Cities as nodes for global governance or battlefields for social conflicts?
The role of dialogue in social sustainability
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by
Hans.Abrahamsson@globalstudies.gu.se
Associate professor, School of Global Studies
Gothenburg University, Sweden

Abstract

Drawing upon experiences from two medium-sized Swedish cities, this article deals with the role of cities in social sustainable development. As the argument goes, their potentialities are challenged by three interlinked processes exposing them to sincere societal strains. The uneven development of globalization, the transformed character of migration and an increasing speed of urbanization bring several cities into the danger of tearing apart and develop into arenas for social conflicts. The article discusses the area of tension in which most cities find themselves as well as some of the factors that are considered decisive for the direction in which the cities are heading. By highlighting the interrelationship between security, development and justice the paper argues that urban social cohesion requires *proventive* security based upon enlarged local democracy and strengthened popular participation. Important conceptual gaps and strong mistrust between different stakeholders calls in this regard for a transformative oriented method of dialogue capable to create space for dissenting voices and to deal with asymmetric power relations.

Keywords: urban governance, social sustainability, security, dialogue

Introduction - Setting the scene

The process of globalization, migration and urbanization constitute, through the way in which these processes are interlinked and reinforce each other, the main drivers behind the great transformation in our time.

Through the development of information technologies, **globalization** has implied compressed time and space and increased peoples mobility and connectivity (Scholte 2000). The economic epicenter has started to move east and south strengthening the geopolitical shift towards a multipolar world and making the western world lose its power of international agenda-setting. Europe and the US have tried hard to maintain their dominance through becoming society of knowledge with innovation, flexibility and cognitive skill as leading catchwords. The so called BRICS-countries are, nevertheless, about to pass both of them as economic growth engines. Accordingly, India and China are expected to bring some 1.6 billion workers to join the global labor market in the next decade. Such duplication would drastically change the modes of production and patterns of consumption as well as increase the rivalry for market outlets and raw material supply, let alone create increased environmental stress and climatological challenges.

The process has also had a strong impact on the pattern of **migration**, to be understood as a flow of people between different places in global times. In an era of fluidity and

openness, people have become more mobile and migration less permanent, with new driving forces and push and pull factors behind. The use of internet and the cyber space connects migrants to relatives and make them lead their everyday life in two or more different places simultaneously, thus strengthening the transnational dimension of migration (Eastmond & Åkesson 2007, Righard 2008). The increased expectancy for remittances increases the vulnerability at both ends.

New meeting places are created, most frequently in urban areas. People are attracted by the modern life style offered in the cities and the opportunities they provide. Migration is the main driving force behind the rapid pace of **urbanization** and its expected astounding duplication in 30 years from now. Here is where the social networks are located and here is where people can search for working opportunities. In sharp contrast to the rapid pace of urbanization in the South, some cities in the North are stagnating due to a shrinking population. Here increased migration is important in order to expand the labor force as well as the basis for taxation. The accompanying unequal development is expected to give continuation to the changed geography of global poverty and misery (Kanbur & Sumner 2011). The poor no longer live mainly in rural areas in poor countries. The new geography also includes an increasing number of poor people living in urban areas of middle income and even high income countries. In Sweden growing income disparities and child poverty can be noted (Save the Children 2010). Living areas are segregated and societies torn apart and disintegrated. A Global South is emerging side by side with a Global North, in the same city and without borders in-between. The concepts of the Global South and the Global North do not refer to the geographical location but foremost to the economic and political marginalization (exclusion) and the economic and political inclusion, respectively.

