

THE GLOBAL SOLIDARITY FRONT TO REALIZE CITIES OF THE FUTURE*

What is really happening in the globalized cities, beyond the numbers and the statistics? What are the social dynamics and the real stories that are occurring in the quarters where the globalization intervenes under the form of real estate investments, urban transformation, functional differentiation and pressure towards human mobility?

The research-action¹ presented by Habitat International Coalition (HIC) in 1998 in Venice with the international seminar *Promoting the life of the cities by opening the doors of the world* can help us. Here it is in fact the direct protagonist that speaks: the habitants and their associations involved in coping with the encroaching modernity without limits impinging in their own homes. We discover therefore that in the center of Lima inside over 17,000 habitations, considered inhabitable “sheds” will shortly be demolished. The tenants are fighting against the evictions favored by the liberalization of the contracts. It is planned to erect offices and luxurious residences (financed by foreign investors) in the place of these shelters.

We learned from the live voice of the inhabitants of Bucharest, who have become 95% owners following the politics of privatization, the impossibility of coping with the maintenance of the habitat sector. Some overseas pension funds who seek to acquire new areas upon which to speculate, are ready to seize the opportunity.

We’ve come to know about the resistance of 3,000 families of Bangkok against the *CD Road project*, a road that would cut in half the historic community of Ban Khrua to favor the traffic circulation.

We discovered still many other stories in Africa and in Europe, in America and in Asia. These are stories that sketch the other shiny side of the globalization: the side that invests in real estate and in telecommunications in the city and business centers, the side that evicts the poor and the popular sectors of the more functional urban zones, leaving abandoned the more preferable zones, while favoring the birth of new ghettos of social and racial exclusion².

However, precisely due to this widespread attack on the housing and city rights, the inhabitants, that are the subjects threatened by the negative effects of the globalization, learn to develop relationships and exchanges of information that just a short time ago was unthinkable.

In other words, the globalization is provoking adverse reactions, that is reactions of international solidarity, that overcome the citizen’s and national boundaries, prefiguring another possible world.

The associations no longer limit themselves to enacting a defense at the local level, but launch appeals to international solidarity, for example against the evictions of the historic quarters of Beijing or of those populated by the old refugees in Athens, both evictions foreseen in view of the Olympic Games³.

From the city to the world, from the local to the international level, the steps are becoming increasingly shorter, because increasingly faster are the exchange of information and the interests emerging from the background of the growing competition directed by the strong transnational and a-democratic powers (IMF, World Bank, NATO, WTO, etc.) against the international institutions born afterwards the second World War. In fact, one can hardly avoid seeing the strong contradiction, emerged during the UNGASS on Istanbul+5, that has weakened the Habitat Agenda, leaving in an uncertain state the program Cities Without Slums⁴.

By Cesare Ottolini, Coordinator of Habitat International Coalition (HIC), 2001

¹Audefroi J., Ottolini C. (2000), *Vivir en los Centros Historicos. Experiencias y luchas de los habitantes para permanecer en los Centros Historicos*, Mexico, D. F.: HIC, FPH, Most-UNESCO.

²Borja J., Castells M. (1997). *Local y Global. La gestion de las ciudades en la era de la informacion*, Madrid: UNCHS, Taurus.

³ See in www.habitants.org (Housing Hotline) and in www.achr.net/

⁴ For example from the Final Declaration of has disappeared the “right to a house”, while HIC’s proposal, reintroduced by the European Union, to establish as 2006 the deadline within which to realize the first 10 million shelters for the ill housed, has not been accepted.

Therefore the tenant unions, the cooperatives and the Ngos open the season of the vindicative transnational platforms sustaining habitat and urban polices, like the one presented to the European housing ministers last October 1st in Brussels.

Therefore, there is a growing request for governmental autonomy by the local institutions and parallel-wise, to avoid the pervasiveness of the increasingly liberalized markets that would render in vain the latter request, more instruments of transnational control are asked for.

