

IDEAS INTO ACTION

The University of British Columbia and the 2006 World Urban Forum
Living the Global City: Citizenship, Culture and Well-being
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“Can Cities Rescue the Millennium Development Goals”?

The “Millennium Cities” Idea

A Talk by Pietro Garau, University of Rome “La Sapienza”, Italy

Five years after the adoption of the Millennium Declaration by the world’s heads of state, the evitable seems to be happening: the resolve of the community of nations to address the ills inherited from the previous millennium – hunger, poverty, lack of access to health, education, and a decent living environment – is losing momentum. Cities, the Cinderellas of a global development model that has always ignored their role, now have a historic opportunity to show the way in a rapidly urbanizing world. They can become “Millennium Cities”: places where citizens can build the dream of a better life today for all and a sustainable future for tomorrow. Universities have a great role to play in promoting this initiative.



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Earthscan under the title “A Home in the City” and is available at the project’s web site (www.unmillenniumproject.org). Together with Professors Elliott Sclar and Anna Rubbo, he is the founding member of “Global Studio”.

In 1976 he attended the first Habitat Conference in Vancouver, Canada, and subsequently joined the then UN Centre for Human Settlements, where he worked as chief of the Planning and Policies Section, then as chief of the Research and Development Branch, and later as coordinator of the substantive preparations for the second UN Habitat Conference (Habitat II). Some of his research and policy outputs at UN-Habitat are the first Global Report on Human Settlements, the Global Shelter Strategy for the Year 2000, and the New Agenda for Human Settlements. He was instrumental in establishing the Advisory Committee of Local Authorities, the first body formally linking cities and their organizations to a United Nations agency.

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Ladies and Gentlemen, friends:

Let me, first of all, let me convey the greetings of the institution where I work, the Department of Territorial and Urban Planning of the University of Rome “La Sapienza”. I would like to thank the University of British Columbia for flying me all the way to Vancouver, hosting me in their city and giving me a chance to add my contribution to the great programme they devised in preparation for the World Urban Forum 2006. I do hope that all of the written contributions to “Living the Global City” can be collected and disseminated widely so that we can all draw ideas and inspiration from them in the build-up to the Forum.

I want to tell you how moved I am to be here at the beginning of the year that marks the thirtieth anniversary of the world’s first global conference on human settlements, Habitat I, in the country that promoted it, and in the city that hosted it in 1976 – Vancouver in British Columbia. We should never forget that it was Canada that made good on the unfulfilled promise of the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, by offering to host a global gathering that would finally devote undivided attention to the huge global challenge already looming over the horizon – urbanization and the “new poor” populating the exploding cities of the developing world.

During my twenty-year Habitat career, I always appreciated Canada’s consistent leadership and guidance on human settlements issues, which continues to this day by welcoming WUF to Vancouver next June. As a result of Habitat ’76, UBC created the Centre for Human Settlements to provide continuity and initially manage the audiovisual collection put together for the Conference. CHS is still alive and well, and deeply involved in providing linkage with UN-HABITAT on Canada’s behalf by producing substantive research and project execution in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

My joy about being here with you today is heightened by the fact that I was here too, in 1976. I was one of the youngest members of a large national delegation that included government officials, mayors, NGOs, academics, experts. Very few of us had any previous experience of large UN conferences, but we were all very excited at the prospect of launching a global plan of action that would address the challenge of a rapidly urbanizing world. I still remember Canada’s Prime Minister of the day, Pierre Trudeau, clad in an immaculate white suit –it was May and Vancouver was offering us a splendid spring – and delivering a stirring opening speech in at least three languages in the Queen Elizabeth Theatre. The global challenge of human settlements and urbanization was indeed daunting, even then, but we also felt light, as lifted over the shoulders of giants – people like Constantinos Doxiadis, who unfortunately died before the conference took place, Aurelio Peccei, Margaret Mead, Duccio Turin, Barbara Ward, Charles Correa, Peter Oberlander, Barney Danson, and many others. We could also count on a very committed and inspiring Canadian side, which included a young chap called Charles Kelly, who now happens to be the Commissioner-General of WUF . We were all quite confident that at the end of it, all controversies would be resolved and the conference would come up with a strong consensus on the world’s new Human Settlements Agenda.

