



eDebate on Cultural Diversity in Cities

FINAL REPORT

“The city is humanity’s greatest achievement. (...) War or peace – the city will survive as an essential, resilient human institution, renewing itself and enhancing life globally.”

Fineman, a participant from Nigeria

The eDebate on Cultural Diversity in Cities took place between 2 and 23 November 2009. Participants were from developing and developed countries, from highly urbanized areas to less urban environments, of different age groups, and from several religious, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. Such a diversity motivated Patgreen, a Jamaican participant, to state: “Cultural dimensions in cities are complex issues and may even be likened to this Forum. Since it has opened, what has impacted me is the rich diversity of cultural participation that has been taking place.”

Since its early stages, the preparation of the debate was guided by the understanding that different groups in society need space to express their cultures, and by UNESCO’s Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, in particular that “cultural diversity is a defining characteristic of humanity” and that “cultural diversity creates a rich and varied world, which increases the range of choices and nurtures human capacities and values, and therefore is a mainspring for sustainable development for communities, peoples and nations.”

An analysis of comments posted indicates that despite participants’ diverse origins and experiences, clear trends were identified and a few issues arose as key areas of interest/concern:

1. **cultural diversity** is a positive value, something to hold on to, and an important urban variable;
2. **participation** of city dwellers in decisions affecting life in the city are necessary and require institutional participatory mechanisms;
3. **urban divide** is intrinsic to life in contemporary cities, as such, it needs to be acknowledged and integrated into urban planning;
4. **women** have a key role to play in bridging the urban divide and promoting cultural diversity;
5. **new technologies** and **education** are important to help bridge the urban divide, as a tool for the expression of diverse cultures, and as a means to deal with the complexities of cultural diversity, respectively.

Participants have also identified some pressing challenges and have described actions or projects in different countries, which they consider to be positive experiences worth sharing.

This report will elaborate on the five points listed above, as much as possible through participants' own words. Each of the five sections will include challenges or questions that would benefit from further discussion. The experiences they considered worth sharing are also included. At the end, the report has a section with observations by the moderator.

The coordinator of the theme "Cultural Diversity in Cities" and the moderator of the e-debate and are extremely grateful for the thoughtful contributions and commitment of debate participants. They also wish to express their gratitude to Habitat's IT personnel for their continued support throughout the debate.

1. CULTURAL DIVERSITY

"Cultural diversity is the spice of cities"

Solomon Tsehai Adall, a participant from Ethiopia

Perhaps it is no surprise that a unanimous position among participants in a debate on cultural diversity is that cultural diversity is a positive value and that it should be encouraged, supported and protected. As Ingierd, from Norway, put it: "We have everything to win from welcoming cultural diversity. Diversity has always created development. Differences are vehicles of development."

The difficulty of working with the cultural dimension of cities was remarked, though. Minfegue, from Cameroon, noted "the complexity of cultural diversity and then the difficulty to use it in order to make cities work"

As spaces of multicultural expressions, cities also represent extremely complex realities. It is in cities that a major challenge of today's world - as identified by Sandra Jovchelovitch, a participant from the UK - can be observed: "how to sustain and facilitate the expression of human cultural diversity and at the same time create spaces and produce connectedness, inclusion and conditions for dialogue."

Cities are culturally heterogeneous (participants noted even diversity within a given culture of the many in a city) as they are places of contrast, plurality and interactions. Margareth, from Brazil, said that cultural expressions and social identities are "constructed and reconstructed" in the city as its inhabitants have contact with "the other". Cities are places where we can learn about "the other" and can, therefore, potentially develop tolerance to differences and thus accept "the other" as part of the larger community.

Despite the positive assessment of the role of culture, participants also raised words of caution: culture can be an alibi for violence such as when it "violates the right to life, freedom and body integrity,"¹ and there can be a loss of a sense of direction when traditional cultures

¹ Sandra Jovchelovitch, UK

and modernization meet and clash. Thus, for cultural diversity to be an opportunity not a constraint it must be managed strategically - "culture as risk and opportunity should be part of city planning."²

Using the example of the Rio de Janeiro carnival, Leila, a Brazilian participant, discussed the double-edged impact of the cultural industry and tourism on cultural diversity. While there are concerns regarding the image of women or the relationship carnival-sex tourism, for example, "carnival industries do provide a living for many people and space for the cultural expressions of many communities."

On the relationship between values like respect, solidarity, ethics and citizenship, and cultural identity, Ingjerd stated that "culture is identity, it is who we are. We need to be respected for that, each and everyone of us – but we also need to have the courage to meet one another. (...) We have to try to be able to both respect that individual identity that our personal cultural belonging represents – AND have a common framework for living together in a society. In living together, ethics and common values are guidelines."

Along the same lines, though from a different perspective, Daliagv, from Mexico, noted that "it has become more common [for young indigenous people] to deny their roots due to fear of discrimination and [not to] want their children to learn their mother tongue. (...) We need to strengthen further development with identity [because] only in this way can we contribute to building an inclusive and tolerant society, with more and better opportunities for everyone."

In addition to Daliagv, other participants also raised the question of language, always identifying it as an important cultural expression. Ingjerd, when describing Norway's efforts to integrate immigrants, noted that there is emphasis in language training as "speaking our local tongue is important to understand and be incorporated in our society." Minfegue described the complexities of cultural diversity in his native Cameroon, a country with more than 200 ethnic groups, and commented that the effort to teach some local languages in schools also means marginalization of others languages.

And on the relationship cultural diversity-spaces, Sortia, a participant from Colombia, stated that "the adequacy of design and planning responses in terms of socio-cultural patterns is critical when it comes to various aspects of urban development, especially those related to housing processes. (...) The creation of space according to the way of living is a form of cultural expression itself; therefore it should be as diverse as society is."

Still on the relationship city spaces and culture, Lauramdm, from Venezuela, believes that traditional markets must be supported as spaces for cultural expressions. Traditional markets, she says, are a rich display of our products and talents and "a great opportunity to share and meet with people from our same culture and others."

