YOUR CITY, YOUR PLANET

The ideal sustainable city according to Greenpeace

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Sustainable cities are central to stopping climate change and biodiversity loss, and to transforming an economic model which is at the core of inequalities and the environmental crisis.

In light of 2050 population growth estimates, it is essential local governments commit to sustainability. In only three decades, world population –now at 7.5 billion– will increase by two billions; this means an enormous additional pressure on the planet. According to the OECD, in the near future 70 individuals out of 100 will live in megacities worldwide (http://www.oecd.org/environment/indicators-modelling-outlooks/oecd-environmental-outlook-1999155x.htm).

In general, our current city lifestyle is unsustainable. Among other things, cities are the biggest water and energy consumers, its where transport pollutes the most, where more single-use products are bought, where more food is consumed as it is where most of the population lives, and where more waste is generated (such as garbage). Cities promote speed, convenience and a frantic way of life that pays no heed to environmental strategies or to anything happening beyond their frontiers. City dwellers buy to reach a certain social status, for the sheer act of consuming, out of habit or because "it is the thing to do". It is an unsustainable way of life. This is an unsustainable pace both for our health and our planet. In order to change this rapid pace, public administrations, the private sector and citizens must do a complete change of mentality.

What is or what should a sustainable city look like?

For most people a sustainable city involves renewable energy, green spaces, bicycle lanes, advanced recycling systems, urban gardens, clean air, etc. These elements which need to be addressed urgently are included in some political programmes, but not in all of them. The inequalities found in neighborhoods and districts of cities that aspire to embody the concept of eco-innovativeness are unacceptable. The type of developments some cities allow and encourage are less about making cities livable and more a means for a minority to get richer and to drive out the people and small businesses from the most sought-after urban neighborhoods.

The concept of Sustainable City is included in the 2030 Agenda, specifically under SDG 11. It is organized around three areas. The social area includes all aspects relating to citizens' quality of life, their access to education and healthcare, housing cost, food prices, and security. A second area refers to environmental issues: pollution levels, use of renewable energy, accessibility to green spaces, success of recycling policies, etc. The third area pertains to economic aspects: indicators include per capita income, employment access and stability, and quality of public services such as transport.

Sustainable cities are energy self-sufficient and have the capacity to reuse their waste as raw materials. Cities that have eliminated single-use products, like plastic, and where container return systems are given priority. Where a sustainable diet is preferred and encouraged by reducing meat consumption and promoting organic and local agriculture. Cities with clean air as cars with polluting engines are limited, while walking, cycling and public transport are given priority. Cities where repair, second-hand or sustainable businesses are given precedence. Cities where all individuals are guaranteed access to safe, affordable, and accessible homes. These rich urban ecosystems are organized around environmental, social, equality and coexistence principles. Cities that prompt sustainable consumption will become people-friendly cities.

First, there can be no sustainability without equity, equal opportunities or guarantee of rights: the urban agenda must include access to housing and energy, quality of public services, protection against precariousness and poverty, plus accessibility to resources. Likewise, sustainability means greater democratic processes. The ideal would be for local citizens to participate in decision-making processes, and urban space planning and management. Second, as a result of the aforementioned this city ideal should be integral and transversal to all local policies, from public health to economic development, from urban planning to infrastructure investment. Last, we would like to add that without sex equality policies there will be no sustainable cities. Perpetuating gender inequality -women being the sole care providers, women's low political participation and lack of opportunities in local economies- makes it difficult for everyone to attain real sustainability.

Environmentally-friendly and sustainable urban mobility.

It is necessary to commit to public transport and sustainable mobility. Some of the following measures will help us comply with SDGs and bring us closer to a sustainable city: converting streets for pedestrian use, building bicycle lanes, promoting shared electric cars and motorcycles services as well as other forms of car sharing, and limiting circulation for those vehicles that pollute the most. Cities must lead the energy transition, moving towards a system that is not dependent on fossil fuels.

Measures

1 Fight against pollution.

All municipalities must prioritize pollution prevention and citizens' health protection by tackling high pollution levels. Therefore it is vital for cities to implement protocols for traffic related high pollution events.

2 City speed limit 30.

Lowering speed limits is essential to improving safety, lowering noise and facilitating the life of pedestrians and cyclists. To do so, many cities have implemented the "30 zone" model in residential areas. For this model to work roads must be redesigned to compel cars to moderate their speed; plus, a public information and surveillance campaign must be launched to ensure speed limits are not violated.

3 Redistributing public space.

When it was decided to promote cars as the main means of transportation, streets were handed over for their use: sidewalks became fewer, other means of transportation such as trams were eliminated, and bridges and tunnels were built to guarantee good traffic flow.

