

Harmonious Human Settlements in the Light of the Principles of Ekistics

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Abstract

Confronted with mounting challenges such as rapid urbanization, global living disparities, climate change, natural disasters, the recent upheaval of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Ukrainian-Russian War, the United Nations and other international entities have redirected their focus towards fostering resilient, democratic, cohesive, sustainable, and digital societies. This paradigm shift necessitates a global partnership to conserve, protect, and restore the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystem. Amid these complex issues, the Ekistics principles provide a comprehensive framework, advocating for harmonious urbanization and balanced territorial development. These principles prioritize the incorporation of ethical, social, environmental, and economic considerations into urban planning and governance processes. Nevertheless, critics argue that sustaining the capitalist system poses a challenge to achieving harmonious settlements, balanced urbanization, and the preservation of natural, environmental, and cultural values. This paper underscores the significance and relevance of Ekistics principles in shaping the discourse around Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It contends that revolutionary changes in globalization, communications technology, and industrial development mandate a reevaluation of existing approaches to address the most pressing global issues and their potential solutions. By highlighting the Ekistics principles, this article contributes to a nuanced understanding of the intricate dynamics shaping urban living in the contemporary era. The analysis aims to stimulate a reorientation of prevailing strategies and policies, fostering a more sustainable and harmonious trajectory for global urbanization.

Keywords: SDGs, Ekistics, sustainability, harmonious urbanization, balanced territorial development.

Introduction

We currently inhabit a world markedly distinct from that of the 1960s and 1970s, undergoing revolutionary transformations in communication technology and industrial development. These changes have profoundly shaped social, economic, and political aspects of life. Both material and non-material conditions have been significantly impacted by the ongoing process of globalization. The globe continues to grapple with challenges arising from this transformation, prompting nations and international organizations to seek ways to mitigate social and economic costs while enhancing profitability. Among the critical issues yet to be resolved are suboptimal living conditions worldwide, the degradation of environmental quality, and the repercussions of irrational and conflicting settlement policies. By providing an understanding of harmonious settlements and focusing on Ekistics principles, this article contributes depth to the understanding of the intricate dynamics shaping contemporary urban life. The analysis aims to stimulate a reconsideration of current approaches and policies, fostering a more sustainable and harmonious trajectory for global urbanization.

Understanding Harmonious Settlements

In contrast to the unbalanced, disorderly, unhealthy, and unplanned urbanization, harmonious urbanization is characterized by features diametrically opposed to those

of its counterpart. Essential attributes of harmonious urban settlements encompass pristine, well-maintained, and habitable environmental conditions, coupled with economic characteristics that mitigate high rates of unemployment and disguised unemployment. It is undeniable that contemporary challenges such as global warming and climate change necessitate the inclusion of resilience against such risks and natural disasters as integral components of harmonious human settlements.

In order to go further into the details of the concept of harmonious human settlements, one can delineate its inseparable components as announced in the general information sheet of the 4th World Urban Forum (UN Habitat, 2008). The six fundamental types of harmonious urban settlements according to this classification are (i) socially harmonious cities, (ii) economically harmonious cities, (iii) environmentally harmonious cities, (iv) spatially harmonious cities, (v) historically harmonious cities and (vi) harmonious cities for all age groups. Socially harmonious cities are those where equity, inclusiveness, income, poverty reduction and land and social housing are the most striking characteristics. Similarly, infrastructure development, financing urban development, direct foreign investment, urban informal economy attract the attention as the characteristics of economically harmonious cities. As to the particularities of environmentally harmonious cities, one can mention the concepts of climate change, energy and resources savings, bio-diversity, water, sanitation and transport, green buildings and cities as their basic components.



Urban planning, urban and rural linkage, integrated regional development and mixed land use are the main attributes of the spatially harmonious cities. Such features as the protection of heritage, cultural and architectural assets and urban renewal characterize the main traits of historically harmonious cities. Finally, harmonious cities for all age groups are naturally identifiable as urban settlements where much needed emphasis is put on the protection of youth, the aging population, education, health care, sports, music and technological progress of communication.

