

# 14-17 November 2010 54<sup>th</sup> IFHP Congress Porto Alegre

## BUILDING COMMUNITIES FOR THE CITIES OF THE FUTURE



The Cities of the Future are cities that already exist today. Since 2007 more than half of the world's population lives in cities, in 2030 this percentage will have reached 60% and in 2050 75%. The concentration of activities and people with different backgrounds and different socio-economical positions goes together with problems such as inadequate housing, poverty and social segregation. The problems that occur in urban areas do not only affect these areas, but also affect the world as a whole.

The territories where this immense number of people – nearly 7 billion inhabitants – will live, are for the biggest part already occupied or defined as potential urban areas. In developing countries, where migration flows to urban areas are the most intense and dramatic (they can reach 2 million new inhabitants per year in a metropolis like São Paulo or Mexico City), the authorities do not have the human or financial means to deal with the tremendous needs of this new urban population. In developed countries, different but comparable contemporary urban challenges require a review of the adequacy of urban policy responses.

The congress will focus on **communities**, for the simple reason that they have a crucial role in the functioning of urban territories, uniting people, their activities and having the potential to improve their living environment. They give people mainstay and a home base in the often impersonal dynamics of the city. Communities are an important basis in urban policies, since they are the reference points for policymakers and other professionals and more importantly, they give substance to the living environment of citizens.

In our globalised world, urban problems differ from one place to another. However, there are also similarities and common elements which make it interesting and useful to exchange knowledge and experiences on an international platform.

The 54th IFHP 2010 Porto Alegre World Congress, 'Building Communities for the Cities of the Future', will deal with these contemporary socio-economic urban problems. In questioning how to address such problems, we will not only discuss policy solutions themselves, but also the process of how to apply those solutions.

### **Theme 1: How can tomorrow's cities be more socially equal, sustainable & affordable?**

Social sustainability is essential for the well-functioning of urban territories, involving different needs, such as social inclusion, social cohesion and safety. At the same time, social sustainability is an increasingly complex challenge, especially in low-income communities, for cities in both developing and developed countries. Different reasons can be found for the vulnerable position of such communities: isolation, lack of opportunity, income inequality, cultural differences, inadequate housing and individualism.

One of the main global challenges with regard to low-cost communities is how to deal with illegal settlements, especially in developing countries. Also in developed countries, low-income communities form an issue on the policy agendas. Problems in these communities can become very complex, since a lack of social cohesion, physical quality (functional and aesthetic) and cultural problems affect each other negatively, and policy makers do not know where to start to deal with this downward spiral.

We will discuss how urban developers, architects and urban planners can contribute to the provision of affordable and decent housing, accessibility of urban services, a good quality of public space and the built environment, to improve the living environment under contemporary social, cultural and economical circumstances.

### **A) Cultural Identities, Social Sustainability & Social Cohesion**

A community consists of its inhabitants. It is a social environment, and therefore should be socially sustainable. **How can social sustainability and cohesion be achieved in low-income communities?** What is important is to bind together the community by developing mutual respect between the various cultural identities living there. Ways have to be found to deal with different cultures living together. **What is the role of architects and urban planners in creating and maintaining socially sustainable communities, social cohesion and binding and respecting diverse cultural identities? Are there limits to cultural differences if we want social sustainability?**

### **B) Promoting & Financing Social Housing**

The immense urbanisation of recent years and the future puts a high pressure on the provision of housing, especially low-cost housing. **How can we promote low-cost housing of sufficient quality given the ever growing demand?** Decent low-cost or social housing is often non-profitable, so its provision depends generally on non-profit organisations and governments. **What are the best practices of social housing policies all over the world? What are the possible low-cost design solutions?**