² Leila, Brazil

Questions

To a question on how to explore and use our cultural resources to bridge the urban divide and for the development of cities, Solomon Tsehai Adall, from Ethiopia, outlined actions that he believes are needed to address this issue:

- “Create access to education and information about the importance of cultural diversity and its contribution to bridge the urban divide
- Establish forum at different levels to exchange experience and ideas on culture
- Organize annual events at regional, national and international levels to reflect cultural experience, heritages etc.. by Government, NGOs and private sectors.
- Promote cultural heritage for tourists by different means.
- Encourage and provoke artists, writers and researchers to have a role in exploring and teaching about cultures, traditions, experiences etc. through different ways like, written document, painters by paints, artists by drama, researchers by documentary film etc..
- Efforts to develop a framework. Responsible institutions should work on integrated plans which involve all stakeholders and collaborators.”

Other questions raised during the debate and which remain useful for the World Urban Forum and beyond are:

- How can we preserve the idea that communities have a lot in common and yet are diverse?
- Is cultural diversity de facto included in urban planning?
- Looking at cultural diversity and the urban divide as multi-dimensional issues, how do we produce holistic responses, which are likely to require inter-sectoral collaboration and partnerships between different urban actors?

Experiences worth sharing (as posted by participants)

1. On the issue of cultural diversity I would like to share our local experience:

Ideals and realities. In the pursuit of cultural diversity there are many questions that we must confront realistically: Is our idea of cultural diversity is really completely attainable and devoid of bias? Our city Cagayan de Oro is primarily a ‘Christian’ city but a very significant population of Muslims from neighboring provinces and autonomous regions preferred to peacefully reside in our city basically because of rule of law. Others are for security- out of fear - from rido the unwritten ‘culture of clan retribution’ (life for life). This practice has been with us (among our muslim and other indigenous cultures) for more than century already. To many muslims, our city is ‘a city of refuge’ from rido. Yet despite of these circumstances we generally have live for so many generations, since time immemorial in relative peace and harmony. Generations of

muslim children have acquired their education in this city. Others become high officials of the national and local governments. Many local executives (mayors) from muslim LGUs acquire residence in the city, and their children grew up and took complete education here. Many of our national government agencies (transport, environment, internal revenue, etc.) are also headed by muslims. Christians do recognize the cultural identity of the muslim people that is why religion and culture is not an irritation here. The muslims also acquired their excellent professions, wealth, and other resources through business in this city. Many of my muslim acquaintances have seen selling quality jewelries to my wealthy Filipino-Chinese friends. The market actually does not care nor raise distinctions between Christians and Muslim traders: 'What? the muslim operator is the family of my classmates too!' so to speak by many. However, perhaps due to this incomprehensive and 'excitingly messy pudding' of cultures, complete cultural unity is not completely attainable. There was some very rare incident of obtrusive 'behaviour' expressed by some fellows against the 'morning prayer-chant' broadcasted over the neighborhood. And on the other hand there was also this 'disgusted murmur' against lengthened 'procession obstructing public traffic' during holy weeks. Yet over and above these temporal 'disparities' the people in all types of religious culture live day-by-day peacefully under the rule of law.

Self-conflicts, biases, and prejudices. The incident of 'obtrusion' not against the religion but the practice of doing loud chant over amplified speakers very early in morning for one month may have been quite rare but a stark reminder that diverse culture cannot completely blend in a city. It maybe a sign that cultural disparities in our city may have been moderated due to the acquired value of social tolerance and rule of law of the people in general, yet the same – it remains a reality. This meant further that in reality, cultural diversity can be a source and does really bring disparities– and to make this an issue or address this issue could only be achieved through a long process of education. In my long observation, this social tolerance has been a product of long process of academic integration (we, our children as well as the city-grown muslims have been classmates since childhood in public elementary to high school), broad scope, and high degree of education (up to doctoral degree) among different religious communities in the city. On the other hand, one aspect which urban divide can be made positive, is the viable proposal to practice zoning of residential and religious centers to prevent such 'rare' triggers of cultural disparities. Concerning other cultural minorities such as Badjao, Manobo, Talaandig, etc. which may count more than 10 tribes around the Northern Mindanao Region, the same our peoples carry the mutual social interactions.

JNBona, Philippines

2. I was grateful for the UNESCO definition for cultural diversity shared by Dr. Edith Chinwe Pat-Mbano under our discussion topic, "Right to the city: spaces and expressions" because I do appreciate that this debate topic falls within specific international criteria with measurable yardsticks, notwithstanding emerging context and dynamic social environments, in which we currently are operating especially with the information superhighway. In sharing experiences "worthily" (also requiring cultural appropriateness), I lean on the UNESCO intercultural dialogue that generated "common humanity heritage" whose definitions are embodied under

the 2001 UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. I quote, "...a key element of intercultural dialogue is the building of a common, shared memory base, recognized and accepted by all parties involved. Engaging in such dialogue may require participants to admit faults, openly debate about competing memories and make compromises in the interests of reconciliation and social harmony..." (UNESCO World Report: Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue. Paris, France: UNESCO. 2009:49)

One of the ways in which we in the Caribbean region have been engaged in this Intercultural Dialogue is through the UNESCO Slave Route Project. Page 9 of the Executive Summary of this 2009 UNESCO World Report states, "...yet even in the extreme circumstance of slavery, exchanges take place whereby certain discreet processes of reverse enculturation come to be assimilated by the dominating culture. Recognition of the universality of human rights has made it possible today – in theory at least – to think in terms of genuine exchanges on the basis of equality between all the world's cultures..." Additionally page 40 of the Report defines, "...the concept of 'route' was chosen to illustrate this flow of exchanges among peoples, cultures and civilizations, which transformed the geographical areas affected by slavery – a unique interaction generating forms of intercultural dialogue of considerable importance to the building of modern societies..."

As regional technical coordinator for the cultural tourism component of this Project, I had the challenge to look at the natural and built heritage of the Caribbean, and especially within our cities across the region, in order to establish positive aspects that future generations may be able to embrace across all cultural barriers embodying the spirit and essence of the Caribbean as a unified region with a shared common heritage. This exercise resulted in the design and initiation of the programme entitled "Places of Memory" under the UNESCO Slave Route Project.

