



Reflections on the World Urban Forum 5: The Right to the City - Bridging the Urban Divide Rio de Janeiro, Brazil | March 22-26, 2010

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The Urbanization and Global Environmental Change (UGEC) project participated in the 5th World Urban Forum in Rio de Janeiro with a special networking event titled: “Urban Responses to Climate Change and Sustainable Urban Development in Latin America”. UGEC is a science and practice coordination project; it promotes - through its network of researchers and practitioners - international collaborations that help create a better understanding of the interactions and feedbacks between global environmental change and urbanization at the local, regional, and global scales. The project members have formulated a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary perspective of these issues through innovative conceptual and methodological approaches. Organizing events and attending fora, such as the WUF5, plays an integral part in this process, as they provide an opportunity for knowledge sharing between the different research communities within this field of study.

The UGEC project’s participation in the WUF5 was centered on the networking event jointly organized with two of our partners, the Helmholtz Initiative on Risk Habitat Megacity and German BMBF Megacity Programme and UN-ECLAC. Participants included Michail Fragkias, *Executive Officer, UGEC project*; Corrie Griffith, *Project Coordinator, UGEC project*; Christopher Boone, *Associate Professor, School of Human Evolution & Social Change, Arizona State University*; Dirk Heinrichs, *Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research – UFZ*; Ricardo Jordan, *Economic Affairs Officer, Sustainable Development and Human Settlements Division, ECLAC United Nations*; and David Simon, *Professor, Department of Geography, Royal Holloway, University of London*.

The event was a continuation of a 2007 workshop theme focused on urban responses to climate change in the Americas and intended to bring old and new members of the network together to assess the progress that has been made in the region since the initial discussion. Topics addressed by the presenters included: the benefits and opportunities for linking environmental justice to the science of ecology and global environmental change; the importance of incorporating eco-efficiency in sustainable infrastructure development for urban resilience; and the rise of urban adaptation strategies within Latin American cities. Over 70 WUF participants attended and it was encouraging to see not only the academic community present, but a strong



representation from the practitioner community, notably, those in the Middle East and Africa, in addition to Latin America.

Following the short presentations, the floor was opened to the audience for discussion; the participants spoke on a number of issues within the climate change policy/development dialogue including: the role of gender, youth and local community involvement in the development of climate change policy, the level of awareness of institutions to the values of green infrastructure, how mitigation and adaptation efforts are conceptualized and translated in climate policy and development, issues of scale and reconciling local adaptation strategies with global solutions and technologies, climate justice, and more fundamentally, how it is that we understand development, particularly with respect to consumption and growth.

The interactions at the networking event made it abundantly clear to us that the strong interest in urban areas and climate is advancing the research agenda, but also creating spaces for intervention in policy, and that the emphasis on urban areas can help us promote sustainability worldwide. It is evident that the urban challenges to sustainability exist in developed and developing world nations alike and a meaningful synthesis of cross-regional knowledge is now a necessary next step for both researchers and practitioners. From our perspective, the WUF provides one of the few spaces where the global community of researchers, practitioners, activists, and the general public concerned by issues of sustainability in an urbanizing world can come together and share their stories, lessons learned, concerns and suggestions for moving forward. The UGEC community is grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the wider dialogue. The experience of our networking event allowed us to gain a better sense of what the participants deem important and relevant in light of UGEC research and helped to further build and strengthen the UGEC project network.