

HABITAT '76: THE HINGE IN A
DECADE FOR CHANGE

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HABITAT 76: The Hinge in a Decade for Change

No profession has changed more fundamentally or radically than ours in the four decades since World War II. We have changed what we do, why we are doing it, where we are doing it and to whom we are doing it.

Once upon a time we made plans - we drew elegant lines on paper and we built handsome balsa wood models - our own identity was clear and our tools for changing the world explicit and concrete. By my reckoning the last plan made for Vancouver was made by Harland Bartholomew, who celebrated his 97th birthday last month. Today the emphasis is on process and rules and regulations. If we define ourselves by what we do rather than what we say or write or imagine, those who profess planning professionally propose, sometimes dispose of, ideas. Essentially they advise those who make the real decisions. Sometimes they negotiate or arbitrate on behalf of others, many times they urge and cajole, mostly they administer. What is the net result? Planning has become the profession concerned with preventing the worst from happening. Planners have become a kind of developmental police, policing the development process and action, handing out tickets to those who jaywalk, overpark or stray from clearly defined guidelines, and urging people to keep moving, particularly not blocking intersections where other streams cross the process of change. This developmental police role is hardly innovative, seldom creative, rarely normative, mostly short term, small scale, and deals with bush fires. As developmental police and aggressive firefighters we are doing quite well and often have prevented the worst from happening, very much to the benefit of the public and private community that employs us, but little more. We are doing it at home and overseas as professionals and as a country on the world stage.

What we ought to do, however, is deal with the future; anticipate and mold it, and create it so that it is better than the past, and place that future in the context of the effective dynamics of development - social, economic and political. Anticipating the future demands three geographic and time scales - local, regional and international - and the reasons are self-evident. The settlements within which we live and by which we make our living are highly interdependent because they are interactive, and they are increasingly forming a network of action and reaction, well beyond the range of the nation state. That is why I have focussed on local, regional and international scales and have skipped the national. More of this later.

Now that I have convinced you that the world is flat and planners are in danger of falling off the edge, let me use Habitat '76 and the intervening decade to demonstrate the rapid and radical changes to urbanization in the world which still includes Canada, and what we can do as a leading member of

the international community now and in the future. Habitat '76 was the hinge.

First a word on scale and scope of the dynamics of development. World population will increase from the present level of 4.9 billion to 6.1 billion by the year 2000 (only 13 years away), by which time 80 percent of the world's population will be in the developing countries. They will have 20 of the 25 cities with over 10 million inhabitants. Current projections indicate that world population can be expected to stabilise around the year 2100 at a level of some 10.2 billion. This could be reduced by at least 2 billion if effective population limitation measures are widely applied, but the prospects of this do not appear too likely at present.

Even those countries which theoretically could accommodate significantly higher populations will find it difficult if not impossible to generate the rates of economic growth that would permit them to provide even for the basic needs of the increased population levels, let alone make possible the per capita increases in growth which these countries so badly need.

Growth in urban centres in the developing world is already more rapid than was ever experienced during the corresponding periods of development in the industrialised world. Many of the cities of the developing world are facing the prospect of being literally overwhelmed by people they cannot look after. They could become centres of social breakdown, resurgent disease and conflict. Social unrest is already endemic in many; look at Manila, Lagos, or Mexico City.

The traditional wisdom on the current state of developing countries holds to a trinity of mythology; the three myths are:

First, developing countries generally are a basket case; no hope, no prospects, no solution; look how badly they have done in the last decade! There is ample evidence that this is not true.

The second myth holds that external aid is a hand-out based charity, it neither helps the receiving country nor does much for the donor country. Again, evidence is to the contrary.

The third myth is that since the poor will always be with us, it is pre-ordained in the world order to have a rich North and a poor South. Clearly not true and above all unacceptable.

Let us deal briefly with each myth in turn.

First, the "basket case" theory is proven wrong by the impressive progress developing countries have made. In the twenty-five year period 1960-1984, the average annual per capita growth of GDP for all developing countries, excepting the major oil exporting countries and China, was 2.8 percent; if those countries are included, the average was 3.4 percent per annum ahead of Canada.

