

Sustainable cities revisited

I. WHAT HAS CHANGED SINCE 1992?

TWO DIFFERENCES ARE worth noting between this issue and our previous issue on sustainable cities six years ago. The first is the greater number of examples of innovative environmental action plans for cities – most of them linked to Agenda 21, the document agreed at the United Nations Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. This issue of *Environment and Urbanization* includes case studies of such plans in Manizales (Colombia) and Chimbote (Peru), along with a study of the Cities for Life Forum in Peru which has been promoting and supporting the development of Local Agenda 21s in many Peruvian urban centres. It also includes a paper reflecting on the experience in localizing Agenda 21s in Nakuru (Kenya), Essaouira (Morocco) and Vinh City (Vietnam). Case studies of Rufisque in Senegal, Porto Alegre in Brazil, Leicester in the United Kingdom and two community level Local Agenda 21s within low-income neighbourhoods in Lima and Manizales will be published in future issues. The innovations in Surabaya (Indonesia) and Ilo (Peru), which have been described previously,⁽¹⁾ will also be revisited at a later date; and there are further examples of city authorities giving more attention to environmental issues or seeking to integrate environmental concerns into development plans that are not necessarily referred to as Local Agenda 21s.

A second difference between 1992 and today is the evidence of greater interest in the theme of sustainable cities among a broader group of people and institutions. This evidence comes from different fronts. One is the unusually large number of papers submitted for inclusion in this issue of *Environment and Urbanization*. Usually, between 15 and 25 papers are submitted; in this case, we received more than 40. Given the high quality of most of the papers, and that the theme of “Sustainable cities revisited” is one of the most popular among our readers,⁽²⁾ we have decided to dedicate a second issue to the topic – in October 1999, after the issue on “Healthy

cities” in April 1999. It is in this October 1999 issue that the other case studies noted above will be published – see Box 1. Another indicator of the greater interest in this area is the greater number of conferences and seminars devoted to sustainable cities or Local Agenda 21s in urban areas, or to comparable topics. “Sustainable human settlements” was one of the two main themes of Habitat II, the second UN Conference on Human Settlements (also called the City Summit) in Istanbul in 1996.

Box 1: Papers to be included in Sustainable Cities Revisited II, October 1999

“Partnerships for urban environmental management: roles of urban authorities, researchers and civil society” by Corinne Wacker, Alain Viaro and Markus Wolf

“Waste management in Madras revisited” by P.B. Anand

“A dream of green and water: community based formulation of a Local Agenda 21 in peri-urban Lima, Peru” by Michaela Hordijk

“The strengths and limitations of partnerships in implementing Local Agenda 21s: the experience of Leicester” by Ian Roberts

“Environmental management of the city of Surabaya with reference to the National Agenda 21” by Happy Santosa

“Improving waste management and the Noble City Award: the case of Surabaya” by Johan Silas

“The local environmental action plan for Olivares bio-comuna in Manizales” by Luz Stella Vélasquez

“Sustainable cities; a guide to the literature” by David Satterthwaite

NB: We plan to have some of these papers available prior to their publication in October 1999 at Environment and Urbanization’s web-site http://www.ied.org/human/env_urb.html

Introduction

There has also been considerable expansion in the literature on sustainable cities.⁽³⁾ Some of this was stimulated by papers in our October 1992 issue which, for instance, included a paper by William Rees on "Ecological footprints and appropriated carrying capacity; what urban economics leaves out" which helped stimulate a much greater interest in the ecological impact that human activities within cities had beyond their boundaries.⁽⁴⁾ The October 1992 issue also included a detailed case study by Jonas Rabinovitch of Curitiba before it became so widely known for its green innovations, and this paper has been republished in many places. Christine Furedy's paper in the same issue on "Non-conventional options for solid waste management" also helped stimulate greater interest among city authorities and researchers in working with waste pickers.

Another indicator of the greater interest in this subject is the rapid growth in the number of urban centres which have developed Local Agenda 21s⁽⁵⁾ although the impressive numbers may hide a high proportion of places where, in reality, the new Local Agenda 21 is neither participatory nor effective. While many of the case studies in this and the October 1999 issue show impressive and exciting examples of innovation, they may not be typical among the thousands of urban centres with Local Agenda 21s. It is also worth noting how many of the more successful case studies are rooted in cities with strong local democracies or at least in cities where local democratic moves are not suppressed. One wonders how many of the urban centres in Africa, Asia and Latin America with Local Agenda 21s have governments that have really engaged in a broad consultative process with their populations - and have the capacity to work with them and with other stakeholders in developing and implementing such agendas. We can draw much inspiration from, for instance, the innovative Bioplan in Manizales and its comprehensive monitoring system described in Luz Estella Velasquez's paper; or the struggle by the coalition of groups in Chimbote to stop the contamination of their city and improve its quality as described by Maria Elena Foronda. But how many Local Agenda 21s have such vibrant local processes at work? Foronda's paper is also a reminder of how obdurate lo-

cal politicians can be to community pressure.