Together, these processes of change have implied a **restructuring of social relations**. The process of globalization with its new actors and diffusion of power has hollowed out the state (Rhodes 1994), decreased the room of maneuver and pressed it back from the political room (Hettne 2009). The State has changed from intervention to enabling and the art of conventional "government" has become replaced by "governance" carried out by different actors acting on different levels (Pierre 2011). This new division of labor follows the Keynesian, inflationist and expansive policy that characterized the post-World War II state craft. With the economic crisis during the 1970s the State was considered to have become too big and to have undertaken too many tasks outside its administrative and financial capacity. The consequent debt-burden increased the demands from the financial markets for a new public management, with the subsequent liberalizations and privatizations. Good governance

was considered a question of less government and downsizing the remedy. In addition, with the emerging post-Fordist mode of production, the Keynesian welfare state was not needed anymore. On the contrary, the new regime of accumulation was in need of exploiting the hitherto untapped market of services, constituting some 75% of the GDP and in the hands and control of the public sector. The aim of the New Public Management was to bring these services to the market through privatization. Such commodification of social goods, using a Marxian terminology, and traditionally provided by the public sector, was facilitated by the process of individualization following the neoliberal market led process of globalization (Bauman 2001). The individual evolved as an important actor at the expense of the collective political parties. Hereby, politics of emancipation (politics of life chances) became gradually substituted by life politics (politics of choice) (Giddens 1991).

The new economy, with demands for the down scaling of the nation-state, has made it more difficult to meet people's demands in terms of economic safety and social welfare. The need for external legitimacy has become prioritized at the expense of the internal, which gradually transformed state policies from welfare programs to workfare activities. The social contract, which in modern time and in a western context has constituted the base for internal legitimacy and societal stability (Byrne 1999, Munck 2005) has started to gradually wither away. Reduced social spending has affected the most vulnerable and exposed part of the population. Many of them have seen themselves forced to create an alternative and more informal system for security and social protection rooted in a closer base for identity (so-called primary groups). Hereby the base of loyalty has been shifted from society towards such smaller identity groups. When modern institutions cease to function, such "we-groups" or identity groups, are considered as valuable safety networks. This should not be understood as the state has lost significance in absolute terms. On the contrary, the state has tried to compensate for reduced legitimacy and political power by increasing the control and surveillance. In this sense, paradoxically, its impact on the daily lives of ordinary citizens has increased (Brown 2010). As illustrated by recent events in United Kingdom, these efforts notwithstanding, the erosion of the social contract and the hollowing out of welfare regimes have led to social upheavals and violent protests in urban areas. The risk for violent social conflicts increases with the dissatisfaction of people who lack basic needs in terms of housing and employment and experience reduced a societal belonging. This is particularly the case in times when identity is based upon what people can afford to consume. Exclusion and alienation creates frustration, shame and outrage (Scheff & Retzinger 2001). Dissatisfied

workers used to channel such frustrations collectively and politically. Nowadays, dissatisfied consumers outrage more individually, albeit in swarms and at times more violently.

Cities as Nodes for global governance…

How these processes of change are dealt with politically will be decisive for the sustainability of societal development. The increased connectivity and compression of time and space have implied that different societal problems are inflicting with and influencing each other. An event far away will immediately have consequences somewhere else. This interconnectivity has implied that the local has become interwoven with the global. Such kind of amalgamation – or hybridization – of the global and the local has implied a glocalized societal development (Robertsson 1995). Cities exist in a space of flows (Taylor et.al 2007). "Glocalization" takes place in those cities capable of attracting these flows (labor, finance technology, communication) and hereby embody and reflect globalization. Consequently, the concept "glocalization" tries to catch the dialectical relationship between global influences and local everyday life (Listerborn 2010).

The process of *glocalization* has increased the need for a holistic policy and global governance permitting coherence between different policy areas. In order to fully meet the global challenges of our time, global institutions and regulatory frameworks are required that are capable of dealing with conflicting goals that may arise as a consequence of the divergent interests of different actors. The problem is that legitimate institutions with a global reach for such coordination of international measures are lacking. Different national security interests still have the upper hand. It is on the national level that politicians need to establish the support upon which their re-election depends. Simultaneously, however, it has become clear that the political strength of individual nation-states and their political outreach is too limited in order to be able to deal with the global challenges they confront. The fact that the economic decision-making of the transnational corporations has become globalized much faster than the political decision-making of different countries has implied a severe lack of national as well as international institutions, and of regulatory frameworks for the required global governance.

