



# HABITAT III REGIONAL REPORT FOR THE UNECE REGION

## TOWARDS A CITY-FOCUSED, PEOPLE- CENTRED AND INTEGRATED APPROACH TO THE NEW URBAN AGENDA

DRAFT '0'

Brian M Evans, Regional Report Writer to UN Habitat & UNECE  
12 September 2015





## NOTES TO THE READER

*Please read these notes and the accompanying narrative before reviewing 'DRAFT 0'*

This document contains an initial 'flat' and 'dirty' draft of the putative content for the UNECE Regional Report to Habitat III. It is preceded by a brief narrative – an augmented contents list that in turn implies a suggested 'storyline' for the document as the process of drafting proceeds to the next and subsequent stages. These documents have both been prepared in light of the following:

We know 5 things:

- There is a draft structure disseminated by H3S in April;
- Dr Clos favours concentration on a few key issues that express the 'DNA' of the UN Region;
- We have identified a putative list of these UNECE key issues at the Geneva EGM in July;
- The emerging draft needs to concentrate on the evolution and elaboration of these key issues within the overall H III structure (and H III website material);
- The thinking and the document should be city-focused, reveal a people-centred and integrated process – and be concise, well-illustrated and readable.

This initial draft is preceded by a brief narrative. Both have been prepared following:

- consideration of the Habitat III draft structure for the Regional Reports (April 2015), H III telephone briefing and website material;
- the principal issues for UNECE identified by the Second Expert Group meeting (July 2015);
- a preliminary reading and editing of the sub-regional reports and national reports (where available);
- meetings with UNECE divisions and reference to UN charters, policies and research although referencing – especially to SDGs – is inadequate.

***The narrative and the draft do not yet join up*** but have been prepared in parallel. The draft is a 'flat' edit of the 3 sub-regional reports (EU/EFTA, the RCCA and South East Europe (Western Balkans, Turkey & Israel) and the US draft national report.

The draft is a 'flat' and 'dirty' document because it simply gathers passages of text from the sub-region source documents through a 'cut and paste' process. However these texts are gathered and grouped together into a structure that reflects on the H III draft and seeks to illuminate the key issues (where the material exists to so do).

This could have taken to the next level of editorial but, apart from lack of time, I was reluctant to do this since I am keen that colleagues consider what has been assembled to date in the sub-regional reports and reflect where the strengths, weaknesses and omissions are. So as yet, the draft has an implicit structure but no flow or hierarchy or, to put this another way, it does not read smoothly from point to point (there are discontinuities and non-sequiturs), nor does it yet distinguish between the primary and secondary (and tertiary) issues of the whole (or the main issues and supporting issues). ***It needs to be subjected to further analysis and synthesis to move from a sum of parts to a whole*** for the UNECE RR that is supported by sub-regional 'colour', commonalities, differences and externalities where appropriate.

However the document does let the reader consider the material that has assembled to date within





some form of context and hopefully therefore enable those coming to the EGM to contribute to an informed discussion on the content and help shape a facilitated and consensual view on where to place the emphasis on content as I proceed with analysis, synthesis, writing and editorial to take the document to the next level. For this reason; the document is described as 'Draft 0'.

The short 'narrative' below however, does attempt to abstract key points and put them together as a series of bullet point conclusions as a form of annotated contents for the document. They are not as yet all documented in the text of Draft 0 but are implicit in source documents, EGM discussions and reflections from UN Habitat and UNECE colleagues. The narrative is offered as a 'straw man' for the UN Habitat/UNECE core group to engage with as a starting point for discussion with the experts at the forthcoming EGM in Brussels. The intention would be to use the deconstruction and re-assembly of the narrative as a brief for me to continue with in future writing and editorial and also to help identify omissions that the sub-regional authors and other consultants (e.g. Orna Rosenfeld) may then put their immediate effort into filling these gaps or refining passages of text related to their own expertise.