The theme of how best to monitor progress on Agenda 21 (including Local Agenda 21s) and on the indicators needed to do so is another theme in which there has been a rapid growth of interest since 1992. In this regard, the paper on Manizales is worth noting since it describes in some detail the system developed for monitoring progress in each of the 11 *comunas* into which Manizales is divided, and the extent of community involvement in the development of the indicators and their measurement and interpretation.

II. BETTER ESTABLISHED THEMES WHOSE RELEVANCE REMAINS UNCHANGED

THERE ARE CERTAIN themes, developed in our 1992 issue on "Sustainable cities", which remain as key issues in the papers presented here. They include: the link to political issues that centre on democracy and citizen participation; the management of wastes in ways that combine social and ecological goals; the role of urban agriculture; and the perennial difficulties facing any city authority in combining economic, social, environmental and ecological goals in improving transport. In addition, the confusion surrounding the term sustainable development remains. This issue has papers which contribute to greater clarification and precision in each of these areas.

a. Democracy and Citizen Participation

In the October 1992 issue, Mike Douglass, in his paper on "The political economy of urban poverty and environmental management in Asia", stressed the importance of democracy and real space for community participation for better environmental management in cities. This theme is strongly amplified in the case studies included here on Manizales, Chimbote and the Peru-wide Cities for Life Forum. Indeed, one of the reasons for the many case studies of Local Agenda 21s in Latin America in this and the October 1999 issue is the fact that a return to or strengthening of local democracy and some decentralization of power in many countries gave

more space to the development of such Local Agenda 21s. But, as the papers by Maria Elena Foronda in Chimbote and by Liliana Miranda and Michaela Hordijk on a larger group of Peruvian cities make clear, this has been a struggle – and one that is so often inhibited by national government agencies and some local politicians. Citizen driven Local Agenda 21s are also so often opposed by companies or corporations, not least because these often seek to finally hold companies or corporations to account for the environmental contamination for which they have long been responsible. This is one of the key points in the paper on Chimbote and is a key point in the development of a Local Agenda 21 in another Peruvian city, Ilo, which was described in an earlier issue.⁽⁶⁾

More participatory responses by city authorities is also an important theme in most other papers in this issue. The need for more participatory (and less “anti-poor”) approaches by government agencies and by international development assistance agencies is the central theme of the paper by Sheela Patel and Kalpana Sharma, as it discusses the need to move people away from the railway tracks in Mumbai (formerly Bombay) to allow an increase in the speed of trains. It also shows how solutions can be developed that benefit everyone but this requires more patience, flexibility and commitment by external agencies to working with the inhabitants of low-income communities. Both this paper and the paper by the Vincentian Missionaries, on the development of a federation representing the priorities of waste pickers in Quezon City, highlight the need for governments and international agencies to allow space for low-income groups to develop their own organization and their capacity to manage their solutions. The paper by El Housseynou Ly and others reveals the difficulties that local government practice in Dakar had in supporting more participatory urban management. The October 1999 issue will also include two papers on neighbourhood level, community based Local Agenda 21s – one from a low-income neighbourhood in Lima, the other in one of the poorest neighbourhoods in Manizales. But some caution is needed in celebrating many community initiatives only for their “environmental” actions, in that these are so often as much

about social justice – as low-income groups organize to address the inadequate provision by city agencies for water, sanitation, drainage and garbage collection or the inadequate attention given to controlling industrial pollution.

b. Reducing and Removing Waste

The need to develop new approaches to waste management which ensure much better service levels to the lower-income and less accessible parts of cities while also improving the livelihoods of waste pickers and other low-income groups involved in the “waste economy” was a key theme in the October 1992 issue – especially in the paper by Christine Furedy, mentioned earlier, and in the paper by Margarita Pacheco, reflecting on practice in Bogotá. Perhaps there has been some progress since 1992 in the extent to which new attitudes to the management of wastes and to the role of informal waste pickers has gained ground. The paper by the Vincentian Missionaries in this issue describes the development of a federation of waste pickers who live around Manila’s largest solid waste dump and the programmes that have been developed to strengthen their livelihoods and improve their living conditions. However, the paper on Cotonou by Ir Houinsou Dedehouanou is a reminder of the difficulties of improving the management of wastes, as a result of both the economic crisis and the difficulties that government agencies have in providing the framework for greater community and private sector involvement.

c. Transport

The only paper in this issue that focuses on transport – namely the one on Mumbai – may not, at first, appear to be about sustainable cities. It concentrates on how community organizations, representing the inhabitants of “slum” communities living along Mumbai’s railway tracks, and supportive local NGOs, showed how there were effective and pro-poor solutions to the need to move people away from the railway tracks in order to increase the speed of Mumbai’s overloaded train system. Yet, it is probably one of the most important issues within any dis-

