

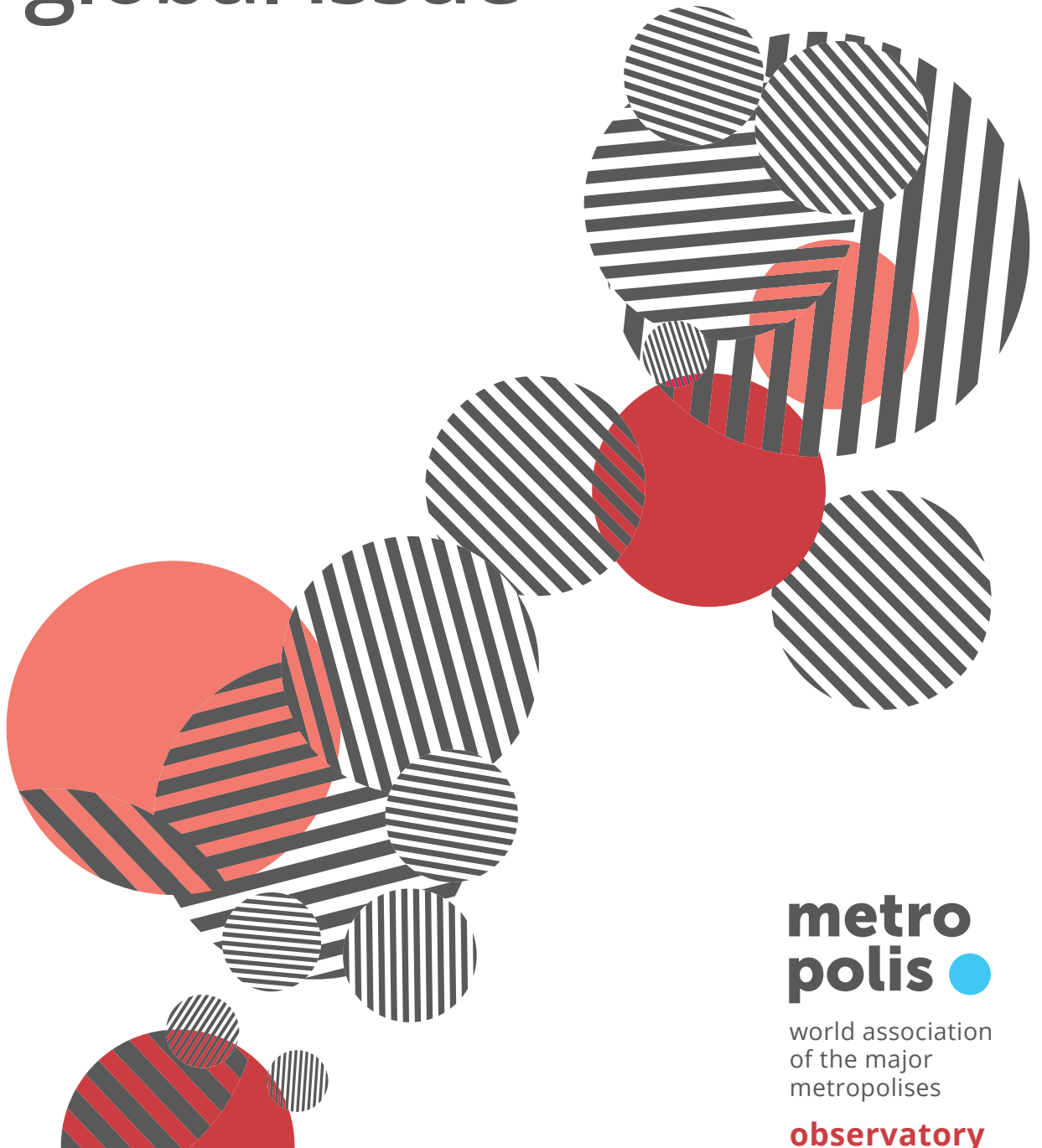
Metropolis Observatory

A. Gutiérrez | F. Llamas | P. Martínez-Osés

11

ISSUE PAPER

Violence in the metropolis: responses to a global issue



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Note from the authors

This document was written in the midst of a pandemic of unprecedented magnitude in recent human history, highlighting the vulnerability and interdependence of our societies. The health crisis has been compounded by a framework of uncertainty in the face of new political, social, environmental and cultural challenges, which have serious consequences for the way metropolises are run, for their governments and for the quality of life of their citizens.

