Cities are both order and chaos. In them reside beauty and ugliness, virtue and vice. They bring out the best and the worst in humankind. Cities are the materialization of humanity’s noblest ideas, ambitions and aspirations but also the repository of society’s ills. They are the physical manifestation of history and culture and incubators of innovation, industry, technology and creativity. They can also be the breeding grounds for crime, poverty and pollution.

Cities are perhaps one of humanity’s most intriguing creations, never finished, never definitive. They are like a journey that never ends. Their evolution is determined by their ascent into greatness or their descent into decline. They are the past, the present and the future.

How can one harmonize and synthesize the various interests, diverse opinions and inherent contradictions within cities? Half of humanity now lives in cities, and within the next two decades, nearly 60 per cent of the world’s people will be city dwellers. How can one create harmony between the physical, environmental and cultural aspects of a city and the human beings that inhabit it?

A harmonious city is one that promotes unity within diversity. Reconciling contradictory and complementary elements is critical to creating harmony within cities. Harmony within cities hinges not only on economic growth and vitality and its attendant benefits, but on three pillars that make harmony possible: equity, good governance and sustainability.

Harmony is both an ancient social ideal as well as a modern notion. In ancient Chinese philosophy, harmony implied moderation and balance in all things. Today, the concept of harmony encapsulates more modern concepts, such as environmental sustainability, equity, gender parity, pro-poor growth and participatory governance. While the concept of sustainability focuses on ethical and ecological considerations and is focused primarily on protecting the Earth’s environmental and natural assets, the concept of harmony also entails the synchronization and integration of all of the Earth’s assets, whether they be physical, environmental, cultural, historical, social or human. In this sense, harmony is a broad concept that relies on distinctly human capabilities, such as mutual support, solidarity, integrity, conscientiousness and happiness. Harmony has now become the theoretical foundation for deepening the social, economic, political and environmental fabric of cities in order to create a more balanced society.

Harmony is therefore both a journey and a destination.

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1 The history of civilization is the history of cities. The word “civilization” itself comes from Latin civitas, which means city.
3 The idea that urban planning entails integrating a city’s various assets has been elaborated by John Friedmann (2006)

The State of the World’s Cities 2008/9 report adopts the concept of Harmonious Urbanization as a theoretical framework in order to understand today’s urban world, and also as an operational tool to confront the most important challenges facing the urbanization and development processes. The concept promotes the birth of new things and thoughts about the city. It features tolerance, fairness, social justice and governance, all of which are inter-related. This integration seeks to promote a more harmonious coexistence at the city level.

This report addresses national concerns by searching for solutions at the city level. For that purpose it focuses on three key areas: spatial or regional harmony; socio-economic harmony and environmental harmony. The report also assesses the various intangible assets within cities that contribute to harmony, such as cultural heritage, places, memories and the complex set of social and symbolic relationships that give cities meaning. These intangible assets represent the soul of the city and are as important as its tangible assets.

Spatial or Regional Harmony

This report shows that the city and regions surrounding it have a symbiotic relationship. As long as this relationship is understood and carefully nurtured, both will advance together. It provides preliminary observations on the spatial identity of the world’s cities, going beyond the “one or two cities tell everything approach” that has dominated urban studies so far. Part One of this report shows with compelling evidence that the growth of cities is experiencing a dramatic bifurcation: while most cities in the global South are growing in population size with some doubling in size every 15 or 30 years, some cities are actually experiencing a population loss (a phenomenon well-known in the North). Contrary to popular opinion, these changes are not random or organic; population growth or decline can be explained through a regional and urban analysis.

Understanding which cities are experiencing a boom in terms of economic and demographic growth is crucial to maximize gains, locate or relocate investments and opportunities and to plan for more sustainable development. Understanding which cities or parts of cities, metropolitan areas and regions are experiencing a decline in their populations is important because it allows us to anticipate trends, design recovery policies and rethink strategies for keeping people and opportunities in cities.

This report advocates for decision-makers at all levels to become more cognizant of some of the spatial nuances of economic and social policies. It analyzes the factors that make cities grow and the factors that lead to their decline. Understanding the determinants of the growth of cities can help planners to support the processes that lead to harmonious urban development and to deal with some of the negative consequences of urban growth, such as asymmetrical regional development and rural-urban disparities.