The pace of growth of developing countries during this period was some 50 percent faster, even in per capita terms, than that of the industrialised countries during their century of rapid growth.

Averages, of course, mask many wide divergencies amongst countries. The upper-middle income countries of Asia experienced annual real growth of 8.6 percent per annum, while the economic performance of most sub-Saharan African countries stagnated and in a number of cases declined.

By the 1980's developing countries as a whole were producing goods and services at a rate six times that of 1950; industrial production was eight times higher; life expectancy rose from 42 to 59 years; infant mortality was reduced to 12 per 1000 from 28 per 1000; literacy in adults rose to 56 percent from 33 percent, and primary school enrolment from 60 percent in 1960 to 86 percent in 1980.

Performance in the agricultural sector was less successful. Although the Green Revolution enabled a number of Asian countries to increase their food production significantly, insufficient attention to agriculture created problems for many countries, most notably the low-income countries of sub-Saharan Africa where food production per capita has actually declined by some 2 percent per year since 1970.

In economic terms, development is clearly a success story. The picture is not nearly so clear nor so positive if the performance of the past three decades is measured in social terms, in the reduction of poverty and the improvement of the quality of human life. The impressive economic performance of many developing countries has obscured the persistence of chronic poverty amongst large segments of their populations.

Economic growth in India, for example, has done little to reduce the numbers or improve the lot of the poorest segment of the population. Indeed it has increased the disparity between them and the middle and upper classes who have benefitted most by economic growth. In many countries the gulf which separates those who live largely in the modern sector, to which most of the benefits of economic growth accrue, and those who live more traditional lives has widened. This has produced growing tensions between the forces of modernisation and those of tradition within the society. (Perhaps one source of surging support for fundamentalist values and their perceived - vaunted superiority.) Not lack of growth but growth without justice -- however on a continuum between first, second, and third world, progress is being made, for example Brazil, Korea, Thailand, and Tanzania.

Second, external aid, particularly mutual aid, is an essential strategy for all industrialised countries, particularly Canada - besieged on all sides by protectionism and brutally competitive markets.

It is necessary to examine the degree to which international development assistance has contributed to the economic success of specific developing countries, as well as the degree to which it must share responsibility for inadequacies in translating this economic success into effective relief of

poverty and improvement in the economic and social conditions of the poorest citizens of the developing countries. However, since international aid is a good deal more important in terms of the proportion of foreign exchange it makes available, it can have an influence on development well beyond its direct contribution to GNP.

In many instances there is clearly some correlation between the amount of external aid a country has received and its economic performance. Tunisia, Jordan, Egypt, Korea, Taiwan, Cameroon, the Ivory Coast, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Indonesia are all amongst the principal recipients of external aid and the strongest performers in terms of economic growth. India, Kenya and Malawi, also major recipients of external aid, experienced significant, though more modest, levels of economic growth.

In most instances external assistance was accompanied by a significant influence on the economic policies of recipient countries. Usually it also encouraged and supported the strengthening of prevailing institutions and internal stability.

Third, poverty is neither inevitable nor a permanent condition of life. The evolution of the global economy will produce more shifts of comparative advantage towards developing countries in many of the traditional areas of industry in which such shifts have already taken place - such as automobiles, heavy equipment, textiles and steel - as well as in an increasing number of high technology areas such as electronics. Globalisation of capital, financial and commodity markets, which rapidly advancing communications technologies make possible, will reach maturity. A recent study indicates that unemployment in the OECD countries, which is now at a level of some 31 million people, is not likely to be significantly reduced in the next term. The developing countries on the other hand face the need to produce some one billion new jobs by the end of the century, just to maintain their present inadequate levels of employment.

The principal objective of international development co-operation per se must be the eradication of poverty. Poverty is the principal problem of the developing countries, the principal source of their environmental degradation, their population and urban explosions, their recurrent famines. It constitutes the principal claim on our humanitarian concern, our assistance and our involvement as professionals.

This need to give priority to the eradication of poverty runs directly counter, however, to the emphasis now increasingly evident in the development assistance policies of many important bilateral donors, including Canada, which are showing a greater and greater tendency to use development assistance as a means of supporting and fostering their trading interests.

