

NEWS

Berlin defends role of cities as complex actors

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Last Thursday, the Department of Urban Development and the Environment of the Senate of Berlin, in cooperation with Metropolis and CGLU, held a workshop entitled “Cities as actors” under the framework of the German Habitat Forum (Berlin, 1-2 June). This two-hour event was held at a unique moment when cities are being called on to act and write their own future through the New Urban Agenda (NUA).

The workshop brought conclusions to the ideas and results obtained through the Metropolis forums prior to Habitat 3, known as PrepCity, which aim to reflect on the different elements to be taken into account in the NUA and work on proposals to put them into practice. Organised by Metropolis, these forums took place in Buenos Aires in May 2015, in Mexico City in March 2016 and in Berlin in May 2016.

This time, in Berlin, the Principles for Better Cities were presented as a general framework for social life and the human condition. It includes four social domains, each divided into seven subdomains.

- Positive ecological sustainability
- Positive economic prosperity
- Positive political governance
- Positive cultural commitment

This set of basic principles is used to map global agendas and challenges, thus facilitating comparison.

As a result of the work carried out, the following conclusions were reached: "political governance" and "cultural commitment", unlike "economic prosperity" and "ecological sustainability", are not dealt with as key aspects of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

During the debate, speakers also brought up interesting issues:

- According to the representative from Johannesburg, we must ask ourselves whether we are building productive, inclusive or resilient cities, or ones with all of these traits at once. In this regard, she pointed out that resilience must be seen not only as a way to tackle negative contingencies but also for positive eventualities.
- Secretary General of the CGLU, Pep Roig, highlighted the importance of the NUA tackling the disparity between cities in terms of territory, governance and society. He also pointed out the need to include city management as a key element (and that this not be confused with city governance).
- “It is important that we ourselves compile data for our territory. No one knows them as well as we do. We are professional non-professionals in our territories,” Rose Molokoane, representative of the Board of Slum Dwellers International (SDI).

- During the debate, it was mentioned and stressed that the mayors of many cities governed by parties other than those in the national government are in an unfavourable situation, and even blocked from participating internationally in representing their cities.

In addition to co-organising the “Cities as actors” workshop, Metropolis and the Senate of Berlin had a booth in the exhibition area of Metropolitan Solutions (Berlin, 31 May – 2 June), where they presented and disseminated the Policy Transfer Platform.

The “Berlin Recommendations for the Cities of Tomorrow” from the German Habitat Forum, which brought together more than 1,000 people from cities around the world, are available here.