From the perspective of building towards coexistence and peace, this crisis, the worst of which is being suffered in cities, represents an opportunity to reflect on how we live and how we can improve public policies to fight against the inequality caused by violence.

Introduction

Metropolises are the hubs that bring our societies together. Our cities and metropolitan areas are the backdrop for the contradictions of our time. On the one hand, they are home to the majority of the planet's population and offer a range of opportunities; on the other hand, they produce harmful emissions, generate waste and exacerbate inequality and conflict. They are complex spaces in which numerous expressions of violence, characteristic to urban spaces, occur; yet, they are, as well, the birthplace of unique and meaningful initiatives for coexistence.

It is equally important to identify types of urban violence in order to address the risks they pose to peaceful coexistence and the well-being of the population, as it is to encourage and reinforce inspiring responses to urban conflict that can serve as a reference point both in our cities and around the world.

We are releasing this publication, the 11th in the collection of Metropolis Observatory issue papers, in the middle of the COVID-19 crisis. Given the current context, how can we rethink the strategic elements of metropolitan management to improve our coexistence in terms of urban services, social services, employment, public space, governance, mobility, energy, education, health and social protection?

Arnau Gutiérrez, Felipe Llamas and Pablo Martínez-Osés explain that the search for an answer to this question must focus on the metropolis, not only because of factors related to high population density, which increases risks; but also because the metropolis has the capacity to redirect common resources towards public goods, such as health or peace, and to establish specific measures to meet the needs of the most vulnerable members of the population.



Octavi de la Varga
Metropolis Secretary General



Metropolitan violence: conceptualising the problem

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), violence causes 1.4 million deaths a year, which breaks down to more than 3,800 deaths every day. Approximately 470,000 people around the world are victims of homicide every year. The data on femicides—which threaten not only life, but also dignity and integrity—are alarming, and show that violence is not just a momentary act, but part of complex prior and subsequent behaviours and processes of hate. Violence is a multidimensional and multicausal phenomenon that can only be properly characterised through a number of indicators. Not surprisingly, violence is related to inequality and social cohesion, lack of access to community spaces and services, educational values and, in a cross-cutting way, to gender.

What is violence?

The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation (WHO).

Millions of women and men, girls and boys, of all ages, fall victim to non-fatal forms of interpersonal violence, including assault, rape, sexual harassment, mistreatment, abuse and insults. Far from being restricted to death or physical injury, violence can also lead to profound emotional trauma that impairs the nervous and immune systems. Abandoning the elderly, childhood loneliness and the exclusion of people with disabilities are also acts of violence that occur in our

increasingly urban society. As a result, people exposed to violence are at an increased risk of suffering from a wide range of mental health problems, which often drives a cycle of violence.