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discussion of sustainable cities: how can the major public works programmes that cities need to install or expand their infrastructure avoid being anti-poor? Two papers in the issue on "Future cities" in 1996 (Vol.8, No.1) are also worth recalling with regard to transport – Peter Newman's paper on "Reducing automobile dependence" and Voula Mega's paper on "Our cities, our future: towards sustainable development in European cities".

d. Urban Agriculture

The paper on urban agriculture in Mexico City by Losada, Martínez, Vieyra, Pealing, Zavala and Cortés is also on a sustainable cities theme which is now better understood – and follows on from the paper in the 1992 issue on "Urban agriculture for sustainable cities" by Jac Smit and Joe Nasr. Indeed, Jac Smit and his colleagues at the Urban Agriculture Network have done so much over the last decade or more to highlight the importance of urban agriculture.⁽⁷⁾ But the paper here, on Mexico City, is unusual in the detail and scope of its description of how urban, suburban and peri-urban agriculture has changed over time, including how it has adapted to changing demands from urban populations. It also points to the ecological and employment advantages of government authorities adopting new approaches to manage urban expansion which recognize and support the role of urban agriculture.

e. What is to be Sustained?

The paper by Peter Marcuse critically reviews the way in which "sustainability" has been added to the goals of so many programmes. In so-doing, he suggests that sustainability should not be considered as a goal for a housing or urban programme – many bad programmes are sustainable – but as a constraint whose absence may limit the usefulness of a good programme. This paper also points out that stressing sustainability can simply encourage the sustaining of an unjust status quo and that the attempt to suggest that everyone has common interests in sustainable urban development masks very real conflicts of interest. These points are particularly important in the follow up to the UN Habitat II conference. As noted al-

ready, this had sustainable human settlements development as one of its main themes and this is reflected in the two documents endorsed by the conference – the Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements and the Habitat Agenda. However, the text of these documents is very unclear as to what they think should be sustained. At times the text suggests that it is settlements that are to be sustainable as in "sustainable human settlements" or "sustainable urban centres" or "sustainable communities" – or aggregates of human settlements as in "sustainable spatial development patterns" or "settlement policies". In other instances, it is society in general or living conditions that are to be "sustainable". In others, again, it is particular activities within urban areas that are to be sustainable – as in "sustainable shelter markets and land development" or "sustainable transport", "sustainable agriculture", "sustainable livelihoods", "sustainable resource use", "sustainable water supply" or "sustainable energy use".⁽⁸⁾ This ambiguity or lack of clarity limits the use of these documents in encouraging governments and international agencies to give a higher priority to "...meeting the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." It also makes it difficult to assess whether governments are responding to these documents, formally endorsed by their official representatives in Istanbul in 1996.

III. HOW CITIES TRANSFORM THEIR WIDER ENVIRONMENTS

MOST OF THE papers in this issue concentrate on how environmental conditions can be improved for urban populations. However, two papers consider another important aspect of sustainable cities, namely how urban development impacts on the local ecology. The paper by Acho-Chi describes in some detail the ecological impacts of unplanned urban expansion on land surface changes in and around the city of Bamenda (Cameroon), and the underlying causes. The paper on urban agriculture in and around Mexico City by Losada, Martínez, Vieyra, Pealing, Zavala and Cortés also includes details of the eco-

logical changes brought about by urban expansion.

However, other papers also show an interest in reducing the ecological disruption caused by urban development – for instance, the development of the eco-parks in Manizales, the movement to protect the wetlands in Chimbote and the measures being taken in Essaouira to better protect the fragile ecosystem of lagoons and dune forest onto which the city's physical expansion is impinging. The papers on Chimbote and Manizales also stress the extent to which effective Local Agenda 21s need populations that are well-informed on environmental issues, including on the ecological disruption that urban development can bring and the measures needed to limit this.

IV. ADDRESSING BROADER CONSTRAINTS

FOCUSING ON LOCAL Agenda 21s can mean that too little attention is paid to what constrains local action. Fortunately, the papers in this issue do not neglect this. The paper on the national campaign in Peru to support Local Agenda 21s is an important one, not only for its study of how a national forum sought to encourage and support environmental action and management in different cities throughout Peru but also for the insights it provides for the broader issue of how to support “good governance” for environmental action within a nation. The paper on Manizales sets the innovations in the city within the broader national context of the new constitution and other political, legislative and fiscal changes in Colombia which have encouraged local authorities to develop local environmental agendas. The paper by Raf Tuts on Local Agenda 21 initiatives in three cities highlights both the innovations achieved and the local and national constraints on their scope and effectiveness. It is also one of the weaknesses of the Habitat Agenda that it does little to outline the kinds of national and international frameworks that can help ensure that sustainable development goals are addressed in cities (and other settlements).