Twelve categories were developed for the Caribbean and refined in regional settings namely, Place of Burial; Place of Commerce/ Trade; Place of Confinement/ Punishment / Execution; Place of Dwelling; Place of Education; Place of Maroonage; Place of Production/ Craftsmanship/ Skills/ Technology; Place of Refuge/ Liberation; Place of Resistance; Place of Worship; Place of Entry/ Departure; and finally Underwater/ Water Place.

The exercise was a very noteworthy one for all of us. Having developed the tools to carry out inventories for these Places of Memory highlighting criteria for significance and meaning, I began to see that together we were experiencing healing and positive direction for the adaptive use of the tangible cultural and natural heritage that had for so many years been "neglected" on account of negative memories of slavery. By associating the common intangible components of connectedness to the historic sites across the region, we saw being lifted off the Caribbean landscape a shroud of bitterness. Instead was being replaced refreshing concepts for historic reinterpretation and showcasing as part of our tourism product for sustainable development of urban and rural communities, as well as regional possibilities for social and economic ties through the Route with other nations in Africa, Europe, Asia and the Arab worlds.

Patgreen, Jamaica

3. Special thanks to Patgreen for sharing the experiences from the Slave Route Project and the Places of Memory. It is rewarding to hear such experiences, and for me it is most educational. Thank you! The effects you point to of healing and moving beyond bitterness, is a strong reminder of the importance of moving through pain, and not go around it. Historical facts are there, and we cannot remove them - so if it is possible to find ways to work through, that is a viable route onwards. Congratulations with every effort and good wishes for the projects onwards!

Sharing a couple of experiences connected to immigration in Norway:

The governmental policy is focused on creating an inclusive society. It is a goal to ensure that immigrants that arrive, and are granted the right to stay, are included on all levels, to avoid a social division where immigrants have less favourable living conditions and lower participation in the societal processes than the rest of the population. Some of the means to achieve this are:

- Language training: speaking our local tongue is important to understand and be incorporated in our society.

- Introduction to the organization and functioning of our society; Norwegian governing systems, laws, how business works, - and that you are encouraged to participate, as a citizen, in the follow-up at your kids' school and kindergarten etc, - the ways and forms of neighbourhood interaction; our customs and ways when it comes to living together on all levels.

- Activities canalized through NGOs: Volunteer organizations are seen as important for our democracy, and play an important role towards immigrants, especially in building the dialogue between immigrants and Norwegian authorities.

- A number of economical and structural incitements, funding etc are offered to facilitate locally, in cooperation between the government and local municipalities, to help the settlement/ housing of immigrants.

- The collective goal of the joint efforts is to provide the knowledge and framework immigrants need to be part of this society - as early as possible upon their arrival.

Are we successful? - on inclusion and especially on protecting cultural diversity, - respecting the individual identity and making it all work for the whole society?

- A comprehensive discussion is not possible within the format of this e-debate, but on a broad scale I believe it is fair to say that we make it work, to a large extend, - and we have challenges too. A lot of the practical policy works, and from my perception immigrants are welcomed and included when they make an effort to be part of our society. The challenges generally occur when groups or individuals refrain from adopting the core interactional patterns. There is a wide tolerance on cultural expressions, worship, personal beliefs and preferences - as long as you respect some collective codes.

The really well-functioning part of the whole picture is that the large number of our new

countrymen and -women that find their way to create a living in our country, and want to belong, really contribute. Our society learns and earns from that. Immigrants bring along other codes and costumes to us, expand our horizons and sometimes makes us rethink our own ways. That generates development - and it provides a broader outlook for a small country like ours.

Ingjerd, Norway

4. I would like to present some situations of my country, which can contribute to this topic. In Cameroon, cultural diversity can be appreciate at many levels: the large number of ethnic groups (over 200); singularity of women and youth approach and appraisal of some situations; marginalization of some indigeneous groups; presence of people coming from others countries; a large number of religious beliefs (but the main are Christianity and Islam). From this moment, it is difficult to give a realistic content to the notion of cultural diversity. So, how are this cultural diversity or this elements of cultural diversity are useful to make cities grow in Cameroon?

Concerning Gender, some works are made by authorities in order to "institutionalize" the gender in all public sectors, so it is difficult to appreciate the contribution of gender issues in the city growth, concerning young people, actions are made presently in order to put in place a national Youth council with representations at local levels (at level of municipalities). Concerning the large number of ethnic groups, I spoke in my last post of the efforts made in order to teach some local languages in schools (but the fact is that this approach marginalizes others languages...) but informally there is a social acceptability by citizens of the fact of ethnic diversity (this aspect reveals the presence of something not appreciable or hidden in this concept of cultural diversity) so they are concentrated to work for the development of their country but not of their city because in fact i have the impression (this is only my opinion) that many Cameroonians not recognize themselves in their "cities" but in their country and particularly in their original region... Concerning minorities particularly pygmies, there are effort as their integration in academic system through scolarization but results are limited (because of the little adhesion of pygmies). All this shows the complexity of the cultural diversity and then the difficulty to use it in order to make cities work and in this context have a central role.

Minfegue, Cameroon

5. I would like to share an experience in my country of the Moral Regeneration Movement which seeks to build the morals and values of our people and society. This movement has brought together different cultural, ethnic and church groups from all over the country in an attempt to build social cohesion. It is a movement that operates through the nine provinces and integrates its programs with other governmental organizations, community based organizations, NGOs and other structures to work together to better the lives of our people.

The success of this program is that through the different strong cultures, religious beliefs, values and norms, it has managed to ensure the security of all cultural groups and has also instilled the positive attitude of being proudly South African through recognizing and appreciating the different religions and cultures.

Babalo, South Africa

6. Thank you all for your contributions; cultural diversity is understood differently by different individuals some Africans think of cultural diversity as adapting to the western culture and forgetting about our own. In Uganda we are threatened by the westernization of many things. In some schools it is against the schools rules for pupils to speak their mother Tongues and they are punished not speaking English. I think we have to be more objective and realistic on Cultural Diversity.