The lack of institutions and legitimate organizations with mandate and capability to manage the global challenges has increased the interest in the role that cities and urban settings can play for such an undertaking (Amen et al 2011). It is here where the majority of the world population lives, and it is here, on the local level, where many of the challenges are created (Borja & Castells 1996). Even if a global regulatory framework is required in order to more fully deal with the problems, it is on the local level where pre-emptive actions must be

taken. That is why urban leadership and urban activists have had to deal with issues long before national governments and interstate treaties address them (Sassen 2011). This strengthens the need for coordinated joint actions between the local and the global.

The withdrawal of the state from the political room has implied increased room for maneuver for other actors. Subsequently, the question has been raised as regards the requirements for and capabilities of cities to reclaim parts of the role they played in medieval times, hereby paving the way for a rebirth of global cities as networks of connectivity (Borja & Castells 1996, McNeill 2006). Established researchers point to the role that many cities played during medieval times for trade and for the relationship with the outside world, before the nation-state building era, when the states with their claim for sovereignty started to take over that role (Braudel 1986). The question is raised not only as regards their role as important nodes and hubs for the world economy. Some researchers argue that the growth of cities, their innovative capacity and global networks equips them with some of the tools that global governance requires for increased sustainability (Castells 1998, Sassen 2011).

The different twin town agreements and city-to-city cooperation that have emerged lately are considered an important base for such a development, administrated and financed through organizations such as United Cities, Eurocities and Urbact, in total bringing together some 1500 cities. Such a development has also been encouraged by the strive for decentralization by the state and the subsequent outsourcing not only of the design and implementation of various welfare programs and social protection schemes but also of the responsibility for local employment and economic growth. For many cities, such policies of deconcentration make it necessary to rely on themselves and the support that their networking with other places in a similar situation can provide. Here, the support provided by the UN system through their organization for urban development (UN Habitat) plays an important role as convener and coordinator, not least when it comes to the question of social sustainability. The UN environmental summits play a similar role and their plan of action for an ecologically sustainable development (Agenda 21) has played a decisive part for increased consciousness and the anchoring of the agreement on local level. In the United States of America more than 1000 cities have on a voluntary basis signed the Kyoto Agreement that has been blocked in the U.S. Congress. The air quality emergency in many cities implied that they simply could not wait till Congress approved mandatory laws for car fuel efficiency and reduced emissions (Sassen 2011). In practice this has implied that the same impact has been achieved as if the Bush Administration at that time would have signed the protocol.

The U.S. initiative with regards to the climate protection agreement has inspired municipalities within the European Union to create the Covenant of Mayors signatories, aiming to cut greenhouse gas emissions with at least 20% before the year of 2020, hereby exceeding the goal decided by the European Commission in Brussels. Through this kind of agreements and networking, cities have already started to develop their own channels for international diplomacy and hereby the conditions for the global governance required. Such diplomatic and lobbying capacities are not only relevant for the growing numbers of megacities in the world populated by more than 10 millions of people. The fine-meshed networks constituted by small and middle range cities, with a population between 300 thousand up to one million people, are expected to play an even more important role.

… Or battlefields for violent social conflicts
The possibilities for cities to participate in global governance are, however, constrained by the immense problems and challenges they have to confront themselves, not the least due to the speed of the rate of urbanization and the subsequent uneven development. While cities are attractive centers for migration, creative arts, innovation and employment opportunities, they are also centers for acute forms of poverty, substandard housing and homelessness (Amen et al 2011). Hence, cities became spaces of contestations, politicizing an economic agenda fostering social exclusion, marginalization and an uneven development. Furthermore, in urban areas people live side by side. They have different cultures, different group identities and different possibilities to live decent lives. Consequently, the intensified process of globalization has, together with the rate of urbanization, new patterns of migration and transformed social relations, implied that many of the cities find themselves in the danger of being torn apart, of disintegrating and evolving into battlefields for social conflicts. If the challenges confronting the cities cannot be managed in a proper way, their possibilities to contribute to a sustainable development will cease.

