

URBAN URGENCY

SUMMARY

WATER CAUCUS, MARSEILLE, FRANCE, 14 OCTOBER 2009



Keynote and Panel:

- Philippe de Fontaine Vive Curtaz, European Investment Bank
- Antoine Frérot, Veolia Water
- Jean-Claude Gondard, City of Marseille
- Wen Kel Lim, Incheon Metropolitan City
- Bill Cosgrove, Ecoconsult

In introducing the Urban Urgency plenary session, Philippe de Fontaine Vive Curtaz, Vice President of the European Investment Bank, evoked some of the major urban challenges we are facing, such as poverty, aging populations, increasing inequalities in access to work, social integration and governance. Managing urbanisation is a difficult task within a constantly evolving context. Urban challenges are interlinked with challenges in other development sectors. In both water and urbanisation, the challenges and the solutions vary from one region to another, from one country to another and even locally.



Philippe de Fontaine Vive Curtaz

According to the United Nations, 50% of the world's population lives in cities, and in 2050, this proportion will rise to 70%. The world will be more and more urbanised, but an urbanisation characterized by poverty.

It is probable that the process of urban concentration will slow in Europe. Conversely, in developing countries, urbanisation has progressed much faster and, hypothetically, this tendency will continue. According to UN projections, between 2007 and 2050, the portion of the urban population in the planet's least developed regions will increase from 28% to 56%.



However, European cities will not be spared. Old cities in rich countries may have difficulties adapting to change, and many cities will be confronted with the problem of their centres becoming run-down. Managing these levels of urbanisation will be more difficult if capacities in spatial planning and management are limited.

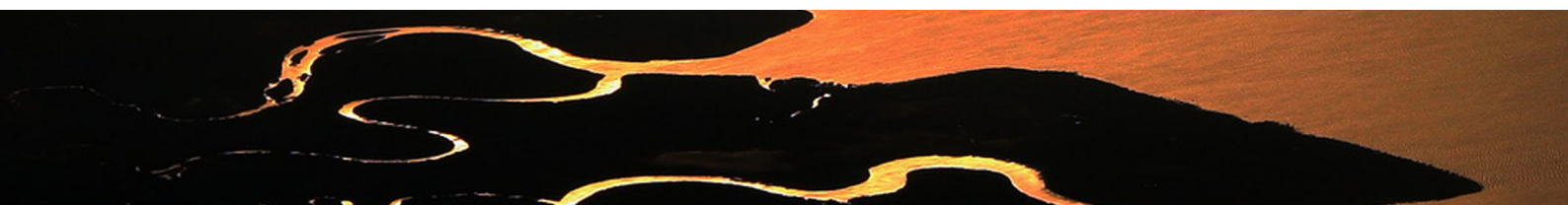
Intersecting urbanisation, water issues exacerbate the challenges. By 2030, 3.9 billion people in the world will live in water-scarce regions, which is 1 billion more than today.

The panellists commented on this introduction with their perception of the challenges as seen through the prism of their own contexts, before raising other points for consideration.

The city is often approached with worry, like an illness to remedy. However, none of the problems can be solved if it is perceived as a danger.

Place for establishment, accomplishment, liberty and well-being, cities let people escape isolation and poverty, and at the same time, offer opportunities and possibilities to meet others.

Since the influx of populations towards cities cannot be stopped, rather than condemning existing realities, methods for controlling urban development must be found, according to Antoine Frérot, Director General of Véolia Water.



To illustrate these points, two examples of cities, Marseille (France) and Incheon (South Korea) were presented respectively by Jean-Claude Gondard, Secretary General of the City of Marseille, and Wen Kel Lim, Director of Water Management Division for Incheon Metropolitan City.

Marseille, a moderate city of 1 million inhabitants, has adopted a strategy that depends on three dimensions of sustainable development: economy, societal balance, and protection of the environment.

The strategy supports the City and the neighbourhoods that comprise it in their efforts to combat social exclusion and environmental and climate problems. These actions also take into account the city's good qualities.

Marseille has a strong tradition of water know-how, in terms of supplying good quality drinking water; in terms of sanitation, since a new treatment plant was inaugurated in 2007; and in terms of risk management, especially with regards to flooding.

The recurring questions of financing and technical solutions are necessary for achieving the designated objectives.



Incheon, a megacity of 7 million inhabitants, has undergone super-urbanisation. Water availability has diminished over the past decades in Korean regions, which has engendered increased awareness of users who today use less water. But, Korea has also experienced extreme events, provoking heavy flooding. To adapt to this hydrological context, Incheon further developed desalination, treatment and reuse of wastewater, as well as rainwater collection. The City hopes to treat 100% of its wastewater by 2015.

Balanced spatial planning requires human-sized cities. To refine thinking and find better adapted solutions, a distinction must be made between big cities and those that are designated as secondary.

Because they offer comfort and equity, collective services, including first and foremost water and sanitation, are a factor of attraction. Regardless of the size of the city, these services should be accessible to all, including to newly arrived inhabitants so that they may become totally integrated. Antoine Frérot recalled that equality of access to these services reinforces social cohesion, security and citizenship.



Comments received from the floor helped to situate the subject within a wider framework. They recalled:

- the role of virtual water;
- the limitations of policies related only to the offer and the need to balance offer and demand;
- the need to reinforce rural zones, whose situations are at the origin of the exodus towards cities, and to consider the territory as a whole;
- the importance of planning, roadmaps, spatial planning and decentralization;
- the need to develop the capacities of personnel in charge of these issues, financial engineering and the quality of governance;
- financial innovation;
- the importance of citizen participation.

The participants also proposed that a theme on global spatial planning be included in the next World Water Forum. It was concluded that solutions to urban challenges must be adapted to each context and to the size of each city.

