

Echoes from Liverpool by the UCLG Africa Secretary General

The UCLG World Executive Bureau held a policy debate on planning and public space as part of the UCLG Global Agenda Priorities. The debate took place at the Liverpool Town Hall on Tuesday 17 June 2014 from 9:15-11:15.

The opening remarks by Cllr Richard Kemp insisted on the role of local governments in building sustainable multidimensional relations that are instrumental to building a more prosperous and peaceful world for all.

The chairperson of the meeting, Mr. Josep Roig presented why it is important to deal with the public space, insisting on the sacred value of public space as a public good. The tendency to have private gated communities that are developing everywhere is the proof that public space is not a given, but should be a concern for each local authority. There is a proposal that a target of 30% of urban space should be public. This can be considered as a good starting point. The 2010 Manifesto insisted on the need to see public space as a public service and public good, and the place where all citizens regard less of their income and personal circumstances can feel equal and equally cared for.

The City of Durban presented the learning exchange that happened in Durban on the critical role of public space to seeking the promised land of equality and care for all. No public space exists without a community and there is no viable community without public space. Culture plays a critical role in identifying public space. It is a place to get social cohesion and build the dignity of the people. This needs innovation and creativity. This should apply in all categories of cities, big, medium size, and small. But public space is not perceived by decision makers or city dwellers as a public service. Public space is not exclusively about public places, but should be understood as an space opened for use to all citizens, for interaction for economic, social, cultural exchanges.

The presentation by Porto Alegre, highlighted the positive way the City contemplated the issue of public space as citizen partnership. The city realized that public space is not a normal city service with municipal workers like roads, water, sewage, energy, education or health. Public space has a very high territorial base. Geo referencing tools provide good entry points to understand the distribution of public space in the city and there is regular hearings in public space interaction between the mayor and the communities. The resilient City Program funded by Rockefeller Foundation also highlights public space as an entry point for resilience.

Diana Lopez from UN Habitat presented the work of UN Habitat on public space. It is the point of departure towards inclusive cities. The global Public space Program of UN Habitat invests 400 000 US dollars in 5 cities around the World. The guidelines on planning to be adopted during the coming governing council of UN Habitat will include a chapter on public space. The role of local authorities is more and more considered. The post 2015 agenda acknowledges the local government perspective on development. That trend is a headway in the right direction. The urban development is primarily the local authorities responsibility.

There will be a conference in September in Buenos Aires on public space and UCLG members are welcome.

The debate was opened with inputs by Richard Kemp. He said that the central park in New York was inspired from a park in Liverpool. The Liverpool 1 City center park shied away

from a shopping mall, that keep the shopping areas within private wall. This option has kept the shopping areas in which a green park is an important part.

Metro Vancouver said that there is no need to go into large space of walkway. Get people out of the buildings and get them in public space to engage. UCLG should be instrumental in exchanging about such experiences.

From Germany, public space is absolutely vital to giving a face to a city. This is a full responsibility of the city. The decision to partner with private sector is ok provided that decision making remains the responsibility of local Authorities. Urban planning is at the heart of the public space interventions. The cleanliness and safety of public space is critical for the image of the city. This is a good topic to reflect on.

Comments from Indonesia said that public space in Indonesia is mandatory under the 1996 national law. 30% of the space should be for greenary areas.

City manager of Joburg gave two examples of success on public space. In South Africa, The Roch live close to the City center while the poor live in formal centres. This is why the City of Joburg decided to pave the sidewalks and plant the Parks in the periphery. In the city center the sidewalks have become trade areas, hence the right against hawkers and street vendors. We need to understand that what happens in the international arène has an impact on the behaviour of citizen. The corridor of free dom at creating density and close the the apartheid gap is a new policy for open space and mix space use. JPEM insisted on the fact that most of the African urban growth translate into growth of informal settlements

Jordi from committee on culture stated that public space gives the unique character to any city. Any global guidelines should acknowledge this uniqueness linked to the unique context and history of each city.

Frederic Vallier raised the issue of community space in the wake of privatization momentum.

Many community owned space or community gardens for example are more and more prevalent.

Bernadia from ASPAC said that most of the planning are market driven, and only the wealthiest can afford to be part of it. The public space should be a way to keeping public space as public service and public good. The reference to number should be used with care, preference to be given to progressive increase instead of targeted standards.

FCM insisted on the need to use all areas of expertise available among UCLG members. It is important to maximize utility of public space with reference to cultural behaviour.

Istanbul stated that the public areas can create risks if not well managed and maintained. There are health dimension to this issue that deserves better attention.

UN Habitat did establish that the figure of 30% proposed for public space is there to open the debate. Durban insisted on quality public space, and use of the public space. How to advocate around quality public space in all our networks.

Mexico insist on culture as a way to regenerate public space. Mexico city was very insecure 20 years ago, it is today one of the most secure. Previously the governance of public space abandoned public space, and the consequence was that people started to close the street for security reasons and fear was spread all over the city. The new governance worked towards more secure streets, and opening the gate communities. Therefore confidence was rebuilt and the cultural interaction and dialogue were back again. The gender dimension of public space should also be highlighted.

Alain Lesaux has a financial dimension. How can we plan public spaces if the financial resources are lacking, and when we are facing difficulties pertaining to local taxes?

Vancouver provides free piano through local neighborhood sponsoring.

Sarah from UCLG Secretary indicated the way forward:

1. Define a Manifesto on campaign for people centered development
2. Practices to be highlighted in the 6 dimensions of the GOLD IV report
3. How to nurtur the Habitat III agenda
4. How to cooperate between members