Therefore the new citizens' networks are beginning to employ the legal instruments of international rights to defend the right to a house, presenting reports to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, asking for the intervention of the Special Rapporteur on Housing Rights, demanding the inclusion of the right to a house in the developing transnational constitutions⁵.

But all this does not consist in mere vindications. On one side the cooperatives and the Ngos, decidedly contesting the poor assistance role, to which certain states would wish to relegate them to, are increasingly assuming a more active role. For example, on the basis of their numerous years of experience, they decide the construction of real popular training schools at the continental level⁶. On the other side, strategic alliances with local powers, starting from the Porto Alegre World Social Forum, are sought after, this in order to spread the theory and practice of participative democracy that should strengthen the relationships among the citizens⁷. The starting point is the realization of a participative budget, but the positive outcomes on the cities could be multiple. For example, with the introduction of a sort of *HIC tax* on land and abandoned real estate for speculation, in order to stimulate new habitat and urban public policies.

How are the new networks of city habitants developing? How do they connect and interact with each other?

Paradoxically, it is precisely Internet, the instrument symbol of the global revolution, that has become a potent means of facilitating the construction and development of these relationships. However, even in this case, is clearly evident the old/new line that divides the north and south of the world. In fact, even if it's true that electronic communication is relatively accessible for the northern associations, in the poor countries, more vulnerable to effects of the globalization, the cost and the scarce diffusion of Internet prevent the latter from being a useful and efficient instrument⁸.

Are these issues merely internal to the grassroots networks? No, not really. Because the future of the cities is everyone's affair, and without a partnership involving subjects able to analyze and act on an equal level, the future would be designed according the mercantile dimension exclusively used and consumed by the more powerful. Let's then discuss about this.

The occasion of the UNGASS on Istanbul+5 being in part wasted, there now at least two important deadlines present before us: the United Nations Conference Financing for Development (Monterrey, March 2002) and Rio+10.

Limiting ourselves to the former, which is still in the background, regardless of its strategic importance, we could begin an in-depth analysis of the subjects and of the financial global flows that intervene on the cities so as to begin to provide a realistic answer to the burdensome problem of the lack of resources. For example, we could verify in what manner part of the 100 billion US\$ per year, recoverable from the *Tobin Tax*, could be used to contribute to resolve the habitat and urban question. Still yet, we could attempt to understand how an hypothetical 1% of the 12.2 trillion US\$

⁵ See the Appeal for the inclusion of the right to a house in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights in www.habitants.org

⁶ For example, for the habitat production in Latin America (International seminar of Montevideo, October 1-6, 2001) see in www.otrosojos.org.uy/users/seminarioPSH)

⁷ S en elart P. (2001). *A Porto Alegre, c'est la population qui trace les destin ees de la ville via « le budget participatif » ou par une co- laboration du budget de la ville. In Innovation sociale : quand les actions rencontrent les politiques.* Brussels : Habitat et Participation. Online in www.habitants.org (Reports, Publications, Ressources).

⁸ Ottolini, C. (2001), *Resident's associations and information communication technologies: a suggested approach to international-action-research. Development in Practice*, 11/2&3. GB: Oxfam. On-line in www.habitants.org (Reports, Publications, Ressources).

present in the private pension funds of the workers could be destined to public urban and housing policies⁹.

All this presupposes the construction of a vast and variegated new front, comprehensive of Habitant Associations, Ngos, Cooperatives, Workers' Unions, Local Authorities. Let's then discuss about this. It would be worth it, since realizing the globalization of solidarity can defeat the heavy mortgage of the globalization on the cities.

3. THE GLOBAL SOLIDARITY FRONT TO REALIZE CITIES OF THE FUTURE (Ottolmi, English, 2001).doc

⁹ This is the proposal of "The Hassan Fathy Project to Help Resolve the Global Housing Crisis".

International Alliance of Inhabitants, 2001



<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/2.0/fr/deed.fr>