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ABOUT THE FUTURE OF CITIES

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I.

Mr. Chair, distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Usually the urban issues, especially the urban future is being discussed and described mostly by architects and urban planners. Let us have a look on this topic from the view of an expert for rural development and village renewal with some consultancy experiences in developed and developing countries and with experiences from discussions with master students for land management and land tenure in urban and rural areas of several African, Asian and countries in transition.

Why do I give a consideration from this standpoint?

Firstly because I strongly believe in the message the former French Prime Minister Edgar Faure once has left as a legacy to us: “If the rural areas don’t breathe any more the urban areas and cities will suffocate”.

Secondly because I strongly believe in the statement UNFAO Director general Jacques Diouf had made at the world congress rural 21 in Potsdam/Germany 2000: “Moving toward sustainable rural development requires firm political will to overcome the remaining urban bias, thus slowing down excessive rate of urbanization. Required are commitment and participation at all levels, including civil society, and **investment in the rural areas to strengthen the diverse roles that they have in society**”.

I remember exactly as organizer of this world congress that this message was mainly directed to African countries too.

Thirdly, because I would like to underline the “Potsdam declaration rural 21”, paragraph 5 which is saying: “Rural areas and urban areas jointly form regions and are partners of regional development. A large scale reconciliation of interests and improved cooperation within and between regions must be part and goal of this development partnership”.

Ladies and Gentlemen, what I wanted to say with this introduction is that we have to discuss the future of cities jointly with the future of rural areas or vice versa. Therefore, the discussion about both futures must be an integrated multidisciplinary one and it comprises a lot of urban and rural experts of many disciplines.

II

On this background I would like to give some reflections and comments on the future of cities:

1. Despite of a lot of literature which promises clarity on the future, nobody of us can really see or know what the future brings or what will be the future of cities. But everybody knows that we must be prepared for it for example by analyzing the current situation (SWOT analysis) and trends and that we even can influence them. The best way to influence our future is to have a dream or better to have a realistic **vision**. In my home country we often use a quotation of the old testamentarian prophet Isaiah: “A nation without a vision will perish”. Therefore, I would like to say: a city without a vision or ideals will not be very successful and it cannot mobilize the hearts, dreams, visions, and ideas of citizens.

I was very pleased to read the Mayor’s vision for Nairobi in the Daily Nation on Tuesday this week. Mayor Akech said: “If we are going to create ideals of a better city environment and safer streets it must be based on ideas of solidarity and integrity. We must open up to embrace our people and their ideas. The council seeks to involve everyone in improving the city by ensuring that everyone has some responsibility towards the city. This will involve changing the attitude of council employees as well as that of city residents in general”.

The future of cities – and it is correctly said that the 21st century will be the century of local authorities – lies in this local politics to implement the paradigm of civil society and the principles of good governance. Naturally, this depends on the size of cities. But more and more we have to realize that cities consist furthermore of several city individuals (polycentrism). Cities must in future be understood as “cities for citizens” (J. Friedmann) or “citizens cities” or “citizens communities”. This means that all actors, the local politicians, the local administrations as well as all citizens, CBOs, NGOs, and representatives of the private and informal sector are equal partners and equal parts of the organism or system called city. Citizens are no more only subjects or clients but more and more partners!

That seems to be a more philosophical vision or issue, but it has a very powerful impact on many attitudes of people and on a really vital civil society and good governance.

2. There is no question that we need cities furthermore and that they should be the “engines of economic growth” and centers of dynamic social and cultural activities and development, although there exist some contrary messages like “the future lies in living country side” (J. Naisbitt).

It is in the interest of the rural areas and people too to have attractive and powerful urban centers, but not those mega cities, which attract all rural people with the consequence of brain drain and aging population in rural areas. **We must finish the discussion about either urban or rural priority (dichotomy) but we must find a viable joint approach to acknowledge the needs and limits of cities as well as the needs and limits of rural areas. Cities and rural areas should acknowledge each other as equal partners! There is no hierarchy!**

This is up to now not the case. In contrary: the more the cities will have economic and ecological problems, (I remind of the increasing competition between metropolitan cities and regions) and the more they are trying to solve their problems to the detriment of rural areas or the more they try to deliver negative footprints to the rural areas the more rural communities and political leaders will oppose the cities. This is the situation at least in West European countries.

The key for this conflict solution and also the key for the future of cities lies not only in a better cooperation with other cities but first in an intercommunal regional perspective with joint visions, strategies, agreed functions of the different settlements, physical planning, use of SDI technologies, urban indicators, implementation of EIA and finally measures with benefits for all, for cities, suburbs, smaller rural towns, villages and for all citizens. These measures can be for example more ecologically oriented land use plans, sustainable land and resource management including land readjustment, brownfield conversion, inclusive social city programmes, reuse of empty buildings, mobile traffic and transport systems etc. It lies in the interest of the cities to spatially deconcentrate and to strengthen existing or establish new settlements within the nearer or farer region (settlement networks) to avoid the dangerous continuing urban growth. Some experts have therefore created a new term: instead of about city now they speak about “cityregion” and “intercity” (in German “Zwischenstadt”). You also can find the term “netcity”. Professor Oswald of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich explains this metaphor: “The net model should be applied consistently to the planning, designing and resource management of an urban territory as it describes and interprets the interaction of the city’s constant movements on all scales”.

