Cities, vector of continuity
The 4th Congress is undoubtedly the most important event ever held by the organization. Its importance can be measured first by the number of registrations which can be considered a record number. The importance of this event also stems from the fact that it coincides with the centennial celebration of the organization as a forum of the globally recognized municipal movement.

The Rabat Summit addresses a number of technical issues, but in my opinion, governance is the topic that tops the event’s agenda. It is certainly a cross-cutting issue that concerns local and regional governments around the world.

Governance is the main motto to our local leaders. In this respect, governance is not operational without a vision and a strategy shared by citizens and civil society. All around the world, a new question emerges: how to organize the relationship between citizens, civil society at the local level with local government. This is a key point for the construction of the city of tomorrow.

The issue of progress and ways to achieve it are also of paramount concern. Progress for a nation becomes real when there is a local approach, local participation of citizens, a local democracy which allows for a type of economic, social and cultural progress that drives the country onward. We are going for the reverse approach and starting from the bottom.

We have to keep in mind that despite all the upheavals the world is going through, the city goes on existing intrinsically. Sometimes States disappear, regions also. But the cities are constantly changing. We ought to give cities the freedom to go on evolving and do so in a manner incorporating the new technologies, communication means, public transport… The ability of a city to incorporate all these will help it qualify as this vector of continuity.

Editorial

The session panel «UCLG standing committee on gender equality: women support democracy»

The fourth UCLG Summit opening ceremony
<< Building the proximity democracy >>

WOMEN IN FIGURES

10 capitals out of 195 cities are managed by women, which is 5.1%.
29 cities of over 1 million soul out of 493 are managed by women mayors standing for 6.1%.
20.3% seats held by women in the world, this figure was 19.5% in 2011. The highest increase was in Senegal were 42.7% MP’s are women.

25 countries have laws which do not allow women to pass on citizenship to their children. Most of these countries are in the Middle East, North Africa, subaharan Africa, but Asia and America are also concerned.

P2 Focus On Kadir Topbas : « to address the crisis, we need to innovate, seek alternatives, and strengthen solidarity »
P4 Interview with F. Oualalou : UCLG is the voice of local governments, decentralization and local democracy; Roger B. Myerson Local foundations for stronger democracy
Kadir TOPBAŞ, Mayor of Istanbul, whose motto is «Istanbul deserves utmost attention,» sums up his feelings towards Istanbul in a simple but significant sentence: «Istanbul is my life». He strives to turn Istanbul into a city that is able to compete with the megacities of the world.

2013, during which the Rabat Summit is held, is also a significant year for Kadir TOPBAŞ: «We are on the eve of two crucial deadlines for local and regional governments, the first in 2015 with the revision of the Millennium Development Goals, while the second relates to Habitat III Conference in 2016, and it is why we are present in the High Level Panel on the development agenda, established by Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-Moon.

The aim in this summit is to lay down the foundations for development's full-fledged agenda, says Kadir TOPBAŞ, who recalls that «in recent years, local and regional governments have taken very important steps in earning recognition of their key role in the global development agenda.

In July 2012, the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon created a High Level Panel in which I represent the voice of cities and regions, for a unique and universal development agenda which focuses on human issues. It is to that effect that we set up at the UCLG the international Taskforce of local and regional governments with a view to strengthening cities and regions in the post-2015 and Rio +20 processes towards Habitat III. At our last meeting in New York in May, the statement made by the Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon was very positive for us.»

For Kadir TOPBAŞ, competitiveness and solidarity are not contradictory notions: «In these times of crisis affecting the brunt of local government in some parts of the world, we need competitiveness that pulls up and generates resources and also solidarity between territories. Cities and regions are the engines of economic dynamics and development. In some parts of the world more than 65% of public investment goes through local and regional governments, so the dynamic of development lies in the territories.

If the economic crisis has deeply affected the local and regional governments and upset priorities, it forces us to innovate, to seek other solutions and strengthen solidarity. This issue was imposed on us and we will try to discuss it in Rabat.»
The fourth UCLG Summit opening ceremony

« Building the proximity democracy »

The fourth UCLG Summit, held under the High Patronage of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, which kicked off on Monday September 30th will be marked by a solemn opening ceremony on Wednesday October 2.