The uneven development of globalization should partly be understood as a result of the different requirements that cities have to meet in order to become a node in the global network of production (Castells 1998, Harvey 2009). Not all cities have the resources to respond to such requirements. Some cities have turned out to have a stronger ability than others to mobilize, within a rather limited geographical area, the critical mass of specialized and at the same time diversified manpower, the infrastructure and the resources of production required. There is also a need to provide an exciting cultural environment, first-class education in various foreign languages, as well as the safety and social trust demanded by

foreign expatriates and their accompanying family members. For the cities of knowledge the capability to offer good living standards and a high quality of life starts to become more important than traditional requirements such as tax agreements, laws and other governmental regulations.

The uneven development of globalization should also be understood as an unwanted consequence of the emergence of the city of knowledge and the distorted income distribution that tends to follow swift not only between countries but foremost within countries. In tandem with the increased demand for high-skilled labor, there is also an increase in the demand for low-skilled workers in order to deal with the logistics and ground services required by the knowledge-intensive system of production. The traditional role that women have played in dealing with this situation has gradually been taken over by migrant labor. In many developed countries, the labor market has started to become split between high-income jobs that many workers lack the qualification for, and low-paid work that one cannot live on. In addition, the strengthened demand for a high-skilled and well-educated work force frequently results in a process of gentrification that creates differences between housing areas. Higher levels of income and social status increase the demand and push the prices for housing in some areas, gradually forcing the present residents to leave and to search for new lodging in areas with slower price escalations. Such development is supported by dominating neoliberal economic policies. They understand growing inequalities and concentration of resources as, at least in the short run, important drivers for economic growth and which, through their trickle down effects, in the long run will increase prosperity for all. However, in reality, the societal development following the process of gentrification has turned out to strengthen the process of segregation further (Wacquant 2009). This is one of the reasons that the urban divide and the internal conflict dynamics threaten the social stability in so many parts of the world. In an increasing number of cities worldwide the more affluent middle class finds it necessary to live behind walls and fences. In more extreme cases they send their children to school escorted by armed guards (or even in helicopter, as in the case of Sao Paulo in Brazil) in order for them not to be kidnapped along the route. As illustrated by the Arab spring, and especially by the events in Egypt and Tunisia, economic growth and increased welfare constitute no solid base for political and social stability as long as people continue to feel alienated from the political decision making process.

Also in European cities there are strong social tensions between people who find themselves included in the development and the ones who find themself marginalized and excluded (Dikec 2007). Also here the number of "gated communities" increases, raising the

danger of reinforcing xenophobic attitudes and social exclusion (Kazepov 2005). Due to such urban division and the subsequent "ghettoization", the city of knowledge gradually begins to lose its possibilities to be the innovative and creative site of learning that is required for remaining competitive. Hereby the city tends to undermine the very base upon which it depends for its success.

Malmoe and Gothenburg – the double facets of the cities of knowledge

Malmoe and Gothenburg could be taken as examples of cities who have done surprisingly well in mobilizing the required resources in order to become attractive and competitive nodes in the global network. Both cities, with their population of 300 and 500 thousand respectively, are considered too small to act alone in the global context. When the State is scaling down, cities are trying to scale up. A strengthened subnational and regional cooperation has become paramount. The Gothenburg region belongs to the fastest growing regions in Europe. Through massive investment in infrastructure for transportation and communication, synergy effects in the areas of research, technological development and innovation that involve the Sahlgrenska University Hospital, Volvo, SKF, Ericsson, Chalmers University of Technology and the University of Gothenburg, the city has succeeded in placing itself on the map of foreign investors. The possibilities of offering a varied cultural supply and becoming a reputed city of events have in this regard been considered crucial. The Malmoe region represents a similar success story. Through impressive investments in information and advanced technology, the city has managed to turn around the economic stagnation during the 1990s with 25% unemployment that followed on the closing down of factories. Instead, an attractive and forward-looking green city of knowledge has been created. The image of the city and the branding through which the decision-makers are marketing its city has become extremely important in this regard. In the city of Malmoe, the Turning Torso building, the University and the waterfront Western Harbor, have, together with the Oresund Bridge linking the city to Copenhagen, become important symbols for a new time. It's multicultural mix with over 100 spoken languages and 160 different nationalities are important in the marketing of the city's continental and international atmosphere.