Mind you: the Vancouver action plan, as it came to be called, was not a list of impossible dreams and unrealistic requests. It was a very practical agenda based on the integration of six areas of action – human settlements policies and strategies; settlement planning; land; shelter; infrastructure and services; and public participation.

From 1976 on, to the many of us who had the privilege of continuing this first involvement in human settlements in the international arena, Vancouver was to become much more than the name of a stunningly beautiful city on Canada's Pacific shores. For nearly two decades, it came to signify a principle, a goal, a commitment, a *standard*. "Implementing Vancouver", we used to say. "But this goes against Vancouver"...and so on.

Vancouver (in both these meanings) also led to the creation of the UN machinery that the Conference had decided to establish to carry out the Habitat I commitments. The Habitat Centre, or Habitat, as it came to be called, was the result of one of the first operations of small-scale institutional recycling in the history of the United Nations: it was assembled in Nairobi, Kenya, putting together pieces from the UN Secretariat in New York and from Habitat's bigger cousin, UNEP, already established in Nairobi. But despite this judicious beginning, it was clear that the new Centre's road would not be easy. I remember the astonishment of other WEOG delegates in Geneva when the one who is speaking to you today, no doubt unwisely entrusted with representing his country's position at the post-Habitat negotiating table on institutional arrangements, broke ranks with the received wisdom and proposed that the new Centre's Executive Director should be appointed at the Under-Secretary General level, and not at the lower rank of Assistant Secretary-General as proposed by the advocates of the status-quo. I am sure that many thought this was the result of God knows what self-interested machination with potentates from the front of the developing countries. Sure enough it was not, but the fact that shortly afterwards I received a welcome and unexpected offer to join Habitat did not help, I am sure. This much to warn you that I am not, nor have I ever been, a neutral observer or an innocent bystander. Throughout twenty-one years with the United Nations, and afterwards at the service of the UN's Millennium Project, I have always been an advocate of human settlements, of cities, of the importance of human settlements for development, of the need for strong international cooperation for achieving this goal, and of the central role of the United Nations as the most sincere intergovernmental advocate of the world's poor. (In fact, I think that all faculties of planning and architecture should establish a chair in international cooperation in the field of human settlements to track its role, its setbacks and its successes in the evolution of policies, plans and projects in countries and cities all over the world. I think this would be at least as interesting as describing the work of Palladio and Sir Christopher Wren, or Ebenezer Howard and Ildefonso Cerda', for that matter).

As a matter of fact, I may not have been an innocent bystander with regard to the candidacy of Vancouver as the venue of the third World Urban Forum thirty years after the first Habitat Conference, either. But in this I admit to a machination. I wanted to come back here. So, cheers again for Vancouver, for the process leading to the Forum, and for the Forum itself, which, I am sure, will be a very, very tough act to follow. You are a great crowd, and the world counts on you.

The World Urban Forum and the MDGs

The Vancouver Urban Forum has special connotations. In addition to providing a unique global venue for debate and networking, its ambition is also to stimulate action.

WUF 2006 will also take place less than a year after the special meeting of the General Assembly held in September of 2005, where the World's heads of State – including, of course, Canada - took stock of the progress achieved in implementing their own Millennium Declaration adopted in the year 2000 and endorsed the Millennium Development Goals as the targets to be reached to translate that declaration into reality. In short, the Millennium Development Goals, also known as MDGs, are the global community's development agenda.

What are the MDGs?

But what are the MDGs, exactly? One way of introducing them is to say that they are time-bound objectives set by all of the world's governments to achieve measurable improvement in at least three areas. The first area is the human condition of the world's poor. The second one is the environmental health of the planet. And the third area, international solidarity – which needs to be brought up to the level needed to help the poorest nations get out of the “poverty trap”.

