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EU 2004 Working Group on Urban Environment Research
I - Discussion Notes

Social Wellbeing for All
Sustainable Human & Social Development
Towards an Open, Balanced and Flexible Interim Understanding

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Social Wellbeing for All

A general condition - in a community, society or
culture - of health, happiness, creativity, responsible fulfilment,
and sustainable development.

[This concept, which is distinguished from Individual Quality of Life, is
missing from the EU's Urban Environment Thematic Strategy.]

1.   Core International Instruments ~ Sustainable Development

A   1969 UN OHCHR Declaration on Social Progress & Development.
B   1972 UN Stockholm Declaration on the **Human** Environment.
C   1992 UN Rio de Janeiro Declaration on Environment & Development.
D   1995 UN Copenhagen Declaration on **Social** Development.
E   2001 UN WHO International Classification of Functioning, Disability & Health (ICF).
F   2003 UN WSIS Declaration of Principles.
G   ? UN   ?   Declaration on Economic Development & Ethical Globalization.

Examining Each of these Documents in Turn, and Comparing:
(i)   much of the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Declaration can already be seen in the 1972 Stockholm Declaration;
(ii)   there are two dimensions to the concept of 'Sustainable Development' - the **Individual-Human** and the **Group-Social**;
(iii)   in the later documents, Human Rights (generic) are becoming progressively and more deeply embedded in the concept. This trend can even be observed, as part of its Mission Statement, on the European Commission DG Environment's WebSite ...
' To promote Sustainable Development, preserving the rights of future generations to a viable environment.' (updated 2004-02-10)
(iv)   a 2000 European Parliament Working Paper is helpful when distinguishing between 'Human' and 'Social' Rights ...
' Fundamental Social Rights in Europe' (PE 168.629);
(v)   the full scope and complexity of 'sustainable development' has not yet been elaborated.

2.   'Our Common Future': Report of the World Commission on Environment & Development (1987)

A special commission was established in 1983, by the UN General Assembly, to report on the environment and the global problématique to the year 2000 and beyond, including proposed strategies for sustainable development.

Many years have passed since that Report was completed in 1987 ... and the following definition of Sustainable Development appeared ...

' development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs '.

In the global context of the middle and late 1980's, the political elaboration of this concept was a strong and important step. With hindsight, we can now see that this was an initial statement only ... with many, but not all, elements of the Development Agenda being addressed.

The following Aspects of Sustainable Development were **all** dealt with extensively in the 1987 WCED Report:

(a) Social;   (b) Environmental;   (c) Economic;
(d) Institutional;   (e) Political;   (f) Legal.

3.   Which 'Environment' ?

Built Environment: Anywhere there is, or has been, an intrusion or intervention by a human being in the **natural environment**, e.g. cities, towns, villages, rural settlements, services, transport systems, roads, bridges, tunnels, and cultivated lands, lakes, rivers, coasts, and seas, etc .... including the 'virtual' environment.

Social Environment: The complex network of real and virtual human interaction – at a communal or larger group level – which operates for reasons of tradition, culture, business, pleasure, information exchange, institutional organization, legal procedure, governance, human betterment, social progress and spiritual enlightenment, etc.

                            The 'social' environment shapes, binds together, and directs the future development of, the 'built' (incl.'virtual') environment.

Virtual Environment: A designed environment, electronically-generated from within the built environment, which may have the appearance, form, functionality and impact - to the person perceiving and actually experiencing it - of a real, imagined and/or utopian world.

                            The 'virtual' and the 'built' environments continue to merge into a new, **Augmented Reality**.

Economic Environment: ?

4.   The Urban Environment in Europe

The WCED Report contains a section on the 'Urban Challenge'.   More recently, UN-Habitat has also stated the following ...

' In 1950, one-third of the world's people lived in cities. Just fifty years later, this proportion has risen to one-half and will continue to grow to two-thirds, or 6 billion people, by 2050. In terms of population densities, spatial distribution, economic activity and social attitude, the world has become urbanized. After a half-century of intense global urban growth, the United Nations and its individual member states now recognise the powerful developmental role that cities play, as well as the challenges they face.

In a world of liberalized trade and finance, cities are focal points for investment, communication, commerce, production and consumption. They are magnets for immigrants and for others seeking a better life, as well as the locus of problems that result from these profound economic and demographic trends.   The most alarming accompaniment to urbanization in this globalizing world has been the deepening of urban poverty and the growth of slums that now envelop nearly one billion people worldwide.
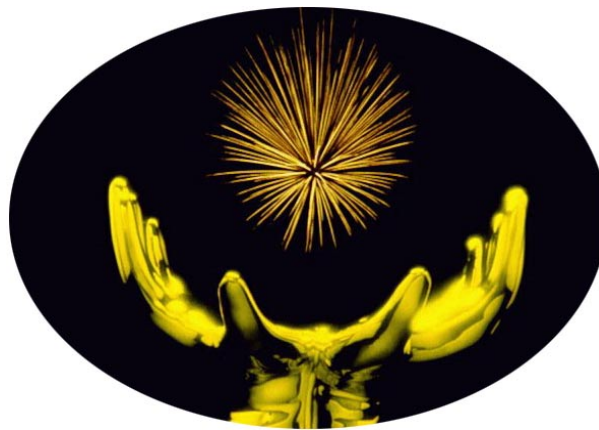
*The **UN Millennium Declaration** recognizes the dire circumstances of the world's urban poor, articulating member states' commitment to improve the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by the year 2020. As large as 100 million may seem, however, it is only ten percent of the present worldwide slum population which, left unchecked, will multiply threefold to 3 billion by the year 2050.*

