue paper on exclusion starts off well with identifying the various factors contributing to exclusion in urban areas. It is suggested to add other elements such as disability and age as drivers of exclusion. Often children and the elderly face various forms of exclusion including barriers in travelling unassisted and while accessing facilities. We may also need to include that exclusion is a result of multiple deprivation and often presents a tangle of interlinked issues and thus may be more complex than solving poverty.

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Under drivers of exclusion in cities, it may also need to add "Privatisation of basic services, if not implemented with enough checks, can create an exclusionary market for those with fragile paying power." For example with the privatization of buses in the UK, many routes in poor areas with low ridership were discontinued creating accessibility issues for the people who can not afford private transport.

Under "Establishing the Pathway to Inclusive Cities", it may be useful to add a point on "Breaking cultural barriers to open the cities and city plan making process for all, including women, children, poor and other tradionally excluded groups". In South Asian countries, the culturally stereotyped gender construct has prevented women from participating in decision making processes. Similarly in certain cultures, people belonging to oppressed groups (lower caste people in India, blacks in South Africa) need to be given a fair chance to participate and reap from the benefits of planning, breaking age old traditions. Social class based exclusion may sometimes be more difficult than economic class based differences.

Issue Paper No.2 Migration and Refugees in Urban Areas

The key flavor of the paper is to make formal and functional space for migrants in the city as they add value and vibrancy to the city. In the developing countries, the quantum of people migrating to urban areas is huge. Major cities see thousands of people arriving everyday, not just from rural areas but also from smaller cities. Accommodating migrants at this rate is very difficult and poses a huge stress on cities, specially for cash strapped developing economies.

Secondly, this also creates a situation where donor cities become depleted, lack talented personnel that further reduces their attractiveness for new businesses and investments. In the context of developing countries, the difference between small, medium and large cities is very stark. I believe that sustainable urbanization should ensure that the smaller towns and cities do not loose their vitality and offer a good array of services and opportunities to its residents. Migration from smaller to bigger towns can not be totally eliminated but it is important that urbanization is well distributed across the region or the country, rather than concentrating in a few big metropolitan areas.

Issue Paper No.3 Safer Cities

As a general comment it has to be stated that city leadership must also be defined within the legal framework and not just within national strategies and policies.

The chapter "Knowledge" is well put and summarizes with the phrase "where cities are well planned, they are engines of economic growth and prosperity and offer access to services…" Although is has to be completed that it is not always the case that lethal violence is rooted in the contexts of under-development, inequality, social marginalization. Indeed we witness lethal violence in developed communities and high income households. It is also true that lethal violence relates to societies that have lost morals and social values and contracts; societies that have individualistic tendencies.

In the chapter "Operations" we like to comment that new communication technology has also contributed to increased and sophisticated crime.

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Issue Paper No.4 Urban Culture and Heritage

The chapter "New culture-based urban models for a renewed governance system" should be expanded by the idea to include new and innovative tools for property valuation and pricing for cultural and heritage assets in both public and private ownerships.

The same tools for valuation and pricing of cultural and heritage assets could be described as a key driver for action.

Issue Paper No.5 Urban Rules and Legislation

Urban rules and legislation have apparently a neutral technical nature, but a high impact on social and economic aspects. Physical planning and infrastructure investments are closely linked to law and policies and reflect the way the public interest is persecuted. The legal framework should be therefore regulated to the effectiveness especially of the provision of public services, for instance schools and public infrastructures.

Urban rules and legislation should be consistent with the human rights. A short supplement in the first chapter "Urban law" about the necessity of reflecting values, ethics as well as social and environmental standards would be helpful.

One of the main challenges in fastest-growing agglomerations are informal settlements and the exclusion of the inhabitants from the law. Therefore one of the key issues should be to prevent informal settlements. The legal framework should contribute to poverty alleviation and provide an urban development that is adapted to the need of the people, see also SDG 16 "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels".

Legislation should be effective in developing an urban framework according to fast-growing agglomerations as well as shrinking regions with effective institutions and procedures beyond sectoral planning. Urban laws should provide mechanisms to encourage private development and alleviate private public partnership. This should accelerate sustainable urban development for the public benefit, see SDG 11 "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable". Public benefit as an outcome and impact is one of the key benchmarks for public policy, see chapter 3 "Good quality of law".

Participation and inclusion of the community in decision-making is not yet common; this must be improved and become more transparent. Learning processes will be improved and could guarantee for high quality of participation processes as well as the quality of their results.

