Continuity and Change

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INTRODUCTION

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen I am very pleased to have been invited to share with you some thoughts on the theme of continuity and change in cities with special reference to historic areas.

Culture is now recognized as an important dimension of development. Professor Amartya Sen has convincingly demonstrated this link from the standpoint of an economist and a philosopher. Culture and Development both embody concepts of continuity and change but attitudes vary regarding the value placed on the legacy of the past and the role this legacy should play in shaping the future.

Cultural continuity provides a coherent framework which can integrate change while providing anchors that shape identity and references that affect social behavior. The inability to manage change creates disruptions that tend to aggravate cleavages along ethnic, religious and class lines. It also affects governance in that it tends to encourage the transfer of imported models and the establishment of technocratic structures as an expedient solution. Yet devoid of cultural significance, these structures can neither motivate participation nor provide modes of empowerment and end up undermining the development of local institutions.

Dr. Ismail Serageldin has argued that the management of change in developing countries which have experienced sudden culturally disruptive transformations requires restoring the coherence of the socio-cultural framework so that it can evolve by incorporating new elements, adapting and responding to new challenges and generating new opportunities. This implies restoring some degree of continuity.

This presentation focuses on two major challenges to continuity confronting local authorities in both developing and developed countries: (1) Dealing with increasingly complex urban dynamics and (2) Coping with unprecedented mobility and large migratory flows. Both issues have been raised in the opening session.

Cultural Heritage in local development

Cities are the repository and the custodians of an important cultural heritage that change can either preserve or destroy. The value placed on significant features and landmarks transcends use value and embodies a mix of spiritual, intellectual and emotional references that give them an intrinsic value as a treasured legacy to be preserved for future generations.

In the face of fierce competition for the high tech, high value added industries, cities increasingly focus on quality of life and cultural assets to enhance their attractiveness. There is hardly a vision statement that does not refer to culture and strategic plans invariably include the development of cultural resources as a key objective. In this perspective, investing in the revitalization of their architectural and urbanistic heritage is a cornerstone of a strategy to enrich their cultural assets.

Europe has been a leader in integrating culture as a component of development. But it took decades for European countries to institutionalize an operational framework for concerted efforts among levels of government at safeguarding historic centers. This supportive framework is critical for rural communes and small towns whose survival hinges on their ability to retain and attract residents, businesses and tourists by offering a distinctive sense of place. Entrepreneurial communes can use these programs to reverse their decline such as Illiers Combray that marketed itself nationally based on Marcel Proust's childhood recollection of the place in his book *Du cote de chez Swann*. They even changed the name of the city and of the landmarks to fit the way in which they are referred to in the book.

Europe is also leading the movement to highlight the common heritage shared by a region or sub-region. The economic delineation of regions is overlaid by culturally defined spaces progressively broadening concepts of identity and heritage to encompass larger geographic territories from community to region. In France, this concept is reinforced by a jurisdictional entity, the "Pays", an interesting feature in local governance.

A. DEALING WITH INCREASINGLY COMPLEX URBAN DYNAMICS

The management of change in culturally sensitive areas reflects the ambivalences pervading attitudes towards continuity. Two key trends which reached an unprecedented magnitude in the 90's constitute serious challenges to continuity particularly in the developing world:

1) The economic restructuring brought by globalization which is increasing disparities in wealth and opportunity. This is generating massive population movements within countries and across transnational borders, thrusting people into culturally unfamiliar environments.

2) The constant onslaught of messages and images of mass culture propagated by the media which display new symbols and lifestyles associated with modernity status and achievement (high rises, sport cars, villas, appliances and computers) that tend to devalorize the old as representing obsolescence and backwardness.

The exodus of the more affluent residents from the historic districts signals the functional obsolescence of the built environment and its inability to accommodate rising expectations and new lifestyles. Neglect and misuse reinforce this negative image particularly among a youthful population eager to access the conveniences and opportunities that new technologies bring.

Revitalization strategies must be based on a thorough understanding of the urban dynamics as they affect each sector of the city and the historic areas as part of the larger whole. Connecting the historic center to the city beyond its boundaries, improving public space, promoting investment in economic activities and attracting people to visit the area contribute to change people's negative perceptions through direct interaction with the

heritage particularly among youth. Facilities with strong attraction power whether placed inside or at the edge of the historic area have a major impact which can be positive or negative. We will be discussing these strategies in the workshop tomorrow.