The report provides strong evidence to support the argument that, to a large extent, local inequalities are explained by regional inequalities (i.e. cities in decline reflect regional trends of economic decay and cities growing reflect often dynamic economic regions). It concludes that there is a real need for regional and national governments to integrate spatial planning into urban

planning and for economic and social policies to address the needs of both cities and the regions in which cities are located, including urban-rural interfaces. If this is not done, it is likely that regional disparities and spatial inequalities will continue to widen.

**Socio-economic Harmony**

In many cities, wealth and poverty coexist in close proximity: rich, well-serviced neighbourhoods and gated residential communities live next to dense inner-city or peri-urban slum communities that lack even the most basic of services.

Today some one billion people—nearly one-third of the world’s urban population—live in slum conditions. Slum dwellers experience multiple deprivations that are direct expressions of poverty: many of their houses are unfit for habitation and they often lack adequate food, education, health and basic services that the better-off take for granted. Frequently, their neighbourhoods are not recognized by local and central authorities; however, in many parts of the world these “invisible” or informal parts of cities are growing faster than formal parts of the city.5

In its *State of the World’s Cities 2006/7* report, UN-HABITAT showed a new urban reality where slum dwellers die earlier, experience more hunger, have less education, have fewer chances of employment in the formal sector and suffer from more ill-health than the rest of the urban population.6 However, inequalities and levels of deprivation have wide variations in different regions and countries. This 2008/9 edition of the report shows that slum-dwellers live with different levels of deprivation: extreme, moderate or low, with diverse health and education outcomes, according to countries and geographic regions. It shows, for instance, that a slum resident in the city of Cairo can be better-off than a non-slum dweller in Lagos or Luanda, in terms of indicators such as health. It also shows that a low-income inhabitant in Turkey, Saudi Arabia or Brazil may live in a slum, but has access to more services and better housing than an inhabitant of a slum in Bangladesh, Haiti or Yemen. In other words, not all slum dwellers around the world suffer the same fate: some are worse off than others. By disaggregating the type and level of shelter deprivation in slums (i.e. severe or non-severe), policy makers will be in a better position to devise policy responses that are better focused and targeted.

The analysis of socio-economic disparities by city-size, as presented in this report, challenges some general assumptions: capital and large cities do not host the worst-off slum neighborhoods, as conventional wisdom dictates, and not all secondary cities are more deprived than large cities, as recent studies have suggested. Slum incidence and levels of shelter deprivation vary by countries and by regions; In general, however, the poorest regions of the world tend to host the largest slum populations who suffer from multiple shelter deprivations. These differentiated levels of social inequality and exclusion can adversely affect cities and regions’ social and economic development.

The report also presents preliminary findings of a first global analysis of income inequality at the city level. The overall conclusion of the findings is that income inequality within cities is high in the developing world, especially in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa, where in some cities, it is actually rising. The report analyzes in detail the cities where a steady worsening trend in the distribution of income is observed and the cases where there are some improvements.

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The analysis of income inequality using variables, such as city-size, levels of population growth poverty, geographic locations, etc., show prevalence of higher levels of income inequality in urban than in rural areas. The analysis also demonstrates that larger cities in the developing world are more likely to have higher levels of inequality and, in general terms, countries in the developing world that are at an advanced stage of urbanization, such as South Africa and Brazil, tend to show higher levels of inequality. It shows that cities with low Gini coefficient have been growing faster than cities with a high Gini coefficient. The reasons that explain these differences are presented in the report.

A society cannot claim to be harmonious if large sections of its population are deprived of basic needs while other sections live in opulence. A city cannot be harmonious if some groups concentrate resources and opportunities while others remain impoverished and deprived. Income inequalities within cities not only threaten the harmony of cities, but of countries as well, as they create social and political fractures within society that could develop into social unrest or full-blown conflicts. The reduction of income inequalities and the provision of services and better housing to those who live in slum conditions would go a long way in averting the types of conflicts that are becoming increasingly prevalent in many cities around the world.

**Environmental Harmony**

It is now generally accepted that global average temperature rise due to climate change could take human beings into an unknown territory and transform the physical geography of the world. Changes in the Earth’s temperature will also impact where and how people live.