Issue Paper No.6 Urban Governance

Promoting urban governance is a key issue to involve the high variety of different stakeholder groups in public decision making on the local and regional level. As a consequence main concepts should not only follow efficient processes but as well effective ones, e.g. by including civil society groups.

In general not only urban and metropolitan planning would be helpful but also all forms of regional coordination, e.g. by regional planning (see issue summary). Concepts like

multifunctionality and synergies of land use could support sustainable urban and regional development.

In addition to all mentioned aspects one key driver for action are learning processes in the society.

Issue Paper No.7 Municipal Finance

The issue paper points out very well the problematic situation of municipalities to manage urban change with lack of finances and increasing demand for urban and local infrastructures. In a global perspective a lot of cities are struggling with fast-growing population and uncontrolled settlements. The scarcity of land and the allocation of settlements produce a high complexity in planning and an increasing need for financing infrastructure, sanitation management and provision of sustainable energy. The management of urban city development should make reference to SDG 6 "Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all", SDG 7 "Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all" and SDG 9 "Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation". Despite of being the main drivers for economic development, cities often do not have the same rights and resources for financing like regional or national authorities. Therefore vertical and horizontal coordination of institutional levels and administrations should be reinforced. Governance structures should be adapted to the need of the cities.

Transport infrastructure, sanitation, water management and the production and service of energy (public infrastructures) request long-term planning and perspectives for an integrated urban development beyond sectoral planning. In order to manage urban change, cities need to build up institutions or agencies with the technical capacity for multidisciplinary approaches.

Financing of public infrastructures should be based on investment plans and programs with a long-term perspective. Often local taxes and other revenue resources are not sufficient to finance urban development. Effective financing mechanisms are mandatory combined with a strong legal and institutional framework. Service provisions, added land values (taxations) and capital investments should provide local revenues to foster urban development.

Issue Paper No.8 Urban and Spatial Planning and Design

If we want to balance urban and rural areas by means of spatial development, then we should not only talk about "Urban and spatial planning and design". We have also to pay a key attention to "Rural planning and design". If we will be unable to create good economic and social incentives to live in villages, planned and designed in high quality, a concentration of people, investment and problems in cities could not be avoided.

Issue Paper No.9 Urban Land

It is important to think about preservation also of some traditional land use cultures, for example nomad type of living. The nomadic livestock breeding cannot survive if no free land for pastures is available.

Therefor it is a need to develop instruments and strategies to preserve part of the land for public use under environmental friendly conditions.

Issue Paper No.10 Urban / Rural Linkages

The problem of urban-rural linkages is the city dominance. There is a need for developing a regional partnership, that respects equally all settlements no matter their their size or economic potential. It is important to support rural communities how to cooperate and to be engaged for their rights to be part of regional development. Urban-rural linkages have to be based on the pre-established rural-rural linkages, in order to form a strong institutional network that will be well respected by the larger cities.

Issue Paper No.11 Public Space

Issue Paper No.12 Local Economic Development

The issue paper is first explaining the notion of LED as a "participatory development process that encourages partnership arrangements with representatives from all sectors". The crucial, necessary element of LED is a courageous government, aware of local resources and capacities, with aim for their municipalities to be visible and competitive, either within their regions or globally, capable of providing local LED strategy as the long term base for development. One of the important key words and the condition for success mentioned is "business enabling environment".

Interesting from the urban planning point of view is the discussion on economies of urbanization & localization. The first is pointing out benefits from different types of companies locating near each other, and the latter entails benefits from companies in the same sector locating near each other. The planning tool of LED mentioned was the higher densities of people and firms that allow ideas to flow giving birth to innovation - one of the main concepts in our fast changing world, for all the successful, contemporary cities appeared to be resilient to challenges, and supportive to innovations.

Not only transitional cities in developing countries have been exposed to economic challenges, but also traditionally strong, rich and stable US and EU cities. There was a need recognized for creative, innovative and open minded city management, accompanied with likewise work force for the successful and stable city development.

The main strategies and key drivers are displayed transparently and cover the field of local economic development in urban futures comprehensivly.

We only like to suggest reconsidering the statement based on World Bank Database: http://databank.worldbank.org/, related to youth in figures and facts chapter, claiming: …"one of the largest untapped sources of economic potential. Some 262 million youth are

economically inactive; and most of these youth reside in cities" … The statement is not clear, or not provided with appropriate arguments.

