

## Rights-Based Approach to Urban Development

### Existing Initiatives

Since 1948, the rights affirmed in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* have been recognized by States and put into effect at the level of States, communities and individuals. Despite the profound socio-economic, political and territorial changes that have taken place in the past 60 years, the promotion and protection of human rights - civil, cultural, economic, political and social - continue to be relevant challenges.

Many maintain that certain rights of the Universal Declaration should be further elaborated. This includes the right to development, the right to safe drinking water, the right to a clean environment and the "Right to the City".

The "Right to the City" concept encompasses the right of all city dwellers to fully enjoy urban life with all its services and advantages, and to directly partake in the management of cities. It relates directly to social inclusiveness in, and the sustainable development of, human settlements. There are a number of current initiatives being implemented at various levels throughout the world, that could contribute to reducing exclusion and increasing social cohesion as well as inclusiveness in cities. Examples include innovative urban policies and programmes, as well as efforts to promote legal reform towards increasing democratic urban governance and expanding citizens' rights. Some of these initiatives are listed below:

- at local level, the *Montréal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities* (2006) [www.ville.Montreal.qc.ca/chartedesdoits](http://www.ville.Montreal.qc.ca/chartedesdoits) ;
- at national level, the *City Statute of Brazil* (2001) [www.cidades.gov.br](http://www.cidades.gov.br) ;
- at regional level, the *European Charter for Safeguarding Human Rights in the City* (2000) and the *Aberdeen Agenda: Commonwealth Principles on Good Practice for Local democracy and Good Governance* (2005) [www.clgf.org.uk](http://www.clgf.org.uk);
- at the international level, the *Charter of Educating Cities* (2004) [www.edcities.org](http://www.edcities.org).

For an overview of International Human Rights Instruments, please consult: [http://portal.unesco.org/shs/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=6896&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/shs/en/ev.php-URL_ID=6896&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

### UNESCO & "Urban Policies and the Right to the City"

The "Right to the City" is not a new concept for UNESCO. The term was first formalized in October 1995 at a UNESCO Round Table, "Towards the City of Solidarity and Citizenship". Participants at this event stressed the need to establish solidarity and create multicultural cities, to commit to the humanization of the urban environment and to make urban dwellers aware of their rights. Since then, the Social and Human Sciences Sector at UNESCO has been actively engaged in stimulating international comparative research on the formulation and implementation of new urban policies taking into account UNESCO strategy on Human Rights approved in 2003 and the UNESCO "Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity" approved in 2001.

### UN-HABITAT & "Urban Policies and the Right to the City"

In 1999, UN-HABITAT launched the Global Campaign on Urban Governance in support of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda goal of "sustainable human settlements development in an urbanizing world". The theme of the campaign is the "Inclusive City", which promotes growth and equity by empowering all inhabitants -regardless of their economic means, gender, race, ethnicity or religion- to participate fully in opportunities that cities offer. The "Right to the City" could well become an appropriate topic for advocacy by the Global Campaign for Urban Governance.

## The Launching of a Joint International Research Project

While national and international initiatives are substantial in remit, an international consolidated approach to inclusive urban legislation and governance has yet to be conceptualised. As a first step towards filling this gap, UNESCO and UN-HABITAT have recently joined hands in launching an international comparative research initiative on "Urban Policies and the Right to the City".

This project was launched at an international public debate on 18 March 2005, held at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, and was followed by two UNESCO/UN-HABITAT working group meetings. The first Working Group meeting was held in September 2005 at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris and the second took place in March 2006 at the Barcelona Municipality. Both enjoyed the support of multiple international NGOs.

### A Joint Working Group on "Urban Policies and the Right to the City"

A Working Group has been created with experts of different regions and from various fields of competence. The UN-HABITAT/UNESCO Working Group includes academics, researchers, city professionals from local, national, regional and international level, civil servants from cities such as Montréal, Lyon, Barcelona, etc. and international NGOs such as International Association of Educating Cities/IAEC ([www.edcities.org](http://www.edcities.org)), Commonwealth Local Government Forum/CLGF ([www.clgf.org.uk](http://www.clgf.org.uk)), Huairou Commission ([www.huairou.org](http://www.huairou.org)), International Social Science Council/ISSC ([www.unesco.org/ngo/issc](http://www.unesco.org/ngo/issc)), UNESCO Centre of Catalonia/UNESCOCAT ([www.unescocat.org](http://www.unescocat.org)), and observers such as United Cities and Local Governments/UCLG ([www.cities-localgovernments.org](http://www.cities-localgovernments.org)), Metropolis ([www.metropolis.org](http://www.metropolis.org)) and the European Community Initiative Programme URBACT ([www.urbact.org](http://www.urbact.org)).

### Major issues identified since March 2005

- There are two different interpretations of the "Right to the City" concept: a legal one, in which all areas are affected, e.g. the *City Statute of Brazil*; and a more value-based interpretation, in which the "Right to the City" concept is not exhaustive but understood rather in the spirit of a global rights-based approach to urban policy making, which is applied to various specific themes, e.g. the international *Charter of Educating Cities*.
- The content of the "Right to the City" concept is crossing-cutting and applies to different institutional levels. It only becomes a reality when thematic considerations are taken into account in reference to specific policies at specific institutional levels. The *Montréal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities* embraces, for example, several themes included in the concept "Right to the City" at municipal level, e.g. the respect for human dignity, equality, inclusion, tolerance and justice.
- The various themes identified until now, include: Gender, Migrants, Children, Youth and the Elderly, Law and Urban Planning, Urban Governance and Democracy (Cities as the Breeding Places of Democracy & Participatory Democracy), "Civic Cosmopolitanism" (Urban Cultural Diversity & Inter-Religious Dialogue in Cities), Decent and Dignified Existence within Cities, Urban Law Promoting Inclusion, Social Cohesion and Competitiveness, Rights and Responsibilities of both Municipalities and Urban Dwellers, and Solidarity between Urban Dwellers.

### What UNESCO & UN-HABITAT have achieved so far

- The creation of a UNESCO Chair on "Urban Policies and Citizenship" by the Lyon Consortium of Research Institutes (including Universities such as Lyon, Montpellier, Mexico, Montréal, Tunis, Beirut, Santiago de Chile, etc.) which will analyse existing normative tools and initiatives, launch annual training workshops for Mayors and provide a platform of knowledge transfer for researchers and decision makers on "Urban Policies and Citizenship"
- The organization of public debates on "Urban Policies and the Right to the City" and the publication of their proceedings. (March/September 2005) Download the file with the proceedings at: [www.unesco.org/shs/urban/rttc](http://www.unesco.org/shs/urban/rttc)
- A consultation process incorporating the participation of major international city NGOs, such as IAEC and CLGF, within the bi-annual Working Group meetings.