

LIALC – INTERVIEW Alfonso Goveia

1. Actions on UN-Habitat for the harmonious socio-economic development of cities.

* Cities are solutions not problems. Cities are the drivers of development, and they make the way the globe looks. As Lewis Mumford said, cities are the second most important invention of humanity after language.

* UN-Habitat is the United Nation focal point on human settlements, its mandate is to make cities and urban processes the main engines of national economic growth with sustainable quality of life.

* For this mandate UN-Habitat leads advocacy; provides policy advice; builds capacities; develops tools, norms and standards; works demonstration projects and provides assistance through seven programs: Urban Legislation, Land and Governance; Urban Planning and Design; Urban Economy; Urban Basic Services; Housing and Slum Upgrading; Risk Reduction; and Research and Capacity Development.

* UN-Habitat partners are Governments, Local Authorities, Intergovernmental Associations, Civil Society, Academic, Research and Professional Institutions.

* In forty years of work in the Developing World, UN-Habitat has gathered a unique trove of knowledge and expertise, a strong capacity to reach institutional agreements, and a global visibility to share best practices.

* "Digital Civics" is a new UN-Habitat Initiative to promote and support effective citizenship and governance within our new information technology paradigm.

* "Digital Civics" promotes citizen engagement and collective action through a three level strategy: Platforms by Expertise, Ecosystems for Interaction, and Interface for Governance. Four tenets guide this initiative: Transparency as mission, Social Collectiveness as context, Planning as instrument, and ICT as media.

2. The Forum Medellin (its issues, its findings, highlights)

* Its main issue was

* Urban Equity in Development - Cities for Life. The purpose of the Forum was to discuss how to reduce the widening gap of inequality, and how to emphasize the search of equity in the Development Agenda. Equality is considered as a moral idea of having the same status in all aspects of life, and Equity as a response to the distribution of opportunities, with equal access, for all to benefit from the urban advantage and the prosperity of cities.

*Its findings, I think, were that:

* There is no possible development of society without equity. Leveling the playing field benefits everyone, and businesses cannot succeed in a society that fails. In the upcoming era of unprecedented urban growth, the private sector has to play a vital role in building and transforming cities.

* Cities are socially produced, and there should be more and wider partnerships; with equity policies supported at all levels -national, regional, local-, with coherent strategies on different urban issues -cross cutting through existing silos-, involved in the processes of decision making and providing opportunities for inclusion.

* As Joan Clos says: cities are assemblages of "people, stones and rules", or in the words of Saskia Sassen, "territory, authority and rights", and these three components of citizenship, built environment and government, should integrate in processes that produce viable, fair and livable cities.

* In this triad, citizens are the soul and heart, mind and muscle of cities. There is a need to educate, inform, and empower them to make wise decisions and to become aware of policy issues. Citizens can strengthen local institutions to enhance capacity, promote transparency and trust, and strive for a new social contract where innovation and partnership create new economic development through shared value.

* The right investments in social and physical infrastructure can help reduce inequality, but equity, in our actual information technology paradigm, can only be reached through access to knowledge and means that bridge efficiently the digital divide.

* Technology can, and should, serve us to improve outcomes, balance inclusiveness and responsiveness, achieve public openness and engage citizens.

* Among its highlights, for me, were:

* The WUF7 Hackathon "Youth and Urban Resilience" as part of our UN-Habitat City Changer Labs Initiative to engage youth to solve urban issues through mobile technology, in this occasion as a way to crowd source resources for the UN-Habitat City Resilience Profiling Programme and its Global Network of Partner Cities.

* This international Hackathon registered 320 young people from Latin America, Africa and Asia, and we had on-site presence of 60 and remote on-line participation. Seven Apps were developed over a weekend. The winning one, "WeMake", is an application that fosters social resilience through increasing community cohesion, and gathers participation in concrete actions with gamming incentives young collaborators can redeem for capacitation opportunities.

* Its results were presented in the Youth Assembly and the Resilience Dialogues, as a practical example of ICT, Youth and Governance.

3. Your Vision of the City of Tomorrow.

* The City we need is socially inclusive, economically vibrant, with a singular identity and sense of place, safe, healthy, affordable and equitable, compact, integrated and connected, inspired by hope and powered by the Internet, as Castells says, with a novel mixture of spaces of places, in the territory, and spaces of flows, in the digital world.

* The City of Tomorrow shall be a *City of Interactions and Synapses*, of multilayered interfaces that engage citizens in collective purposes; of self-conscious networks of activities that are -and help everyone to become- aware and deliberate; with live understanding and evaluation of results and impacts; with pervasive and inevitable observation, record and analysis; with the risk, yes, of Orwellian surveillance, but also with the potential to promote human wisdom and compassion as active sympathies for others.

* A City where building and operating infrastructure become complete with genuine concern for its inhabitants. Where interest in M2M sensors, networks, and analytics, is complemented by the human counterparts of consciousness, collective collaboration, and interpretation.

* A City where the technical connectivity that has come from places to people, and expands now to things, continues in the immediate future to organisms, and to human ecosystems of beliefs, ideas, goals, motives and activities.

* A City where the first component of the triad “people, stones and rules”: the citizen, becomes again the origin and purpose of the other two: the built environment and government.