From an ideological standpoint, the private interests of certain social classes, such as the bourgeoisie, can be blamed for obstacles before the realization of harmonious urbanization. According to such an exaggerated view, the philosophy of capitalism itself cannot ensure harmonious, balanced and healthy forms of urbanization, as its priorities concentrate on maximizing the private interests of the bourgeoisie - in other words, capital - thereby sustaining the existence of the capitalist system itself at the expense of the preservation of natural, environmental and cultural values. It is mainly due to the destructive characteristics of the capitalist system that Mr. Hervé Kempf, a writer for *Le Monde*, drew the attention of world public opinion to the negative effects of the operation of the capitalist system on the survival of the ecosystem as a whole; a position outlined in two of his works of his works, *Comment Les Riches Détruisent la Planete?* (How are the Rich Destroying the Earth?), Ed. du Seuil Paris, 2009; and *Pour Sauver la Planete Sortez du Capitalisme* (In order to Save the World, get away from the Capitalist System), Ed. du Seuil, Paris, 2014,

Development and impact of the Principles of Ekistics

The main source of information about the principles of Ekistics is the various publications of the Athens Center of Ekistics, the Journal of Ekistics and the Declarations of Delos Symposia that have taken place between 1963 and 1975, as well issues of *Ekistics and the New Habitat* recently published online (2021- present) Ekistics has grown as a new discipline starting from the beginnings of the 1969's thanks to the efforts of C. A. Doxiadis, engineer, architect and former Greek Minister. Ekistics literally means the science of human settlements, and its general conceptual framework is designed around the principles of five major elements: (i) Anthropos (peoples and individuals), (ii) Nature, (iii) Society, (iv) Shells (buildings), and (v) Networks (roads, utilities, transportation, communication and administrative boundaries). The main aims of this newly emerging discipline were firstly to initiate basic research in these fields; secondly, to bring together specialists from all the relevant disciplines to work together using an interdisciplinary approach in the field of Ekistics; Thirdly, to work out new methods of training those who could assume leadership and responsibility in the sphere of action; and finally, to attract some of the best young and promising minds into this new area of research, development and practice.

Delos Symposia played an important role in developing the Ekistics principles. Twelve symposia were organised from 1963 to 1975, ten were hosted on-board ship, while the last two took place in Athens and the Apollonion Porto

Rafti, where the writer of this article was one of the participants. I have also had the privilege to attend the last meetings which took place in Athens in 1972 (half a century ago). More than two hundred eminent planners, architects, philosophers, geographers, scientists from all European countries as well as from the USA attended, making considerable contributions to the successful progress in the development of Ekistics principles.

Worldwide problems of urbanization in both developing and developed countries, growth of cities and planning, regional development, urban identity, social housing, resource conservation, transport and communications, local self-government and a variety of other issues concerning harmonious human settlements were dealt with intensively, manifesting a deep concern for making human beings happier in their living environments. The ideas developed by the Ekisticists led not only to the establishment of the United Nations Center for Human Settlements (UNCHS) in order to integrate fragmented aspects of policy and to combine them in a genuine strategy in the field of human settlements, but also deeply affected the main themes dealt with in the various UN HABITAT Conferences in the following years, such the Vancouver (1976) and İstanbul (1996) Conferences on Human Settlements, Stockholm (1972) and Rio Summits (1992) on the Protection of the Environment an even the Johannesburg (Rio+10) Declaration on Sustainable Development, as well as the Urban Charter of the Council of Europe (1992 and 2008), and the Guiding Principles of Spatial Development prepared by CEMAT, Conference of the Ministers responsible for Spatial Development. One more document may be added to this list, which is the Sustainable Development Goals (or Global Goals) that were formulated in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly as a part of the Post-2015 Development Agenda, which sought to create a future global development framework to succeed the Millennium Development Goals which ended that year.

