



The City Centre For Everyone: Urban Thinkers Campus Belfast, United Kingdom, 31 May – 2 June, 2016

CAP was one of a number of organisations that was a Partner to the International Federation of Housing and Planning's (IFHP) Urban Thinkers Campus (UTC) held over three days in Belfast.

The objective of the UTC was to assist in the implementation of the United Nations' New Urban Agenda (1) by focusing on several principles of the World Urban Campaign's "*The City We Need*" document (2), namely how to make cities more:

- Socially inclusive and engaging
- Affordable Equitable and inclusive
- Safe, Healthy and promoting wellbeing

The UTC brought together over 150 international experts and 'thinkers' from the UK and beyond to debate and discuss the issues and propose solutions. The UTC included politicians, non-governmental organisations, the voluntary sector, academics, community workers, and practitioners in housing, planning, built environment, education, and economic development to agree actions that will assist in making cities more cohesive, inclusive and fair to everyone.

The event was held in the wonderful City Hall in the centre of Belfast. The urban issues being faced in Belfast provided the local context for challenges that many cities face around the world.

The opening plenary session was led by Suzanne Wylie, the Chief Executive Officer of Belfast City Council. Suzanne highlighted that one of the major challenges being faced in Belfast is how inner city communities that live on the edge of the city centre can be much better integrated into the city centre which has experienced massive and transformative urban regeneration. The city has been hugely improved over the last 20 years from a city of unrest to an international city with massive regeneration projects including the Titanic Quarter and the Belfast Waterfront. However, whilst the city centre of Belfast is thriving, this success is not being fully shared by adjoining communities many of which feel alienated and detached. These inner city communities remain segregated by religion and separated by Peace Walls. The City Council is developing a long term strategy known as the Belfast Agenda (3) to address these and other challenges. The Belfast Agenda is a Community plan prepared by a partnership of key city organisations, residents and communities. The Agenda has been subject to extensive consultation and looks forward to 2035 with detailed proposals for the next four years to generate new jobs, better integrate communities, provide more affordable housing and improve transport linkages including public transport.



Clive Harridge (L) meeting Anette Galskjot (IFHP) and Flemming Borreskov (IFHP)

A critical component of the UTC was a series of five “Urban Labs” which each focused on a major challenge facing cities. Urban Labs are an initiative of UN-HABITAT and are designed to share thinking and achieve practical outcomes through an agreed Action plan to help address the changes identified.

CAP was participant in an Urban Lab led by Trudi Elliot, Chief Executive of the Royal Town Planning Institute, on the topic of “*Health and Wellbeing of Inner City Communities*”. Kate Henderson, Chief Executive Officer of Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA), introduced the TCPAs “*Reuniting Health and Planning Project*” (4) and presented ideas on how to ‘health proof’ developments focusing on key topic areas such as movement/access, open space / recreation, access to healthy food, neighbourhood spaces, building design and the local economy. Professor Geraint Ellis from Queens University Belfast spoke on how to use the planning system to help secure health and wellbeing. Specifically in the context of Northern Ireland Professor Ellis summarised the following key actions for realising healthy urban planning:

- Make good health a statutory objective of the planning system
- Adopt a health-led planning system
- Make places greener
- Address health and environmental inequalities
- Get serious about car dependency
- Integrate environmental health with planning
- Make active travel easy
- Rediscover planning at the neighbourhood level
- Achieve effective community engagement

There was broad agreement by all participants in the Urban Lab that there is much more that planners can do to better integrate health considerations into planning which in turn will help achieve improved health and well-being of individuals and communities. Clive Harridge led the discussion at the Urban Lab on the Action Plan which included commitments by individual enatrustn orojevyls and organisations to promote the importance of integrating planning and health.

In addition to the plenary sessions and Urban Labs there were also site visits to see the hugely impressive city centre regeneration projects as well as the Peace Walls and the Girdwood Community Hub (5). The latter is a community leisure development and part of an excellent initiative to regenerate a 14 acre site for housing, employment and community purposes – the project has involved the participation of some 20 groups from different local communities who have been working together to achieve a facility that all communities can benefit from. The project has been part funded by the EU III Peace Programme.

Conclusions

CAP was extremely proud to be a Partner to this Urban Thinkers Campus organised by IFHP. As a Partner of the World Urban Campaign and a contributory author of the 'City We Need' document, CAP proactively seeks opportunities to promote the new urban paradigm for the 21st century now encapsulated in the UNs New Urban Agenda. The event provided excellent opportunity for 'urban thinkers' with a wide range of experiences from the UK and beyond to share their knowledge to help address the challenges being faced specifically in Belfast but also in cities across the Commonwealth and beyond.

Notes

1. <http://habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda/>
2. <http://www.worldurbancampaign.org/city-we-need>
3. <http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/council/Communityplanning/BelfastAgenda.aspx>
4. <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/Pages/Category/health>
5. <http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/buildingcontrol-environment/regeneration/girdwood.aspx>

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Clive Harridge