HUMAN SETTLEMENT DEVELOPMENT INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE

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Contents

Summary

The human population on the Earth is growing, resulting in the expansion of human settlements and an increase in a wide range of problems, mostly in the booming urban areas. The United Nations has played an important role in attracting international attention to the problems of human settlements with the organization of conferences in Vancouver and Istanbul. The latest conference in 1996 resulted in the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda. Providing adequate shelter for all and working towards sustainable human settlements development were the main themes of the conference. In this article a distinction is made between issues in less developed

countries and more industrialized regions. Cities in developing regions need to look into the sustainable provision of basic human needs, such as decent housing, water and energy supply, sanitation systems, education, and health care services. Local authorities in industrial areas have to focus on the reduction of energy and material consumption, reducing the need to travel by car, and stimulating inhabitants to lead a more sustainable lifestyle. Social, economic, and environmental aspects of more sustainable human settlements are discussed, and examples on how to solve existing problems are introduced. The eradication of poverty, exclusion and inequality is considered very important in making human settlements more sustainable. Planning and construction strategies for cities which integrate natural processes, and which try to function within the limits of the natural ecosystem are presented. Involving the local population in developing the neighborhood in which they live, empowering the community, and developing an economy that benefits the local people is considered part of a more sustainable future. While developing human settlements there is a constant need to ask the question "does the development benefit the local people, ameliorate their quality of life and improve the local environment?"

1. Introduction

The earliest human societies consisted of hunters and gatherers. These are small groups or tribes with fixed territories, migrating regularly around them. Not many hunter and gatherer cultures remain today. About twenty thousand years ago, pastoral societies and agrarian societies emerged. Pastoral societies, relying on domesticated livestock, move across large distances, while agrarian societies grow crops, settle in a certain place, and form the first permanent human settlements. From about 6000 BC, large societies emerge in which cities develop, although society is still largely based on agriculture. Large-scale urbanization is a much more recent phenomenon, linked to the industrialization of society. The Industrial Revolution originated in eighteenth century England, and resulted in the concentration of many human activities in the city.

This discussion on human settlements is mainly a discussion of urban issues today, because global and urban population growth rates will bring about an important expansion of cities in the coming decades. By the year 2000, the urban population has reached approximately 2.9 billion people and is expected to grow to 5 billion by 2025; some 61% of the world population will then live in urban areas. Estimates show that by 2015, the world will contain around 560 cities with more than one million people. Urban growth is also demonstrated by the increase of the number of megacities, which are defined as cities with a population exceeding 8 million. In 1950, New York and London were the world's only megacities. By 1990, there were 21 megacities, 16 of them in developing countries. In 2015, there are expected to be 33 megacities, 27 in the developing world.

However, these figures need to be put in their proper context. Only a small percentage of the South's total population is found in megacities, and most developing countries have no megacities. Urbanization is closely linked to economic growth. In general, the higher the per capita income of a country, the higher the level of urbanization. Low-income countries are also among the least urbanized. Most of the urban population in the South is found in urban centers with less than one million inhabitants. In other

words, the focus should not only be on managing the problems of giant metropolises, but also on looking into all kinds of human settlements.

Human settlements are currently called cities, towns, or villages, and a distinction is made between urban and rural settlements. Is a given settlement a city or not? What is or is not a city is relative, and must be considered in the context of any given society. A city is not defined merely on the basis of size, but also on the basis of the diversity of its inhabitants, and the complexity of their activities. Urban residents can be distinguished from rural residents by their dependence on the formal provision of services. Urban residents tend to rely on established providers in the public or private sector to meet their daily needs—usually through a cash economy. Rural residents seem less reliant on the cash economy, and on the institutional or corporate provision of goods and services. However, what may seem like a rural way of living can be found within cities, especially in the South, and the ways of living of rural residents of the North can often barely be distinguished from those of their urban counterparts, especially with improved communication systems.

Also within cities, different settlement types can be distinguished. In urban areas of Western cultures, which rely to a large degree on cars as a means of transportation, spread-out suburban areas emerge. Typically, a differentiation can be made between the high-density central city and the low-density suburbs.

Since the 1970s, economies have evolved from national to global scales, and this has had profound effects on the shape and functioning of human settlements. These changes are also a result of the rapid evolution in telecommunications and modes of transportation, which neutralizes distances or makes human activity less dependent on a particular place. Consequently, a deindustrialization of large, old manufacturing cities, and the rise of new landscapes of high-technology industry and "edge city" office complexes can be seen. In many urban areas these trends have contributed to the phenomenon of "hollowed out" inner cities with serious social problems, and the creation of "walled-off" and more wealthy suburbs. A concentration of advanced corporate-service activities can now also be seen in a relatively small number of large cities. Moreover, major cities have also attracted many migrants fleeing political instability, and seeking economic opportunity. While certain urban dwellers have benefited from the new global economic order, many others were hurt by economic restructuring or were excluded from the benefits. As a result, cities in North America and Europe have seen increasing poverty.