As yet the document has no illustrations, no bibliography and the footnote system has been (almost) shot to pieces by the 'digital scissors'. I propose to arrive at the EGM with a schedule of illustrations and I have been assembling candidate illustrations as I work. I will come with these in my draft PPT for the EGM – again to stimulate discussion at the EGM. To this end, and with the advice of Jean-Christophe along the way, I have called for tables of cities to be prepared for each sub-region of the UNECE (a blank is attached to the document). The idea is that the contents of these tables should be used as city source material to rebalance the emphasis in the text away from countries and more towards cities themselves, thereby honouring the proposition that the final regional report is city-focused. I cannot be sure, but I suspect that Dr Clos wisely believes that if the emphasis of Habitat III is focused on cities rather than on countries, it may well be possible to achieve greater consensus around the 'new urban agenda'. I know from my own strategic work in major cities within very different jurisdictions that there are many commonalities and considerable consensus about the key issues facing cities and the methods and tools needed to address these.

Finally, it is my view that if we can undertake the facilitated discussion on content that I refer to above at the forthcoming EGM in Brussels, then I would be able to prepare a follow-up document 'First Draft' within two weeks of the meeting which would allow a first draft of the regional report to be issued more widely for consultation by – say – Friday October 16.

**A note on words, length and size of completed book.** If we assume 5 core chapters of 3000-5000 words (this narrative has 4 but I believe that 'economy, equity and life' including housing may be too large for one chapter and will be split into 2) accompanied by an introduction and conclusions or 2000-3000 words, this will result in a manuscript of around 25,000 words excluding appendices. If this is liberally illustrated with maps, photographs, diagrams and info-graphics, the resulting document is likely to extend to somewhere between 150 and 200 pages in an A4 (or 'quarto' or similar format) document.





## **HABITAT III REGIONAL REPORT FOR THE UNECE REGION DRAFT NARRATIVE OF CONTENT (15 September 2015)**

### **Introduction – The Character and personality of the UNECE**

- There are 56 member states with X00 million inhabitants almost all of whom live between the tropic of Cancer and the Arctic Circle; It is the global north.
- There are 4 distinct sub-regions within the UNECE: North America – the USA & Canada; the countries of the European Union and the European Free Trade Association, the former CIS countries of Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia with Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine.

### **Urbanization in UNECE – Cities and Super-cities**

- The UNECE is urbanizing ... fast!
- In addition to the process of urbanization there is also a trend toward urban concentration.
- The UNECE contains many of the worlds 'super-cities' – polycentric megalopolis or urban agglomerations – the Boston-Washington Corridor, the European Dynamic Banana, the Moscow and Istanbul agglomerations, and the Great Lakes corridor. These and a few others in the USA are home to X00 million people – X% of the UNECE
- There is widespread recognition of, support for and work towards the compact city, but in spite of this sprawl persists as an issue that erodes urban quality, social equity and the sustainable management of the urban environment and the urban hinterland
- Urbanisation can often result in high housing costs leading to crises of affordability especially in large metropolitan areas where housing markets can become over-heated leading to increasing social housing lists (New York City 347,500; 354,000 in Greater London and 550,000 in Paris (Ile-De-France)).
- Sprawl is a consequence of informal settlement, but only in part, it is also an issue of transition from centrally planned to market economies and it is also a consequence of over-heating markets in the noughties and the great depression and financial crisis of 2008-12
- Informal settlement is a current issue throughout the RCCA countries, Turkey and to a certain extent the Western Balkans and to a lesser extent in converging eastern European countries.
- Informal settlement is often better than the accommodation it replaces but fails to deliver on social, transport and environmental infrastructure contributes to sprawl and presents the governance authorities with challenges for a massive infrastructure retro-fit.

