

Building socially and environmentally sustainable territories

Charter of Responsibilities for habitants of urban-rural communities of the world

Preamble:

We, the representatives of inhabitants of the world's urban and rural territories, **certify that:**

1. the scale and irreversibility of the interdependencies formed between human beings, between societies, and between humanity and the biosphere constitute a radically new situation in the history of humanity, irrevocably transforming the latter into a common destiny;
2. the solidarity between the urban and rural territories of the world and their inhabitants is one way to express this common destiny;
3. The current development of urban and rural territories is based on the following factors: a heavy reliance on natural resources (in particular energy resources), the exaltation of individualism and competition, the transformation of common good into merchandise, the absence of partnership between participants and social segregation. The continuation of said development is therefore incompatible with social harmony, preserving the integrity of the planet and safeguarding the interests of future generations;
4. People can neither live in the sky, nor in the sea and have the right to be and remain on their land;
5. the scale of changes necessary nowadays for the construction and management of socially and ecologically sustainable cities is beyond our reach and requires the engagement of all people and public and private institutions, to cooperate in order to succeed;
6. the legal, political and financial methods for the management and control of public and private institutions does not encourage said institutions to take full social and ecological responsibility, indeed it pushes them towards irresponsibility;
7. the awareness of our shared responsibilities concerning societies and the planet is a survival requirement and an advancement for humankind;
8. our co-responsibility, beyond the conflicts of interest that arise between different participants involved in the production and management of cities, is to design ecologically and socially sustainable cities. In this way we preserve our unique and fragile planet, ensuring that major imbalances do not bring about ecological and social catastrophes that would affect peoples of the earth;
9. consideration of the interests of others and the community and the reciprocity between its members – from a neighbourhood to a worldwide context – form the basis of mutual trust, a sense of security and respect for the dignity of each member and of justice;
10. the proclamation of universal rights, particularly the rights to housing and to the city, is not enough, as these rights are ineffective when no single institution has the capacity to guarantee even the application conditions;
11. these observations require the adoption of the shared principles for responsibility by all urban and rural territories stakeholders, thus inspiring their behaviour and rules and creating the conditions for co-responsibility and a solid partnership between participants;

We proclaim our Charter of Responsibilities for habitants of territories of the world and we are committed to use it as the basis of our behaviour and relationship with other participants. This engagement can only be valuable if other actors from cities around the world – in particular public powers – take on their responsibilities using the same principles as a basis.

Co-responsibility principles on which we base our commitment

These commitments stem from both the points raised in the preamble and the implementation, in the case of cities, of the general principles of human responsibility such as they appear in the Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities. We ask that other city players, particularly regional authorities, become involved by adopting their own Charter of Responsibilities on the same basis.

1. We fully accept the awareness of a common human destiny. We are committed to continuing and developing international networks of inhabitants' organisations of the world as an expression of the profound solidarity shared by them. Said networks also demonstrate the duty of mutual aid and the sense of enrichment that we gain from discovering on a daily basis that, in spite of the great diversity of the situations in which we find ourselves, we can and must learn from one another. We are willing to provide all city stakeholders with what we have learned from these exchanges.

In view of States that speak the language of power and rivalry, as opposed to that of cooperation and solidarity, we maintain that the dialogue between the the communities of the world constitutes a true alternative globalisation, horizontal and cooperative. This is the case, provided that the numerous international meetings of leaders of regional authorities and experts make way for international meetings involving all city stakeholders, starting with inhabitants' organisations, in order for this common destiny to become a lived reality.

2. We affirm the unsustainable social and ecological character of current urban-rural territories development models. We note that within a given city the consumption of natural resources and fossil energy is not shared equally and that a large part of overconsumption and waste is due to the most privileged classes and not the poorer ones. We want to develop models of simplicity, optimal usage of available resources, circular economy and collaborative production, wherever there is scope for initiative, and we are committed to developing cooperative practices.

