

Voluntary Metropolitan Review UNECE SDG Forum 2023 Side Event

Contributing to achieving SDG 11 of the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda by imagining the way forward for metropolitan areas characterized by the co-existence of different territorial areas with their own political mandate and institutions.

The 2030 Agenda addresses the future of cities and human settlement. Specifically, SDG 11: Making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. This event addressed the following target:

SDG 11.a: Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning.

This side event sought to inform the audience about the success and challenges in implementing the SDGs of three cities – Barcelona, Geneva, and Strasbourg.

Speakers:

Dr. Raymond Saner, Director CSEND, Geneva & Titular Professor em, University of Basel
Bárbara Pons-Giner, Architect, PhD in Urban Planning, Commissioner for the 2030 Agenda
Barcelona City Council & Ramon Canal Oliveras, Director, Technical Cabinet, 2030 Agenda
Panos Mantziaras, Director Braillard Foundation for Architecture, Geneva
Yves Zimmerman, Project Director, City and Eurométropole, Strasbourg

Programme:

Introductory Remarks – Raymond Saner
Barcelona – Bárbara Pons-Giner
Geneva – Panos Mantziaras
Strasbourg – Yves Zimmerman

UNECE Side Event: Voluntary Metropolitan Review Summary

Agenda Topics

1. Introduction – Raymond Saner

This panel introduces a new form of review: the Voluntary Metropolitan Review (VMR). Metropolitan areas, according to the OECD, are cities with population between 500 thousand and 1.5 million people. They can be agglomerations of separate cities which have been integrated into a larger urban area. The separate areas retain autonomy which can make it difficult for the metropolitan area as a whole to coordinate sustainable growth and other functions of city government.

2. Principles of the Barcelona 2030 Agenda – Bárbara Pons-Giner

- 2.1. Barcelona's principles towards actions for the implementation of the SDGs are collaborative, comprehensive, daring, transparent, committed to action, and restricted to the municipality of Barcelona. Currently, the metropolitan area is preparing for a midterm review in September 2023 to better align with the UN agenda. They have elaborated for every target a political target, context, operational target, key indicators, source, and displayed it through a graph.
- 2.2. The impacts are broad and include the improvement of planning and standardization of reporting, and the fostering of applied innovation in sustainability topics.

- 2.3. Shortcomings are that the 2030 agenda is still marginal within the Barcelona city council, the budgetary alignment to the SDGs are ex post, and the Barcelona VLR only applies to the municipality and not the greater metropolitan area.
- 2.4. The Strategic Metropolitan Plan of 2030 has 8 missions: Innovative and inclusive economy, fair income levels, environmental and climate emergency, sustainable and safe mobility, healthy food, territorial cohesion, proper housing, and cultural vitality.
- 2.5. The New Metropolitan Plan focuses on the preservation of the function and services of the metropolitan ecosystem; recovery of urban structures and continuity to configure a metropolitan city of proximity; urban regeneration; and ecological, social, and technological transition.
- 2.6. There is potential for the EU mission of creating 100 climate-neutral cities by 2030 to collaborate with the metropolitan area of Barcelona.
- 2.7. Barcelona's limitations:
 - Limited resources caused Barcelona to evaluate each target's status and concentrate on the ones that are within the municipal competence. This has led to prioritizing 20 targets
 - There is no clear middle level government to lead vast change yet. The metropolitan authority is functional for transportation and waste and tends to be reactive rather than forward thinking.

3. Prospective Visions for Greater Geneva: Inhabiting the City-Landscape of the 21st Century – Panos Mantziaras

Sustainable Development is not a project. It is a stable long-term condition. Rather, the ecological transition is the project

- 3.1. The Themes of the Greater Geneva 2050 visions are
 - Reducing overall consumption for 2050
 - How to propose a space that is not constrained by individual mobility?
 - How to recreate a web of eco-systemic service provision?
 - What mix of public spaces will correspond to the aspirations of resident populations and to future changes?

Ideas

- 3.2. The Metabolism of the Invisibles brought a new understanding of the geography and sociology and Geneva based on the invisible networks of the area.
- 3.3. The Greater Geneva and its Soil spread out from Geneva to allocate green spaces and construction spaces.
- 3.4. Resource realms sought to build urban solidarity and community.
- 3.5. Energy landscape repurposed the airport as a green area, and proposed hybrid energy buildings.
- 3.6. Soil and Work, combined living and producing food with services, leisure, and industry.