### **Economy, Equity & Quality of Life**

- The population of the UNECE is growing very slowly, not at all or declining. Fertility is low and ageing is increasing – people are living longer but not always better and the Region will need some 50 million new people in the next 20-50 years to sustain itself.
- There has been and is a structural transition from centrally planned to market economy throughout eastern Europe, the Western Balkans and the countries of the greater Russia, Caucasus and Central Asia region
- Wealth is increasing across the UNECE but so is inequality – prosperity gaps, gender gaps and inter-generational gaps abound.
- Social equity is the principal issue facing the cities of the UNECE in the next 20 years. As we approach Habitat III, the UNECE is a region of the world where equality has decreased and





inequality increased in the 20 years since Habitat II. *According to the UNECE Social Housing Study housing is the least affordable human right of all. At least 100 million low and middle-income people in the UNECE region are housing cost overburdened and spend more than 40 per cent of their disposable income on housing*

- Huge steps have been made with urban poverty and urban regeneration in the 20 years since Habitat II, but new urban and suburban poverties are emerging, there is a lack of social housing and accessibility and affordability remains a clear and present challenge.
- Generally the cities of the UNECE fair well in terms of human rights but there is no cause for complacency
- There has been a huge step forward in digital life - the movement, speed, capacity the internet of things and the collective commons are morphing economies, but ...
- ... there is a digital divide that reflects income and social inequalities.
- UNECE economies and cities are well-placed to continue to ride the benefits of the digital revolution. Cities are mastering metadata and putting it to constructive use for and access by of cities, citizens and businesses – cities like New York and Helsinki are leading the way with open source development for democracy, the citizen, quality of life and business development.

#### **Environment, Climate Change – Energy & Risk, Water & Air**

- Two thirds of the greatest lakes of the world (23 of 35) and half of the greatest rivers (27 of 54) lie in the UNECE. These great river and lake systems within the UNECE account for over half of the world's fresh water. These lakes and rivers are home to complex systems of cities that share ecologies and exposure to environmental risk
- The UNECE encircles the Arctic Ocean – all of the Arctic Signatories are member states of the UNECE
- The UNECE is home to the boreal forest – 25% of the worlds forest cover and larger that the Brazilian Rain Forest, the 'taiga' is a vast green blanket, carbon sink and oxygen engine.
- The UNECE is well-provided for in terms of natural resources and yet the quality of water and air in cites – what we drink and breath – is variable and frequently below tolerable standards.
- Adaptation to and mitigation of climate change is a clear and present issue across the UNECE and there is growing awareness of the need for integrated thinking in pursuit of the climate change agenda particularly related to emissions reduction, however ...
- ... there is as yet no comprehensive drive to a systemic transition towards the green economy
- Environmental risk and the potential disaster is not a region wide but locally concentrated and
- Agriculture – and a growing awareness of the relationship between cities and the food supply
- The UNECE is transitioning to a new energy system with a different role for utilities with a shift from fossil fuels to new technologies
- Access to energy is about quality, affordability and reliability and these vary greatly across the UNECE. However there are very few people 'off-grid' compared to other UN regions.

#### **Governance – Movement & Planning**

- The is substantial evidence of economic and social damage from climate change and natural and human-induced disasters and addressing challenges of climate change and disaster risk reduction remains a priority for regional and urban government in the short, medium and long term





- There is a move to 'smart cities' with smart infrastructure and smart services including: Data & communications infrastructure, on-site combined heat and power; District Heating, Distributed Renewables, LED street lighting, Energy from waste, Energy efficient building retrofits, Low carbon public transport fleets, Electric vehicles and charging;
- 'Smart cities' are a current preoccupation but there is widespread recognition that 'sustainable', 'smart', and 'resilient' are 3 vertical or 'cross-cutting' themes in urbanism reflecting a transition since Habitat II from sectoral or siloed thinking to an integrated and 'people-centred' approach underpinning the thinking and practice of urbanism towards Habitat III and beyond
- Increasingly city government is attempting to *finance new infrastructure, design innovative financial mechanisms* so that others can follow and mobilise private investment to bring about change.
- There are significant differences in the movement systems of the UNECE sub-regions – whether inter- and intra-urban or inter- and intra-regional transportation.

## Conclusions

