Exchange from São Paulo/Osasco/Várzea Paulista to Durban

(4th - 10th October 2006)

This international exchange was organised with the intention of having the Mayor of Durban sign a Memorandum of Understanding with a representative from the Municipality of Osasco (within the metropolitan Region of São Paulo, Brazil), and the Sao Paulo (S.P). based NGO Interação as the SDI partner link. The Secretary for Housing and the person responsible for the “Areas of Social Interest” from Osasco came, together with the Secretary for Works, Urban Planning and Environment from another like-minded municipality in the SP metro region: Várzea Paulista. The latter decided to join at his own cost in order to better understand and support the SDI process in his city.

The full delegation was: Mr Sérgio Gonçalves (Secretary for Housing, Osasco City Council), Mr Alvaro Melo (Official from Osasco City Council), Mr Gregorio Silva (Secretary for Public Works, Urban Planning and Environment, Várzea Paulista City Council); Ms Sandra Simões (Interação NGO, São Paulo); Ms Cláudia Pereira Bento, Mr Alexsandro Moraes Da Silva, and Mr Esequiel Machado Ferreira (slum dwellers and group treasurers from the São Paulo Metropolitan Region).

The FEDUP groups in Piesang River, Amaoti and Ntuzuma (as well as uTshani Fund in Durban) organised site visits and meetings to achieve the exposure and share the objectives of the initiative. Also the greenfield development of Newlands West was proudly showed to the delegates, who were impressed by the satisfactory standards and size of the houses as well as the energy of the women who fought for it. (Of course they welcomed us federation style on our arrival.)

In Amaoti we participated in a meeting where strategies were discussed to overcome the stop to the building of 4-roomed houses that recently occurred. In Piesang we met the community and we saw the houses which are being built with the funds which the community applied for in 1997. We listened to the history of the Ntuzuma H and G settlements while visiting them. During the weekend we also passed through Nseleni, in the rural areas, and had a quick sense of how the Federation process is able to address issues other than land tenure and housing.

Mr. Coughlan Pather, the Secretary of Housing for the Ethekwini (Durban) Metro, organised two meetings with city officials. One was general and political in nature; the other was technical and focused on the Metro’s housing strategies and options.

Outcomes

Unfortunately the MoU was not signed. The available version of the MoU had been drafted in Brasil ten months earlier and translated by the Durban Metro’s International Relations Department. It was then cleared by the Brazilian City’s juridical office. However Coughlan Pather and Eric Apelgren (Ethekwini Head of International Relations) felt that approval was now required from the new Executive Committee of the Ethekwini Metro.

This was in spite of the fact that the Mayor of Ethekwini had met an SDI delegation at an international conference in Nairobi in September and agreed to go forward with the MoU. Eric Apelgren gave his assurance that he will push the ExCo to analyse and approve the agreement as a matter of urgency.

For these reasons the atmosphere was relaxed. No tactics were needed to achieve a goal. The Brazilian delegates made it clear that though they have been working in a genuine participatory way for a while, they rely on such international partnerships to enhance the real inclusion of the people’s organisations in the urban planning and development action.

They also showed how the Federal legal framework is more and more obliging the municipal governments to work by including the people in broad committees (“people’s councils”) which approve a number of budget items regarding slum and even city-wide upgrading.
The delegates openly told the officials of Durban that the relocation operations presented during the technical meeting by Faizel and Mark from the Durban Metro sounded like forced removals to them in spite of the promises for land tenure, infrastructure and houses.

That is why an interesting attempt to think wider and deeper, based on the Brasilian team’s concept of the “city as a living environment”, was proposed by Patrick Magebula, SA Federation leader, to give more flesh to the “partnership” stated in the MoU.

The harmony between the consistent approach advocated by the Brazilian officials and the SDI/FEDUP vision, as well as the genuine friendly and cooperative attitude in the dialogue with their slum dwellers counterpart, may be seen as the most positive result of this exchange.

They came to South Africa already convinced of their participative approach, but here something was strengthened: the Federation’s realisations, its shortfalls, its rituals, its energy and its capacities.

This gave them a stronger sense of their future collaboration with the Brasilian. They were also able to advise their Durban colleagues in a way that local NGOs would not be able to do about a fuller meaning of participation than the one currently in practice in South Africa.

The Durban officials are indeed committed to innovation through a large number of projects where they test new approaches. In 4 specific cases a close interaction with the Federation is a crucial element of this exploration of alternatives. They also explained that they are aware of the risk of recreating ghetto conditions in the new relocation sites if there are no education, health, recreational and cultural facilities, but that the problem so far has been a lack of synchrony among the budgets of the various departments involved. ABMs (area based teams) have been devised and launched in the recent years in order to overcome this problem, thus showing they are, too, learning from the past experience, but the situation is not yet satisfactory. Patrick and the Brazilians (slum dwellers and officials) replied that the proposal of closer work with the FEDUP looks the best way to innovate and seek effectiveness, e.g. creating the conditions for the other departments to come on board.

The relationship between the South African Federation members and the Brazilians was warm as usual despite the serious language barrier. The favelados and the NGO rep (as well as their officials) asked so many questions and tried to apply the answers to their reality. They still seem to see South Africa as a model to imitate but are more and more aware of the need to adapt it to the average younger age of the savers in Brasil and to other contextual realities that are specific to their country.

Way forward

Cogi Pather and Eric Apelgren will push for the approval of the MoU by the ExCo in the next weeks. A final version with a small alteration in the paragraphs will be submitted to both juridical clearance offices.

The Mayor of Ethekwini or other officials are expected to go to Rio de Janeiro in November for a beach soccer international tournament and could either extend their stay for a jump to Sao Paulo or be joined by the Osasco representatives.

Patrick/FEDUP, the Housing staff in Durban and SDI should devise the projects where we want to start giving content to the partnership and working together, taking into account the attitudes and availability of the Brazilian officials.

The Regional federation groups should start linking more regularly where interesting and high potential initiatives are under way.

The Brazilian treasurers will use this exposure as a strong push towards the multiplication of the saving groups.

The Interação NGO will try to redefine its role more as one of support than as one of stimulation.
Zulu looks much easier to chew and swallow than English, so maybe this will be the medium language for future exchanges!

Stefano Marmorato 11/October/2006