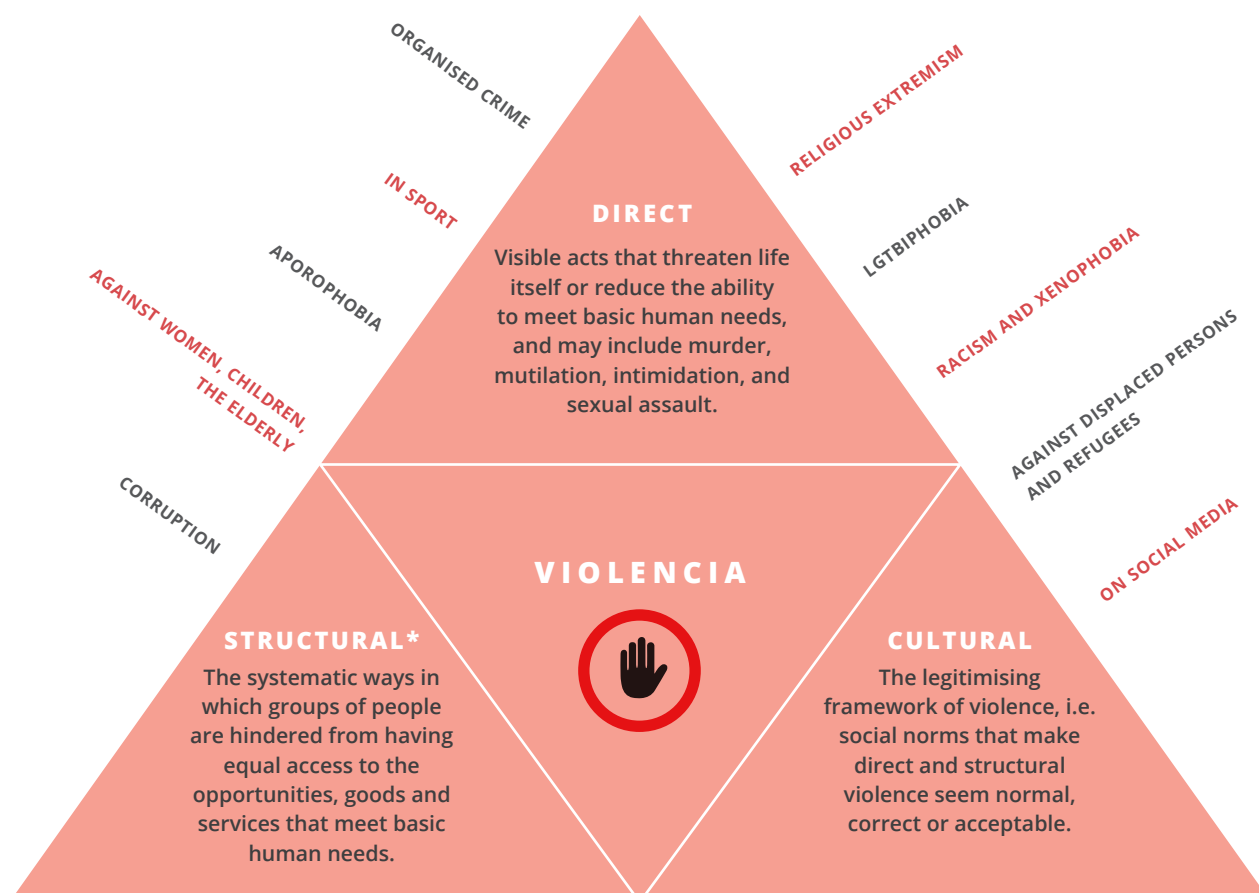
It is crucial to highlight that multiple expressions of violence have a different impact on men and women, whose vulnerability is accentuated depending on an intersection of variables such as age, origin, identity and/or sexual orientation, skin colour, type of family unit, social class, religion, physical or intellectual abilities, and more. Women may be victim to gender-based violence just for being women, and this extends to any person who does not fit the profile of “man, Caucasian, adult, “healthy”, with heterosexual orientation and privileged access to economic resources and political power” (Metropolis, 2019). This demonstrates how violence undermines the socio-economic development of groups, communities and entire societies, as it affects the majority of the population. There is a process of interconnection and feedback between different scales of gender-based violence, from domestic violence to violence on an urban and metropolitan scale: assaults, sexual harassment, crime and rape take place in homes, as well as on means of transport and in streets, squares and other public spaces.

Beyond those who suffer it directly, violence may acquire such a collective importance to a degree that it becomes normalised in economic, social, cultural and political relations, translating directly into the daily life of a metropolis.

Citizens, especially women, tend to consistently limit their movements and experience in public spaces, adapting their itineraries, routes and schedules according to the risk of violence.

Types of interrelated violence

Source: Galtung, 1990



*Structural violence materialises in the denial of needs which may be formal, through legal structures that impose marginalisation (apartheid in South Africa), or may be functional, albeit without a legal mandate (such as limited access to education for marginalised groups).

Towards a diagnosis of violence in metropolitan spaces

Diagnosing the conditions that allow violence to occur requires exhaustive local knowledge not only of the specific conditions of a territory, but also of intersecting global dynamics

Metropolises concentrate and recreate much of the violence that, while specific to urban spaces, is often a response to global dynamics. In order to provide appropriate responses to different types of urban violence, it is important to know the dynamics and structures behind the conditions that allow violence to occur.