Ycwu, Uganda

7. In my personal point of view, every action taken by our different local communities as well as urban sectors as far as culture is concerned must be supported by our governments. The actions of authorities should not be limited to their speech, it should rather be followed by action. If I remember this little words said by the Togolese minister of communication and culture during the annual festival of Guin people(a festival during which these people consider as their new year, when the remember their forefathers) that the department of culture of his ministry will make of Togo culture, a privilege center of interest; You know there are so many sectors of tourism here in our country which need to be valorized and I know Government alone can not do that, they should therefore encourage NGO, associations, local communities, which should not only bring them together but to also reveal the importance of the mysteries of our beloved CONTINENT AFRICA...I know what am saying, only because I work as Museum Guide but also a member of an NGO in all, Culture promotor.

Amoudji, Togo

8. More often than not, knowledge needs to be assembled from several quarters and measures deployed in several different sectors of society, even certain issues and problems can be addressed and resolved within a particular sector or with expertise from field of cultural knowledge. An interdisciplinary approach is therefore necessary to deal with the multiple culture and with the complexity of the urban environment and life. For instance, music and sports are still the best way for communities to link with common goal for sharing fans so these cultural challenges are made to achieve social objective with diversity in one community.

Okumedjero, Togo

2. PARTICIPATION

“We need to guarantee voice and participation and facilitate top-down, bottom-up encounters and deliberation.”

Sandra Jovchelovitch, a participant from the UK

As multicultural environments, which in most cases are constantly expanding, cities are under continuous pressures and renewed aspirations. An element necessary to help manage this “chaos” is to provide city inhabitants with mechanisms through which they can have a voice and participate in the decisions affecting life in the city.

Sandra Jovchelovitch put it clearly: “participation and voice are central to articulate a dialogue between different practices and forms of knowledge in cities.” The knowledge and expertise of urban professionals need to benefit from and to dialogue with the multifaceted experience of those who live in the city. Institutional mechanisms of participation need to enable different identities to have voice as interlocutors of city officials.

Sortia described the positive impact of new policies and programmes in her country which make “popular consultation and participation a key part of project development, at least in the planning stage.” And she adds: “the real impact of these projects is to be defined in the long run, but until now, they are highly appreciated by the communities which are part of the process.”

Participation was also brought up in relation to the discussion on the tension between “THE national culture” and national culture as a reflection of the diversity of cultural expressions within a given country. “Preserving commonality and defending diversity is not easy, but one way forward is guaranteeing institutional channels of participation and debate where everyone can be represented and actively engage,” Sandra Jovchelovitch suggested.

Experiences described in the debate indicate that active engagement of cultural groups from marginalized areas/backgrounds show how urban frontiers can be challenged and can help bridge urban divides, as seen below under “experiences worth sharing”.

Participation was also the underlying issue when Leila said that social/cultural change should be “mainstreamed from inside, hopefully through organized movements of disadvantaged groups and local supporters.” She added that local movements could be supported by international groups that would “put pressure on governments and other institutions/sectors (including the private sector) from the outside.”

Though necessary and even crucial, participatory processes come with “several health warnings”, as Professor Paul Murrain put it in his post, arguing that “participatory products are more important in sustainability terms than participatory processes, valuable as the latter undoubtedly are, and the latter do not automatically result in the former.”

A concluding observation is that while throughout the debate participation of mainstream groups and minorities in decisions affecting life in the city was seen as necessary, the role

played by officials was directly or indirectly acknowledged as equally necessary. This was particularly visible in the calls for culture as risk and opportunity to be part of city planning, as seen above, and for the urban divide, as indicated in section 3 below, to be acknowledged and incorporated into urban planning.

Questions

- What fora do cities have that enable and encourage participatory debate? This question was raised in the debate and it could be further explored at the Rio de Janeiro World Urban Forum.
- As cultures meet and clash, could participatory mechanisms be a means to promote communication among cultures and between them and state institutions?
- Could a participatory debate help address the challenge of accepting cities as spaces of tolerance and of learning and recognizing “the other”?

Experiences worth sharing (as posted by participants)

I would like to share some reflections on the experience of grassroots hybrid organizations such as Afroreggae and Cufa in the city of Rio de Janeiro (however, these organizations operate in various other Brazilian towns and, in the case of Afroreggae, in London as well).

I think these are experiences worth sharing for the following reasons:

- a. Bottom-up Experiences: these are experiences that emerged from the communities they are directed to. They were created, instituted and continue to be led by people who experience first hand marginalization and exclusion in the city, who were born and grew up in the communities where they work, who share identity, life trajectories and belonging. The bottom-up nature of this experience seems to us an important factor in understanding why they work, and work so well. We are trying to systematize this variable, as a great deal of community-led interventions in cities fail because they are driven and initiated by external agents.
- b. These organizations are hybrids: it is difficult to define them as just one thing. They are a mix of being an NGO, a band, a cultural enterprise, a social movement. They are political but are not afraid to engage with markets and make money so that they can be financially independent from sponsors and the state.
- c. Relation to the state: they operate in areas that are traditionally linked to the state, such as providing social assistance and education in the communities they are based. Indeed the state is keen to develop partnerships with these organizations because they can get in where the state cannot. This experience affords an important reflection about the role of the state and social movements. I think we need to think creatively in face of these experiences: we cannot displace the state and we cannot provide alibis and excuses to the state, but we must be open and learn from novel partnerships and solutions being created by agents of civil society and

agents of the state (the state is also a social space full of tensions and there are many inside the state that are pushing this dialogue with grassroots, civil society groups.)

d. Arts and cultural identity: the groups in Rio use the arts and cultural identity as a major weapon to bridge social and cultural divides in the city. In doing so, they subvert in a very clever way dominant representations that see people in the favelas as only dangerous, criminals and drug-related. They use the symbolic and cultural resources of their communities and show that these are in fact constitutive of Brazilian culture as a whole.

e. Communication/Dialogue in the city: these groups are communicators and conflict-mediators; this is very explicit in what they do. Their work is inside their community but their outlook is outside; they aim to "make the invisible visible" and establish a line of conversation with the state, the police and society as a whole.

There is much more to be said, but I think these are crucial factors in the experiences taking place in Rio.

We are going to be comparing these experiences with others taking place in London, where the cultural background is very diverse. Both Rio and London are multicultural urban centres but deal with multiculturalism in very different ways, have a very different history and a different socio-economic and political configuration. So, all these variables need to be part of the analysis when considering how cultures meet, clash and hopefully communicate in the contemporary city.

