



Sustainable and inclusive cities, a common challenge for Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean

*by Catherine Paquette Vassalli**

Due to the high level of urbanisation in Latin America and the Caribbean and Europe (in Latin America in particular, the urban population is already 80%), the future of societies in these two regions will be determined to a large extent by the type of development that will be achieved in the cities. We know that the issue of environmental sustainability has become more relevant. Although much remains to be done in this area (on topics as sensitive as air quality or the impacts of climate change), we can consider that significant progress has already been realised in many cities. The theme is a priority and is generating more and more forums and reflections around the world, integrating a growing number of actors from different horizons, which is encouraging. On the other hand, the problem of social inclusion, that is, the social side of the sustainable city, is often less discussed. However, in order to achieve a viable transition of cities towards greater sustainability, "without leaving anyone behind", as proposed by the New Urban Agenda adopted in Quito by the United Nations just two years ago, we know that progress will have to be made both socially and in the ecological and economic dimensions.

To address urban sustainability with emphasis on the social sphere, the EU-LAC Foundation and the Institute of the Americas, together with the French Development Agency, organized in Paris in late May 2018 the International Colloquium "Sustainable Cities, engine of social transformation in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean". The event included the participation of speakers from both regions, coming from very different perspectives: academics, experts, elected officials, development banks, and representatives of civil society. In particular, three key issues were identified as levers to achieve a transformation towards more sustainable and inclusive cities: access for all to basic urban goods and services; employment and shared economic prosperity; and culture in a broad sense, as a vector of social cohesion, which promotes coexistence and allows the participation of all in the co-production of the city.

Urban issues are presented differently in both regions. The incidence of poverty and social inequalities (and as a consequence, socio-spatial inequalities) is, for example, higher in Latin America and the Caribbean, as recalled by the Executive Secretary of ECLAC, Alicia Bárcena, who participated in the opening session of the event. However, there are shared problems between the two regions and the exchange of experiences can be very fruitful. The colloquium showed that progress could be made in the formulation of common guidelines for public policies towards the construction of more inclusive cities.



One of them is undoubtedly the guiding role of culture in a broad sense. This issue is not usually associated with the problem of the sustainable city. However, it has a great potential to transform cities and make them more inclusive, as shown by the experience of the Houses of Culture installed by the Mayor of Barranquilla in its low-income neighbourhoods, with the aim of involving marginalized youth.

Another key issue debated during the colloquium is the issue of the social and solidarity economy as a generator of shared economic prosperity, as well as the new business models linked to the sustainable city and its potential to create jobs. The existence of an important field of possible experimentation in this matter is evident, as evidenced by the examples of Madrid and Bilbao, the one of some Brazilian cities, as well as the case of Paris, in relation to its new climate action plan.

On the other hand, access to essential urban services remains a necessary condition to guarantee urban inclusion. As could be seen through the exposition of the cases of the city of Hamburg and its municipal companies, and the account of the experience of several cities in Bolivia, there is not a single "good" model of management in the matter (private? public?). The existence of strong political will on the part of governments to act in favour of access to these goods and services appear as the key determinant.

The book that is currently in the process of elaboration from the colloquium will allow the development of these themes along with others that emerged as key elements for the construction of sustainable cities that are also inclusive and that generate opportunities for all.¹

*Catherine Paquette Vassalli is Urbanist, researcher at the French Institute of Research for Sustainable Development (IRD)

This paper was prepared for the EU-LAC Foundation's Newsletter of September 2018 on the theme "Sustainable and Inclusive Cities as motors of social transformation". This article gives the views of the author, and not necessarily the position of the EU-LAC Foundation.

¹ This publication will be available soon on the Foundation's website, <https://eulacfoundation.org/en/search/ipaper>



EU-LAC Foundation
Fundación EU-LAC