The interactions between the three types of violence outlined above indicate that we are facing multidimensional processes that require similarly multidimensional responses, in line with the vision of the emerging sustainable development paradigm shown in the latest international agendas, such as the New Urban Agenda (NUA) and the 2030 Agenda—which includes the need to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” (SDG 11) and “promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies” (SDG 16) among its Sustainable Development Goals. The United Nations General Assembly and Security Council have stated that Member States need to work to uphold peace at every stage of conflict and across

all its dimensions. The UN Secretary-General’s report on Peacebuilding and Sustaining (2018) placed preventive action on par with post-conflict peacebuilding and peacekeeping. The report deems it essential to develop participatory approaches for peacebuilding that involve civil society and local communities, while also preventing violent extremism and addressing the conditions conducive to mitigating terrorism.

Carrying out a proper diagnosis rooted in the specific conditions in each territory requires exhaustive local knowledge, in addition to recognising the global dynamics that intersect with them. We can currently see examples of global cities all around the world that display the metropolitan realities of inequality and exclusion, subject to the tensions that dominate our globalised world, which is characterised by financial capital and the technological revolution. The economy cannot be contained by the state, and instead develops in a globalised context.

In the words of Sassen (2005), with the weakening of the national state as a spatial unit, due to the privatisation

and deregulation associated with strengthening globalisation, come conditions for the emergence of other spatial units and scales. These are focused in particular in the urban centres and suburbs that provide the setting for the contradictions of our time. The processes that produce territorial re-anchoring in global cities are described by Sassen as *expulsions*, which are expressed through the emptying of inhabited urban spaces to foster transient financial businesses, which empty the city centre and break from it as a space inhabited by the community. The result is known for the growing inequalities that De Sousa calls *abyssal exclusions*, and which characterise the metropolises.

These structures of concentrated wealth and growing inequality are key points behind the continuation and recurrence of urban violence. Following De Sousa (2018), inequality is ultimately an imbalance of power that is currently shaped by three factors of domination: capitalism, colonialism and the patriarchy. Accordingly, the exploitation of wage labour through relations between people who are theoretically equals, the hierarchical relationship between human groups for allegedly natural reasons (race, caste, religion or ethnicity), and power relationships based on the alleged inferiority of a particular gender or sexual orientation, are established simultaneously and respectively.

These three power relations systematically reproduce a structural violence that is accompanied by narratives that, by justifying inequality, socio-spatial segregation and normalising social positions, symbolically

legitimise the use of violence, with the end result of direct violence that affects a large number of people.

Indeed, the enormous expansion of the city through the growth of suburbs is taking place at a rapid pace, accentuating the peripheral location of vast sectors of the population who have great difficulties in accessing basic public services, such as hospitals and schools. This means that a large number of people live in a growing series of ghettos, turning their fragmentation into vulnerability and segregation. Accordingly, the city centre/suburb model underpins socio-spatial segregation.

The people who are most affected by processes relating to precariousness, impoverishment and marginalisation usually express their discomfort through social mobilisation. Given the lack of suitable channels for collective action and organisational capacity, this is expressed through acts of violence or delinquency, in which the cycle of violence forms an endless loop: once again the violent actions of groups that are considered disadvantaged provoke a response that deepens the “reasons” for increasing the mechanisms of domination that protect the elites and their interests.

