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PARTICIPATION AND FRATERNITY TO REBUILD THE CITIES OF THE 21ST CENTURY

The Co-Governance conference organised by the Focolare Movement: co-responsibility in cities today

If Baumann warned us that “cities serve as dumping grounds for problems generated globally”, this is being confirmed by statistics. Since 2015 over half the world’s population live in cities and the projection is a figure of 70% by 2050. Lagos, the biggest city in Africa, is set to reach 90 million inhabitants by 2100.

“These figures reveal irreversible and unstoppable changes triggered in cities long ago” explained Paolo Frizzi, Academic Coordinator of Sophia Global Studies at the Sophia University Institute (Loppiano, Italy). We must ask ourselves what is the role of cities today? How can local and global co-exist within and outside of cities? On the role of administrators and the contribution of citizens: is there such a thing as “participative governance”?

These and many other challenges are the focus of the conference **“Co-governance and co-responsibility in cities today”** currently being held at Castel Gandolfo (Rome, Italy) organised by the New Humanity Movement, the Movement for Politics and Policies for Unity and the Cities for Fraternity Association, all outworkings of the social and political engagement of the Focolare. The speakers are local authority administrators, politicians, active citizens and managers from 33 different countries. The aim is to learn from one another, exchange ideas, share projects and good practice.

Pasquale Ferrara, the Italian ambassador to Algeria and professor of international relations at the Libera Università Internazionale degli Studi Sociali (Rome, Italy) opened the meeting by exploring the meaning of cities.

“Today as always – he explained – cities respond to the deep rooted needs of human beings: community and solidarity”. Answering the question why cities should not only focus on what is local but also play a role in international relations, he affirmed that it is a matter of inevitable evolution: local choices have global implications whether in the field of health or security, climate change or standards of living”.

The fact that relationships are key to social cohesion and are the essential foundation for developing democracy in cities was demonstrated by Jo Spiegel, mayor of Kingersheim, a small town of c. 13,000 inhabitants, in the region of the Upper Rhine in France. “Twenty years ago we laid the foundations of a participative democratic ecosystem, setting up the “Citizens House”, a place open to all citizens and dedicated to democratic practices and planning for future developments. Then, through other settings, like council meetings at which citizens, elected representatives, experts and local organisations could meet and relate to one another, about 40 projects in the town were completed over a 10 year period. If the town is to become a

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genuinely transformative space, democracy must be based on a sense of family, on neighbourliness. Hence the role of administrators changes and they become builders of good relations.”

The challenges faced by many cities in the world include the loss of cultural identity and secularisation. These are visible not least in the mega cities of Asia, including Seoul, the capital of Korea. Kim Sunggon, former general secretary of the Korean Parliament and honorary president of the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace, summed up as follows the diminishing influence of Confucianism, the cultural foundation on which the nation’s value system has been based up to now. “Confucianism’s influence has rapidly diminished in recent years through secularisation. Up to now the Korean peninsula has been the victim of wars, but it could be reborn and become a peaceful place starting from Seoul. The starting point for people like us, who believe in ‘co-governance’ of cities, is to build societies that are more reconciled”.

Lucia Fronza Crepaz, a former member of the Italian parliament and educator at the School for Social Engagement (Trent, Italy) explained that the question being posed by politics today is not so much “what to do” as “how” to do it. It is a cultural issue, a crossroads for anyone engaging with the life of their city”. “Participation creates new settings for collaboration between politicians, experts, bureaucrats and citizens. All are key components of ‘good government’.

Cinzia Guaita is a spokesperson together with Arnaldo Scarpa of the Committee for Reconversion RWM that began in Sulcis Iglesiente (Italy) to enable the process of reconversion of this industry that, among other things, supplies bombs to Saudi Arabia “From May 2017 to date there a vast amount of work has been done. The silence on the subject was broken and many more people became involved. We are invited to speak all over Italy and national and international TV networks have brought the issue to the headlines. There is a long and difficult path ahead because peace can only be built little by little. We are doing what we can, counting on other people and other cities to do their part at different levels, obstinately and meekly”.

A comparison between ideal and real cities will examine four significant areas: **town planning**, with Mario Tancredi and Ximena Samper, professors of architecture at universities in Colombia; a focus on the city of Medellin and examples of good practice from Tunisia, Poland and Italy; **communications**, with a panel discussing cities and citizens as stewards of the digital world. Speakers include Fadi Chehadé former chief administrator of ICANN; **corruption** with studies on measures taken and the responsibility to prevent it and contributions from Lebanon, Kenya, Colombia and Italy; **testimonies** of those who have looked at the wounds of their cities in order to heal them.

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