Like any other organic system, cities consume, metabolize and transform energy, water and materials into goods and waste. Although cities consume a disproportionate share of the world’s energy, and are responsible for a large share of climate-changing global greenhouse gas emissions, this report clearly shows that it is not the level of urbanization in a country or the size of a city that determine the level of emissions; rather, the level of greenhouse gas emissions are determined by other factors, such as consumption patterns, lifestyles, income levels and urban sprawl. For instance, a megacity such as Sao Paulo in Brazil produces far less carbon emissions than a medium-size city such as Austin in Texas, USA, partly because the latter is more dependent on motorized transport. Although income levels tend to determine levels of energy consumption and carbon emissions in cities, lifestyles and consumption patterns are equally important. For instance, Europe, one of the world’s most highly developed and urbanized regions, produces less carbon emissions than the USA or China and is implementing policies to reduce emissions further. In fact, China’s emissions are nearly five times those of India, even though both countries have similar economic growth rates and urbanization levels. These examples point to the fact that when explaining a city’s energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions, it is important to bear in mind not just the size of a country’s economy, its transport and consumption patterns, but also the form and structure of its cities.

The report presents new data and information on how cities consume energy by sector (industry, residential and commercial buildings, services and transport), taking into account the stage of development of countries and their income levels. Heating and lighting of residential and commercial buildings ranks first in the household energy end uses in cities of the developed world and is one of the main causes of energy-related greenhouse emissions, while transport consumes the largest share of energy in developing world cities. However, at the global level, transport, including air and rail transport, is not as big an emitter of emissions as are residential and commercial buildings or land use change and deforestation. Furthermore, agriculture
produces emissions that are comparable to the transport sector. These findings indicate that efforts to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions have to focus on both rural and urban areas.

At the household level, a large number of low-income households in cities of the developing world consume energy for cooking, rather than for heating and lighting. The report demonstrates that poor households in low-income countries expend in proportion to their income more money in energy consumption than other non-poor urban residents. It also shows that the progressive reduction in the use of fuel-wood and the shift to charcoal may lead to an increase in greenhouse gas emissions, even if it will improve the health conditions of urban dwellers in the short term. For urban poor households the climb up the energy ladder – from biomass fuels to “cleaner” energy sources, such as electricity – not only improves their quality of life, but also reduces greenhouse emissions. There is, therefore, a need of financial support from the government and the international community to introduce new energy-efficient and environmentally-friendly technologies in low-income communities in order to reduce their environmental impact and lessen environmental hazards. The Report makes reference to some of these urban energy policies, presenting successful cases implemented at the city level.

The report also presents detailed information on how climate change will impact coastal settlements that may be adversely affected by rising sea levels. It shows which coastal towns and populated delta regions will experience increased flooding and why slum settlements that tend to be located in flood-prone areas will be particularly affected.

Countries and cities that adopt green policies and enforce energy-efficiency can dramatically reduce pollution, diminish loss of biodiversity and forests and lessen the production of carbon emissions. The report shows, using various examples, that harmonious urbanization presents a real opportunity to minimize environmental impacts through economies of scale and concentration of environmental sectoral solutions.

**Cultural and Generational Harmony**

Cities are not just brick and mortar; they represent the dreams, aspirations and hopes of societies. In a way, each city has its own “personality”, with its strengths and weaknesses, failures and successes. A city’s “soul” is exhibited through its cultural heritage, its traditions and its social fabric – in other words, its “intangible assets”. A city may have excellent facilities and infrastructure, but it may lack social cohesiveness, while another city may have a high prevalence of poverty but an extremely high sense of its own history and culture.

The management of a city’s intangible assets is as important as the management of its infrastructure, its social amenities and its public spaces. In fact, some would argue that intangible assets are often more important in determining levels of well-being in cities than socio-economic indicators.

Paradoxically, as standards of living are increasing in some countries and cities, levels of happiness are decreasing. One survey in Britain, for instance, showed that people are less content today than they were in the 1950s, despite the fact that Britain today is three times richer than it was half a century ago. Indeed, the survey showed that the proportion of people saying that they

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7 This part has not been yet fully analyzed and written. These are preliminary thoughts.
8 BBC, Britain’s Happiness in Decline, article by Marc Easton, 2007.
were “very happy” had fallen from 52 per cent in 1957 to just 36 percent today. A similar trend has been observed in the United States and other European countries, particularly in the former Soviet Union.

Well-being is no longer understood purely in terms of an increased material standard of living and quantitative growth. Rather, qualitative aspects such as dreams, aspirations, culture and relationships seem to play a larger role in determining which communities are happy and which are not. A city that does not correspond to these dreams, aspirations and cultures becomes “soulless”, or alienating; it may be prosperous and efficient, but does not respond to the emotional, cultural or generational needs of its citizens.