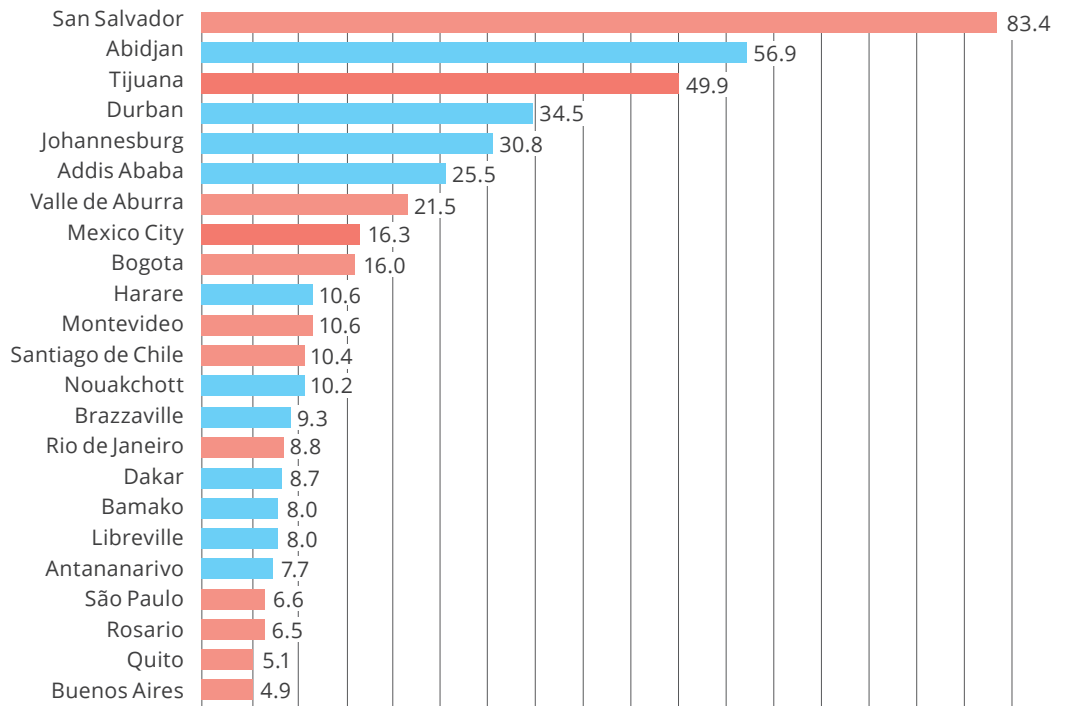
The relationship between violence and inequality in the metropolis is extremely close, as shown in the data in Metropolis' comparative study, which gathered data from 67 members of the association. The study shows that the 23 metropolitan spaces with the highest murder rates are in Latin American and African metropolises with high rates of inequality:

The structures of concentrated wealth and growing inequality that characterise the metropolises are key points behind the continuation and recurrence of urban violence



Murder rates in Latin American and African metropolises

Source: indicators.metropolis.org



Number of murders (intentional and unlawful deaths purposefully inflicted on a person by another person) per 100,000 inhabitants

Applying a gender perspective to urban planning is very useful to combat the inequalities that cause violence

Cities need to recognise the fractures in society and fight existing forms of domination. In this way, it is possible to unlearn the preconceived beliefs (cultural violence) that perpetuate structures based on inequality (structural violence), and that threaten peace and coexistence (direct violence).

Taking Henri Lefebvre's concept of the "right to the city" as a reference point, the solution is to decommercialise public space, combat the inequalities that cause violence, and establish spaces for coexistence. In this sense, it is very useful to apply a gender perspective to urban planning, insofar as it incorporates the visions, needs and problems of the entire population in equal measure. Accordingly,

as part of the process of constructing and rehabilitating public spaces for coexistence, in addition to the "white-middle class-adult-male" perspective, the visions of women, children, the elderly, people with physical and intellectual disabilities, and people from various socio-economic sectors and with diverse identities and sexual orientation, will also be included.

This perspective allows for the consolidation of new democratic formulas based on citizen participation ("Demodiversity", in the words of De Sousa), so that the coexistence and public spaces are managed from the full spectrum of society.

Challenges and hope from the emergency

Understanding violence as a security problem alone is to look only at one aspect of the issue—the symptom— and taking it as the whole, in which the lines of response would only deepen the gap of inequalities

If, on the one hand, the diagnosis of violence in the metropolis exposes the fragility of our own existence, then on the other hand it may also help us understand that this is the result of causal links between socio-economic fractures, which often run very deep. Human beings are vulnerable, and we are born and raised depending on each other.

Addressing violence and conflict in large cities involves reversing the contradictions of a territorial model that is based on a fragmented metropolis, one with a negative impact on severely marginalised people. This is the case for the poorest populations, who are pushed by an almost “centrifugal” force to the outskirts, where they fall prey to informal work, mobility difficulties due to their distance from the workplace, the price of land and housing, and the lack of public transport systems.