We have eight MDGs, each of them comprising one or more target, for a total of eighteen. All targets, except the 2020 “slum target”; have to be met by 2015. Let me list them one by one.

Goal 1: *Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger*. Target 1: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day. Target 2: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

Goal 2: *Achieve universal primary education*. Target 3: Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling

Goal 3: *Promote Gender equality and empower women*. Target 4: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and in all levels of education no later than 2015.

Goal 4: *Reduce child mortality*. Target 5: Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate.

Goal 5: *Improve maternal health*. Target 6: Reduce by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio.

Goal 6: *Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases*. Target 7: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS. Target 8: Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.

Goal 7: *Ensure environmental sustainability*. Target 9: Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and program and reverse the loss of environmental resources.

Target 10: Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. Target 11: Have achieved, by 2020, a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.

And finally, Goal 8: *Develop a global partnership for development*. This goal, a complex one, subsumes no less than seven targets. Target 12: Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, nondiscriminatory trading and financial system (includes a commitment to good governance, development, and poverty reduction—both nationally and internationally). Target 13: Address the special needs of the least developed countries (includes tariff-and quota-free access for exports enhanced program of debt relief for HIPC and cancellation of official bilateral debt, and more generous ODA for countries committed to poverty reduction). Target 14: Address the special needs of landlocked countries and small island developing states (through the Program of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and 22nd General Assembly

provisions). Target 15: Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures in order to make debt sustainable in the long term. Target 16: In cooperation with developing countries, develop and implement strategies for decent and productive work for youth. Target 17: In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable, essential drugs in developing countries. And finally, Target 18: In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications.

How do the MDGs link to WUF3

How does all of this link to WUF 3? Very simple. As explained before, the MDGs are the world's development agenda. Their fulfillment concerns everybody, from the inhabitants of the largest metropolises to the dwellers of the most remote villages. But it so happens that half of the world's population already lives in cities, and this share will increase to two-thirds only thirty years from now. WUF3 deals with cities and their sustainable future. Therefore, the themes, issues, approaches, experiences and solutions that WUF 3 will consider will be central to the future of the world's development agenda.

The question is, however: how can WUF be more than an arena for discussion, exchange of views and experiences, and networking, and fulfill its organizers' ambition to make a difference and mark a turning point in development co-operation? In other words, what ideas can we identify to be turned into quick, immediate action?

Are all the MDGs applicable to cities?

With the exception of the macroeconomic targets subsumed under Goal 8, all MDGs and targets are applicable in cities. There is virtually no urban setting which is immune to one or more of the ills the MDGs are set to address – poverty; malnutrition; poor access to education; gender inequality, with particular regard to access to education; child mortality; poor maternal health; preventable killer diseases, like AIDS, malaria and TB; environmental degradation; lack of adequate water supply and sanitation. In addition, target 11 – improving the lives of slum dwellers – is typically urban.

But there is more. The factor that makes all of these problems so severe in urban settings – concentration, with its killer corollaries of overcrowding, insecurity, and rapid spread of contagious diseases – can be turned into an advantage. It is precisely in cities that a successful innovation, a new water pipe or line of sewerage, an additional bus line, a regularization of x hectares of consolidated informal settlement, can serve the maximum number of poor people. Good policies and good planning simply go farther in denser settlements.

Millennium Cities

As you will remember, Jeffrey Sachs, who spoke in Vancouver last September, underlined the importance of the Millennium Cities initiative and linked it to the WUF process. And this is the story.

Exactly four years ago, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan asked Professor Jeffrey Sachs, Director of Columbia University's Earth Institute, to lead the "Millennium Project", an advisory undertaking designed to provide viable and practical ways to achieve the MDGs. And exactly one year ago, Professor Sachs delivered to the Secretary General the Project's findings. Together with Professor Elliott Sclar of Columbia University, I had the privilege to coordinate the work of one of the Millennium Project's ten Task Forces; so, one of the project's reports was our own report, which we chose to title "A Home in the City".

