REPORT ON E-DIALOGUE – GOVERNANCE AND PARTICIPATION

@ WUF 5, Dialogue 5, 25th March 2010

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Ladies and Gentlemen, Good morning/ Bonjour/ Bom Dia! It is a great pleasure to be in Rio, with you, today. This presentation will provide a brief outline of the e-debate on Governance and participation which preceded this session and which proved to be a particularly rich, intense and reflexive discussion forum.

The e-debate's main objectives were on the one hand to:

1) identify and unfold the fundamental elements of the participative city and participatory governance.

2) evaluate the role of participatory governance in helping to forge inclusive and equitable urban development outcomes, in line with the overriding framework of the World Urban Forum: The right to the City– bridging the urban divide.

These objectives were underpinned by a couple of framing assumptions regarding participatory governance, namely that:

- Participation in local democratic decision-making *is* one of the fundamental elements of the 'right to the city'

- But the numerous benefits assumed to flow from Participatory Governance (e.g. bridging a democratic deficit or delivering on pro-poor dvpt outcomes) have too often failed to materialise: urban development indicators remain very low in many parts of the world – *even* in cases where participatory democratic norms and systems have been introduced or have been in effect for some while. So, the role of participatory governance in bridging the urban divide is complex and certainly requires closer scrutiny.

The participative city

1. Some definitions

When sketching the contours of the participative city, participants to the e-debate emphasised a city where people feel heard, where people feel that their voice matters. This feeling of belonging, of citizenship, engenders in turn a sense of responsibility to engage in public life. Truly participative cities are those that are able to incorporate the most vulnerable members of society into routine governance.

Participants to the e-debate were keen to emphasise that such substantive, or transformative participatory governance is, at core a political endeavour: it

requires enabling institutions – which are themselves dependent, to a large extent, on a favourable political culture.

2. The participative city: mechanisms and institutions

Sound institutions, trustworthy and transparent, enabling mechanisms and institutions were seen as crucial in ensuring deeper or more meaningful participation of vulnerable groups. These should be:

- context/ culturally specific

- And they should be underpinned with sufficient resources if participatory processes were to have any bite: i.e. sufficient fiscal resources, but also adequate legal/institutional resources (allusion was made for instance to metropolitan fragmentation and the substantial lack of control over metropolitan and city regional land markets as real impediments to the potential transformative benefits of participatory processes in Brazil).

3. The politics of the participative city

Ultimately though, these enabling institutional set-ups and mechanisms, were dependent on a conducive political culture and decisive political will.

While strong, functioning representative democracies could provide the conducive backdrop, a (hopeful) message from the e-debate was that there was some room for manoeuvre in more difficult contexts through the vector of strong, progressive public opinion. The latter was understood in a broad sense, encompassing political parties, the media but also and crucially, robust, autonomous organizations of the excluded, able to engage pro-actively in decision-making processes, around issues that speak directly to the livelihood strategies of these communities and their desire to see entrenched the Right to the city.

Supporting such organizations of the poor, often structured around livelihoods and employment issues was seen as a critical factor in attempts to reach more equitable urban futures. Indeed, it was seen as essential to overcome the ritualisation and the depoliticisation of many participatory practices which, many suggested, had become the norm and yet were inimical to any meaningful progressive societal transformation.

Participation and the urban divide

Thus the second broad thrust of the debate sought to assess the transformative potential of participation in practice, by questioning the role of participatory governance in bridging the urban divide and helping to take the Right to the City forward.

1. Participation v. efficiency

Debators agreed that participation remained key to these broad objectives, even as they called for simultaneous improved technical efficiency in meeting citizen's needs. However, the debate focused on the need to reinvigorate the notion of

participatory governance along two vectors if the Right to the City was to be more than window-dressing:

2. Participation as empowerment

A conception of participation as empowerment (as opposed to a more utilitarian conception of participation): participatory governance needed to be reinjected with a politicized conception of participation whereby participants are given the tools and the vision to challenge unequal distribution of resources in a progressive and sustainable fashion. This would necessitate political education of marginalized groups (but not uniquely) both to raise their understanding of the mechanisms of the political system in which they operate, and to raise their awareness of the ways in which the stakes can be changed towards more equitable and sustainable outcomes.

3. Participatory economics

A stretching of the concept of participation to include the economic or livelihoods terrain. That is, in order to remain relevant to the vast majority of marginalized in our cities, participatory processes would have to engage seriously with (that is aim to understand and support) the livelihood strategies already employed by marginalized groups in their daily struggles to live in the city.

Failing to do so was missing out on a fundamental meaning of citizenship; it also missed out on rich potential synergies between the state and civil society.

Developing this stretched conception of participatory governance was likely to become increasingly urgent as cities faced impending and fundamental transitions to low-carbon local economies. This area was thus identified as an area in need of urgent democratic innovation.

So, the e-debate raised some important issues for our urban community, calling for real, transformative participatory governance.

Towards transformative participatory governance

This would require context-specific, mature, reworkings of the principles of participatory governance, along the following axes:

- a renewed emphasis on vision (of the just city) as the core driver to participatory processes; participatory processes should be subsumed/aligned to the core long-term objective of progressive, participatory, urban transformation – to the ideals of the 'good' or 'just' society.

- a greater effort to translate such vision of the just city - garnered through participatory processes and therefore build in part on the often fluid livelihood strategies of the excluded - into workable programmes that tally with governmental procedures and budgetary processes. While this governance conumdrum is an area in need of critical democratic innovation, participants to the e-debate did highlight the crucial role of facilitators in this instance.

- a careful and context-specific exploration of the most productive interaction between social movements of the marginalized and the formal political process and political parties in particular. As the debate showed, there is no one way forward here but this reflection needs to consider whether civil society pressure is most effective when working within legal frameworks or outside of them. Meanwhile, participants put forward some mechanisms to increase social movements' bargaining power towards political parties, including capacity building, political education, literacy campaigns (including literacy in planning and budgeting).

- Finally, more work could be done to try and understand how independent organizations of the poor can be fostered in hostile environments; and, following on that, how maturing organisations of the poor are best able to scale up to mobilise around city-wide issues: i.e. how to develop sophisticated, broad-based transformative visions while retaining their mobilising capacity as organisations able to deliver on idiosyncratic demands for change. This is clearly another area for further democratic innovation.

These principles should drive the now numerous vectors and avenues of participation (including PB, gender PB, CDS, etc) which were described to some extent in the e-debate.

And these principles should also be entrenched in any attempts to introduce tools for measuring participatory processes in cities (a possibility that was discussed in the e-debate and proved attractive to a number of participants).