## Innovation is our common future
## INTA Initiative for Habitat III

*As long as poverty exists, there can be no freedom or beauty*
*Byung-chul Han*

*The battle for a more sustainable future will be won or lost in cities*

*Innovation, the tool for building the city of tomorrow*

### Social, technological and territorial innovation: the tools for a sustainable future.

A preparatory document for Habitat III, "*The City We Need*"[1] has set key principles and essential paths for building a new urban agenda, questioning what direction global urban development will take in the coming 20 years, and what shall guide national and local governments, their partners, and the international community to prepare for the urban future. However, assertive statements alone cannot constitute the premises of a new urban paradigm. In general these mechanistic approaches do not address basic structural problems nor do they offer workable solutions appropriately scaled for tomorrow's challenges.

The systemic crisis of our society requires innovative solutions. The crisis forces us to think about a fairer economy, more rational, more energy efficient, less polluting, less "extractive" development patterns. Being an historic challenge it requires to build a new "urban society", based on visions tending to harmony, balanced trade between human beings, with ourselves and nature. The crisis calls for the search for an inventive approach of a "mode of production, reproduction and accumulation always in balance with nature"[2], that is community-centric, ecologically-balanced and culturally-sensitive. The approaches of the Andean "**Buon Vivir**" or the **Gawad Kalinga** of the Philippines are examples of possible solutions.

In a context where conventional approaches to local development have failed, the need has never been greater for a proven catalyst for a rapidly changing urban world in the form of leading-edge innovation (political, cultural, social, institutional) to improve the urban system and more generally the quality of life in cities.

Social innovation is our common future, and it raises powerful questions in order to inspire key decision makers to address the issues and challenges prevalent in

---

[1] The City We Need, The World Urban Campaign, 2013
[2] Jean Ortiz pour Le Grand Soir, http://www.legrandsoir.info/le-concept-andin-de-buen-vivir-et-l-ecosocialisme.html

developed and emerging countries. It is a search for a way of life and a form of development that sees social, cultural, environmental and economic issues working together and in balance, not separately and hierarchically as at present. Anticipating integrated solutions to cope with these challenges by developing a comprehensive range of local policies requires putting the user at the centre of the scene leading to a continuous commitment to create a better urban society through either technological or social innovation.

Thus the central question of how, and under which conditions, **social, technological and institutional innovation** can accelerate transformation, and cope with the social, economic and environmental challenges of the coming decades. Could the Andean approach bring more than the conventional ones?

We must clarify the meaning given to innovation (collective ecosystem of knowledge) that differs from technology (hardware production).

The innovative process is political, just as it is social and cultural. It is legitimate to ask how the strategy of transformation through innovation and technology can be up to the new urban challenges? How innovation, by local initiative, contributes to regional and national development? This is the question posed by the Ecuadorian experience of the city of knowledge "Yachay".

At the heart of this way of understanding the link between innovation and urban development is the idea that local development is built not block by block, or sector by sector, or by the force of the market, but is the result of a chain of interconnected individual and collective actions with often divergent intentionality and interests, but sometimes converging ones. **Thus the challenge to reconcile the city and community approaches with the "overhanging" position of the State**.

Innovation cannot be thought of only in terms of its usefulness or purpose. It must also be thought of as a **process** of building a purpose which can go in different directions where come into play cooperation, negotiation, compromise and balance of power[3]: therefore the social, cultural and political dimensions. Habitat III cannot propose a vision of the city of tomorrow without commenting on the role of innovation in the production of a shared future.

The "social dimension" of innovation differs from its "social purpose". Across the local level and for political or economic leaders, an innovation represents either an opportunity to reproduce the status quo, or an opportunity to create new relationships or to redefine old ones. Each new "social" results in a concrete flow of resources in the hands of individuals (ownership movement) and between places (localization movement). The novelty offers the possibility to access new values (tangible or intangible, monetary or social) and which raises the question of the fair distribution of the benefits associated with its use. Again the approach of "**Buon Vivir**" is exemplary.

---

[3] Albert O. Hirschman, Exit, Voice, Loyalty (1970) in INTA35 Congress

A second clarification is that concerning the city itself. How to maintain unity of vision while preserving the many individual singularities? The city is not a collection of loosely bonded sectors or functions - housing, transport, economy, environment... nor it is confined to an intrinsic and exclusive quality (property) - resilience, inclusion, fairness, smart... nor it is a merchandise. The observation of the nature and stability of the urban qualities and properties (resilient, smart, inclusive..), seems less significant than the analysis of the factors of change and transformation of these properties, in particular the power and institutional process.

Quite paradoxically there is a multiplicity of starting points to define a city and to give it a meaning: where does it begin, where does it end? How revolve all interactions? What are the needs of the inhabitants and how they live; then, what levers to use to provide answers in terms of services to the multiple demands of the people? At what level should these interactions be managed?