The uneven development accompanying the process of globalization, with its increased inequalities, points with all reason to the fact that the success stories of Malmoe and Gothenburg also carry unwanted consequences and reverse sides. On a high level of aggregation, statistics show that the increasing process of segregation going on in Gothenburg has divided the city into three parts. The more affluent population has moved out to the

suburbs in the southwest, leaving the inner city in the hands of the middle class. Following the ongoing process of gentrification the lower middle class, workers and migrants are forced to leave the increasingly more expensive inner city for a life in the more low-cost suburbs in the northeast. This development manifests itself in strong differences, be it the rate of employment, level of income, life expectancy, or health standard. The same situation is found in Malmoe. Also here, where every third inhabitant is foreign-born, the multicultural variety of people has implied strong segregation (Johansson & Sernhede 2006).

The situation has become aggravated through the changing role of the state and its withdrawal from the political room. The Swedish state has abandoned its financially supported national urban politics to instead focus on local urban governance. For cities like Malmoe and Gothenburg this change has manifested itself in non-state financed local development agreements based upon local public-private partnership. The cities have tried to find their own financing through a combination of public-private partnership and increased taxes. This has increased the leverage of the private sector considerably as regards the need to prioritize investments for strengthened economic growth and increased international competitiveness at the expense of social undertakings. This change in priorities has been facilitated by the increased international competition between cities giving rise to the urban entrepreneurialism and the more business-like urban management that the city government has found it necessary to apply (Taylor et al 2007). The ambition to maintain, let alone increase, tax revenues has made city governments to pay increasingly higher attention to the needs of more affluent citizens. Such attention is considered to further have strengthened the gentrification and segregation.

Of special concern in the social and political development in Malmoe and Gothenburg is the urban youth. According to provided analysis of the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs as regards the living conditions of the population in Swedish suburbs, 35 % of the youth between 20 and 25 year in the suburb of Rosengård (Malmoe) and Angered (Gothenburg) neither work nor study. For some housing areas the figure can reach 50–60%, especially for the foreign-born and less educated youth. In order to fully benefit from the opportunities of life chances the requirements for cognitive ability will increase drastically. Young people with low education risk becoming predestined to unemployment or very low-skilled and low-income work. Basic schooling is not considered to be enough for seizing the life chances of a knowledge economy. Young people without upper secondary education face a three times higher risk of long-term unemployment. Low education decreases the prospects for descent pensions. Consequently, child poverty will be transformed into old age poverty.

Of alarming importance is the fact that an increasing share of young people in some housing areas belong to the third generation being unemployed. They consider themselves "unemployable" and have simply stopped looking for jobs. This has made societies incapable of harnessing the energy, intelligence and workforce of the next generation upon which the society with its aging population depends. The lack of housing is making things worse. Many young people find themselves having to move back and forth to the home of their parents as some kind of "boomerang kids" as they can neither find permanent work nor permanent lodging. Both Gothenburg and Malmoe at times experience severe social upheavals driven by frustration from what is perceived as discrimination, lack of respect and lack of opportunity to a life in dignity. The social tensions have increased through transnational migration and better access to global information about what is going on in other parts of the world. The social exclusion and discrimination that people encounter worldwide give racial and colonial connotations with subsequent frustration and alienation.

This situation explains the paradox that politicians and decision-makers in both Malmoe and Gothenburg – despite their success in transforming the cities into competitive and attractive places of knowledge and innovation – describe both cities as strongly segregated and with severe social tensions. They express strong concern that the tensions will tear the cities apart and in the long run create a social situation that would inflict negatively on the foreign investors that have an interest in social stability and safety. Consequently, decision-makers in both cities manifest ambitions to create economic, ecological and social sustainability and launch special commissions in order to deal with segregation and inequalities.

