



Technical Meeting 2022

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SPEECH BY IGNACIO SOCIAS

Welcome to the third technical meeting of signatories of the Venice Declaration. Since the Project was launched in October 2018, many cities and regions that include around 170 municipalities have joined it, even in the middle of the difficulties that we have all passed through in the last months: the economic recession, aggravated by a long pandemic as humanity hadn't suffered for more than a century and now, before finishing it, the consequences of a war in Eastern Europe.

This situation has and is still affecting many areas of our lives: emotional wellbeing, relationships and in the economy, with many people feeling the strain in their family relationships, being out of work and businesses facing the possibility of permanent closure. And as we are removing the dressing off some of these wounds to see what we are left with, we need to be prepared that things might be different in the future,

In the middle of all this, something is clear – families have shown once more how much we need their presence and strength in our lives, because no matter who you are or where you live, you should be able to live in a place that is healthy, prosperous, and resilient. Cities and towns of any size shouldn't be for a single type of person. You shouldn't have to uproot your life and move to a different place just because you enter a different stage of your life.

What's more, greater diversity—of race, income, and age—can lead to better outcomes for everyone. More inclusive communities have better education outcomes, less crime, are more economically productive, and have a “high level of civic cohesion.” There's also another benefit to being exposed to and interacting with people that are different from each other: developing empathy. By endeavoring to create a place that's great for families, we can create a place that's great for everyone.

"If we expect cities to be part of the answer to the problem of climate change, the financial unsustainability of sprawl, or anything else, then it has to be a place where children can be raised to thrive in the world . . . This doesn't mean necessarily junking the urbanist agenda, but it does mean building a bigger tent and not overly obsessing the needs of niche market segments." (Aaron Renn)

Perhaps some answers lie in the character of the built environment, too. Should we diversify our urban housing stock to include larger as well as smaller homes, to include playgrounds as well as trendy espresso bars? What about more kid-friendly restaurants?

Building places that are holistically family-friendly goes far beyond the built environment, but the built environment can help (or hinder) a city's efforts. Great schools, inclusive public spaces, multiple transportation options, and a variety of housing choices can help cities create diverse, inclusive communities that support families and society at large.

The list of issues included in the Venice Declaration is far from being exhaustive, but it demonstrates some of the ways in which we often overlook or take for granted families and their unique needs in cities. Often it's about simply providing more choice where we've favored one transportation option or housing style to the detriment of the greater good.

That's not to say that every neighborhood in a city or urban area needs to cater to families, but families shouldn't have to flee to more deprived areas to find a place that better meets their needs. To say nothing of the families that can't move and then are stuck in places where streets aren't safe for their kids, housing is too small, or lacking in green space.

In other words, in creating a place that works better for families, we create a place that works better for everyone.

Quite simply, family-friendly places are people-friendly places, and these things would be a start. What ideas do we have for cultivating more kids in the city? If we're as committed to diversity as we like to say, shouldn't that include children?

This meeting is called to be, therefore, a new step forward in our common effort to make SDG11 and the whole 2030 Sustainable Agenda a reality, through the implementation of Good practices related to the Venice Declaration and the communication of them among its signatories. By sharing our knowledge, we also promote empathy, as much as it is needed in today's present and future world.

