privatization run counter to strengthening local democracy in the way they produce exclusion and polarization. The notion of cities with areas reserved for the affluent professional classes where other, generally poorer classes, are effectively excluded, or where cities are themed for the benefit of the consumer, is one that portrays a false image and prohibits effective, meaningful civic engagement.

Sustainable cities need active involvement of the people; they need active citizens (Selman and Parker, 1997; Taylor, 2000). Local Agenda 21 recognized that some 70% of the actions required to achieve sustainability needed to be done locally (UNCED, 1992). As Camagni *et al*. (1998) point out, policy-making and decision-taking need to be focused at the local level. Active citizen involvement implies a fundamental change to politics and political structures. Local government needs to be more than modernized; it needs to be transformed into a vibrant dynamic and challenging forum of debate, based on public involvement. Instead of responding to falling turn-out only by seeking to make voting easier, people need to be reconnected to the democratic process by having more reason to vote. Local government needs enhancing with a return of the powers that have been stripped away by budget cuts, centralization of power, and privatization of facilities and services. City governments need the ability to make decisions, including economic issues and taxation that are connected to the local population. This might include allowing a greater local tax and the ability to make choices on spending. Examples already exist such as the participatory budget process in Porto Alegre in Brazil (Wainwright, 2003). Reforming the funding process for local government will begin to re-connect the elector with the elected. This reform needs to go beyond the rhetoric of partnership which does not fundamentally empower citizens and communities; there needs to be real power in the hands of residents.

Conclusion: Do cities have a future?

Urbanization is certainly the future but a question mark hangs over what kind of future the city can look forward to. Despite technological advances and an explosion in wealth, human societies are becoming increasingly divided, socially and economically. Much of the strain of these social divisions is focused on the cities. Urbanized humanity is also placing increasing burdens on the planetary ecological support systems and without marked changes in patterns of consumption many ecosystems will not survive.

This chapter has argued that cities can provide a rich and varied quality of life for all of its citizens, but that this depends upon changes being made to the ways in which cities

are funded and governed. The primary focus of the city needs to be its people, operating at a human scale, rich in symbolism and with spaces and places for social interaction and the daily business of life. Technological advances may assist in solving some of the challenges for cities, but they are not a panacea. What is needed is a new debate on the future of cities that will challenge many of the present political and economic norms.

The city has a long history and has been the major source of human culture, innovation and democratic rights. The key is to build on its essential characteristics and make them relevant for today. The possibility of a continuation of present trends of unsustainable economic growth, increased social fragmentation and environmental degradation is neither an acceptable nor sustainable option. Without change, human societies will find themselves having to survive in a polluted world where social relations are severely damaged and economies have collapsed. For many communities this is already the case. The adaptability of the city is unquestioned. It is the adaptability of its citizens, decision-makers and urban policy within that city that will be put to the test in the pursuit of sustainability. Society needs to challenge the view that the market economy is the main form of socio-economic organization that can successfully provide for a society (Hutchinson *et al.*, 2002). Cities should be places where the interaction and participation of citizens enable them to meet their own needs and aspirations, and those of the wider community, as well as allowing future generations to meet theirs. If citizens can collectively recover the character of cities as a source of democratic reinvigoration and creative energy, solutions to the challenges of sustainability may well emerge.

Note

1. See Section Three of this book, Gillen, N. *Emerging Work Patterns and their Implication on the Strategy and Planning of Work Environments.*

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