Security, development and justice in an urban context
How cities will navigate in this area of tension between, on the one hand, the capability to contribute to the required global governance and, on the other hand, the danger to evolve into battlefields for violent social conflicts, depends upon how citizens and policy decision-makers relate to the question of security, development and justice. These essentially contested concepts should be considered as important values guiding societal development during human modern history. Through the process of globalization, the reality that these concepts are trying to grasp has changed and implied more expansive contents. Security, once considered a question of the state and its capacity to defend its population from external military threats, has become widened and deepened and a question of predictability, of economic security, of employment, of people's welfare and safety in a broader sense (Fierke

2007). Following the same logic, development is no longer only a question of economic growth but foremost prospect for prosperity and equal life chances for all. Claims for ecological and social sustainability (Brundtland 1987) as well as the level of public health and equal access to care have become underlined (Marmot 2008). Simultaneouslym, the question of justice and a fair distribution of resources and opportunities have lately been complemented with questions of social recognition and a fair distribution of the access to political power (Fraser 2003, Stewart 2010, WDR 2011).

The process of globalization has not only changed the way the concepts are understood but also, and particularly, increased their interdependence. They have become overlapping, mutually constitutive and cannot be understood in isolation from each other. Such amalgamation reinforces the need for a coherent policy approach that the intertwined processes of globalization, migration and urbanization have brought about.

The content and dynamics of the concepts can be elucidated with assistance from the founding father of the Peace Research tradition, the Norwegian scholar Johan Galtung. He made an important distinction between direct and structural violence. With direct violence he referred to physical violence, frequently as a result of military interventions, and by structural violence he had in mind the regulatory framework and societal structures that constrained people from fully using their potential and capability and at times also taking away their means of subsistence. Galtung talked about the absence of direct violence in terms of negative peace (to be defended from something). In order to achieve a state of positive peace (to have the right to something), constraints in the form of structural violence must be taken away. Such a removal constituted the conditions for sustainable development and could only be achieved through increased social justice (Galtung 1996) and a more inclusive, territorially based development strategy (Friedmann 1992).

In the same way, this paper suggests that we can talk about negative and positive security. By creating fences and walls and various technical systems for increased surveillance and social control, people are intended to be defended from crime and violence and granted increased negative security. However, through measures in order to enhance people's participation in the political life and their empowerment, as well as their social recognition, conditions for increased social cohesion and social trust could be created, thereby strengthening people's right to safety and the conditions for a more positive security (Lidskog 2006, Sahlin 2010). Accordingly, this paper also suggests that the answer to the question of whether or not cities could develop into nodes in the global network and hereby contribute to required global governance or if they tend to develop into battlefields of violent social

conflicts ultimately depends on their capacity to create social sustainability, that is, how cities respond to the needs for security of its population by providing conditions for a positive security. Some scholars argues that cities have certain advantages in relation to states in this regard as the urban security setting being more people-oriented and potentially quite different from "national security" setting being more state oriented (Sassen 2011).

In order to create conditions for a positive security there is a need to combine acts of prevention with acts of promotion. Such measures of *provention* require financial support and a new mindset (Burton 1990). Social sustainability must be understood as a prerequisite for economic sustainability. Expenditures in increased social cohesion must accordingly be understood not as operating costs (with demands for immediate amortization) but foremost as investments for the future (with more favorable rules for depreciation). The investments are necessary in order to counteract the changing role of the State and to create the social conditions required at the local level as regards a labor force with sufficient skill and cognitive capacity in order to attract foreign investments. Hence, some kind of social investments funds are called for. Important as these measures and approaches may be, the conditions for positive security cannot, however, only be created from above. They require a strong popular participation and trust-building from below.

The role of dialogue in confronting power

Increased citizen participation has become a fashion in the industrialized OECD countries. Most of them face complex societal problems involving questions of life-style, something that requires citizen participation in order to be dealt with. Of special concern is how to finance future welfare-programs bearing in mind the shrinking and aging population that characterize many OECD-countries. The political decision-makers on central level express also the need to strengthen democracy, to improve the decision-making and to gain support for policy proposals from the wider public in order to achieve higher efficiency in the implementation (Kuokkanen 2011). Such needs have been reinforced by the shift from government to governance. Negotiation and partnership requires dialogue and a more fully involvement of different actors at different levels.