Issue Paper No.13 Jobs and Livelihoods

In some points the issue paper mentions general recommendations to generate employment, that should be considered more carefully because their impact might also be negative:

Large infrastructure projects must be analyzed carefully on their cost-benefit balance. They consume a large part of public investments, are prone to corruption and are rarely accessible for small and medium size enterprises. They create jobs mainly for the period of construction, but seldom long-term employments.

After experiences in France and the UK, public private partnerships are not automatically a positive solution. They should be employed appropriatly by the public authorities under well negotiated terms, as public interests are not always directly compatible with private interests. Also SMEs have very limited access to PPP.

The following points we would like to recommend to develop further in the issue paper, as they are of a certain importance for sustainable urban areas:

A very important point concerning jobs and livelihood in urban areas is included in the list of key words (page 1) and the key drivers for action (page 7): the spatial forms for cities. It would be worthwhile to give this point more room in the issue paper, as there probably is a direct link between a favorable environment for employment creation and employment conditions and the urban form. Compact cities with functionally and socially mixed used neighborhood reduce the need of transport and create new job opportunities. Well planned cities reduce the necessary investments for technical infrastructure, which can be redirected for investments in education.

Generally concerning the generation of employment in urban areas, the issue paper states in the beginning the important role played by SMEs (page 2), but could develop further the necessary support of SMEs through for example specific tender offers, to strengthen entrepreneurship. SMEs are through their flexibility particularly adapted to face future challenges in the economic development.

The future impact of the upcoming changes in urban economy are a big challenge and opportunity, if they are taken into consideration in time. There are the new economic development linked to the necessity of "reducing, reusing, and recycling" in order to minimize the ecological footprint, to develop a social and solidary economy in contrast to a purely profit-oriented economy. These new economic sectors developed in the context of an ongoing urbanization and will have their impact on the economic growth and the generation of employment.

Issue Paper No.14 The Informal Sector

This is obviously a significant multi-component urban issue. It has become an important employment category within most, if not all cities throughout the developing world, although characteristics vary between cities, countries and cultures. The issue paper, although out of

necessity fairly brief in its coverage, gives a good overview of aspects involved, covering a number of different but interconnected issues – social, economic, environmental and the future-proofing of these – not just the traditional components of modern city development.

A few aspects could be expanded in in the issue paper, for instance:

The structure of the sector and what will happen to it, if it is converted into the more "formal" category: Although there are obvious deficiencies, the informal sector has had significant success in providing financial assistance to many people. The sector has become a breeding ground for entrepreneurship and adaptability and a starting-point for many migrating to the urban centres. Much of this may be lost or its growth hindered should enterprises become too mainstream and formalised and the sector's ability to employ people on an ad hoc basis.

Next, there is the composition of the informal sector and the need to be able differentiate between groups within it; many of which have very different urban requirements. It is right to say that urban planning should encompass the needs of the urban informal sector through provision of basic infrastructure and amenities, whilst ensuring that mobility plans recognize the requirements of the sector and provide for it in all its various formats – adequate roads for transit traffic and dedicated corridors for rickshaws. Urban plans will need to accommodate a number of different informal activities, but not necessarily all. Urban plans of the future will need to be developed for all residents within the urban area without bias and without over-promoting the needs of those who may have been disadvantaged in the past.

Finally, we should be careful when determining which practices are deemed 'good' when some do not necessarily contribute to the development of a comprehensively and cohesively planned urban area. It is positive that the local authorities are willing to take account of the street vendors and allocate them space within the urban area where they can carry out their business. However, the location of many of these street vendors in major cities often hinders others from using the sidewalks – which is what they were originally designed for. Future urban development scenarios will need to be able to accommodate the vendors, but in a way that is beneficial rather than detrimental to other urban users.

Issue Paper No.15 Urban Resilience

It would be worthwhile to clarify the relation between resilience and sustainability in the issue paper, particularly because many other issue papers refer to sustainability. In this way the paper could benefit from a simpler introduction. The influential factors of urban resilience listed in the file is more related to the hazard. The more common phenomenon is that most of fast urbanizing cities are facing a series of sustainable crisis, such as limited urban land, water shortage, air pollution. These issues are more important for city development and more related to urban planning. To complete the terminology of resilience, the original meaning in the social sciences could not be omitted, but also adapted to the urban population, besides the technical and physical meaning of "resilience".

Important figures and key facts underline the recent development of our environment: It would be helpful to organize the data analogously to present them easily understandable.

In the chapter "Key drivers and action" important measures are listed: A single resilient plan couldn't be effective as long as resilience is a typical cross-cutting task. The cross-sectoral approach should be highlighted particularly.