Metropolises face the challenge of diagnosing the violence that occurs within them, considering said violence as a multicausal and multidimensional phenomenon, in order to put coherent responses in place. Understanding violence as a security problem alone is looking only at one aspect of the issue—the symptom— and taking it as the whole, in which the lines of response would only deepen the gap, increasing the separation

between the groups and metropolitan spaces who feel like victims of violence, and other groups and metropolitan spaces who will be criminalised and blamed, once again. In this sense, metropolises can combine actions to combat urban violence on three different levels: through diagnoses, educational actions for peace, and the implementation of policies and initiatives for coexistence.

Diagnosing metropolitan violence

Studies and diagnoses on violence are an important resource for deciding how the metropolis is structured and when drawing up metropolitan plans. Evidence-based approaches have helped generate knowledge and create prevention strategies (UN Women, 2014), with results that last longer than strategies focused on coercion. Diagnoses of metropolitan violence are required in order to address:

- The different forms of violence that occur in the lives of metropolitan inhabitants, taking into account the behaviour and social structures of urban systems. There are numerous forms of violence which have been normalised or made invisible in the metropolis, and that must be revealed through diagnoses.

- The consequences for human development, linked to situations of abyssal exclusion and the creation of disposable subjects, while incorporating an analysis of structural violence and its relationship to the expressions of direct violence that take place in the metropolis.
- The damage caused by violence, such as asocial, economic, environmental and cultural decay that occurs in the metropolitan area. To this end, the consequences of the propagation of violence must be anticipated through a multidimensional approach in the metropolis.

Education for coexistence and peace as a response

Violence is not a characteristic or inherent condition of the human species, which means it can be reduced and prevented. People living in a peaceful society know that they can solve their issues and have greater opportunities without using violence.

Many metropolises are beginning to bring together relevant experiences on coexistence to fight against violence. Since the First World Forum on Urban Violence and Education for Coexistence and Peace, held in Madrid in 2017, local governments have highlighted the profound consequences of urban violence.



Foto: Diario de Madrid, Wikimedia Commons

Strategies and tools are essential to allow people to resolve conflict, confrontation and frustration in a peaceful manner; as well as to provide people with the skills required to make a world without violence possible.

Metropolises around the world count on social entities and solidarity networks whose work focuses on preventing violence, while acting on behalf of the most vulnerable groups and communities. The series of actions carried out by these organisations, ranging from support to empowerment, and encompassing economic and educational support,

psychological care, job orientation and training, recreational and intercultural encounters, etc., constitute an immense map of metropolitan wealth that needs to be acknowledged, recognised and promoted institutionally.

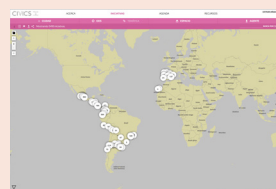
Roadmaps of initiatives promoted by local groups and entities are an essential part of metropolitan strategies for peace that include interventions at a number of levels, starting with social interventions in the local area that, if coordinated across the metropolitan territory, can achieve effective results in the prevention, mitigation and reduction of violence.



The World Forum on Urban Violence and Education for Coexistence and Peace, held in Madrid in 2017 and 2018 (the next one is scheduled to be held in Mexico City in 2021), was founded with the aim of combating violence and promoting coexistence and peace at a metropolitan level. These meetings resulted in the creation of diagnoses on violence applied to the context of participating metropolises, a roadmap for education initiatives for coexistence and peace in numerous Ibero-American cities, the book *Ciudades de Paz* (Cities of Peace), and the commitment to an agenda for the Cities of Coexistence and Peace, through which the participating organisations have committed to combating interpersonal violence, racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance, while rejecting corruption and organised crime.



losmadriles.org



civics.cc



Source:
AECID Digital Library

Policies and initiatives for coexistence

Coexistence goes beyond public awareness and security policies. Coexistence is based on the concrete practice of knowing how to relate, so that differences can be managed peacefully and creatively. Municipal policies and their corresponding equivalents in the metropolitan area can link together the values of coexistence, mutual respect and concerted interests through shared values like democracy, equity, tolerance and peaceful conflict resolution.

