"Metropolis in 2023": A Policy Debate in an Extraordinary Time

The latest Extraordinary Meeting of the Metropolis Board of Directors took place on 7 July 2020, and was attended by 22 of our 28 Board members. Titled “Metropolis in 2023”, this year’s Policy Debate was held virtually and was co-organized by the Secretariat General and the Governing Mayor of Berlin, Michael Müller, in his role as President of Metropolis. The Policy Debate aimed to bring together a wide variety of political perspectives to discuss the main strategies and actions to be included in the upcoming Metropolis Action Plan 2021-2023 which will be approved by our members at the General Assembly.

In light of the situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the critical role metropolitan spaces play in providing immediate solutions to the urgent issues faced by our citizens—terms of basic social services, social inequality and the consequences of the economic crisis, among others—, our Board of Directors not only discussed the new Action Plan, but also turned its focus to the opportunities we have to help our members deal with these new metropolitan challenges.

The President of Metropolis, Michael Müller, opened the Policy Debate by pointing to the importance of having a clear, unique and strong profile as an organisation, so members know why they participate in Metropolis and not in other city networks. He also highlighted that incorporating young people in the next Metropolis Action Plan is a key priority, alongside the topics of urban mobility and climate change, two of the many challenges metropolises face.
During the interactive panel discussions, the Board of Directors had the chance to provide their political insights on the future of Metropolis. Pascal Smet, Secretary of State of the Brussels Capital Region, started with a speech declaring that: “The essence of city life has been deeply affected by the virus (quality of life, economic development, social life...) and our biggest challenge is how we are going to deal with those issues to ensure that cities continue to be an environment where quality of life is guaranteed”.

Along the same lines, Ernest Maragall, Vice President of International Relations and Cooperation in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area, stated that: “Coronavirus is a big equalizer, making inequalities even greater; we are all global cities and we share most of the aspects classed as good living conditions”. Meanwhile, Fatimatou Abdel Malick, President of the Regional Municipality of Nouakchott, called on members to rethink their way of life and behaviours: “We need to rethink our health systems, establishing shared solidarity between different populations, not only between each country but also between each city, and developing our digital systems”. Ms. Abdel Malick also stressed the importance for each country and city of ensuring that national food production allows for food self-sufficiency, especially during pandemics. Dr. Sabaghpour, Deputy Mayor for International Affairs of Tehran, reminded attendees of the importance of multi-sectoral collaboration: “We need to work more with NGOs and create bridges between cities and local communities”.

The urgent need to rethink our public spaces with a balance between public and private interests, ideas around the polycentric city or “15 min city”, and the need to raise awareness of international migration phenomena and showcase how they can have a positive impact on cities in terms of culture and gastronomy, were all topics highlighted by Nelson Fernández, Director of International Relations of Montevideo.

Other ideas shared during the virtual meeting were the crucial role that Metropolis can play in helping its members face the challenges that will arise. In this regard, Sophie Mauzerolle, Associate Advisor on Urban Planning and Mobility on the Montreal Executive Committee, pointed out the need for action on crisis management and environmental concerns. Mr. Xie Shuibin, Secretary General of Guangzhou People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, talked about the SDGs and how Metropolis’ actions should align with these targets.

Rahmatouca Sow, Representative of the Mayor of Dakar, stated that: “In most African cities, up to 70% of the economy is informal, and Metropolis should take a leading role in facilitating measures for African cities to foster local economic development”, while she also celebrated some of the organisation’s exchange platforms, like Cities for Global Health and the USE.

Kim Hyoung-Zhin, Ambassador for International Relations of Seoul, also mentioned the environment as a key priority to be addressed in the coming period, together with gender and technology. Again, relating to technology, Felip Roca from Barcelona City Council remarked on the importance of humanizing technology, keeping people at the centre. He also wanted to remind participants that: “Metropolitan governance is our niche and it is important to keep working on this and to demonstrate how metropolitan governance can help us through those types of crises”. “We need to have a stronger voice in the international agenda”, as Francisco Mugaburu, Director General of International Relations and Cooperation of Buenos Aires, underlined.

Hamid Isfahanizadeh, Director of the International Scientific Cooperation Office, Planning and Development
Department in Mashhad, placed emphasis on inequality in cities and countries, and on how Metropolis should work on inequality not only at a local level, but also at a global scale. To conclude, Rashid Seedat, Head of the Planning Division of the Gauteng Province, reiterated that: “The use of technology is changing the nature of work, which does not necessarily have to be in offices, and we need to explore those relations in governance issues”.

The new Metropolis Action Plan is not only aimed at consolidating the work undertaken, following the lessons of the last three years, but it is being launched at a historic moment for our metropolises and needs to draw a new path. Undoubtedly, the thoughts on this Policy Debate—part of a participation process initiated in November 2019 with our Strategic Meeting—will serve to determine the strategic and operational lines of action in the next mandate, with special attention to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), while keeping citizens at the centre of our future metropolises.

More information about our Board of Directors here

Find the full video of our Policy debate here:

SDGs

7 - Affordable and Clean Energy

10 - Reduced Inequalities

11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities
17 - Partnerships for the Goals