

The City We Need: The Mannheim Manifesto

Preamble & Context

Too often the cities we have disappoint and there is an urgency to make dramatic changes. Too often they are ugly, too often there are sharp divisions between the rich and the poor, too often corrupting influences hold sway, too often there is an insufficient balance between public and private interests.

'The City We Need' has been a global advocacy process connected to UN-Habitat and is organized by their World Urban Campaign who have created a series Urban Thinkers Campuses. These have involved 26 cities across the world and over 6000 people. Each city has chosen a theme and its work and messages are intended to shape 'The New Urban Paradigm' to be adopted at Habitat III - the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development in Quito, Ecuador in October 2016.

Habitat III is connected to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This is a landmark document that across its goals and targets clearly reflects how cities will be crucial to achieving the UN's broader aims. More specifically it has a dedicated target namely Goal 11 to "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable".

The German city chosen was Mannheim where 480 participants gathered to explore 'Urban Citizenship in a Nomadic World'. Other cities chose themes like public space, children and young people or how to use technology in a smart, clever way.

The world of cities is experience intense change and a business as usual approach will not get us where we want to be. We are in the midst of redesigning the world and all its systems - legal, moral and political as well as the economy and our infrastructures for an interdependent and digital age. Its effects will be as powerful as those brought about by the Industrial Revolution 200 years ago. This is true for cities and places at all levels of development.

There is an urgency to this new urban agenda and many forces are asking the crucial question: "will the public interest be put centre-stage". The Mannheim assembly in all its diversity and representing the region's range of interest groups endorsed the principles and aims of 'The City We Need' campaign as did the other Urban Thinkers Campuses including for cities to be: healthy, regenerative, affordable, equitable, economically vibrant, walkable, well-designed and well-managed at a metropolitan level and crucially distinctive. The important point it added was that the notion of

the 'common good' and 'justice' be highlighted as overarching themes for good city making.

Mannheim's central concern was to ask itself honestly why these worthy objectives have not been met and why so many cities can sometimes disillusion often creating unhappiness and distress. What are the obstacles to achieving the public purposes of the city? Where are the good solutions?

The Mannheim assembly believed it was necessary to re-affirm that cities at their best are open and this openness makes them cradles of civilization. Openness is the key to successful city making that is vigorous, fair, transparent, diverse and accessible. This entails being against discrimination of all kinds (religious beliefs, racism, gender, disability, ageism, sexual and gender identity). It is the lively democratic, humanistic and secular city that creates the rules of engagement for people to share and live together within their differences and diversity. This allows people, organizations and cities to harness their collective imagination.

This civic conception of openness is not universally accepted and there are increasingly negative reactions across the globe. In the fast and relentless dynamic of urban change with its disruptive economic forces that create a sense of anxiety and uncertainty, the alternative has been to appeal to a politics of fear, hatred and exclusion. Our response must be not to demonise but to understand and engage with these people based on our constructive alternative of openness and hope.

The new norm is nomadic, there is mobility and not only for people, but for capital, for jobs, for commodities, for information, for ideas. In the new interdependent world, people move within and across countries in search of a better life – never more than today. The vast flows of refugees we are witnessing will remain a permanent feature over the next decades and already seriously affects over 30 countries globally in the North and the South. More than 60 million refugees and some estimate up to a billion other people are in motion. This creates challenges for arrival as well as departure cities. There are frenzied finance movements, and companies and factories are on the move in search of cheap labour and markets. In this digital age these forces contribute to the 'anytime, anyplace, anywhere' phenomenon changing how we interact with space, place and time.

In deliberating these urgent issues the Urban Thinkers Campus in Mannheim focused on constructive responses to the dilemmas of

diversity, inclusion integration and intercultural understanding as well as those of economic and financial disruption. Mannheim wishes to see itself as a model and as a city of welcome and refuge given its long experience of diversity with something special to offer to the wider world. Here are the main themes that emerged from Mannheim that have wider resonance for all cities:

Major messages & themes

The participatory imperative: There is an increased demand for people to be shapers, makers and co-creators of their destiny and that of their evolving city. There is a tension between the old top down structures of governance and emerging bottom up people-centred approaches. The empowerment agenda is rooted in democratic forces that represent a liveable civic society. A shift is required from a controlling to an enabling and facilitating administration if the value of collective community intelligence is to be taken seriously.

Urban citizenship redefined: People want to belong to a city not just to live in one. Cities need the right to assign urban citizenship to all residents regardless of their status (as does New York with its urban identity cards for undocumented workers). Residence in the city should confer full membership and rights. Such expressions of civic generosity provide the means for genuine participation in decision making and city life. It strengthens a sense of belonging and will be reciprocated by loyalty, commitment and engagement.

The city as global actor: Cities are agents of action and change in the new interdependent world, but to be fully effective they need to co-operate across borders in networks like UN-Habitat, C40, Climate Cities and UCLG. To be truly effective in addressing global problems the balance between city and state needs to be re-assessed. They also require a new collaborative mechanism such as a governance association embodying the so-called 'rights of the city and citizens'.

Such a new governance association should and can contribute to and reinforce the role of national governments and international organizations like the UN in addressing global challenges. Whilst governments retain formal authority, cities bring legitimacy and democratic participation to the table.

The right to resources: The new responsibility of cities to contribute to the solution of global problems requires both the jurisdictional authority and material resources to realize its obligations. As the source of 80% of

global GDP and preponderance of tax revenues for the state, the city has the right to resources adequate to this responsibility. Otherwise without such access to resources the demands on the cities become 'unfunded mandates' – a downloading of political responsibilities to municipal government without funding.

The listening city and diversity as reality: Cities are democratic sites of listening, contestation and diversity not just in aspiration, but as their reality. We live with diversities, and must acknowledge the intractability of conflicts and interests that must be negotiated by words not force. Diversities include: ideas and opinions, ways of living, identity measures, economic conditions, state of health and age among many others and the listening city take their full measure.

Obstacles to the 'City We Need': Underlying the many obstacles to 'The City We Need' is power, inequality, monopoly and dominance. Unless these potent issues are tackled head on it is unlikely that the aspirations and principles promulgated here will be realized.