

2016 Conference Transcription

Date	Friday 1 April, 2016
Session Title	Thriving In Uncertainty
Session Time	10:30-10:45
Moderator	n/a
Speakers	Maita Fernandez Armesto
Notes	n/a

Introduction

Moderator	Hello and welcome to Future Everything 2016 Festival Podcast Series. Over two days, in Manchester's iconic Town Hall, we tasked designers, artists, scientists, and many more, to rethink our resources. From life, earth and intelligence to community and uncertainty, our speakers asked what we might need less, and more of, in our near future. How do we design a city that is resilient to climate change and can we? We heard from Maita Fernandez Armesto from UNs Habitat City Resilience Profiling Programme or CRPP, which focus on providing national and local governments with tools for measuring and increasing resilience to multi-hazard impacts, including those associated with climate change.
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<p>Maita Fernandez Armesto</p>	<p>Thank you Carlo, and thank you the organisation for this extremely flexible adaptability of the controllers of decisions, not taking me here at the right time. Thank you to all of you for being here.</p> <p>I'm the Senior Programme Coordinator at the City Resilience Profiling Programme. It's a UN Habitat programme that works trying to measure part of that uncertainty that Carlo was mentioning. We tried to measure resilience, not to come to a final number, but to come to a baseline for cities for them to improve. So in my field, the cities, and I've been spending the last fifty years of my life working for cities, somewhere in between, the real practice building cities and the urban planning that deals with uncertainty and with the future is of course unknown, but with that wanted future, the fate of future is of course uncertain. So my presentation will talk about both sides; this complexity about reality and how we deal with uncertainty.</p> <p>I work for UN Habitat. This is the UN agency for human settlements and it is mandated to promote socially, environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all. So that's quite concrete but not that much.</p> <p>The state that we are now is that more or less in the fifties of the last century. Thirty percent of the total population of the world lived in cities. Fifty years later, around the year 2000, fifty percent of world population was living in cities. The expectation is that in the next fifty years, two thirds of the total world population will be living in cities. That's huge. That means that cities are growing, but they are not growing following standard patterns. They are not growing following planification. They are just growing and growing and growing, and trying to solve the daily problems and not focusing on what will happen in the coming years. So our executive director, Joan Clos, mention clearly that the urban transformation is inevitable. It will continue for better or worse, but it's a process and it's just going on. There is nothing that can stop this [inaudible 04:26].</p> <p>So that's a fact. We don't know how. We don't know for how long. There is a lot of uncertainty inside this, but there is a big certainty talking about that the process has already started. If we don't re-examine urbanisation, we will continue to propagate negative trends, including increased segregation, inequality, and environmental degradation, among others. Not all is good, we are doing things bad. We are doing things bad because we don't know what will happen, and sometimes we don't want to face that future.</p> <p>As well, and this is part of the [inaudible 05:14] Secretarial General, we have briefed him to the General Assembly in January this year, he mentioned that we have made a lot of progress. Last year they send a framework for disaster [inaudible 05:29] this action was approved, there were the agreements from parties from [inaudible 05:34] twenty one that were in place. There were plenty of different good news for the world, but still yet we know armed conflicts, poverty, disaster, and discrimination continued to affect millions. How many millions, we don't know, but we know that there are millions of people affected. So last year, so raising to it the global commons on our shared values, again, we are not quantifying, we are not able to quantify all that is happening.</p>
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Finally, and this is just to frame our area of work. We come from a world that is disaster risk reduction. We have a branch within UN Habitat that is exactly that. So our background comes from there. It comes from recovery. It comes from what to do after the disaster hits urban areas. Again, it's about uncertainty, but there is one thing which is true, is that cities ask, just after the disaster, it's very hard to convince them that they are exposed to possible disasters coming. The results is this. The result is that the economic losses only related to earthquakes, floods and drought have been underestimated by at least fifty percent. No one wants to know, or no one is mapping the interdependence between different systems within a city, and this brings us to this situation. I can give you some figures. This is from the end of last year, and this is what [inaudible 07:30] has accounted until now a billion dollars for recovery after hurricane Sandy. This is real. This is reality, and no one had that money allocated. If day one after a hurricane you go to any government and ask for that huge amount of billion dollars, no one has that money, but finally money has to come, and has to flow, to cover all the expenses. It's there and they have not finished. This is the cost of real disaster, and this is why we need to act first.