Sandra Jovcelovitch, UK

2. A good experience to share is how "Acción Social" (Colombian Agency for Aid and Cooperation) has developed a line of work focused specifically on improving the habitability conditions of vulnerable population, involving those to be benefited in every stage of the process. This kind of approach has a special focus in recognizing key socio-cultural features of the target population, because those vulnerable groups are those affected by the armed conflict of Colombia and in many cases are indigenous and from afro-descendant origins. The real impact of these projects is to be defined in the long run, but until now, they are highly appreciated by communities that part of the process.

Sortia, Colombia

3. URBAN DIVIDE

"Urban divide is not always negative but can be used to achieve harmonious, meaningful and sustainable development of urban areas."

Abubakar Sadiq Sani, a participant from Nigeria

The urban divide is a multifaceted phenomenon that is intrinsic to life in contemporary cities. The message from the debate seems to be that inclusiveness and co-existence of differences are desirable, but it might not always be possible for different groups to be together, sharing the same spaces.

When looking at the “division” or “divide” one must also look at inequality of access to resources and opportunities, as a key element to understand the problem. JNBona noted that when people fight for scarce resources, “cultural polarization starts (...)” and Patricia Chaves from Brazil stated that “urban divide means not only a spatial division within cities, but it is much more the inequality in the access and control to material, human and intellectual resources (...)”

In the context of reviewing the impact of urbanization on the caste system, which “in some cases is getting reinforced and in some losing its importance”, Amitangshu, from India, concluded that “the market economy-led urbanization has also strengthened social and cultural divides, perhaps by design or by default.

The urban divide in all its shapes and forms needs to be acknowledged and incorporated into urban planning, if we are to have sustainable development, as Abubakar Sadiq Sani, from Nigeria: “It is now a known fact that urban divides (physical, cultural, economical, environmental, social, political and technological) do exist and must be incorporated in our urban planning and management to produce sustainable development.”

Solomon Tsehai Adall, from Ethiopia, explained that “division is natural way [that] we cannot stop or change.” And he added: “we have to keep the rights of different cultures [but not] all traditions,” alerting that “there are some traditional cultures specifically in developing countries which have a significant negative impact on people in terms of health, psychology, etc...” (This concern echoes the comment on cultures as alibi for violence as seen in section 1 on cultural diversity above.)

A concern was also raised in connection with the promotion of multiracial communities and cultural diversity and realities that might trigger intercultural conflicts. “Unless we put these centres of cultural distinctions into proper spatial places and context, there will always be intra-community conflict due to cultural identities. At this point, spatial urban divide maybe viewed in a positive angle,” Sadiq Sani added.

How communities sustain cohesion and identification when they have much in common and yet are diverse was discussed by Sandra Jovchelovitch. “Both sides are important because without anything in common social cohesion disintegrates, and without an appreciation of diversity we exclude different voices.” It is a very difficult matter to deal with, she added, but a possible approach, as seen in section 2 on Participation, is establishing institutional channels of participation and debate where all feel represented and can actively engage.

To illustrate his point that cultural diversity is a most sensitive matter in the context of the urban divide, JNBona noted that inclusiveness is a key element to achieve sustainable development, yet there are other elements, such as some religious beliefs, that are based on exclusiveness. The point being that concepts understood as essential for sustainable

urbanization might be in contradiction with some cultural traditions and practices. (Incidentally, a number of participants commented on the role of some religious practices and interpretations, as a divisive force.)

Patgreen, however, observed that equitable and inclusive urban development has to do with the 'intangible' as the dimension of culture with its diversity, and that these have the possibility to bring about inclusiveness in the city."

Babalo, from South Africa, said that rural migrants from all over the country converging on Johannesburg "have started to accept each other through their different cultural backgrounds and languages thereby bridging the urban cultural divide." Dr. Edith Pat-Mbano, citing her experience in her native Nigeria with "250 ethnic groups and 521 estimated and catalogued linguistic groups and diversity of cultures," find that different cultures and languages co-exist in cities. "Despite the peculiarities of each culture, their diversities have helped tremendously in our emerging urban cities".

Caroline Andrew, from Canada, considers that people can learn about difference through being side by side", but she identifies as a challenge how to give visibility to marginalized groups. Their "spaces are often ignored or worse, eliminated.

For Patgreen, who discussed urban divide, cultural identity and spaces, the tension created by the urban divide might generate inclusiveness: "Downtown areas of Caribbean cities with "colonial" urban heritage wrestle between modern development intervention and preservation lobby and in the vacuum –whose culture is it-- some have become sucked into squatting and peripheral housing. Yet interestingly, we have observed that out of this tension and even within the face of poverty and crime have evolved strong Caribbean cultural expressions especially in music and festivals that arguably have also served to foster inclusion in Caribbean cities."

Questions

Participants identified a few challenges that require continued discussion and reflection:

- how to ensure that cities are indeed spaces of tolerance and where we learn about differences
- how to accept and recognize diversities, starting with those within the same social/cultural group
- how to give visibility to the spaces of marginalized groups, as these spaces are often ignored or worse, eliminated
- and more generally, how to preserve or regain spaces in the city for the expression of traditional cultures of those migrating from rural areas

Experiences worth sharing (as posted by participants)

1. Jos has always stood out among the cities in Nigeria on account of its social character. It is not only highly cosmopolitan but has also always been a very sociable city where cultural diversity has been downplayed and unity and cohesiveness encouraged. Indeed, Jos could easily be described as an all comers city. Jos was so attractive that everyone from all parts of Nigeria looked forward to at least visiting Jos. Jos became (and still is) the retirement city for many top military and civilian officers. Jos was such a cosmopolitan city that residents could easily learn to speak the three major Nigerian languages by just being resident in it.

Jos was so peaceful and sociable that it was not odd for mosques and churches to exist side by side without any problems between worshippers/adherents of both religions. The people, having lived and interacted together for a long time, had come to accept one another as brethren with all groups having very deep respect for one another. Indeed in certain parts of the city it was difficult to differentiate the composite ethnic and religious groups because they had blended almost perfectly.

