

Institutional recognition of metropolitan areas

Post-Habitat III

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Future challenges of the metropolis:

a contribution to the New Urban Agenda

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The importance of metropolitan areas in the New Urban Agenda

Metropolitan areas around the world face a number of common challenges, especially those arising from the fight against social inequality and the consequences of climate change. The New Urban Agenda, approved in 2016 as part of the international Habitat III conference, is a symbol of the international recognition of the urban phenomenon. Prior to this, the Montreal Declaration on Metropolitan Areas, approved in 2015 as part of the regional and thematic meetings in the lead-up to Habitat III, called for greater institutional recognition of metropolitan areas. According to this document, States must provide better legal and financial instruments to urban agglomerations, and must recognise their political importance in solving problems.

Despite the demands made in the Montreal Declaration, the New Urban Agenda focuses on a strictly municipal area, and only one article (article 90) highlights the need to strengthen the

abilities of subnational and local governments to implement an effective and inclusive local and metropolitan governance. The New Urban Agenda defends the “right to the city”, although it does not recognise anything beyond a local scale. In the context of progressive urban growth and given the rising trend of metropolitan areas around the world, the “right to the city” must refer to the right to a metropolitan city. In this sense, metropolitan areas must be provided with the necessary powers and resources, while metropolitan governance must be built on democracy, transparency and collaboration.

The Metropolitan Area of Barcelona (Àrea Metropolitana de Barcelona, AMB) aims to have an impact on the international metropolitan project. The AMB, due to its characteristics and leadership, wants to become a leading figure in the fight for the right to a metropolitan city.

The relationship between local and global agendas

The New Urban Agenda provides an international frame of reference, but cities and metropolitan areas work towards their own goals; there needs to be a link between the local agenda and the aims being worked towards as part of a global agenda. One key issue is identifying the model that a given area is working towards. It is important to keep in mind that cities are generally in different stages of development, following different urban models (compact, disperse, completely urbanised or with large swathes of farmland). The stage of development largely defines the urban agenda and whether or not city rights, which vary on a case-by-case basis, are being fulfilled (the right to housing, education, health, public space, participation, and so on).

Similarly, in relation to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), certain problems arise with regard to defining and complying with indicators. Cities often try to adapt to the SDGs without their own development plan. In other words, they try to apply standards dictated from above, without having taken their local circumstances into consideration. Use of the SDG label should also be avoided unless substantial changes have been made to urban and metropolitan policies.

Key aspects of the metropolitan agenda

Metropolitan challenges can be grouped into the following categories:

1 Sustainability

Challenges related to climate change, mobility, floods and other natural disasters, a lack of natural resources and renewable energy must all be resolved on a metropolitan scale, adapting to the area's morphology. In order to change the model of urban development and mobility, there needs to be a change of paradigm and mentality from citizens, as well as level of political will and commitment.

2 Urban and metropolitan planning

Splintered urbanism must be avoided, while compact metropolitan city models should be encouraged, even though some urban agglomerations have significant defects in their urban planning that makes this even more challenging. Regulating informal settlements and the arrival of migrants is fundamentally important to mitigate their impact on housing, social cohesion and the economy, as well as on ageing inhabitants. Good information is required to make good plans.

3 Social cohesion

A lack of social capital is a problem for social cohesion, and spaces for coexistence need to be created that guarantee diversity and democratise public spaces. Schools and spaces for children to socialise are important tools for social cohesion, as well as ensuring safe metropolitan cities. Social cohesion must be encouraged through bottom-up policies, from neighbourhoods to the entire metropolitan city. Social cohesion and inclusion are pillars of the right to the metropolitan city: unequal metropolitan areas do not guarantee fundamental rights.

4 Local development and economic competitiveness

Metropolitan areas, especially less attractive areas, need better resources and better use of existing assets. In addition, it is important to develop the capabilities to provide local services, while approaching financial institutions. It is also necessary to adapt to economic changes and the rise in housing prices and cost of living, as well as the effects of tourism and the informal economy. Other challenges include tackling unemployment, guaranteeing public safety, and mitigating the effects of global conflict on urban economies.

and two **cross-sectional categories**:

1

Citizen participation

Citizen participation tends to be forgotten about in the majority of urban and metropolitan policies. Many cities carry out citizen participation initiatives, but there are problems with how they are run.