So again, there are other people that are worrying about risk in the world and they are trying to map the risk, and think the relation between different risks. So this is not only about climate change and natural disasters that are here, the most worrying issues are here, and it's failure of national governments socially aligns to inner stability, and around unemployment. So you see, it's quite complex, and it's quite hard to measure how we can imagine our future to face these assets. It's extremely complicated.

So what we do is try to overpass the traditional approach from risk reduction and face our under proactive way of developing cities. Taking into account all the inputs that we have previously mentioned, all the inputs that the global economic forum is taking into account, all the issues that we are seeing that are having direct influence in our cities. Just believe me when I say that when a disaster hits, it hits. Probably in [inaudible 09:35], but the biggest input will be in an urban area where people live.

What is our definition of urban resilience? It's the ability of any urban system, we consider that a city is a complex system of systems, so any urban system. It's like the human body. You cannot imagine your body working properly if one of your systems, the circulatory system, the digestive system, if it doesn't work, your body won't work. The city is the same. There are plenty of systems, and if the system doesn't work correctly, the city cannot function as it should. So it's the ability of any urban system to absorb and recover quickly. Why quickly? Because it's a matter of time. It's how you interact with your problem. The sooner a problem gets solved, the less consequences that you will need to face. But in front too, all plausible shock and stresses. So plausible, that's again about uncertainty. We are not sure of what will happen, but there is a high possibility that there will be some impacts that we will have in the city. Shocks and distresses, why, because the shock is the easy one, it's the disaster, it's a natural disaster that hits the city. But the stress that is there is the transit congestion in Mexico city, it's the air pollution problems in China. There are

stresses that are already in the cities and cannot be disregarded. [Inaudible 11:22] continue to function. Exactly what I was saying before. If the system doesn't work properly, if you cannot have access to your health, education, transportation, and waste collection system, if all these services don't work, your city won't perform as it should.

So the main objectives are to have a multi-hazard, multi-sector, multi-stakeholder approach, so the outputs are for future planning, but not only. The action needs to start now. They have to be measurable and verifiable because if not, we won't get money to invest in the city. So that's quite important and that's the objective of our job, measure what is unmeasurable, and it has to be incremental. Why? Because the system is continuously changing, and that's about uncertainty as well. So if I add within my city, the city behaviour will change, and I need to map that change to go on acting and improving the performance of the city, the resilience of the city. So the priorities are clear; people, assets, not only in terms of economic benefits or damage, but in terms of people, is much more than one human being. One human being that is related to social groups, to the things we own, our homes, our working places, our environment, our neighbours. So we are much more than just one person. Continuity of function, so we need to provide services, but not only the visible ones, but those that are creating convenience in our environment or creating inconvenience for the huge development of our cities. This is the map of [Jerusalem? 13:41], and all this area that you almost don't see around here are illegal settlements. This is the city, one hundred years ago, so you can see this huge growth and it's completely uncontrolled.

So how do we do it? I will go very quickly but I will be around if you have any questions. We have chosen five dimensions that are common to any city in the world. A special organisational meaning that it goes from the individual to different kinds of associations, local government, subnational, and then national government. There is this special dimension that goes from the plot to the country, but the different scales are relevant and pertinent to different aspects of the analysis. It's true that the national scale is acting on the local scale, so we cannot just delete them from the map. Then function and physical configuration because the city is host within a built-in environment, plenty of services and functions that need to be there and that make our life in cities possible.

So we have mapped hazards. This is a clear effort on mapping what can come but I'm sure contrasted with the presentations from my colleagues, we will need to add plenty of other categories that are not included. That's as well about what we don't know that we don't know. We mapped interdependences, just let me share one short example. The critical service for a hospital to go on working normally in our developed world is not electrical supply, it's not personnel, it's not human resources; it is the cleaning of operation rooms. This is something that no one takes into account when you are dimensioning a contingency plan that has to be there, because it's critical.

So we cross the capacities from the city, the resilience, with the hazards that we have mapped till now affecting cities. We provide some results, unfortunately you can't see them very well, but we provide some results in spider or diagrams.

	<p>Why? Because there is no number. Having that value in resilience of eight out of ten means nothing at all, if in the inside you are at a level too, in social resilience. So you need to have the whole picture where you are performing well and where you are not because with this information you can develop a plan to act. A plan, not an urban planning document, but a plan meaning actions, projects, and our future objectives included in the normal planning. Thank you.</p>
	<p>We hoped you enjoyed Maita's talk and thanks for listening. You can hear the rest of the talks from 2016 at: futureeverything.org/2016podcasts.</p>

[Transcription ends]