Just as Ingerd Johansen posited in her post of 18th November, 2009, while contributing to the dialogue on cultural diversity and urban divide, these people had transformed their diversity into tools of cultural, economic and political development. They had formed themselves into various development groups such as youth, women groups, etc., irrespective of cultural and religious backgrounds and lived in almost perfect harmony with one another. For instance, Nassarawa area in Jos, Nigeria, could easily be described as a cosmopolitan area, a pot pourri of people of diverse backgrounds living together, all jumbled up. One compound house would house tenants from over three broad parts of Nigeria living in perfect harmony with one another. Children of different backgrounds grew up together and intermarried even across religious lines. It was just bliss.

As a result of its peace, premised on a high level of socio-cultural tolerance, the city of Jos experienced rapid physical growth in the past 20 years especially as it became a city of refuge for people who fled other cities because of one form of persecution or another.

The above was the general character of Jos before the September 2001 ethno-religious crisis that resulted in segmenting the city along religious lines.

However, in the midst of the general chaos and violence that broke out in Jos at that time, there were pockets of neighbourhoods (poor and rich alike) where the hostilities that prevailed (at the time) were not experienced. As would be expected, most of the high brow areas were quiet and safe mainly because of the high level of education and awareness of the residents. Of immense interest, however, were the pockets of poor neighbourhoods that were able to resist the general temptation to chaos, violence, killings, looting, destruction, etc, and chose, by deliberate action, to maintain their peace and harmony. In such places people chose to continue to respect their differences and forge unity amongst themselves, their diverse backgrounds notwithstanding. Residents of such areas formed vigilante groups who patrolled day and night especially so as to ward off intruders that wanted to infiltrate them, sow seeds

of discord, and shatter their harmony and peace. The youths who had grown together within such areas without paying any attention to their differences were the back bone of these vigilante groups.

Also, elders in such areas constituted themselves into peace councils that ensured tension did not escalate beyond bearable limits. Such areas survived the crisis without any internal casualties and came out of the period very strong and united.

Jos, Nigeria, is a city that has shifted from one end of the spectrum of urban divide to the other with regards to culture. While culture has helped build the city, it has also contributed in dividing it up into segments. The present situation in Jos is delicately balanced with both sides of the divide struggling to ensure that the balance is maintained while working towards reversing the situation for good. The future of Jos on the other hand will depend to a large extent on the ability of the urban managers to bridge the urban divide that has ensued from the ugly events of the past through progressive inclusive urban governance.

Harunapan, Nigeria

2. The concept of the 'right to city' is a splendid idea indeed; for it connotes equitable access for all persons in the urban area to the resources, welfare, education, housing, comfort, leisure, employment, etc. On the other hand, it also connotes a bleak scenario where all the population saturates in the urban centers for certain reasons; security, governance, order, relative peace, health, livelihood, and survival in general. I think there is the utmost need, and a must for social or political scientists like in these organizations to look much deeper into the dynamics wherein the circumstances that breeds or lay grounds for this concern is effectively addressed before it evolves into a crucial issue in the governance of cities. Look, as this scenario develops, what is happening to the rural communities? Shall we primarily focus our development energies to urban centers concerns? I think there is a need to review our general thinking over this matter. For there must be a balanced emphasis on 'spatial development'. This issue is a real sign of a very serious political and social problem...

JNBona, Philippines

3. Another good experience to share is one I had the chance to be part of:

The Colombian Ministry of Culture decided to develop a program to reach vulnerable communities throughout of cultural expressions. For that purpose I was in charge of managing a public call seeking the empowerment of communities and populations affected by poverty and armed conflict, through the provision of urban facilities and infrastructure for cultural activities.

Municipalities had to prepare a proposal including the description of their cultural assets and present a plan for dissemination of cultural activities and preservation of local heritage and identity.

This public call had a huge response by municipalities of the most remote, conflicted and

cultural diverse areas of Colombia (25% of municipalities submitted proposals).

This situation was an indicator of the desire and of these impoverished and vulnerable populations to have spaces where to develop and preserve their cultural assets, AND the compelling necessity for governments to acknowledge distinct socio-cultural patterns, and develop actions to support initiatives to preserve local identities and cultural assets of different groups of the population.

The program had a budget of \$US 3.5 million, and was able to benefit 14% of those who submitted proposals. The immediate outcomes were a sense of empowerment of the communities that were despoiled of their land and basic rights, and the “regeneration” of areas throughout the development of infrastructure and urban facilities useful for the entire communities.

The real impacts of these government-supported projects are to be defined in the long run, but right now, the communities benefited had the chance to develop something they would not be able to do in regular circumstances.

Sortia, Colombia

4. WOMEN

“Inequality is a result of a perverse model of development in which only few can benefit from our cities and the great majority – in which women are in greater number – is kept unable to benefit from it.”

Patricia Chaves, participant from Brazil

Women are seen as instrumental to help bridge the urban divide and promote cultural diversity in cities. If nothing else because they represent more than 50% of the urban population, as Tsehai Adall put it, but more importantly because of the roles they are starting to play in more urbanized societies as well as the more traditional female role of transmission of cultural heritage in less urban environments.

Women have been gaining social, economic and political space in a number of countries, but there is still a long way to go, in particular when it comes to women occupying decision-making positions. For Patricia Chaves, “we – women – have been participating in all spaces of public policy formulation and implementation in great numbers. However, when it comes to occupying decision positions we are in disadvantage.” Fzongo, from Burkina Faso, believes that “women are still marginalized and minds are not ready to change.”

Blessingm, a participant from South Africa, called for women to “reposition themselves to become the main drivers of decision-making and development” and that the role of women must be defined as “a development instrument” because they are the ones that “provide

livelihood to their families (...) and are the major labour force of the economy today” – men are the highest paid but the reality is that most of the labour force in industries is women, he concluded.

For Lorenagy, from Mexico, reduced space for women varies in “many aspects and levels, also depending on the region and country.” This situation is more acute “in case of developing and less democratic countries,” Namraj, from Nepal, added. But WomeninCitiesIntl, from Canada, said that “women in rich developed countries like Canada share many commonalities with women in other, more traditional countries. All women share cultural pressures that emphasize maternal nurturing, strong communication and intuitive knowledge. (...) This can be viewed as a cultural bridge – women can work together to redefine their own cultural roles.”