### **C) Slums, the informal city and urban policies**

The extraordinary urban growth referred to above manifests itself mainly in developing countries and is inherently linked there with a significant increase in the number of slum dwellers. Actually, one out of three people of the world urban population is a slum dweller. The growth of cities and slum formation poses one of the greatest challenges for urban planners and city managers in the developing world. According to UN-HABITAT, the rate of slum formation is the highest in the world in Africa (4.58%), where urban growth is practically a synonym of slum growth. In Latin America, where slum and urban growth rates are the lowest of the developing world, the figures are still 1.28% and 2.21% respectively. But slums can also be looked at as a solution that offers housing opportunities to a large share of the world population whose demands for housing, land and infrastructure cannot be met by governments' policies and formal housing delivery systems. **How should we deal with slum formation? How can we actually define slums and informal settlements in order to understand its genesis and logic? What are possible policy solutions and approaches and what should be the role of urban planners and architects?**

## **Theme 2: How can communities be included in the city of the future?**

In the present context of globalisation and fragmentation, the idea is increasingly being shared that traditional government does not have the capacity to react on issues related to uncertainty and rapid change.

Our world is complex and unpredictable. Traditional top-down and standardised government is often

incapable of perceiving the needs of different layers in society and reacting to them, because the distance between traditional government and the issues that manifest themselves at lower levels is too large. A dialogue between the diverse stakeholders is needed to arrive at new results which formal institutions or governments cannot attain.

With regard to this situation and these questions, the city of Porto Alegre is an ideal venue, given its long history of public participation in the process of public management and participatory budget activities in public administration.

### **A) Citizen participation and the process of urban planning**

The need for citizen participation in urban planning is increasing, but it remains an underdeveloped phenomenon in practice. Not everybody agrees on the benefits of different degrees of public participation. Many defend that it is a condition for a good planning process; others question to what extent people are able to decide themselves on urban planning issues without the necessary expertise. **To what degree and in what way is citizen participation desirable? What conditions are needed for citizen participation with both freedom and practical efficiency?**

### **B) Social Inclusion in a Network Society**

Our network society is a global society, based on technologies that are not limited to any physical boundaries (only political!). We can have contact with the whole world, and people that do not have the possibility to travel have the possibility to know what is happening on the other side of the world. On the other hand, this increase in scale can cause a polarization, in which some people have greater opportunities, and others less. **Does telecommunication contribute or hinder social inclusion of different population groups? How can internet contribute to the social inclusion of different population groups? What is the role of Social Networks, such as Workers' Movements, Movements of Homeless People, religious communities, NGO's, in the process of social inclusion?**

### **C) Retreat of the Public Sector**

Nowadays, the market is increasingly replacing the public sector. This can be seen in sectors such as education, transport, housing and even water- and energy supply. Can the growing demand for these services be answered by public policies? **To what extent can the private sector take care of former public services that are often not profitable? What are best practices of low-cost housing and low cost urban settlements provided by the private sector? Has the retreat of the public sector reached its limits?**

## **Theme 3: Can the urban spaces created by the modernist design of cities promote community life?**

In the recent past, the pioneers of the Modern Movement have tried to respond to urban challenges by the internationalisation of their style and way of thinking and doing. The blueprint of the Modern Movement was: 'form follows function', reinforced by new construction materials and technologies. In rationally designed neighbourhoods and cities, city life was brought back to four separated main functions; residence, employment, recreation and traffic, with the 'neighbourhood approach' as the dominant social-spatial concept.

Brasilia, the capital of Brazil, is probably the most well-known example of modernist architecture and urban planning worldwide. Besides Brasilia, other examples of places that are planned according to modernist principles can be named, e.g. the city of Chandigarh in India and some post-war neighbourhoods in the outskirts of European cities.

At the time, Urban Modernism was looked upon as a promising concept. In contemporary times, it has become clear that the thinkers of the Modern Movement were not able to determine people's behaviour and to forecast the importance of public involvement, particularly in urban planning and development.

Almost a century after the ideas and practices of the Modern Movement and half a century after the realisation of Brasilia, it is time to analyse the success and failures of urban modernism and to draw some lessons for the future.