In summary, this brief review of prevailing myths indicates that the only long-term solution is to make the consumer a more efficient producer and the producer a better consumer, thereby revitalising the world economy; that alone will give the poor the means and purchasing power and therefore the capability to buy what they need. A tall order indeed, but the last 10 years

also have proven conclusively that only the political will is the constraint on effective development and in reaching growth with justice and continuing development with balance.

Now to Habitat '76 specifically:

One hundred and thirty four government delegations met in Vancouver in May/June 1976, for the first United Nations Conference on Human Settlements. This was in response to Canada's strong and decisive initiative at the UN Conference on the Natural Environment convened in Stockholm in 1972. At that time Canada argued that the global concern for the natural environment could only be examined, understood and ultimately improved in relation to its use or abuse by man, particularly urban man, who through high-density and high-intensity of use, threatened the characteristic elasticity of the natural envelope in which and through which we exist and survive.

Canada's perspective was clearly based on the stirring discoveries Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring" and Barbara Ward-Jackson's exhortation that there is only one world. The Secretary General of the Stockholm Conference was a highly articulate Canadian - Maurice Strong, and the substantive responsibility for both framing Canada's position at Stockholm and the subsequent management of Habitat '76 was entrusted to the fledgling MSUA. Jim McNeil from the outset played a central role from writing "Environmental Management" to being the Commissioner General in 1976.

Canada urged the UN to look at settlements as both cause and effect of environmental degradation and analyse the consequences involved; urban man and settlement emerged as the eventual threat. After several years of lobbying, the UN agreed to convene the Conference in Vancouver, with Canada as generous host to the tune of \$27 million. It was the first and is still the largest single international meeting dealing with urbanization and the planning process to improve it globally. It had an extraordinary impact on thinking and action and no doubt history will designate it as a hinge to the changes in how governments approach their own problems of urbanization and how they choose to assume specific international responsibilities to help the weakest and most at risk new nations. The conclusions and recommendations of the Habitat Conference resulting in the Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements upon re-reading may seem dated or perhaps even quaint 10 years later, but they need to be seen in the context of their time and the opportunities available for action under UN auspices. The institutional climate, the concern with alleviating poverty, a comparatively favourable economic situation and the state of the art of planning, all influenced the Conference recommendations. In the early '70s many countries began to achieve solid rates of economic growth measured in GNP and yet poverty was escalating substantially in certain segments of the urban/rural population. The concentration of investment in the 'productive sector' rapidly began to call into question the so-called 'trickle down' theory. Consequently, professionals and political leaders in the developing countries called for alleviating poverty, achieving 'growth equity' and the 'basic needs theory' emerged.

During 1976, apart from Habitat, the ILO hosted a World Employment Conference advocating that basic needs be made the centre of all national development, and the Tinbergen report for the Club of Rome called for equity on an international scale, and poverty eradication. Habitat 76 reflected and continued that worldwide emphasis and focus. On the economic side it is worth remembering that despite the 1973 extraordinary oil price increase, the economies of most developed countries were in good shape, and commodity prices in the mid-'70s, key to most developing countries, remained solid. There was widespread economic optimism and there was hope that significant international capital transfer of official aid was possible. The UN target of 1% of GNP seemed realisable since the major banks were also busy recycling the new petro-dollars. All this contributed to the heavy emphasis on public sector initiative and responsibility to solving shelter and human settlement problems.

During the '70s the state of the art and policy issues concerning human settlements were in rapid transition; let us remember that even Canada, that rich nation-state historically frightened into ambivalent inaction and timidity by constitutional limitations regarding cities and towns, had created a Ministry of State for Urban Affairs designed to improve the state-of-the art of federal urban initiative, overcome institutional rigidities, and push for innovative solutions to shelter and urban development problems including pushing for Habitat '76. New solutions to chronic problems were demanded throughout the cities of the world. Donor countries were deeply concerned with directing the aid to the poor, encouraging self-help construction, and pushing 'sites and services' upgrading projects. Cost recovery from publicly provided shelter seemed possible and projects promoted in one part of the world seemed replicable elsewhere. Habitat '76 recommendations reinforced these concepts and still assumed that the public sector must lead the effort to improve shelter and urban living conditions and that a project by project approach was the vehicle for implementation. Above all Habitat '76, through its Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements tried to raise international awareness of the problems and needs of human settlements, particularly in the developing countries and more particularly for the urban poor. Habitat '76 succeeded handsomely in this regard by raising conscience and consciousness, and is continuing to do so. The rhetoric was clear and invoked 'the establishment of a just and equitable world order' and it demanded 'adequate shelter and services as basic human rights'. It demanded an effective shift in priorities by governments to help the poor and for massive financial support of international donors to improve the conditions of the poorest of the poor in the cities of the developing world which were growing exponentially. Participants and policy-makers were enthusiastic in raising objectives and framing recommendations. They severely underestimated institutional restraints and financial resources and the rapidly worsening economic resources globally.