Two of the report's main recommendations are, I think, admirably suited to this time and occasion. They also happen to be the ones where Prof. Sclar, myself, and select Task force members have been working on since the report came out last February. First: the urban poor have proven their ability to organize and develop implementable and low-cost solutions to improve their livelihood and quality of life. In addition to this, they are becoming increasingly frustrated with politicians, bureaucrats and professionals who devise solutions *for* them, rather than *with* them. Therefore, it is essential that the crucial formative process of young professionals, particularly human settlements professionals, become responsive to this need. This is a great challenge for academic institutions that wish to become more relevant and effective in today's changing and rapidly interconnecting world. Had I the time to do so, I would love to take you through the exciting experience of Global Studio in Istanbul which our colleague from Sydney, Anna Rubbo, recorded admirably in a very attractive web site (www.theglobalstudio.org).

But universities, and faculties and departments of urban planning, can set for themselves a second crucial task. They all operate in a community, a town, a city which they study, analyze, use as their living laboratory for research, design, planning, management. They are often called to respond to their community's needs. What better challenge, therefore, than stimulating their own city, as well as other cities around the world, to become a "Millennium City" – that is, a city committed to implementing the Millennium Development Goals?

Rescuing the MDGs

The title I chose for this talk is "Can Cities rescue the Millennium Development Goals?" It's a question drawn out of hope and concern. Let me start with the concern.

Not long ago, I had the opportunity to attend a meeting of donors on the MDGs. The topic was: what are we doing to achieve them? The message that came out of the meeting was: very little, really. You know: shrinking budgets, donor fatigue, the governance issue, poor absorptive capacity, and so on. Now, is this not extraordinary, if you consider that all the shakers and movers of development – governments, agencies, and intergovernmental organizations - keep emphasizing their unflinching commitment to the MDGs?

Quite aside from this, one would think that aid, no matter how inadequate it happens to be, should be at least visibly concentrated on, and allocated to, MDG-related programmes, projects and actions. Nothing of this kind. The sneaky feeling is that the global community is tempted to go back to business as usual. We are moving our first uncertain steps in a new millennium, but we are still playing the last millennium's game of "donors" and "recipients". The donors, who are in such enviable position also because they are very good at accumulating wealth by exploiting favourable

trade conditions and pricing mechanisms, show their generosity by earmarking pitiful percentages of their resources to international co-operation (mind you: even if all donors paid according to their pledges, which they don't, they would still hold on to 99.3 per cent of their Gross Domestic Product). But wait: only a small part of this goes to fund international programmes serving several countries and managed by international agencies whose operations are scrutinized by all governments, "donors" and "recipients" alike. The bulk is totally discretionary, and goes to high-visibility projects (dams, bridges, roads, factories, schools, hospitals) with high ribbon-cutting attractiveness, and more often than not selected by the donor on the basis of its domestic oversupply of expertise, technology, goods and services.

In order to address this problem, the Millennium Project proposed that the poverty reduction strategies introduced by the World Bank and already drawn up in many developing countries should be framed into ten-year MDG-related strategies outlining the policies, the means and the resources needed to reach *all* the MDGs by the year 2015. Well, there are no strong signs that this sensible proposition has been taken on board on a vast scale. And all signs indicate the possibility of a very disappointing scenario. While all parties concerned shift back to a business as usual mode, a monitoring mechanism is set in place to monitor the MDG implementation process. Long reports are issued every year, packed with more or less reliable statistics. Countries report to the General Assembly on support activities, plans, projects, progress, and difficulties. The debate, or lack thereof, is summarized in recognition that despite important progress, the MDGs will require additional attention and resources...And we move on to next year. Meanwhile, nobody complains. Why should they, since perhaps only a few hundred people around the world know what the MDGs are, and perhaps only a few hundred thousand have ever heard about them? (I want to emphasize again: these are the goals solemnly and unanimously endorsed by all of the world's leaders assembled at the United Nations at the dawn of the New Millennium).

Well: it may make sense for the governments of the so-called donor countries in North America, Europe and Asia not to spend too much in publicity to inform their citizens about the commitment they have taken on their behalf to reduce poverty by half ten years from now, including devoting 0.7 of GDP to official development assistance. Conversely, the governments of developing countries may be a trifle cautious in airing on their mass media the news that help is on its way, considering the many disappointments experienced before after international pledges of a comparable nature.