In Sweden many decision-makers express special concern with regards to increased events of social upheaval and burning cars understood to frightening away foreign investors and not considered compatible with the social sustainability that is required in order to become a competitive city of knowledge. A coinciding interest between economic and political decision-makers has emerged with regard to the need of enhanced invited citizen

participation and dialogue. Such interest manifests itself in the efforts of most of the municipalities to develop guidelines on how to more fully reach out to the ordinary citizens.

According to my own observations from an ongoing research project in the suburbs of Gothenburg, studying the interplay between citizen initiatives and invited participation in urban planning (http://mellanplats.wordpress.com) there exists in reality nevertheless, a strong reluctance towards dialogue and increased citizen participation amongst the local political decision-makers. Many of them conceive the citizen dialogue as a threat against the representative democracy. They understand themselves as elected by their constituency and in need of being accountable to them and no one else. They are afraid that citizen dialogue only will increase the opportunity for certain strong and articulated groups to have their voices heard and to strengthen their influence at the expense of others. They also feel that people often lack the overall perspective and understanding of the long-term goals and only see their own short-term interests. Officials in the public sector are more positive. They tend to see the dialogue as a way of getting inside the customer's head through first-hand interaction in order to shape services to meet their needs. They do, however, express strong concerns about having to meet angry citizens and to account for political decisions over which they themselves have had no influence. The citizens, for their part, frequently feel that the dialogue often only is about to getting information about decisions already taken and that they very rarely get the opportunity to influence them. They seldom get any feedback on the role that the dialogue played. Some think that the dialogue primarily is a way for politicians to transfer the onus of unpleasant decisions on the citizens themselves.

The question of power and power-sharing constitutes probably the most important factor that can explain the rhetorical gap among decision-makers between what they say and actually do. Long-term, enlightened, coinciding interests might be of importance but only as long as they do not challenge power. Many policy-makers feel that dialogue, and the empowerment of citizens, automatically will lead to troublesome power-sharing. According to their understanding, when conflicts of interests prevail, there does not always exist a win-win solution that could be identified through dialogue. Consequently, the only way to resolve such conflicts in a democratic way is by voting through the political system.

In order to understand the rhetorical gap and the double standard of the politicians, it is important to distinguish between two types of dialogue. One is the more encompassing political dialogue, the so-called citizen dialogue, which is about to discuss longer-term socio-political issues and what should be done to create the society one wants to live in. The second dialogue, the user dialogue, is more short-term and aimed at discussing what to do, and how it

should be done, to satisfy the users' individual needs of public services. In theory, the idea is that the politicians take responsibility for the policy-oriented dialogue, while the civil servants take on the 'user dialogue. The observations made during the mentioned field studies indicate that the interest in and support for dialogue from the decision-maker's point of view is mainly linked to the user-dialogue. The reason being that with the changing role of the state, the outsourcing and privatization of public services, the citizens are more and more conceived and treated as customers. A dialogue with the citizens, through the user dialogue, is a must in order to understand their needs, not as citizens but as clients. In a society characterized by individualization and commodification, this approach does not challenge power, on the contrary, satisfied clients will strengthen the power of the providers. Subsequently, in order for such approach to become legitimate the decision- makers have to, at least rhetorically, also promote the citizen dialogue (as some kind of a necessary evil even if they are not persuaded of its utility and benefits).

There is however, a danger in reducing citizens to clients. By limiting the discussion to individual needs and remove the political content about how "the good society" should be created and the common resources mobilized and distributed, the society will become depoliticized. Such depolitization implies a risk of people losing interest in politics and that the democratic system as such hereby is threatened. Contrary to what is needed, it also reduces the ability of policy-makers to deal with complex social problems, thereby putting in danger the legitimacy of the whole political system.