Notably, Ekistics principles influenced the creation of the 17 goals and targets laid down in that (SDG) document. They are the goal of 1. No poverty, 2. Zero hunger (no hunger), 3. Good health and well-being, 4. Quality education, 5. Gender equality, 6. Clean water and sanitation, 7. Affordable and clean energy, 8 Decent work and economic growth, 9. Industry, innovation and infrastructure, 10. Reduced inequality, 11. Sustainable cities and communities, 12. Responsible consumption and production, 13. Climate action, 14. Life below water, 15. Life on land, 16. Peace, justice and strong institutions, and finally, 17. Partnership for the goals. As one looks carefully at the content of all these 17 goals and targets, one can easily notice to what extent they are all interrelated with all the principles of Ekistics.

Brief look at the Ekistics Principles

Briefly, holism, ensuring the right to adequate shelter, reducing regional imbalances, planning and public participation, environmental concerns, and social justice are the main values behind the steps taken to develop the principles of Ekistics. Since its establishment in the early 1960's, the World Society of Ekistics and the Athens Center of Ekistics focused their efforts on various aspects of the issues which had both direct and indirect impact



upon the kind of urbanization described as “harmonious” within the context of the World Urban Forum 4. It is certainly not possible to cover all the principles of Ekistics within the context of this article. Rather a selection can facilitate our task and an effort will be made here to show just how relevant are these principles for the establishment of harmonious human settlements and balanced territorial development all over the world. The main source of information is numerous publications of the Athens Center of Ekistics, the Journal of Ekistics and the Declarations of Delos Symposia mentioned earlier.

In addition to the contribution of a new discipline called Ekistics, to initiate basic research in these and related fields, to bring together specialists from other relevant disciplines to work together with an interdisciplinary approach on projects in this field, to work out new methods of training those who can assume leadership and responsibility in the sphere of action and finally to attract some of the best young minds into this new area of research, development and practices were the basic objectives of the Science of Human Settlements, in other words, Ekistics.

A second impact of Ekistics practice was to help the development of the institutional set-up of the UN system to enable it to seek out the solutions of the problems more effectively of human settlements. It was suggested that a) human settlements be recognized within the UN system as a separate sector or activity, and that b) appropriate organizational measures be taken within the framework of the United Nations to meet the needs of this new individual sector and that c) the proper share of the UN funds be allocated to the sector of human settlements and further finance be sought on a scale more adequate to the extent of urban crisis. In addition, the need to establish a United Nations Agency or a major programme was constantly stressed by the participants of Delos symposia. As a result of the accumulation of pressures towards that direction resulted in the creation of the United Nations Center for Human Settlements (UNCHS) following the Vancouver Conference in 1976. It was hoped that new Agency would integrate fragmented aspects of the policy and would combine them in a genuine strategy in the field of human settlements. The UNCHS urged many international agencies “to adopt the Ekistics approach” in their own work and to collaborate closely with each other to formulate integrated policies.

(i) Holism

Perhaps the first important Ekistics principle is the one of holism. Actually, the Ekistics grid is the best expression of a holistic approach to the study of human settlements. The view that the application of the basic sciences to human welfare is extremely fragmented is no longer acceptable. Therefore, parts of the basic needs of human beings such as health, nutrition and education cannot be dealt with in isolation, but the whole person, and the person within the community had to be studied. What is needed is not to examine the butterfly alone, but to study the insect and its habitat as a whole: this is the essential requirement of an holistic approach.

This methodology, which is perfectly embedded in the Ekistics grid, assumes it is only by looking at all aspects of these networks that a framework for the future well-being

of humanity can be provided. Importantly, this approach both fits quite well with spatial (territorial) and temporal (intergenerational) equity issues, as well as being based on the ethical responsibility of individual citizens. Indeed, it is safe to claim that the concepts of comprehensive development and planning have been considerably influenced by this approach during the last several decades.