> The city begins with the **domestic space** where the priority should be given in the next urban agenda to issues such as home, housing, kinship (Intergenerational), habitat, family, education, health, beliefs, dignity of aging and death…
> The city unfolds thanks to **supplies** hence the priority themes could be: urban logistics, infrastructure, consumption, trade, local production, new distribution networks - informal markets, barter, exchange, social and socially responsible economy (self-regulation of the market economy replaced by a more balanced combination of redistribution, reciprocity and exchange)…
> The city is a **built space** where the priority themes could be: construction, promotion, real estate market, financing, speculation, land monitoring, urban planning, standards, urban form, quality, responsible buildings, infrastructure, ownership versus usage, public private partnership, adaptation of the building to the evolving demand...
> The city's **recreation**, **creation** and **innovation** hence the priority of themes such as leisure and sporting activities, nature and biodiversity in the city, public spaces, culture, communication, social, technological, cultural or territorial innovation…
> The city is enriched by the **diversity of its neighbourhoods** where the priority themes could be: security, safety, freedom of movement, protection of individual and collective rights, solidarity, confidence (trust), social inequality, informal, formal, regulated, unregulated, Identity, respect for differences, urban narrative, appropriation of the town by the residents, poverty, exclusion, the stranger in the city…
> The city is a **space of flows** hence the priority of themes such as physical and virtual mobility, accessibility (freedom of movement), modes of travel, trade, financial and economic flows, local jobs and services…
> The city **institutionalized its interactions** hence the priority of themes such as local democracy, role of the experts (architect / planner / engineer / sociologist) in local political decision, the urban economy - local finance (debt, borrowing capacity) and economic development policy, multilevel governance based on partnerships and real collaboration between territories (multi local); less sectoral planning and shared approach between neighbouring communities – metropolisation…
> The city has **responsibilities to its margins** hence the priority themes could include recognition of the contribution of rural areas and peri-urban development, territorial inequalities…

> The city must be **resilient to instability and risks** hence priority themes such as natural hazards, climate and environmental issues, diseases of civilization, industrial risks, political risks, etc.[4]

It is in response to this call for intensified attention that INTA[5] and its partners propose a side session in the framework of the 3rd UN Habitat Conference taking place in Quito in October 2016.

Entitled innovation is our common future: towards a sustainable urban future, the conversation in the special side session will focus on the place of innovation in the production of the city of tomorrow. What is the possibility of a novel approach to urban development always in balance with nature? How to reconcile the vision of the people, and of their communities, with the "overhanging" position of the State? How to take into account local unemployment, social and territorial inequalities, poverty, economic changes, climate risks, but also aging, urban neuroses and diseases, or the feeling of helplessness because of the lack of an "engaging" vision of urban society in the contemporary world.

For many, this is to rethink the city in a new relationship with nature without adopting an anti-urban posture. A way of changing is to aim at a community-centric, ecologically-balanced and culturally-sensitive policy that can contribute to the *creation of purchasing power and jobs* and shape a way of life and a form of development that sees social, cultural, environmental and economic issues working together (horizontal dimension) and in balance, not separately and hierarchically as at present;

Can the process of ***innovation/knowledge*** at work, alone or not, in the production of the City of Tomorrow deliver higher quality of life either between territories (territorial solidarity) or between the inhabitants (redistribution of growth, reduction of social inequalities). The novelty is that the vision of a desirable urban future is no longer abstract; it is anchored in reality by the multiple possibilities offered by social, technological or territorial innovation[6]. It mobilizes both vision and operational projects, since it is to build a path, even uncertain, to a desired destination. There is no question of an overall rational planning, or search of a single model, "*the one best way*", but rather to open the field of possibilities and recognize the plurality of paths to get there.

From an urban development point of view, it requires the creation of strong interactions between city and its hinterland (the territory) with effective instruments for inter-territorial solidarity. From an architectural point of view, it requires adaptation of the design and construction process to increase the energy efficiency of housing, the development of denser housing, the use of local, natural building

---

[4] Typology proposed by Ulf Hannerz in Explorer la ville; éléments d'anthropologie urbaine, Paris 1983

[5] INTA is a global membership association where public and private policy-makers and urban practitioners come together to share knowledge, experience and performing tools for integrated urban development.

[6] Au delà du faux débat sur le bien-fondé de la smart city comme si la ville en train de se faire était susceptible d'un traitement définitif avec une seule qualité réduisant "le vivre ensemble" à n'être plus qu'un agencement d'algorithmes.

materials or from recycling, etc. From an institutional point of view it calls for more democratic and effective participation of the local actors in their urban development.

These issues will be illustrated by inspiring cases of **integrated affordable habitat policies** based on different approaches – State-led, or market or community led, or by empowerment of individuals putting themselves outside conventional institutional frameworks*.*