Habitat '76 as an official Conference met in the Queen Elizabeth Theatre, which had been remodelled to reflect the UN General Assembly in style and format. The World Forum - a much more broadly representative world forum on human settlements - met at Jericho, amongst the recycled hangars of a World

War II sea-plane base. The Forum, through well-structured and articulate debate, pushed and pummelled hard the official delegates in articulating the needs of the poor and the urgent help cities of the developing countries will require in the future.

The official UN Conference and the informal Forum came together and had a lasting impact through the Vancouver Action Plan to implement the Vancouver charter. It dealt with six areas:

1. Settlement Policies and Strategies

All countries should establish as a matter of urgency a national policy on human settlements embodying the distribution of population and related economic and social activities over national space. Some success with this policy can be seen in Kenya or Indonesia.

2. Settlement Planning

Settlement and environmental planning and development must occur within the framework of the economic and social planning process at the national, regional and local levels. Jamaica and Thailand have attempted to implement this policy with some success.

3. Shelter, Infrastructure and Services

This set of recommendations included eighteen separate groups of sub-recommendations covering each of the three subject areas, as well as the construction industry, energy, and the environment. This policy recommendation was widely followed. For example, in Nigeria, Botswana, Malawi, Mexico.

4. Land

The recommendations on Land are among the most controversial of the Vancouver Action Plan. The tone is set in the preamble which starts:

Land, because of its unique nature and the crucial role it plays in human settlements cannot be treated as an ordinary asset controlled by individuals and subject to the pressures and inefficiencies of the market. Private land ownership is also a principal instrument of accumulation and concentration of wealth and, therefore, contributes to social injustice; if unchecked, it may become a major obstacle in the planning and implementation of development schemes.

This policy approach met with LEAST SUCCESS and seemed to have been honoured mostly in the breach.

5. Public Participation

This section of the recommendations identified public participation as the

essential right of citizen involvement in the development decision-making process.

Everybody supported this proposal and has incorporated it into national and regional development process in countries in the first, second and third world with varying degree of practical success.

6. Institutions and Management

The recommendations concerning institutions and management focused entirely on the public sector. As might be expected, they stressed the importance of good and efficient management practices and the need to develop a mutually supporting network of institutions covering the various levels of government and functions. Here countries like Brazil, Mexico, Indonesia, Kenya, Nigeria and those in Western Europe have pioneered.

With 20/20 hindsight vision, what influence did Habitat '76 have on public policy and governmental action? The Habitat Conference did influence subsequent practice in many areas of shelter and human settlements development. It was a milestone of sorts in codifying a number of trends which have become widely accepted. Here are five:

** It endorsed the need for national policies even if the content of such policies might be quite different in the current context.

** It was innovative in outlining regionally and locally appropriate approaches to settlement planning.

** It gave recognition to the importance of the informal sector and its legitimacy in the development process.

** It recognised the need for flexible developmental standards, the use of appropriate technologies, and endorsed the concept of affordability.

** Many of the specific sub-level recommendations highlighted well-reasoned approaches to improving public sector performance and responsiveness to development issues.

However, in retrospect Habitat '76 and its recommendations was flawed in six ways:

1. Reliance on the Public Sector

The recommendations were all addressed to the public sector and were designed to suggest that the private sector either did not exist or needed to be controlled lest it 'derail' the Action Plan.

Such a view was wrong in 1976 and experience has shown that the failure to develop the private sector as an active and positive partner in development has been extremely costly to those countries that proceeded with this development approach.