But never mind. The fact remains that governments, and that includes Canada in its traditional role of strong advocate of multilateralism and international co-operation, are to be commended for committing themselves to the MDGs. It was a noble action, and there is no reason to believe that it was not inspired by a true desire to tackle the scourges of poverty, hunger, disease, social injustice, preventable illness, ignorance, gender inequality, environmental disruption, economic discrimination carried forward from the previous millennium. There are signs that the global challenge of urbanization of poverty is being taken more seriously, and WUF3 may well become the forum for a much bolder, MDG-oriented urban poverty eradication strategy. But now, it is up to citizens and civil-society institutions like universities, to remind governments about this commitment. Without that, there is a strong possibility that even the MDGs may fizzle away – with disastrous consequences for the credibility of the global international co-operation system.

The Hope

I used the term “citizen” for a reason: the root of “citizen” is “city, just like “Citoyenne” comes from “Cite”, “ciudadano” from “ciudad”, “cittadino” from “citta”.....

Since the second Habitat Conference in Istanbul in 1996, local authorities from all over the world have been striving to gain a seat at the United Nations. But ironically, they have approached this objective in the wrong way. They have asked for a seat at the table on the basis that they are the legitimate representatives of local communities, and by doing so they entered a difficult path of confrontation with central governments, who see themselves as the sole legitimate members of a member-state organization like the UN. Instead, they would have covered much more ground if they had simply said – Look, here we are, the cities of the world, finding work, sustenance, shelter and hope for more and more people every day despite all the odds. Shall we work together, particularly around these millennium development goals that happen to be our daily bread and butter? (To understand this, we need not look very far: it is enough to take stock of the initiatives and the track record of the Canadian federation of Municipalities at home and abroad over the last decade).

Actually, the newly formed world organization of cities, UCLG (United Cities and Local Governments) has started moving in this direction. It’s another longish story, that began (don’t get bored now) in Vancouver. It was here, at a preparatory meeting of local authorities organized by ICLEI for the 2002 Earth Summit+10 in Johannesburg, that the idea of holding WUF 2006 in Vancouver took form; and it was here, at the very same time and on the very same occasion, that the proposal was launched that local governments should include a commitment to the MDGs in their statement to the Johannesburg Summit. It was done, and the commitment was to launch a global Millennium Cities and Towns campaign. Reaffirmed in Paris at the founding meeting of the new organization in May 2004, the campaign has taken off. However, so far it has been limited to encouraging members of the organization, cities and other local governments, to publicize the MDGs within their constituencies.

Cities can do much more. What they can do has been described in the “A Home in the City” report. In short, the following steps are suggested. They are referred to a typical city in the developing world, but nothing prevents a “rich” city from taking similar steps.

First, the City Council “adopts” the MDGs as its 2015 antipoverty goal. At the same time, it pledges to take every possible action to support their fulfillment. Second, it holds a city-wide consultation where the poor (more generally, all those who survive in circumstances below the accepted norm) are encouraged, through associations or neighbourhood groups, to present their problems, needs and aspirations in terms of improvement of their quality of life (typically, these needs will relate to employment or income-earning opportunities, security, shelter and infrastructure improvement, access to services, protection against evictions and harassment, protection of environmentally fragile areas and resources, better access to transport, etcetera).

Third, city departments, professionals, neighbourhood organizations, and other actors of civil society draw on the citywide consultation to prepare jointly local improvement plans designed to address the most urgent priorities. In this process, costs are identified, as well as the possible sources for financing. Some will come from the municipality; some from central government transfers; some from external donors; and some, most importantly, however small, from the “beneficiaries” of the improvement plan themselves.

