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EDITORIAL

Public Space and the New Urban Agenda(*)

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Public Space led urban development

Cities that improve the quality of life for their citizens experience higher levels of prosperity; they are also likely to find themselves more advanced in terms of sustainability. Such cities strive towards social equity and gender equality by increasing access to the urban commons and public good, preventing private appropriation and expanding the scope for improved quality of life for all. Cities that have a strong notion of the 'public' demonstrate a commitment to an improved quality of life for their citizens by providing adequate street space, green areas, parks, recreation facilities and other public spaces.

Public spaces are a vital ingredient of successful cities. They help build a sense of community, civic identity and culture. Public spaces facilitate social capital, economic development and community revitalisation. The liveliness and continuous use of public space as a public good leads to urban environments that are well maintained, healthy and safe, making the city an attractive place in which to live and work. It is important for local governments to invest in public space:

- Public space = quality of life
- Public space supports the economy
- Public Space contributes to a sense of civic cohesion and citizenship
- Public space fosters social and cultural interaction
- Public space enhances safety
- Public space improves health and well-being
- Public space increases mobility
- Public space improves the environment

Public space can lead urban development by ensuring that building will only be permitted if public space has been organized prior to development. The link between public space and urban development needs to be understood in each context and legal framework in order to prevent the creation of unmanaged and/or public space deficiencies common to many cities. Particularly in recent decades, many cities have put public space at the core of urban development, for example Bogota in Colombia.

Ensuring city-wide distribution of public spaces is a way for governments to reduce inequalities and reallocate benefits. The benefit of preparing a city-wide strategy/policy is the protection and creation of a network of high-quality public spaces. City-wide policies

and strategies should ensure planning, design and management of public spaces at different scales. Without a clear strategy/policy, it is difficult for local governments to prioritise, spend and plan resources and to show how much public space is valued, and to mitigate the negative impacts of site specific interventions (e.g. gentrification).

The Relevance of Public Space and global mandate

Globally, the growing attention to public space informed the 23rd Session of the Governing Council of The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) in 2011, where member states mandated UN-Habitat to consolidate agency-wide work on public space, to develop and promote public space policy, coordination, disseminate knowledge and directly assist cities in public space initiatives[1]. In addition, UN-Habitat established in 2012, a Global Programme on Public Space now working in 30 cities.
In 2013-15, the Future of Places (FoP) initiative also significantly contributed to raising awareness around the public space agenda on a global level. A multi-stakeholder initiative which was established by Ax:son Johnson Foundation, UN-Habitat and Project for Public Spaces (PPS) brought together a large and diverse network of stakeholders around the issues of public space through a series of annual conferences. The Future of Places gathered global thinkers, academia, decision-makers, practitioners, UN Agencies, media, communities and private sector that subscribe to the transformative power that good quality public spaces can have in a city. The initiative has shown the commitment of a wide range of actors with a stake in public space, as well as highlighted the global importance of this theme.

The opportunity: the global SDG and the New Urban Agenda

Another great milestone is the adoption of the 2016-2030 Sustainable Development Goals which adopted a Goal 11 'Build cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.' One of the proposed targets set out is "by 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, particularly for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities". Support for SDG 11, and in particular public space Target 11.7, is important to ensure adequate means of implementation and a sound monitoring framework that will be necessary to catalyse action on public space as a contribution to sustainable cities and human settlements.
The adoption of SDG 11.7 and the elaboration of the New Urban Agenda provide significant recognition of the importance of public space to sustainable development and whilst it is a critical first step, on its own it will have little impact without an appropriate follow up mechanism. Therefore, there is a need for supporting local and national governments in developing legislation, policy, norms and practices, which support governments in adopting a holistic and integrated approach to the planning, design development, creation, protection and management of public space. This will require that cities invest in public space and in the spirit of the new urban agenda cities and local governments should take a trans-disciplinary approach by working in partnership with a range of stakeholders and organizations, including civil society, academia and the private sector to ensure inclusive, safe and accessible public spaces for all.

Towards Habitat III: the road from Vancouver to Quito
In 1976, the United Nations General Assembly convened the first United Nations
Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat I) in Vancouver, Canada. Governments had
just begun to recognize the consequences of rapid urbanization driven by rural poverty,
growing urban economies, reduced infant mortality and longer life spans. Along with this
shift came unplanned urbanization and in some cities urban slums and evictions became
commonplace, whilst others struggled with urban sprawl and decaying inner cities. While
Habitat I was notable for bringing urban issues to an international stage for the first time,
the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) which took
place in Istanbul, Turkey in 1996 was notable for being the first UN conference to invite
NGOs and civil society organizations to provide input and participate in drafting
recommendations. The result of the conference was the Habitat Agenda containing 600
recommendations organized around five central objectives meant to guide UN policy
regarding cities: (1) adequate shelter for all, (2) security of tenure, (3) support for
vulnerable groups and women, (4) adequate and equitable access to services, and (5)
promotion of decentralization and good urban governance. Despite the success of
bringing urban issues to the global stage and the inclusion of a broad range of
stakeholders, Habitat II was criticized for failing to produce a lasting and meaningful
impact on urban policy.
In the period since Habitat II, cities have become centres of unprecedented wealth and
prosperity. As Habitat III approaches, the New Urban Agenda (NUA) is being articulated.
The NUA is guided by the following interlinked principles: (a) Leave no one behind, (b)
Sustainable and inclusive urban economies, and (c) Environmental sustainability as well as
reflecting the Sustainable Development Goal 11. Promoting socially inclusive, integrated,
connected, accessible, gender-responsive, environmentally sustainable and safe public
spaces is key in achieving the New Urban Agenda. Good quality public space provides
connectivity and access, protection from crime, shelter from climate, seclusion from
traffic and the opportunity to rest, work and meet. Through its multifunctional and multi-
disciplinary nature, public space offers a holistic view of the city, such as social inclusion,
gender equality, the benefits of nature and green spaces, governance, health, safety,
education, climate change, transport, energy and the local urban economy. Therefore, in
the spirit of the new urban agenda, cities and local governments should take a trans-
disciplinary approach by working in partnership with a range of stakeholders and
organizations, which should include civil society (taking into consideration indigenous
people, women's and grass roots women's organizations), academia and the private
sector to ensure inclusive, safe and accessible public spaces for all.
The enabling components of the New Urban Agenda are mutually reinforcing and vital in
ensuring prosperous cities. Rules and legislation protect access to public spaces, urban
planning and design provides adequate quantity and good quality public space and urban
finance and economy share values, promotes income, investment, wealth creation and
provides employment and decent job opportunities for all. When planning focuses on
providing an adequate public space structure in terms of supply and connectivity, it is
possible to move forward with infrastructure, land subdivision and development in a
much more efficient and sustainable way. Streets and public spaces need to be planned
first with a view of supporting adequate urban density and connectivity. Furthermore,