2. The Limited Capacity of the Public Sector

It is recognised that there is an essential, important, and large role for the public sector to play in national development efforts, but this role needs redefinition from that contemplated in 1976.

The totality of the recommendations added up to a vast increase in the role of the public sector. Even in 1976, it should have been self-evident that the public sector would not have the capacity to fulfill it.

In reality, little improvement has been achieved in the capacity of the public sector, and the same set of limitations as could have been identified in 1976 still constrain capacity in 1986.

3. The Disregard for Finance Mobilization

In spite of the enormous agenda for public sector action listed in Vancouver, there was little or no mention of how the finances were to be mobilized to fund the investments, or to operate the required services. There were specific recommendations on increasing revenue, achieving cost recovery, establishing viable pricing policies, other than vague references for 'self-financing'.

The recommendations stated that subsidies were necessary and appropriate for a wide range of publicly provided facilities and services. But the Action Plan reflected no awareness of the magnitudes of subsidy or the potential impact on national finance. They have not, of course, been provided at the scale contemplated because of the non-availability of government resources.

The key role of interest rates in the financial sector was ignored entirely. There was little evidence that the financial marketplace was understood or appreciated as a means of mobilizing and allocating scarce resources.

4. The Emphasis on Equity Rather than Economic Growth

It is not possible in principle to argue with the passionate support given at Habitat '76 to the achievement of social equity and justice. Indeed, any agenda for action must respond to these imperatives. However, equity objectives uncoupled from sound economic growth cannot be achieved in the long term. National case studies abound with evidence of this reality.

The Vancouver Action Plan -- even while responding to the new directions in development thought: basic needs and poverty alleviation -- failed to give any careful consideration to the role of human settlements in achieving economic development.

5. The Assumption of Project Approaches

The underlying assumption was that development would be achieved through discrete project-by-project activities generated by the public sector. There was at best only passing reference to the role of government as a facilitator of development processes within which a broad spectrum of private entities and individual households can play a useful role.

The experience of the last decade has shown that the project-by-project approach is too slow, is not replicable at scale, and is too expensive in terms of both capital and management. Approaches must be made at the national, regional, and local system levels to be effective.

6. Understanding of Markets

The recommendations on land and shelter showed no understanding of how and markets function. There was little appreciation of the interaction between public activities and the markets. Because of this failure to understand the market, many of the recommendations, if implemented, could well have had the opposite effect than that intended, by making shelter and land less available and less affordable to the low-income target groups.

The essential success of Habitat '76 lies in its continuity and in keeping alive the issues of human settlements and their increasing complexity and the urgency to deal with them globally and to learn from experience. UN Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) was established a year after Habitat '76 upon Canada's insistence and substantial financial support. Both support and involvement continue. Here is a freestanding agency looking at urbanization and its global implications - a professionally staffed secretariat located in a Third World city - Nairobi. It has two major functions - the central clearing house for all UN-sponsored or supported technical assistance to developing countries. Some 150 missions emanate from Nairobi annually providing technical advice, information and substantive help to the cities of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Topics range from the sublime to the ridiculous - UNCHS matches a country's request with available world experts, and the financial resources available to and through the UN. The other function is to act as a secretariat to the Commission, its annual meetings, its work programme and research agenda.

What of the future - short and long term?

Next year the UN Commission on Human Settlements will meet for its Tenth Annual Conference in Nairobi. The 58 member nations, selected on a regional basis and elected by the UN General Assembly, will commemorate the first decade of its existence by focussing on the needs of the poorest of the poor. The UN General Assembly has declared 1987 the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. Apart from celebrating a decade since Habitat '76, it is an attempt to refocus on the urgent, the critical, and what specifically can be done, both by the developing and developed countries. Canada has launched a dual track programme. CIDA has re-allocated substantial resources for assisting countries in Asia and Africa, particularly for improving needed shelter and ensuring access to land for shelter by the dispossessed and disenfranchised. The task is enormous but a

start has been made.