(ii) Cities as the Real Engines of Growth

As pointed out in the İstanbul Declaration adopted at the end of the HABITAT II Conference (1996), rapid urbanization, the sprawl of cities, and the rapid growth of mega-cities are among the most significant transformations of human settlements. The urban population had increased from less than 30 percent of the total in 1950 to more than 47 percent at the beginning of the 20th Century; and although it was estimated at the time that by 2006 more than half of humankind would begin to live in urban areas, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs reviewed this figure, reporting in 2018 that, in fact, 55 percent of the world’s population lived in urban settlements. Currently, this number is projected to reach 68 percent by 2050 (UN, 2018). During the course of history, urbanization has been associated, in principle, with economic and social progress, the promotion of literacy and education, the improvement of general health conditions, greater access to social services, and cultural and political participation. As rightly stressed in the Habitat II document, cities and towns have been the engines of growth and incubators of civilization and have facilitated the evolution of knowledge, culture and tradition, as well as industry and commerce. Nevertheless, the continued and rapid growth of urban areas brings with it a new set of problems. This is particularly true for developing countries with the least financial resources that suffer considerably from the adverse consequences of excessive urbanization, manifested through enormous backlogs in shelter, infrastructure and services, increasingly crowded transportation systems, unsustainable consumption patterns, deteriorating sanitation and environmental pollution. All these are often associated with general conditions of urban poverty, insecure land tenure, unsatisfactory housing conditions, urban crime and homelessness. Only if handled in an appropriate manner and with a planned approach, as advocated by Ekisticians for years, can the range of opportunities be broadened, and equal rights can be favored.

(iii) Housing and Urban Land

Long before the Vancouver Conference on Human Settlements, Ekisticians, in the Delos Eleven Declaration declared that a Charter of Human Settlements had to be formulated and three basic rights should be defined there. These rights were respectively The Right to Shelter, The Right to Equality, and the Right to Dignity. The ultimate goal a human right to shelter has to be understood as one person / one room, and in the first stage, one family/one dwelling.

Although Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948 had defined the right to housing, among others, as the



following: "Everyone has the right to a level of life sufficient to guarantee his feeding, well-being of himself and his family, particularly for nutrition, dressing, housing, health care and necessary social services..." (UN, 1948). Even after twenty years following the Vancouver Conference on Human Settlements, humanity has observed that it was far from having reached the targets set during the Conference. However, one has to keep in mind that the provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and similar documents are of 'soft law' nature and their becoming legally binding for particular states depends upon their ratification by the national parliaments. Therefore, it is necessary to ratify the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights of 1966 in order to enable the citizens to claim that right. Besides, as reaffirmed in the Habitat II Conference, the provisions of the Covenant require that States commit themselves "to the full and progressive realization of the right to adequate housing as provided for in international instruments".

An inseparable element of harmonious urbanization is undoubtedly the fact that urban land must be used in the public interest. This principle has been defined by World Society of Ekistics since the beginning. The role of the landownership in urban development is so crucial that one of the main themes of the 2005 Congress of International Union of Architects asked, "Who owns the land? Who owns the city?" This philosophical question may be correct in the sense that those who own the land also have the power to control what happens in the city. However, the impression that both land and the city may be owned by individuals in the absolute sense is false. Indeed, this is more than a semantic phenomenon; both the land and the city are not owned by the present generations. They are, and should be, regarded as being in their possession, not in their ownership. Because, as collections of material and non-material assets, they are inherited from past generations, and they ought to be transmitted to future ones in no worse condition than when they are obtained.

Political scientists draw attention to the uncontrolled utilization of political power and insist on the need to keep it under control by referring to the saying, "Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely." Similarly, in order to make human settlements livable habitats, the right to urban land must be under the strict control of both central and local authorities. Because, it is right to assume that "land ownership corrupts; but absolutely - in other words uncontrolled land ownership - corrupts absolutely."

Land is both a physical commodity and an abstract concept. It may be owned by one person, or may be in possession of another, and land may still be occupied by a third or collective. Ownership means the right to enjoy the use of something, the ability to dispose of it, and to benefit from the rights associated with it. On the other hand, possession involves the ability to enjoy the use of the land, and in some circumstances to exploit the products on or below its surface. Possession implies the physical power to control an object. Possession may be legitimate or illegal. In some cases, it may be based on formal agreements, such as leases or rental arrangements.

The right to ownership in land is one of the economic and social rights recognized to human beings. John Locke, a 17th century philosopher, had indicated that the land in its natural state was un-owned. Some of the well-known philosophers, like Karl Marx and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon described the private ownership over production as a form of theft (*la propriété, c'est le vol*). On the other hand, others believed that it is the right of ownership that enables societies to succeed in achieving rapid development. Indeed, ownership was regarded as the key to increased welfare and prosperity taking off (*La propriété, c'est l'envol pour la prospérité*).