– They are often tools for consulting citizens, rather than for discussion or joint decision-making.

Mechanisms for real citizen participation must be encouraged, such as participatory budgets or debates on the use of certain facilities and services.

– In large metropolitan areas it is more difficult to handle proposals so that people feel involved in the process. In addition, it is often the case that people living in informal settlements **do not feel like citizens** with rights, and therefore it is more difficult for them to participate.

– Participation should ideally be at a local level: it is a space for **innovation** and in order not to repeat any mistakes made on a national scale. There are less examples of participation on a metropolitan scale, and they must be encouraged.

– Participation must represent a **variety of interests**, and it is therefore necessary to ensure the participation of a number of stakeholders.

2

Metropolitan governance

Governance is key to implementing metropolitan policies, and the following aspects are particularly important requirements:

– Leadership and the ability to create a sense of pride in the city.

– The political will to face problems and a long-term vision.

– More transparency in decision-making processes and when creating and managing data.

– The necessary skills and financial resources (budget), technical resources (data, instruments) and human resources (qualified personnel).

– Improved coordination between the administrative bodies and areas of government that are involved in the metropolitan area.

– Comprehensive and cross-cutting metropolitan policies, which must be implemented and then assessed.

– Better cooperation between municipalities, rather than encouraging competition.

– Reaching a consensus and a shared vision of challenges and solutions.

– Complementary transparency policies for citizen participation, which help build citizens' faith in institutions. Data and information can empower a community that, in official terms, has no power.

– It must be ensured that the voices of the different parties involved are represented and balanced: both political leaders and local government, as well as experts, universities and civil society organisations. The private sector must also be taken into account, as well as the influence that certain international figures, such as the World Bank or the Inter-American Development Bank, have through their financing programmes.

Barcelona's metropolitan proposal in response to the New Urban Agenda

Metropolitan coordination: at the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona (AMB) we defend our role as an institution that allows for metropolitan coordination, while respecting the identities of the 36 municipalities that make up the metropolitan area. We are a very diverse metropolis, with municipalities that have different sizes, urban fabrics and socio-economic circumstances. Even so, certain metropolitan policies are being implemented because they are necessary and benefit us all, on matters such as housing, employment, entrepreneurship, sustainable mobility, green logistics, urban planning, recovering natural spaces and economic development.

Human scale: at the AMB we want to prevent infrastructure from dividing the metropolitan area. The metropolitan area must be reconsidered and the metropolitan landscape must be improved, recovering green areas and natural spaces. We demand a citizen right that existed in the 19th century and that has since been lost: the possibility to walk from one municipality to another, and to walk between neighbourhoods in the same city. The soft infrastructure network, used by pedestrians and cyclists, must be protected, creating a minimal metropolitan network.

Plurality: we need to encourage projects that create a metropolitan social plurality, putting leading metropolitan facilities in place as a counterweight to pre-existing municipal centralities, balancing the population and recovering peripheral areas as part of the city centre. We must avoid the idea that there are first- and second-class citizens in terms of access to facilities and services, such as public transport.

Stakeholder: the AMB also plays a role in defending the general interests of the region, and takes part in a number of international networks for cities and metropolitan areas, such as the UCLG, Metropolis, Medcities and Metrex. The AMB also promotes the European Metropolitan Authorities Forum, created in 2015. The summit brings together mayors from a number of metropolitan areas in Europe to demand greater visibility for the metropolis and better tools for metropolitan governance. We also ask the European Union to allow metropolitan areas to participate further in European affairs, such as in how the structural funds corresponding to their territories are managed. *Europea més participació de les àrees metropolitanes en els assumptes europeus, com en la gestió dels fons estructurals corresponents als seus territoris.*

Conclusions

- We must adapt the proposals in the New Urban Agenda to a **metropolitan scale**: we demand the right to the metropolitan city.
- We need to develop **shared metropolitan governance**, with adequate competencies and financing, as well as an international presence and international and national political recognition.
- We must create a **metropolitan story** and politicise the metropolitan area so that citizens can use it as a space for making use of their basic rights (the right to mobility, culture, housing, clean air, education, etc.). We must ensure that this story is shared and build on a socially- and gender-inclusive platform.
- **Metropolitan solidarity** is a necessity: we do not want first- and second-class citizens in the metropolitan area.

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