The “Berlin declaration on urban future” underlines this development toward polycentric forms of settlements and several city centers and toward a regional planning approach. **So we really can say: the future of cities lies in “synoikos”, i.e. in networks and in networking!**

3. There is a big divide between the current situation and trends in cities in developed and developing countries regarding especially the different growth of population. The common basis is that cities provide jobs, but different is that especially in Western Europe cities lose citizens, enterprises and central functions. Citizens and enterprises move into the suburbs and into nearer regions (therefore cityregion!) consuming land and resources and partly producing a lot of traffic problems because of commuting daily to the cities. Some of the enterprises and citizens settle down more and more in smaller towns in rural areas which as a result of special politics for rural areas can offer good jobs and good traffic and IT-infrastructure. With regard to global City-Regions like New York, London, Tokyo, Paris, Randsted in wealthy countries which are normally considered as attractive cities I must mention that they do more and more display high levels of inequality!

What does happen in developing countries I must not mention any more. What I do want to say is: the future of cities needs different and individual answers, strategies, and measures depending on the regional and national context and culture. Let’s listen what John Friedmann once has said: “We urban planners may have our own professional discourse about the “urban problematique”, but how relevant is it? In any

event, we cannot talk about Switzerland, France, the United States, India or China in the same breath, although the urban problematique were everywhere the same. One reason for the many failures of planning practice stems from the unthinking implementation of a theoretical ideal “solution” to a situation where the solution doesn’t fit”.

But everywhere there is a common task and goal: **in both cases in developed and developing countries the goal is a liveable city, in both cases we need good or even better politics, strategies and programmes for vibrant cities and vital surrounding suburban and rural areas to get back an economic, ecological and social cultural balance.**

And: in both cases, we need an integrated sustainable approach! I wonder if separate Agenda 21 actions driven by CBOs and NGOs are enough in order to achieve sustainable communities. I recommend the visible or transparent integration of sustainable thinking, deciding and monitoring into the daily work of political and administrative institutions of local authorities. Naturally the citizens must broadly and continuously be participated and integrated.

III

Finally I would like to offer some considerations and questions to UN-HABITAT and the delegates of this conference:

1. Is it right that UN-HABITAT is only a “city agency”? I have read this in one of the conference papers. Shouldn’t be UN-HABITAT an advocate for all habitats or settlements both in urban and rural areas?
2. Why should we discuss only about good urban governance? Why not just as well about good rural governance as we discuss secure tenure and access to land issues in both urban and rural areas?
3. What’s about our approach and efforts to guarantee the education and training of holistically thinking and inter-disciplinarily acting experts and planners for urban and rural issues at our schools and universities? Don’t we need more efforts on strengthening a really sustainable oriented study and practice, this means including economic, ecological and social cultural aspects besides of the technical subjects?

Don’t we need more capacity building for all parts of our “citizens community”? Does it really happen at the moment?

4. More than ever, we should discuss whether the rural to urban migration is really inevitable? Don’t we risk that mega cities become no more to be governed? Shouldn’t we discuss more strategies like the well experienced European ones or the new established Chinese one with a clear preference on strengthening existing or establishing new rural settlements (towns and villages) in order to reduce the migration into the cities?

Shouldn’t we review more the existing specific finance programmes and measures for urban and for rural areas before we continue to accept that all is inevitable? There is

no doubt that we must act like a fire brigade in urban areas by improving the housing, water, sewage, road, traffic, social and ecological situation and reducing urban poverty, **but shouldn't we focus as well on the source of all migration namely on the rural areas and on rural poverty etc.?**

The document on “urban-rural-linkages and sustainable urbanization” (HSP/GC/19/CRP.4) offers a clear chance for doing it.

My Conclusion:

Once again: the future of cities lies mainly in the future of rural areas too! The Habitat Professionals forum as an informal alliance of several international Federations and especially FIG would like to wish UN-HABITAT a great success in all its indispensable efforts and programmes in order to achieve a better and more just world. We promise to support UN-HABITAT with a wide range of activities like joint conferences as we will do it for example in Marrakech/Morocco at the end of this year on the topic “urban-rural-interrelationship for a sustainable environment” or by delivering expertise in all fields of SDI, Mapping and Surveying, Land Administration, CPD, physical planning, land management and valuation and in the very important field of land tenure in urban and rural areas.

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