Thematic session 4: LIVING TOGETHER IN URBAN SOCIETIES

Long report:

The panel discussion aimed to address the following questions:

- What practical methods are available to resolve disputes and build dialogue?
- Where are the places and spaces in which a common urban citizenship can be built?
- How can new ideas and innovations emerge when apparently discordant forces meet and mix in the cosmopolitan city?
- What lessons are drawn from the following three practical examples: (a) the emerging intercultural City approach to integration and diversity management; (b) the use of city diplomacy as a tool for conflict prevention and resolution through mutual relations of learning and support between cities; and (c) the rich experience of cultures living together in the host city of Rio de Janeiro.

Phil Wood, urban therapist from the UK, moderated the session and provided a brief outline of his expertise. He highlighted how the history of diversity is written in the cities every day, and illustrated this with three cities that each present a different intercultural model: Bristol (cultures encountering through immigration), Cordoba (“convivencia”) and Rio (post-colonialism).

The Minister for Cities of Brazil, Mr. Marcelo Fortes, reminded the audience that the cities are at the forefront of all that happens in the world, and described his mandate at the head of the Ministry for Cities. This is an innovative institutional answer to challenges faced by cities in a transversality and holistic approach that incorporating the social dimension of urban policies.

Mr. Vincenzo Scotti, Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs of Italy, then introduced a project of the Italian Foundation Della Rocca, presenting the concept of the “Right to the City”. This projects aims at improving the management of intercultural urban areas, providing expertise and resource to the cities so that they adress their own problems with local solutions.

The Spanish Mayor of Sevilla and high level member of FEMP and UCLG, Mr. Alfredo Sánchez Monteseirín, stressed the need for policies oriented to a new multi-level governance approach for the management of diversity needs. He further explained how diversity can only contribute to the growth of the local social and cultural capital if local governments benefit from the appropriate conditions to manage it. In addition to experience, the human and financial resources are crucial to enhance properly the creativity, innovation and competitivity of intercultural cities.

Ms. Irena Guidikova from the Council of Europe emphasized the need to move towards a new third paradigm, the “intercultural cities”, after the two paradigms that were formerly in use: “assimilationism” and “multiculturalism”. She also underlined the importance not only of collect and learning from good practices (for instance, in Europe, the cities of Regio-Emilia, Oslo, Neuchatel or Barcelona), but also to develop conceptual tool kits in order to replicate them.

The Portuguese Mayor of Lisbon, Mr. Antonio Costa, underscored the need of Cities for concrete and feasible projects, as a practical translation of the more general discourses and theoretical strategies in this field. He described the example of the Lisbon-based projects Children’s House for Refugees, the program Caminhada de culturas in the Moraria neighbourhood, or the Piazza Vittorio intercultural orchestra.

Mr. Kadir Topqaş, Mayor of Istanbul and Co-President of UCLG, put forward the example of his City. In Turkey, Istanbul has managed to show that diversity offers a competitive advantage. The Municipality works to build a new kind of urban spaces that are socially and culturally sustainable, and looks for creative and innovative solutions to the new global problems.
Local experiences from Brazil were further provided by the two following speakers. Mr. Sérgio Besserman Vianna, from the Chamber for Sustainable Development of the City of Rio de Janeiro, reaffirmed the interconnection between global strategic action and local action. Highlighting the example of recent actions implemented in Rio de Janeiro, Mr. Vianna made the link between sustainability at the environmental level and at the social and cultural levels. Strategic planning on the long term was stressed as a key to successful management of diversity in Cities, with the perspective of “Rio+20”.

Ms. Cecilia Leal Martinez, Director of UN-HABITAT regional Office for Latin America and Caribbean, brought in a regional expertise and listed seven main challenges:

- Migrations are changing radically, implying a new responsibility for northern countries.
- One of the main responsibilities of intercultural policies is to ensure that all citizens become equal.
- Participation must be not only a question of processes, but also a question of products.
- Ways must be found to use the cultural diversity to fight against poverty and inequality in divided cities.
- Women and youth are new and sensible targets of population with new values and different needs.
- New technologies and education must be used for a better understanding of cultural diversity.
- Local authorities need a new and different national framework to act properly at the local level.