The problem seems to exist in getting the powerful to realize that power should not be understood as a zero-sum game. Power is nothing that those in power will be able to acquire by any mean but something they might be able to acquire depending on their perceived legitimacy. The more people are empowered, the stronger their capacity to give support to the leadership will be. Furthermore, during the nation-state project, the legitimacy of the rulers depended very much upon their capacity to provide their citizens with safety and security, primarily against foreign (military) threats. As accounted for, the process of globalization has changed the contents of security. Nowadays it is more a question of satisfying the citizens' need for predictability, the economy, job- and health security, let alone the capacity to deal with global challenges and complex problems. To fulfill the latter, social cohesion and trust as well as confidence and participation in the political system is required. In a multipolar and multicultural world, characterized by floating identities and different bases for citizenship, the local rulers must be prepared to give up their precedence regarding the interpretation of the causes and contents of the problem, as well as the agenda-setting aiming to identify require

measurements to deal with them. A more open-ended interpretation, agenda-setting and identification of measures could only be made in dialogue with the concerned citizens. This is not only important for trying to visualize various existing power structures that may constrain conflict resolution and developmental efforts. Increased citizen participation and dialogue is also important in order to identify, at times informal and not visible, local circumstances and social conditions that might be able to valorize and used for a more "salutogenesis" approach following the terminology of Aaron Antonovsky (1987). Conflict resolution must not only focus on underlying problems but at times also visualize functioning, legitimate and socially based customs in society that might be supported and developed albeit not always fully understood by the rational of the market economy.

Hence, the real question for urban rulers and decision-makers is not why participation and dialogue with citizen is important. The question is rather how to get the citizen on board for such an exercise. In many countries corruption and bribery scandals have reduced the legitimacy of the political system to all time lows. To end the prevailing dialogue fatigue and to increase the involvement of the public in daily politics seem almost insurmountable. Reference is not foremost made to the powerful citizens already claiming their "Right to the City" and to have a voice in how the city is shaped. It is neither made to the dissatisfied and angry citizens already expressing their protests. Reference is foremost made to the weak, poor and alienated citizens in the margins. They identify themselves as excluded, too powerless and uninteresting to those in power in order for them to care about what they think. Social sustainability requires a city for all. Consequently, means to include these precarious and frustrated groups of citizens in the planning of urban development need to be identified.

Dialogue will increase well-being by providing the participants a " sense of coherence" about life and its challenges (Antonovsky 1987). Dialogue is about to become visible, to feel that you are listened to, respected and that you can influence your situation. Dialogue is about to grow, to straighten ones back and to be a little longer. One way to break the dialogue fatigue and create new motivation for such an undertaking might be, as a first step, to focus upon the perspectives and attitudes that lie behind the types of social decisions (non-decisions) that policy-makers opted for, as well as the content and scope of the alternative solutions proposed by the citizens. Such an approach permits visibility of how the decision-makers understand the value of dialogue and how they perceive the issue of power. Rather than to seek consensus and to agree, the object of such a more confrontational dialogue is to highlight the differences. The concept of "confrontative dialogue" for the contrasting of the different views under consideration can be misleading and give the wrong connotations. It

does not catch the mindfulness and the deep listening that such a method requires. The aim of the transformative oriented method is to improve the understanding between parties whose relationship is asymmetric and characterized by mistrust and conceptual gaps. The applicability of the confrontative method has been reinforced by the increased complexity in the challenges that societies face and the different ways in which people relates to open-ended and contested concepts such as social sustainability, security, development and justice. At times, problems are so complex that there is no solution. Societies must learn to live with them, something that requires a strong tolerance of ambiguity. Antagonistic contradictions must be transformed to non-antagonistic ones – in the language of Chantal Mouffe: - agonistic contradictions (Mouffe 2009). For such transformation to take place, people must relate to opponents as adversaries to be dealt with through the political system by political means, and not as enemies to be silenced with violence and repression.

In fact, participatory budgeting could be one concrete example of how to apply the confrontative dialogue. Research suggest that by inviting citizens to participate in such a dialogue regarding the mobilization and allocation of the social investment funds earlier discussed, an enhanced understanding and trust between different stakeholders could be facilitated (Fung and Wright 2003). Hence, the combination of these measures could be decisive for the direction in which cities and municipalities are heading in the area of tension outlined in this paper.

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