In addition, land became subject to ownership when labor was added to land. It took quite a long time to abandon the idea that the land belonged to God. However, as different from its conception in the 19th century, it is now widely accepted that the right to ownership in land, like other properties subject to private ownership, can be restricted by the considerations of public interest, public safety and public order. Ethical considerations require that ownership rights to land should be used with due regard to the public interest. In other words, no one could use his private ownership right in land in contravention of the general interests of the society and humanity.

Despite the fact that since the last quarter of the 20th century widespread privatization efforts in the world undermined considerably the importance of the above mentioned socially motivated restrictions, more efficient safeguards are still needed in order to ensure sustainability in urban development, in the management of land stocks, housing design, architecture and environmental protection. The trend from Aristotles to Léon Duguit signifies a constant shift from pure individualism towards a system more or less socialized where public interest is reconciled and harmonized with private concerns. Principles defended by Ekistics provide vast opportunities to incorporate such ideas into the very definition of harmonious urbanization.

(iv) Balanced Territorial Development

As early as in 1965, participants of the Delos Three Symposium had drawn the attention of world public opinion to the need to tackle the problem of regional underdevelopment. It was stated that the problems of urban sprawl and mass migration to urban centers could not be dealt with locally. Rather, they need to be handled within larger systems of planning and administration at the regional levels. Mentioned among the fundamental goals of territorial development were aims to redress economic imbalances, reduce regional disparities, and to encourage all regions contribute to the overall growth of the national economy. Eventually, such considerations as balanced territorial development were included in the concerned international declarations at Vancouver and İstanbul. In the Ekistics publications, one can find references to the successful regional development projects carried out in various parts of the world like Mezzogiorno in Italy, Guayana Project in Venezuela, and the Lakish Project in Israel. Balanced Territorial Development, as a sub-heading of the main theme of the World Forum 4, is one of the most important policy issues occupying European institutions such as the European Union and the Council of Europe. European Spatial



Development Perspectives (1999), The Territorial Agenda of the European Union (2007), Leipzig Charter (2007), Guiding Principles for Sustainable Development of the European Continent (2000) are some of these documents authored by European institutions which contain relevant principles for balanced territorial development.

(v) Sustainable Development and the Environment

Numerous principles adopted in various Delos Symposia, as well as those embedded in the traditional components of Ekistics grid, reflect basic guidelines for sustainable urban and spatial development. Respect for human scale and dignity in urban settlements, concern for the protection of settlements' historic and natural assets, understood as a part of the heritage of humanity, were constantly emphasized in those documents. The Ekisticists had deplored the destruction of irreplaceable cultural values through careless stewardship, thus predicting the significance of the concept of sustainable development long before the concept appeared in the environmentalist agenda.

More specifically, as early as Delos Three Symposium, certain consequences of population growth and technological progress were being blamed as factors causing visual monotony, lack of satisfaction in urban design, and the pollution of air and water. Similarly, Delos Four underlined the increasing stress placed on natural resources, wilderness for recreation, untouched habitats for biological research, water tables and circuits, and unpolluted air. All these were, to varying degrees, in need of protection against the encroachment by human beings; and were, to some extent, a by-product of the chaotic combination of over-density and sprawl that resulted in the production of unacceptable urban landscapes in addition to a compromised environment. Repeatedly, attention was drawn to the fact that if we treat the living ecology of the planet as a seamless web, and recognize that breaks are disastrous, we can plan for the ways in which the construction of an environment of this planet can be managed within the Anthropocene, that is, an ecosystem altered by human activity.

Finally, but by no means less importantly, the rights of future generations over the resources of the planet, should be taken into consideration. Not only may it shed light on the formulation of harmonious urbanization policies, but it could also inform balanced territorial and sustainable development. Insistent calls for an immediate change in environmental conditions and the nature of our society, without waiting for infants still unborn, are increasing (Keleş, 2007). Ekisticists have always paid due attention to the consideration of the needs of future generations. Volume 67 and 68 of *Ekistics*, published in 1999 and 2000 respectively, (1999) were devoted to the discussion of the future in general, and of human settlements in particular. In his introductory notes to these volumes, Mr. Psomopoulos attempted to conceptualize the ways in which the future could be shaped, distinguishing four major forces that were actually shaping the city of the future at the time.