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The need to integrate the challenges and implementation of resilience in the education of urban planning is missed.

Issue Paper No.16 Urban Ecosystems and Resource Management

The issue paper gives a broad introduction to the subject: 7 main concepts are presented as pillars of urban ecosystems and resource management. Unfortunately it remains open how these concepts interact or dominate in reality? Are these 7 concepts all of the same importance?

The importance of ecosystems is only justified as a "service production" for urban residents. The natural function of ecosystems as a habitat should at least be mentioned, particularly because urban ecosystems could house rare species, which are already extincted in rural areas.

The chances of urban gardening and agriculture is missed in the chapter "Summary" and "Key drivers for action".

Instruments of comprehensive resource managment plans as well as the role of urban planning for implementing these instruments should be strengthend in the chapter "Key drivers".

Issue Paper No.17 Cities and Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management

From a professional point of view, the very basic contradiction between the need of an urban structure of high density and the need of green and public spaces is left out in this paper. Only by a very comprehensive planning, and the chance given by urban districts in transition, the urban structure of a city could be influenced in a balanced way between density of buildings and green spaces.

The opportunities of renewable energies should be stronger addresses in the issue paper, as well as a pioneer role of local and regional authorities to use them.

Issue Paper No.18 – Urban Infrastructure and Basic Services, including Energy (Parul, erledigt)
Due to the fact that many themes has to be covered in one paper, the discussion in the paper is geared towards the physical infrastructure – water / sanitation and other areas – social infrastructure – schools / health are not covered proportionately.

The generalization in the paper that urban services are unaffordable for the low income groups / urban poor, does not work in the context of South Asia. In fact, many slum dwellers in the large cities of South Asia are paying higher fees for water / solid waste / sanitation services (in terms of per unit costs) to private and /or unregulated service providers relative to the middle or high income neighborhoods that are connected with the city infrastructure network.

Key drivers for action could allude to fiscal decentralization where municipal governments are empowered to impose and collect service fees to increase own-revenues and are less

reliant on fiscal transfers from central / provincial governments. This is key to implement timely infrastructure improvements which respond to local needs.

Issue Paper No.19 Transport and Mobility

The issue paper covers the mobility subject very well. It would be good update the data used in chart / figure 1.

Issue Paper No.20 Housing

From the point of view of urban planning professionals there are some policy areas in the issue paper that could be strongly advocated:

First, there is difference in mixed-income housing developments compared to low-income housing blocks; e.g. New York City has shifted the policy focus from low-income housing in city center which inadvertently are unable to attract the kind of economic stability / vibrancy in the neighborhood and end up as blocks of blight. Instead, the city is now promoting affordable / inclusionary housing as a percentage share in market-based housing development – a model incentivized through financial and density bonuses for viability. The policy goes on to detail that these inclusionary / affordable-low income housing units must be distributed throughout the building rather than concentrated on floors or as a separate building. This is an important point for social cohesion.

Housing policy at the national level must define and set standards at both macro and micro level, from anti-discrimination policies to micro level should include minimum size of rooms, area per person, etc.

Issue Paper No.21 Smart Cities

The issue paper covers the different dimensions of smart cities, variations in perception, and the linkage with ICT very well. Underscoring policy sequencing and testing readiness of implementing ICT and hi-tech innovations in the context of each city is a good point.

The issue may benefit from a discussion that ease of data collection with ICT innovations allows for continuously refining urban planning policies with changing urban needs.

The use of smart city concepts and ICT tools have enabled greater decentralization and democratization, empowerment of mayors, local government elected officials and citizens to stay connected, e.g. mayors have taken to social media to build consensus and increase community participation.

Issue Paper No.22 Informal Settlements

The issue paper refers to all the key areas in informal settlements and in a format that is easy to follow.

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In the context of South Asia Region, the proportion of urban population living in informal settlements is much higher than the share of population under income based poverty, implying that not only the urban poor but the middle income households are also living in informal settlements. This has policy implication on type of housing needed, affordability of housing, services, etc.

An area for consideration is to define the role for private sector more clearly. For instance, under the chapter "Key drivers for action", the government leadership could also entail coordination and negotiations with the private land owners to define and agree on tenure security, service delivery etc. for residents living in the squatter settlements. In the context of the political economy, constraints in government oversight and implementation, where land grabbing by private landlords or henchmen with or without political connections is commonplace.

28th July 2015, Susanne Fischer and Task Force