

‘No Regrets’ Charter

Principles for Climate Change Adaptation in Cities

Preamble

1. Acknowledging that climate change is complex, with its precise future patterns and impact relatively uncertain.
2. Recognizing that, as testified by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, changes in climate over the coming decades will probably have a profound effect on the planet.
3. Affirming that, as United Nations Convention on Climate Change (COP) process has agreed, climate change adaptation and mitigation are bound up with each other.
4. Affirming that the present charter builds upon the terms of the 2011 Durban Adaptation Charter (see Appendix 2).
5. Agreeing that the carbonn Climate Registry (ICLEI) works as a common global reporting platform for enhancing the credibility of urban climate action activities.
6. Recognizing that *no regrets* strategies are based on concepts and measures that can begin to be enacted now without being certain about all dimensions of future climate change.

We the signatories to this *No Regrets Charter* now underline the importance of the following steps beyond existing charters and agreements:

- To work together to establish general principles for urban climate change adaptation through ‘no regrets’ measures (See ‘Basic Principles’ below); and
- To develop negotiable and adaptable guidelines for the implementation of adaptation strategies oriented towards the precepts of sustainability, resilience and liveability (See ‘Principles in Practice’ below).

Basic Principles

We, the signatories to this *No Regrets Charter*, agree to the following basic principles:

Principle 1. *Climate adaptation needs to start here and now*

Adaptation requires time. Adaptation to climate change involves long-term goals, and its success may only be able to be perceived a generation hence. Responses need to be monitored in an ongoing way that extends over longer time-spans than electoral periods. This means that we need to begin now to make changes relevant to long-term adaptation. For this, strong political leadership, commitment and accountability are indispensable.

Principle 2. *Climate adaptation needs a 'no regrets' or precautionary approach*

The discrepancy between the necessity of pursuing long-term objectives and meeting short-term political purposes can be overcome by 'no regrets' measures. Having no regrets does not mean business as usual, but rather taking a precautionary principle to future risks. 'No regrets' measures are steps that include improving the quality of life today in relation to long-term adaptation to climate change. In this way we can counter uncertainty about how serious climate change will be, and heighten acceptance for the measures that need to be taken.

Measures are taken and strategies are thus adopted in a precautionary sense with the aim of responding to possible negative impacts before they intensify. Such measures are advisable for future generations, but also relevant to enhancing the living conditions of people in the present. With a 'no regrets' strategy, the benefit of these measures to society therefore continues even with the mitigation of the worst anticipated consequences of climate change.

Principle 3. *Climate adaptation needs an integrated and collaborative approach.*

Climate change will impact in a changing way on all fields of urban life and environment. Planning strategies should therefore, as a matter of principle, be constructed in such a way that they take into account possible future effects of climate change and leave the way open for integrating adaptation measures into changing policy parameters.

Climate adaptation also requires a collaborative approach. Adaptation policies require close co-operation between differing disciplines and planning fields, overcoming unproductive tensions between them. What is at issue is not the shuffling of responsibility, but on the contrary involving others in responsibility. This partnership approach requires that all the relevant players need to be included: municipalities, civil society and business. This partnership includes close co-operation between a city and its hinterland in order to avoid setbacks and counter-productive results.

An integrated and collaborative approach to adaptation needs the following attributes:

- An over-arching strategy and clear objectives;
- An intensive communication process (inside and outside public authorities);
- An agreed conferral of political responsibility and leadership; and

- A significant level of co-operation with higher-level territorial entities (regional and national governments).

Principle 4. Climate adaptation needs a holistic sustainability approach.

In adapting actively to climate change, cities should consider action across all domains of social life based on a precautionary or ‘no regrets’ principle based on an ethics of care:

Ecology: As well as choosing technical responses that enhance climate change adaptation, cities should seek to generate deeper and more integrated relationships with nature, both inside the city and beyond urban boundaries. This is to move to an understanding of our embeddedness within nature and away from dominion over it.

Politics: In adapting to climate change, cities should begin now to develop a clear vision and an integrated adaptation plan through a dialogue between expert deliberation and committed municipal and civic involvement. The agreed adaptation strategy should be embedded in all policy-making.

Economics: Urban development should be based on an economy organized around negotiated social needs over and above conventional production-driven economics.

Culture: In developing climate adaptation responses, cities should treat the process as one of deep cultural engagement involving broad cultural issues of social learning, symbolism, visualization, aesthetics, and well-being. This includes recognizing that urban citizens live in natural-cultural regions, not in ‘built islands’.

See below for an outline of suggested ‘Principles in Practice’ based on this approach.