public space can lead the implementation of the new urban agenda and urban growth. This link between public space and urban development is critical and needs to be understood in each context and legal framework in order to prevent the creation of unmanaged and unimproved open spaces and/or public space deficiencies common to many cities.

Public space offers an integrated and holistic approach to sustainable urban development. Building on the interlinked principles of the New Urban Agenda:

a) public space lends itself well to participatory, gender and age -responsive approaches, and to landscape planning that catalyzes on the benefits of ecosystems to health and quality of life, providing equal access and making sure to leave no one behind. Adequately planned and designed public space raise issues regarding the right of people to freedom of artistic expression, political assembly and civic empowerment, to enjoy, engage and exchange with each.

b) public space creation, protection, management and enjoyment are ideal opportunities for the involvement of all citizens, ensuring that individual and differentiated interests are transformed into collaborative practices. The commons provides the space for participation of urban stakeholders from different classes of the society to advance sustainable and inclusive urban economies. Investments in streets and public space infrastructure improve urban productivity, livelihoods and allows better access to markets, jobs and public services, especially in developing countries where over half of the urban workforce is informal.

c) Public space is critical for environmental sustainability. Adequately planned and designed public spaces play a critical role in mitigation and adaptation strategies to climate change. Green open spaces can minimise carbon emissions by absorbing carbon from the atmosphere. Green spaces can act as sustainable drainage system, solar temperature moderator, source of cooling corridors, wind shelter and wildlife habitat.

Key drivers for action: implementation of the New Urban Agenda

Some of the key driver that have been distilled from the issue paper on public space and the dialogues leading up to the adoption of the New Urban Agenda include:

1. At regional and city level, city-wide strategies need to focus not only on places and spaces but on the form, function and connectivity of the city as a whole.

2. Local authorities should be able to design the network of public space as part of their development plans.

3. At neighbourhood level, urban design should work with communities to foster social inclusion, gender equality, celebrate multiculturalism and biodiversity, and enable urban livelihoods, thus creating rich, vibrant spaces in the urban commons.

4. Laws and regulations need to be reviewed, to establish enabling systems to create, revitalise, manage, and maintain public space, including participatory processes to define their use and manage access to public spaces.

5. Land value sharing and land readjustment tools to be widely adopted and promoted for municipalities to capture private values generated by better public spaces to sustain investment in public space.

6. Investing in public space needs to be harnessed as a driver for economic and social development, as well as for gender equality, taking into consideration urban-rural linkages.
7. As cities expand, the necessary land for streets and public spaces as well as public infrastructure networks must be secured. Urban projects need to ensure adequate public space in planned city extensions, planned city infills and participatory slum upgrading projects. Instruments to enable the creation of public space from private owned land are of critical importance.
8. Debate on targets, indictors and principles on measuring the distribution, quantity, quality and accessibility of public space.

Note
(1) UN-Habitat Resolution 23/4 on Sustainable Urban Development through Access to Public Spaces.

(*) Some contents of this paper are a summary of articles and documents already published on line, available at: www.habitat3.org; www.unhabitat.org; www.futureofplaces.com.

Editorial

View the agreed draft of the New Urban Agenda - 10 September 2016
http://habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda

The Habitat III Conference has, as its mission, the adoption of a New Urban Agenda - an action-oriented document which will set global standards of achievement in sustainable urban development, rethinking the way we build, manage, and live in cities through drawing together cooperation with committed partners, relevant stakeholders, and urban actors at all levels of government as well as the private sector.
After the release of the Surabaya Draft of the New Urban Agenda at the third session of the Preparatory Committee for the Habitat III Conference in Surabaya, Indonesia in July 2016, the New Urban Agenda has been agreed on at the Habitat III Informal Intergovernmental Meeting which took place at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from 7 to 10 September 2016, and it will be adopted in Quito, Ecuador, in October 2016.

View also the Habitat III Issue Paper on Public Space (Area 3. Spatial Development, issue paper n. 11): http://unhabitat.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Habitat-III-Issue-Paper-11_Public-Space-2.0.compressed.pdf