### **A) Planned Cities**

Pleasant urban spaces are often the result of gradual developments, of different people undertaking different actions over the years. Planned cities are often criticized for being unnatural, inhuman, unpleasant, static. **After fifty years, what are the lessons learned from the modernist city Brasilia and other planned cities or neighbourhoods? Are the critics of modern urbanism inspiring contemporary urban projects to promote new social and spatial relations?**

### **B) Spatial Determinism: impact of urban design on social behaviour**

Although it is now accepted that physical design cannot determine social behaviour, spatial interventions are still applied in neighbourhoods with spatial, social and economic problems. **To what extent can urban planners and designers influence social relations? How could urban design be applied in order to improve social and economic circumstances?**

### **C) New urban projects; new urbanity**

Designing new urban projects is still the fundamental task for urban designers and planners. **How can new cities or neighbourhoods be planned that promote community life and identity? Why do some new urban spaces become a (social) disasters, while others are successful? How can we create qualified, human and pleasant new urban spaces and cities?**

## PLANNED COMMUNITIES AND THE INVOLVEMENT / RETREAT OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR – THE CASE OF LOUVAIN-LA-NEUVE (BELGIUM).

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### ABSTRACT

Many European countries witness the retreat of the public sector from urban planning and urban services. In the UK, development corporations in charge of public new towns have been scrapped. This has for example been the case for Cumbernauld in Scotland, making it an orphan new town, administered from a far-away Local council. Public urban services such as transport/water provision, traditionally managed by the Local authorities have been outsourced to the private sector. In France the private sector is frequently entrusted by concession to operate public services. Delegation of public responsibilities to the private sector (“gestion publique déléguée”) requires a specific skill in handling of public/private partnerships, which had to be learned. In some cases the private sector has taken itself the initiative to conceive, develop and maintain planned unit developments.

The case of the Louvain-la-Neuve “private” university town is examined in this context and illustrated by slides showing its location within the Brussels conurbation, its cultural references, its planning principles and its implementation.

The 1968 Belgian legislation imposing the exclusive use of the Dutch language to the Catholic University of Louvain (UCL) forced the French speaking part of the University to leave the mediaeval City of Louvain, where it settled 500 years ago, and to look for a new site. The University decided to develop a new university town inspired by the traditional university towns like the city of Louvain/Leuven, instead of an isolated campus. To this effect it acquired a 1000 ha tract of agricultural land 25 Km south of Brussels, on the territory of the Ottignies Municipality.

To work out the overall Master Plan and undertake the architectural coordination of the new town the UCL appointed the “Groupe Urbanisme Architecture” (Urban Planning and Architecture Office), headed by R. Lemaire, J.P. Blondel and P. Laconte. The equity was provided by the state subsidy for university buildings, academic facilities and related infrastructure. Land remains in private property of the University (only long term leases are granted to developers).

The high density - low rise built area covers only 1/3 of the site acquired by the University. The remaining area is to remain without buildings, including a forest, managed as nature reserve. The rain water is separately collected towards an artificial lake situated at the lowest point of the site. This urban concept - both compact and green - is by far the thriftiest in infrastructure, energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions, since cars are not needed within the town.

The Louvain-la-Neuve project started as a new university town conceived developed and managed by its teams. It is now, due to its residential and commercial success, becoming a

service and cultural centre at regional level, entailing a huge development of private commercial and cultural activities.

This presents a new planning challenge at a time when public sector subsidies are retreating from university development. The non-university infrastructure maintenance by the University, as general developer of the site, becomes a burden for the University budgets, which have to give a priority to the academic competition within the “Bologna” framework. Partnerships with local authorities (public-public partnerships) have started to take place. The science park is jointly managed with a public regional development body. Outsourcing of non-university activities to the private sector (public-private partnerships) are being considered as an avenue for further development.