This process would set forth two virtuous developments. First, a city engaged in such a process would earn the title of “Millennium City”, and progress could be recognized and facilitated further through high-visibility initiatives, such as a “Millennium City Prize”. Secondly, conventional donors, as well as foundations and other development funds, would be greatly encouraged by the opportunity of channeling funds in transparent, city-wide, and highly participatory processes. In fact, many may be willing to fund the take off phase of the Millennium City process.

The idea is catching on. Professor Sachs himself, during a recent visit in Vancouver, has discussed “Millennium Cities” with prominent personalities and institutions, and is now engaged in identifying locations in Africa willing to initiate a “Millennium City” process. In fact, if you open the UN-HABITAT web site, you will find a pleasant surprise. And wherever we go and have an opportunity to explain the idea, people come to us and say – Great. How do we start?

One way is to engage in this process from our own location and position, whatever or wherever it is (government official, entrepreneur, professional, civil society activist, worker, student, retiree...) So, I will try and sketch a very doable initiative involving my present home - the university world.

The role of Universities

One way to start, indeed, is with universities, and through universities. As mentioned at the outset, the role of universities is not simply to impart higher learning. It is also to have strong relationships with the reality they are physically and culturally anchored to, to create partnerships based on affinity and commitment, to help bridge artificial barriers between different disciplines, and – paradoxically - to transcend locational linkages as well, by linking to other realities far more distant in terms of space and culture. Millennium Cities may provide just such an opportunity.

I think that the months between now and the WUF3 should be marked by an intense dialogue among universities interested in the Millennium Cities idea. This initial nucleus already exists with the planning departments of Columbia University in the City of New York, the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, and my own University of Rome “La Sapienza”. I think that among the topics we should discuss are the following:

- How we can inspire and mobilize cities and local governments around the world;
- How we can establish linkages with other universities in the North and in the South willing to do the same, and eventually create a global network of academic institutions committed to the “Millennium Cities” concept;
- What kind of “advisory products” we can devise for our engagement (e.g. validation of Millennium City candidacies; preparation of Millennium City strategies; monitoring and evaluation; screening of candidates to a “Millennium City Prize”).

This preparatory work should enable us to present to WUF3 an open-ended, action-oriented agenda, and formulate a two-year plan for review two years later.

Vancouver Millennium City

During the last couple of days, several people asked me: what about Vancouver in relation to the Millennium City idea? What can the role of this city be?

Vancouver is no ordinary city. As we have seen, it hosted the landmark conference that provided a global agenda, a global programme and a global forum for all those engaged in the improvement of the quality of life of people in human settlements. It has a widely recognized reputation for sustainable regional and urban planning and management. It hosts one of the world's great universities. With WUF, in June, it can become the world capital of sustainability in an urban context.

This unique record deserves an equally unique leadership role. Vancouver simply has all the credentials to present itself to the WUF delegates and participants as a Millennium City. But there is more.

Vancouver, in one clean stroke, can become the leader of the world's Millennium City movement and of the MDG implementation process at the local level; it can produce the initial impetus to rescuing the Millennium Development Goals. How? By becoming an example. The city of Vancouver could devote 0.7 per cent of its Gross City Product to a fund earmarked for technical co-operation programmes and projects with other cities of the developing world. And it could use part of this fund to set up a bilateral partnership project of sharing and mutual learning with a city of the South capable of carrying out a rigorous, sustainable, and participatory Millennium City strategic plan and implementation process. And finally, I would like to invite Vancouver to initiate the "Millennium City Prize", to reward the efforts of cities around the world in implementing the MDGs and ensuring a better present and future to their less fortunate citizens.

What we would like to happen at WUF

Whatever happens, we cannot afford to let a historic opportunity slip by the Vancouver World Urban Forum. This city's unique history in international engagement in the area of human settlements, the distinguished record that I tried to summarize, the talent and resources that have been employed in organizing the 2006 World Urban Forum, will provide an unique opportunity for mayors and local governments to focus the world's attention to the MDGs and to solicit cooperation and support for the identification and implementation of local MDG-related strategies for the benefit of their own communities. I call upon the organizers of WUF to make this happen and ensure that this process continues to WUF 4 in Nanjing 2008 and beyond.

I thank you.