

NEWS



Urban renewal / rehabilitation

Metropolises in transformation share their experiences in Habitat III

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On October 19, the city of Montreal led the Habitat 3 side event “Rebuilding the City” and invited Brussels, Johannesburg, Mexico City and Seoul to share concrete cases about the transformation of their urban spaces. These Metropolis members inspired the major cities of the world to reinvent themselves through the implementation of planning and intervention operations associated with processes of public participation.

The first presentation of the event was given by Mr Chang-Heum Byeon, President of the Seoul Housing & Communities Corporation, who explained the housing conditions in his city, where 60% of the residents are renters and most of them want to live in public housing, a wish that is fulfilled, though, just for 6% of them. Therefore, the city government plans to change this scenario by adding 80,000 public housing units by 2018, funded by resources from the private sector.

The presentation of Seoul was followed by Johannesburg’s Development Planning Department Director, Ms Linah Dube, who showed the city’s vision to become more compact and polycentric, with the creation of

socially inclusive and low carbon neighbourhoods, integrated by targeted infrastructure investment in priority areas.

Next, Mr Pascal Smet, Minister of Mobility and Public Works of the Brussels Capital Region, showed how his city transformed itself from a city for cars to a city for people, having converted parking areas and highways into parks, squares, pedestrian-only spaces and exclusive bicycle lanes. In addition to expressive changes in the urban design in recent years, Mr Smet underlined the importance of the leadership of citizens in changing habits: he himself travels every day to his office by bicycle, and believes that every person should unlock the potential of rebuilding the city on a daily basis, and that the ones who are in charge of the administrations should give the example.

Mr Felipe de Jesus Gutierréz, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development of Mexico City, also highlighted the recent transformations in the Mexican capital that counted on the strong participation of citizens. In this process, abandoned areas were restored and open public spaces were reactivated, recovering the cultural relevance of historical protected buildings, boosting local economic activities and avoiding gentrification.

The session was closed by a presentation by Mr Russell Copeman, Member of the Executive Committee of the City of Montreal, who showed the present outcomes of an urban renovation process that started back in the 1980s. Since then, Montreal has been investing in planning and urban projects that resulted in the booming development of its downtown area and the transformation of industrial areas into green, livable neighborhoods, among other redevelopment projects.

After the event, attendees declared to be satisfied with the high quality of the presentations and impressed by the high interest of the theme. “We were able to show concretely how the New Urban Agenda could be implemented by the examples put forward by our respective cities”, stated Sylvain Ducas, Director of Urban Planning of the City of Montreal, who moderated the session.

“Rebuilding the City” shall be presented again at the 12th Metropolis World Congress in Montreal, in June 2017, featuring site visits and additional time for discussions with the audience. Metropolis members interested in presenting their experiences in urban renewal should check soon for the guidelines published at montreal2017.metropolis.org.