Betsy Hartmann's paper on “Population,

environment and security: a new trinity” considers another very important but often neglected constraint – the extent to which faulty or distorted diagnoses of environmental problems by powerful interests in the world's wealthiest countries misrepresent environmental problems in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The paper points to the many inaccuracies in the literature claiming that internal conflict in these regions is often the result of population pressures and resource scarcities. As the paper describes, in presenting the “evidence”, the literature fails to consider the underlying (generally economic and political) causes of poverty and environmental degradation, including the role of international companies, development assistance agencies and the US government. From such misrepresentation, ill-conceived responses so often develop – including, as her paper describes, entirely inappropriate roles for the military in search of a new role after the end of the Cold War and very regressive and inaccurate views of the needs, priorities and abilities of women and “peasant” farmers.

A final point worth highlighting in the papers is the discussion of partnerships. The Habitat Agenda and many other recent policy documents stress how new partnerships play a central role in addressing environment and development problems in cities. Most of the papers in this issue point to some successful local partnerships but also to their limitations; there are also few examples of successful partnerships between local governments, citizen organizations and private businesses. This issue will be explored in more depth in several papers in the October 1999 issue. For instance, the paper by Corrine Wacker, Alain Viaro and Markus Wolf on “Partnerships for urban environmental management – the role of urban authorities, researchers and civil society” will discuss in detail the local and national constraints on the development of effective Local Agenda 21s. It considers six case study cities (in Uganda, Bolivia, Pakistan, Viet Nam, Benin and Burkina Faso), where the most general constraint is, not surprisingly, weak local authorities. The paper also stresses how the nature of the constraints differs according to the extent of decentralization and of the space given to civil society involvement in environmental management. With high levels of de-

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centralization, there is a tendency to ask too much of local communities. In countries where there has been some decentralization, but where roles and responsibilities remain unclear, one of the main constraints is the conflict between different sectors and departments within governments as well as conflict between urban administrations and elected leaders. This constraint is also highlighted in the paper by Liliana Miranda and Michaela Hordijk, as decentralization in Peru gave new responsibilities and roles to local governments but without curtailing the responsibilities and functions of other authorities, so the legal framework gives rise to many conflicts over who is responsible for which tasks. A paper by Ian Roberts in the October 1999 issue will consider the strengths and limitations of partnerships in implementing Local Agenda 21s in the British city of Leicester. The paper by Peter Marcuse in this issue also reminds us of the very real conflicts of interest between different partners in their priorities for the use of resources.

V. FEEDBACK

IN THE FEEDBACK section, the paper by Pedro Piréz reviews the changes in the management of urban services in Buenos Aires over the last 100 years and discusses the implications for the quality of service provision in recent decades and for the future. It stresses how the quality of provision for water and sanitation is much influenced by the extent to which the agencies responsible for such provision are directly accountable to the citizens they are meant to serve. This has particular relevance for the many cities in which the provision of water and sanitation is now privatized or being privatized, although Pedro Piréz's paper also highlights how locating the control of such provision in central government agencies can also make these unaccountable and unresponsive. The paper by Olusola Olufemi describes the scale and nature of homelessness in central Johannesburg based on a survey of street shelters, public places and buildings used by the homeless.

1. For Ilo, see Díaz, Doris Balvín, López Follegatti, José Luis and Micky Hordijk (1996), "Innovative urban environmental management in Ilo, Peru", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol.8, No.1, pages 21-34. For Surabaya, see Silas, Johan (1992), "Environmental management in Surabaya's kampungs", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol.4, No.2, pages 33-41.

2. See the analysis of returns from the last questionnaire sent out to all subscribers in 1997, as reported in Vol.9, No.2, 1997, pages 348-350.

3. The October 1999 issue will include a review of the literature on sustainable cities. Earthscan Publications will also be publishing, in 1999, a reader bringing together recent papers on the subject of sustainable cities.

4. See, for instance, Wackernagel, Mathis and William Rees (1995), *Our Ecological Footprint: Reducing Human Impact on the Earth*, New Society Publishers, Gabriola (Canada), 176 pages.

5. ICLEI (1997), *Local Agenda 21 Survey* (A study of responses by local authorities and their national and international associations to Agenda 21), ICLEI, Toronto.

6. See reference 1. The October 1999 issue will have an up-date on what has been achieved in Ilo since 1996.

7. For more details, contact the Urban Agriculture Network, 1711 Lamont St NW, Washington DC 20010, USA; fax: (1) 202 986 6732; e-mail: 72144.3446@compuserve.com

8. This issue is discussed in more detail in Satterthwaite, David (1997), "Sustainable cities or cities that contribute to sustainable development?", *Urban Studies* Vol.34, No.10, pages 1667-1691.