The first of these was the constant one, represented by things like mountains, which we cannot change, or the fundamental properties of matter and energy. The second

future was represented by those elements inherited from the past but which were declining and would be gradually eliminated, such as the present generation of people, or houses which are in a dilapidated state, or the cultural traits and technological inventions which have been superseded: that is the declining past. The third future was represented by the continuing past, including the children of the present generation who are influenced by parents now alive, houses being built according to the patterns of existing ones, or roads which exist today and will go on being used in the future. The fourth and final future, which will come into being because of things that do not currently exist: new ideas, new technology, new developments. Mr Psomopoulos concludes his comments on the Editor's Page: "It is the creative future which, in fact, makes all the real difference between the past and the future and which marks the difference between Anthropos [Humans] and animals, since they cannot influence their future in this way, whereas Anthropos can" (Psomopoulos, 2009).

The principle of intergenerational equity in International Environmental Law suggests that the instrument of sustainable development be adopted and respected, as a kind of development which, while meeting the needs of present generation, should not compromise the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs.

(iv) Public Participation: Local Involvement and Subsidiarity

Integrating urban growth with planned intervention, ensuring the flexibility of both the planning process and the instruments available to decision-makers, as well as ensuring the maximum degree of public participation, have been major concerns of the World Society for Ekistics for a long time. The Delos Declaration Five emphasized the achievement of the goals of public participation and the need for people to be consulted about their choices, as a practice of freedom. Similarly, the Delos Declaration Nine underlined the fundamental ideology behind public participation as the following: "The settlements' pattern should not come to the citizen in a shape so fixed and predetermined by external authority that there can be no free play or creativity for development and change". Again, according to Delos Declaration Ten, "involvement of the citizens in the solution of ekistics problems is indispensable." All these requirements had an undeniable impact on the inclusion of the basic principles of public participation in the planning process. In fact, *The Habitat Agenda* (1996) devoted a whole section to the needs and the role of the vulnerable groups and people with special needs among its strategies. Similar provisions have been incorporated into such international instruments as the *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* (1992) and the *European Urban Charter* (1992; 2004; 2008).

Bringing local governments closer to the people and ensuring active participation were among the recommendations of the Delos Declaration Ten. This suggestion reflected the same ideology of the principle of subsidiarity which has been guiding the policies of the European Union since the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty in 1993. *The Amsterdam Treaty* (1997), the *European Charter of Local Self-Government* (1985) and



several other international legal instruments possess the same principle which requires that public affairs must be carried out at the levels of authority that are closest to the citizens. A recent report prepared by the Governing Council of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (2005) has resulted in Resolution (20/18) with a view to:

develop the concept of a global observatory that would assess, monitor and evaluate the state of decentralization and accountability to people at the local level and local governance in the world, as important conditions for achieving the goals of the Habitat Agenda.

One can find similar commitments made by a well-known NGOs, as well as European cities and towns, towards social equity for urban sustainability, sustainable land-use patterns, sustainable urban mobility patterns, etc. *The Aalborg Charter* (1994), and the *Aalborg+10: An Inspiring Futures* (2004), with the European Council's *European Urban Charter* (1992, 2004, 2008, 2023) are full of commitments for strengthening local democracy to contribute to harmonious urbanization and balanced territorial development.