A comprehensive approach to metropolitan violence requires incorporating the principles for dismantling violence across all three dimensions (structural, cultural and direct) into metropolitan policies and plans. To this end, it is important to take advantage of new information and communication technologies, which make it possible to generate and share reliable information quickly, in order to have efficient access to

Since 2013, the **Seoul Metropolitan Government** has promoted safe environments for women across its 25 districts by rolling out the “Women’s Safety Metropolitan City” policy, currently in version 3.0. The metropolis adopts a multisectoral approach that focuses on the use of mobile applications and includes different urban actors, law enforcement agencies and community members as part of a comprehensive strategy to end violence against women and girls, which also includes initiatives to raise awareness.



Photo: Seoul Metropolitan Government

eKhaya is a residential area of Hillbrow, a district located in central **Johannesburg**, that has historically been known for its high levels of unemployment, poverty, crime and high population density. In 2004, the city government chose eKhaya as the location for an urban regeneration pilot scheme supported by the city housing company, local businesses and citizens. Driven by strong community mobilisation, the regeneration of the eKhaya neighbourhood has seen a reduction in levels of violence not only in the district, but also in other areas of the city.



Photo: Johannesburg City via Twitter

resources and experiences related to citizens. For example, bringing together and highlighting the importance of projects that actively promote meetings, communication, dialogue and mutual support between various social and cultural groups in local neighbourhoods helps to create a new framework of coexistence relationships and to prevent discriminatory and intolerant attitudes.

Recently, one element in particular has been highlighted as crucial for the development of urban plans and

policies. This involves citizens having an active part in identifying problems, drafting proposals to address them, and in implementing plans and policies, even for the policies that have traditionally been the most important for urban development (urban planning, land use distribution, commercial regulations and promotion of tourism). Encouraging the participation of citizens and social organisations in decision-making, planning and policy monitoring processes at a local level strengthens metropolitan governance and transparency.

It is necessary to promote a shared framework of values which places the fulfilment and defence of human rights, the rule of law and respect for differences at the heart of metropolitan political action. This requires offering education on values, coexistence, peace, and empowering youth, as fundamental aspects for combating violence. The discourse by public institutions and the construction of metropolitan identities are built on the basis of ensuring that inhabitants have equal rights (economic, social and cultural) and opportunities in terms of access to high-quality public goods and services in the field of health, education and justice.

The anti-rumour network of **Barcelona** is an awareness-raising and training initiative aimed at dismantling the stereotypes and rumours that hinder interculturality and cause violence, like the falsehoods that engender distrust, racist behaviour and discrimination. Driven by the city council, the network connects municipal programmes and facilities and involves more than 400 civil society entities and organisations, as well as individuals. The initiative has become an international benchmark, as it has turned social cohesion into a shared task for all citizens. More than 11,000 people have already participated in specific activities and more than 1,000 anti-rumour agents have been trained in order to build an intercultural city model based on equality, coexistence and diversity.



Photo: Barcelona City Council



Photo: Redacción Últimas Noticias, Wikimedia Commons

In this way, metropolises focus their political action and strategies on encouraging tolerance and respect for diversity, promoting coexistence and social care policies aimed at reducing “constructed vulnerability” and guaranteeing respect for human rights.

Faced with the clear lack of safety faced by women and girls on public transport in the city, the Municipality of the Metropolitan District of Quito has run, since 2017, an initiative to reduce harassment (*Bájale al acoso*, in Spanish), which allows sexual violence to be reported in real time, in a way that is confidential and free. Through mobile phone messages, victims or witnesses of violence in public transportation can notify the control centre and specialised personnel. This makes it possible to assess cases on an individual basis and inform the bus driver, who activates an alert message on the bus where the harassment is taking place, which results in fines and a reduction in discriminatory practices.



Recommendations

Violent actions in our cities reveal previously unsuspected vulnerabilities. The paradigm of human safety shows that all human beings are deeply interconnected at a global level, where the main threats stem from a lack of human development, a lack of education and health, and from economic inequality and a lack of respect for human rights.