The message of His Majesty King Mohammed VI to be read out will be the high-water mark of the ceremony. A speech that will undoubtedly give meaning and substance to the work of this congress placed under the topic, «Imagine society, build democracy» and which coincides with the centennial of the international municipal movement.

The UCLG centennial

This movement was born in 1913, the year when Belgium hosted the first international conference of cities, the International Union of Cities later dubbed the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG).

On this occasion, the UCLG, a faithful heir of the movement, will trace the history of the last hundred years of municipal cooperation marked by success stories but also challenges. Also, key figures in the UCLG network, international institutions and actors in the world of development cooperation, will share visions of the historical movement, and its standing today and in the future.

Participative democracy

A future that will have to increasingly deal with issues such as the fight against racism and social exclusion, the fight for gender equality and the promotion of participatory democracy in compliance with various development agendas.

For this reason and in his capacity as mouthpiece and representative of local and regional governments, UCLG claims the role of the institutions closer to citizens in the construction of democracy.

This is also why UCLG introductory plenary focuses on a topic related to the stance to be adopted in dealing with the major changes in our era in our cities and regions. This plenary will analyze the major current and future challenges faced by local and regional governments in the world. It attempts to explain the impact of ongoing changes, including political, economic, social and environmental crises of cities and territories in different parts of the world.

UCLG will attempt to probe the fate of the world

UCLG will therefore attempt to question the world. Is it subject to serious irreversible breaks or just specific adjustments?

Noting that in 2030, 60% of men and women will be living in cities, UCLG will also explore solutions to cope with the growing urbanization worldwide, and probe to what extent cities, metropolises, and regions are they at the heart of the problems as well as the solutions to address the major energy, environmental, political, social and cultural issues of our time? This session will also reflect on the impact of local democracy and redraw the contribution of the international municipal movement to the construction of local democracy in the 20th century and to the strengthening of decentralization.

Renowned participants

It will also address the stakes for local democracy in the 21st century, taking into account the impact of the «Arab Spring» and attempts of re-centralization in some areas.

On all issues, renowned personalities will be expanding their visions.

Key participants include Roger Myerson, Nobel prize winner in economics and professor at the University of Chicago, Omar Azziman Omar, Advisor to His Majesty the King and President of the Consultative Committee on Regionalization, Andris Piebalgs, European Commissioner for Development Lakshmi Puri, Deputy Executive Director of UN Women, Khalifa Sall, Mayor of Dakar and President of UCLG Africa, and Xavier Trias, Mayor of Barcelona, Spain.
UCLG is the voice of local governments, decentralization and local democracy

In this interview, the Mayor of Rabat highlights the key challenges and priorities local leaders will deal with in the 4th UCLG Congress. He also pinpoints a number of initiatives, projects, and recommendations in order to address the global crisis.

Cities are a major concern for local governments meeting in Rabat. How high are cities in the congress agenda?

On the occasion of this world-class event, held in the capital of the Kingdom of Morocco, it is important to emphasize that this is in fact “the UN of cities”. Cities have become the main vectors of countries and it should be noted that urbanization, which ended in the Northern hemisphere in the 21st century, will be finalized in the South and with a relatively much faster pace. The big problem lies in the fact that due to the challenges facing our globalized world, it is important that the advocates for decentralization assist the UN, and states make their voice heard by taking part in the most important debates.

What are these debates focused on?

They are focused first on topics that are closely linked to cities, including urbanization and its impacts. It is inside the city that people’s lives are managed on a daily basis, and where big and small things, and moments of happiness and sadness take place.

At the same time, it is at the level of cities where we see the competing economies, competitiveness, and the attractiveness of a nation through the quality of its facilities and infrastructure (schools, clusters of knowledge, know-how, and culture...). Today, the attractiveness of a nation is defined inside the city, and discussions will focus on all the priorities to take into consideration.