Urban Living in the Era of Transformation

The first European urban charter, adopted by the Council of Europe's Standing Conference on Local and Regional Authorities of Europe in 1992, was a landmark document which represented a key stage in the necessary recognition of the roles of towns and cities in the development of societies. The Congress complemented the European urban Charter in 2008 with the European Urban Charter II- Manifesto for a New Urbanity. The 2008 Manifesto updated the original Congress' European Urban Charter and proposed a more contextual approach to urban living, urging the Council of Europe member states to build sustainable towns and cities. Since then, urban living has gone through a series of transformations linked to the development of smart cities, the protection of urban heritage, deepening social inequalities, democratic innovations, and but not the least, the accelerated pace of climate change. The many facets of urban transformations have been accompanied by the urban-rural interplay which entails the much needed balance between the development of cities and their surrounding areas. More recently, urban living conditions in Europe have undergone major changes and adaptations dictated by the Covid-19 sanitary crisis; in Europe, towns and cities were at the forefront of the response and were required to rapidly adapt to the pandemic while efficiently delivering basic public services and preventing the further spread of the virus. It impacted the way local authorities interacted with national authorities, but also challenged the way they envisaged transportation, health, education, participation and elections. It also reaffirmed the need for more sustainable towns and cities, as European towns and cities managed to rise to the challenge and to even use the crisis as an opportunity to review their efforts to create more cohesive societies and to further engage urban citizens. In this respect, Ukrainian towns and cities are a particularly relevant example of the incredible resilience and capacity of local authorities working together with citizens to cope with the unprecedented multiple challenges caused by the Russian invasion.

As a result, the Council of Europe has felt the need to further develop the European Charter in light of these new challenges and the post-pandemic context, which have increased pressure to support the implementation of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. This second revision of the European Urban Charter aimed to tie the idea of urbanity/urban society, as it is today, with the Congress' priorities of promoting resilient, democratic, cohesive, sustainable and digital societies. As driving forces for local, regional and national development, town and cities, in their diversity, will remain an asset for our societies confronted with unprecedented challenges. The revised European Charter is a kind of invitation for all those involved in urban development to review their practices, and to further implement the principles of ethical governance, sustainable development, solidarity, and human rights as enshrined in the *European Declaration of Urban Rights* (2020) and the *European Urban Charter* (1992, 2004, 2008, 2023), as a body of common principles and concepts enabling towns and cities to meet the current challenges of urban societies.

With the revision realized during 2023, within the framework designed in light of the guiding values of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, the principles for modern urban living have been set up as the follows:

- Democracy and citizen participation (elections, consultation and participation, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association, freedom of movement, inclusion and non-discrimination, gender equality, youth involvement).
- Social rights, cultural and economic development, (health, housing, education, work, social security and welfare, social cohesion and integration, culture and intercultural dialogue, economic development and infrastructure, architecture and heritage, sport and leisure).
- Sustainable development, protection of environment and climate change, (Protection of environment and climate change, natural wealth and resources, sustainable mobility, environmental decision-making).
- Integrity and prevention of corruption, (Integrity policy and ethical rules, conflicts of interest, public procurement, transparency, and oversight).
- Security and crime prevention (Security, crime prevention, resilience).
- Digitalization and artificial intelligence. (Smart cities and E-governance, digital equity, assessment and mitigation of risks, protection of personal data and privacy).

Lessons to be learned from European experiences

Occasionally, references have been made to the provisions of several international legal instruments throughout the intervention. It was assumed that a considerable



accumulation of valuable information could be found in the sources of several European institutions, such as the European Union and the Council of Europe. Therefore, a reciprocal and constant exchange of ideas, experiences and assessments with regard to harmonious urbanization and balanced territorial development between the UN and the individual member states on one hand, and the institutions on the other, would be highly rewarding.

