



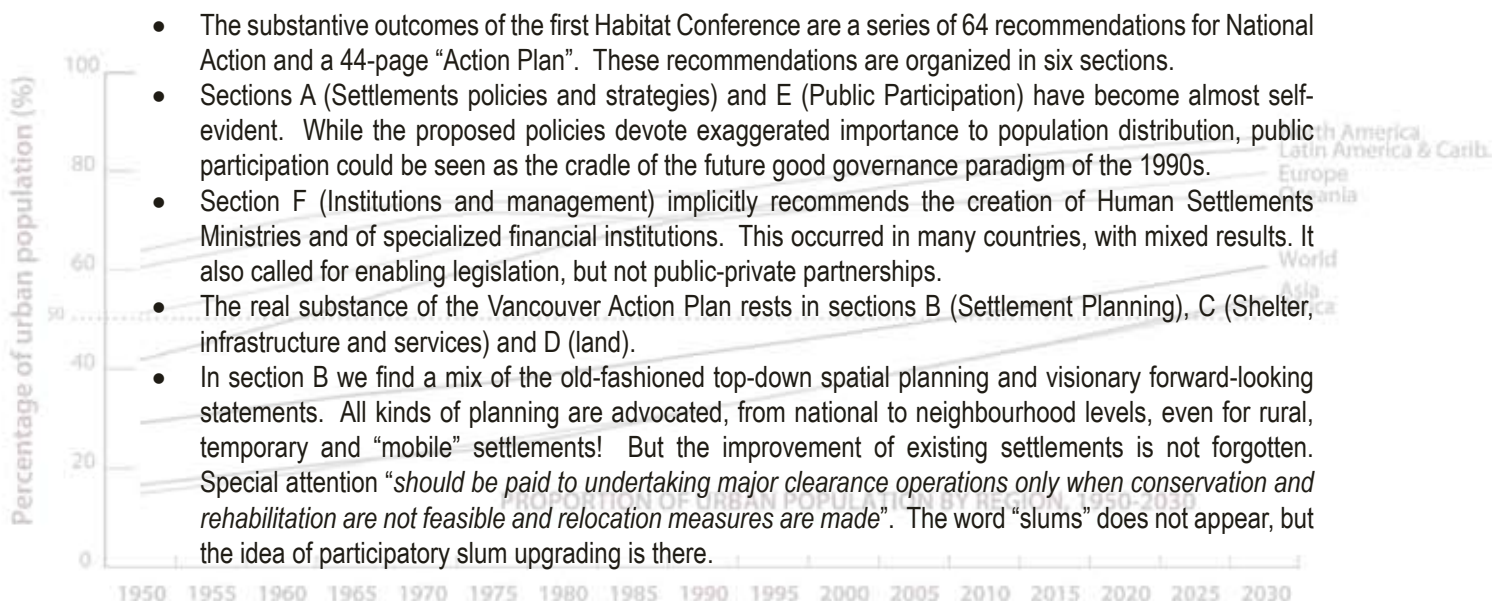
Vancouver 1976 – back to the future

- In his opening statement at the conference, Mr. Kurt Waldheim, Secretary-General of the United Nations, indicated that *“one third or more of the entire urban population of the developing world lives in slums and squatter settlements”*.
- The Secretary-General of the Conference, Mr. Enrique Peñalosa, responded that, *“the paramount question was whether urban growth would continue to be a spontaneous chaotic process or be planned to meet the needs of the community”*.
- The outcome documents of the Conference include a Declaration of Principles (the *Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements*) as well as recommendations for national action and international cooperation.

The Vancouver Declaration

- The Vancouver Declaration starts with a preamble stating that *“unacceptable human settlements circumstances are likely to be aggravated by inequitable economic growth and uncontrolled urbanization, unless positive and concrete action is taken at national and international levels”*.
- The first action is to *“adopt bold, meaningful and effective human settlement policies and spatial planning strategies (...) considering human settlements as an instrument and object of development”*.
- Among the general Principles, the Conference advocated improving the quality of life through more equitable distribution of development benefits, planning and regulating land use, protecting the environment, integrating women and youth, and rehabilitating people displaced by natural and man-made catastrophes.
- In the Guidelines for action, various elements of a human settlements policy are defined. Focus is placed on harmonious integration, reduction of disparities between rural and urban areas, orderly urbanization, progressive minimum standards and community participation.
- The Declaration states that *“adequate shelter and services are a basic human right”* and that *“governments should assist local authorities to participate to a greater extent in national development”*.
- The Declaration strongly emphasizes that *“the use and tenure of land should be subject to public control”*.

The Vancouver Action Plan



- The next recommendation on urban expansion calls for legislation and institutions to manage land acquisition and development, for securing fiscal and financial resources, and integrated development of basic services. Reconstruction after disasters is also emphasized as both a challenge and an opportunity *“to reconcile the meeting of immediate needs with the achievement of long-term goals”*. But the question *“who are/should be the planners”* is not addressed (partnerships are not yet on the agenda) and the link to implementation and management is missing.
- Section C carries 18 recommendations representing the core of the Action Plan. While some financial recommendations are clearly outdated (regulate the flow of financial resources, develop new budgetary techniques), its recommendations on the construction industry and the informal sector are still very valid. Among the identified priority areas are: *“ensuring security of land tenure for unplanned settlements, and providing sites and services specifically for construction by the informal sector”*.
- Excellent recommendations are also made on National Housing Policies (*provide serviced land on a partial or total subsidized basis, make rental alternatives available, promote aided self-help*) and Infrastructure Policies (*use pricing policies for improving equity in access, minimize adverse environmental impact, give priority to safe water supply and hygienic waste disposal, favour mass transportation and energy efficiency*).
- Section D on land may appear as the most obsolete part of the Action Plan. It starts by stating that *“private land ownership contributes to social injustice”*, and that *“public control of land use is therefore indispensable”*. It advocates a very pro-active land policy based on zoning, land reserves, compensated expropriation, redistributive property taxes, the recapturing of excessive land profits resulting from public investment, and public ownership wherever appropriate. It also encourages the establishment of comprehensive land information systems.

Beyond Vancouver 1976

- In fact sections C and D could be positively compared with the strategies in the Habitat Agenda to provide adequate shelter for all (paras. 60-98). Governments moved from the Keynesian consensus of 1976 to the market-driven paradigms of 1996 (*“enabling markets to work”*) and have since moved from the Cold War era and the New International Economic Order to a globalizing world with more opportunities and risks. It is a world in which national action is more constrained than it was in 1976. This evolution had a direct impact on human settlements policies, strategies and practices around the world.

This is a UN-HABITAT Feature/Backgrounder¹ is based on an article in Habitat Debate written by Mr. Daniel Biau, Director of the Regional Technical Cooperation Division of UN-HABITAT. Please feel free to publish or quote from this article provided UN-HABITAT is given credit. Suitable photographs are available on our website. For further information, please contact: Mr. Sharad Shankardass, Spokesperson, or Ms. Zahra Hassan, Press & Media Liaison, Press & Media Relations Unit, Tel: (254 2) 7623153/7623151, Fax: (254 2) 7624060, E-mail: habitat.press@unhabitat.org, Website: www.unhabitat.org