It was remarked that less democratic regimes and some religious rules and practices impose limitations on women and significantly reduce their space to participate. Mehdi, from Germany, called for the identification of laws and the role of governments that limit wider participation of women. Shirazzudin Siddiqi, a participant from Afghanistan, noted, however, that “family laws should be looked at and improved,” but laws alone will not “necessarily bring about fundamental change.”

“Cultural diversity has been maintained by women, even as patriarchal constructs may have dictated the formulations of a culture,” Shivani Bhardwaj, of India, stated as Blessingm wrote: “the influence a mother has on a child is ever lasting thus women become the catalyst of change and diversity in our societies.”

Though many programmes have been put in place, including by governments, to ensure equal rights and to guarantee women a space and voice in different sectors of activity. Such initiatives contribute to empowering women, but are not enough. Among the actions suggested for improvement, YCWU, a participant from Uganda, recommends that “governments and all stakeholders have to provide relevant information to urban and rural women.”

According to Patricia Chaves, women are more affected by the urban divide. She explains: “the urban divide is much more a question of inequality in access and control of resources that persist in all cities in developing countries and affects women mostly.” And Shivani Bhardwaj noted the impact of recent urbanization on women. She said that women worldwide have demanded a culture of shared spaces with services near their homes - “the newer forms of city structures have not kept in mind the needs of women”.

To close this section, a call by Ycwu: “there are some traditional and cultural beliefs which we have to abandon in this age, like in Buganda where there is a saying that if a man does not beat his wife, he doesn’t love her.

Questions

Some questions have been raised in the course of the debate and they remain valid for the World Urban Forum. In fact, some are meant to be addressed by the Forum:

How are women as political actors pushing forward their role in the processes and spaces of formulation, implementation and control of public policies in different contexts?

- In the context of urban divide and the role of women, how are governments, institutions and societies reacting and opening space to new political actors and change agents, i.e., women?
- What are women's main challenges and how/where have they advanced? Progress achieved by women in the urban context as well as obstacles and barriers to be overcome in different contexts could be presented and analyzed at WUF V.
- If revised and improved legislation alone will not improve the condition of women, what actions from city and national governments, civil society organizations, private sector, media and academic world could help change this situation in cities?
- Many Treaties have been signed and endorsed by many countries, and still, there is a long way for many of them to even advance and monitor improvement. How can citizens (especially women), organized movements and other social actors profit from them? How can the UN support these citizens, movements and actors in changing their realities in cities?
- What is the status of implementation of the Nanjing World Urban Forum recommendations on women?

Experiences worth sharing (as posted by participants)

In my previous presentation; in enhancing attaining the levels of involvement of women, it is clear there is the need for 'developing leadership capacity'. At this point, politically (through the governmental framework), we have to address the issues of educating or training of women, capital support, policy support for mobilization, leadership, and management capacity building, etc. All these facilities required for the sustainable development of the women sector require first and foremost political framework that will facilitate the active and productive participation of both the civil societies, and the local government. As a concrete example, the Barangay Government of Puntod, Cagayan de Oro have been active in mobilizing and organizing their women sector-supporting primarily with Barangay funds. Other sources include congressional funds, and (usually in kind) from the generous support of private businessmen. At present, they have organized women livelihood associations in the barangay. Their activities are logistically supported and administratively supervised by assigned or related committees (Women, Youth, Barangay Health, Senior Citizens, etc.) of the Barangay Council. Because Barangay income is much limited, the significance is likewise quite small, but the fact this program formally and institutionally exist, it makes difference to the total political system or governance of the Barangay Puntod.

JNBona, Philippines

5. NEW TECHNOLOGIES and EDUCATION

“I believe that bridging the digital divide is one of the most important steps to development everywhere, including here in Seattle, Washington, home of Microsoft and Amazon. I just believe that it is not a panacea.”

Derrickf, a participant from the USA

“What is important in education is having the right intellectual tool for one to fight ignorance, and prejudices and easily understand the wonders and workings of the “world” around them. This could be as well a good start for bridging the cultural divide in cities.”

JNBona, a participant from the Philippines

Both new technologies and education generated a great deal of interest among participants.

There was a unanimous view that education is essential to provide people with better means to deal with the complexities of cultural diversity. As Solomon Tsehai Adall put it: “Efforts should focus on creating access to education and information about the importance of cultural diversity and its contribution to bridging the urban divide.”

In the contemporary city, with all its complexities and multicultural environment, education is necessary to provide people with information and references needed to appreciate, respect and tolerate differences. Ingjerd, from Norway, elaborates: “Respect is built through knowledge and understanding – education is suggested as a viable mean and I agree with that. By developing knowledge about each other we reduce the fear that naturally tends to follow what is unknown for us – then we can focus on the synergy that we can create.”

Participants considered ICT one of the greatest inventions of our times, but it is not a panacea and its unchecked growth, Amohanty, from India, alerted could “open a can of worms,” but even then “the problem is pregnant with the solution itself.” Fadriana, from the United Kingdom, noted the “umbilical relationship between ‘technological progress’ and energy dependence”, and called on participants to think about ‘appropriate technologies’ that can function in the energy-parsimoneous future.

Participants called for more joint investments in ICT by developing and developed countries. As a general observation, it was noted that poorer nations need to expand ICT. Tsehai Adall was more prescriptive: “developing country governments have the responsibility to install the infrastructure of ICT” while the private sector has a “role in inventing and supplying appropriate, easy to manage, affordable quality technologies.” Leila acknowledged the role of

NGOs as providers of “IT courses and access of the public to computers,” empowering and supporting community groups, including elderly people.

ICT democratizes access to information, but in order to promote cultural inclusiveness it needs to be fully integrated into educational systems. Leila explained: “We should profit from bringing together ICTs and youth, especially [by further developing] its use in education and public schools.” New technologies make it possible for groups – youth, for example – “to connect and share experiences” as well as to obtain information that otherwise would be difficult to access, Danjay1, from Nigeria, added.