Today we know individual car transport is an inefficient way to move large numbers of people. To promote biking, walking and public transport we must begin by designing streets with users in mind first, without fear of leaving no space for cars. This is not about fixing traffic flow, but about guaranteeing mobility: prioritizing the space for those who use it best through bus and bike lanes, or/and more accessible sidewalks.

4 Improving above ground transport.

People from neighborhoods and municipalities with few mobility options demand the construction of the underground as a means to promote public transport. But the underground is expensive to build and maintain, and its construction is only worth in very specific situations.

Improving above ground transportation -trams and especially busses- will increase the use of public transport since this type of transport is able to serve more users as it covers a greater area and has greater accessibility. Improving traffic light priority, management systems and infrastructures (such as busway or BRT) will allow for a quality service with reasonable costs and deadlines.

5 One-for-all travel card.

As new travel options become available, public transport networks become more complex making it necessary to facilitate intermodality. Being able to change from one mode of transportation to another with no additional costs will allow citizens to choose the most convenient transportation combination in each case, saving time and improving convenience, while the Administration lowers costs by eliminating duplicated routes.

The one-for-all travel card will encourage the use of public transport, especially among occasional users. Using prepaid (balance) or postpaid cards, or even MaaS (Mobility-as-a-Service) systems, will make it easier to take advantage of all solutions available and to do without privately-owned cars.

6 Measures to decrease traffic.

For sustainable means of transport to effectively grow, measures must include ways to reduce total number of cars in areas that attract the most traffic or with greater traffic congestion. The first step is to penalize or eliminate surface parking because of the public space it takes.

Other usual measures include residential priority areas, low emission areas and pedestrian streets. Although some negative reactions are to be expected, these measures offer good results for businesses and people in these neighborhoods, provided measures include actions to counteract gentrification in these areas.

Healthy and Sustainable Food

Food is one of the most powerful tools available to every person and institution to fight against climate change, biodiversity loss, water consumption and pollution, animal welfare and to protect our health. Unfortunately, Spaniards are moving away from the traditional Mediterranean diet, and our meat and animal products consumption has sky-rocketed since the 60s (according to FAO data Spain is the second country in Europe in meat consumption, especially red and processed meat), and the vast majority of these products come from industrial livestock.

The latest scientific studies urge us to adopt the Planetary Health Diet. This diet is similar to the traditional Mediterranean diet where vegetable foods make up the biggest portion of the diet but where small amounts of fish, meat and other animal products may also be included. Adopting this diet would improve our health and that of the planet, and is the only way to guarantee food for everyone. The Milan Urban Food Policy Pact is a pact to develop sustainable food systems, every city should join. The 10th indicator to measure cities' progression towards sustainability takes into account the consumption of meat per person.

Measures

1 The Planetary Health Diet in governmental institutions' canteens.

Local governments must decrease meat and animal products offered in public canteens while increasing organic, local and seasonal vegetables and foods.

To do so, they must follow the most recent international scientific guidelines as well as the Guide for Healthy Eating of the Sociedad Española de Nutrición Comunitaria, and apply the new regulation for public procurement and introduce specific criteria to reduce the environmental footprint of mass catering bids. One way to show they care about what goes on beyond their frontiers is to approve a motion by which they commit to adopting the Planetary Health Diet.

2 Organic, local, seasonal and plant-based foods in public events.

Public events are a great opportunity for cities to show their commitment to healthy and sustainable food, and to organic and local products and producers. To this end, cities will only accept bids from public procurement companies that only cater plant-based, organic, local and seasonal foods. Additionally, this will ensure everyone attending the event can happily enjoy the food regardless of food preferences.

3 Organic, local and seasonal food for everyone.

Cities have the ability to bring organic, local and seasonal food to everyone, especially to highly vulnerable groups and to children whose development is highly conditioned by food. To this end, cities can develop programs to provide new distribution channels for these foods, and to allocate part of their budget to distributing this type of food in school canteens, soup kitchens and among the most vulnerable individuals.

4 Join the Milan Pact.

The Milan Urban Food Policy Pact was created to develop sustainable food systems and is one of the best international tools to promote healthy and sustainable diets in cities. Close two hundred cities around the world, of which almost two dozen are in Spain, have already joined the Milan Pact and are launching many initiatives to improve their food system's sustainability.

Ten out of its 44 indicators focus on individual meat consumption, thus it is a city's responsibility to keep meat intake within a healthy and sustainable range.

Joining the Milan Pact is an excellent way for cities to show their commitment to a healthy and sustainable diet and to launch food related initiatives.

5 Megafarms free cities .

According to the latest statistics from the European Commission, 66% of Spanish farmed land is used to produce food for livestock. In addition, almost 80% of livestock products come from megafarms. For example, 93.7% of pork production, 94.2% of poultry meat and 80.6% of milk and other dairy products come from large or very large farms that negatively impact our environment, our health, local development and animal welfare. Local governments can create and approve city regulations that prevent such livestock farming model from settling in their territory, thus showing their commitment to sustainable production.