Principles in Practice

Acknowledging that cities will be affected by climate change in different ways and that operationalization of the basic principles listed depends significantly on the concrete situation, we, the signatories to this *No Regrets Charter*, consider the following systematic set of principles as a point of reference for developing our own ‘principles in practice’ adapted for our city:

Ecological Propositions

- 1.1. With urban settlements organized as much as possible around locally distributed renewable energy, planned on a district or precinct-wide basis, and with existing buildings retrofitted for resource-use efficiency and weather responsiveness;
- 1.2. With waterways returned to maximum ecological complexity, linked to the larger ecosystem, and flanked, where possible, by indigenous natural green-spaces (re-)established along their banks, and with consideration of low-lying areas for water retention or flood control;
- 1.3. With green parklands and urban woodlands — including areas providing habitat for indigenous animals and birds — increased or consolidated within the urban area, ideally connected by further linear green swathes or ribbons;
- 1.4. With urban settlements organised into regional clusters around natural limits and urban-growth boundaries to contain sprawl and renew an urban-rural divide; and with growth zones of increased urban density within those urban settlements focussed on public transport nodes;
- 1.5. With porous-paved paths for walking, dedicated lanes for non-motorised vehicles, and corridors for sustainable public transport; and with these dedicated paths networked throughout the city and given priority over cars;
- 1.6. With food production invigorated in the urban precinct, including through dedicated spaces being set aside for commercial and community food gardens; and
- 1.7. With waste management directed fundamentally towards green composting, hard-waste recycling and hard-waste minimizing.

Political Propositions

- 2.1. With adaptation governance conducted through deep deliberative democratic processes that bring together comprehensive community engagement, expert knowledge, and extended public debate about all aspects of adaptation;
- 2.2. With adaptation legislation enacted for socially just land-tenure, including, where necessary, through municipal and national acquisition of ecologically sensitive areas;
- 2.3. With public communication services and media outlets materially supported and subsidised where necessary to generate debates about climate change adaptation;
- 2.4. With political participation in adaptation decisions and processes going deeper than electoral engagement;
- 2.5. With basic ‘human security’ considerations afforded to all inhabitants as the city under-takes its agreed adaptation changes;
- 2.6. With adaptation taking into account the need for on-going reconciliation with the original inhabitants of the landscape, including indigenous peoples; and
- 2.7. With ethical debates concerning how we are to adapt to climate change becoming a mainstream aspect of all levels and disciplines of formal education.

Economic Propositions

- 3.1. With production and exchange shifted from an emphasis on production-for-global-consumption towards generating resilient mixed economies oriented to generating sustainable local livelihoods;
- 3.2. With urban financial governance moved towards budgeting for climate change adaptation, which is built into relevant aspects of municipal annual infrastructure and services spending;
- 3.3. With regulation negotiated publicly through extensive consultation and deliberative programmes including emphasis on regulation for climate change adaptation;
- 3.4. With consumption substantially reduced and shifted away from goods not produced regionally or not for reproducing basic living — i.e., food, housing, clothing, music and so on;
- 3.5. With workplaces brought back into closer spatial relation to residential areas, while taking into account dangers and noise hazards through sustainable and appropriate building;
- 3.6. With adaptation technologies used primarily as tools for good living, rather than a means of transcending the limits of nature and embodiment; and
- 3.7. With redistributive processes that break radically with current cycles of inter-class and inter-generational inequality built into climate change adaptation implementation.

Cultural Propositions

- 4.1. With climate change adaptation processes recognizing and celebrating the complex layers of community-based identity that have made the urban region;
- 4.2. With the development of consolidated cultural activity zones, emphasizing active street-frontage and public spaces for face-to-face engagement, festivals and events, including those featuring climate issues;
- 4.3. With museums, cultural centres and other public spaces dedicating some of their ongoing space to comprehensive ecological histories of the particular urban region — public spaces which at the same time actively seek to represent visually alternative trajectories of climate change adaptation from the present into the future;
- 4.4. With locally relevant fundamental beliefs about climate change from across the globe woven into the fabric of the built environment: symbolically, artistically and practically;
- 4.5. With conditions for gender equality pursued in all aspects of climate change adaptation, while negotiating relations of cultural inclusion and exclusion that allow for gendered differences;
- 4.6. With the opportunities for facilitated enquiry and learning available to all, from birth to old age across people's lives; not just through formal education structures, but also through well-supported libraries, community learning spaces and access to interactive websites, including access to climate change adaptation curriculum; and
- 4.7. With public spaces and buildings aesthetically designed and curated to enhance the emotional well-being of people through the process of adapting to climate change, including involving local people in that curatorial task.

Appendix 1.

Background Considerations for the No Regrets Charter

The No Regrets Charter is intended to contribute to the global search for guidance on sustainable urban development strategies. It is complementary to the present European Union *Climate Change Adaptation Initiative for Cities*. As a document of the Metropolis network, it is meant to be of decisive for enhancing long-term climate adaptation strategies that Metropolis member cities and regions are developing.