In Poland, conservation of the architectural and urbanistic heritage as a symbol of cultural continuity and ethnic identity is accepted policy at all levels of governance. Since 1992, the city of Lublin has been investing resources in the revitalization of its "old town" considered to be the image and pride of the city. Paradoxically, the housing administration views the historic buildings it manages to be of low quality and allocated the ill maintained units to poor families damaging the heritage and stigmatizing the residents. Since 1997 when this policy was stopped, rent deregulation and privatization are bringing about displacement, gentrification and the spread of commercial uses. The leadership is aware of the threat this trend represents. A well preserved historic area that houses mostly transients looses its soul as happened in the Vieux Carre of New Orleans.

Actors, Stakeholders and Strategic Partners

Decentralization and the growing role of the private sector and civil society have multiplied the categories of actors whose activities and decisions are transforming the natural landscape and the urban environment. Not every actor is a stakeholder and not every stakeholder is a custodian of the heritage. A couple of examples will clarify this point.

In Montpellier an agreement was reached among public and private strategic partners and local civic groups to revitalize the historic neighborhoods by restoring and adaptively reusing monuments and improving public space. The interventions gave the historic center a new image and attracted private investment in commercial activities, offices and housing. In the well located sites the new dynamic is fostering gentrification. In other sites displacement is substantially reduced and in older neighborhoods beyond the historic core, migrants of diverse origin continue to live in the upgraded areas.

In developing countries it is much more difficult to overcome the negative image of the old and reverse the cycle of deterioration and decay. Rent controls, lack of maintenance and the influx of rural migrants unable to adapt to urban settings compound the predicament of cities in their efforts to prevent the loss of their urbanistic heritage. The value attached to the civic and religious buildings ensures their preservation but other elements are allowed to decay.

Underlying the urban and social dynamics in any part of the city, there are layers of actors and stakeholders. Some are visible, others less visible but no less important and usually well connected politically. Cities in Latin America, particularly those with recognized world heritage have launched initiatives to revitalize their historic centers by improving public space and street facades and by controlling the chaotic proliferation of street vendors and concentrating them in designated market areas. Street vendors are part of organizations that provide them with wares and protection. In Mexico City, the political protectors keep interfering with efforts to rehabilitate the historic center. The

resident population is being displaced by warehousing and storage. Vendors proudly display the color code of their protector on their cloth umbrellas. The public and private sector could not agree on a joint action plan and are working in parallel. Both have scored successes but overall coordination is lacking.

Direct public interventions, sustained outreach, community organization and strong incentives are needed to signal official commitment and incite property owners to rehabilitate their buildings. Sustainable strategies must restore use value and livability in order to retain the upwardly mobile middle class and attract a balanced mix of socio economic groups.

In Tunis, the Municipality relocated rural migrants crowding in dilapidated historic buildings to areas outside the Medina. Unsafe structures are being consolidated or demolished and private owners allowed to rebuild. Elsewhere owners are authorized to add floors to their properties up to a maximum height of three storeys. Simple design guidelines ensure compatibility between the old and the new. Adaptive reuse fosters the continuity of the architectural and urbanistic tradition of the Medina. Progressively, it is being revitalized and its social balance restored.

Can disrupted continuity be restored?

This is the challenge that the new Bibliotheca Alexandrina in Alexandria, Egypt has taken on. The magnificent modern building designed by the Norwegian architect Snohetta carries the name of its ancient predecessor destroyed by wars and religious zealots 1,600 years ago. It is located at the edge of the ancient site currently under the waters of the Mediterranean Sea. The new library performs the same functions: a repository of knowledge, a beacon of enlightment and a forum for the exchange of ideas in the contemporary world. It is a living building where citizens and visitors can relink with a distant glorious past as they walk through the museums, the exhibits, the stacks and the internet archive.

B. COPING WITH UNPRECEDENTED MOBILITY AND LARGE MIGRATORY FLOWS IN BOTH SENDING AND RECEIVING COUNTRIES

Massive population movements are adding new layers of complexity to urban dynamics. The willingness of migrants to endure deprivation in order to save leads them to live in conditions of overcrowding and lack of amenities that other city dwellers would reject. They contribute to the growth of slums and the dilapidation of the built environment in older areas. Their influx sets in motion a sequence of intra urban movements altering the character of the different neighborhoods. Local authorities have to simultaneously upgrade deteriorated areas and revitalize the historic centers. To succeed they must demonstrate commitment and generate resources

To reverse the cycle of disinvestment and decay in the historic business center, Sao Paulo is improving public space and refurbishing vacant buildings for social housing. The City Hall and administrative offices were moved back to the center. The move signaled the

city's commitment to the revitalization effort and stemmed the exodus of banks and other businesses from the area. A productive dialogue with the private sector is now taking place.