On the domestic side, Canada has recognized that homelessness is not just something that happens in Bangladesh, Uganda, or the Sudan. Homelessness is also a feature of Canadian cities and is a rapidly growing and threatening blight on the urban fabric and on our conscience. No one knows the numbers of homeless across Canada or in selected cities. CMHC has asked the UBC Centre for Human Settlements to find out and define the scale and scope of homelessness in Canada. Fortunately, while the problem is indeed serious, some solutions have already been tried with visible success. Consequently, we will also identify specific solutions to local homelessness in the major Canadian cities, as demonstration projects for submission to the forthcoming tenth anniversary meeting of the UN Commission on Human Settlements.

In addition to this modest research effort there will be a series of regional research conferences - one in each province - on homelessness during the next eight months, culminating in a national conference next September in Ottawa, focussing and highlighting both the problem and solutions to homelessness. Immediately following that meeting, an International Symposium is being held, to put the Canadian issue of homelessness in perspective with other developed countries and the cities of the developing world. The 1987 programme is probably the best example that the spirit of Habitat '76 is alive and well and living in Canada.

Perhaps I can return in closing to my earlier comments about what planners do and their perception of their profession, internally and externally. While Canada presents many, perhaps endless, challenges to planners and planning, far greater opportunities have opened up overseas in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The next decade or two will see these opportunities expand dramatically and they will require an ever increasing commitment of those in training and planning for development, to work in the third world. This is both a logical extension of the success of planning as a profession in North America in the last thirty years, and an urgent moral imperative for young Canadians - outward looking and energetic.

We in academia will have to shift our teaching and research activities to problems relevant to the third world, for Canadian students will be spending a substantial portion of their career in tropical countries, in the burgeoning cities of the South and above all interpreting and improving the lot of the poor through their professional and technical competence.

The unexpected and great joy to an old planning professor is to discover at this year's UNCHS meeting in Istanbul, that eight member-state delegations contained at least one UBC planning graduate. By the same token it was wonderful to welcome back Bill Paterson after nearly 30 years' service with the UN, and to know that among many others, Darshan Johal, another UBC graduate, is continuing to play a central and senior role in managing the UNCHS Secretariat in Nairobi. It is clear that problems are being better understood and we individually and collectively also know our limitations.

We need far more professional contact with international public service and

perhaps that is the major heritage of the first decade since Habitat '76.

A final observation may be in order. Urbanization is a global phenomenon and its exponentially accelerating scale and scope deserve consideration beyond the nation state. The interdependent and interactive network of urban settlements, large and small, point to action at the local and regional level as well as internationally. The natural environment and human settlements, since Stockholm '72 and Habitat '76, are recognised as parts of a seamless web that need each other, that feed on each other, they threaten each other and therefore have to be dealt with, within a mutually satisfactory conceptual framework and plan of action. National boundaries and political borders tend to represent the past and often prevent the future from happening. They are irrelevant to the current dynamic movement of people and goods and services, and invariably try to maintain the status quo of the city dependence on the nation state. In the last 15 years the world community has moved from social aspirations to brutal economic realities; it now seems essential to move towards political realism. The nation state was invented in the 19th century and perfected in the first half of the 20th century for valid and essentially successful reasons. The 21st century will belong to the city state, of which Singapore and Hong Kong are persuasive and early examples. It is the network of settlements, committed to local self-government, that will maintain the balance between man and man, and man and nature. Nineteenth century nationalism has given us the UN as a fragile but surviving forum for discussion, aid exchange, and resolving political differences. It is not unrealistic to anticipate in the 21st century a network of cities taking the place of the network of countries. Perhaps we will see the creation of a UCO (United Cities Organization) taking the place of the UNO (United Nations Organization).

While this may seem or sound exotic or academically exuberant, the problems of urbanization are too critical to leave to the established world order; they are too serious to leave to the cynics and far too pervasive to be resolved by flippancy. It is easy to be cynical and fashionable in the council of nations; it may even be fun to be flippant, but neither posture is constructive.

The problems are serious but soluble, both on a local and global basis. The UN as an international forum is an excellent beginning; it provides for dialogue, comparative co-operation and exchange of local and national resources. The decade since Habitat '76 has clearly demonstrated that we have the resources to deal successfully with urban change. Therefore the only question left is - do we have the political and collective will to act with conviction to achieve a positive change?