The report shows that the concept of “having” in the sense of owning material resources, such as like money, goods and housing, has to be combined with social needs and relations, like social networks, emotional support and social integration, and also with forms of “being” such as overall recognition, the need to integrate into society, participation in public life and a sense of belonging. A city that preserves intangible assets, such as symbolic and historical neighbourhoods, cultural life, inter-generational relationships and different forms of societal relations and resources, is a more harmonious city than one that neglects the very assets that give it a “soul”.

The Role of Government and Planning

To bring a suitable, timely and appropriate state of harmony in cities, there is a need for new political action that perceives the city in a broader territorial dimension of city-region and focuses on developing its physical, social, environmental, human and cultural assets in a way that brings stability and balance. Doing so would require a strong government capable of innovation that uses the concept of harmony to generate a new vision of a city that would entail working together towards the implementation of this vision with the city’s population, corporate interest and other government authorities, regulating social contradictions by mutual understandings and continuous collaboration based on a broad long-term agreement.

This report presents the main conclusions of an analysis of the policies and interventions that cities are implementing to achieve more harmonious development. The analysis was conducted by UN-HABITAT and the Cities Alliance and covers approximately 30 cities. This study provides a better understanding of what drives city/country’s performance in reducing intra-city inequalities by upgrading slums and preventing their formation. It also provides preliminary observations on what cities are doing to address environmental concerns, particularly with regards to poverty and the environment.

Changing the approach to today’s world urbanization process calls for enlightened political leadership with clear long-term political commitments, progressive sectoral and institutional reforms, and massive mobilization of domestic resources to scale up actions and sustain the motion of change. It also calls for a strategic definition of priorities responding to four fundamental concerns: i) geographic or spatial disparities, ensuring that government policies promote convergence of leading and lagging regions and cities, supporting further development in the former and dealing with asymmetric growth and regional disparities in the later; ii) an

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9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
increasingly divided urban society, ensuring that governments adopt pro-poor growth policies and reforms by designing interventions in those sectors and areas in which poor people earn their living and where economic development has clear distributional changes; iii) increased environmental costs, ensuring that governments and the international community adopt policies to enhance energy efficiency and promote environmental protection by exploring consumption modes suitable for development that do not impair economic growth; iv) lost of cities’ soul, ensuring that governments adopt policies to protect intangible assets such as its cultural heritage, and creating social spaces that contribute to “humanizing” a city. The interaction between these different interventions will create a state of harmony that will bring stability and prosperity to the world’s cities.

Finally, the report analyzes the implications of world urbanization trends that are causing urban populations to spread out beyond their old city limits, rendering the traditional municipal boundaries, and by extension, the traditional governing structures and institutions, outdated. The report concludes that metropolitan governance arrangements affect the levels of harmony and disharmony in cities. Spatial, as well as economic, social and environmental harmony, depend on effective metropolitan governance.

Many urban agglomerations of more than one million inhabitants are becoming “cities of cities” requiring new governance structures with new requirements for good practice such as effective leadership, efficient financing for metropolitan governance, effective evaluation mechanisms and forms of citizen participation, and institutional reforms addressing multi-level and inter-jurisdictional challenges in governing metropolitan areas.

Concerns related to an increasingly divided urban society, together with inequalities and poverty that stretch across large metropolitan areas point to the need for balanced urban development policies embedded in metropolitan planning and governance frameworks. Similarly, cities of different sizes within countries are struggling with issues of metropolitan governance and inter-city harmony. Some cities experience demographic and/or economic decline while others face rapid growth and development. Cooperation among cities, working together instead of in competing within the same metropolitan territory, can help to overcome disharmonies associated with crime, poverty, social inequalities, under-serviced transport systems and inadequate infrastructure. Effective metropolitan governance offers the potential for more harmonious urban development.

12 In the past, cities were characterized as having one central area or central business district, well-defined limits of residential and industrial growth, and a clearly delineated area of commercial influence in a defined larger region, this often being the surrounding rural hinterland. Currently, metropolitan areas worldwide often have more than one central area, very diffused limits defined often not so much by local geography but more in terms of global reach, extended commercial areas of influence (often commanding influence for the country as a whole), and highly diversified economies.