The IADB estimates that overall Latin American municipalities cannot subsidize more than 25% of the cost of revitalizations programs (less than one third of the comparable subsidies in Western Europe). The balance must be generated from the various stakeholders. Property owners, investors, businesses, residents and NGOs concerned with the preservation of the cultural heritage. Partnership is the only feasible option not only in Latin America but everywhere else too.

The historic center of Cuenca, Ecuador is a World Heritage Site. Since 1999 the area has experienced high out migration. Labor shortages have triggered an influx of Peruvians willing to work for lower wages and needing cheap accommodations in central locations. Investment in rental housing has become a highly lucrative option. Local developers and Ecuadorian migrants in the US and EU are driving the conversion of traditional courtyard houses "conventillos" into tenements setting in motion the cycle of abuse and deterioration that is eroding the historic fabric. Upgrading the infrastructure may prove insufficient to change this dynamic as long as tenements remain the most profitable use of the residential building stock in the center.

Coping with rapid economic growth

Rapid change associated with an improvement in living conditions brings a sense of exhilaration. The faster the pace of change the greater the challenge to continuity. As China pursues a strategy of high economic growth, coastal cities are clearing the older neighborhoods judged to be unfit with the image and requirements of a new age. Growing disparities among regions and cities have sent millions of migrants from the interior to these booming cities. Estimated at over 200 million, this floating population sends remittances to their hometowns and villages while seeking to meet the city's requirements for urban residence status thereby fueling demand for lower priced housing.

Unfortunately, enthusiasm for new development only starts to be tempered by a degree of apprehension regarding the loss of continuity when a few remnants of the heritage remain to be saved as happened in Singapore or in the Gulf states. China has a window of opportunity to act but cities have to be convinced that the old is not a blight tarnishing their image and that the continuity of their urbanistic tradition adds to the quality of their living environment.

Driven by an image of modernity and development inspired by the mega-projects in the West, the Shanghai government is releasing large parcels of land emptied of residents and buildings to big developers to erect huge towers. This policy carried out on a massive scale is changing the character of the city as well as its skyline and destroying its older neighborhoods. A private developer restored of a block of traditional "Shikumen" courtyard houses and reused them as an upscale retail and entertainment complex. The popularity among affluent residents and visitors demonstrated the viability of adaptive

reuse that can ensure a degree of continuity despite the frenetic pace of development. The designers are now proposing to create a mixed use waterfront environment along the Suzhou Creek by renovating and reusing the 2 Km stretch of warehouses and row houses instead of replacing them with a concrete wall of mega towers.

Within 100 Km of Shanghai, Suzhou's historic gardens and canals are recognized world heritage and a major tourist destination. The historic center is now threatened by insensitive development around the site and by the exodus of original residents who move out and convert their houses into tenements. A privately funded proposal would restore a historic neighborhood and create a cultural tourism complex. Whether the current planned projects will be able to counter the negative image that local officials and citizens have of the old is open to question.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Professor Amartya Sen has discussed how cultural traditions, education, travel and the experience of growing up, living and working in different places, countries and continents combine in shaping identity.

Cities offer a unique exposure to different architectural and urbanistic settings, diverse historical and cultural expressions shaped by the legacy of the past, the opportunities of today and the outlook to the future. Reaction to these multiple exposures provides links enabling people and particularly youth to develop a frame of reference where layers of interpretation can and should be cumulative and non exclusive. Well interpreted diversity is culturally enriching and creates an appreciation of continuity that is also welcoming of change.

Governance and in particular social inclusion programs should have a strong cultural component to overcome the negative impacts of dislocation and exclusion. Such a component would counteract the propagation of narrow views and prejudices distorting the definition of identity and cultural continuity in a new socio economic context and a different urban setting by:

- Dispelling misleading notions of incompatibilities and misrepresentations that devalue the heritage produced by older generations and other cultures.

- Reinterpreting the heritage in a way that is meaningful to socially and culturally diverse groups.

- Creating interaction between groups living in the same urban space in order to enhance appreciation of shared values and aspirations.

A world view of cultural heritage transcends differences among ethnic, religious and economic groups who live and work in historic centers today. Heritage can be shared by diverse groups even as they experience it and value it differently.

Governance and participatory processes in local planning and management must relate to culturally meaningful concepts of representation and empowerment derived from the way people define their identity and their affiliations within the social and political order. Providing a meaningful cultural framework for ensuring continuity with change is a key component of governance for urban change.

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