- 3.7. Greater Geneva Metropolis was a ring city around Geneva.
- 3.8. Greater Geneva Crossing proposed highlighted idiosyncratic spaces in Geneva.

Future Defense Systems against Climate Change

- 3.9. There needs to be a reckoning with the negative impacts of climate change. How do we decide what fortifications to build? How do we decide the winners and losers when we fortify cities? Building a defense system may be as costly as developing the city itself and can come at the expense of some, therefore it is important to reckon the costs of climate change that we are facing while considering the investments for developing sustainably.

Development is not a project. It is a condition. Rather, the transition is the project.

4. Strasbourg – Yves Zimmerman

Strasbourg's vision reflected the SDGs before the 2030 agenda was implemented. In 2008, the city reflected: what is the balance of greening the city versus greying the city? In 2008, the mayor decided to stop urban sprawl.

- 4.1. There was a Refurbishment of the city with a neighborhood called Echo that had affordable housing, offices, school, nursing homes, and shops. This was part of a process of thinking, planning, and building ecological transition to implement the climate action plan 2030. This extended public action on ecological urbanism.
- 4.2. The EMS climate plan has 8 objectives to be achieved by 2030:
 - Eliminate fossil fuel usage in the territory's Low emission Zone by 2030.
 - Reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40% by 2030.
 - 40% of final energy consumption produced by renewable sources, 100% by 2050.
 - Limit the share of car transportation to 30%.
 - Renovate 8000 homes per year to be low-consumption, half should be low-income households.
 - Strive to reduce water usage by 20%.
 - Half the tonnage of landfill trash.

There are 154 signatories representing many different stakeholders from developers, citizens, and planners.

- 4.3. While assessing whether these goals were ambitious enough it was important to consider the limitations that Strasbourg faced. It is hard to engage people, the government may run slowly, and there is a tendency to revert to normality after a few years of implementing a program.

5. Further discussion

- 5.1. It is important to consider territorial balance in a metropolitan area. Cities can be the center of research and innovation, community, and consumption while heavy industries move outside the metropolitan area. This causes imbalance in economic activity. Even with

renewable energy, there is the issue of no return to the land of the past. For example: photovoltaic and wind farms are used to power cities, but they bring much less return to the land that they inhabit. With a fixation on achieving the SDGs in metropolitan areas, the development of neighbouring rural areas can easily be ignored.

- 5.2. Consensus in the journey towards achieving the SDGs may be hard to achieve. In an emergency, much like in war, widespread consensus may be sacrificed to achieve the goals of survival. Democracy is possible when there exists something to share. However, with the increasing costs of climate change, society might give less choice to people. However, the process should still aim to include people and collaboration in the process. When considering the necessary sacrifices for sustainability, it is important to make sure that whoever sacrifices has a chance to benefit in the future.

6. Conclusion

The speakers touched on various aspects of metropolitan areas' shared responsibility towards achieving the SDGs. The key is collaboration between the governing bodies present in and around the center of metropolis. Achieving balanced and sustainable growth can be achieved through planning and collaboration and creating a common vision while embracing local solutions at the same time. Furthermore, ecological, economic, and social transformation depends on imagination going beyond the normal day-to-day habitual behavior.

However, this transformative process is not without limitation. The existing capacities for collaboration of governing bodies constituting a metropolitan area need to improve. Without this, metropolitan areas will sacrifice balanced growth and perpetuate inequalities, or they may not be able to implement innovative solutions outside the city centre of a metropolitan area. The envisioned transformation will have its pains. Certain sections of society may lose in the short run, but collaborative measures must ensure that they can benefit at another point. The defense against the effects of climate change shows that the investment in sustainable development solutions must be matched with investment to protect against the damage that has already been done.

These are multidisciplinary issues that call for further exploration. How can metropolitan governance systems be adapted to respond to administrative demands of implementing innovative solutions? How can planners and design experts accommodate change in the way people move? Governance at the city level lends to call for more experimentation which gives opportunities to quickly determine what works and what fails. Highlighting these experiences at the international level would give the metropolitan community better direction and momentum.