In what context is the fourth congress taking place?

It is taking place in an extremely sensitive context. As a remainder, our meeting in Mexico in 2010 took place at a juncture marked by a major crisis that originated in the developed world due to the disruption of the financial system. The crisis affected the rest of the world. And ever since, people, men, and women have lived this crisis inside their cities. The Rabat Summit will also be a time of reflection on the post-crisis era, on how to end it, and the response capabilities of local authorities to support the post-crisis process and create new dynamics of national economies that are those of cities after all.

It is important to throw in, after the downward slide caused by the crisis, the local factor and decentralization in the ongoing debate. It is for this very reason that the UN will pay close attention to the Rabat meeting, which will be a great opportunity to prepare cities to be present in the three Agendas: the post-2015 MDGs, the urbanism agenda, and Rio+20.

What are the transitions that affect the African continent?

Africa is the continent of the urbanization of tomorrow, and it is important that such urbanization follow that of Europe in the 19th and 20th century. You know, the south-north and south-south demographic transition is an important dimension in understanding ongoing developments. Morocco, for example, is a country receiving and sending immigrants at the same time, in addition to being a transit country. So the demographic issue is fundamental. It is a matter of mediating between young and aging human structures. It is an important issue. The second transition is ecological or environmental. The third transition which is related to the second one is about energy. There is an ongoing debate on the switch from traditional fuels to renewable energy: solar, wind and other. In fact, we are dealing with building the 21st Century. And it is a matter of pride because Rabat will become a reference point, a reference in this debate.

What about Morocco and this evolution?

Morocco, especially after the reforms to its Constitution, believes in diversity and the virtues of diversity. Also, it is important that we play a leadership role in this realm in our region.

It is important to take into account the determination of the geography for Morocco. Geography is stubborn; it has always had an effect on identity. We are an African country, we have African roots, we are an Arab country, we are a Muslim country, and within, we are an Arab, Amazigh, Hassani country; we are a Mediterranean country, an Atlantic country. We are also open onto Europe and the Euro-Mediterranean area and open to the world through the Mediterranean. This is important in today’s world where there are risks of instability, terrorism, fanaticism, to raise values of diversity, pluralism and openness. This is essential.

Interview with Fathallah Oualalou

Roger B. Myerson, Nobel Economy Prize

Local foundations for stronger democracy

United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) is the foremost global organization for promoting democratic local government in all regions of the world. Local democracy is vital for democratic development. In some parts of the world, however, powerful vested interests for centralization have resisted the establishment of responsible democratic local governments. In the face of such forces against local democracy, UCLG has an important role as the international advocate of democratic local government.

Successful democracy requires more than just elections. For democracy to be effective, voters must choose among qualified candidates with proven records of public service. When such trusted leadership is lacking, democracy is inevitably fragile. Excessive centralization can also harm economic development. Poor communities can build and maintain local public goods that are essential for economic development, like roads and schools, but they can accomplish this only when their efforts are coordinated by local leaders whom they trust. Such trust can be expected only from leaders whose authority is based in local politics. Local officials whose positions depend on national political patronage are inevitably less concerned about developing trust among the residents of a small poor community. Interactions between the various levels of local and national politics can strengthen democracy at all levels. A constitutional system with democratic local government tends to become politically stable once it is established.

What can the international community do to facilitate the growth of local democracy around the world? International donors of economic assistance funds can help promote responsible local governments by including elected local governments as partners in economic development projects. Donors should insist that any country that receives their assistance should allow provincial and municipal governments to apply directly for some portion of the country’s development assistance funds. UCLG can have a major impact by disseminating information about democratic local governments in its Global Observatory of Local Democracy (GOLD). This will provide researchers with enough information about local political systems in many countries, increase understanding in this area, and help academic political scientists in the next generation of public officials to better appreciate the value of local democracy.

With broader understanding of the benefits of democratic local government, we can truly imagine a world in which people everywhere can trust their local and national leaders to provide the public goods and services that are essential for the welfare and prosperity of their communities.