A mature and democratic society must consider the strategy of designing policies that eradicate violent habits and raise awareness among citizens that violence is the greatest possible expression of inhumanity. We need programmes that develop strategies and tools to enable people to resolve conflict, confrontation and frustration in a peaceful manner, as well as to provide people with the skills required to make a world without violence possible. Transforming cultures that cause violence into cultures of peace is a key task for local governments, by stimulating policies that erode legitimacy and the use of violence.

Violence is avoidable. When faced with approaches that consider violence to be intrinsic to the human condition and life in society, eradicating violence requires political will and a clear commitment to education. Strategies and tools are essential to allow people to resolve conflict, confrontation and frustration in a peaceful manner. To move towards peaceful metropolises, coexistence needs to be prioritised in order to build a liveable, supportive and inclusive city, to promote a sustainable economy and acceptable standards of employment, and to establish democratic, transparent and effective governments.



We can learn lessons based on the analysis presented and by examining the successful initiatives launched by a number of cities, and we can offer recommendations on building metropolises focused on coexistence and peace.

- **Turning coexistence and a culture of peace into a cross-cutting concept** that runs through the different policies drawn up by metropolitan governments, promoting the right to the city understood as reducing inequality and creating opportunities for metropolises to be engines of sustainable economic growth.
- **Diagnosing the violence that takes place** in the city (structural, cultural and direct) and the actors involved, in order to develop coexistence plans based on respect for diversity and addressing the violence suffered by specific groups on political, religious, sexual or ethnic grounds, or nationality.
- **Implementing people-focussed social care policies**, helping to overcome poverty, inequality and discrimination.
- **Rethinking public space to ensure the security and mobility of citizens**, promoting public spaces free from violence, and paying particular attention to improving mobility and public transport.
- **Improving relationships between citizens and the government.** Encouraging citizen participation becomes a key strategy for coexistence.
- **Encouraging the ethical use of information technology** and social networks through campaigns that promote the values of empathy, solidarity, cooperation, justice and equality, while rejecting discourses that encourage violence.

The future of our societies is at stake in metropolises; the construction of cities based on coexistence is essential in order to harness the possibilities of building a peaceful and sustainable world.

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About the authors



**Pablo José
Martínez Osés**

PhD in Political Science and International Relations with a Master's in Contemporary Latin American Studies. Martínez Osés has 25 years of experience working in international cooperation, managing comprehensive development programmes and carrying out studies and research. As a university professor focused in political science and international relations, he has coordinated and promoted social initiatives for mobilisation and social participation in transnational social organisations' networks. He has worked as an advisor in international cooperation matters for the Madrid City Council and was General-Director of the Union of Ibero-American Capital Cities (UCCI). He is also a member of the La Mundial collective.



**Felipe Llamas
Sánchez**

Sociologist, Master's in Territorial and Urban Policy. Since 1994, Llamas Sánchez has focused on developing public policies and international action in local government. Director and manager of multiple European Programmes. Within the framework of the UN, he collaborates in the UNDP ART Initiative and is a consultant for UN Habitat. He is a member of the International Council of the World Social Forum and Chief of Staff for Manuela Carmena in Madrid City Council (2015-19). Being author of a number of studies, articles, and publication; he is currently an associate professor at the Carlos III University of Madrid and an advisor to the Más Madrid Municipal Group. He is the founding partner of PHARE Territorios Globales.



**Arnau Gutiérrez
Camps**

Degree in Political Sciences and Public Administration (UAB, Birmingham) with a Master's Degree (Georgetown) and a Diploma in Advanced Studies in International Relations (UAB). He has received various scholarships for research and studies, such as the Rafael del Pino Foundation Scholarship of Excellence. Gutiérrez Camps is currently an Associate Professor of International Relations at Carlos III University in Madrid, and is Head of the Department of International Alliances and Networks at Madrid City Council. He previously worked in the Directorate of International Relations in the Province of Barcelona and as an expert evaluator in the European Commission for the Horizon 2020 programme. He has developed research on international relations, cooperation and multilevel governance, collaborating with various think tanks and international organizations.

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Secretariat General

Avinyó, 15. 08002 Barcelona (Spain)

Tel. +34 93 342 94 60

metropolis@metropolis.org

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