6 Encourage restaurants to adopt the Planetary Health Diet.

Collaborate with hotels and restaurants to help them adopt and promote the Planetary Health Diet.

Waste Management and Circular Economy

The European Union recommends a transition towards waste management systems based on circular economy; that is, an economy oriented towards reducing waste and facilitating waste recycling to convert it again into raw material. Among many things, this would mean that in the future every building would have a domestic waste sorting facility, and that public administrations would prioritize hazardous waste collection. At the same time, organizations like Greenpeace are trying to change mentalities and move society from a "throwaway" culture to a culture of reparability, reusability and exchange.

Measures

1 Cities free from single-use plastics.

The European Single-Use Plastics Directive bans the use of straws, plates, cotton bud sticks, sticks to be attached to and to support balloons, cutlery, beverage stirrers, and food and beverage containers made of expanded polystyrene. This ban will take effect in 2021 and is applicable to the entire EU, and it provides cities a great opportunity to implement it. Buildings, municipal facilities, and whenever possible city establishments, can opt for reusable alternatives and say bye-bye to single-use plastics.

At city/town level, local governments can become free of single-use plastics by using reusable steel cutlery, reusable bamboo or steel drinking straws, reusable steel beverage stirrers, and reusable glasses and plates made of glass, china or other reusable material.

2 Single-use plastic free events.

Public events provide cities another great opportunity to show their commitment and adopt reusable alternatives. To this end, cities can require public procurement companies to eliminate single-use products from their catering and beverage services. This mean these companies would be responsible for providing reusable products, food/beverage in reusable containers, and for collecting and managing these products so they can be used in future events.

To this effect, a deposit system for products and utensils provided can be set up. Glasses, plates and cutlery needed for the event may be subject to a fee which is refunded upon return. Thus, companies responsible for catering services can retrieve containers and products via an incentive, and can wash them after the event to be used again. This method is already in place in several festivals and even in supermarkets with takeaway food.

3 Promote tap water.

Access to drinking water is a fundamental human right recognized by the United Nations, and everyone must have access to it. In Spain, 99.3% of tap water is drinkable. Drinking tap water saves enormous amounts of plastic and energy. A 1L mineral water bottle requires 5 liters of water during its manufacturing process (including cooling water for the power plant).

Local governments must encourage sustainable and responsible consumption of tap water in homes, as well as in public places, governmental facilities, and hotel and catering business.

Drinking water fountains in public spaces should once again be the norm so citizens are able to fill-up refillable bottles.

In addition, municipalties could offer non-plastic refillable/reusable bottles in tourist information offices, partner establishments, markets, etc...

4 Implement a waste generation fee.

Implementing a generation fee or pay-as-you-throw (PAYT) refers to a waste management system that allows cities and municipalities to charge a fee to each user based on the amount of waste individually generated. This system is not only fairer, as those who generate more waste pay more and those who generate less waste pay less, but it also provides an incentive for citizens which results in greater reduction and recycling levels.

5 Door-to-door waste collection.

Spain falls short in urban waste management, a responsibility of local governments. In 2016 (last year analyzed), a total of 21.9 million tons of urban waste were collected. This means 471 kilos per person per year. Of these, 18.1 million (82.6%) is mixed waste (of which almost nothing is recovered) and 3.8 million (17.4%) is waste from separate collection.

These data shows a system with better waste selective collection is essential, and one of the best options is door-to-door collection. Under this system, homes, industries or businesses separate domestic waste in fractions that allow for its recycling and reuse.

Informing citizens through awareness and education days on waste separate collection is as important as implementing a better system.

6 Containers deposit, return and recovery systems.

Systems that encourage the return of containers, known as deposit-return systems (DRS), have shown the best results for container recovery where implemented.

These systems foster the use of reusable packaging, and when they are implemented recycling rates triples. For local governments this means significant savings in cleaning services and treatment costs.

In addition, by implementing systems that encourage citizens to return containers we prevent and stop containers from being left in natural environments. Leaving behind plastic waste is the main cause of ocean plastic pollution as most ocean waste begins as land waste.

7 Encourage bulk sales, reuse and repair.

The level at which we consume natural resources and generate waste is unsustainable. Cities have become the epitome of consumption. A sustainable city provides good quality of life without jeopardizing natural resources and while taking care of citizens' health and well-being.

To meet this objective, it is essential to develop local awareness campaigns on sustainable consumption. It is also essential to publicly support and promote the creation of repair shops and second-hand shops, as well as businesses that eliminate the unnecessary use of packaging, prioritizing bulk sales and thus generating new jobs in a circular economy.

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Greenpeace is an independent global campaigning organisation that acts to change attitudes and ehaviour, to protect and conserve the environment and to promote peace.

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