Also, urban areas in developing countries are characterized by increasing poverty. There is typically a large population of less affluent people residing in slums and squatter settlements. Squatters reside illegally on land, while slum residents have legal access to the land through ownership or lease. A slum can be broadly defined as a dilapidated shelter. The term "informal settlement" is used for, e.g., an illegal subdivision or a squatter settlement. Although economically and politically weak, squatters are important in the urban economy, since they provide inexpensive labor. Usually a squatter settlement is highly organized despite being illegal. There are clearly defined behavioral rules, spatial boundaries, methods of solving tenurial disagreements, and rules for selling and renting illegal housing as if it was legal. Asian informal settlements

have evolved into real "informal cities" over the years. Important changes that have taken place in informal settlements are the development of trade, commerce, and manufacturing, and the emergence of leaders and activists representing the inhabitants of the settlements. Because of political expediency, informal settlements now sometimes have some basic form of services such as water, post offices, police stations, government clinics and schools. In most Asian cities over 50% of jobs are generated in the informal sector, and in certain cases this may be as high as 76%.

When studying human settlements, it becomes clear that they are a reflection of a way of life of their inhabitants, and that they evolve continuously as societies and cultures change.

2. International Attention for Human Settlements

The United Nations has played an important role in attracting international attention to the problems of human settlements, with conferences held in Vancouver, Rio and Istanbul.

2.1 International Conferences on Human Settlements

The first United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (HABITAT I) was held in Vancouver, Canada, in 1976. The follow-up was HABITAT II, which took place in Istanbul, Turkey, in 1996, and resulted in the adoption of the Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements and the Habitat Agenda. This conference focused on urban areas and cities and was, therefore, also called "the City Summit." HABITAT II was a huge international event, attracting thousands of registrants and participants in both the formal conference, and in parallel events organized by NGOs or governmental organizations.

The two main themes of the conference were "adequate shelter for all," and "sustainable human settlements development." To make progress in achieving the goals of adequate shelter and sustainable human settlements, a concerted global approach was considered a necessity, and a need to develop comprehensive and innovative strategies was put forward. One of the basic assumptions of HABITAT II was that human settlement problems are of a multidimensional nature. It was recognized that adequate shelter and sustainable human settlements are not isolated from the broader social and economic development of countries, and that they cannot be set apart from the need for favorable national and international frameworks for economic development, social development and environmental protection. Another basic starting point was that critical differences regarding human settlements within and between different regions and countries need to be taken into account in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

2.2 The Istanbul Declaration

The Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements is a confirmation by the Heads of State or Government, and the official delegations of the 171 participating countries, of the need for adequate shelter, and for safer, healthier and more livable, equitable, sustainable, and productive human settlements. It also focuses on the interdependence

of rural and urban human settlements, and the need to develop an integrated network of settlements, and minimize rural-to-urban migration. The well-being of humans is a core concern of the Declaration, with particular attention to the living conditions of women, children and youth. The eradication of poverty and discrimination, the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the provision of basic needs such as education, nutrition, health care and adequate shelter are considered important goals.

The principles of partnership and participation are presented in the Istanbul Declaration as the most democratic and effective approach for the realization of its goals. Local authorities are considered the closest partners in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and the need for cooperation with parliamentarians, the private sector, labor unions and nongovernmental and other civic society organizations is stressed. It is assumed that full and effective implementation of the Habitat Agenda will require the strengthening of the role and functions of the United Nations Center for Human Settlements.

The Istanbul Declaration ends with a visionary statement in which the conference in Istanbul is considered a turning point leading to a new era of cooperation and a culture of solidarity. The results of the conference offer a positive vision of sustainable human settlements, a sense of hope for the future, and an exhortation to join a truly worthwhile and engaging challenge, that of building together a world where everyone can live in a safe home with the promise of a decent life of dignity, good health, safety, happiness and hope.

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Biographical Sketch

Dimitri Devuyst (born April 15, 1964) is environmental coordinator and visiting professor of ecology at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium. He has been a scientific staff member of the Human Ecology Department at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel since 1988. He holds a Bachelors degree in Biology and a Masters Degree in Human Ecology. In October 1994 he received his Ph.D. in Human Ecology (*Summa Cum Laude*). The title of his dissertation was *Instruments for the Evaluation of Environmental Impact Assessment*, and was the result of six years of research in the field of quality control and evaluation of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process. He is recognized as an EIA expert by the Flemish Region in Belgium, and has published on EIA in international journals such as *Environmental Management*, *Environmental Impact Assessment Review*, *Impact Assessment* and *The Environmental Professional*. Dimitri Devuyst has also been actively involved in a number of EIA related projects. He evaluated the EIS for the Gabcikovo-Nagymaros project for the Hungarian authorities, developed an EIA short course in the framework of the Tempus project in Bulgaria, and develops guidelines and methodology for implementing Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in the Flemish Region. He has also collaborated with the EIA Centre, University of Manchester, for the following projects issued by the European Commission: Feasibility Study for a Community-Wide EIA Training Programme, and Evaluation of the Performance of the EIA Process. Since 1997 he has been working in the field of

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