This Charter has been developed through a Metropolis Initiative on Integrated Urban Governance. It comes out of an extensive period of consultation, including forums in Berlin (2013), Brussels (2014), Hyderabad (2014) and Buenos Aires (2015).

Why We Need Principles for Climate Change Adaptation in Cities

The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) climate report emphasizes the likelihood of global temperature increases in excess of two degrees. It states that sea levels are rising more rapidly than had previously been predicted. Even if we can stay within the threshold of a two-degree increase, urban environments and living conditions will change considerably.

Cities are simultaneously the origin and also the solution for dealing sustainably with climate change. Cities were and still are the principal originating places for practices that cause carbon emissions. On the other hand, because of their high population numbers, density, and/or geographical location, cities are particularly vulnerable. This quandary has further implications. Cities in the Global North are currently higher *per capita* carbon emitters, while cities in the South will be more severely affected by the impacts of climate change. Cooperation and knowledge exchange is therefore essential.

Large metropolises will be especially affected by climate change. Major cities, in particular, are heat islands. The overall effect of global warming and heat-island effects does not merely form the sum of those parts. As a result of coupling and mutual build-up effects, temperature increases in cities will be higher than the global mean. There will be a significant increase in the frequency and duration of heat waves. Simultaneously, there will be significant changes in precipitation volumes and distribution. In particular torrential rain and storm events will proliferate — albeit with differing regional intensity.

The various dimensions of climate change remain uncertain. It is doubtful whether the aim of limiting temperature increase to no more than two degrees can be adhered to. Mitigation remains essential, but it needs to be supplemented by adaptation. In the best possible case, responsive measures will involve synergy effects between mitigation and adaptation. It is therefore necessary to achieve a balance between effective CO₂ reduction (mitigation) and adaptive social responses to those impacts of climate change that are anticipated (adaptation). This requires that we pursue long-term objectives that require action to be taken here and now in a sustainable way in order to adapt to climate change and make cities more resilient. Such action is best conceived around clear principles and a systematic sense of the comprehensiveness of what is to be done.

Why Co-operation Is Needed

Cities are central players in climate adaptation. The opportunities they have to act are however limited. Their activities need to be embedded within a regional and national climate policy framework which in a meaningful way supplements and safeguards municipal efforts. For this reason, support from regional, national and supra-national governments and institutions is required

The majority of cities, for example, do not have any legislative mandate. Regional, national and as applicable supra-national legislators need to establish a legal framework enabling cities to implement their adaptation policies as effectively as possible. Climate change mitigation and adaptation objectives need to be incorporated into relevant legislation and taken into account in new legislation. Regional, national and where applicable supra-national legislatures must not thwart cities' efforts.

Why Further Research and Communication Is Needed.

There are still gaps in knowledge and prognosis. In many cities models for long-term regional climate development do not exist. Further research is required. Research programmes need to be designed with this in mind and to address climate adaptation as a priority research field. This research needs to be structured in interdisciplinary and practically oriented ways. Dissemination must be included as a central component. Awareness raising and societal discourse are also municipal tasks, but they are not enough. They need to be initiated and continued at other levels as well. For this aim, regional and national governments but also the media are called upon. The topics of climate change and adaptation should for example find their way into school curricula.

Why Cities Need Other Means of Support.

All over the world, several higher-level territorial authorities have elaborated recommendations and information material for municipal climate adaptation. These specific support aids take into account the particular legal and other conditions. They can inspire and assist municipal climate policies and should be elaborated everywhere. Financial, staffing and other resources in many cities are not always sufficient for climate adaptation measures. In this context support is required through regional, national and/or supra-national governments for instance by adapting existing funds.

Appendix 2.

Durban Adaptation Charter

We the signatories to the Durban Adaptation Charter, call upon local and sub-national governments to commit and upscale action to accelerate their adaptation efforts by committing to the following:

1. Mainstreaming adaptation as a key informant of all local government development planning
2. Understand climate risks through conducting impact and vulnerability assessments
3. Prepare and implement integrated, inclusive and long-term local adaptation strategies designed to reduce vulnerability
4. Ensure that adaptation strategies are aligned with mitigation strategies
5. Promote the use of adaptation that recognises the needs of vulnerable communities and ensures sustainable local economic development
6. Prioritise the role of functioning ecosystems as core municipal green infrastructure
7. Seek the creation of direct access to funding opportunities
8. To develop an acceptable, robust, transparent, measureable, reportable and verifiable (MRV) register
9. Promote multi-level and integrated governance and advocate for partnerships with sub-national and national governments on local climate action
10. Promote partnerships at all levels and city-to-city cooperation and knowledge exchange