The problem of slums is a dynamic one. At any point in time and in any one place, it may present itself as a cluster of symptoms which might be dealt with sector-by-sector until the problem begins to dissolve. There are, however, economic, social and political forces behind the urban poverty which cause slums to form at a rate that overwhelms every effort to fight them. It is those forces that must be challenged and channelled, not just within the slums but also in the wider urban and regional context. Fundamentally, urban poverty and slums are not just a matter of local improvement but of region-wide and national development policy.'

So far, no such perspective of European Urbanization has been presented in the Thematic Strategy. No wonder the issue is finding little support.

The Thematic Strategy must deal with the following realistic timeframes:

(i)   **Short Term - Up to 2010**. What can be done to immediately improve 'quality of life', and 'social wellbeing', in the Large Towns and Cities of Europe ?

(ii)   **Medium Term - From 2011 to 2040**.

5.   Sustainable Human & Social Development ?

The 1987 WCED/Brundtland Definition of Sustainable Development is ambiguous; and although a postscript to the definition referred, in the first instance, to the *'essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given'* ... this postscript is usually forgotten when the concept is interpreted by the Developed World.

The WSSD, Cancun, Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, the less than whole-hearted implementation of the **Millennium Development Goals**, Kyoto, the ICC, and the blinkered world economic view from Wall Street (World Bank, IMF) have been keenly observed outside Europe & North America.

The 1987 WCED/Brundtland definition of Sustainable Development is being systematically rejected.

A 2nd Generation definition of Sustainable Human & Social Development which embeds Rights at its core is, therefore, an absolute necessity ...

*' development which meets the responsible needs, i.e. the **Human & Social Rights***, of this generation - without stealing the life and living resources from future generations, especially our children ... and their children.'*
***As defined in the **1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (UN OHCHR).*

At a practical level, two serious problems can now be overcome:
- as far as the Developing, the Least Developed and the Poverty Trap Worlds are concerned, we can establish what a 'responsible need' is - with a basis, and a minimum baseline, described in International Law;
- as far as the Developed World is concerned, we can say that it is not a 'responsible need', for example, that each child should have his/her own Sports Utility Vehicle (SUV) !

This definition also provides the context for a proper consideration of the **Millennium Development Goals** ... and their effective implementation within, or ahead of, targeted timescales.

6.   The System of the European Union

(a)   Europe & Our Common Future on Earth

The concept of Sustainable Human & Social Development is global ... in interpretation, operation and implementation. Europe cannot proceed alone, or in its own peculiar way.

(b)   Areas of Responsibility in the European Commission

What is required is that a Commission DG considers its own policy development and implementation in relation to other Aspects of Sustainable Human & Social Development .. any potential impacts are meaningfully assessed ... and this feedback re-informs the DG's decision making. It is stated Commission policy to introduce the SIA Process to all areas, and to all levels, of its institutional decision making.

(c)   Urban Environment Thematic Strategy & OMC

The re-organization and re-presentation of the Lisbon Strategy by the recent Irish Presidency was very welcome. See the March 2004 EU Presidency Conclusions. The opportunity should now be taken to apply the Open Method of Co-Ordination to the Thematic Strategy. While encouraging alternative networking, the national clustering of Cities and Large Towns is fundamental to effective co-ordination of the Strategy. See the March 2000 EU Presidency Conclusions for an explanation of OMC.

(d)   Sustainable Urban Management, SIA & Sustainability Labelling

It follows, from above, that these are now the basic implementation tools.

(e)   Sustainability Performance Indicators

The 2001 WHO ICF should serve as a model for performance classification.

7.   Conclusions

It will require the balanced integration of social, economic, political, institutional, legal and environmental objectives into a coherent overall framework ... but within a global context ... to achieve Sustainable Urbanization in Europe. This will be a gradual process of conversion.

WG Research must promote an open, balanced and flexible understanding of Sustainable Human & Social Development which will permit a further developmental leap in our understanding of the concept by 2010.

Although not very efficient, vertical co-ordination exists in Europe The principal challenge before us will be to establish a structure of horizontal co-ordination at the different institutional levels, i.e. European, national, regional and local ... and between the many different actors and users in the social environment.