



DEMOCRATIC PRACTICES WILL, IN THE COURSE OF  
TIME, FURTHER ENRICH THE CONTENT OF THE  
PRINCIPLE OF LIVABILITY

# “Livability”

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The aim of the United Nations Conferences is the production of two documents. The first of these is a global plan of action. The target to be attained by the solution of the problem considered in this document consists of the formulation of the principles to be applied and the basic strategic options. It creates an international legal framework on the subject of problems on which interests are focused. The second is a national plan of action. This explains what will be done on the national level within the framework of the global plan of action.

The national plans of actions are the responsibility of the nations, while the global plans of action are produced as a result of international discussions. These are at present being held on the subject of the global plan of action to emerge at the end of the Istanbul Conference. In the course of these discussions, the Turkish delegation proposed the principle of livability as one of the main principles of the conference and this proposal was duly approved. This principle is of special importance insofar as it gives the Istanbul Conference an individual identity distinguishing it from other UN conferences. The Istanbul Conference is a conference on the subject of habitation, but prior to the acceptance of the principle of livability the conference lacked any principle

that would serve to define the character of a satisfactory habitation. Without such a principle, principles accepted in other UN conferences, such as sustainability, justice and bonds of citizenship, are incapable of deciding what is to be done in order to create a satisfactory habitation.

If livability had not been accepted as a principle, sustainability would have come to the fore in determining the form of habitation chosen by the Conference, in which case the Istanbul Conference would have been merely a continuation of the Rio Conference on Environment and Development. Sustainable development is defined as a form of development which meets present-day needs without reducing the possibility of meeting the

needs of future generations. It is thus a principle of inter-generation justice. It is, however, obvious that the satisfaction of the condition of sustainability does not necessarily entail the creation of a good, livable habitation.

Principles put forward at the UN conferences are carefully defined, but no matter how careful these definitions may be at the beginning, it remains impossible to foresee the importance the principle may later assume. The importance of a principle becomes apparent through time and use. The potential of the principles proposed becomes apparent with the passage of time. From the moment of their definition, these principles assume the character of a field of political conflict. Every political or ideological act is an attempt at moulding the content in a particular direction through a re-interpretation of the definition. The content of the principle crystallizes and develops as a result of this democratic practice. The sustainability principle possesses just such a discourse, and the principle of livability has a discourse quite peculiar to itself.

In the global plan of action placed on the Habitat Agenda, livability is defined as follows in connection with the predominantly spatial preoccupations of the town-planners. “The quality of life of the people is intimately connected with the ➤



spatial and physical features of our villages, country towns and cities, as well as with other social and economic factors. The plan and aesthetic appearance of the city, the form of land utilization, building and population density and the accessibility of the necessary public services all exert a very great influence on the livability of a habitation. Therefore, the idea of human habitations in which public health is adequately protected, safety and security guaranteed, in which the social group

can develop in all its variety and cultural identity and buildings and areas of historical and cultural significance are protected, should direct the administrative and supervisory processes towards the needs and expectations of the people regarding the creation of more livable districts and localities.

The more detailed treatment of this short statement of the Habitat Agenda in the Turkish national report will point out how local livability can be developed in

such a way as to include the characteristics and conditions given below.

It may be useful to touch upon the reason for the mention in the Turkish National Report of the development of criteria in these fields. It is desirable that the livability of a habitation should be accurately defined by means of the required performance criteria. Furthermore, these performance criteria are interpreted as the implementation and realization on the abstract plane of the principles of human rights in the field of habitation. The livability criteria of a habitation can therefore be regarded in a certain sense as the concrete expression of human rights

For example, the percentage of sulphur dioxide in a city's atmosphere can be seen as one of the concrete criteria of the right to life. The conservation of a habitation's historical and cultural identity is intimately connected with the right to a dignified life-style. It is obvious that the criteria related to the subject of housing belong to the second generation of human rights included within the right to a home. These examples could be multiplied to show that each one of the livability criteria are closely connected with human rights.

The close connection of the principle of livability with human rights clarifies its exact character. At the opening of the United Nations Human Rights Conference in Vienna, the UN General Secretary stressed that human rights were both universal and historical. This stress developed and enriched the concept of human rights as a universality depending not on reason but on consensus.

Pursuing this idea in this direction, it becomes clear that a principle of livability based on human rights bears the potential of forming a source of social activity. Just as the environmental movement rests on a principle of sustainability, a habitation movement which could be developed through Habitat II might, in the same way, find its support in the principle of livability. This habitation social movement may assist in the realization and enrichment of the principle of livability as twin movements with the human rights and environment movements. The principle of livability will be most suitably used not as the acceptance of present conditions but as part of the pursuit of something better, transcending the present state. ■

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## THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF A LIVABLE HABITATION\*

(a) The guarantee of the citizens' rights to life and health and the provision of adequate health conditions and environmental standards by ensuring adequate infrastructure, air and water quality, noise control, cleanliness, etc.;

(b) The safety and security of all citizens, especially women and children, at all times, in the home, the workplace and public places;

(c) The prevention of any discrimination in districts, housing markets and public goods by equitable service, planning, flexible zoning and administrative and legal precautions;

(d) The planning of a proper balance between built-up areas and green spaces, such as district parks and playgrounds, in land utilization for private and public use, and the implementation of same achieved after exhaustive discussion processes;

(e) The achievement by means of exhaustive discussion processes of a balanced building and population density;

(f) Ensuring the efficient use of the citizen's time and financial budgets by an effective urban form, reasonable distances between the home and the workplace, good quality communications and public transport, and the preservation of pedestrian priorities by preventing the domination of the roads by vehicular traffic;

(g) The provision and easy and equitable availability to all citizens, and more particularly to the handicapped, defenceless and crippled, of all public spaces, goods and services, including health, education, transport and communication .

(h) The provision and easy and equitable availability of recreational, entertainment and sporting facilities;

(i) The preservation of buildings, regions and practices of spiritual, historical and cultural significance;

(j) The adoption after due discussion of a method of taking into consideration developments in traditional, regional, modern and other styles in the spheres of housing aesthetic, art, architecture and town design and planning and the creation of a due balance between these;

(k) The increase and development of networks strengthening social cohesion and promoting respect for differences in life-style, cultural identity and other citizenship rights, and ensuring reciprocal influence between citizens and between that particular habitation and the world outside.

(l) The provision of regional institutions of good quality such as instructional, educational and cultural centres, museums, libraries, theatres, concert halls, newspapers and television stations that will strengthen education, the proliferation of information and the individual and social development of the citizens;

(m) The protection of the rights of citizens as consumers and the provision of information regarding sustainable forms of consumption;

(n) The prevention of activities and processes likely to lead to deterioration in livability standards, the establishment of observation and control mechanisms and their efficient working;

(o) Cooperative endeavours in the public sphere for the provision to all citizens of better livability standards without privileges being given to any individual or group.

\* Draft of HABITAT II Turkish National Report and Action Plan, December 1995. Turkish National Committee (2nd impression, p.80-81).