The directives of the European Commission on the European Urban Environment Strategy, the Environment Action Programmes of the Union possess valuable guidelines for a sound urbanization policy. The document called the European Spatial Development Perspectives (ESDP) (1999) may provide a suitable policy framework for balanced and sustainable spatial development. Such principles of this document as a) the development of a polycentric and balanced urban system and a partnership between and urban areas, b) the promotion of integrated transport and communications concepts and c) the development and conservation of natural and cultural heritage are highly relevant in terms of the objectives of the World Urban Forum 4. On the other hand, the *Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities* (2007) and the *Territorial Agenda of the European Union* (2007) provide essential guidelines for integrated urban development, strategies for upgrading the physical environment, strengthening local economy in deprived urban areas, as well as the efficient and sustainable use of resources. Similarly, the *Guiding Principles for Sustainable Spatial Development of the European Continent adopted by the Ministers Responsible for Spatial Development of the Member States of the Council of Europe* (Hannover, 2000) contains the main traits of the theme of the World Urban Forum 4, as embedded in the sentences of socially, economically, environmentally, spatially, historically harmonious cities and cities for all age groups. Territorial cohesion, harmonized urban-rural relationships, equal access to public services, reducing environmental risks and damages, protecting natural resources and cultural heritage, are some of the major objectives of this document. The *Principles of Aalborg Charter* (1994), and the *Aalborg+10: An Inspiring Future* (2004), The *European Charter of Local Self-Government* (1985), and the *Valencia Declaration of Good Local and Regional Governance* (2007) all stress the need to strengthen territorial authorities for improved implementation of the idea of harmonious urbanization. Finally, *The European Urban Charter* (1992, 2004, 2008, 2023) of the Council of Europe must be added to this list.

Concluding remarks

Considering that at least two thirds of humanity will be living in towns and cities in the next fifty years, the keen interest of the United Nations to examine the impact of rapid urbanization on human settlements, economies and policies becomes increasingly meaningful. Humanity will necessarily be more concerned with burgeoning poverty in cities, improving the access of the urban poor to basic facilities such as shelter, clean water and sanitation, nutrition, as well as controlling the skyrocketing prices of urban land, achieving environmentally friendly and sustainable urban growth and development. All these require a planned intervention into the free play of market

forces, not only in developing countries, but also in those already in the advanced stages of development.

On various occasions, and particularly in the Habitat Meetings, (Habitat II, İstanbul, 1996), world leaders have committed themselves to sustainable patterns of production, consumption, transportation and settlements development, pollution prevention, respect for carrying capacity of ecosystems, and the preservation of opportunities for future generations. In this connection, the pressing need for cooperation among nations in the spirit of global partnership was repeatedly emphasized make sure that nations are able to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystem; and in view of different contributions to global environmental degradation, it is notable that the principle of common but differentiated responsibility has been inserted into the agenda of humanity. Nevertheless, despite all the efforts reflecting the goodwill of the United Nations and other international organizations, there is still a wide discrepancy between what governments say and what they did. It was rightly noted in the World Urban Forum 3 in Vancouver that all urban players must do their part in this respect rather than simply transfer their responsibility onto others. Planners, architects, designers, decision-makers, teachers and scientists, coming together under the umbrella of the World Society for Ekistics, have made for their part undeniable contributions during the last half century to the development of a conceptual model suitable for the analysis and the solution of such worldwide issues as rapid urbanization, rational settlements patterns, regional underdevelopment, eradication of poverty in cities, problems of exclusion, deterioration of environmental conditions, addressing the shelter needs of the poor, and the strengthening of local authorities.

Several selected and distinguished scholars, philosophers, authors, and practitioners of planning, architecture and environmental sciences under the leadership of late Constantinos A. Doxiadis have greatly contributed to both theory and practice of the Science of Human Settlements (Ekistics) during the Delos Symposia convened between 1963 and 1975. I firmly believe that the intellectual caliber of the ideas developed during the debates in Delos Symposia is extremely high and relevant to the enlightenment of the most pressing problems facing the world today and their likely solutions.

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Keleş taught courses on Urban Politics, Local Government, Environmental Law, Environmental Policies, Housing Policies, and Urban Development Law at several prestigious universities in Turkey and Cyprus. He was a visiting professor at institutions such as the University of California, Harvard University, and the International Christian University in Tokyo. He actively participated in public, civil, and international organizations, including memberships in the European Local Government Association, Turkish Association for the United Nations, and the World Society of Ekistics, as the President. He also contributed to monitoring the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government as a member of the Group of Independent Experts at the Council of Europe. In recognition of his contributions, Keleş received prestigious awards and honors, including the Japan Emperor Gold Award, Abdi İpekçi Peace and Friendship Prize, and special awards from organizations such as the Turkish Chamber of Architects and Middle East Technical University. He has an extensive publication record, with nearly 100 books and 700 articles published in Turkish, English, French, German, and Japanese.