Concerning good and services – the available quantity of which is not a matter of human ingenuity but of the finite nature of the planet, the suns, water, fossil energy - it is not socially just or beneficial for the biosphere that they return without consideration to those who have no other justification for enjoying them than having the means to procure them on a supply and demand market. We universally defend, using words, examples and, if necessary, through protest, that only a quota system, indicating equal access for all to these scarce resources, is fair and effective. It is the responsibility of those who wish to use more than their share to purchase that of someone who, through their minimalism, does not take full advantage of their right to use these goods.

3. Given our certainty that only a balanced partnership between stakeholders would allow the creation and management of sustainable cities, by sharing of our experiences in different continents, we want to be the driving forces in our respective communities. We want to define the rules of a partnership whose quality and equitable nature could be the basis of dialogue, mutual trust and joint actions. We commit to scrupulously respecting the rules of the partnership, the formation of which we will have participated in.

We have already assumed our responsibilities with regards to our families and our immediate community. We take on our mutual responsibilities in solidarity and on an international scale through our Alliance. We are prepared to accept larger responsibilities in the production and management of the habitat, neighbourhoods and communities as a whole, provided that we have spaces for initiatives to do so. It must also be clearly displayed and accepted by all city stakeholders that the responsibilities of each one are exercised and assumed in proportion to their respective powers.

4. As leaders of inhabitants' organisations we recognise that, regardless of the way in which we were chosen, our legitimacy is based on the act of answering for our actions before those who are under our authority, that our actions are inspired by a concern for the common good and that we report in a transparent way. We believe that the legitimacy of public powers and other actors comes from the same concern for the common good. The rules enacted by public powers, in particular, are not legitimate and respectable if they are based on a value hierarchy: the universal right to inhabit the land and to have or build a dwelling, the right to dignity and initiative, the right to property only comes in third place and is subject proper use being made of the goods owned. We are committed to recognising the legitimacy and action of public powers if they consent to the principles of transparency and citizen control.

5. We recognise the need to take into account the immediate or delayed effects of our actions, to predict them and to compensate any damages, whether or not they were committed intentionally. We subscribe to a collective and long term learning perspective, aiming to better learn from and prevent possible damages. We call for public powers and universities to assist us and accompany us in this learning effort. We require that public powers and businesses demonstrate that they take on their responsibilities, in proportion to their power, by taking into account the immediate or delayed effects of their actions and by building on the international experience in order to learn to prevent possible damages.

6. Far from seeking to free ourselves from our responsibilities in the name of our powerlessness or our ignorance, we call loudly and clearly for the possibility of having the means and space for initiatives that allow us to take on greater responsibilities in the production and management of communities, without taking refuge in an attitude of protest or passive requests for assistance. We observe that the experience acquired over the last decades at an international level enables us, as inhabitants' organisations, to propose, in our cities, guiding principles that have been attested by various experiences in very different contexts. These principles should guide the evolution of working-class neighbourhoods or informal areas of communities and the delivery of basic services to all. We expect public powers to assume this responsibility by creating policies and regional government reforms with us, as these are necessary to practically implement the abovementioned guiding principles.

7. We maintain that a community, beyond the elements of which it is composed, is a common good. We invite other actors to investigate with us how to best manage this common good.

In the historic phase of rapid growth of the cities in which we find ourselves, which are generally fuelled by migration from the countryside or other countries, we know that there are no established and stable communities that are able to adopt an overall management of this common good. Nevertheless, supported by our own history and that of our neighbours, we believe we have an irreplaceable role to play in the welcome and long term integration of new arrivals into the city and society, provided that this responsibility is delegated to us and accompanied by adequate resources.

We also recognise that if community cannot be globally managed as common goods, we could define a multi-level governance providing considerable autonomous management spaces on a neighbourhood and community scale. We are therefore prepared to take responsibility for the development of a habitat, the neighbourhoods and the production units that make up the smaller communities that are learning to govern themselves.

We also affirm our commitment to contributing towards the management of urban-rural ecosystems, to actively participating in evaluating and monitoring the impact of our current habitat on ecosystems, provided that this analysis is not limited to poor communities, but involves the whole city and all social classes.