For Tsehai Adall, new technologies “create access and an enabling environment to promote cultural diversity.” They can bring empowerment to marginalized communities and in this context “the city becomes the new terrain of conflict between the ‘historically empowered elites’ and the ‘reinvigorated subalterns’,” Amohanty analyzed.

Questions

A sort of an “existential” question was raised by Derrickf, from the USA, which reaches beyond the debate. ICT has great value in empowering people, but there is a dangerous side to it. New technologies allow us “to customize our social spaces.” And the question is asked: “Empowerment is great, but what if it empowers us to separate ourselves from society? How are we supposed to mobilize the world if people (...) are more inclined to support a cause by only joining a Facebook group?”

This question leaves us with food for thought: empowerment of marginalized communities that can be a means to help bridge the urban divide versus empowerment that could mean reduction of space for social interaction.

Other questions raised during the debate and which could be discussed at the World Urban Forum include:

- How can new information and communication technologies be used to expand spaces and expressions of diverse cultures?
- What is the impact on the city’s cultural diversity of the “virtual city” on the “formal city”?
- Would an education process be enough to generate a community based on common values?
- Could education and ICT help in getting people to work together as a community?

Experiences worth sharing (as posted by participants)

It might be a marginal point - but still worth mentioning: What we do here in this global informal debate on the internet - carried out over a few weeks as input to World Urban Forum 2010, - is an extraordinary cultural exchange. The voices present are professionals, practitioners, community workers, researchers, students and a variety of individuals from all around the world, who have experiences, ideas and interest in sharing on the wide topic of urbanization. The available technology allows us to share voices instantly in the debates, indiscriminately - with an equal access for everyone to participate. In the exchanges voices and views seem to reflect and respond to each other with the same consideration as we would have done face to face; with attention to how our words and expressions are perceived by others. It is a real meeting-place, a room where actual exchange takes place.

It is a great way to share, and beside its direct purpose of providing inputs, I believe this kind of communication also enhances our mutual cultural understanding. Thanks to everyone involved in the facilitating.

Ingjerd, Norway

FINAL OBSERVATIONS

As professionals we should avoid underestimating the role of cultural diversity in the city that has the ability to become a vital tool for inclusion and sustainable development.

Patgreen, a participant from Jamaica

Participants have clearly stated their position in support of diversity in cities, and of participation of civil society, including mainstream and marginalized groups, in a continuous dialogue with city officials.

The views expressed throughout the debate seem to acknowledge that in this XXI century, diversity (social, cultural, religious, ethnic, economic, etc) in cities, though difficult to deal with and often times generating tension, is an important variable to help bridge the urban divide. Equitable and inclusive urban development has to do with the "intangible" aspects of cultural diversity.

In this era of expanding city populations and rapid, widespread dissemination of values and information, participants stated that cities are heterogeneous, and where cultures are in a “perpetual fight” according to different perceptions, values, and ideals. Implicitly they rule out “gentrification” or similar urban interventions as such practices have a direct, negative impact on cultural diversity in cities and in further opening the urban divide.

The role of women as agents of change was acknowledged as well as progress they have achieved in societies around the world. It was noted, however, that they are still significantly behind in holding decision-making positions and that less democratic regimes, some religious practices as well as some traditional cultural patterns are obstacles for the advancement of women.

Inclusiveness is a guiding principle, but “unless we practice inclusiveness and cultural diversity at global level, governments and societies will continue to resist” at the local level and “our efforts (...) will remain limited to global advocacy, fund raising, and relief management.”³ Inclusiveness is not always easy to put into practice. Among the obstacles, some religious practices and interpretations, which are seen as oriented to exclusiveness, thus becoming a divisive force.

Regarding inclusiveness and its relationship to the use of city spaces – suggested to be both physical, concrete realities and expressions of social practices - a very clear signal in this debate is that groups cannot always share the same spaces and this is when, in the words of a participant, “urban divide is not always negative.”⁴

Still on spaces, debate participants read a firm defense by Paul Murrain of the “robustness, adaptability and resilience of the building stock, the network of spaces and routes. (...) as prerequisites for any initial built form (...) perhaps even more so in times of sustainability and the efficient use of resources.”

Scale and size - “who constitutes ‘minority’ versus ‘majority, who is on top or at the bottom, as Patgreen put it – and the specificity of situations -one size does not fit all – have also been raised in a more or less explicit fashion to reaffirm that each situation is unique and must be looked at and dealt with accordingly.

³ JNBona, Philippines

⁴ Abubakar Sadiq Sani, Nigeria

Education as well as information and communication technologies need to be expanded, particularly in developing countries. Though not a panacea, they are important tools to understand and react constructively to a multicultural environment, to democratize access to information, to facilitate exchanges among people, including marginalized groups, and to improve or create spaces for multicultural expressions.

Legislation and other regulations are important to encourage partnerships between civil society and the private sector to promote social investment in support of cultural diversity.

The role of NGOs, international organizations and the UN was acknowledged and the UN's contribution in what concerns norms and standards highlighted. What should their continued role be in support of the issues debated? There seems to be an implicit concern not to reinvent the wheel as participants cited recommendations of earlier sessions of the World Urban Forum. Similarly, UNESCO documents were mentioned to reaffirm common definitions and references.

Though debate posts tended in their vast majority to discuss issues, there were also a number of references to specific country and regional situations. Usually to illustrate issues under discussion, but some – mostly from participants in Africa – also calling for an African approach or identification of a common African cultural identity.

Finally, a word on the commitment of participants and thoughtful nature of their posts. They have indeed contributed with principled yet pragmatic ideas. The experiences they shared can help others think through approaches to similar situations elsewhere in the world.

We are all more educated. We are all more motivated with statements such as Fineman's from Nigeria that despite challenges, obstacles and difficulties sees the city as an engine of economic growth, trade and transformation; as a social change agent (...); as centre of successful, dynamic progressive governance; as facilitating the exchange of ideas, goods and services, community experiences and practices; as leader in healing environmental damage (...) and as focus of global communication."

We are all more sensitized to the many aspects of cultural diversity and urban divide because, as Ingjerd from Norway reminded us, "new views, new approaches that other cultures bring along increase the variety of values and options that are available in society. " This is exactly what happened in our mini cultural-diversity-in-cities-debate "society".