

3rd European Resources Forum, Berlin – 9/10 November 2016

Minutes from the European Resources Forum 2016

Minutes by:

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DAY 2 – Thursday, 10 November 2016

Key Note: Humanity on the move – the transformative power of cities

- **Dr. Inge Paulini** Secretary General, German Advisory Council on Global Change WBGU (substituting Prof. Dr. Dirk Messner)
- Chair: **Dr. Martin Hirschnitz-Garbbers** Coordinator Resource Efficiency & Circular Economy, Ecologic Institute

Dr. Paulini presented the results of a report on urbanization by the German Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU), which was submitted to the German government in April 2016 and contributed to the Habitat III conference in October 2016. The report is entitled “Humanity on the move – Unlocking the transformative power of cities” and builds on a former WBGU report which identified urbanization as a main area in need for transformation towards sustainability. Background of the report was the expected population growth as well as the growth and movement within cities. Furthermore, the issue of climate change and the new targets of the Paris Agreement have been taken into account in the report. Dr. Paulini pointed out the many challenges that are related to the urbanization surge, including the provision of housing, improving housing conditions and modernising existing infrastructure. She particularly emphasised the last point, stating that we will need to build approximately the same amount of infrastructure that has been build since 1850. Conventional technologies would not only consume huge amounts of resources, but also cause an enormous amount of green house gases. Cities are also confronted with social challenges, such as access to basic services (sanitation, fresh water), and dealing with socio-economic disparities. As one main message of the report, Dr. Paulini stated that it will be decided in the cities if global sustainable development, the goals of the Paris Agreement and SDGs can be achieved. She acknowledged that there are many studies on urbanization, and overall there is a consensus on key issues. These are housing, climate, infrastructures and mobility as technical areas, as well as the social areas governance, empowerment and inclusion. However, there is a lack of a long-term overall vision for transformation. Therefore, the WBGU aimed to build a normative compass. Dr. Paulini pointed out that there is no single blueprint that fits all. Rather, the “Eigenart” (i.e. the specific character) of each city needs to be considered. She closed her presentation by saying that we have many solutions already, but more research is needed and, even more importantly, existing networks in different areas need to be connected to enable integrated thinking.

Following the presentation, Dr. Paulini answered questions from the audience. First, it was asked whether cities are more efficient in regard to resource use compared to rural areas due to shorter ways, public transport and higher density and height of houses. According to Dr. Paulini, overall this does not seem to be true: the WBGU detected that energy consumption is overall lower in rural areas. She relates this to big changes in lifestyles in the cities, such as a trend towards more appliances and overall more resource use. The second question was on the

budget and impact of the WBGU. Dr. Paulini explained that the council is nominated by the German government and is comprised of nine professors who work independently. Their task is to inform and organise discussions as well as to give recommendations – but not to implement policies. The budget amounts to 1.7 million EUR. On the question what are the success factors for realising the sustainable transformation of the cities and what should be done, Dr. Paulini replied that you cannot plan huge changes, but you can engage and empower actors that have not yet been involved, and also strengthen their education. Moreover, she argued that top-down and bottom-up approaches have to go together; you need pressure from citizens and voters so politicians are able to realise changes.

Reflecting on model cities in Europe for sustainability, Dr. Paulini stated that it is hard to say there is one best fitting example. She mentions Copenhagen, which is on a good path in regard to energy, mobility and social inclusion; but stresses again that there is no one blueprint. Next, there is the comment from the audience, that growing cities and construction activities are related to an enormous resource demand. This is a topic that must be addressed to the international relations community concerned with climate protection. Here the question arises, what is the best way to address the international community? Dr. Paulini explains that in order to reach a larger audience, the WBGU report had been translated to English, a presentation on it was held in the German Habitat Forum, and summaries of the report in various languages were distributed at the Habitat III conference in Quito. She calls upon people working on identified key areas (e.g. transport) to look at the report and recommendations for the respective sectors. According to her, the way forward is to learn from good practice cities and pick what works and fits to your city. Moreover, comics have been included in the report to reach more people.

Finally, a person in the audience asked whether Dr. Paulini thinks that a drastic change was needed in the way we build infrastructure, particularly in regard to the use of concrete. Dr. Paulini affirmed that the way we build and create infrastructure needs to be changed and that we definitely need a change in construction materials. This includes for example the use of less concrete, more wood and also recycled construction waste. She stressed that the business as usual does not work and that a cultural change is needed to realise the transformation.